

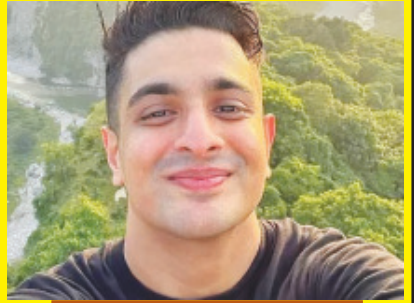


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## Modi-Trump Meet

### Key Takeaways : 26/11 Plotter Extradition, F-35 Jets, Trade Deal



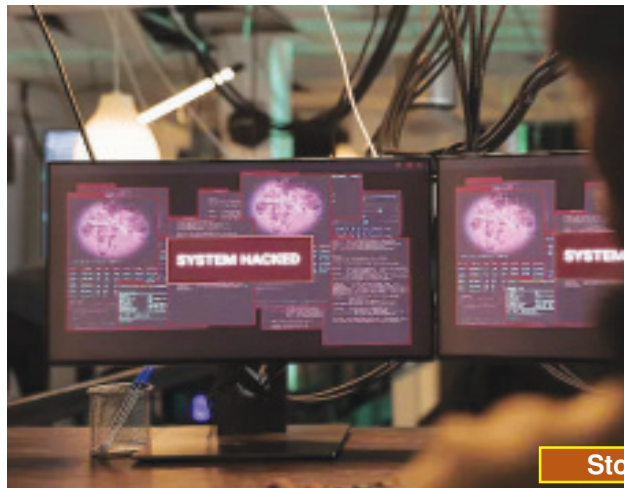
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### Kerala's Rs 1,000- crore half-price scam: Victims explain how they got duped

# More and more Indian asylum seekers to US are speaking a different tongue



**Punjabi speakers formed 66% of all asylum-seekers from India from 2001 to 2022, according to an analysis by Johns Hopkins University researchers. However, the five years from 2017 to 2022 saw a 30% rise in asylum petitions being filed in the US by Hindi-speaking Indians.**

(By Staff Reporter) The times they are a changin, and that's true for the illegal immigration trend in the US too. While Punjabi-speaking asylum-seekers formed 66% of all Indian illegal immigrants in the US from 2001 to 2022, Hindi-speaking undocumented Indians have surged past them in recent years.

An analysis by two Johns Hopkins University researchers found that around 66% of all asylum petitions filed from 2001 to 2022 by Indian nationals came from Punjabi speakers. In that time period, the share of Hindi-speakers among Indian illegal immigrants was 14%. However, between 2017 and 2022, the number of Hindi-speaking undocumented citizens in the US grew by 30%.

Punjabi-speaking individuals have consistently been the most dominant among Indian asylum seekers for over 20 years, according to court records accessed through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC). The Johns Hopkins study was released on February 10, and coincided with the deportation of illegal immigrants from the US to their home country.

On February 5, 104 people were deported to India. Another flight is expected to deport more Indians on February 15.

There are around 6,75,000 undocumented Indian immigrants in the US, according to a Pew Research report. The number of total Indians in the US is 5.1 million.

## INDIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN US JUMPED 470% IN 5 YEARS

Indians' asylum claims increased from 6,000 in 2020 to more than 51,000 in 2023, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD). This is an eightfold increase in their migration numbers. The total number of Indian asylum seekers in the US has increased by 470% in the past 5 years. Between 2001 and 2022, around 66% of all asylum petitions filed by Indian nationals came from Punjabi speakers, suggesting that a large portion of these individuals likely hailed from Punjab or nearby states like Haryana.

A significant rise is also seen in the rise of Hindi-speaking undocumented immigrants in the US.

Traditionally, Hindi speakers made up about 14% of Indian asylum cases. However, data by TRAC shows that between 2017 and 2022, this share has nearly doubled to 30%.

This trend suggests a growing diversity among Indian migrants, with more people from Hindi-speaking regions now seeking asylum in the US.

Other language groups are not far behind. English speakers contributed to around 8% of asylum cases, followed by Gujarati speakers at 7%.

The number of petitions heard by these Indian language groups is also fairly larger than other language groups.

## 63% OF PUNJABI-SPEAKING, 25% GUJARATI PETITIONERS GRANTED ASYLUM

The US immigration judges have granted 63% of cases involving Punjabi speakers and 58% of cases involving Hindi speakers, but only 25% of cases petitioned by Gujarati speakers were granted.

These disparities make one question whether different groups were being treated equally under the existing asylum procedure.

Research by Budiman and Kapur states that economic factors are a major reason behind immigration. It highlights the data from the 2019-2022 American Community Survey (ACS), that amongst all Indians living in the US, those who speak Punjabi at home have the lowest average income, around USD 48,000.

In comparison, Gujarati speakers earn about USD 58,000 on average. This difference in income suggests that economic struggles in places like Punjab push people to migrate in search of better financial opportunities.

## COST OF MIGRATING TO US 100 TIMES AN AVERAGE INDIAN'S INCOME

The cost of migrating is also extremely high, often ranging from 30 to 100 times India's average income per person.

Because of these high costs, only people with significant assets, like land, can afford to start the process.

More people are asking for asylum in the US as immigration rules change rapidly. At the same time, the government is trying new ways to stop illegal border crossings. For example, in the first week of President Trump's second term, the U.S. government closed the CBP One app—a tool that had helped thousands of migrants schedule appointments for

*Punjabi-speaking individuals have consistently been the most dominant among Indian asylum seekers for over 20 years, according to court records accessed through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC).*

their asylum cases.

This shutdown cancelled almost 300,000 migrant appointments, including many asylum cases.

Recent studies on asylum claims show a complicated situation. Even as Trump enforces stricter immigration rules, the number of formal asylum applications keeps rising—mainly from Punjabi speakers, with a growing number of Hindi speakers. As immigration policies focus on both border security and humanitarian considerations, the experiences of these migrants highlight the economic factors that contribute to global migration today.



## PM gets grand welcome from Indian community in US: Warm reception in winter chill

(Sai Bureau) Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a grand welcome from members of the Indian community in the US upon his arrival in Washington for a two-day visit. During his visit, the Prime Minister will be staying at Blair House, the official guest residence for dignitaries visiting the White House. Blair House has a rich history of hosting presidents, royalty, and global leaders. Despite the freezing weather, members of the Indian community gathered outside Blair House to welcome PM Modi and celebrate his arrival. As he arrived, the crowd chanted slogans such as 'Bharat Mata ki Jai,' 'Vande Mataram,' and 'Modi Modi,' and waved the flags of India and the United States. Expressing his appreciation for the warm welcome, PM Modi tweeted, "A warm reception in the winter chill! Despite the cold weather, the Indian diaspora in Washington DC has welcomed me with a very special welcome. My



gratitude to them." This marks PM Modi's first trip to the US since Donald Trump assumed office for a second term as President. During this visit, PM Modi will be among the first four world leaders to meet

Trump in his second term, following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Japan's Shigeru Ishiba, and Jordan's King Abdullah II. On Thursday, PM Modi is scheduled to engage in bilateral talks

with Trump. The discussions will cover a range of key issues, including trade, energy, defence, security, technological advancement, and strategic cooperation. Shortly after arriving in Washington, PM Modi met with Tulsi Gabbard, the newly appointed US Director of National Intelligence, just hours after the Senate confirmed her appointment. Additionally, it is anticipated that the Prime Minister is likely to meet Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, who also leads Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). According to Reuters, their conversation may include discussions about Starlink's potential entry into the Indian market. Before travelling to the US, PM Modi wrapped up a three-day visit to France, where he participated in the International AI Action Summit, attended the 14th India-France CEO Forum, and held discussions with French President Emmanuel Macron.

## AAPI Mourns the Passing Away of Dr. Sampat Shivangi

(By Our Staff Reporter) "We are deeply saddened and shocked by the sudden passing away of Dr. Sampat Shivangi, a physician, an influential Indian American community leader, and a veteran leader of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI)," said Dr. Satheesh Kathula, President of AAPI. Describing Dr. Shivangi as "A trailblazer of the Indian



Diaspora," Dr. Kathula, who has known Dr. Shivangi for decades and has worked closely in several AAPI-led initiatives, said, "Dr. Shivangi has left an indelible mark on the Indian American community. Over the decades, he dedicated his time and efforts to serving AAPI and numerous other Indian American organizations. His

leadership, vision, and tireless contributions to the greater cause of commitment to advocating for the the Indian Diaspora, Indo-US community set him apart as a pillar of relationship, and particularly for his strength and guidance." "AAPI is proud dedication to enhancing the mission of Dr. Shivangi's numerous of AAPI," said Dr. Sunil Kaza, Chair of accomplishments, leadership, and AAPI Board of Trustees.

## Indian-origin Paul Kapur, a Pak critic, is Trump nominee for top South Asia job

(Sai Bureau) - In another appointment aimed at prioritising the US's relations with India, the Donald Trump administration has tapped Paul Kapur, an expert on India-Pakistan security and nuclear issues, to be the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia. If confirmed, Kapur will become only the second Indian-descent US diplomat overseeing the South Asia bureau, which is tasked with managing diplomatic ties with India and the region. "Paul Kapur of California to be Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs," a US press release stated. Kapur will replace Donald Lu, who oversaw the South Asia bureau during the Joe Biden regime. A strong backer of close US-India relations and a harsh critic of Pakistan, Kapur was part of the US State Department's policy planning team on South Asia during Trump's first term as President. An

accomplished scholar and an author of several books specialising in South Asian politics, he currently serves as a professor in the US Naval Post Graduate School. He is also a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Among the notable books Kapur has authored include 'Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security and the Pakistani State' and 'Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia'. The Indian-American also manages consultancy and engagement projects for the US Department of Defence. He is also part of the US-India Track 1.5 dialogue on defence cooperation. The US President has appointed several Indian-Americans to key positions in his administration, including Kash Patel as FBI director and Sriram Krishnan as White House policy adviser on Artificial Intelligence (AI).



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# Trump clears 26/11 plotter Tahawwur Rana's extradition: Giving violent man back

**US President Donald Trump announced the approval of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack convict Tahawwur Rana's extradition to India, stating he will face justice.**

US President Donald Trump on Thursday announced the extradition of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana to India and said he will face justice. He made the announcement at the joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi following their bilateral meeting at the White House.

"I am pleased to announce that my administration has approved the extradition of one of the plotters (Tahawwur Rana) and one of the very evil people of the world, having to do with the horrific 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack to face justice in India. He is going back to India to face justice," Trump said. India has been pushing for the extradition of Rana, who was convicted in connection with the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and is currently being held in a Los Angeles prison. The Canadian citizen of Pakistani origin is linked to Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, also known as "Daood Gilani," a key figure in the attacks. He is accused of aiding Headley and others in Pakistan in supporting the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in carrying out the



attack. India and the US will be working together like never before to confront the threat of radical Islamic terror across the world," the US President announced at the White House briefing.

In response to a question from India Today's Foreign Affairs Editor, Geeta Mohan, regarding the extradition of individuals working against India in the US, particularly Khalistani extremists, the US President stated, "There are more to

follow".

"I don't think India had a good relationship with the Biden administration...A lot of things happened that weren't very appropriate between India and the Biden Administration. We are giving a very violent man (Tahawwur Rana) back to India immediately. There are more to follow because we have quite a few requests. So, we work with India on crime and we want to make it good for India,"

he said. Prime Minister Modi thanked Trump for clearing the extradition and promised India's cooperation in fighting terror.

"We will cooperate in fighting terror. Tough action is needed against cross-border terrorism. Grateful to President Trump for deciding to extradite 26/11 terrorist Tahawwur Rana. Our courts will bring him to justice," he said.

On the timeline of the extradition, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that New Delhi is "working on the logistics of this--his surrender and extradition to India. There are a few final steps to be completed. The two sides are in touch on this," he said at a press briefing.

On other extradition requests, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that there are requests but refrained from naming any. "Yes, there are other requests as well. I won't mention any names at the moment, but there are other requests registered with the US authorities," he said. Meanwhile, the two nations agreed to strengthen their cooperation in various fields and signed multiple deals in trade, energy, defence, and more.

## Senate votes to confirm Tulsi Gabbard as director of national intelligence



The Senate voted Wednesday to confirm former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard as director of national intelligence, a major win for President Donald Trump as Gabbard had been among the most controversial of his Cabinet picks.

The vote was 52-48 mostly along party lines, though Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky joined Democrats in opposing the confirmation.

Gabbard faced concerns from several Republican senators over her lack of support for Ukraine; her shifting position on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance

Act's Section 702, a key surveillance and security tool; her 2017 meeting with former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad; and her past support for Edward Snowden.

McConnell appeared to reference some of Gabbard's positions in a statement he released after voting against her, saying she has "a history of alarming lapses in judgement."

"The nation should not have to worry that the intelligence assessments the President receives are tainted by a Director of National Intelligence with a history of alarming lapses in judgment,"

McConnell said.

However, key swing Republican senators, including Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Todd Young of Indiana ultimately decided to back her confirmation.

On Monday night, Murkowski acknowledged in a statement that she still had "concerns about certain positions (Gabbard) has previously taken," but added that Gabbard "brings independent thinking and necessary oversight to her new role."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune defended Gabbard's nomination in a speech on the Senate floor Monday afternoon, in which he highlighted her military service and focused on her promise to "right-size" the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "I am glad that Ms. Gabbard plans to focus on identifying and eliminating redundancies and inefficiencies to restore the office to what it was originally designed to be," he said. He also said that he was "glad to hear" Gabbard refer to FISA Section 702 as essential, after Gabbard seemed to go back and forth on her position on the issue. Gabbard is Trump's 14th nominee to be confirmed since January 20.

Her confirmation was a dramatic

turnaround for a nomination that, from the start, has been among Trump's most divisive. A former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, Gabbard drew scrutiny from Senate Intelligence Committee lawmakers over her views on surveillance and a series of controversial meetings she held in Lebanon and Syria in 2017, including with then-President Assad. In a contentious hearing, she refused under persistent questioning by Republican and Democratic lawmakers on the Senate Intelligence Committee to say whether she now believed Snowden's actions were traitorous.

Those repeated dodges appeared to imperil her already-fraught nomination on the committee, where she could afford to lose not even a single Republican vote — even as she had secured the endorsement of the committee chairman, Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican. Although no Republicans publicly opposed her, several expressed doubts.

"I'm worried by what I hear from some of my Republican colleagues. I'm worried that her nomination may be in jeopardy," GOP Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri told Fox News' "Jesse Watters Primetime" at the time.

# S Jaishankar schools West, shows inked finger after US Senator's democracy remark

Participating in a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar differed on the view that global democracy is under threat and said India is a thriving democratic society.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar schooled the West over what he called a "prevailing political pessimism" of global democracy being in trouble and showed his inked index finger, saying "for us, democracy is actually delivered".

Participating in a panel discussion titled 'Live to Vote Another Day: Fortifying Democratic Resilience' at the Munich Security Conference, Jaishankar on Friday differed in the view that global democracy is under threat and said that India is a democratic society and gives nutrition support to 800 million people.

In conversation with PM @jonasgahrstore, @ElissaSlotkin and @trzaskowski\_ on the topic 'Live to Vote Another Day: Fortifying Democratic Resilience' at #MSC2025.

"I appeared to be an optimist in what is relatively a pessimistic panel, if not room. I will begin by sticking up my finger and don't take it badly. It is the index finger. This, the mark you see on my nail, is a mark of a person who has just voted. We just had an election in my state (Delhi). Last year, we had a national election. In Indian elections,

roughly two-thirds of the eligible voters vote. At the national elections, the electorate of about 900 million, about 700 million voted. We count the votes in a single day," Jaishankar said when asked about his views on Western democracy. He asserted that "nobody disputes" the result when it is announced and said "we are voting well", and "optimistic about the direction of our democracy".

"From the time we started voting in the modern era, 20 per cent of people vote today than they did decades ago. So, the first message is that somehow democracy is in trouble globally, I am sorry. I have to differ with it. I mean, right now, we are living well. We are voting well. We are optimistic about the direction of our democracy and for us democracy is actually delivered," he said.

Apart from Jaishankar, the panel comprised

Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, US Senator Elissa Slotkin and Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski.

Countering US Senator Elissa Slotkin's remark that democracy "doesn't put food on the table", Jaishankar said India gives nutrition support to 800 million people.

"Senator, you said that democracy doesn't put food on your table. Actually, in my part of the world, it does. Today, since we are

a democratic society, we give nutrition support, and food to 800 million people. That is a matter of how healthy they are and how full their stomachs are. So, the point I want to make is that different parts of the world are going through different conversations. Please do not assume that this is a kind of universal phenomenon, it is not," he said. "There are parts where it is working well. Maybe there are parts where it's not and the parts which are not. I think people

need to have honest conversations about why it's not. But I would argue that to an extent, as someone dispassionately viewing it, a lot of it is an accumulated problem of the model of globalisation that we have followed for the last 25-30 years. I think a lot of chickens have come home to roost. So, yes there are issues, but from our point of view, let's not make that universal," he added. Taking potshots at the West, Jaishankar stressed that the West treated democracy as a "Western characteristic" and was busy encouraging "non-democratic forces in the Global South. "There was a time and I would have to say this in all honesty when the West treated democracy as a Western characteristic and was busy encouraging non-democratic forces in the Global South, and it still does. I mean in many cases, I can point to some very recent ones where everything that you say you value at home, you don't practice abroad. So, I do think the rest of the Global South will view the successes, shortcomings and the responses of other countries," he said.



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# 20-year-old accused of sexually assaulting minor gets bail: Deserve second chance

Granting bail, the Bombay High Court observed that when it comes to young offenders, rehabilitation should be explored as the primary option before sending them to jail.

( News Agency)- The Bombay High Court has granted bail to a 20-year-old accused charged under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Posco) Act, stressing the need for a reformatory approach. The court observed that given the accused's young age, there is a possibility that he will feel remorse and repent in retrospect. "This is a chance required to be taken by the court because punishment should aim for reformation rather than being punitive in nature," Justice Milind Jadhav said. The accused was charged with sexual assault based on a complaint filed by his 14-year-old cousin. The victim, an orphan staying with her uncle, said that she was sexually assaulted on three separate occasions. She had remained silent throughout her ordeal for five months before breaking her silence and filing the complaint. "The prosecutrix's silence from April 2023 to August 2023, despite attending school and tuition regularly, is somewhat deafening,"



the judge remarked. The court also highlighted several loopholes and contradictions in the victim's statements recorded by the police and medical counsellor. At first, the victim stated that the mother of the accused was in the house at the time of the incident. However, later on she claimed that there was no one

present in the house. "These omissions are crucial," the judge observed. After remaining silent for several months, the victim finally revealed to her friend about her pregnant condition, according to the victim's complaint. She told police that she kept quiet out of fear as she was dependent on the parents of the accused.

However, a year after the accused's arrest, the victim submitted an affidavit asking for the accused's unconditional bail while maintaining that she was acting voluntarily and not without coercion.

Opposing the bail plea, the prosecution called the crime "heinous" while arguing that the accused had "taken advantage of the vulnerability of his sister". The prosecution further argued that granting bail to the accused would set a wrong example and erode people's trust in the judicial system.

Despite the compelling arguments presented by the prosecutor, the bench, taking into consideration the accused's young age, observed, "If the accused remains in prison, he might lose faith in the system and society at large, possibly leading him toward criminality or wasting his life. Studies show that incarceration exposes young individuals to abuse, and courts should adopt a reformatory approach wherever possible".

## Illegal gambling, cockfighting den busted at Telangana farmhouse, 64 held

Telangana police raided a farmhouse in Moinabad, busting an illegal casino and cockfighting racket, arresting 64 people. Officials seized Rs 30 lakh in cash, 55 cars, 86 betting roosters, poker chips, and other gambling materials.

( Sai Bureau) In a major crackdown, Telangana police raided a farmhouse in Moinabad, Rangareddy district, and busted an illegal casino and cockfighting racket. The late-night operation, led by the Special Operations Team (SOT) along with Rajendranagar and Moinabad police, resulted in the arrest of 64 individuals.

Authorities seized over Rs 30 lakh in cash, 55 luxury cars, 86 roosters used in cockfights, and 46 cockfight knives. Poker chips and other gambling materials were also confiscated from the farmhouse, which had reportedly been converted into a high-stakes gambling den. Among those arrested, 10 are from Telangana, while the rest are from Andhra Pradesh. Police believe a well-organised syndicate was operating the setup, and an investigation is underway to trace the masterminds behind it.

A case has been registered under the Gaming Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act at Moinabad Police Station. Further action is expected as officials probe the scale of the illegal operation and potential links to organised crime.



# Rebuilt For Rs 150-Crore, Inside RSS' New High-Rise Office In Delhi

The revamped RSS building - a vast change from the earlier two-storey building - fuses modern technology with ancient architectural practices to make it airy and exposed to ample sunlight

(News Agency)- The BJP's ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that has expanded significantly in the last two decades is moving back to its old address in Delhi as its rebuilding project is nearly done. Some interior work is still going on.

Spread over 3.75 acres, the RSS office houses three 12-storey towers and some 300 rooms. The new office will be used to hold RSS events and provide lodging to RSS workers and leaders.

Ancient and modern techniques have been used in the construction that began in 2018. The main auditorium honours the memory of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Ashok Singhal, who was one of the main proponents of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The three towers - ground floor plus 12 floors - are named Sadhna, Prerna and Archana. The name of the building will remain Keshav Kunj. The building has a massive solar power facility; its library has 8,500 books and is open to



researchers. There's also a clinic with a five-bed hospital in the building complex. The new complex cost Rs 150 crore to build, and at least 75,000 donors have contributed to making it.

The construction took over eight years during which the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and delayed work.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and general

secretary Dattatreya Hosabale will attend a "karyakarta sammelan" of the organisation's Delhi unit on February 19 to mark the beginning of its work from the new building in Delhi's Jhandewalan. The Nagpur-headquartered organisation will organise its annual 'Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha', considered the RSS' top decision-making body, in

Bengaluru from March 21 to March 23. Some 1,500 people including senior functionaries of the RSS and affiliated organisations will meet to discuss key issues, including organisational matters. Resolutions will be passed to outline the RSS' positions on a host of matters. The RSS had been using a rented place as its office since 2016, following the beginning of the rebuilding and renovation exercise at the place, out of which it had been working since 1962. The revamped building - a vast change from the earlier two-storey building - fuses modern technology with ancient architectural practices to make it airy and exposed to ample sunlight. Gujarat-based architect Anup Dave designed it.

The RSS-linked weeklies Panchjanya and Organiser, besides publishing firm Suruchi Prakashan, which has been bringing out books and other literature will also have offices on the RSS office premises.

## Himanta Sarma jabs Congress's Gaurav Gogoi, wife over 'Pak link', MP hits back



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Sarma has gone full throttle in attacking his one-time colleague and Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on the issue of his wife retaining her UK citizenship for 12 years and allegations that she was employed by an organisation with links to Pakistan's spy agency ISI. In a spree of posts on X since Wednesday, Sarma, without naming anyone, also flagged Gogoi's meeting with then Pakistani High Commissioner in 2015 despite India's protest.

Gogoi, who is also the Congress's deputy leader in Lok Sabha, has rejected the charge of his wife having ISI links as "laughable", calling it a "smear campaign" against him ahead of the 2026 Assam election. At the centre of the row is Elizabeth Colburn, whom Gogoi married in 2013 after they met in the United States. Elizabeth worked with the Climate Development and Knowledge Network (CDKN) between 2011-2015 and was stationed mostly in Pakistan. The BJP has

alleged that she worked under Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, a former adviser to the Planning Commission of Pakistan, who was linked to the ISI.

"Serious questions need to be answered regarding allegations of ISI links, leading young individuals to the Pakistan embassy for brainwashing and radicalisation, and the refusal to take Indian citizenship for the past 12 years," Himanta Sarma tweeted.

Sarma's attack on Gogoi started on Wednesday when he tweeted that IFS officers could marry foreign nationals based on the condition that the spouse must acquire Indian citizenship within six months. He said that the rule doesn't apply to lawmakers.

"Allowing a foreign spouse of a lawmaker to retain foreign citizenship for 12 years is far too long. Loyalty to the nation must always take precedence over all considerations," Sarma tweeted in a seeming reference to Gogoi's wife.

Sarma escalated the matter by alleging that a partner of CDKN, where Elizabeth worked, received funding from the Open

Society Foundation of American billionaire George Soros. The BJP has repeatedly accused Congress of working with Soros in a bid to destabilise the government.

"Additionally, participation in a conversion cartel and receiving funds from external sources, including George Soros, to destabilise national security are grave concerns that cannot be ignored," he said. HIMANTA SARMA ON GOGOI'S MEET WITH PAK DIPLOMAT

On Thursday, Sarma kept up the attack on Gogoi by raking up his 2015 visit to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to meet the then High Commissioner Abdul Basit. The Assam Chief Minister questioned the intent behind Gogoi's visit as he was not a member of the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs at the time.

"This visit occurred despite India's official protest against the Pakistani High Commission's interference in internal matters, particularly its involvement with the Hurriyat Conference. Ignoring these concerns, the MP took 50 to 60 young Indians to meet Pakistani officials," Sarma tweeted.

# AI, nuclear energy, and startups: Key outcomes of PM Modi's 3-day France visit

PM Narendra Modi's France visit bolstered India-France ties with key agreements on AI, nuclear energy, and sustainability. Highlights include startup support, innovation collaboration, and a new consulate in Marseille.

( Sai Bureau) Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to France has resulted in several important agreements and declarations aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two nations in the coming years.

The Prime Minister's visit highlighted the strengthening Indo-French partnership across key areas, including technology, nuclear energy, sustainability, and cultural ties.

Taking to X, PM Modi also said that India and France were working together to enhance cooperation in logistics, sustainability and global trade, reinforcing a shared vision for a better maritime future. "Strengthening Maritime Ties in Marseille! President @EmmanuelMacron and I visited the control room of CMA-CGM, a global leader in shipping and logistics. As India expands its maritime and trade networks, collaborations with industry leaders will play a crucial role in boosting connectivity, supply chains and economic growth. We are working towards enhancing India-France cooperation in logistics, sustainability and global trade, reinforcing our shared vision for a better maritime future," he tweeted. PM Modi and his 'friend' President Emmanuel Macron also co-chaired the AI Action Summit in Paris,



held bilateral talks and also addressed a meeting of business leaders.

**KEY OUTCOMES OF PM'S FRANCE VISIT**

**India-France declaration on Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Both nations committed to enhancing collaboration in AI research and applications, emphasising ethical and responsible AI development.

**Launch of India-France Year of Innovation 2026 logo:** The two countries unveiled the official logo for the upcoming initiative, signifying their commitment to fostering innovation and scientific collaboration.

**Indo-French Center for Digital Sciences:** A Letter of Intent was signed between

India's Department of Science and Technology (DST) and France's Institut National de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique (INRIA) to establish a dedicated center for digital sciences, furthering research and development.

**Support for Indian startups:** In a bid to boost entrepreneurship, an agreement was signed to host 10 Indian startups at the renowned French startup incubator, Station F.

**Partnership on advanced modular and small modular reactors:** A Declaration of Intent was signed to enhance collaboration on next-generation nuclear reactor technologies.

**Renewal of MoU on nuclear energy cooperation –** The agreement between

India's Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and France's Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique et aux Energies Alternatives (CEA) was renewed, strengthening the nuclear energy partnership.

**Cooperation between nuclear research institutions:** A new implementing agreement was signed between DAE and CEA to foster collaboration between India's Global Center for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP) and France's Institute for Nuclear Science and Technology (INSTN).

**Triangular development cooperation:** India and France issued a joint declaration of intent to collaborate on development projects in the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on sustainability and economic growth.

**India's consulate in Marseille:** PM Modi and French officials jointly inaugurated India's new consulate in Marseille, further strengthening people-to-people ties and diplomatic presence.

**Environmental partnership:** A Declaration of Intent was signed between India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and France's Ministry for the Ecological Transition to enhance cooperation in biodiversity conservation, climate action, and sustainable development.

## Too much to handle: Samay Raina deletes all videos from his show amid jokes row

Comedian Samay Raina finally broke his silence on the controversy over Ranveer Allahbadia's remark on his show, India's Got Latent. He has confirmed deleting all the videos of the show, and also added that whatever is happening right now is too much for him to handle.

( Sai Bureau) Comedian Samay Raina on Wednesday broke silence on the massive row surrounding obscene jokes featured on a recent episode of his show India's Got Latent. Saying that his only "objective was to make people laugh", Samay Raina said that he had taking all videos of India's Got Latent from his channel. Raina also said he will "fully cooperate with all agencies", reacting to the various police complaints filed against him and other members of the show's cast.

Raina's comments come three days after the last episode of India's Got Latent was aired, where a certain joke cracked by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia on parents created a massive uproar.

Reacting to the row on Wednesday, Samay Raina put up an Instagram story, as well as a post on X.



He wrote, "Everything that has been happening has been too much for me to handle. I have removed all

India's Got Latent videos from my channel. My only objective was to make people laugh and have a good time. I will fully cooperate with all agencies to ensure their inquiries are concluded fairly. Thank you (sic)." Samay Raina's India's Got Latent has courted controversy with its content. However, things took a serious turn in the latest episode when a remark by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia about parents did not sit well with the audience. Not only did they strongly condemn the influencer, but legal measures were also taken against him and Samay Raina, along with others who were a part of the show as judges.

Amid the controversy, the comedian's shows in Gujarat's Ahmedabad and Surat scheduled in March and April have been cancelled.



# Indian Army says ceasefire along LoC intact, denies reports of heavy firing

The Indian Army, in an official statement, said the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) is intact and continues to be observed as per the understanding between both the armies. The statement comes after reports of unprovoked firing by Pakistani troops in the Mendhar sector of Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district.

"Tension due to some stray incidents of cross LoC firing and a suspected IED blast on the LoC is being dealt with through the established mechanism. No exchange of fire of heavy-calibre weapons has taken place. Minor incidents are not unprecedented along the LoC," it clarified.

The Indian Army further said that it has raised concerns with the Pakistan Army at the appropriate level. "The situation remains stable and being closely monitored. Indian Army maintains high state of alertness and is dominating the Line of Control," the statement read.

Earlier, a PTI report had said that the Pakistan Army suffered 'heavy casualties' after it resorted to unprovoked firing along the



LoC on Wednesday evening.

The ceasefire violation by Pakistan in the Krishna Ghati sector came a day after two Indian Army personnel, including a Captain, were killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion triggered by suspected terrorists near the LoC in the Akhnoor sector of Jammu district.

The ceasefire violation along the LoC is very rare ever since India and Pakistan renewed the ceasefire agreement on February 25, 2021.

**INDIAN ARMY OFFICER INJURED**

A junior commissioned officer (JCO) of the Indian Army sustained minor injuries when he accidentally stepped over a

landmine in the same sector this evening, PTI report quoted officials. The JCO, who is a resident of Mendhar, was part of a patrolling party keeping a close vigil on the LoC to prevent infiltration of terrorists. The injured officer was evacuated to the military hospital. Indian Army did not confirm or deny the incident.

On February 10, General Officer Commanding of the Jammu-based White Knight Corps, Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva, reviewed "hostile activities" along the LoC in Rajouri district.

"GOC White Knight Corps, along with GOC Ace of Spades and GOC Crossed Swords divisions, visited forward areas of the Rajouri sector for an operational update on the prevailing security situation and the hostile activities," the Army had said in a post on X.

On Monday, a soldier manning a forward post in the Kalal area of the Nowshera sector in Rajouri district was hit by a bullet fired from across the border. Meanwhile, on February 8, an Army patrol in Rajouri's Keri sector came under fire from terrorists positioned in a forest across the LoC, reportedly waiting for an opportunity to infiltrate Indian territory. During the night of February 4 and 5, a landmine explosion resulted in casualties among terrorists attempting to cross into India from the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch district.

## Turkey's president arrives in Pakistan's capital on a 2-day visit to boost trade, economic ties

Turkey's president, accompanied by a high-level delegation, arrived in Pakistan's capital late Wednesday night on a two-day visit to discuss how to boost trade and economic ties between the nations, officials said.

When his plane landed at an airport near Islamabad, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan was received by his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and other senior government officials.

Erdogan is visiting Pakistan at the invitation of Sharif, according to a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It said the Turkish president will jointly chair "the 7th Session of the Pakistan-Turkiye High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC)" and the sides are



expected to sign a number of agreements.

Erdogan will have bilateral

meetings with Zardari and Sharif on Thursday.

According to the ministry

statement, HLSCC will provide "strategic direction to further strengthening the bilateral

relations between the two countries."

The statement said "Pakistan and Turkiye are bound by historic fraternal ties" and the visit by Erdogan "would serve to further deepen the brotherly relations and enhance multifaceted cooperation between the two countries". Pakistan, which has witnessed a surge in militant violence in recent months, has deployed additional police officers and paramilitary forces to ensure the security of the Turkish leader and his delegation.

The visit comes hours after the U.S. Embassy issued a travel advisory, citing a threat by Pakistani Taliban against the Faisal mosque in Islamabad and asked its citizens to avoid visits to the mosque and nearby areas until further notice.

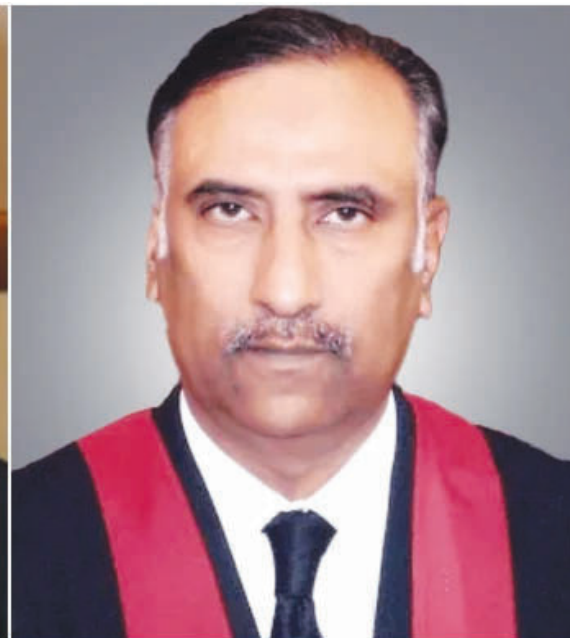
# Justice Sarfraz Dogar set to take helm of 'divided' IHC

Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar is expected to take oath as the acting chief justice of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) today (Thursday), despite reservations shown by some judges over his seniority.

Judges recently elevated to the Supreme Court will also be sworn in by the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) today.

Unlike the usual practice, where a senior judge administers the oath to an acting chief justice of a high court, President Asif Ali Zardari will oversee Justice Dogar's oath-taking. This follows speculation that five senior IHC judges, who had openly opposed Justice Dogar's transfer, might refuse to administer the oath.

A similar precedent was set when the Punjab governor administered oath of office to Justice Shujaat Ali Khan as acting chief justice of the Lahore High Court (LHC) in June last year. A senior IHC official said that when a chief justice goes on leave, a senior judge usually administers the oath to the acting chief justice. However, when the office is vacant, the oath is taken before the appointing authority. The IHC administration was



informed about the oath-taking in the afternoon, as the outgoing chief justice, Aamer Farooq, is set to take oath as a Supreme Court judge today.

Late on Wednesday night, the Ministry of Law and Justice issued a notification formally announcing Justice Dogar's appointment as acting chief justice of the IHC, in the late night. The appointment, made by the president under Article 196, may diminish the controversy over seniority.

The law ministry also notified acting chief justices of the three

other high courts: Justice Ejaz Swati has been appointed as acting CJ Balochistan High Court, Justice Junaid Ghaffar has been named acting CJ Sindh High Court and Justice S.M. Attique Shah as acting CJ Peshawar High Court.

In addition, notifications for the appointment of seven judges to the Supreme Court have also been issued.

Besides Justice Aamer Farooq, Balochistan High Court Chief Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, Sindh High Court (SHC) Chief Justice Muhammad

Shafi Sid-d-iqvi and his colleague Justice Salah-ud-din Panhwar, Peshawar High Court (PHC) Chief Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and his colleague Justice Shakeel Ahmad, and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb will be sworn in by the chief justice of Pakistan. Justice Aurangzeb will serve as an acting Supreme Court judge under Article 181 of the Constitution to clear pending tax and commercial cases. The provision allows the president to appoint a high court judge to temporarily

act as a Supreme Court judge. Justice Aurangzeb will remain a judge of the Supreme Court until the pleasure of the president, after which the judge may either return to the IHC or be confirmed as a Supreme Court judge, depending on the situation.

Seniority concerns

Earlier, Justice Farooq cleared the way for Justice Dogar's next move towards the office of the IHC chief justice by dismissing a representation filed by five IHC judges.

The representation had challenged the transfers of Justice Dogar (from LHC), Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro (from SHC), and Justice Mohammad Asif (from BHC), arguing that the move had unfairly affected their seniority. The rejected representation was filed by Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan and Justice Saman Rafat.

The judges contended that under the Constitution, a high court judge must take a new oath upon transfer to a different high court, which should affect their seniority ranking.

# Hasina govt behind 'crimes against humanity', says UN

Bangladesh's former government was behind systematic attacks and killings of protesters as it tried to hold onto power last year, the UN said on Wednesday, warning that the abuses could amount to "crimes against humanity". Before prime minister Sheikh Hasina was toppled in a student-led revolution last August, her government cracked down on protesters and others, including by "hundreds of extrajudicial killings", the United Nations said.

The UN rights office (OHCHR) said it had "reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment and infliction of other inhumane acts have taken place".

These alleged crimes committed by the government, along with violent elements of Hasina's Awami League party and the Bangladeshi security and intelligence services, were



part of "a widespread and systematic attack against protesters and other civilians", OHCHR's report into the violence said. Hasina, 77, who fled into exile in neighbouring India, has already defied an arrest warrant to face trial in Bangladesh for crimes against humanity. Asked about Hasina's personal culpability, UN rights chief Volker Turk told reporters that his office "found reasonable grounds to believe that indeed the top echelons of

the previous government were aware, and in fact were involved in... very serious violations".

Up to 1,400 killed

Bangladesh's interim leader Mohammed Yunus, who had asked the UN rights office to launch its fact-finding mission, welcomed the report, insisting that he wanted to transform Bangladesh "into a country in which all its people can live in security and dignity".

The UN investigation examined

events in Bangladesh between July 1 and August 15 last year, relying on hundreds of interviews with victims, witnesses and others, and on photos, videos and other documents. The team determined that security forces had supported Hasina's government throughout the unrest, which began as protests against civil service job quotas and then escalated into wider calls for her to stand down.

OHCHR estimated that "as many as 1,400 people may have been killed" over the 45-day period, the vast majority of them "shot by Bangladesh's security forces". Children made up 12 to 13 percent of those killed, it said. The overall death toll given is far higher than the most recent estimate by Bangladesh's interim government of 834 people killed.

'Rampant state violence'  
"The brutal response was a

calculated and well-coordinated strategy by the former government to hold onto power in the face of mass opposition," Turk said.

He pointed to findings of "hundreds of extrajudicial killings, extensive arbitrary arrest and detention and torture and ill treatment", decrying "a disturbing picture of rampant state violence and targeted killings".

The rights office also found indications of widespread gender-based violence and the abuse and killing of children. On the other side, the report highlighted "lynchings and other serious retaliatory violence" against police and Awami League officials or supporters. Bangladeshi rights group Odhikar said that a dozen people had died in detention since Hasina's ousting. Asked about these cases, Turk said his office had only examined the situation up to mid-August.

# How China Is Rushing To Fill The Gaps Trump Is Creating

America, the leader of the free world, is once again hellbent on abdicating its global leadership responsibilities. Donald Trump is back, and so is his signature foreign policy move—cutting the US off from some key global organisations. He has, just like during his first term, decided that the World Health Organisation (WHO) doesn't deserve US funding anymore. His reason is the same as before: the WHO did not act right during the Covid-19 pandemic and that it's bent more favourably towards China. The American contribution to WHO in 2024 was \$950 million. This was nearly 15% of the organisation's budget, making it the largest single donor out of 194 member countries. So, when Trump pulls out, it's not just a dent—it's a crater in the organisation's budget. The WHO is funded through two primary sources: assessed contributions, which are mandatory dues paid by the 194 member countries, calculated on factors like a country's wealth and population, and voluntary contributions, which come from member states, private individuals, philanthropic organisations and other partners. A significant portion of the WHO's budget relies on voluntary contributions, chiefly the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which provides substantial funding to support various global health initiatives. In fact, the Gates Foundation has pledged to continue to contribute to global health causes.

## A Billion-Dollar Challenge To Trump

The WHO, worried but not surprised like last time, has politely asked Trump to reconsider his decision. It says it "plays a crucial role in protecting the health and security of the world's people, including Americans, by addressing the root causes of disease, building stronger health systems, and detecting, preventing and responding to health emergencies, including disease outbreaks, often in dangerous places where others cannot go".

There has been a global backlash to the US move. But this one should put the country to shame: a member of WHO staff has embarked on a campaign to raise \$1 billion through crowdfunding—just enough to cover what the US contributed in 2024. So far, donations have been only trickling in—ordinary citizens of the world are paying from \$1 to \$4,000 per person. It's a noble gesture, a show of defiance against Trump, but let's be honest. It's like climbing Mount Everest. The symbolism, though, is powerful. The message to Trump is clear. The WHO is no stranger to both applause and outrage. It vaccinated over 90% of children in Gaza against polio—commendable indeed, considering it accomplished the feat during the ongoing war in Gaza. It battled the Ebola virus in conflict zones where even armies feared to tread. It has led global vaccination drives that have saved millions of lives. But

it has its share of shortcomings and failures too: it botched the early COVID-19 response, hesitating to call out China when the virus first spread, it has been accused of bureaucratic delays that cost lives during major health crises, and though it has launched internal reforms since the end of the pandemic, they are not enough. Ironically, Trump's executive order to cripple WHO financially to further his cause of pushing the "America First" agenda may prove counterproductive. By walking away from global commitments, Trump might be winning cheers from his MAGA base, but he doesn't realise that when the next global health crisis hits, his country might find itself very much alone. And for a country that was once the leader of the free world, that's quite a downgrade. Also, what should be more worrying for the US is the possibility that Trump's action may just open up space for China to step in to fill the gap. Last time Trump pulled this stunt, China rushed in, pledging to increase its voluntary contributions to the WHO. This time, Beijing is still weighing its options.

## An Ever-Growing China

The US exiting the WHO and other global agreements and institutions under Trump's "America First" policy is going to create a power vacuum, which China is sure to quickly move to fill. If this trend continues, Beijing will feel that it would gain the ability to reshape international norms, setting rules that favour its economic, political and ideological interests.

There's proof to back this. But first let's look at which treaties and organisations Trump got out of during his first term that led to the US retreating from global leadership:

World Health Organization (2020): The US left it amid the COVID-19 pandemic, accusing it of being too China-centric  
Paris Climate Accord (2017): The US claimed that it unfairly burdened the US while allowing China to pollute.

Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) (2018): America's exit led to Iran's renewed nuclear activity and increased West Asia tensions.  
Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (2017): The US cancelled a major trade pact designed to counter China's dominance in Asia.  
UNESCO & UN Human Rights Council (2018): The American withdrawal was due to claims of bias against the US and Israel  
Arms Control Treaties: The US withdrew from the INF Treaty with Russia, increasing global arms race risks

NATO & G7 Threats: Trump repeatedly threatened to withdraw from NATO, weakening confidence in the alliance  
Each of these exits did not necessarily weaken the organisations themselves, but they certainly led to massive uncertainties. Some might argue it reduced US influence and allowed China to step in an effort to fill the leadership vacuum.

By Syed Zubair Ahmed

# TV news was incensed at Ranveer Allahbadia's 'cringe' remark—only to telecast it ad nauseam

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh, podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia. Who has been at the centre of media attention this week? C'mon, you know this... Ranveer Allahbadia aka 'BeerBiceps', of course. Forget the PM's visit to France where he co-chaired the AI Summit, or the resignation of CM Biren Singh after over 20 months of ethnic violence in Manipur—a podcaster stole the limelight. Television news, YouTubers, digital media, and newspaper websites lavished attention on him. Major English newspapers, including their city supplements, covered him—some on the front page. He was the top news item across websites for three days since Monday—and counting. YouTube news channels such as Barkha Dutt's Mojo debated him; podcasters like RJ Raunak devoted an entire programme to him. Television news channels ran lengthy reports on him. Monday evening, leading English TV prime talk shows discussed him—anchors Navika Kumar (Times Now), Arnab Goswami (Republic TV), Zakka Jacob (CNN News 18), Vasudha Venugopal (NDTV 24x7) led the way. CNN News 18 devoted three debates to him on a single night. Ranveer Allahbadia has been everywhere on social media. He is the talk of the town, and, if TV news anchors are to be believed, of "the nation". The news media, the police, the politicians, the National Commission for Women (NCW) have all jumped into the controversy to condemn the podcaster and call for his head. This is the same Allahbadia who last summer hosted Union ministers like S Jaishankar, Piyush Goyal, Smriti

Irani, Rajeev Chandrasekhar on his YouTube podcast, TRS: The Ranveer Show. The same Allahbadia who received the Disruptor of the Year Award from PM Modi in March 2024—with a pat on the back and a jocular conversation. Incensed but interested in the highly unlikely event that you still haven't caught up with the reason for Allahbadia being the news media's latest toast, it was his extremely offensive sexual 'joke' on the YouTube show, 'India's Got Latent' (whatever that even means). This has been widely circulated and doesn't bear repetition.

Three aspects of the media coverage stand out: the disproportionate amount of time devoted to him, the double standards employed by some anchors to judge him, and the dangerous call for "regulation" of YouTube and other social media platforms. As you can see from the examples given above, Ranveer Allahbadia became the story of the day on Monday and parts of Tuesday. Did he really deserve so much attention—and didn't the large-scale coverage only magnify the reach of his crass question to a woman contestant on the show, increasing people's interest? Did the "nation" really demand action against him, as CNN News 18 argued—the very same channel that held not one, not two, but three prime time debates on him on Monday? And with each telling, the news channels indulge themselves in making Allahbadia's offence as sensational as they could: "Perverted, incestuous, filth..." said Republic TV.

By SHAILAJA BAJPAI



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# Is Donald Trump Interested In Pakistan?

By Parth Seth

The bilateral ties between the US and Pakistan have undergone many ups and downs in the last 77 years. What is certain is, however, Pakistan's strategic location, which has allowed it to be a frontline state for the US on several occasions. During the Cold War, as a member of both the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation and the Baghdad Pact bloc, it was embedded in the US-led order, benefitting from the latter's diplomatic and military support. Pakistan's centrality increased during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, declining after the end of the Cold War, and reached its apogee during America's War on Terror. And although the Trump administration faced an uphill struggle with Imran Khan, the US and Pakistan closely engaged to facilitate the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

## Changed New World

However, both the United States and Pakistan have changed since Trump's last term. Trump has returned with a massive mandate but is ageing and will serve his last term in office, more encumbered in considerations of legacy. The US



is unprecedentedly polarised across the fault-lines of ethnicity, race, sex, class, and political ideology.

Politics in Pakistan is transient. But be that as it may, the hybrid order seems to be the dominant backdrop, against which politicians will jostle for influence and Rawalpindi's favours. The hybrid order, however, has little popular legitimacy. The loss of popular consent and allegations of rigging the results of the national elections in 2024, coupled with the country's ongoing economic crisis and the imprisonment of Imran Khan—

arguably Pakistan's most popular leader—have strengthened secessionist and sectarian forces, with some, such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), actively colluding.

## Biggs' Big Proposal

Given these challenges, the legislative proposal by Representative Andy Biggs of Arizona to terminate the designation of Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally could not have come at a worse time. Biggs is a vocal member of the Freedom Caucus, a far-right, fiscally

conservative and spiritually Trumpian faction of the Grand Old Party (GOP), known for its opposition to the centre-right elements of the party. While the Freedom Caucus's positions might have seemed beyond the Overton Window, Trump's return and his decision to withdraw the US from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris Climate Pact, as well as doubling down on his hardline stance on immigration, have confirmed what may be the new normal for years to come. However, it is unlikely that Pakistan or its status as a major non-NATO ally will figure highly in Trump's foreign policy agenda. His executive orders on backtracking on the US's multilateral commitments and amending the basis of American citizenship suggest that his agenda will likely revolve around key electoral planks like immigration and the geo-economic competition with China. Pakistan's primacy in the American calculus precipitously declines in the absence of a conflict in South Asia, one that is of interest to the Americans. Whatever little engagement the Trump

administration enjoyed with Imran Khan's regime rarely extended beyond the facilitation of American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Trump and his appointees will not like the deployment of American assets in conflicts peripheral to American interests, and, due to the sectarian conflict in Pakistan and the resumption of terrorist activity by the TTP and BLA, will avoid dialling up its partnership with the country.

## The Signs Were There

By neither meeting nor talking to Imran Khan and Shehbaz Sharif, the White House effectively downgraded Pakistan's status during Joe Biden's Presidency. While this also has to do with the Democrats' support for Israel in the Israel-Gaza war, Imran Khan's reception by Donald Trump in 2019, as well as the linkages fostered by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) with the Pakistani diaspora, had endeared the latter to Trump. Their belief in Trump to vocally support and build pressure on the Pakistani establishment to release Khan was strengthened by Richard Grenell's support for him.

## Congress Should Know That Deportation Is An Ongoing Process

By Sanjay Singh

Since last week, Congress and its allies in the Opposition had been at a loss of words. The presentation of an exceptionally strong Union Budget, which pleasantly surprised the Indian middle class, along with the momentum leading up to the Delhi Assembly elections, has spurred broader public discourse in favour of the Modi government and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The news that 104 undocumented Indian immigrants were deported by the newly sworn-in Trump administration in the US—flown to India in a military aircraft and restrained during the flight—gave the Opposition the controversy they were desperately seeking. In their wisdom, they believed that staging a protest within Parliament House, complete with mock handcuffing and slogan-shouting, would not only attract publicity but also serve two additional purposes: one, to insinuate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's perceived



friendship with US President Donald Trump had failed to protect Indians and India's interests, and two, to project a semblance of unity within the Opposition, or the INDIA bloc, which has been teetering on the brink of collapse since the Parliamentary election results. Perhaps they did not anticipate the government's swift response. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addressed the issue in both Houses of Parliament. It takes courage, conviction and policy clarity to make such a statement on the floor of the House—especially amid the sound and

fury raised by Opposition leaders, led by Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Jaishankar was unapologetic: "It is the obligation of all nations to take back their nationals if they are found to be living illegally abroad. This is naturally subject to an unambiguous verification of their nationality. This is not a policy applicable to any specific country, nor indeed one only practised by India. It is a generally accepted principle in international relations."

The deportation of illegal immigrants from the US to India is not a new phenomenon. It has occurred regularly since 2009,

the UPA government's tenure. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for deportation by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), including the use of restraints, have been in place since 2012.

Consider these figures:

2009: 734 Indians deported  
2010: 799 deported  
2011: 597 deported  
2012: 530 deported  
2013: 515 deported  
2014: 591 deported

This process has continued under successive governments. Yet, Congress and its allies—now making an issue of these deportations—were conspicuously silent when the same occurred under their rule. It is public knowledge that the US, under Trump's administration, has identified thousands of illegal immigrants from different parts of the world as part of his flagship strategy—a broader policy to enforce immigration laws more stringently. Nothing different has happened now compared to the procedures followed in the past.

Women and children on board were not restrained.

It's true that images of deported Indian nationals—who had entered the U.S. illegally—being handcuffed and restrained onboard have not gone down well with the public. However, the manner in which the Congress and its allies raised the issue created a false impression that it was the Modi government's fault—as if the Indian government were responsible for American laws and the SOPs related to the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants. The government remains mindful of public concerns regarding the treatment of deported individuals. "We are engaging the US government to ensure that the returning deportees are not mistreated in any manner during the flight," said the External Affairs Minister. "At the same time, the House will appreciate that our focus should be to crack down strongly on the illegal migration industry while taking steps to ease visas for legitimate travellers."

# How will India navigate trade in the Trump 2.0 era?

**PM Modi's visit may ease tensions, but a lasting solution remains uncertain. With billions in trade at risk, the coming months will test US-India relations in a high-stakes economic standoff.**

Many countries welcomed Donald Trump's return to the White House but are now bracing for economic turbulence. For India, the primary concern is tariffs. Trump aims to impose new tariffs—taxes on imported goods—on a "reciprocal" basis, targeting countries with high tariffs on US exports. With billions at stake, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is heading to Washington to keep India's exports flowing and to prevent a trade war.

#### KEY FACTS:

The US was India's top trade partner in 2024, but India ranks tenth for the U.S.

The US trade deficit with India doubled from \$24 billion in 2020 to around \$46 billion in 2024.

While India has made concessions—lowering tariffs on some items in its recent budget—Trump's administration remains focused on levelling tariff rates. India is negotiating larger liquefied natural gas (LNG) purchases from American suppliers.

India's average tariffs dropped from 80 percent in 1990 to 13-14 percent today.



#### WHY IT MATTERS

Trump plans to sign an order requiring U.S. tariffs to match the tax rates imposed by other countries. "It's time to be reciprocal," he told reporters on Monday. This policy could significantly impact countries with higher tariffs on American goods, including India.

During Trump's first term, he revoked India's preferential trading partner status and raised tariffs on steel and aluminium—

a proposed 25 percent tariff on global steel and aluminium imports. Nearly \$2 billion of Indian steel exports and \$270 million in aluminium exports could be affected. Additional tariffs on cars, chemicals, and other goods are also under discussion. India has already cut duties on items like

Harley-Davidson motorcycles, a nod to Trump's past demands. Further tariff reductions on electronics,

medical equipment, and chemicals are being considered. However, lowering tariffs could strain India's slowing economy, making Modi's challenge a delicate balancing act—maintaining favourable trade relations with the US while protecting domestic industries. A

LOOMING TRADE WAR In 2024, the US imported the bulk of its goods from Mexico, China, and Canada, each sending over \$400 billion worth

of products. The US also remains the world's second-largest steel importer, heavily reliant on Canada, Brazil, and Mexico. Europe, a key US ally, has already signalled possible retaliation if new tariffs are enforced.

Trump's return has also shifted global perspectives. A survey across 11 EU nations, Ukraine, Switzerland, and the UK found that most now view the US as a "necessary partner" rather than a close ally.

#### WHAT'S DRIVING TRUMP'S TARIFF PUSH?

The US has run a trade deficit of at least \$500 billion since 2017, buying more from other countries than it sells. Trump sees this as a justification for his aggressive trade policies. His 2017 tax overhaul expires this year, and without new legislation, tax rates will rise, leading to fiscal tightening.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR INDIA? Modi's visit may ease tensions, but a lasting solution remains uncertain. With billions in trade at risk, the coming months will test US-India relations in a high-stakes economic standoff.

## Who's Afraid Of Criminalising Marital Rape?

By Derek O'Brien

Your columnist introduced a Private Member's Bill during this session of Parliament. The proposed legislation aims at removing the provision exempting marital rape in India. Section 63 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (one of the three new criminal laws passed by this government) continues to provide a disturbing exception for marital rape, undermining the autonomy and equality of women. This archaic exception sends a dangerous message—that a woman's right to consent is irrelevant once she enters into marriage. This exception, rooted in outdated beliefs and patriarchal systems, is not just an affront to the dignity of women but also a direct violation of a woman's constitutional rights, including personal liberty, equality and privacy. The new Private Member's Bill proposed by your columnist seeks to



plug this loophole and ensure that marital rape is not excluded from the purview of criminal laws.

#### The Origin Of The Exception

The origins of the marital rape exception can be traced back to 17th-century England. Sir Matthew Hale's

interpretation of the law proclaimed that a husband could not be guilty of raping his wife because, through marriage, the wife had consented to sexual intercourse and had no right to retract that consent. The British colonial legal system did not recognise the equality of men and

women. This view persisted when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was drafted in the 19th century. Subsequently, Section 63 of the BNS explicitly provides an exception to the definition of rape, stating that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is over the age of 18, cannot be considered rape. This bizarre exception has remained, despite multiple recommendations for change. As a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which (hurriedly) examined the new laws, your columnist and other Members of Parliament, mainly belonging to Opposition parties, submitted dissent notes objecting to this provision. The 42nd Report of the Law Commission (1971) suggested the removal of this exception. In 1983, the IPC was amended to criminalise spousal rape. This exception was restricted to cases of judicial separation.



# Great Expectations From Modi-Trump Talks

By Tara Kartha

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is due in the US soon after he wraps up his France visit. There is widespread speculation on the result of this visit, given a series of actions by the new US administration that appear to be directed against India. These include the widely publicised issue of deportation of illegal Indian migrants, and the lesser-known fact that President Donald Trump has just put a full stop to India's development of the Chahbahar port in Iran by withdrawing the exemption for New Delhi to provide aid to Afghanistan. That's not all. There's a savage announcement of tariffs that has already hit the Indian stock market and dragged the rupee to a historic low. Despite a very optimistic press briefing by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, strengthening bilateral relations will likely be an uphill task, for both sides.

**Deportations As Noise**

First, that issue of the deportation of illegal migrants and its outflow. The Opposition noise was misplaced, in that the report of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement has statistics that show that this has been going on for years. It has so far been a totally non-discriminatory exercise involving citizens of some 228 countries, including close allies like the UK. There have been charter flights to China since 2018.

The report notes that some 37 per cent of those deported had a serious criminal background. Shackling, though inhuman, also seems to be across the board, and legal in the US. Those deported violated

US law, and Indian law - which includes the Emigration Act 1983 and the Passport Act 1967 among others.

No questions there. The problem was of course, the deliberate publicity given to the exercise by the US Border chief on the 'farthest ever' deportation, which is patently false, given that five flights went to China in recent months. His timeline doesn't show any other country (other than Guatemalans and Mexicans) but does show that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem is at the forefront of the drive against illegals. The problem is anti-India sentiments that have been growing, and could get worse with more 'brown skins' being publicly deported, with a reported additional 4,000-odd identified. That has now got inextricably tied up with the H-1B visa issue that led to Indian origin Congressman Shri Thanedar being targeted with racist attacks when he raised the issue. That in turn led him to sponsor a Resolution against 'Hinduphobia'.

Rising racism is not something either country will be able to deal with if it spirals. The US should be advised that while deportation is legal, deliberate humiliation is not. Besides, the truth of the matter is that jobs are not being lost to Indians but to AI (Artificial Intelligence), crossing 350,000 mid last year. This is about perception management, which both sides need to consider.

**Trade Tariffs Wars Are Hurting Already**  
Then there is the expected arm-twisting on trade. New Delhi had been proactive on this, announcing tariff reductions in

the Budget, which eliminated an entire slab of high tariff ranges, with reports suggesting more is coming. Yet, recent comments by top officials on 'enormously high' tariffs persist. The US is second to China in the 'top 10' trading partners list, but the only one with which India has a surplus (\$37 bn). That says something. The new tariffs on steel and aluminum will not impact India directly, but an overly protectionist trade regime could emerge, as it did in the previous Trump era. That's no good for anyone, not even the US, as shown in an analysis of the 2019 Senate Joint Economic Committee, which showed that Trump's trade wars hurt Americans most, with the loss of some 300,000 jobs. In India, however, the pain is immediate. The rupee has weakened to a historic low even as it is rated as Asia's worst performing currency. The stock market crashed on the announcement of the tariffs, with investors losing some 6-lakh crore. No, India cannot afford a trade war, especially not now. But at least it can be argued that the tariff wars are against even the US' strongest allies.

Meanwhile, India has also changed its Nuclear Liability laws after the US lifted restrictions on three nuclear entities - Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE) - but by the previous administration. It can be expected that Trump will demand an operationalisation of the long-delayed Indo-US nuclear deal, which involves the US building nuclear reactors for India. That never

happened. Expect that to be raised strongly, regardless of preferences for co-production, and relaxation of the US non-proliferation Act. That deal in turn was pushed by then President George W Bush's conviction that India was bound to be a major world power and to that end, he personally pushed it through. It's unclear whether that conviction still remains.

**Academic Reservations**

That it might not, is evident in recent writings. Despite the great optics of a meeting between Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and Secretary of State Marco Rubio immediately after the inaugural, and the Quad meeting, there are signs that India's 'strategic autonomy' is being questioned. A recent Foreign Affairs (BACK-LINK) article exemplifies the prevailing conviction among many in the US, that India is an unreliable partner to the US because it acts in its self-interest - a rather puzzling statement given that it is presumably a fundamental function of a state. Others from premier think tanks view strategic autonomy in terms of India's participation in such bodies like the China-helmed Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil Russia South Africa) as corrosive to US security, and suggest that the US is in fact encouraging a 'regional hegemon'. Another point being made is that in encouraging India with defence ties and technology, US policy is deviating from the 'lessons of history' that rising powers should be prevented, by all means, from trying to impose their own order on the world.

# OPPOSITION PARTIES MEE' UNITED WE STAND

17-18 JULY BENGALURU, KARNATAKA



## INDIA Bloc: Self-Sabotage Is A Skill, Too

By Sunil Gatade, Venkatesh Kesari

Is the INDIA bloc a victim of the crabs-in-a-bucket mentality, that is, a mindset in which individuals prevent others from advancing? Folk wisdom holds that in an open bucket, no crab escapes because others pull it back down. The idea may seem unusual, but the way India's opposition partners are undercutting each other is not very different from this. Formed after extensive deliberation to challenge a resurgent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the bloc now appears more preoccupied with internal conflicts than with its stated goal. This discord is evident in state elections, where members often work at cross purposes.

The Debacle In Delhi

A case in point is the recent Delhi elections, where most non-Congress INDIA allies backed Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Some even campaigned for it, leaving the Congress—attempting to regain relevance in the national capital—isolated.

Additionally, how does one interpret Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's aggressive efforts to encroach upon the vote banks of his allies? A recent example is the caste census conducted in Congress-ruled Telangana, following which Gandhi proposed a specific percentage of reservations for backward communities in the state. Gandhi also championed a caste-based census at the national level, arguing that it would reveal

the extent to which weaker sections are integrated into the power structure and whether they participate effectively.

Uneasy Overlaps

Dalits, tribals, and OBCs currently serve as the electoral base for several Congress allies within the INDIA bloc. As a result, Gandhi's rhetoric is bound to create unease among them. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), for instance, has long relied on the MY (Muslim-Yadav) factor and seeks to expand its influence. Similarly, Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) advocates for the PDA (Pichada, Dalit, and Alpasankhyak) vote. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) emphasises its tribal identity, while the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), rooted in the Dravidian movement, takes pride in securing higher reservations for backward communities in Tamil Nadu.

An Idea That Couldn't Be

Gandhi's scathing attack on AAP leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during the Delhi campaign—criticising him for constructing a "Sheesh Mahal" and accusing former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia of orchestrating the controversial liquor scam—was no off-the-cuff remark. Observers see it as a message to allies who have undermined Congress while benefiting from its setbacks. The message is that the party's patience is wearing thin.

Despite their professed commitment to defeating the BJP, INDIA bloc members

are, in practice, weakening each other. The growing internal strife is turning the alliance into a non-starter. As long as internal rivalries overshadow collective strategy, the INDIA bloc risks being little more than an idea on paper—held back, much like crabs in a bucket.

Battle Of The Insecure

The INDIA alliance has seen multiple plots and subplots, driven by contradictions within the grouping as regional parties clash with the grand old party's interests. Parties like the Samajwadi Party, the RJD, the JMM, and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) do not want the Congress to gain strength in their respective states—Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra—because their own growth depends on encroaching upon the Congress's political space. However, the BJP's juggernaut has made them insecure to the extent that they recognise the need for an opposition coalition, lest they be overrun.

The AAP and its leader, Arvind Kejriwal, present a different challenge. Kejriwal has harboured prime ministerial ambitions since founding his party 13 years ago, making him uncomfortable in any coalition where he is not the central figure.

Meanwhile, the Congress, struggling to regroup after three consecutive Lok Sabha election defeats, is finding it difficult to earn the confidence of its INDIA bloc partners, despite being the principal

opposition party in Parliament. Its predicament is complex: in the battle of "BJP Hatao, Desh Bachao" (remove the BJP, save India), it cannot ignore or forgive the past actions of regional allies in the bloc, but it also cannot defeat the BJP alone.

A Lost Opportunity

The rise of Narendra Modi at the national level, coupled with the relentless expansion of the BJP under him and Home Minister Amit Shah, has presented new challenges for the ruling party's detractors. Modi is skilfully exploiting internal contradictions and personality clashes within the INDIA bloc. The once-powerful Janata Parivar is now limited to select districts in Bihar, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh. Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, once a key figure in third-front politics and a kingmaker at the national level, appears to have fully aligned with the BJP.

In Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has become largely inactive, while the futures of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab remain uncertain. The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) have already faded into irrelevance in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, while the YSR Congress Party and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) are slowly getting marginalised.

# Modi-Trump Meet: Don't Fall For Window Dressing



By Tara Kartha

There is likely to be hectic activity at the Ministry of External Affairs as reports point to a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington in just a week. That's unusual. Normally, an event of this magnitude would take months of preparation by both sides. A White House 'official' has even confirmed that Modi will visit the US on February 12, meeting the President the next day. True, there already had been rumours of Modi possibly making a trip to Washington, especially after a scheduled visit to Paris to co-chair the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit. So far, however, the Ministry has been quiet on the Washington visit, even as a hail of preparatory actions are evident in the run-up to it.

**Irritants Upfront: Dollars And Such**  
The initial winds did not seem good. As President-elect, Trump was threatening tariffs against the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) grouping, demanding that they abandon any talk of moving away from the dollar and having a separate currency.

That fear is not insubstantial. In recent times, the group has expanded to include Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Egypt, and some 34 countries have submitted an expression of interest in joining the bloc of major emerging economies. Imposing

tariffs against all of them would indeed be a challenge, but any move towards de-dollarisation is certain to invite some form of American retribution. Until recently, nearly 100% of oil trading was conducted in US dollars. But, in 2023, a fifth of oil trade was reportedly done under non-US dollar currencies

The BRICS 'unit'—if it materialises—will be backed by a basket of currencies of the respective member countries. Among them, the yuan will be the strongest. This is a reality that hardly serves Delhi's interests. Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has since denied the possibility of any backing of such steps, indicating that it is neither 'policy' nor 'strategy' to consider de-dollarisation.

That's move number one, and a very swift one indicating that in a consensus-based grouping, India will stand aligned with US interests, at least in this case.

**The Deportation Spree**

The second concern is the Trumpian threat to illegal migrants and the weaponising of tariffs, which saw Columbia first putting up a fight but then caving in in a matter of hours, agreeing to take back all undocumented migrants. China bowed, too, as nearly five flights sent back undocumented Chinese immigrants from America.

India, however, was quick off the mark, with Jaishankar in his press interaction noting that while Delhi wanted 'legal mobility' for its citizens, it was against illegal migration and all the other related threats it entails. The issue was clearly raised in his meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, as a read-out confirmed. It was broached 'gently', with the main text stressing continuing cooperation.

Days later, India confirmed that it was taking back 18,000 identified migrants, with some 205 being sent back to Amritsar, even as orders were given to ensure that bureaucratic procedures were in place. The trouble is there is a lot more where that came from. Last year, US data indicated that some 90,105 people were trying to enter the country illegally, with Indians totalling some 3% of them. That's a lot, and it's not an issue that can be resolved easily or quickly.

**Those Pesky Tariffs Don't Exist**

The recently unveiled Union budget also made some significant announcements, again pre-empting America's tariff threats. It did away with peak tariff rates of 150%, 125% and 100% on imports. These actually applied to just five items, including the contentious Harley Davidson motorcycles and imported Tesla cars (as well as Japanese vehicles

and other bikes). While duties have been slashed, a cess remains, which goes to the Centre. This can be used flexibly at any point.

Meanwhile, import duties on the top 30 items exported by the US to India—crude oil, coking coal, aeroplanes, and liquefied natural gas (already minimal) being the top ones—are anyway in the range of zero to 7.5%. All this is very good optics, with the data apparently shared with US officials, and the message going out that India is not, in fact, a 'high tariff' country.

**And Then, China**

The positive messages from Washington were also many, with Jaishankar being the first top diplomat to meet with his counterpart, and the scheduling of the Quad foreign ministers' meeting immediately after the inauguration being seen as Trump reinforcing his backing of the grouping. That's also a clear signal to China from the White House, which analysts seem to have missed amid all the bonhomie seen in the call between President Xi and Trump—in which, according to the latter's tweet, Xi promised to work for a peaceful world.

Words, however, are cheap. True, with Trump promising to 'take over' the Gaza strip in his meeting with Israel's Netanyahu recently, the focus on the Middle East is unlikely to change. True also that

Trump is to call the Chinese President soon—this after he promised 60% tariffs against Beijing but ultimately imposed a mere 10%. In any case, these tariffs are actually linked to narcotics trafficking, something Beijing too sees as a threat rather than trade. China, in turn, fired off the launch of DeepSeek immediately after, which topped download charts and wiped billions of dollars off the market of Nvidia, sending the signal that the country can retaliate in multiple ways. The actual retaliation by Beijing in terms of tariffs was relatively mild in hard terms. Expect more negotiation ahead.

**An Unchanging Constant**

However, what is not open to negotiation is one constant in the US National Security Strategy: it states unambiguously that the US doesn't tolerate competitors or challenges from other powers. This was Trump's outlook, too, in 2017, and it will likely be even more magnified now. A rising China will not be tolerated. And Trump, being what he is, will want other powers to step up. That includes not just allies, but also 'friends' like India. Prepare to step up to the plate, with—as the White House readout made clear—more weapons buys from the US. 'Strategic autonomy' is going to get more difficult to maintain, at least in terms of managing Beijing's perceptions. The point, ultimately, is that China is going to be front and centre of US policy.

For India, this can be a huge opportunity. The proposed US-India Defence Cooperation Act 2024, introduced by Rubio, back then a Senator, is an example. It treats India at par with US allies, placing it on nearly the same footing as them in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) in terms of provision of defence equipment. On the question of transfer of technology, however, there is not much at present.

This point will need to be added to a future proposal to make it attractive to India and to boost not just the Indian defence industry but the economy as a whole, on which everything else rests.

And, these additions will need a



# Delhi Debacle: Can Kejriwal Ever Recover From This Wipeout?



By Ashutosh

Many may be tempted to write the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) obituary today, but that may be both hasty and tragic. The AAP's defeat in Delhi is basically a journey from Dreamland to Crashland. Much before the results were out, I had argued that this was the most opportune time for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win in Delhi. The results of the Delhi assembly elections are shocking for both AAP and Arvind Kejriwal, but it's they who must take the blame for the rout, and gracefully accept their mistakes.

Kejriwal had emerged on the national scene as a radical revolutionary who promised to change the politics of the country. Instead, it was politics that changed Kejriwal. Twelve years in power turned him into yet another politician who lost all his moral lustre and charisma. Nothing could be more tragic than the defeat of Kejriwal from his own seat, the New Delhi constituency. It's a lesson for all politicians who think they are bigger than the party and the collective wisdom of the people.

Five things went against the AAP in this election.

## 1. Same Old, Same Old

First, the AAP's biggest undoing was that it was no longer seen as a party with a difference. Moral capital used to be its unique asset, something that few parties in contemporary politics could claim. But over time, the AAP sacrificed its core values; it became vulnerable as its most loyal supporters lost confidence in both the party and its leader.

A similar thing had happened with the

BJP in 1984, when it could win only two seats in the national election. Yes, Indira Gandhi's assassination was one of the reasons for the party's dismal performance, but it was also a fact that the BJP had abandoned its core ideological Hindutva pitch and had



been trying to be secular. True, the AAP is not an ideological party, but it had a certain moral virtue and responsibility. It was this moral image that had helped it win landslide mandates in both 2015 and 2020 assembly elections.

## 2. Losing The Moral Edge

Second, serious corruption charges dented Kejriwal's image. The alleged liquor scam proved to be an albatross around his neck. It landed him in jail, along with his colleagues Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and others. And, the 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy proved to be the final straw. Voters could not believe that a leader who criticised every politician for their wealth and fancy bungalows had ironically built a plush house worth crores for himself. The leaked images of his renovated home did more

damage to Kejriwal's personal image than the liquor scam. He did realise this, and attempted some damage control by resigning from office and leaving the chief minister's bungalow for a much more modest accommodation. But the deed was

done. The middle class, which had been the biggest pillar of the AAP's success story in the national capital, had already been disillusioned, and ended up deserting the AAP.

## 3. The Policy Paralysis

Thirdly, the non-performance of the AAP government in its third term from 2020 to 2025 contributed to its rout. In its first full term, the AAP government was seen to be delivering on its promises. Other than the provision of free electricity and water, schools in Delhi were turned into better centres for education, a step that brought global appreciation for the government. The introduction of Mohalla clinics was also an excellent step to improve primary healthcare. It became a hit among large sections of society that could not afford costly

medical care at private facilities.

In the last term, however, the AAP government suffered from policy and administrative paralysis. It was seen as constantly wrangling with the Lieutenant Governor for power. The tussle between the Centre and the AAP government brought governance in the city to a standstill. Broken roads and open sewer lines were for everyone to see.

## 4. When Theatrics Don't Pay Off

Fourthly, 10 years is a long time for anti-incumbency to set in against any government. Even the Modi government at the Centre could not avoid the repercussions of anti-incumbency in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Despite the party's expectations that it would get more than 400 seats along with its allies, it could not get a majority in the Lok Sabha polls and had to rely on smaller allies to form a government.

The AAP government in Delhi was no exception. Its misstep was that instead of trying to arrest and address the disillusionment of its voters, it indulged in theatrics.

## 5. Volunteers Were Tired

Finally, the AAP failed to strengthen its biggest asset: its selfless volunteer force. It couldn't create a party structure across the national capital. In contrast, the BJP has always had the advantage of having a robust organisation. Kejriwal, by nature, does not believe in that. Slowly and steadily over the last 10 years, many volunteers, feeling ignored, exploited, disheartened and disillusioned, either left the AAP and went back to their usual lives, or, they joined other parties. In this election, the AAP had to rely on paid workers.

Even so, it might be too early to be writing an obituary for the AAP. The party has lost almost 10% votes compared to its tally in the 2020 assembly elections. But it still commands almost 43% votes. It still controls the capital's municipal body. In Punjab, it has a government with more than 90 MLAs, and has also made its presence felt in Gujarat and Goa. And, it still holds the status of a national party.

Kejriwal's obituary has been written often in the past, but every time, he has risen from the ashes like a phoenix. The latest crisis is unlike any other though. It is existential. It will take deeper introspection and great courage to go back to the old drawing board if the AAP and its boss are serious about regaining the confidence of those who sided with him for 10 long years.

# Raising the issue of deportation of Indian immigrants by US in Indian Parliament Punjab MP expressed peoples' outrage

By Jag Mohan Thaken – India

During the discussion on budget in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, Aam Aadmi Party MP Raghav Chadha launched a strong attack on the Indian government's policies and raised the issue of deportation of Indian immigrants by US and expressed the peoples' outrage.

Referring to the incident in which 104 Indians were deported from the United States, MP Chadha said, "Indians were brought on airplanes shackled and chained. This is against humanity. The government should have strongly protested this, but our Ministry of External Affairs failed to take decisive action."

In a scathing attack, Chadha questioned India's response by asking: Why did the Ministry of External Affairs not summon the American ambassador to express its outrage? Why didn't India send an aircraft to repatriate its citizens with dignity? And why does such treatment not occur for citizens of countries like Sweden,

Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom?

Putting the government in the dock, Chadha further asked, "Why did the flight carrying deported Indian citizens land in Amritsar, despite it carrying individuals from various states across India? What was the rationale behind this decision?"

"What steps is the government taking to address the potential cancellation of visas and the increasing risk of deportations? How does the government plan to support the reintegration of these individuals, particularly in terms of employment opportunities?"

Chadha added that when Colombia's President Gustavo Petro heard that the US military was arriving with an aircraft full of expatriates, he refused to allow the plane to land. Instead, he boarded the aircraft himself and assured that a 'dignified life' would be provided in Colombia.

Divulging the details of voice raised by Chadha, a party release states that the Punjab MP then referred to the policies of the Trump administration, stating that H-1B visa restrictions and tariffs are



negatively impacting Indian professionals and industries. He said that American tariffs are severely damaging Indian IT exports, pharmaceuticals, and the automobile sector—putting millions of jobs at risk.

"The H-1B visa restrictions will affect Indians the most. In 2023, 72% of the total 386,000 H-1B applications were from Indians, which could lead to massive job losses—potentially risking the jobs of around 0.5 million

Indians in the US. Additionally, increased H-1B visa costs mean that Indian IT companies may have to hire local staff at higher salaries."

The release reveals that Chadha also stated that Trump's policies will not spare the textile garment exports, competitiveness will decline, and exports worth \$8.4

billion in 2023 could shrink. In the pharmaceutical sector, a 25% tariff could disrupt the supply of generic drugs to America—jeopardizing 150,000 jobs in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

Stating repercussions, Chadha warned that a 25% tariff on the automobile sector could result in a \$14-billion trade loss and affect nearly 300,000 jobs. The situation for expatriates will worsen, as stricter measures on illegal immigration and delays in green card processing may cause many Indians in the US to lose their jobs. This, in turn, will increase unemployment in India and create difficulties for returning Indians in reintegrating into the economy.

He noted that a decline in foreign currency reserves could weaken the Indian rupee against the dollar. A drop in IT companies' revenues might result in a reduction of India's corporate tax collection by as much as \$2,500 to \$3,000 million.

Moreover, the release expresses, such economic challenges will add political pressure. The US may compel India to purchase more defence equipment and could also pressure India to halt defence agreements with Russia. In addition, the US might withdraw the \$200 million it provides for health and education.

## Move Over Middle Class, 'Replicants' Are Coming

By Dinesh Narayanan

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away recently, heralded the era of economic liberalisation in India with the quote: "No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come." It was perhaps Singh's keen sense of history that made him append those Victor Hugo lines to the end of his famous 1991 Budget speech in Parliament.

The forces unleashed at that moment were responsible for the social, political and economic changes that marked the past 34 years of India. Economic freedom helped lift millions out of poverty. It made wealth, until then looked down upon as a sign of dubious morality, fashionable. Above all, it spawned a vibrant middle class of managers, professionals, innovators, entrepreneurs, creators, and many more pursuing a multitude of new vocations.

White-collar jobs, fat salaries, aspirations, new tastes, and uncommon pursuits drove the economic engine for three decades.



Conventional wisdom suggests that the expansion of this class helps a country improve its stock in the world in many ways. The middle class greatly contributes to the national economic status, social progress, and transnational influence with their creativity, innovation, and drive. Their hive mind powers the nation and influences its trajectory.

Now, the time for another idea—Artificial

Intelligence (AI)—has arrived, and it may not bode well for the middle class, which in countries such as India would mean the very backbone of the economy.

The Disruption

As a phenomenon, AI swept the public imagination in November 2022 when OpenAI unleashed ChatGPT on an unsuspecting world. But the slow creep of the tide began arguably a decade before

with AlexNet, an artificial neural architecture built by founders Geoffrey Hinton, Alex Krizhevsky, and Ilya Sutskever, the pioneers of AI as we know it. What they demonstrated was training machines to recognise and classify images. That was made possible largely because of Nvidia re-engineering its ultra-fast graphic processing units built for gaming for general-purpose computing. Its programming model and parallel computing platform could process data at supercomputer speeds. Nvidia's processors kept getting faster, each generation in lockstep with skyrocketing demand when the industry discovered that it could deploy the processors to teach machines how to analyse words, voice and images, still and moving. The growth of the industry was so fast that within two years of ChatGPT's release, the Nvidia stock rose nearly 800% in value, helping it pip Apple to become the most valuable company in the world.

# Yeh Dilli Maange More

By Bharti Mishra Nath

The Delhi election is done, and people have given a clear mandate. The new government's priorities need to be infrastructure transformation and improving public services.

In the last decade of AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) governments, the country's capital turned unliveable. Damaged roads, garbage on the streets, overflowing open sewers and polluted air became the norm.

As the quality of life deteriorated, citizens watched AAP blaming the central government for every problem, and making excuses for promises not kept.

The BJP, back in power in Delhi after over 26 years, has its task cut out, with expectations soaring. Its to-do list runs long - roads, waste management, clean drinking water, cleaning river Yamuna; developing the riverfront; controlling air pollution, and improving health, education and public services.

Persistent Problems

Delhi is one of the world's fastest-growing urban cities and its various challenges range from population growth to infrastructural stress. As of 2024, the population of Delhi is estimated to be over 33 million (per the latest UN World Urbanisation Prospects). An estimated four to five million people - or 25-30 per cent of the city's population - live in



unauthorised colonies and slums without any essential services, which makes it a more complex problem.

The new government will have to streamline and overhaul its various agencies and departments for better internal coordination and smooth functioning.

The Delhi Jal Board, which oversees the task of providing water and sewerage services to the city, has been found wanting on many fronts.

The DJB has not been able to meet the city's water requirement of 1,290 MGD (million gallons per day) during peak summers, as estimated by the Economic Survey of 2023-24. The Jal Board collects raw water - which is treated to

make it safe for drinking - from internal and external sources. This could be surface water (from rivers, canals etc) groundwater, or rainwater. The raw water is transferred to the 10 water treatment plants located across the city with a total installed (treatment) capacity of only 946 MGD.

Inadequately treated drinking water and sewage have posed health risks for Delhi citizens and is possibly one of the main reasons for the public to vote out AAP. Cases of cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, hepatitis, typhoid, dengue and chikungunya have emerged with disturbing frequency.

Waste treatment in Delhi suffers from systemic failure and over half of the

waste ends up in landfills. In an affidavit to the Supreme Court in May 2024, the Centre disclosed that in Delhi alone, the daily waste generation in all the three jurisdictions - Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Council and Delhi Cantonment Board - is about 11,342 TPD (tonnes per day). But only 8,073 TPD is processed, while around 3,800 TPD of fresh waste is dumped at the two giant dumping sites in Delhi - Ghazipur and Bhalaswa - causing a foul stench.

Most of the sewage treatment plants (STPs) in Delhi failed to meet standards in various parameters. The water from these plants, treated or untreated, often makes it to the river Yamuna or is used for horticulture, thus contaminating the river, food product and the groundwater, leading to serious health consequences.

Safe drinking water and proper sanitation are important public health requirements, and providing these services is the mandated duty of local and state governments. Delhi's smog is a public health emergency. The largest contributor is vehicular emissions, which account for over 30% of the city's air pollution. Construction and industrial activities, especially from brick kilns and small manufacturing units, also contribute significantly to pollution.

## How The Middle Class Turned Delhi's Fate

By Yashwant Deshmukh & Sutanu Guru

In February 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the spanking new headquarters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi. Since then, he has travelled many times to the imposing building in Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg to celebrate the electoral victories of the BJP. Television channels have shown visuals of myriad leaders with broad smiles waiting for him to address the jubilant crowd of BJP supporters. They did the same on February 8 as the cadre and leaders prepared for Modi to arrive to celebrate the BJP's victory in Delhi, a state it had last won in 1993. But the authors did notice something. This time, many TV cameras focused on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who sported her trademark smile: seemingly reluctant, enigmatic and yet interesting.

Overnight Perception Change

And why not? Even before she presented her eighth budget on February 1, the BJP had already been giving a tough fight to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). However,



scores of surveys done by C Voter since the Lok Sabha election of 2024 had indicated that the middle-class voter of India had not just been in despair but also quite dissatisfied with the government at the Centre. All that disappeared literally overnight when Sitharaman announced a massive tax bonanza for India's middle class. It was akin to pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Prior to the budget speech, about 30% of respondents in the C Voter Tracker survey had said that they

expected their quality of life to improve in the next year, while more than 37% expected it to deteriorate. The budget, however, had a near-magical impact on middle-class perceptions. The tracker survey results of February 2 were revealing. While 24% expected their quality of life to deteriorate in the next year, more than 40% expected it to improve. There can be no doubt that the final BJP push for victory in the last week of the Delhi campaign was powered by

the middle class.

A Four-Point Gap

On the face of it, the BJP has delivered a landslide win in Delhi. From eight in 2020, the seat tally went to 48, while AAP's score crashed to 22 from 62 in 2020. But numbers can be deceptive. One major expectation of commentators was that the Congress would dent AAP big time in quite a number of seats in Delhi. The party campaigned stridently and aggressively against Arvind Kejriwal, despite the two being members of the INDIA bloc.

However, data from the Election Commission of India suggests that the Congress vote share improved marginally to a little over 6%. That's why the vote share of AAP is still formidable—almost 44%—despite such a heavy loss. In most other states in India, a 44% vote share would be enough to win a big majority. But it's also true that the BJP and its allies together managed to gather almost 48% votes. That 4 percentage point divergence proved decisive in the end and spelt electoral doom for AAP.

# Maha Govt website hacking: Court tells expert to give solutions, not point fingers

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed a petitioner, a cyber expert, to directly make suggestions to the state cyber department and the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mumbai Police's Cyber Crime Unit, regarding the upgradation of cybersecurity for Maharashtra government websites. "It is a noble cause, but you should approach the authority," said the bench of Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Bharti Dangre while disposing of the petition filed by Information Technology Consultant and Visiting Professor Ruzbeh Raja.

Advocate Ajinkya Udane, appearing for Raja, submitted, "The petitioner is ready and willing to give suggestions to the authorities to ensure that cyberattacks do not happen on government websites." "Undoubtedly, there is a need to prevent government websites from cyberattacks," said the bench while directing the petitioner to submit a proposal or suggestions. The authorities have been instructed to take effective steps to implement them, subject to feasibility.

The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Raja had sought an investigation into sporadic incidents of Maharashtra

government websites being hacked.

However, the bench observed that, being an expert in the field, the petitioner should provide suggestions rather than merely point fingers at the authorities. The petition had sought urgent action by various state and central government authorities to prevent the large-scale contamination and infection of several official Maharashtra state government websites under the domain Maharashtra.gov.in. These websites were allegedly redirecting visitors to gambling and betting pages and attempting to extract personal information.

The plea pointed out that several important state government websites, including those of the Mumbai Police, State Information Commission, Transport Department, Directorate of Forensic Science, Government Resolutions, Law and Justice Department, Chief Electoral Officer, and even the Directorate of Information Technology, had allegedly been compromised.

The petition listed over 20 state government websites that had been affected and highlighted that new infected websites were being discovered daily.

# Trump admin prioritising relations with India: Ex-White House official



The Donald Trump administration is prioritising relations with India and recognises that the country has the potential to transform the Indo-Pacific region and is an important partner when it comes to competing effectively with China, a former White House official has said.

These remarks were made by Lisa Curtis ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the White House for a bilateral meeting with President Trump on Thursday. She has served in President Donald Trump's first administration as the senior director for South and Central Asia in the National Security Council between 2017 and 2021.

In an online press briefing on Tuesday hosted by Washington DC-based think tank The Centre for a New American Security (CNAS) on the eve of Modi's visit, Curtis said, "Clearly, the Trump administration is prioritising relations with India."

"They recognise that India is an important

emerging global power and really has the potential to transform the Indo-Pacific region and the world," Curtis, Senior Fellow and Director of the Indo-Pacific Security Programme at the think tank, said. Modi will be the fourth foreign leader to visit Trump in the weeks after the American leader's inauguration as the 47th President of the US.

Within less than a month of the start of Trump's second term in the White House, he has hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Jordan's King Abdullah II. Curtis added that it is quite notable that India is being given such close attention with everything that is happening domestically here under the new Trump administration.

And of course, the Indian government has also done its groundwork and has already taken positive steps to set a tone, a good tone for Thursday's meeting, she said. She

also said the Quad is something very important to the Trump administration.

"We've already seen a meeting of the Quad foreign ministers, literally on the first day of the Trump administration. So that shows the importance that the Trump administration attaches to India and its role in the Quad," she said.

On January 21, a day after Trump's inauguration, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had a bilateral and Quad meeting. Rubio met Jaishankar as well as other foreign ministers of the Quad grouping Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi at the State Department on January 21, the first Quad ministerial meeting of the Trump administration's second term. "So that's something that draws them together, the idea of the US and India working together to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific,

to make sure that other countries have choices beyond China, to reduce dependencies on China, to diversify supply chains. All of this is important to both countries, and this is where their interests converge. So I expect that will be some of the glue that brings the US and India together despite this trade friction, she said.

With the Trump-Modi meeting coming against the backdrop of the Trump administration's announcements and focus on trade and tariffs, Curtis said it will be necessary for the two leaders to try to reach a trade deal.

"But if we look back at the first Trump administration, despite a great deal of effort, they never did conclude a trade agreement. Still, the trade friction did not overwhelm the overall strategic partnership. And by the time Trump left office, I think he had left the US-India relationship in a very good place," she said. Curtis, however, added that this time around, we're going to see less patience from President Trump on the trade issues, the expectations will be higher of India to make concessions to lower tariffs. And so we've yet to see whether India will be able to do that. "And I think you know this means that the trade issue could be more of an irritant this time around than it was during the first Trump administration. In response to a question on whether Trump is looking to draw India more closely to the US to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, Curtis said that even though much of the talk will be on the bilateral relationship, trade, immigration, defence purchases, the China thread will weave through the meeting.

# Who is Ranveer Allahbadia and why is he receiving flak from all corners?

Ranveer Allahbadia, the 31-year-old podcaster and content creator with over 27 million followers, apologised on Monday afternoon after the social media flak for his comments on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube talent show, India's Got Latent.

"My comment was not just inappropriate, it was not even funny. Comedy is not my forte. I'm sorry," he said on Monday afternoon in a video shared on X.

In the episode which was shot in November and premiered last week, Allahbadia asked a provocative question to a contestant – "Would you rather watch your parents have sex every day for the rest of your life or join in once to stop it forever?"

In no time, the clip featuring this part went viral with the podcasters being slammed by netizens online, including Congress leader Supriya Shrinete, former Infosys CFO Mohandas Pai and journalist and lyricist Neelesh Misra.

"Everyone has freedom of speech, but our freedom ends when we encroach upon the freedom of others," Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said while addressing the controversy, adding, "In our society, we have made some rules, and if someone violates them, it is absolutely wrong and action should be taken against them."

Soon two Mumbai lawyers, Ashish Rai and Pankaj Mishra, submitted a written complaint to the Mumbai police, and the National and Maharashtra State Women's Commission claimed obscene comments were made against parents, women, and their body parts. Mumbai police also started a probe against him.

An engineer turned content creator An alumnus of Dhirubhai Ambani International School, Allahbadia was born into a family of doctors and pursued engineering from Dwarkadas J. Sanghvi College of Engineering, Mumbai. "I knew I didn't want to follow in their footsteps, so engineering seemed like the next best option," he is quoted on the official website of BeerBiceps – the moniker he went by (and is popularly known as) when he started his career as a content creator back in August 2015. His content creator journey started with fitness and recipe videos before expanding to include content on self-development and styling, and eventually pivoting towards podcasting in 2019.

"I was quite buff, which, surprisingly, led to some disdain from my teachers. Around the same time, I was going through a breakup and had fallen into the habit of partying every day." The wake-up call

came when he flunked one subject, and he decided to turn his life around.

After graduating Allahbadia decided to launch a fitness app and came on YouTube to promote the app. Today, he has 9.6 million followers across three Instagram accounts and 18.8 million followers across two YouTube channels and has interviewed actors Priyanka Chopra, Kareena Kapoor Khan, actor-businessman-and-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger, spiritual guru Gaur Gopal Das, and author Amish Tripathi among others.

More recently, Allahbadia has gained access to cabinet ministers like Smriti Irani, Nitin Gadkari and S. Jaishankar, all of whom have appeared on his podcast. He was also presented 'Disruptor of the Year' award by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the National Creators Award last year. The podcaster is known for covering a wide range of questions, across fame, finance, spirituality and especially asking people about their fears and if they have thought about death — his perennial question being "Maut ke baare mein sochte ho?". The latter has made him the subject of several memes on social media. He also appeared in the official video of singer Jasleen Royal's popular song Sang Rahio, which

has 87 million views on YouTube since its premiere in 2020 and made it to Forbes 30 under 30 in 2022.

Allahbadia also turned to entrepreneurship when he reconnected with his college junior Viraj Seth to manage him. Soon they identified a gap between emerging influencers and brands and co-founded Monk Entertainment, a talent management, social media management and influencer marketing agency. Their clientele includes chef Sanjyot Keer of Your Food Lab, comedian Niharika NM and self-taught fashion designer Nancy Tyagi, who created a storm at the Cannes Red Carpet in 2024. The show India's Got Latent, known for its dark humour and Allahbadia are not new to controversies. Nearly a decade ago, Allahbadia asked advocate J Sai Deepak to name "three individuals who should leave India and never come back", who named some journalists and historians, sparking outrage. In 2021, he received backlash for a sexist tweet suggesting that women wearing long kurtis and big earrings would bring men "to their knees." Lately, he was also criticised for platforming an unverified claim about a "Muslim-only town in Malappuram".

## Black warrant reality check: Is India skipping the noose?

In 2024, for the second consecutive year, the Supreme Court of India didn't confirm any death sentence, revealed a report from Project 39A of the National Law University Delhi. The Supreme Court, it seems, is exercising the utmost restraint on capital punishment, which has seen calls from several quarters to be scrapped. The sparing use of the hangman's noose wasn't always the case in India, as was reminded by Vikramaditya Motwane's Netflix series Black Warrant. The series, which has won praise, explored the rampant nature of capital punishment through the lens of five executions in Tihar Jail between 1982 and 1985. The Supreme Court's not confirming any death sentence in two years makes us probe if India is gradually loosening the hangman's noose?

This comes even as the number of death row prisoners has gone up significantly in India.

In India, capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is carried out by "hanging by the neck until death", as per the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that replaced the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Even as several countries like Portugal, the Netherlands, France and Australia have

moved towards abolishing executions, and many countries are opting for less painful methods of capital punishment, countries like the US, Iran, China and India have retained a legal framework to enable the death penalty in one way or the other.

Capital punishment, which the Supreme Court has repeatedly stated should be used only in the rarest of rare cases, was last carried out in 2020 when four convicts in the 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder case, also known as the Nirbhaya case, were hanged.

The NLU report published in January, also revealed that the Supreme Court in 2024 commuted five death sentences to life imprisonment and acquitted one person out of six appellants.

The report noted that even as lower trial courts continued to impose death sentences, with 139 such verdicts in 2024, the Supreme Court was reluctant to confirm them.

Is the Supreme Court's approach signalling a shift in India's use of capital punishment? Does it align with lower court rulings on death sentences? Let's have a look.

**ARE LOWER JUDICIARY, HIGH COURTS TOO GOING EASY ON DEATH SENTENCES?**

High Courts across India confirmed death sentences of nine convicts in 2024, the highest number in five years. But the High Courts also commuted the sentences of 79 convicts, acquitted 49, and sent one case back to the trial court, revealed the NLU report.

However, this still represents a small fraction of the total death sentences imposed by trial courts.

Despite the lack of executions in the past few years in India, the number of prisoners on death row has increased significantly. By the end of 2024, there were 564 prisoners awaiting execution, the highest number since 2000.

The rise is a result of a high rate of death sentences imposed by trial courts and a low rate of disposal of death penalty appeals at the High Court level.

"This reflects a continuing and unabated increase in the death row population, with a 41% increase since the compilation of the Annual Statistics report in 2016. Trial courts contributed to these high figures by imposing 139 death sentences in 2024," noted the report of Project 39A.

The number of prisoners on death row in India has steadily increased from 404 in 2020 to 564 in 2024. **BLACK WARRANTS AND HANGINGS IN INDIA**

Since 1991, 16 convicts have been

hanged to death in India. Among them were Ajmal Kasab, Afzal Guru and Yakub Memon, who were hanged for waging war against the state, and Dhananjay Chatterjee, who was executed for the rape and murder of a 14-year-old schoolgirl.

The hanging of the Nirbhaya gang-rape and murder convicts in March 2020 was the first time in Independent India that four people were hanged at the same site.

A death warrant or black warrant is issued when a convict has exhausted all legal resources and is to be executed. A black warrant is addressed to the jail in-charge and is signed by a sessions judge or district magistrate.

**WHY DEATH PENALTY, TO BE RARELY USED, IS STILL LEGAL**

The death sentence in India, since the days of Constituent Assembly debates, has remained a complex issue.

The Constitution does not prevent death sentences but has mention of it in the articles underlining the powers of the President. India continues to have provisions for the death penalty for crimes, including murder, terrorism, organised crime, and rape under both the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and special laws like the Army Act and Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

# 26/11 plotter extradition, F-35 jets, trade deal: Takeaways from Modi-Trump meet

Trade, defence, and immigration took centre stage during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral meeting with Donald Trump hours after the US President announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs, asserting that India "is right at the top of the pack". The key takeaways from the whirlwind meeting, coming within the first month of Trump's presidency, were the extradition of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana to India and the F-35 jet deal.

During the joint press briefing, PM Modi said India and the US have set a USD 500 billion target for bilateral trade by 2030, with India set to import more US oil and gas to shrink the trade deficit. Trump welcomed India's recent measures to lower tariffs on US products like motorcycles, metals, and tech products. Despite the tariff shadow, the bonhomie between the two leaders was clearly visible as Trump and Modi shared a warm hug and lauded their partnership in their own inimitable style. The Prime Minister

said only Trump had a "copyright on the word deal", with the US President reciprocating by asserting that Modi was a "much tougher and much better negotiator than him".

Modi-Trump Meeting: Key Takeaways Much of the remarks of Donald Trump and PM Modi during the joint briefing focused on trade. PM Modi said the two nations have set a USD 500 billion target for bilateral trade. Trump also announced a deal with India to import more US oil and gas.

A key announcement was the extradition of 26/11 terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana, a longstanding demand of India. "My administration has approved the extradition of Tahawwur Rana, one of the very evil people of the world, to face justice in India," Trump said. In a major boost to defence ties, Trump said the US would increase its military sales to India by "billions of dollars" and it would provide fifth generation F-35 stealth jets to the country. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri later said the deal was at

"proposal stage". New procurements and co-production arrangements for 'Javelin' anti-tank guided missiles and 'Stryker' Infantry Combat Vehicles were also announced.

PM Modi added his own twist to Trump's "MAGA" (Make America Great Again) slogan while lauding the partnership of two nations. "In India, we are working towards a Viksit Bharat, which in American context translates into MIGA (Make India Great Again). When US and India work together, this MAGA plus MIGA becomes a 'MEGA' partnership for prosperity," PM Modi said.

The Prime Minister, when asked about the Russia-Ukraine war, said India stood by peace as he praised Trump's efforts to douse the crisis. "The world thinks India is neutral, but India is not neutral. India has its own stance, it is peace," Modi said.

On the Bangladesh crisis, which led to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government last year, Donald Trump rejected speculation of the involvement of the US deep state. "I will leave

Bangladesh to PM Modi," the President said.

Days after the US deported 104 Indians, PM Modi stressed that India was fully prepared to take back "verified" citizens living in America illegally. He called for joint efforts to end the ecosystem of human trafficking.

The two leaders announced the launch of the 'TRUST' initiative for greater collaboration among governments, academia and the private sector to drive innovation in defence, AI, semiconductors, energy and space.

Trump also admired the "negotiating" skills of PM Modi. "He is a much tougher negotiator than me, and he is a much better negotiator than me. There is not even a contest," he said. He also called the PM a "great friend for a long time".

The US President also offered to mediate to end the longstanding border issues between India and China along the LAC. "If I could be of help, I'd love to help, because that should be stopped... It's quite violent," he said.

## Kerala's Rs 1,000-crore half-price scam: Victims explain how they got duped

Hundreds of foot soldiers acting as promoters, and monitored by coordinators at the village, block, and district levels. Scores of politicians from across party lines, including a dozen prominent ones. This is what created the structured network which was used to pull off one of the largest scams in Kerala's recent history. The half-price scam. Over 40,000 people were duped in the scam which is estimated at over Rs 1,000 crore, meticulously orchestrated by a 26-year-old for years.

Ananthu Krishnan, a young graduate from Kerala's Idukki district, exploited Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to swindle thousands of middle-class families, leveraging political patronage, NGOs, and a retired High Court judge. He promised scooters, laptops and home appliances at half price, claiming that the remaining money would be met from the CSR funds of networks of companies.

The entire expanse of the state-wide scam has now been laid bare with over 6,000 complaints from across Kerala and probes by the State Crime Branch and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). It was a sophisticated Ponzi scam, to which an entire state fell prey, and thousands of people are now left in distress and anger. India Today Digital spoke to several victims to understand how the half-price

scam worked, and how they fell for it. Their names have been changed in the report to conceal their identity.

**KOLLAM STUDENT EXPLAINS HOW SHE FELL FOR HALF-PRICE SCAM**

Kavya Vinod, a 23-year-old student from a village in Kollam, a district from which several hundreds were scammed, needed a scooter. The lack of public transport to and from the nearest town made that a necessity.

Two years ago, she came to know about a scheme through her friends, promising brand-new scooters at half price, endorsed by local leaders. For Kavya, it seemed like a perfect solution. She discussed it with her family and friends and did some basic online research, primarily on YouTube. Everything appeared legitimate.

"The coordinators reached out to us. The offer was attractive. Scooters that typically cost over Rs 1 lakh were available for half the price. We paid a Rs 320 membership fee. They then gave us an account number, and we transferred the money," she said.

Up to this point, the process had been smooth and swift. However, there was no communication for the next two months. Concerns arose within the WhatsApp group of 'beneficiaries', and after repeated inquiries, the promoters announced an upcoming event for scooter

distribution.

"They finally set a date and announced an event at a community hall. The presence of panchayat members and other local figures reinforced our trust. We believed everything was genuine," she said. However, even at this event, Kavya didn't get her scooter.

"They distributed laptops and sewing machines. Then, they asked us to buy stamp paper. An advocate was present, and we were given promissory notes. They assured us the vehicles would be delivered within 100 working days," added Kavya.

**HOW ANANTHU KRISHNAN, HIS ASSOCIATES GAINED TRUST**

The event that Kavya attended was one of hundreds such held across Kerala over the past few years.

In the early stages of the scam, Ananthu Krishnan and his associates distributed sewing machines, mixer grinders, and other household appliances—a strategic move to gain public trust. These events were frequently attended by local politicians, police officers, and even ministers.

Visuals of these distributions were widely publicised through newspapers and digital platforms, also spreading rapidly across countless WhatsApp groups of so-called "beneficiaries".

The event Kavya attended was cleverly staged.

The scheme was named 'Women on Wheels', and there was a verification desk where their Aadhaar details were checked. A few scooters were put on display, allowing applicants to choose the colour they wanted, and even take test rides. Kavya received a token and was assigned number 250.

She and her friends waited a few more weeks, but there was still no update.

"Then, silence. When we inquired, they (the promoters) shouted at us, saying they were trying to help and that we wouldn't receive anything unless we paid the full amount. They again claimed the scheme was backed by the central government and that CSR funds in crores were available," a helpless Kavya told India Today Digital. She added that two distribution dates were announced and postponed with excuses. The first postponement was attributed to the cancellation of all events following the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The second postponement was blamed on the unavailability of the venue due to Republic Day parade preparations.

With the scheme now being exposed as a scam, Kavya has filed a complaint and is waiting for her refund.



# How did BJP end Delhi's split-voting trend in the 2025 polls?

After 10 years, Delhi has voted out the AAP as voters backed the BJP's double-engine government narrative. Here's how a decade of split-voting came to an end.

By Amitabh Tiwari

Delhi has voted out the Aam Aadmi Party, ending 10 years of split-voting. Voters backed the Bharatiya Janata Party's double-engine government narrative in a state plagued by the constant confrontation between the lieutenant governor and the Chief Minister.

Delhi has been voting differently in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections for years now. In 2014 and 2019, while the BJP swept 7-0 in the general elections, the AAP won a resounding 67 and 62 out of 70 seats respectively in the Assembly. In the 2020 state elections, the AAP gained a 36 per cent vote share compared to the 2019 general elections at the cost of the BJP and the Congress (18 per cent each). In the 2024 general elections, the AAP lost 30 per cent vote share, while the BJP and the Congress gained 14 and 15 per cent each. The AAP hoped for a repeat of the trend in 2025 - and it did gain just 20 per cent, 13 at the cost of the Congress and seven from the BJP. The AAP recovered almost all the votes lost from Congress (13 of the 15 per cent), the transfer being seamless as these voters are essentially anti-BJP. However, the BJP held onto almost half of the swing voters losing just seven per cent of the 14 gained

during general elections.

This resulted in the BJP and its allies finishing with around 47 per cent and the AAP at 44 per cent, giving a slender lead of three per cent to the saffron party.

Class divide evident

The AAP's strong vote share of roughly 44 per cent in 2025 signals how it holds on to its core vote base of the poor, Dalits, and minorities. However, it lost support amongst the middle-class, which provided it the lead against the BJP, largely due to the dent in Arvind Kejriwal's anti-corruption crusader image and his relatively weak performance in his second term. The AAP was leading amongst the poor by 28 per cent in 2020. It received 61 per cent of this vote while the BJP bagged 33 per cent, as per a CSDS post-poll study. The lower-class was lured by the AAP's free bijli-paani schemes, the upgradation of government schools, and the creation of mohalla clinics. However, the BJP seems to have made a dent in this vote block, promising the continuation of schemes, higher cash blocks for women, and tackling civic problems faced by the poor in slums. The lead of AAP amongst the poor declined from 28 per cent in 2020 to just eight

per cent in 2025.

The AAP was leading amongst the middle-class by 14 per cent in 2020. It received 53 per cent of the vote (and the BJP 39 per cent) largely due to the fascination with clean politics. However, the liquor scam and the "sheesh mahal" scandal dented Kejriwal's credibility. The AAP lost its lead amongst the middle class with the BJP taking a lead of three per cent in this election. Zero tax liability for incomes up to Rs 12 lakh announced in the Budget also seems to have consolidated the already brewing discontent.

The BJP was leading amongst the rich by one per cent in 2020. This lead swelled to 31 per cent in this election and contributed to a lack of progress on air pollution and cleaning of Yamuna, as well as a dent in the AAP's credibility. The middle- and upper-class contributed to the BJP's lead. Unlike other states, their proportion is much higher in Delhi, which has a per capita income of more than twice the national average.

Unemployment, corruption, inflation, lack of development, and cleanliness were the top five issues and impacted the voting choices of 63 per cent of voters. The voters were very clear about who was responsible for these

issues.

With unemployment and prices rising, most voters held the Centre responsible. For voters for whom these issues were important, 55 per cent backed the AAP. These together provided a vote share lead of five per cent for AAP.

However, because of a lack of development and corruption, the majority of voters held the state government responsible. For voters for whom these issues were important, 59 per cent and 76 per cent backed the BJP. These together provided a vote share lead of seven per cent for the BJP.

Cleanliness, which was the second most important issue amongst voters, however, saw similar voting for the BJP and the AAP at 46 per cent and 43 per cent respectively, giving the BJP just a lead of 0.5 per cent vote share.

Corruption as an issue pervaded across class groups, while inflation and unemployment seem to be largely driving the poor, while lack of development seems to have irked the middle- and upper-middle class. A stark class divide shaped voters' inclination towards issues and thus impacted voting decisions, giving an edge to the BJP.



## Delhi Elections - A masterclass in strategy by Team Modi

**In Haryana, Maharashtra, and now in Delhi, Narendra Modi personally ensured that the miffed karyakarta came back to trudge the streets, knock on the doors, man the booths, and unobtrusively spread the message while keeping the faith.**

Electoral politics is warfare with a delicious twist. Soldiers don't get killed on the battlefield, nor do generals surrender an army in defeat. However, as the Delhi Assembly elections have demonstrated once again, the best way to fight and win a war is to conceive a sound strategy and execute it on the battlefield with precision and ruthless efficiency. Once again, the Bharatiya Janata Party has signalled that when it comes to executing a sound strategy, there is no match for this party in the Narendra Modi era.

Since 1998, "Dilli Dur Ast" has become a grim reminder for the party. Even under the marauding electoral juggernaut run by Amit Shah, an electoral victory during assembly elections remained an elusive dream for the BJP as an Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party notched successive landslide victories.

The persistent dilemma for the BJP as it suffered consecutive battlefield losses was simple: in the Lok Sabha elections, about 55 per cent of Delhi voters chose the BJP. But when it comes to Assembly elections, more than 15 per cent of this cohort moved towards the AAP. This dilemma formed the basis of the BJP's strategy during this time: persuade this 15 per cent to remain with the party. Looking at it another way, the strategy was straightforward: bring down the AAP vote share by about 10 per cent and raise the BJP vote share by a

similar proportion.

Anyone can have a sound strategy in theory and on paper. For instance, the Congress strategy was to chase a double-digit vote share to remain politically relevant in the city-state. The AAP strategy of ensuring its 54 per cent vote share (like in 2015 and 2020) remained largely intact. Yet, both failed while the BJP strategy worked like a charm in Delhi. Some sceptics refuse to give credit to the unparalleled manner in which Modi-Shah along with other leaders execute strategies. But since 2014, the many battlefield victories across India would force any objective commentator to advise other political parties to adopt and follow what the BJP does.

Look at how the narrative has changed in less than a year after voters gave the BJP a rude wake-up call in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Since then, it has bagged three seemingly impossible victories: Haryana, Maharashtra, and now Delhi, with a loss in Jharkhand to serve as a reminder that no person or organisation is infallible.

The strategies

Successful strategies need a few things: ample financial resources to be deployed at the right time; a disciplined, motivated and committed body of troops, multiple generals, and staff officers; wielding and deploying surprise weapons when the battle is at its peak; and most importantly, the agility and ability to change tactics quickly. In the Delhi Assembly elections,

all these factors worked as a well-oiled machine.

The availability of financial resources has not been a challenge for the BJP for a long time now. It has deep pockets to outspend any competitor on the ground if required. But as some battlefield setbacks for the BJP, particularly the one during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections showed, throwing a lot of money around is not enough to win elections.

The second critical element of a successful strategy is the ability to deploy motivated and committed troops on the ground. This is one area where no other party can match the unique ability of the BJP to harness the resources and manpower of the extended Sangh Parivar. The hubris-laced days in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha campaign are long gone - when party president JP Nadda had unwittingly given a perception that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh cadre may not be needed for this future-ready BJP.

In Haryana, Maharashtra, and now in Delhi, Narendra Modi personally ensured that the miffed karyakarta came back to trudge the streets, knock on the doors, man the booths, and unobtrusively spread the message while keeping the faith. In this Delhi campaign, RSS cadres seemed to have organised 50,000 plus interactive sessions with small groups. All other organisations of the Sangh Parivar, including the Akhil Bharatiya

Vidyarthi Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, and others were tasked to focus relentlessly on their target groups.

To ensure that affiliated outfits did not work at cross purposes, the BJP, like a well-oiled military machine, deployed staff officers to lead their troops onto pre-selected battlefields. Staff officers manning an outfit like the Bajrang Dal knew where the presence and rhetoric of this outfit would work and where it would backfire. BMS members were deployed in areas populated with factories and other workers who had become ardent supporters of Arvind Kejriwal. And so on.

On any given day, at least a dozen senior BJP leaders were actively campaigning in Delhi, leading processions, organising rallies and addressing a series of meetings. The task was made easier for the BJP as Delhi is a city-state. Any given day would see leaders from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha campaigning in different localities.

A very important element of a successful strategy is the agility with which the top brass of an army can change tactics amid a raging war. During the early phase of the campaign, the BJP was focused a lot on corruption charges against Arvind Kejriwal and his so-called "Sheesh Mahal". That became the central focus of the party.



# The hole new world of Rahul Gandhi's Congress

The BJP won the Delhi elections, the AAP lost, and the Congress didn't even start. Yet, the Congress is jubilant that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not beat the AAP, the AAP beat itself up.

By BV Rao

"The Delhi Vidhan Sabha election results reflect nothing more than a referendum on Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party. After all, at the height of the PM's popularity in 2015 and 2020, AAP had won decisively in Delhi. This shows that, rather than being vindication of the policies of the PM, this vote is a rejection of Arvind Kejriwal's politics of deceit, deception, and vastly exaggerated claims of achievement."

-- Extract from the February 8 statement of Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary. When you are in a deep hole, the first step in the struggle to get out of it is the realisation or awareness that you are in one. The problem with India's oldest party, the Indian National Congress, is that more than ten years after getting into perhaps the deepest and darkest hole ever in its existence, it has no realisation of where it exactly is.



Instead of acknowledging its status at the deep end of the hole, it continues to behave as if the deep end of the hole is where the whole world is.

Three major political parties contested the election for the Delhi Vidhan Sabha; the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Aam Aadmi Party and the Indian National Congress. The BJP won, the AAP lost, and the Congress did not even start. Yet, the Congress — as communicated to us by its

communications head — is pleased as a punch that Narendra Modi did not beat the AAP, the AAP beat itself up!

The latest election makes it the sixth time in a row that the Congress has failed to open its account in a Delhi election (Lok Sabha 2014, 2019, 2024 and Vidhan Sabha 2015, 2020, 2025). That is the depth of the hole it is in. Ramesh's celebration of an imaginary past humbling of Modi tells us the Congress has no clue of its

present station in life.

The next step for coming out of a hole is to ask yourself why you are in it? If, like the Congress, you refuse to believe you are in one, then it is necessary to at least ask yourself why you are where you are. Situational or positional awareness.

Here's what we know about the Congress' positional awareness as evident from this bit of Ramesh's statement: "After all, at the height of the PM's popularity in 2015 and 2020, AAP had won decisively." So, Ramesh says, the 2025 result is not a Modi win but a Kejriwal loss. And that is obviously great solace for the Congress. It does not matter to him that his party scored a platinum duck in the three elections. He talks about these elections like the Congress party had nothing to do with them. Like it was a spectator, not a participant.

All that matters to the Congress is that Kejriwal has lost, Modi

has not won. Why couldn't Kejriwal have lost the referendum in favour of the Congress instead of the BJP? That is not even a passing thought in the Congress' minds, because the party has become used to being where it is. The Congress does not give itself the status of even an also-ran in the Delhi election.

What's worse than not being aware you are in a hole? Exulting that the other guy is also in the same hole. Whether he is actually in the same hole or not is of no relevance. It's enough that you have convinced yourself that he is. Consequently, the Congress is happy drawing a false equivalence with the BJP. Here's the Congress' stretched logic: Rahul Gandhi has failed to beat Arvind Kejriwal. Modi has also failed to beat Kejriwal. So Rahul and Modi are in the same boat, sorry, same hole. And the Congress is happy. Delusional.

## AAP chose expansion and lost Delhi: Preeti Choudhry's key takeaways

**AAP fell and BJP stormed to power in Delhi after 27 years. This election was about more than just seats — it was about trust, credibility, and survival. Here are key takeaways from the 2025 Delhi polls.**

By Preeti Choudhry

The 2025 Delhi Assembly election wasn't just a routine contest — it was a political reckoning for Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party and the verdict couldn't be harsher.

For over a decade, Kejriwal cultivated the image of a leader above conventional politics, a disruptor who upended the old order. But that halo has shattered. The middle class, once his most ardent supporter, has turned its back. This election was about more than just seats — it was about trust, credibility, and survival. And when the dust settled, it was clear: the voters had made their choice, and AAP was



no longer it. Here are my key takeaways as Delhi voters decisively showed AAP the door and welcomed the BJP after 27 years: Takeaway 1: Arvind

Kejriwal's moral halo decimated.

Takeaway 2: Middle class abandoned Kejriwal.

Takeaway 3: A lackluster second term, as Arvind

Kejriwal went to voters on promises made during the first term.

Takeaway 4: Erosion of core vote bank - AAP even lost safe seats such as Sangam

Vihar, Maliviya Nagar, Greater Kailash.

Takeaway 5: Anger over AAP-run Municipal Corporation of Delhi, as civic mess drowns Kejriwal's party.

Takeaway 6: Congress strategically fought not to win, but to ensure AAP's defeat.

Takeaway 7: Not a level playing field - Arvind Kejriwal fought with his back to the wall.

Takeaway 8: BJP ran a well-rounded cohesive campaign.

Takeaway 9: Ideological agnosticism did not sit well with the minority voters.

Takeaway 10: AAP chose expansion over consolidating the Delhi base.



# Decoding Donald Trump's Gaza plan

**In a statement that shocked the world, Trump, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sitting by his side, said on February 4 that the US will "take over" and "own" Gaza after resettling Palestinians elsewhere.**

**By Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd)**

US President Donald Trump has proposed taking over Gaza!

In a statement that shocked the world, Trump, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sitting by his side, said on February 4 that the US will "take over" and "own" Gaza after resettling Palestinians elsewhere under a plan that would turn the Gaza Strip into "the Riviera of the Middle East".

It drew instant condemnation across the globe, with many calling it bizarre, ridiculous, unbelievable etc. Even British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the staunchest ally of the US, refused to support it, stating, "They [Palestinians] must be allowed home, they must be allowed to rebuild, and we should be with them in that rebuild on the way to a two-state solution." As expected, Hamas condemned it out rightly stating: "We consider them [the plan] a recipe for generating chaos and tension in the region because the people of Gaza will not allow such plans to pass." This is, however, not the first time that President Trump has hinted at "cleansing" Gaza in his current term. A brief recap of Trump's

first term as the president also provides significant insights into his stance on the issue of Palestine.

Trump 1.0 and Palestine Soon after taking office as the US president in January 2017, Trump prioritised the Israel-Palestine issue. As early as May 2017, he hosted Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and during the meeting, stressed that he was "personally committed to helping Israelis and Palestinians achieve a comprehensive peace and that any peace settlement can only be the product of direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians".

But any illusions of finally getting a peaceful resolution under Trump were dashed when he took the world by surprise on December 6, 2017, announcing his twin decisions to formally recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and his decision to move the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Soon after, a "Trump Peace Plan" was reported in February 2018 after a meeting of Arab and European Foreign Ministers in Brussels. It indicated that the US and the international community would grant recognition of a

Palestinian state and acceptance of East Jerusalem as its capital. The plan also called for placing the Old City of Jerusalem under "international protection while Israel would continue to have its capital in Jerusalem."

The Trump administration called the proposed plan the "deal of the century", while the Palestinian Authority denounced it as a conspiracy aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause. The plan was officially finally presented by President Trump on January 20, 2020, as "Peace to Prosperity".

However, the decision that did the maximum damage to the cause of Palestinians was the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020. Signed after hectic parleys over months and weeks before the presidential elections that Trump was projected to lose, the accords had three clear aims: first, to bring about broad-based acceptance and reconciliation of Israel with the Arab world; second, to move the needle of discourse in the region beyond the Palestine issue; and thirdly, a critical subtext of the accords was designating Iran as enemy number one without even any mention of it in the text.

Of course, the unilateral revoking of the Iran nuclear deal by Trump in May 2018 at the behest of Israel was a crucial factor in the overall strategy.

What was the total of Trump's strategy for Gaza in the first term?

Two things: firstly, to ensure Israel and Netanyahu got what they could not get from any previous US president, all-out support for anything in the region, and the marginalisation of the Palestine issue. Secondly, specific targeting of Iran as enemy number one, whether through the revocation of the nuclear deal or instituting a "maximum pressure" policy. Therefore, it should not surprise what Trump has already started doing early in his second term. It also indicates why and how Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff could coerce Netanyahu to agree to the ceasefire deal in Gaza. Perhaps a promise of greater rewards to follow - bigger than the price of the ceasefire - made Netanyahu sign off on the deal.

Trump 2.0 and Gaza Trump had Gaza in his crosshairs even before taking over as president. During the

election campaign, he criticised the Biden administration's handling of the Gaza war and claimed the war would not have happened if he were the president. Some post-election surveys suggest that the Gaza war was one of the significant factors that tilted the votes in favour of Trump.

Even before taking over as the president, he threatened that there would be hell to pay if the ceasefire was not in effect before he took office. In a well-orchestrated display of public diplomacy, the ceasefire deal was agreed upon. However, soon after taking office, the tone and tenor of Trump's approach to Gaza changed and took many by surprise, except Israel, which is quietly watching how things unfold in its favour.

In his first interaction with reporters on January 20, just after the oath-taking ceremony, he expressed doubts over the Gaza ceasefire, stating that he was "not confident" that the ceasefire would hold. He added the ongoing conflict was "not our war, it's their war", and followed it up with another stunner on January 25, calling Gaza a "demolition site" that should be vacated.

# A Major Battle Is Brewing In Africa.

## Can India Catch Up?



By Anil Trigunayat

Natural- and human-resource-rich Africa has seen many a geopolitical storm. It has suffered a great deal of exploitation at the hands of its colonial and neo-colonial masters, as well as that of its own power- and pelf-hungry leaders. Poverty and underdevelopment still are the biggest bane of the region, irrespective of who holds the reins. Whether it's military leaders and juntas or the crafty politicians they try to overthrow, the slogans and the promises remain the same. Many years ago, when I was in Nigeria and we covered several African countries, it was a general belief that every officer of the rank of Colonel and above harboured a dream to be the Head of State or government someday. Coups were common. However, it is also a fact that it was President Olu?gun ?basanj?, an army man, who ushered in democracy in Nigeria. That his position of power failed to save him is a different story though.

In recent times, West Africa and Sahel, and many other parts of the continent, have not only witnessed the overthrow of regimes by military coups, but also the wiping out of the last remaining footprints of erstwhile colonial powers. The French are the biggest losers in the region.

France Losing Its Edge

A number of francophone countries have been severing their French connection, and the French, despite their last-ditch efforts, haven't been able to salvage the situation. Last year, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso asked the French and Americans to leave their territories and cut off all ties as they moved to build closer

ones with Russia and China. When big brother Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) tried to intervene, not only did the three countries put up a defiant protest, but they also created their own trilateral, displaying a kind of macho-nationalism against their own African brothers. Despite action by the African Union (AU) and the ECOWAS, the three countries have refused to yield, forcing regional institutions to take a more inclusive approach.

Chad and Cote d'Ivoire have also pushed for a withdrawal of French troops and severance of ties. In the 1980s, when I was serving in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire was the show window of the French in Africa; according to some estimates, nearly 93% of the decision-making was done mostly by the French advisor or the 'Directeur de cabinet' in a particular Ministry. Their currency, the French Franc, was the mainstay of their intervention and rule, and the French rapid deployment forces were stationed there to secure the Presidency. In fact, at the time, a French Colonel from Pondicherry headed the contingent. All the accounting in their embassies was mainly allotted to Indian-origin officials from Pondicherry. True, this arrangement was too good to last, but compared to their British counterparts, the French colonisers were smarter and did not avoid social mixing.

Ultimately though, the Africans paid dearly for the so-called 'management' of the region, and the discontent finally ignited a revolt against French establishments in their countries, embers

of which continue to burn.

America Tries To Catch Up

A month before demitting office, former US President, Joe Biden, had hosted the US-Africa Summit and made his last visit to Angola, emphasising the importance of the Lobito corridor. Aimed at countering Chinese influence in the region, the US-backed project will connect critical minerals mines in Zambia and Congo with the Lobito port in Angola. Even Trump is expected to focus more on Africa in his current term, no matter the fact that he had called the place a "shithole" in his last. US policy in Africa is largely driven by concerns about countering China and Russia in the region. As such, it tends to ignore the interests of Africans in general and serves only its own geopolitical objectives. The disenchantment with Americans at the grassroots is, hence, natural, and quite visible. Memories of the West's historical excesses in the region during the colonial era have anyway led to a credibility crisis, which, by default, lends a certain acceptability to both Moscow and Beijing, both of which stay heavily engaged through their Africa summits and direct outreach and military and material support to all kinds of regimes. They do it without any compunction or value proposition, unlike the West, whose overly prescriptive behaviour, policies and conditionalities evoke anger and disappointment both at the popular and leadership levels.

While the US did launch the 'Prosper Africa' initiative in 2019, it's Russia's Wagner Group—now rechristened

African Corps—that has emerged as a major tool for wielding influence in several African countries. Trump appears to be rocking that boat: he threatened to cut the funding to South Africa over allegations that the latter was confiscating land—most private farmland in the country is still owned by Whites—and "treating certain classes of people badly". Perhaps what the US President didn't realise was that this year, South Africa is also the chair of the G20.

China In A Consistency Loop

On the other hand, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, has made it a practice since 1991 to start the New Year by visiting several African countries. This January—his 57th trip—he was in Namibia, the Republic of Congo, Chad and Nigeria. While he nearly missed the coup in Chad, Congo was facing its own moment of reckoning, thanks to Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

Beijing is also keen on expanding its Global Security Initiative (GSI) in Africa. It has chosen Nigeria for a closer partnership as it is the biggest and richest country in the region. China is a major supplier of weapons and military equipment to Nigeria and is also working to initiate joint manufacturing of defence armaments in the country. Its infrastructure projects range from ports (62 projects across Africa) and roads to strategic connectivity and securing the supplies of critical minerals and resources, including in the Horn of Africa, where it already has a base. It is also building a new headquarters for the ECOWAS.



# India's love affair with dry days - A lip service to Gandhian values that must end

**To understand the roots of India's dry-day obsession, we need to rewind to November 1948, when the Constituent Assembly was drafting the country's Constitution.**

**By Manish Adhikary**

On February 5, 2025, Delhi goes to the polls for the assembly elections. And like clockwork, the city will go dry - no liquor sales, no alcohol consumption in public spaces. Fast forward to February 8, the day votes are counted, and guess what? Another dry day.

Delhi isn't alone in this ritual. Across India, alcohol sales are banned on polling days, major national holidays, religious festivals, and even on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, October 2. Some states take it a step further, adding their own extra dry days to the calendar. This raises a fundamental question: Why does India still enforce dry days? Are there other countries with such rules? And in a modern democracy, should the government still be regulating when people can or cannot drink? To understand the roots of India's dry-day obsession, we need to rewind to November 1948, when the Constituent Assembly was drafting the country's Constitution. Among the many fiery debates was one on prohibition - whether India should completely ban alcohol.

A key voice in the discussion was Kazi Syed Karimuddin, a lawyer from Central Provinces and Berar. He passionately

argued for a constitutional ban on liquor, citing Mahatma Gandhi's lifelong battle against alcohol.

"Where there is liquor, Gandhiji cannot be, and where Gandhiji is, liquor cannot be," he declared, urging fellow lawmakers to honour Gandhi's ideals. Though Gandhi had been assassinated earlier that year, his views on alcohol had left a lasting imprint. He believed alcohol was a colonial vice, corrupting Indian society. Writing in *Young India* (1926), Gandhi warned that alcohol led to moral decay and sexual crimes, stating that "the drunkard forgets the distinction between wife, mother, and sister."

The Constitutional dilemma: A bitter compromise

While many lawmakers supported prohibition, others saw economic pitfalls. Odisha's Biswanath Das questioned why the debate focused solely on liquor while opium and other intoxicants were left out. Others pointed out that liquor sales were a crucial source of revenue for state governments.

Karimuddin was unfazed. "We do not wish to live by the excise revenue, which is in fact the revenue got by the ruin of so many labour-class families," he argued. In the end, the Assembly struck

a compromise. Instead of a nationwide ban, they included prohibition as a Directive Principle of State Policy under Article 47 of the Constitution. This meant that while states were encouraged to reduce alcohol consumption, there was no legal mandate to ban liquor entirely. For some, this was a frustrating half-measure. One member even remarked, "If we cannot have even this small reform in our Constitution, the book will not be even worth touching with a pair of tongs."

But this was the reality: prohibition would remain an ideal, not a law.

How dry days work today

Since Directive Principles are not enforceable, most states chose to regulate alcohol instead of banning it outright. Today, liquor taxes account for 10-15% of state revenues. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, states scrambled to reopen liquor stores - not for public demand, but because they needed the money.

Yet, the idea of "dry days" persisted, with bans on certain occasions. Officially, these bans aim to maintain public order, especially during elections. But do they actually work?

Do other countries have dry days?

India isn't entirely alone in banning

alcohol on select days, but no other major democracy enforces it as strictly. Thailand bans alcohol sales on Buddhist holidays

Sri Lanka imposes a dry day on Poya (full moon) days

The US once had full-blown Prohibition (1920-1933). It failed spectacularly, fuelling the mafia, speakeasies, and illegal liquor sales, while the government lost massive tax revenues

however, India stands out for strictly enforcing dry days for elections.

Does the concept of dry days make sense today?

Critics argue that dry days are ineffective. People simply stock up in advance - especially when governments announce dry days in press releases. Black markets flourish, and illegal sales undermine the very regulations meant to curb alcohol consumption.

Supporters counter that dry days prevent alcohol-related violence on sensitive occasions. No one wants drunken brawls at polling booths.

But in a democracy, should the government be policing when citizens can or cannot drink?

Or are dry days simply a relic of a time when the state believed it could dictate moral behaviour?

# Chinese businesses rush to try DeepSeek AI at 'unprecedented' scale

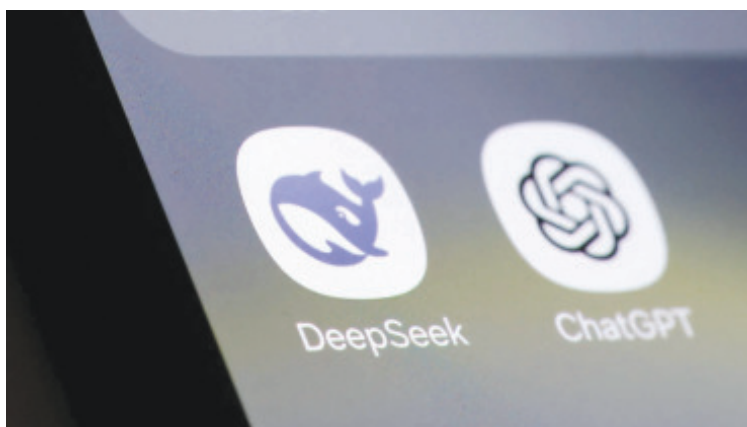
Chinese businesses are tapping DeepSeek's newest artificial intelligence model to see how it can improve productivity.

The Chinese AI model took the world by storm in recent weeks after showcasing its reasoning process and claims to undercut rival OpenAI's ChatGPT on cost — despite U.S. restrictions on Chinese access to the advanced semiconductors needed to develop the tech.

Eight automakers including BYD

, at least nine financial securities companies, three state-owned telecommunications operators and smartphone brand Honor are among the many that have rushed in the last week to integrate with DeepSeek. Cloud computing operators Alibaba, Huawei, Tencent and Baidu have all offered ways for clients to access DeepSeek's latest model.

"This is quite unprecedented," Wei Sun, principal analyst of artificial intelligence at Counter-



point Research, said in an email Monday. She pointed to the rate of adoption, scale of business integration and breadth of specific industries covered.

"When we have all of these, we know it's making a big social and economic impact," she said. Optimism over artificial intelligence has spread to Chinese stocks. UBS said Wednesday that AI-related Chinese stocks are up by 15% since the start of the year, outperforming the broader MSCI China Index by 9%.

A big factor in the widespread interest is timing. DeepSeek released its latest R1 model on Jan. 20, and news of its low-cost reasoning capabilities prompted a global tech stock sell-off on Jan. 27 — just as millions of urban workers in China were returning to their hometowns to celebrate the eight-day Lunar New Year holiday.

As a result, less developed parts of China gained greater understanding of AI and its impact, a topic previously limited to con-

versations in China's largest cities, said Wenhao Zhang, CEO of the Beijing-based consumer marketing consultancy Doodod.

"It's a major education of the market. This will push the entire ecosystem's development," he said Tuesday in Mandarin, translated by CNBC.

Zhang, who studied AI at Tsinghua University, founded Doodod in 2012 to build customer engagement through social media analysis. He said the company — which counts China Merchant's Bank and Toyota as clients — started looking at DeepSeek's offerings late last year, and began using it more after the R1 release in late January. DeepSeek, founded in 2023 out of a quantitative hedge fund, had released a basic version of R1 in November, and a V3 model in December. It launched a smartphone chatbot app in January.

Open-source local deployment

Another attractive factor for businesses is that DeepSeek's models are open-source, allowing individuals and companies to download and customize it.

DeepSeek also advertised drastically lower prices for applications to use its tech versus that of OpenAI. ChatGPT is not officially available in mainland China and requires users to provide an overseas phone number and payment method from a supported country such as the U.S.

DeepSeek changed the perception that AI models only belong to big companies and have high implementation costs, said James Tong, CEO of Movitech, an enterprise software company which says its clients include Danone and China's State Grid.

He said Movitech started integrating an earlier version of DeepSeek in the fourth quarter of last year, helping boost sales by about 25% from the same period in 2023.

## Elon Musk's X to pay about \$10 million to settle Trump lawsuit over account suspension

Social media company X has agreed to pay about \$10 million to settle a lawsuit by President Donald Trump, who has put X's billionaire owner Elon Musk in charge of a major government cost- and staff-cutting effort.

Trump had sued X, then known as Twitter, and its then-CEO Jack Dorsey in San Francisco federal court for deplatforming his account following the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol by his supporters. Twitter had cited the risk of Trump inciting further violence related to his effort to remain in the White House following his loss to former President Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

Trump claimed Twitter had violated his First Amendment right to free speech

The Wall Street Journal first reported the settlement on Wednesday.

John Kelly, one of Trump's attorneys in the lawsuit, confirmed to CNBC that the president and X reached a settlement.

"It's resolved," Kelly told CNBC.

NBC News later Wednesday confirmed settlement involved a payment of about \$10 million by X, citing a source familiar with the situation. CNBC has requested comment from a lawyer for X.

## Hopes for more Fed rate cuts dim as Powell notes hot CPI means 'we're not quite there yet'

A Federal Reserve interest rate cut won't be coming until at least September, if at all this year, following a troubling inflation report Wednesday, according to updated market pricing.

Futures markets shifted from the expectation of a June cut and possibly another before the end of the year to no moves until the fall, with a minimal chance of a follow-up before the end of 2025.

"The Fed will see January's hot inflation print as confirmation that price pressures continue to bubble beneath the economy's surface," Bill Adams, chief economist at Comerica, wrote in commentary that echoed others around Wall Street. "That will reinforce the Fed's inclination to at least slow and possibly even end rate cuts in 2025."

Reduced optimism for Fed easing came after the January consumer price index report showed a 0.5% monthly gain, pushing the annual inflation rate to 3%, a touch higher than December and only slightly lower than the 3.1% reading in January 2024. Excluding food and energy, the news was even worse, with a 3.3% rate that showed core inflation, which the Fed tends to rely on more, also rising and holding well above the central bank's goal.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, in an appearance Wednesday before the House Financial Services Committee, insisted the central bank had made "great progress" on inflation from its cycle peak "but we're not quite there yet. So we want to keep policy restrictive for now." As the Fed tar-

gets 2% inflation and the report showed no recent progress, it also dimmed hopes that the central bank will view further policy easing as appropriate after it lopped a full percentage point off its benchmark short-term borrowing rate in 2024.

Fed funds futures trading pointed to just a 2.5% chance of a March cut; only 13.2% in May, up to 22.8%



in June, then 41.2% in July and finally up to 55.9% in September, according to the CME Group's FedWatch gauge as of late Wednesday morning. However, that would leave the probability still up in the air until October, when futures contracts pricing implies a 62.1% probability.

Odds of a second cut by the end of 2025 were at just 31.3%, with pricing not indicating another reduction until late 2026. The fed funds rate is currently targeted in a range between 4.25%-4.5%.

## Aashram 3 Part 2 teaser: Bobby Deol's comeback as Baba Nirala promises more twists



Bobby Deol's *Aashram 3* Part 2 teaser was unveiled on February 12. The upcoming Prakash Jha series will premiere soon on Amazon MX Player. The explosive teaser for the upcoming season has reignited the frenzy and fandom for the series that had captivated audiences across India. The riveting crime drama features a star-studded ensemble cast led by Bobby Deol, along with Aaditi Pohankar, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Tridha Choudhury, Darshan Kumar, Vikram Kochhar, Anupriya Goenka, Rajeev Siddhartha and Esha Gupta in key roles.

The teaser gives a glimpse into Baba Nirala's resurgence to power, the unwavering loyalty of

his followers, and the unsettling tension within his inner circle. While secrets simmer beneath the surface and old betrayals threaten to erupt, the new chapter marks a new segment in the nail-biting saga of betrayal, revenge, and redemption, with Pammi and Bhopa at its heart. Making the teaser doubly gripping and exciting is the use of the soundtrack *Duniya Mein Logon Ko* by Saregama, laying the groundwork for an enthralling season.

The second part of the third season promises to raise the stakes even higher, with intense rivalries and dark secrets spilling out like never before.



## Bridget Jones Mad About the Boy review: A warm, poignant end to a beloved

If you loved the original *Bridget Jones's Diary*, chances are you'll adore *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy*. The fourth instalment in the beloved franchise brings back the humour, charm, and delightful messiness of Bridget while introducing a fresh storyline that does double duty—wrapping up the series in a fun, heartfelt way that feels quintessentially Bridget.

What makes *Mad About the Boy* especially enjoyable—and arguably the best since the 2001 original—is not just her awkward silliness but her ability to make us feel invested in her life—even two decades later. Years



have passed since Renée Zellweger first embodied the wine-guzzling, self-deprecating, and eternally awkward Bridget Jones, but Renée and Bridget remain classic.

Even through occasional

moments of strained comedy and predictable plotting, the last film in the franchise feels like a warm and befitting farewell to one of the most iconic characters in Hollywood rom-coms. This time, the film takes

a more emotional turn. Directed by Michael Morris and based on Helen Fielding's third novel, the story picks up years after *Bridget Jones's Baby* (2016). Now a widow, Bridget is struggling to move on after the tragic death of Mark Darcy (Colin Firth), who was killed on a humanitarian mission in Sudan. She's left raising their two children—10-year-old Billy (Casper Knopf) and six-year-old Mabel (Mila Jankovic)—while grappling with grief and the pressures of single parenthood. Yet, in true Bridget fashion, life doesn't stop. Encouraged by her ever-supportive (and hilariously blunt) friends—Shazzer (Sally

Phillips), Tom (James Callis), and Jude (Shirley Henderson)—Bridget reluctantly re-enters the dating world. Enter two potential love interests: her son's mild-mannered science teacher, Mr Walliker (Chiwetel Ejiofor), and Roxster (Leo Woodall), a much younger, free-spirited biochemistry student. While *Mad About the Boy* delivers the classic humour we expect, what truly sets it apart is its depth. The film tackles grief and healing with sensitivity, showing how even the most devastating losses can lead to unexpected joy and renewal.

# Scarlett Johansson blasts 'paralysed' US government over AI video on Kanye West

Actor Scarlett Johansson has issued a statement against the misuse of AI technology. Her appeal comes in response to the widespread circulation of an unauthorised, AI-generated video featuring several popular public figures including the actor, standing against Kanye West's recent anti-Semitic statements. The viral video opens with an AI version of Johansson, wearing a white T-shirt with an image of a hand making a middle finger gesture, The T-shirt features the Star of David and the word Kanye written underneath. The clip features stars like Drake, Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Spielberg, and Jack Black among others. In her statement to People Magazine, Johansson condemned the use of AI to create such videos and requested the US lawmakers to take strict action against the same. Wow after Kayne was allowed to go a rampage on @X against Jews watch this amazing video of legendary Jewish

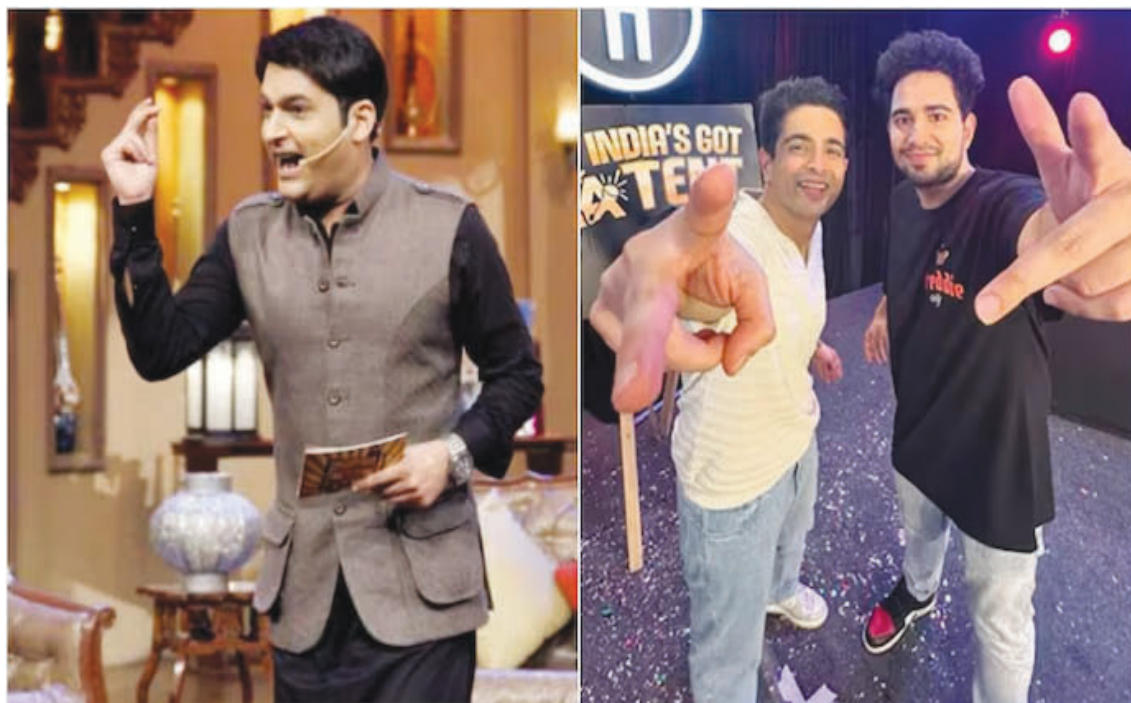
celebrities telling him to F-Off. This made my day.

"It has been brought to my attention by family members and friends, that an AI-generated video featuring my likeness, in response to an anti-Semitic view, has been circulating online and gaining traction," Johansson said, adding, "I am a Jewish woman who has no tolerance for anti-Semitism or hate speech of any kind. But I also firmly believe that the potential for hate speech multiplied by AI is a far greater threat than any one person who takes accountability for it," she said.

The Avengers actor emphasised the broader aspects of AI manipulation, saying, "We must call out the misuse of AI, no matter its messaging, or we risk losing a hold on reality." "It is terrifying that the US government is paralyzed when it comes to passing legislation that protects all of its citizens against the imminent dangers of AI.



## Kapil Sharma's 'Maa Baap ki Kabaddi' joke goes viral amid Ranveer Allahbadia row



The spark that was about parents on Samay wildfire. Not just has there been caused by YouTuber Ranveer Raina's show, India's Got an outrage against the joke, and Allahbadia's certain remark Latent, has turned into a the show, but several celebrities

and influencers who agreed to be a part have been entangled in legal trouble. In fact, Raina has now deleted not just this episode but all the episodes from India's Got Latent, as he feels the circumstances have been "too much to handle." Amid such intense reaction, an old joke of Kapil Sharma about "Maa baap ki kabaddi" is going viral.

The joke was back from the days of Comedy Nights with Kapil, where the comedian is speaking about two things which make Indians go crazy - cinema and cricket. Speaking about cricket, he shares how kids are ready to even wake up as early as 4 am while they would never do so for their studies. He then says that some even wake up at 2 am. He then exclaims,

"Cricket ka match shuru hona that 4 baje, aur phir yeh maa baa ki kabaddi dekh ke so jaate hai (the match is to start from 4 am, so they watch their parents' kabaddi and sleep). Here is the video: The clip has been going viral. Many social media users commented on the video about how Kapil Sharma played it smart by never saying anything out loud. Here are some of the reactions: controversy erupted for Allahbadia when he asked a contestant in India's Got Latent, "Would you rather watch your parents have sex for the rest of your life or join in once and stop it forever?" The Internet condemned him for the distasteful remark. Though the YouTuber quickly apologised, the damage was done.



## Kanye West dropped by talent agency amid antisemitic, controversial actions

Kanye West has been dropped by his talent agency, 33&West, following a series of antisemitic remarks, controversial social media posts, and public support for Sean 'Diddy' Combs, who is currently imprisoned on sex trafficking charges.

Daniel McCartney, a talent agent at 33&West, announced

via Instagram on Monday that he would no longer represent West, stating, "Effective immediately, I will not be representing Kanye West due to his harmful and hateful remarks that myself nor 33&West can stand for." It remains unclear when West had signed with the agency.

The fallout continued as Eric

Cui, a former chief of staff at West's Yeezy brand, also resigned. Cui cited his belief in free speech while condemning "violence and crimes against women and children", referencing West's recent defence of Diddy after hotel footage showed him attacking ex-girlfriend Cassie Ventura. West further stirred

controversy during the Super Bowl, posting a bizarre ad featuring a swastika-embazoned T-shirt, making derogatory remarks about overweight women, and sharing pornographic content on his X account. His posts led to X placing a "sensitive content warning" on his profile.

The rapper, who has previously called himself a "Nazi", continues to face widespread backlash as industry professionals distance themselves from him.

Other celebs such as David Schwimmer and Charlie Puth also condemned West and his actions.

## Amy Adams joins Javier Bardem in Cape Fear TV adaptation

After Javier Bardem, actor Amy Adams is on board for the much-awaited Cape Fear TV adaptation. The release date for the show has not been announced yet.

Apple TV+ has officially announced a 10-episode adaptation of Cape Fear, with Hollywood stars Amy Adams and Javier Bardem leading the cast, as reported by Variety.

Based on John D MacDonald's 1957 novel The Executioners, the psychological thriller follows happily married attorneys Anna (Adams) and Tom Bowden, whose lives spiral into chaos when Max Cady (Bardem), a violent criminal from their past, is released from prison. Seeking revenge, Cady's return sets off a tense battle of wits and survival.

The novel was previously adapted

into the 1991 film Cape Fear, directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Robert De Niro as Cady. The upcoming series will bring Scorsese back as an executive producer, alongside Steven Spielberg, ensuring a gripping and high-quality production. With Adams and Bardem at the forefront, the new adaptation promises a fresh take on the chilling story of obsession, vengeance, and justice. With Javier all set to portray the main antagonist of the show, Cape Fear is expected to be a must-watch for thriller enthusiasts.

No official release date for the show has been announced yet.

