

The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

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THE BEIJING SUMMIT

TRUMP AND XI RESHAPE THE WORLD ORDER — AND EVERY NATION MUST CHOOSE ITS PLACE



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(By Sharanjit Thind)

BEIJING — The motorcade of the most powerful man in the world rolled through the sun-splashed boulevards of China's capital on Wednesday, past wary residents and shuttered tourist attractions sealed for "security," past red banners and flag-waving children, past the ancient stones of the Temple of Heaven where emperors once offered sacrifice — and arrived at the Great Hall of the People, where history was waiting. For the first time in nearly a decade, an American president has come to China. And the world is holding its breath.

From May 13 to 15, 2026, President Donald Trump is in Beijing for a state visit — his second trip to China overall and the first during his second presidency. It is more than a diplomatic courtesy call. It is a summit that could redefine global trade, recalibrate the balance of power in Asia, and determine whether two

nuclear-armed superpowers can co-exist — or whether they are, as history grimly suggests, destined for collision.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS: A SUMMIT UNLIKE ANY OTHER

The sheer weight of the American delegation tells you everything about what Washington believes is at stake. Trump arrived with members of his national security and economic team including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer aboard Air Force One, along with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who arrived via Seoul, South Korea, where he had held preparatory trade talks with his Chinese counterpart.

The military dimension is particularly striking. Pete Hegseth becomes the first Secretary of Defense to accompany a U.S. president on a state visit to China since Richard Nixon's historic opening in 1972. That Nixon par-

allel is not accidental — it evokes the last time Washington fundamentally rewrote its relationship with Beijing, and signals that something equally tectonic may be in the making.

But if the generals and diplomats represent the architecture of power, the business titans represent its engine. More than a dozen high-profile business leaders joined the trip, including Apple's Tim Cook, Tesla's Elon Musk, Boeing's Kelly Ortberg, Meta's Dina Powell McCormick, as well as executives from BlackRock, Blackstone, Cargill, Citi, GE Aerospace, Goldman Sachs, Mastercard, Micron, Qualcomm, and Visa. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, not originally on the manifest, flew to Alaska to board Air Force One at the last minute — a detail that captures the frenzied urgency felt in Silicon Valley about the outcome of this summit. Technology, trade, and access to the world's largest consumer market are on the line.

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ED Challenges Jacqueline: "Knew His Past, Chose the Gifts"



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THE BEIJING SUMMIT

On the Chinese side, Xi's top diplomat Wang Yi and Zheng Shanjie, head of China's economic planning agency, stood among the Chinese representatives — a configuration that mirrors the dual-track nature of the talks: geopolitical signaling and economic negotiation, running simultaneously.

INSIDE THE GREAT HALL: FIVE CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

1. Trade: The Art of the Visible Deal

Trump came to Beijing above all seeking economic wins he can sell to American voters ahead of November's midterm elections. The script was familiar: analysts noted that Trump's foreign policy style places enormous value on the public performance of dealmaking, so the optics of success may matter almost as much as the substance.

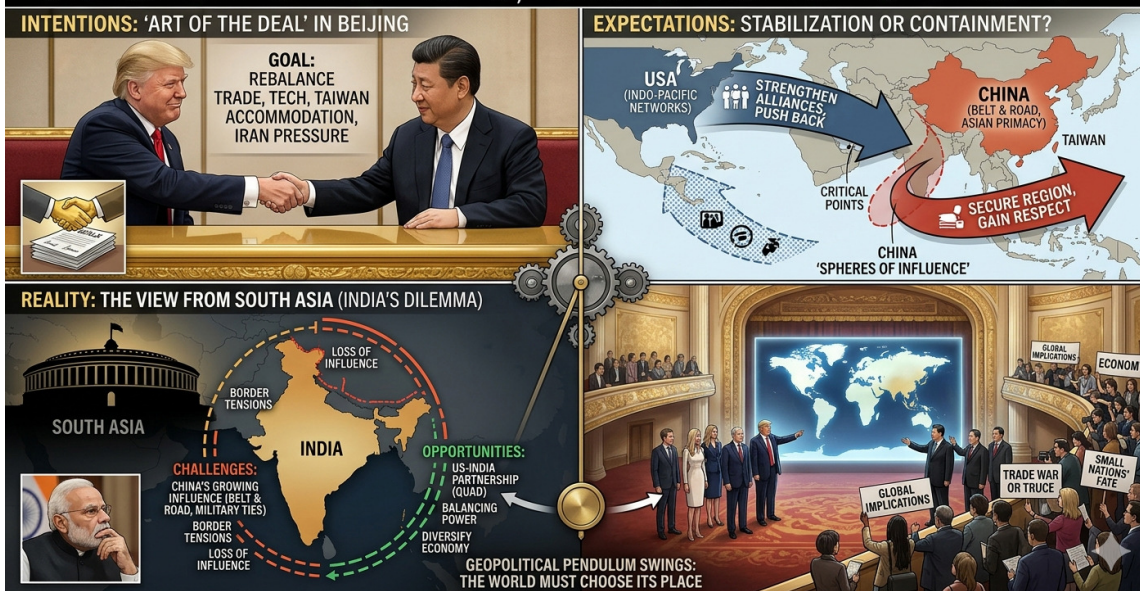
The groundwork had been laid. The two countries' trade envoys reached "overall balanced and positive outcomes" at a preparatory summit in South Korea on Wednesday, that delegation led by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng. Beijing opened the door for more: Xi said "China's door to opening up will only open wider," and both sides discussed expanding market access for U.S. goods including agricultural products. Traders were predicting Chinese purchases of Boeing aircraft and American farm goods — the kind of headline numbers that play well in Iowa and Ohio.

But beneath the handshakes, the structural imbalances remain. Beijing pressed the U.S. to ease restrictions on advanced semiconductor exports and roll back measures limiting China's access to critical chip-making technology — Washington's most potent economic weapon. For China, this is an existential imperative. Its entire AI and defense modernization program depends on access to leading-edge chips that American export controls have sought to deny it.

2. Taiwan: The Volcano Beneath the Banquet Table

If trade is the visible agenda, Taiwan is the fault line beneath it. Xi warned Trump directly that the U.S. and China "will have clashes and even conflicts" if the issue

THE BEIJING SUMMIT: TRUMP'S VISITS, SPHERES OF INFLUENCE & REGIONAL REALITIES



of Taiwan's independence is mishandled, and that the entire bilateral relationship could be put "in great jeopardy." He reiterated Beijing's iron position: that Taiwan independence and peace in the Taiwan Strait "are as irreconcilable as fire and water."

What followed was a diplomatic sleight of hand that deserves scrutiny. The White House readout of the bilateral meeting made no mention of Taiwan, while China's version explicitly detailed Xi's stark warning — each side managing its domestic audience while navigating the same minefield.

Taiwan watched from Taipei with the focused anxiety of a small nation whose survival depends on great-power calculations it cannot control. Analysts warned that what matters is the precise wording: whether Trump reaffirms support for Taiwan's defense, whether he sounds ambiguous on arms sales, and whether he gives Xi any rhetorical opening to claim Washington is restraining Taipei. "In great-power politics, small words often carry large consequences, especially for those whose survival depends on the credibility of others," observed Professor Salvador Santino Regilme of Leiden University.

3. Technology and Rare Earths: The New Battleground

The competition over semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and critical minerals has replaced tariffs as the defining arena of U.S.-China rivalry. China's 2025 rare earth export restrictions exposed a critical U.S. national security vulnerability, prompting Washington to respond with billions in financing and global partner-

ships — yet the U.S. remains far from genuine resilience. Beijing holds rare earths as leverage; Washington holds chip design and manufacturing equipment. Both sides know neither can simply decouple.

4. Iran: The War That Crashed the Summit

No agenda item was more disruptive — or more revealing of the new global order — than the shadow of the ongoing U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has major implications for China, the world's largest consumer of Iranian oil. Trump was expected to encourage Xi to push Iran to reopen the strait and agree to a peace deal.

The timing was extraordinary. Iran's foreign minister traveled to Beijing just days before Trump arrived, underscoring the close ties between the two countries. Beijing arrived at the summit table as a player with cards on multiple sides: it needs the strait open for its own energy security, but its relationship with Tehran gives it leverage Washington desperately needs. Some experts stated that the ongoing Iran war gave China greater leverage when dealing with Trump, given that the U.S. had diverted resources away from South Korea and Japan to the Middle East.

The summit produced a fragile consensus: both sides agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open to ensure global energy flows, and both agreed Iran should not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon — with Xi signaling interest in buying more U.S. oil as a sweetener.

5. The "Thucydides Trap": Can Two Superpowers Coexist?

In the summit's most historically resonant moment, Xi asked Trump directly whether the U.S. and China could avoid the "Thucydides Trap" — the historical tendency for wars to erupt when a rising power threatens a ruling one. It was a remarkable acknowledgment that catastrophic conflict is not theoretical. The two leaders agreed, at least rhetorically, to build a "constructive China-U.S. relationship of strategic stability" — Beijing declaring it would treat this as the guiding framework for the next three years and beyond.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM PING-PONG TO POWDER KEG

To understand where we are, one must understand where we have been.

The modern U.S.-China relationship was born in duplicity and idealism in equal measure — Nixon's secret backchannel to Beijing in 1971, the ping-pong diplomacy that preceded it, and the formal normalization of relations in 1979 under Carter. For three decades, Washington operated on a theory of engagement: that integrating China into the global trading system would gradually liberalize its politics. China would grow rich, then free.

That theory is now officially dead. China grew rich — spectacularly, transformatively rich — and did not become free. Instead, it became the world's largest manufacturer, the largest holder of U.S. debt for a period, the dominant trade partner for most of Asia and Africa, and a military power that has modernized at a pace that alarmed every serious strategist in Washington.

The relationship soured progressively: Obama's "pivot to

Asia" signaled alarm; Trump's first-term tariffs in 2018 launched an economic war; Biden's semiconductor export controls escalated it into a technological cold war. And now, in Trump's second term, we arrive at a moment where both sides have concluded that managed competition — not decoupling, not accommodation — is the only viable path.

"China comes into this meeting far more confident than in 2017, when it feared even a small rise in U.S. tariffs," said Scott Kennedy of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "In the last year, Xi has been able to push back and neutralize much of Trump's actions."

THE VIEW FROM NEW DELHI: INDIA'S STRATEGIC ANXIETY

Perhaps no country outside of Taiwan watches this summit with more existential alertness than India. And the signals coming out of Beijing are not entirely reassuring.

India's significance to U.S. foreign policy has been substantially shaped by frictions between Washington and Beijing — the narrative of India as a democratic counterbalance to Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific. But experts warn that narrative has weakened under Trump's second administration.

The concern in New Delhi is structural and acute. "If Trump prioritizes a bilateral grand bargain with Beijing, India will have reasonable concerns that the United States will treat China as the central negotiating partner in Asia rather than as the central strategic challenge," warned Ronak D. Desai of Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

The economic signals have already stung. India-U.S. relations suffered a major jolt after Washington accused New Delhi of profiteering from cheap Russian oil and levied 25% in penalty tariffs — while looking past China's Russian oil purchases. Following the Xi-Trump meeting in Busan last year, Washington cut tariffs on Chinese goods to around 47%, lower than the 50% it was charging on imported Indian goods. The message, however unintentional, was clear: Beijing is more indispensable than New Delhi.

"The narrative of India as a counterbalance to China has weakened under the Trump administration," said Chietigj Bajpae, senior research fel-

low for South Asia at Chatham House. "Trump's foreign policy during the second term has been more transactional and less value-driven."

India's anxieties run deeper than trade arithmetic. A U.S.-China rapprochement that accepts Chinese dominance in Asia — even implicitly — leaves India exposed on multiple fronts: a long, disputed Himalayan border with China that has seen recent military confrontations; Beijing's deep economic and military investment in Pakistan, India's nuclear-armed adversary; and China's Belt and Road infrastructure encirclement through Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

New Delhi fears the revival of the so-called "G2" concept — an informal U.S.-China condominium that would effectively marginalize middle powers like India, as well as other significant regional players, in favor of a bilateral superpower settlement. If Washington and Beijing divide the world between them — as empires have done throughout history — smaller nations become pieces on a board rather than players of the game.

The Iran war has added another dimension to India's strategic headache. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to curb fuel use, reduce overseas travel, and pause gold purchases, underscoring the severe economic impact of the conflict. Higher energy costs are expected to significantly widen India's trade deficit and

current account deficit. India imports the vast majority of its oil; energy price spikes are not abstractions — they are inflation, poverty, and political instability.

For Pakistan, China's "all-weather friend," the summit's outcome is watched with a different calculus. Any improvement in U.S.-China relations risks loosening Pakistan's utility to Beijing, even as Islamabad depends on Chinese investment under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka — all deeply enmeshed in Chinese infrastructure financing — will be watching whether a U.S.-China trade truce reduces Beijing's appetite for geopolitical expansion in South Asia, or accelerates it.

THE FUTURE: THREE SCENARIOS

What happens after the motorcades leave Beijing? Analysts offer three broad trajectories.

Scenario One: Managed Coexistence. The summit produces a durable trade framework, tariff reductions, and a military hotline that prevents accidental escalation. Both leaders claim victory. The world exhales. The structural competition continues beneath the surface but within guardrails that prevent catastrophe. This is the best-case scenario — and the one both governments have publicly committed to.

Scenario Two: The Hollow Deal. As with previous grand summitry between Washington and Beijing, the communiqués prove more aspirational

than operational. Experts warned that "a comprehensive trade deal seems unlikely because the structural sources of rivalry remain unresolved," and that a limited agreement involving tariff pauses and purchase commitments is the more probable outcome. The deeper competition — over technology, military dominance, and political legitimacy — continues unabated.

Scenario Three: The Trap Springs. A miscalculation over Taiwan, a naval incident in the South China Sea, or a breakdown in the Iran negotiations triggers an escalation neither side wants but both have prepared for. CSIS analysts have noted that the U.S. military would face serious challenges in a protracted conflict with China, due to a lack of long-range munitions, air defense systems, and unmanned systems, as well as vulnerable bases in the Indo-Pacific. This is the scenario that haunts every defense ministry from Washington to Tokyo to New Delhi.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Trump arrives seeking headline deals and visible momentum ahead of the midterms. Xi is playing a longer game, focused on strategic patience rather than substantive compromise — so concludes the Council on Foreign Relations. That asymmetry of time horizon is perhaps the most important single fact about this summit.

America votes every two years. China plans in decades. Trump needs wins now. Xi can wait.

And yet both men understand, in their

different ways, that the relationship between their two countries is the most consequential bilateral relationship in human history — more consequential, in its implications for global peace and prosperity, than any other pairing of nations. Trump described Xi as a "friend" and said both countries had an opportunity to "create a future of greater prosperity, cooperation and happiness." Xi, for his part, called for partnership rather than rivalry — while delivering the clearest possible warning that the Taiwan question remains a loaded gun.

For the people of Asia — from Taipei to Tokyo, from Mumbai to Dhaka, from Manila to Islamabad — this is not abstract geopolitics. It is the architecture of the world their children will inherit. Whether that world is one of competitive but peaceful coexistence, or one stalked by the specter of great-power war, depends in no small part on what two men decided, over two days, in the Great Hall of the People. The motorcade has left the Temple of Heaven. The incense has cleared. The world is still waiting to learn what was truly decided in Beijing.

(Reporting contributed from Beijing, Washington, New Delhi, and international wire services. The summit continues through May 15, 2026. This report will be updated as developments warrant.)

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When The World Plays Out On Two Stages At Once



(TSAI BUREAU) New Delhi and Beijing have emerged as twin hubs of intense diplomatic activity, each hosting conversations that could shape the future of the world order.

Moments that redefine global power are rare, but this feels like one of them. At the same time, Beijing and New Delhi have emerged as twin hubs of intense diplomatic activity, each hosting conversations that could shape the future of the world order. In Beijing, the meeting between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping is far more than a routine bilateral engagement.

It reflects a new era where politics, technology and capital converge at the same table. Accompanying Trump are some of the most powerful figures from the corporate world, including Elon Musk, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, Apple's Tim Cook, and leaders from major financial institutions. The message is unmistakable. Diplomacy today is no longer confined to governments alone. It is increasingly driven by the combined force of state power and corporate influence. Against the backdrop of the Iran crisis, concerns over oil supply, semiconductor competition, and the race for AI dominance, Beijing

has effectively become the arena where the present global order is being negotiated. At the very same moment, a different narrative is unfolding in New Delhi, where the BRICS nations are meeting — a grouping often viewed as a counterweight to

Western dominance. The presence of Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi adds a sharp geopolitical edge to the gathering. This is not just participation. It is a signal. A signal that the Global South is asserting itself more confidently, pushing for energy security, reduced dependence on the dollar, and the creation of alternative global institutions. Viewed together, these parallel developments are far from coincidental.

They form a powerful snapshot of a world in transition. In Beijing, the United States and China appear focused on managing rivalry and preserving influence within the existing system. In New Delhi, emerging powers are questioning and attempting to reshape that very system. At the centre of this evolving dynamic stands Iran, a pressure point for Washington, a strategic partner for Beijing, and an increasingly vocal participant within the BRICS framework. What makes this moment truly significant is the simultaneity. It highlights a split-screen world where two competing visions of global order are unfolding side by side. One seeks to stabilise the present, while the other strives to redefine the future. In a nutshell, Beijing is negotiating the world as it is. New Delhi is shaping the world as it could become.

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When Vajpayee Broke Silence: Inside The Day India Went Nuclear

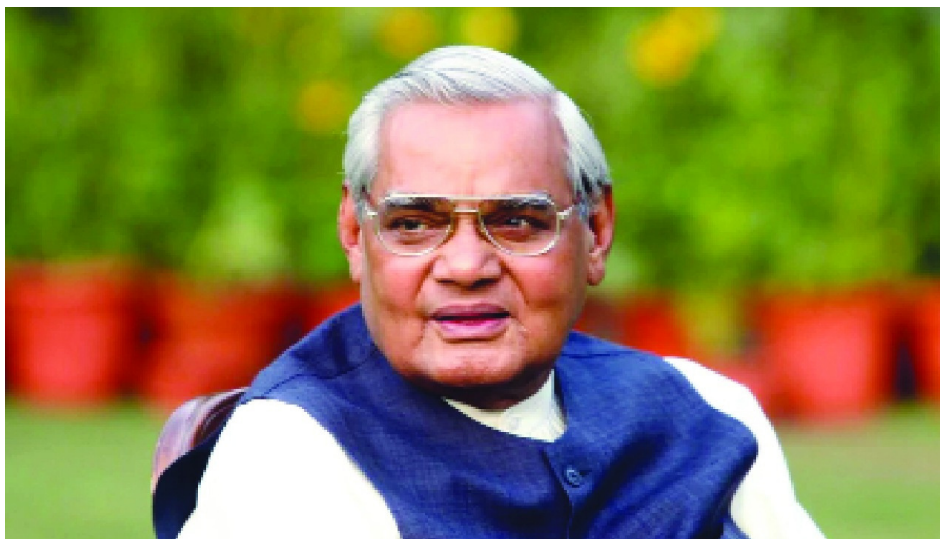
(TSAI BUREAU) It was a hot afternoon on May 11, 1998. At that point in time, I was working as a correspondent covering the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and parliament with the news agency ANI.

I received a call from Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's office that he would address a news conference in the next two hours or so. I was asked to rush to the prime minister's house at "7 RCR", as it was then known, along with my camera team. I was taken aback; wondered why this sudden news conference by the prime minister.

I immediately rushed to my editor's cabin and informed him that Vajpayee was going to address a news conference at 5 pm or so, if I remember correctly.

The first question he asked was: "Is J Jayalithaa withdrawing support to the Vajpayee government?"

This speculation had been doing the rounds in the corridors of power. It remained a hot topic of discussions among politicians and the media. The sudden announcement of a news conference to be addressed by the prime minister himself made journalists curious. Vajpayee was not known for holding sudden news conferences. We rushed to the prime minister's house. After going through many security checks, we finally entered the lawns. The setting is still engraved in my mind. We were early; the



officials were still placing a podium for Vajpayee to stand and address the media. We saw Pramod Mahajan, who was Vajpayee's adviser then, telling some officials to bring the national flag.

"Pramod ji, what's the big news?" I went up to him and asked.

"Just wait. You will hear from the man himself," he said.

Mahajan was usually accessible to journalists and was known for sharing timely information with the press. His response left me wondering why he did not share what the conference was about. The preparations went for a while and many journalists started arriving. I saw some officials close to Vajpayee walking in. "What is all this about?" I asked them.

They, too, didn't say a word, just smiled. The national flag and the podium were all set, and the venue was full of reporters. Then we saw Vajpayee come out of his house and walk slowly to the podium. A paper was placed before him. He adjusted it and began his address: "Today, at 1545 hours, India conducted three underground nuclear tests in the Pokhran range..."

My hands froze; for me, it seemed time had frozen, and from one corner of my eye, I could see the similar reactions on the faces of other journalists present at the venue. It was dead silence. It seemed everything had become still around me, including the birds which had made Vajpayee's garden their home. And

at other times, they were always chirping without fear.

The moment Vajpayee finished his address and started walking back home, I scrambled outside to pick up my mobile phone, which was at the reception; we weren't allowed phones inside the PMO. I picked up my phone and ran to inform the office that India had conducted three nuclear tests. I had barely finished flashing the news, and my phone went dead. I rushed towards my car along with my cameraperson and used a walkie-talkie set in the car to give details to the office. I told them to book a satellite feed to play the Vajpayee statement announcing India's nuclear tests to Reuters, then ANI's partner. Those days, live TV broadcast was a rarity and used sparingly, only by the state broadcaster. The office reacted swiftly, and it was in less than 25 minutes of Vajpayee making the statement that I was at Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited to uplink the statement. The duty editor at Reuters told me to hold for a second as BBC, CNN, and many more news networks in the world wanted to carry Vajpayee's comments live. It's exactly 28 years today, but I still get goosebumps thinking about May 11, 1998. A lazy day to the most talked-about day till today. With these tests, India announced that it was a nuclear power, a status the world recognises and cannot be undone.

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Makes Mahabharat look small: Supreme Court as Sanjay Kapur estate row heats up

A fresh Supreme Court plea, allegations of forged documents, a battle over control of the RK Family Trust and a sharp courtroom remark have pushed the Sunjay Kapur family dispute into a dramatic new phase.

(TSAI BUREAU) The Supreme Court on Tuesday witnessed dramatic scenes in the escalating battle over late industrialist Sunjay Kapur's estate, with Justice JB Pardiwala remarking, "We have entered into an arena. The Mahabharat will look very small," while hearing a fresh plea filed by 80-year-old Rani Kapur against Priya Sachdev Kapur and other family members.

The court was told that a proposed board meeting linked to the disputed estate was aimed at reshaping control of the family's financial empire even as mediation proceedings ordered by the apex court remain underway. A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and Ujjal Bhuyan listed the matter for hearing on May 14.

FRESH PLEA OVER BOARD MEETING

Rani Kapur has sought urgent directions restraining Priya Sachdev Kapur and certain other respondents from interfering in the functioning of the "RK Family Trust" during the mediation process initiated by the Supreme Court on May 7.

She has also sought a stay on a board meeting scheduled for May 18 pursuant to a notice issued by Raghuvanshi Investment Private Limited, which allegedly holds a substantial portion of the disputed family estate.

Appearing for Rani Kapur, counsel informed the court that the proposed meeting was intended to appoint additional directors to the company's board.

Kapur alleged that the meeting had been convened at the behest of Priya Sachdev Kapur and others to bypass the Supreme Court-mediated settlement process and take control of the company's finances, management and disputed assets.

According to the plea, the move could render the mediation proceedings meaningless before they even conclude.

CLAIMS OF FRAUD AND CONTROL

In her application, Rani Kapur claimed she was wrongfully stripped of her "legacy, estate



and home" through what she described as fraudulent documents connected to the "RK Family Trust" or "Rani Kapur Family Trust".

The plea claimed that while the Trust Deed described her as the Settlor and Trustee, it named Priya Sachdev Kapur and others as the sole beneficiaries, excluding her and the rest of the Kapur family.

"It is humbly submitted that the Petitioner/Applicant has a strong

prima facie case as the Respondents are wrongfully attempting to usurp the disputed family estate and the financial control of... RIPL, through a hastily and mala fide Board Meeting," the plea said.

Rani Kapur further claimed that even if the Trust were assumed to be valid, she was presently the sole trustee after removing Priya Sachdev Kapur through a letter

dated March 21, 2026, allegedly under powers granted by the

Trust Deed.

The plea also pointed to the timing of the board meeting notice, claiming it was issued within 24 hours of the Supreme Court referring the matter to mediation. SUPREME COURT MEDIATION last week, the Supreme Court formally referred the dispute for mediation under the supervision of former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud.

The court had asked all parties to participate with an "open mind"

and avoid discussing the matter publicly or on social media.

"It is a family dispute. Let it remain within the family," the court had said earlier.

The legal fight began after Rani Kapur challenged the validity of the RK Family Trust, claiming she was the sole beneficiary of the estate of her late husband Surinder Kapur, founder of the Sona Group. Her petition alleged that a "systematic fraud" was carried out in collusion with her late son to transfer assets into the trust without her consent.

The Supreme Court had also observed that prolonged litigation at Rani Kapur's age would serve little purpose and encouraged all parties to explore an amicable settlement.

Sunjay Kapur died on June 12 last year after collapsing during a polo match in England. The dispute over his estate has since widened into multiple legal battles. Separately, the children of actor Karisma Kapoor and Sunjay Kapur have challenged the authenticity of his alleged will before the Delhi High Court.

Not a victim, knew Sukesh's past and still accepted gifts: ED on Jacqueline's plea

The ED opposed actor Jacqueline Fernandez's plea to turn approver in the Suresh Chandrashekar money laundering case, telling a Delhi court there was sufficient evidence against her.

Actor Jacqueline Fernandez was fully aware of alleged conman Suresh Chandrashekar's criminal background, yet chose to continue her association with him, accepted expensive gifts, and enjoyed part of the illegally acquired money, the Enforcement Directorate told a court on Monday while opposing the actor's plea to turn approver in the Rs 200 crore money laundering case.

The central agency said her claim of being a victim was contrary to the evidence on record. Jacqueline recently told a Delhi court that she wanted to turn approver in the case, a move that came months after the Supreme Court refused to quash the criminal proceedings against her. Chandrashekar, who is currently lodged in jail in connection with multiple cases, has consistently claimed to be the actor's boyfriend. While leaked pictures suggested that the two knew each other closely, Jacqueline has maintained in court that Suresh misled her into believing he was a

legitimate businessman. However, the ED said, "Jacqueline was well aware of the criminal antecedents of the main accused, Suresh. Despite this knowledge of his real identity and criminal background, she chose to continue her association with him and accept valuable benefits, use and enjoy the 'proceeds of crime' for herself and her family members, clearly demonstrating a conscious disregard for the source of the funds and actively participating in the laundering process". The agency further submitted that Jacqueline and her family members allegedly used and benefited from the proceeds of the crime despite being aware of their source. The ED argued that this reflected a conscious disregard for the origin of the funds and indicated active participation in the laundering process. The anti-money laundering agency also told the court that her claim of being a cooperating witness in the main offence did not absolve her of liability in the money laundering case. The ED also sought time from the court to

file a detailed response in the matter.

The actor has categorically denied all allegations and maintained that she had no knowledge of Suresh's criminal background. She said, "Suresh played with my emotions and made my life hell," adding that he "misled me" and damaged her career and livelihood. However, the ED named her a co-accused in its chargesheet filed in August 2022. Suresh Chandrashekar faces cases for allegedly duping the wives of former promoters of Ranbaxy, Shivinder Singh and Malvinder Singh, of Rs 200 crore. According to police, the conman and his associates took money from Shivinder Singh's wife, Aditi Singh, by posing as government officials and promising to secure bail for her husband, who was in jail in a money laundering case. The police have invoked the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) in the case. Several separate investigations against Chandrashekar in the country are currently underway.

The H-1B Crisis: Skilled South Asian Workers in Uncharted Waters



(Our Staff Reporter) For hundreds of thousands of South Asian tech workers, nurses, engineers, and academics across the tri-state area, 2026 has arrived with a terrifying level of uncertainty. The H-1B visa program — once a reliable if bureaucratic pathway to the American dream — now feels like a minefield. The chaos is real. A proposed \$100,000 fee for new H-1B applications filed on behalf of candidates outside the U.S. would fundamentally reshape how American companies re-

cruit globally. Even travel decisions have become immigration decisions: leaving the country at the wrong moment can delay or complicate an entire application. Indians, who receive approximately 71 percent of all H-1B approvals, bear the brunt. In Congress, there is a lifeline in view — but only barely. The WISA Act, introduced in March 2026 by Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, would strike down the presidential proclamation imposing the \$100,000 fee and restore the program's function as a mobility ladder for South Asian families. Its fate is uncertain. Meanwhile, green card backlogs for India remain staggering. The March 2026 Visa Bulletin shows minimal movement in the EB-2 and EB-3 categories, meaning many skilled workers — some of whom have been waiting a decade or more — remain trapped in limbo, unable to change jobs, start businesses, or make long-term life decisions. They are, in every practical sense, frozen in place.

The New South Asian Power Map in New York Politics

(Our Staff Reporter) The election of Zohran Mamdani is the headline, but the real story of South Asian political power in New York is written in the details. Mayor Mamdani appointed Zara Rahim, a consultant of Bangladeshi descent, as an influential senior adviser. Shahana Hanif, from Brooklyn's Bangladeshi-majority Kensington neighborhood, continues to grow her profile at the City Council. City & State New York's 2026 Asian Trailblazers list is populated with South Asians in law, finance, and government. What's shifting is not just representation, but the type of representation. For decades, South Asian political power in New York was largely concentrated in the In-

dian-American professional and business class — a community whose politics often aligned with Hindu nationalist movements abroad and with moderate or center-right Democratic politics at home. Mamdani's insurgent coalition — powered by Bangladeshi aunts in Kensington, Nepali temple organizers in Ridgewood, and young desi activists from Queens — represents something structurally different: working-class, progressive, and deeply cross-ethnic. The question now is whether this new power can hold together across communities that have very different — and sometimes bitterly opposing — views on Kashmir, Modi, Pakistan, and the legacy of Partition.

A Bangladeshi Man Shot by Police. A Community Asking: Who Protects Us?

(Our Staff Reporter) The January 2026 shooting of Jabez Chakraborty, a 22-year-old Bangladeshi New Yorker experiencing a mental health episode, by New York City police officers inside his own home, hit the South Asian community with particular force. For Mayor Mamdani — who had campaigned loudly on police accountability, mental health alternatives to armed response, and the protection of immigrant communities — the incident arrived as the most personal kind of political test. Chakraborty's family, neighbors, and advocates from the Bangladeshi community in Brooklyn organized immediately, calling for transparency, accountability, and a rethinking of how the city responds to mental health crises in immigrant households. Language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity with 911 systems, and fear of police among undocumented family members all contributed to a tragedy that advocates say was preventable. Mayor Mamdani, in his response,



was pointed: he has championed expanding mental health crisis response teams as an alternative to armed police intervention. The city's investment of \$12 million in peer-led substance-use and mental health recovery services announced this month is a start — but for the Bangladeshi and broader South Asian community, the test is not the policy announcement. It is whether the next family in crisis gets help instead of a bullet. South Asian Weekly covers community news from across New York's Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan communities. Tips and story leads

Trump's India Tariffs: Queens Spice Merchants and New Jersey Jewelers Are Feeling It



(Our Staff Reporter) While diplomatic tensions between Washington and New Delhi simmer, the economic fallout of President Trump's near-50 percent tariffs on Indian goods is landing squarely on the backs of South Asian small business owners in New York. Pakistan, by contrast, faces a 19 percent tariff rate — a disparity not lost on business owners in Jackson Heights, Flushing, and along Route 1 in New Jersey.

Indian fabric importers, spice wholesalers, jewelry traders dealing in 22-karat gold, and Ayurvedic supplement retailers are all recalibrating. Some are

absorbing costs quietly. Others are passing them to customers. A few are pivoting to suppliers in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or Thailand to escape the tariff ceiling. The deeper wound may be reputational. India's cool response to Trump's ceasefire claims after Operation Sindoor — New Delhi insisting the peace was bilateral, not brokered — reportedly soured the once-warm Modi-Trump relationship. For Indian-American entrepreneurs who had long seen that relationship as a commercial tailwind, the shift signals something uncomfortable: geopolitical loyalty is not a hedge against economic exposure.

AAPI Heritage Month 2026: South Asians Step Into the Spotlight

(Our Staff Reporter) May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and this year's national theme — "Power in Unity: Strengthening Communities Together" — has never felt more resonant for South Asians in New York. The city is home to nearly 40 percent of all Bangladeshis living in the United States, and its South Asian population spans Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan communities across all five boroughs. The month's lineup includes a South Asian Dance workshop hosted by NYC Parks, a celebration of Indo-Caribbean heritage at Asia Society's Leo Bar on May 14, and a screening of *The A List: 15 Stories* from Asian and Pacific Diasporas at the Asia Society on May 13. The AAPI Cultural and Heritage Parade returns to Midtown

Manhattan's Sixth Avenue later in the month. But behind the festivities lies a harder conversation: within the broader AAPI umbrella, South Asian communities have often felt their stories are eclipsed by East Asian narratives. The presence of a South Asian mayor, combined with the growing political organizing power of Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Indian working-class communities, is slowly changing that dynamic. This May, more than any other, South Asians are not just celebrating heritage — they are asserting a claim on the city's future.



Debashis Ghosh Faces US Citizenship Revocation For Multi-Million Dollar Fraud

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON, DC – The United States Department of Justice has filed denaturalization actions against 12 individuals accused of obtaining U.S. citizenship by concealing serious crimes, war crimes, fraud, and links to terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. Among those named is Debashis Ghosh accused of participating in a multi-million-dollar investment fraud scheme. Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said, “Individuals implicated in committing fraud, heinous crimes such as sexual abuse, or expressing support for terrorism should never have been naturalized



as United States citizens.” Debashis Ghosh is a 62-year-old native of India. Federal authorities allege that Ghosh participated in a conspiracy to defraud investors of approximately \$2.5 million linked to the construction of an aircraft maintenance facility both before and after he became a U.S. citizen. According to the complaint, Ghosh falsely stated during his 2012 naturalization process that he had not committed crimes for which he had not been arrested. Prosecutors argue that the alleged conduct disqualified him from meeting the “good moral character” requirement necessary for citizenship.

Saikat Chakrabarti Draws 1,400 Supporters At San Francisco Rally

(Our Staff Reporter) SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Congressional candidate Saikat Chakrabarti drew a crowd of more than 1,400 to the city’s SoMa district on May 7, launching a final grassroots push ahead of California’s June 2 primary. The “Change the Party” rally focused on efforts to challenge corporate influence and support a new generation of Democratic leadership. Demographics Chakrabarti, who is running for Congress in the seat held by Nancy Pelosi who has announced her retirement, said his campaign is focused on changing the direction of the Democratic Party. “We need a Democratic Party that knows how to fight against authoritarianism, and we need a Democratic Party that will fight to create a society that works for everyone, not just the richest few,” Chakrabarti said during the event. The rally featured candidates backed by Justice Democrats, including Melat Kiros of Colorado,

Angela Gonzales-Torres of California, and Darializa Avila Chevalier of New York. According to the campaign, the event raised approximately \$20,000 for the visiting candidates’ congressional campaigns. Political commentator Hasan Piker also addressed the crowd, speaking about frustration among working people who feel ignored by political and corporate institutions. Piker said working people, rather than corporations, were responsible for the country’s productive output. Melat Kiros, a congressional candidate for Colorado’s 1st District, connected the current progressive movement to earlier organizing efforts behind Social Security, fair labor laws and the New Deal. “And now, with so much at stake, it’s on us to push the party again,” Kiros said. Daily news headlines The event also featured former Congressman Jamaal Bowman and Justice Democrats Executive Director Alexandra Rojas.

Two Indians Arrested By ICE In CA, TN Face Deportation



(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. ICE, Patel had received a six-year sentence, which was suspended after he served less than a year in jail. “ICE took custody of him from the Bradley County Jail and will hold him pending removal proceedings,” the agency said in a statement. ICE said other enforcement operation arrests involved individuals convicted of sexual battery and criminal sexual conduct involving minors between the ages of 13 and 15. ICE said it uses detainers to request that local law enforcement agencies notify federal immigration authorities before undocumented immigrants in custody are released, allowing ICE to assume custody for possible removal proceedings. The agency said individuals taken into custody may be placed in immigration detention and could face deportation proceedings.

Hemant Khann-Kumar, identified by ICE as an undocumented Indian national, was arrested following a conviction in Contra Costa County, California, for an attempted lewd act involving a child. In a separate case, Rinkeshkumar Kaushikbhai Patel was taken into custody in Bradley County, Tennessee, after being convicted of conspiracy to commit theft involving more

Immigration: Trump’s Gold Card Struggles To Gain Traction

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON, DC – 338 people have filed requests for President Donald Trump’s so-called “Gold Card” visa, and only 165 have gone on to pay the \$15,000 processing fee, according to a Department of Homeland Security court filing, underscoring a muted response to a program pitched as a magnet for the world’s ultra-wealthy. Daily news headlines The tepid uptake stands in sharp contrast to earlier claims by Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who had projected the initiative would generate more than \$100 billion by issuing 80,000 visas. Lutnick also asserted in March that 1,000 Gold Cards had already been distributed at \$5 million apiece even before the program formally launched. Yet attorneys advising high-net-worth clients are urging caution or outright rejecting the offering, citing legal

and financial risks, according to reporting by The Washington Post, which is owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who has been donating, like most corporations, generously to Trump’s causes.

Seven lawyers who represent the program’s target clientele told the newspaper they are steering applicants away due to ongoing litigation, tax exposure concerns, and the absence of congressional authorization for the visa. The Washington Post reported that the lack of statutory backing means the program could be reversed at any time, a key deterrent for prospective applicants. Some of the skepticism is coming from figures with ties to Trump’s own circle. Immigration attorney Michael Wildes, who has represented First Lady



Melania Trump, told The Washington Post that he would decline clients seeking the visa, calling it ethically questionable given the uncertainty

surrounding its legality. Others echoed similar concerns. Rosanna Berardi, another immigration lawyer, said recommending such a program would expose clients to significant financial risk without clear legal footing. Meanwhile,

attorney Mona Shah said she has clients moving forward despite warnings the visa could amount to “false advertising,” with applicants willing to risk losing substantial sums, The Washington Post reported. The Gold Card, introduced by Trump in June and later formalized through an executive order, has not been codified by Congress. According to the DHS filing, applicants would not bypass existing employment-based visa categories such as EB-1 or EB-2, further limiting its appeal. Lutnick has maintained that at least one individual has received a Gold Card, though details remain unclear. Speculation briefly swirled around Nicki Minaj, but a White House official told The Washington Post that any such card linked to her was merely a “memento,” not an actual visa.

Bharatiya Learning Center opens in Pennsylvania

(Our Staff Reporter) The Bharatiya Temple in Pennsylvania inaugurated the Bharatiya Learning Center, a cultural and educational facility aimed at preserving Indian languages, heritage, and values among younger generations.

More than 300 people attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony, including elected officials and community leaders, among them Brian Fitzpatrick, who represents the region in Congress, and Neil Makhija, a county-level elected official in Montgomery County.

Addressing attendees, Fitzpatrick said cultural institutions play a role in

strengthening the national fabric, adding that communities preserving their heritage contribute to diversity and unity. Makhija highlighted the importance of such spaces in helping families maintain connections to their cultural roots. The project traces its origins to 1999, when Nand Todi and a small group of community members envisioned a dedicated learning space. Nearly three decades later, that effort has culminated in an \$8.5 million institution, supported by volunteers, donors, and the broader Indian-American community.

"This Learning Center represents nearly three decades of vision, perseverance, and

community unity," said Todi, founder and president of Bharatiya Temple. "It is a place where heritage will be preserved, values will be nurtured, and future generations will remain deeply connected to their cultural identity."

Located at PARAM, 1030 Dekalb Pike in Blue Bell, the center currently serves nearly 200 students each week. It offers instruction in seven Indian languages—Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil—alongside cultural programming focused on values and community engagement.

The curriculum is guided by the Sanskrit

principle "Vidya Dadati Vinayam," meaning knowledge imparts humility.

Organizers said the center functions as a community hub where families gather to celebrate festivals, sustain traditions, and build social connections.

The inauguration comes as the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, with organizers noting the role of immigrant communities in shaping the country's cultural and civic landscape. The Bharatiya Cultural and Learning Center has also been recognized in U.S. Congressional records, underscoring its role in cultural preservation and education.

Pan IIM Alumni conference hosted in NY *Green Card Backlog, H-4 Anxiety, and the Quiet Mental Health Crisis*



Private Limited. Chatterjee is 1994 alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. The programme also included panel discussions on entrepreneurship, AI, investment, business transformation and leadership, featuring several distinguished speakers from the fields of business, technology and innovation. The New York event comes a week after IIM Americas organized Pinnacle 2026, the annual conference hosted by IIM Americas in San Francisco. The May 2 event was themed "Navigating a Complex, Uncertain World," and was attended by the likes of Consul General of India in San Francisco, K. Srikar Reddy, and Matic Robots Cofounder & CEO Navneet Dalal. IIM Americas is a tax-exempt 501(c)(6) not-for-profit organization. It stands as a pan-IIM alumni association representing over 10,000 alumni across the Americas from the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

(Our Staff Reporter) IIM Americas in partnership with the Consulate General of India, New York, organized the Pan IIM Alumni Conference on May 9, in New York. The alumni gathering brought together distinguished leaders, entrepreneurs, investors, innovators and alumni from the IIM community across the United States. The inaugural address for the event was delivered by the

Consul General of India in New York, Binaya Srikanta Pradhan.

CGI Pradhan highlighted the important role of IIM alumni in strengthening the India-U.S. partnership, particularly in the areas of technology, innovation, entrepreneurship and investment, the Consulate General noted on X. The conference also featured special remarks by Sonjoy Chatterjee, Chairman and CEO at Goldman Sachs India Securities

Green Card Backlog, H-4 Anxiety, and the Quiet Mental Health Crisis

(Our Staff Reporter) It rarely makes the front page, but inside the neat suburban homes of Edison and Parsippany, in the cramped apartments of Sunnyside and Woodside, a mental health crisis is quietly deepening among South Asian immigrant families. At its root: a web of visa insecurity, professional limbo, and cultural silence. H-1B visa holders who lose their jobs have, in most cases, 60 days to find new employment or leave the country — taking their spouses and children with them. H-4 visa holders, most of them women, are often barred from working, leaving them economically dependent and isolated. Green card backlogs for Indian nationals stretch into decades for some applicants. Add to this the

trauma of watching the India-Pakistan conflict from thousands of miles away, or navigating hostile immigration rhetoric from Washington, and the pressure compounds quietly but relentlessly.

Mental health professionals in New York are reporting increasing demand from South Asian clients, yet stigma remains a powerful barrier. Therapy is still widely seen in many South Asian households as something for people who have "really broken down." The community desperately needs more culturally competent providers — professionals who understand joint family dynamics, immigration stress, and the particular weight of being expected to succeed while legally unable to fully participate in the country you call home.

Indian Tech Professional Dies In California After Rare Valley Fever Infection

(Our Staff Reporter) A 37-year-old Indian tech professional living in California has died after a rare fungal infection severely damaged his lungs and left him battling for life in intensive care for nearly a month. Chiranjeevi Kolla died on May 5 in Walnut Creek after contracting Valley Fever, according to a fundraiser created by his family to support his wife and young son. Family members said Kolla first developed symptoms in early April that appeared similar to a regular flu, including a persistent cough. As his condition worsened, he went to the emergency room, where doctors initially suspected severe pneumonia.

Further medical tests later confirmed that he had Valley Fever, a fungal infection caused by inhaling spores of the *Coccidioides* fungus, which is commonly found in dry soil across parts of California and the southwestern U.S.

According to the fundraiser, the infection

rapidly affected Kolla's lungs and led to respiratory failure. He was eventually placed on a ventilator in the ICU, where



he remained under treatment for around 30 days before dying earlier this month. The fundraiser was created by his cousin, Rama Koteswara Rao, who described Kolla as a quiet and deeply caring family man respected by colleagues and loved by relatives and friends.

"If you knew Chiranjeevi, you already

know what we lost. He was the kind of person who never raised his voice, never cut a corner, and never made anyone feel small. He gave the very best of himself to two things: the company he worked for, and the family he came home to. Everyone who worked with him respected him. Everyone who knew him loved him," the fundraiser note said.

Kolla lived in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, Pavani Marella, and their five-year-old son, Vihan. The fundraiser said his wife stayed beside him throughout his hospitalization while also trying to care for their child during the medical crisis.

The campaign aims to help the family manage hospital expenses, funeral arrangements in both the U.S. and India,

childcare costs, and future educational expenses for their son.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Kolla worked in the healthcare technology sector in the Bay Area.

Valley Fever, medically known as coccidioidomycosis, is caused by breathing in fungal spores that live in soil in certain dry regions of the U.S. According to health experts, many people exposed to the fungus either develop mild flu-like symptoms or experience no symptoms at all. In some cases, however, the infection can become serious if it spreads through the lungs or other parts of the body. Symptoms may include fever, cough, chest pain, fatigue, and difficulty breathing. Medical experts say severe complications are relatively uncommon, but people with weakened immune systems or underlying health conditions may face a higher risk of life-threatening illness.

Indian National, 2 Firms Charged Over Deadly Baltimore Bridge Collapse

(Our Staff Reporter) Federal prosecutors have filed criminal charges against two shipping companies and an Indian national in connection with the cargo ship crash that destroyed Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge and killed six construction workers in 2024.

The indictment, unsealed on Tuesday, May 12, accuses Singapore-based Synergy Marine Pte Ltd, Chennai-based Synergy Maritime Pte Ltd, and Indian national Radhakrishnan Karthik Nair of conspiracy, obstruction, false statements, and failing to immediately report a hazardous condition to the U.S. Coast Guard, an official news release from Office of Public Affairs revealed.

The charges stem from the March 26, 2024 crash involving the Singapore-

flagged container ship MV Dali, which slammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge after losing power while leaving the Port of Baltimore. Prosecutors said the economic damage caused by the disaster is estimated at more than \$5 billion.

According to the indictment, the Dali suffered two power failures within four minutes while heading out to sea. Investigators believe a loose wire in a high-voltage switchboard likely triggered the first blackout. Although the ship briefly regained power, it lost power again shortly afterward because of changes allegedly made to the vessel's fuel system. Federal prosecutors alleged that the companies and Nair relied on a flushing pump to supply fuel to two of the ship's four generators. The pump was not designed

to restart automatically after a blackout, causing the generators to fail during the second power outage. Authorities said the ship would likely have regained power in time to safely pass under the bridge if the correct fuel supply pumps had been used. The Justice Department also accused the defendants of misleading investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board during the probe into the disaster. The indictment alleged that Nair falsely claimed he did not know the flushing pump was being used to fuel the generators.

In to conspiracy and obstruction charges, the two companies also face misdemeanor violations of the Clean Water Act, the Oil Pollution Act, and the Refuse Act. Prosecutors said the crash released pollutants into the Patapsco

River, including oil, shipping containers, cargo contents, and debris from the bridge. The collapse of the bridge killed six construction workers and shut down one of the country's busiest ports for weeks, severely disrupting regional trade and transportation.

The case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Coast Guard Investigative Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division.

Officials from the Justice Department and federal agencies described the disaster as preventable and said the prosecution is aimed at holding companies accountable for violating maritime safety laws and endangering public safety.

Body Of Missing Indian-Origin Student Sandarsh Krishna Found At Grand Canyon National Park



report him missing. During the search operation, investigators found additional clues connected to his disappearance. Park officials said a backpack believed to belong to Krishna had been turned over to staff at Bright Angel Lodge around 7 am on April 28. Authorities also noted that Krishna was not linked to any vehicle inside the park. Investigators believed he may have traveled to the area using a rideshare or taxi service.

As the search continued over the past several days, Krishna's family publicly appealed for answers and hoped for his safe return. His brother, Adarsh Krishna, had earlier said the family wanted closure and did not believe Sandarsh would intentionally harm himself. The National Park Service has not yet released further details about the circumstances surrounding his death.

(Our Staff Reporter) A weeks-long search for 26-year-old Sandarsh Krishna, an Indian-origin science graduate student at Arizona State University (ASU), has ended after National Park Service personnel found his body below the rim near Verkamp's Visitor Center at the Grand Canyon National Park's South Rim on Saturday, May 9.

Authorities confirmed the discovery in a statement released on Tuesday, May 12, and said the investigation into the incident is still ongoing.

Krishna had gone missing during a hiking trip to the Grand Canyon in late April. According to park officials, he was last seen sometime between 4 pm local time on April 27 and midnight on April 28.

Officials said his last known possible location was along the Rim Trail on Hermit Road between Bright Angel Lodge and Mohave Point. Krishna was described as being 5 feet 10

inches tall with a thin build, weighing around 160 pounds, with black hair and brown eyes. At the time, he was reportedly wearing athletic clothing.

Krishna had informed friends about his trip and was expected to return on April 28. Concern grew after his family was unable to contact him, leading them to

Adani Ports Expands Into Deepwater Offshore Business With U.S. Partnership

(Our Staff Reporter) Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd is expanding its offshore business into deepwater and subsea operations through a new partnership between its maritime subsidiary Astro Offshore and Houston, Texas-based applied technology company Oceaneering International Inc. The agreement will focus on specialized offshore projects in Europe and strengthen Astro Offshore's capabilities in complex subsea engineering work, including underwater construction, pipeline installation, inspection, and maintenance.

The partnership marks a major step in APSEZ's long-term plan to build a globally

diversified marine business covering logistics, offshore support services, and deepwater infrastructure solutions. As part of the expansion, Astro Offshore has added its first ultra-deepwater vessel, Astro Atlas, to its fleet. The company said the vessel will improve its ability to handle advanced offshore operations and support growing international demand. Astro Atlas is a 97-meter DP2 multipurpose support vessel formerly known as Energy Savannah. It is equipped with advanced subsea systems, including a 150-ton crane, a secondary crane, a moonpool, and accommodation for up to 100 personnel. The vessel can operate at water depths of more

than 3,000 meters. APSEZ Whole-time Director and CEO Ashwani Gupta said the partnership supports the company's ambition to create a stronger global marine platform. He said combining Astro Offshore's expanding fleet with Oceaneering's deepwater engineering and remotely operated vehicle expertise would strengthen capabilities in offshore operations while helping the company expand into Europe. Astro Offshore CEO Mark Humphreys said the addition of Astro Atlas significantly boosts the company's ultra-deepwater capabilities and allows it to handle more complex offshore projects.

Birthright Citizenship: The Supreme Court Case That Could Redefine South Asian Families

(Our Staff Reporter) Few legal battles have higher stakes for New York's South Asian immigrant community than the case currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. At issue is Executive Order 14160, signed by President Trump, which challenged the 14th Amendment's guarantee of citizenship for all persons born on American soil — a cornerstone of U.S. law for over 150 years. The stakes for South Asian families are acute. Among Indian Americans, roughly 51 percent are naturalized citizens, while large numbers remain on H-1B or H-4 visas — temporary statuses that can be revoked. Many have U.S.-born children whose citi-

zenship, under the challenged executive order, could theoretically be in question. A coalition led by the South Asian American Justice Collaborative submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court highlighting the specific risks to South Asian communities. The brief argues that stripping birthright citizenship would create a permanent underclass of stateless children, born in America but belonging nowhere. For a community where a single visa status shapes where children go to school, whether spouses can work, and how secure a family feels, the court's eventual ruling is not a political abstraction — it is existential.

Governor Newsom Picks Rohit Chopra To Lead California Consumer Protection Agency

(Our Staff Reporter) California Governor Gavin Newsom has appointed former Consumer Financial Protection Bureau director Rohit Chopra to lead the state's newly created Business and Consumer Services Agency, as California positions itself against the rollback of federal consumer protections under President Donald Trump's administration.

The new agency, set to officially begin operations on July 1, 2026, will combine several state departments and regulatory bodies under one umbrella to strengthen oversight of businesses, financial services, healthcare, licensing, and consumer protection across California.

Announcing the appointment on Tuesday, May 12, Newsom said, "As the Trump administration turns its back on consumers, we need strong and fearless leaders to keep protecting Californians. Rohit Chopra has shown exactly that kind of leadership — taking bold action, standing up for working families, and

enforcing real consumer protections. I look forward to our ongoing partnership as we build on our work to protect families, hold bad actors accountable, and advance affordability across California."

Chopra, who is of Indian-origin, will serve as Secretary of the Business and Consumer Services Agency, which was created through a government reorganization approved by Newsom last year. The agency will oversee departments including the Department of Consumer Affairs, Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, Department of Real Estate, Department of Cannabis Control, and the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, among others.

Responding to the appointment, Chopra said, "While federal agencies are making life more expensive and enriching special interests, California will be firing on all cylinders to make sure markets aren't rigged against families and small businesses."

He added, "By bringing together dozens of boards, bureaus, and departments under one roof, California's new agency will work to protect the public in health care, technology, financial services, and more. I'm grateful to Governor Newsom for the opportunity to serve as the new agency's Secretary."

California officials said the agency will support the state's wider push to strengthen consumer protections as federal oversight weakens. The state has recently increased efforts to crack down on junk fees, regulate oil companies, lower prescription drug prices through CalRx, improve online privacy protections, and expand enforcement against scams and predatory business practices.

Chopra is one of the most prominent consumer protection officials in the country. He led the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau from 2021 to 2025 under President Joe Biden, overseeing regulation of mortgages, credit cards,

student loans, and other financial products. During his tenure, the agency recovered nearly \$10 billion in refunds and penalties from companies accused of violating consumer protection laws.

Before leading the CFPB, Chopra served as a commissioner at the Federal Trade Commission from 2018 to 2021 after being nominated by Trump in his first presidential term and unanimously confirmed by the Senate. He also worked at the U.S. Department of Education and previously served as the Student Loan Ombudsman at the CFPB.

Chopra, a Democrat, has been a fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School since 2025. He holds an MBA from the Wharton School and a degree in government from Harvard University. He also received a Fulbright Fellowship to South Korea.

His new position requires confirmation by the California Senate and carries a compensation of \$254,450.

State Department Imposes Visa Ban On 13 Linked To Indian Firm In Fentanyl Case

(Our Staff Reporter) The United States has imposed visa bans on 13 people linked to an Indian trading company already sanctioned for allegedly trafficking fentanyl and other illegal drugs into the country, according to the State Department. The move was announced on Tuesday, May 12, by State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott, who said the individuals were close business associates of KS International Traders and its owner. He said the action reflected the shared commitment of India and the U.S. to fight illegal drug trafficking networks.

The State Department did not reveal the names of the 13 individuals affected by the visa restrictions. The bans were imposed under a provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act that blocks drug traffickers from entering the U.S.

KS International Traders and its owner, Khizar Mohammad Iqbal Shaikh, were sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in September along with another Indian national, Sadiq Abbas Habib Sayyed. The

sanctions froze any assets they held in the U.S. and barred them from carrying out financial transactions connected to the American financial system.

According to the Treasury Department, the company and the two men were involved in supplying large numbers of counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl and other illegal drugs to buyers in the U.S.

American authorities alleged that Shaikh and Sayyed worked with narcotics traffickers based in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. to market and distribute pills containing fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and methamphetamine. The U.S. government has treated fentanyl as a major national security and public health threat under President Donald Trump's administration. Officials say the synthetic opioid has played a major role in the country's drug overdose crisis.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that 70,231 people died from drug overdoses in the 12 months ending in November in the United States.

Mayor Mamdani at Four Months: Desi Pride Meets Political Reality

(Our Staff Reporter) When Zohran Mamdani was sworn in on January 1, 2026, as New York City's first South Asian and Muslim mayor — taking his oath on the Quran, in a decommissioned subway station, with Bernie Sanders presiding — it felt like a seismic cultural moment. South Asians from Queens to the Bronx watched live streams, WhatsApp-ed their cousins in Mumbai and Dhaka, and felt something rare: visibility at the very top. Four months in, the honeymoon is giving way to something more complicated — and more interesting. A Marist poll shows just under 50 percent of New Yorkers approve of Mamdani's performance. His signature promises — a rent freeze on one million stabilized apartments, free buses, city-run grocery stores, universal childcare — remain works in progress, stalled by a \$70 billion financing gap and an Albany legislature not always willing to play along. Within the

South Asian community itself, the mayor walks a careful tightrope. Born in Uganda to a Muslim father and Hindu mother, raised in Queens, Mamdani has deliberately bridged divides that normally run deep — between Indian and Pakistani, between Hindu and Muslim, between first-generation immigrant and second-generation activist. Community leader Kazi Fouzia, a Bangladeshi activist who campaigned tirelessly for him, urges patience: "His promises are always misunderstood." But Dilip Nath, a Bangladeshi district leader in Queens who backed Andrew Cuomo, remains skeptical: "I hope he can deliver for New Yorkers." His biggest early test came in January when Jabez Chakraborty, a 22-year-old Bangladeshi New Yorker experiencing a mental health crisis, was shot by police inside his own home. For the Bangladeshi community, the tragedy crystallized longstanding fears about how law enforcement interacts with South Asian immigrant families.

One Year After Operation Sindoor: A Diaspora Still Divided

(Our Staff Reporter) It has been exactly one year since India launched Operation Sindoor — the missile and drone strikes on nine terror infrastructure sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir — in retaliation for the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam massacre that killed 26 civilians, most of them Hindu tourists. The four-day aerial war that followed, ending with a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on May 10, was the most serious military confrontation between two nuclear-armed neighbors in nearly three decades. One year on, both capitals are celebrating what each insists was their own victory. In Lahore, government-organized concerts marked what Pakistan calls the "Day of the Battle of Truth." In New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi and his ministers changed their social media profiles to honor the armed forces. But in New York's South Asian neighborhoods — from Jackson Heights to Richmond Hill — the conflict left behind something harder to celebrate: a community fractured along national, religious, and political lines. Indian-Americans largely rallied around Operation Sindoor as a necessary and proportionate response to terror. Pakistani-Americans, many of them deeply proud of their Air Force's performance in the early phase of the conflict, felt blindsided by American indifference. And Kashmiri-Americans, caught between both narratives, found themselves navigating a grief that neither side fully acknowledged. What's clear a year later is that the geopolitical fallout remains unresolved. India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty — still not reinstated — threatening Pakistan's agricultural water supply for over 240 million people. India's relationship with Washington has cooled after New Delhi refused to credit Trump with brokering the ceasefire, while Trump reportedly called Pakistani Army Chief Asim Munir his "favorite field marshal." For New York's South Asian community, these are not abstract diplomacy stories.

How made-in-India assault rifles are paying tribute to defence hero Manohar Parrikar

Manohar Gopalakrishna Parrikar's thrust on indigenisation of defence products and reforms opened doors for private players in the sector. Today, the former defence minister's legacy lives on in the M72, G72 and P72 assault rifles, named after his initials. Fully made in India, the rifles are now being used by India's security forces.

(Our Staff Reporter) There are leaders who serve competently, and then there are those whose vision leaves a lasting imprint on the nation. Manohar Parrikar belonged to the latter category. An engineer-politician, Parrikar brought deep domain understanding to the defence ministry, and remains one of the most respected figures in India's national security establishment even years after his death. Today, his legacy has taken a unique, tangible form — a series of indigenous firearms that now stand guard with Indian forces. The rifles carry the initials of his full name — Manohar Gopalakrishna Parrikar — as the M, G, P series. Defence analyst and senior journalist Sandeep Unnithan recently drew attention to this quiet tribute in a video posted on X, highlighting how a private Indian company, SSS Defence, has chosen to honour the former defence minister not just in words, but through weapons designed and built in India.

Unnithan described Parrikar as "one of India's greatest defence ministers ever", and "a leader still fondly remembered by the country's defence industrial complex". He pointed how the Bengaluru-based firm SSS Defence named three of its weapons after the late politician. "Here's the M72, M for Manohar, that's a 5.56x45 assault rifle. G72, G for Gopalakrishna, chambered for the 9x19 Parabellum round. And finally you have the star of the show, the P72, P for Parrikar, chambered for 7.62x39 assault rifle," Unnithan said in the video, showcasing the weapons.

WHY IS MANOHAR PARRIKAR CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST DEFENCE MINISTERS IN INDIA?

Manohar Parrikar, who served as Union Defence Minister from November 2014 to March 2017, with a brief return later, is credited with injecting fresh momentum into India's defence establishment at a critical time. A metallurgical



engineer from IIT Bombay and a leader known for his simplicity and integrity, Parrikar brought a pragmatic, hands-on approach to the ministry. His tenure saw several landmark decisions. He

pushed aggressively for "Make in India" in defence, revising the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) in 2016 to prioritise indigenisation and ease bureaucratic hurdles. Foreign

direct investment (FDI) in defence was raised to 49%, opening doors for private players. Parrikar reformed the blacklisting policy that had previously stalled deals, and he set up the Shekatkar

Committee to recommend ways to enhance combat capability and rebalance defence spending. Vivek Krishnan, CEO of SSS Defence, told India Today Digital that naming the M, G and P series rifles after Manohar Parrikar was a tribute as well as a recognition of his transformative contribution to India's defence industry. "Before Mr Parrikar came in as the defence minister, the defence sector was pretty much over-regulated and over-licensed. Private sector participation, especially in offensive weapons, was almost minuscule. It was post-2016, after the Arms Rules 2016 were announced, that it became possible for private companies to enter this space," said Krishnan. He explained that the naming began with the P72 rifle. "The first thing we did was naming the P-72 after Mr Parrikar. And then very shortly when the other weapons came in, we said we've got to complete this whole thing [naming tribute]. So we kept M and P and G," he added.

After 3 arrests, CBI takes charge of probe into murder of Suvendu's aide

(Our Staff Reporter) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has taken over the investigation into the murder of Chandranath Rath, close aide Suvendu Adhikari, after registering an FIR and formally taking charge of the case from the West Bengal Police. The move follows a request from the state government, escalating the high-profile killing into a wider probe amid rising political tensions in post-poll West Bengal. As per procedure, the CBI has re-registered the FIR originally filed by Madhyamgram police and will now independently investigate the case. Officials said a CBI team is expected to visit West Bengal on Tuesday as part of the initial phase

of the probe. The agency's inquiry will proceed afresh, with the findings eventually submitted before a competent court, either in the form of a chargesheet or closure report depending on evidence gathered.

Rath was shot dead on May 6 in the Doharia area of Madhyamgram, two days after the declaration of the fiercely contested Assembly election results with the BJP winning 208 of the 294 seats.

He sustained critical injuries after being fired upon on a public road and was rushed to a private hospital, where doctors declared him

dead. Investigators believe the killing was a planned ambush carried out after extensive reconnaissance. The state probe had made key breakthroughs before the transfer. Three accused — Mayank Raj Mishra, Vicky Maurya and Raj Singh — were arrested in connection with the case after coordinated operations in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. According to police, Mayank Raj Mishra and Vicky Maurya were detained from Buxar in Bihar, while Raj Singh was held from Ballia in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday before being formally arrested the following morning.

The three were produced before the ACJM court in Barasat, where 13 days of CID custody was granted. The next hearing has been scheduled for May 24. They have been booked under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including murder, criminal conspiracy, illegal arms possession and suppression of evidence, along with provisions of the Arms Act.

DIGITAL TRANSACTION LED TO ARRESTS? A digital trail through a UPI transaction proved crucial to the

breakthrough. Investigators traced a payment made by one of the suspects at the Bally toll plaza near Kolkata, which helped track the movement of a car believed to have been used in the attack. CCTV footage and technical surveillance indicated that the vehicle crossed the toll point shortly before the murder. Police said at least eight people were involved in the conspiracy and execution of the killing.



India's sharp message to China on providing Pak support during Op Sindoor

In a sharp swipe at China, India said 'responsible nations' should reflect on backing state sponsors of terror. The remark came as China publicly admitted to helping Pakistan during Operation Sindoor last year.

(Our Staff Reporter) India said "responsible nations" must reflect on their attempts to support state sponsors of terror, in a pointed message to China after Beijing publicly admitted assisting Pakistan during Operation Sindoor last year. The remarks come days after a Chinese official suggested Beijing provided on-ground technical assistance to Pakistan during the three-day hostilities. It, however, did not account for much as Islamabad scurried to Delhi for a ceasefire as the Indian military pounded air bases in Pakistan.

In its weekly media briefing, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) underscored that such actions by global actors undermined their credibility and global reputation. "We have seen reports that corroborate what was known earlier," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

INDIA'S REPUTATION JAB AT CHINA

"It is for nations that consider themselves responsible to reflect on whether supporting



attempts to protect terrorist infrastructure affects their reputation and standing," Jaiswal further said.

Jaiswal reiterated that Operation Sindoor was a "precise, targeted and calibrated response" to the terror attack in Pahalgam, which left 25 tourists dead. "It was aimed at destroying state-sponsored terror infrastructure operating out of Pakistan," he further said.

That China provided support to

its all-weather friend Pakistan during the conflict was known all along. In July last year, Lieutenant General Rahul Singh first revealed that China provided "live inputs on our deployment" to Pakistan.

Not only China, but Lt General Singh also disclosed that Turkiye also supplied Bayraktar drones to Pakistan. But such assistance had little impact on the conflict as India destroyed nine terror camps and struck 11

military sites deep inside Pakistan.

HOW CHINA HELPED PAKISTAN DURING SINDOOR

So, what help did China provide? On the day India marked the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, China's state broadcaster CCTV aired interviews with engineers from the Aviation Industry Corporation of China's (AVIC) Chengdu Aircraft Design and

Research Institute Beijing's South China Morning Post on Friday reported that state broadcaster CCTV aired interviews with engineers from the Aviation Industry Corporation of China's (AVIC) Chengdu Aircraft Design and Research Institute. The institute works on developing military aircraft and drones for China's air force. In the interview, one of the engineers, Zhang Heng, said they worked alongside Pakistani personnel during the hostilities. "At the support base, we constantly heard fighter jets roaring into the sky and air-raid sirens blaring," Zhang was quoted as saying by the South China Morning Post.

"By late morning, temperatures were nearing 50 degrees. It was physically exhausting and mentally intense," he further said.

Zhang emphasised their role was to ensure that their equipment could "truly perform at its full combat potential". He was likely referring to the J-10CE fighter jet, manufactured by the Chengdu Group.

Chhattisgarh teen dies hours after eating watermelon, 4 others fall sick

Five children fell ill in Chhattisgarh's Ghurkot village after eating watermelon and other food at a house. One boy died and officials are investigating suspected food poisoning as four others remain stable.

(Our Staff Reporter) What began as a cheerful family visit after a wedding ended in panic, hospital rush and death in a Chhattisgarh village, after five children suddenly collapsed within hours of eating watermelon kept inside a home.

Wedding trip turns tragic as Chhattisgarh boy dies after eating watermelon

A joyful visit after a wedding ceremony ended in heartbreak in Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa district when five children suddenly fell violently ill after eating watermelon, leaving one teenager dead and four others fighting for recovery in hospital.

The tragedy unfolded in Ghurkot village on Monday afternoon. Laughter and post-wedding celebrations quickly turned into chaos after the children began vomiting, complaining of severe

stomach distress and struggling to breathe just hours after eating watermelon kept at the house.

By the time their families rushed them towards the district hospital, 15-year-old Akhilesh Dheewar had stopped responding.

Doctors later declared him dead.

CHILDREN FELL ILL WITHIN HOURS

According to officials, the children had arrived in their maternal uncle's village after attending a wedding function. Around 12 pm, they reportedly ate watermelon along with other food items at the house. What followed left the entire village shaken. Within nearly two hours, all five children began suffering from vomiting, diarrhoea and breathing difficulties. Their condition deteriorated rapidly, triggering panic among family members, who scrambled to take them to hospital. The children were identified

as Akhilesh Dheewar from Podi Dalha, Shri Dheewar from Avreed, Pintu Dheewar from Khatola, Narendra Dheewar and Hitesh Dheewar from Kotgarh. Despite desperate efforts by relatives, Akhilesh died on the way to the district hospital.

FEARS OF FOOD POISONING

The sudden illness and death sparked fears of food poisoning, prompting the district administration to launch an urgent investigation. Collector Janmejaya Mahobe took cognisance of the incident soon after receiving information. Teams from the health department and administration reached both the village and the district hospital as concern spread over what exactly caused the children to collapse. Officials collected samples of watermelon and other food items consumed by the children and sent them for laboratory testing. To

determine the exact cause of death, doctors preserved viscera samples after the post-mortem examination.

FOUR CHILDREN STILL UNDER OBSERVATION

Doctors said the remaining four children are stable, though they continue to remain under close medical supervision. Dr S Kujur, Civil Surgeon at the district hospital, said, "Five children from Ghurkot village were brought to the district hospital after complaints of vomiting, diarrhoea and breathing difficulty. Treatment was started immediately for all of them." "During treatment, one child died, while the condition of the other four children is stable at present. Prima facie, the case appears to be food poisoning. The children had consumed watermelon and other food items, so samples have been sent for examination.

Iran threatens to enrich uranium to weapons grade if attacked by US, Israel again

Iran has threatened to cross the nuclear red line and push uranium enrichment to weapons-grade levels if the United States launches another strike on its territory. The warning came as some aides of President Donald Trump said he is now more seriously considering a resumption of combat operations in Iran. Ebrahim Rezaei, spokesperson for Iran's parliamentary national security and foreign policy commission, said Tehran could enrich uranium up to 90 per cent purity, which is a level considered suitable for nuclear weapons.

"One of Iran's options in the event of another attack could be 90 percent enrichment. We will review it in the parliament," Rezaei wrote on X.

The remark landed less than 24 hours after Trump questioned the fragile ceasefire between Washington and Tehran, saying the truce was on "life support" after Iran rejected a US-backed proposal aimed at ending months of conflict.

Iran's nuclear programme is at the core of the dispute,



particularly the fate of roughly 400 kilograms of uranium already enriched to 60 per cent purity, just below weapons-grade levels. Trump declared last June that US and Israeli strikes during the 12-day war had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear facilities. But US intelligence assessments have reportedly concluded that Tehran's nuclear programme may still survive unless the highly enriched uranium stockpile is either destroyed or moved out of the

country.

That disagreement has now become the main obstacle in negotiations.

Trump wants Iran to hand over the enriched uranium and abandon its nuclear programme. Tehran, however, says nuclear issues should only be discussed in the later stages of talks and has rejected demands to give up what it considers a sovereign right. Iran has also demanded an end to the US naval blockade, compensation for war-related

damage and a halt to military operations involving Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The collapse of confidence between both sides became more visible after Trump lashed out at Tehran's latest response to the US proposal.

"I would call it the weakest right now, after reading that piece of garbage they sent us. I didn't even finish reading it," Trump told reporters on Monday. The US proposal aimed to freeze the fighting first before opening

negotiations on more divisive issues, including Iran's nuclear activities. Iranian officials spent much of Tuesday projecting defiance rather than compromise. State-linked Fars news agency cited Mohammad Akbarzadeh, deputy political director of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, as saying Tehran had expanded its operational definition of the Strait of Hormuz under a new military strategy. According to the report, Iran now considers a broad maritime zone stretching from Jask to Siri Island as part of its operational area. Meanwhile, Washington stepped up its economic pressure campaign against Tehran, unveiling fresh sanctions on companies and individuals accused of helping Iran sell oil to China. US officials said the move was aimed at choking off money that allegedly helps fund Iran's military operations and nuclear activities. Trump is expected to arrive in Beijing on Wednesday, where Iran is likely to feature prominently in discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

California mayor resigns after pleading guilty to acting as Chinese agent

The Mayor of the Californian City of Arcadia, Eileen Wang, has resigned and agreed to plead guilty to acting as an illegal agent of China, a Reuters report said, citing the US Department of Justice. The 58-year-old politician is expected to plead guilty in federal court in Los Angeles in the near future.

As per the federal prosecutors, Wang, along with her then fianc, Yaoning 'Mike' Sun, have been charged with promoting pro-China propaganda on behalf of the Chinese government in the United States.

"Individuals in our country who covertly do the bidding of foreign governments undermine our democracy," said First Assistant US Attorney Bill Essayli for the Central District of California.

"This plea agreement is the

latest success in our determination to defend the homeland against China's efforts to corrupt our institutions," Essayli said in a statement.

As per reports, Sun is presently serving a four-year term in jail after he pleaded guilty in a federal court last October. In a related filing, Wang has agreed to plead guilty to the felony count, which comes with a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. The two worked at the direction and control of Chinese government officials to promote Beijing's interests by, among other things, promoting pro-PRC (People's Republic of China) propaganda in the United States.

The duo also ran US News Centre, a website that purported to be a news source for the local Chinese American community.



They also received and executed directives from Chinese government officials to post pro-China content on the website.

In her guilty plea, Wang admitted that she did not notify

the Attorney General that she was acting in the United States as an agent of China. She also did not disclose on her website that some of its content had been posted at the direction of members of the Chinese

government.

The former Mayor was elected in November 2022 to the Arcadia City Council, a five-person governing body from which the mayor is selected on a rotating basis.

Trump heads to China for high-stakes summit with Xi; Iran, AI security on agenda

US President Donald Trump is set to travel to Beijing this week for a closely watched summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, with Washington signalling that it plans to press China on its ties with Iran, emerging technologies, trade imbalances and global security issues.

The three-day visit, scheduled from May 13 to May 15, is being seen as a critical moment in US-China relations amid intensifying geopolitical competition, supply chain realignments and growing tensions across the Indo-Pacific. Senior White House officials said the administration was seeking "tangible outcomes" from the summit rather than symbolic optics, with discussions expected to focus on economic reciprocity, strategic stability and technological safeguards. One of the key issues expected to dominate the talks is Beijing's relationship with Tehran. US officials said Trump would raise concerns over China's engagement with Iran, pointing in



particular to recent American sanctions imposed on a Chinese intelligence-linked firm and satellite companies accused of supporting Tehran.

The summit comes amid heightened scrutiny of China's role in the Middle East and Washington's broader efforts to isolate Iran diplomatically and economically. The US is also expected to push discussions on

artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, with officials expressing concern over the rapid advancement of frontier AI technologies and the risks posed by a lack of communication mechanisms between the two powers. According to officials, Washington hopes to establish channels for "deconfliction" and crisis management in emerging technologies to prevent

escalation or misunderstandings. Nuclear arms control is also expected to feature in the talks despite what the administration described as Beijing's long-standing reluctance to engage in formal arms control dialogue with the United States.

Officials acknowledged that previous efforts had yielded little progress but said the issue would again be raised directly

during the summit. On Taiwan, US officials reiterated that there had been no change in Washington's policy position and indicated that the administration would continue to maintain the existing status quo framework. The White House also said the visit would include efforts to secure agreements across sectors such as aerospace, agriculture and energy through ongoing bilateral trade and investment mechanisms. Officials said the administration's goal was to "rebalance" economic ties with China while protecting American workers, farmers and strategic industries. Trump is expected to arrive in Beijing on Wednesday evening local time and depart Friday afternoon after bilateral meetings, ceremonial engagements and a working lunch with Xi. The summit is being viewed as a potentially defining moment for the future direction of US-China ties, particularly on trade, technology governance and global security coordination.

New York Pop-Up Library Opens With 3.5 Million Pages Of Epstein Files; Know All Details

A temporary library in New York displaying millions of pages linked to Jeffrey Epstein has become the center of fresh public attention in the United States. The unusual pop-up exhibition contains printed records released earlier this year by the US Department of Justice and is open to visitors for a limited time in Manhattan's Tribeca area.

The exhibit has also drawn attention because it includes references to the long-discussed relationship between Epstein and US President Donald Trump. Organisers reportedly say the goal of the project is to encourage transparency and public accountability.

Millions Of Pages Placed On Display

The pop-up installation is called "The Donald J. Trump and Jeffrey Epstein Memorial Reading Room." According to organisers, it reportedly contains nearly 3.5 million pages of Epstein-related records released under the Epstein Files Transparency Act.



The documents have been compiled into 3,437 bound volumes weighing nearly 17,000 pounds. Shelves inside the gallery are lined with the massive collection, which visitors can access through prior registration and scheduled appointments between May 8 and May 21. The project has been organised by the Institute for Primary Facts, a nonprofit group that says it focuses on government transparency and public education. "The truth is hard to deny when it's printed and bound for you to see," the organisation said on its website.

The exact location of the exhibit has not been publicly shared for security reasons. Visitors who successfully register receive the address through email and text message before their scheduled visit.

Organisers Speak About Accountability

The library also features a timeline showing the relationship between Trump and Epstein, which has remained a topic of debate for years.

Project organisers reportedly said the exhibition is meant to keep attention focused on the Epstein case and the larger

questions surrounding how the matter has been handled politically and legally in the United States.

"The Donald J. Trump and Jeffrey Epstein Memorial Reading Room is a physical, undeniable record of corruption, cover-ups, and crime, all 3.5 million pages, 3,437 volumes, and 17,000 pounds of the released and partially redacted Epstein files Trump has been working overtime to distract us from," the project's website highlighted. David Garrett, one of the organisers behind the project, also spoke about the purpose of the display. "We're a pro-democracy organisation, with the goal of educating the public using these kinds of sort of pop-up museums and other in-real-life experiences to help people understand the corruption in the United States, the dangers to democracy," Garrett told AFP.

"And what we attempted to do here was to create, or help to

create public outcry to have real accountability," he added. "The evidence in this room is evidence of one of the most horrific crimes in American history," Garrett was also quoted as saying by Wired. Public Access Comes With Restrictions

Although the exhibit is open to the public, access to the actual documents has been restricted because some files reportedly included names that were not properly redacted by the Department of Justice.

As a result, only selected professionals such as journalists and lawyers are allowed to directly consult certain records. General visitors can still walk through the exhibit and view the printed volumes. Jeffrey Epstein was a wealthy financier accused of sexually exploiting underage girls at multiple properties, including homes in Manhattan and Palm Beach. Many allegations were linked to his private island, Little St. James, which he purchased in 1998.

From US to Iran, why is Saudi blaming everyone at once now?



Amid the deadlock in the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia -- long considered one of the US's closest and oldest allies in the region -- is now striking a different tune from the White House. In a bombshell revelation, Saudi royal Prince Turki Al-Faisal has claimed that the US-Israeli war on Iran was part of Benjamin Netanyahu's calculated and repeated attempts to ignite a conflict between Riyadh and Tehran. That, Prince Turki wrote in the state-owned Arab News over the weekend, was a pill Saudi Arabia refused to swallow time and again. Contrary to the popular belief that Riyadh had been pressing the panic button

in Washington DC for Trump to put boots on the ground in Iran, it is Saudi Arabia that has now denied the US access to its airspace and bases for Project Freedom -- the plan to militarily escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz.

Saudi's move eventually forced US President Donald Trump to shelve the initiative after a last-ditch phone call to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman failed to change Riyadh's position, NBC News reported.

EX-SAUDI INTEL CHIEF BLAMES NETANYAHU

In his piece, Prince Turki went on to outline that it had always been Saudi Arabia's position to prevent a US-Israeli war on Iran

from the very onset.

In fact, Prince Turki -- who also served as Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief -- told CNN a week after the war began: "This is Netanyahu's war." "He somehow convinced the president (Trump) to support his views," he added. "When Iran and others tried to drag the Kingdom into the furnace of destruction, our leadership chose to endure the pains caused by a neighbour in order to protect the lives and property of its citizens," Prince Turki wrote in Arab News, defending the crown's decision to stay away from Trump's plans to militarily escort stranded vessels out of Hormuz.

The former intelligence chief argued that the kingdom was fully capable of retaliating against Iran by targeting its facilities and interests. But such a response, he warned, could also have invited devastating strikes on Saudi oil infrastructure and desalination plants along the Arabian Gulf coast -- and even targets deep inside the kingdom.

WHY HORMUZ TURNED INTO A STALEMATE

After the fallout of Project Freedom -- seen as a successor to the US-Israeli joint 'Operation Epic Fury' -- a Saudi diplomat told The Guardian that the US had landed itself in a quagmire, unable to either escalate or exit. And therein lay the stalemate with Iran over the Strait of Hormuz.

When Trump attributed his U-turn on Project Freedom to progress in talks with Iran, he remained mum on Saudi Arabia's rejection. Beyond the reasons outlined by Prince Turki, Riyadh was also worried about the Houthis entering the conflict if Project Freedom went ahead. Saudi officials feared that could trigger the closure of another critical chokepoint -- the Bab-el-Mandeb in the Red Sea.

That would have further battered the Saudi economy, already hit hard after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz disrupted oil exports. Any disruption in Bab-el-Mandeb would have been disastrous for the kingdom, as it could have blocked the remaining exports moving through its western ports via the Red Sea route.

SAUDI-UAE RIFT WIDENS OVER HORMUZ CRISIS

In contrast, Saudi Arabia's neighbour, the UAE, has been making bolder moves. Unlike Saudi Arabia, the UAE -- not blessed with an alternative Red Sea route -- has struggled to export much of its oil through the Fujairah pipeline on its east coast. That partly explains why the UAE, unlike Saudi Arabia, was on board with Project Freedom and was subsequently bombed by Iran.

In fact, the Emirates also reportedly tried bypassing Iran's blockade in the Strait of Hormuz by turning off their transponders in the hope of going dark.

Riyadh's intervention to stop Trump from militarily escorting stranded vessels through the Strait of Hormuz is expected to further strain Saudi-UAE ties.

Saudi Arabia already has standing disputes with the UAE over Yemen, Somalia and Sudan. This latest fallout over Project Freedom is bound to further complicate ties between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Frustrated by Saudi caution, the UAE has already walked out of the Saudi-dominated OPEC and is now reportedly deliberating leaving the Arab League as well.

'Never Considered': Venezuela Acting President Rejects Trump's 51st US State Comment



Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez on Monday firmly rejected US President Donald Trump's suggestion that the country could become the "51st state" of the United States.

Speaking to reporters after attending a hearing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Rodriguez said that such a possibility has "never" been considered and would go against the country's deep-rooted commitment to country's deep-rooted commitment to independence. "That

would never have been considered, because if there is one thing we Venezuelan men and women have, it is that we love our independence process, we love our heroes and heroines of independence," she said.

Her remarks came in response to Trump's earlier comments after the capture of deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro by the US military earlier in January.

Trump has repeatedly suggested tighter American control over Venezuela and, in public statements and social media posts, even floated the idea of statehood for the oil-rich South American nation. In a post on his Truth Social platform in March, the US president had written: "Good things are happening to Venezuela lately! I wonder what this magic is all about? STATEHOOD, #51, ANYONE?" However, Rodriguez pushed back strongly against any such framing.

Four Indian tourists 'mysteriously' faint at Thailand cafe, one dies hours later

An Indian national, who was among four tourists who were hospitalised after mysteriously losing consciousness at a cafe in Thailand's Phuket, has died, the Indian embassy here said on Tuesday. The circumstances surrounding his death were not immediately clear.

The embassy said it has been in touch with the Thai authorities and it's closely monitoring the incident in which four Indian tourists fell unconscious in Phuket on May 9 and were subsequently

hospitalised for treatment.

"Our deepest condolences for the death of one young Indian tourist among them," the Indian mission said in a post on X. "The Embassy officials are in contact with the family of the deceased to extend all support in this hour of grief. We remain in contact with the relevant Thai authorities who are looking into the incident, and also following the health situation of the others," it added.

The embassy did not give further details on the incident. Local officials reported that the incident occurred early Saturday in the Kamala Beach area of Kathu district, according to Thai media. Security staff at the cafe said that five Indians arrived together at the cafe around 11 pm on Friday.

About 1.54 am, four of them reportedly lost consciousness one by one. They were rushed to the hospital, the Bangkok Post reported. Around 2 pm on Saturday, police were informed that one person had died. The remaining three were reported to be in stable condition, the paper added.

Deadly Hantavirus Cruise Ship Outbreak: List Of Countries That Have Reported Cases

A deadly hantavirus outbreak linked to the cruise ship MV Hondius has spread across multiple countries, leaving at least three people dead and several others infected as health authorities race to trace passengers repatriated across Europe and the United States. Among living patients, seven cases have been confirmed while another has been classified as a "probable" infection, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and national health authorities. Several suspected cases and close contacts are also being investigated. The

outbreak, linked to the rare Andes strain of hantavirus, has triggered emergency evacuations, isolation measures and international contact tracing efforts after passengers aboard the South Atlantic cruise began falling ill. Here is a country-wise breakdown of confirmed and probable cases linked to the MV Hondius outbreak: Netherlands: The Netherlands has reported the highest number of deaths linked to the outbreak so far, with two Dutch passengers dying and another case confirmed. The first fatalities were a Dutch couple who had

travelled around South America before boarding the ship in Ushuaia, Argentina, on April 1. The 70-year-old husband developed symptoms on April 6 and died on April 11. His body was later removed from the ship during its stop at Saint Helena island in the South Atlantic. While no hantavirus test was conducted, the WHO considers him a "probable" case. His 69-year-old wife, who had also disembarked at Saint Helena after feeling unwell, died in a Johannesburg hospital on April 26 after her condition worsened during a flight from the island.

The Dragon and the Deal-Maker: Trump's High-Stakes Return to Beijing

For the first time in nearly a decade, a sitting American president has set foot on Chinese soil. President Donald Trump arrived in Beijing on May 13, 2026, for a state visit running through May 15 — his second trip to China overall and the first during his second presidency. The world watched with a mixture of cautious optimism and barely concealed anxiety, fully aware that the stakes of this summit extend far beyond any single trade deal or diplomatic communiqué. The pageantry was unmistakable. China rolled out a ceremony replete with pomp as Trump arrived in the capital for the start of a visit carrying global consequences, as the world's two largest economies seek to frame their fractured trade relationship. But beneath the choreographed handshakes and the waving flags of schoolchildren lay a relationship burdened by years of mutual suspicion, tariff warfare, technological cold war, and now the shadow of a hot one — in the Middle East.

A Delegation Unlike Any Other

The composition of Trump's delegation alone sent a loud signal about Washington's intentions. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth accompanied Trump, making him the first Pentagon chief to join a U.S. president on a state visit to China since Richard Nixon's historic trip in 1972. The inclusion of a defense secretary is not incidental — it underscores that this summit is as much about military stability and the specter of conflict over Taiwan as it is about soybeans and semiconductor export controls.

Other senior officials included Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, and Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gabriel, among others. Trump's son Eric and his wife Lara also joined the visit.

But the most striking presence may have been in the private sector gallery. Tech billionaire Elon Musk walked through the Great Hall of the People alongside his son, while Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang gave interviews from inside the hall, and Apple CEO Tim Cook was photographed in conversation with Huang. The presence of American business titans — from aerospace, technology, and energy — signaled that Trump came not just to talk, but to transact.

The Ghost of 2017: A Very Different China

To understand the weight of this moment, one must revisit the last time Trump stood in Beijing. In November 2017, China's economy, though formidable, still harbored deep anxieties about American economic pressure. The relationship was unequal in ways Beijing was acutely aware of.

That calculus has fundamentally changed. "China comes into this meeting far more confident than in 2017, when it feared even a small rise in U.S. tariffs. In the last year, Xi has been able to push back and neutralize much of Trump's actions," said Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese Business and Economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. China was the first major economy to retaliate against Trump's 'liberation day' tariffs in April 2025.

In the intervening years, Beijing has diversified its trade relationships, deepened ties with the Global South, advanced its domestic semiconductor ambitions, and positioned itself as a credible diplomatic alternative to American leadership on the world stage.

The red carpet it rolled out for Trump this week was not the carpet of a supplicant nation — it was the hospitality of a peer competitor that believes time is on its side.

The Agenda: Trade, Taiwan, Technology, and Tehran

Four issues dominated the summit's proceedings, each one a potential flashpoint capable of reshaping the international order.

Trade emerged as Trump's stated priority. Washington pressed for China to increase purchases of American goods, including Boeing aircraft, beef, and soybeans, while seeking closer investment and trade cooperation. Preparatory groundwork had been laid: the two countries' trade envoys, led by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, reached "overall balanced and positive outcomes" at a preparatory summit in South Korea on Wednesday.

Taiwan proved to be the summit's most charged dimension. In a moment that sent shockwaves through diplomatic circles, Xi warned Trump that the U.S. and China "will have clashes and even conflicts" if the longstanding issue of Taiwan's independence is mishandled, and that if not handled properly, it could put "the entire relationship in great jeopardy." Xi further stressed, according to Chinese state media, that Taiwan independence and peace in the Taiwan Strait are "as irreconcilable as fire and water." What made this exchange particularly significant was the asymmetry in the two leaders' public accounts: the White House readout of the bilateral meeting did not include any information about Taiwan, while China's version explicitly detailed Xi's warning. That discrepancy is itself a form of diplomatic communication — each side managing its domestic audience differently while navigating the same minefield.

Beijing is expected to push for limits on U.S. arms sales and stronger political restrictions on Taiwan, while Taipei fears it could become part of a broader geopolitical bargain between Washington and Beijing. "In great-power politics, small words often carry large consequences, especially for those whose survival depends on the credibility of others," warned Leiden University professor Salvador Santino Regilme.

Technology forms a third, equally consequential battleground. Beijing pressed the U.S. to ease restrictions on advanced semiconductor exports and roll back measures limiting China's access to critical chip-making technology. For Beijing, this is an existential economic priority. For Washington, allowing China to acquire advanced chips is framed as a national security risk that funds military modernization.

Iran loomed as the uninvited guest at every table. The U.S.-Israeli war with Iran and the ensuing global energy crisis cast a long shadow over the trip. The U.S. continues its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, with major implications for China, the world's largest consumer of Iranian oil. Trump had originally delayed the visit precisely because he hoped the war would be resolved quickly. It was not. A peace deal remains elusive, and Trump himself described the ceasefire as being on "massive life support." In a notable development, both sides agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open to ensure global energy flows, while Xi expressed opposition to its militarization and signaled

interest in buying more U.S. oil. Both sides also agreed that Iran should not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon.

The Global Perspective: The World Holds Its Breath

From Singapore to Brussels, from Seoul to São Paulo, the world's governments and markets watched the Beijing summit with rapt attention. The outcome of this meeting will set the tone for global trade, energy security, and geopolitical alignment for years to come.

Analysts described the relationship as one shaped by both strategic rivalry and deep economic dependence. "Trade remains politically powerful, especially for Trump, because it gives rivalry a language that voters can easily understand," said Professor Regilme. "Yet the deeper conflict concerns hierarchy, legitimacy and the future architecture of global order."

Asian allies — Japan, South Korea, the Philippines — watched the Taiwan exchanges with particular anxiety. Any ambiguity in Washington's commitment to Taiwan's defense chips away at the credibility of America's broader security architecture in the Pacific. Southeast Asian nations, locked in complex economic dependencies with both powers, have a great deal riding on how U.S.-China trade issues are ultimately resolved.

European capitals, still navigating their own fraught relationships with Washington over NATO burden-sharing, were equally attentive. A U.S.-China trade détente, however partial, could redirect investment flows and alter the competitive landscape for European manufacturers.

The Thucydides Trap Looms

In perhaps the most historically resonant moment of the summit, Xi asked whether the U.S. and China could avoid the "Thucydides Trap" — the historical tendency for wars to erupt when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one. It was a remarkable acknowledgment from a Chinese leader that the risk of catastrophic conflict between the two superpowers is not merely theoretical.

For his part, Trump described Xi as a "friend" and said the relationship was one of the most consequential in world history, adding that both countries had an opportunity to "cre-

ate a future of greater prosperity, cooperation and happiness." He invited Xi to visit the United States on September 24, with further meetings possible at APEC and G20 events later in the year.

The language of friendship, however warm, has not resolved a single structural disagreement. Analysts noted that while the White House framed the summit as an opportunity for new economic agreements and "rebalancing" the U.S.-China relationship, Beijing's priorities were far broader and more long-term. "Trump arrives seeking headline deals and visible momentum ahead of the midterms," wrote Zongyuan Zoe Liu of the Council on Foreign Relations. "Xi is playing a longer game, focused on strategic patience rather than substantive compromise."

What Comes Next

The Beijing summit of May 2026 is not an ending — it is, at best, a pause in a structural rivalry that will define the 21st century. The two sides agreed to develop a "constructive China-U.S. relationship of strategic stability" — a formulation deliberately vague enough for both governments to interpret favorably at home, and meaningless enough to require constant renegotiation. The immediate tests will be concrete: Will tariffs actually be reduced? Will semiconductor restrictions be eased, and if so, by how much? Will arms sales to Taiwan continue? Will China meaningfully use its influence to reopen the Strait of Hormuz? These questions will be answered not in the halls of the Great Hall of the People, but in the grinding machinery of trade negotiations, congressional votes, and military posturing in the months ahead.

What is beyond dispute is this: the meeting matters enormously. Two leaders, representing nearly three billion people and more than 40 percent of global GDP, sat across from each other in Beijing and chose, at least for now, to talk rather than confront. In a world fraying at its geopolitical seams — with war in the Middle East, unresolved territorial disputes in the Pacific, and an AI arms race with no rulebook — that choice, however fragile, is not nothing. It may, in fact, be everything.

(By Sharanjit Thind)



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Editor in Chief

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Tel: 646 875 8495

Managing Editor:

Amaninder Singh Thind

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com

Aruna Singh

Resident Editor (New Delhi)

Mailing Address:

NuWay Media Group Inc.

223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4

Manhattan, New York 10018

For General and Advertising Inquiries:

thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.

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Somnath and Bharat's unconquerable spirit!

Somnath will continue to stand tall in all its glory because the sense of unity and shared civilisational consciousness lives on in the hearts of every Indian.

At the start of 2026, I had gone to Somnath for the Somnath Swabhiman Parv, marking a thousand years since the first attack on the Somnath Temple. Now, I will be back in Somnath on May 11 to mark 75 years since the inauguration of the restored Temple by the then President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad. In less than half a year, it is a privilege to be attending two important milestones relating to Somnath and its journey from ruin to renewal or what we describe as from Vidhvans to Srijan.

Somnath gives us a civilisational message. The vast sea before it evokes timelessness. The waves tell us that no matter how fierce the storms are or how turbulent the tides are, one can always rise again with dignity and strength. The waves return to the shore, as though reminding every generation that the spirit of the people can never be subdued for long.

Our ancient scriptures say: "Prabhasam cha parikramya prithvi kram sambhavam". It means, a Pradakshina of the divine Prabhasa (Somnath) is equal to a Pradakshina of the whole earth itself! While people have come here to pray, they have also experienced the remarkable continuity of a civilisation whose flame could never be extinguished. Empires rose and fell, tides changed, history moved through conquest and upheaval, yet Somnath continued to endure in our consciousness.

It is time to remember the countless greats who stood firm in the face of tyranny. There were Lakulisha and Soma Sarman, who transformed Prabhasa into a great centre of philosophy. Chakravarti Maharaja Dharasena IV of Vallabhi built the Second Temple there centuries ago. Bhima Deva, Jayapala and Anandapala will always be remembered for defending civilisational honour against invasions.

It is said that Raja Bhoja too helped with the reconstruction. Karna Deva and Siddharaja Jayasimha played a vital role in restoring Gujarat's political and cultural strength. Bhava Brihaspati, Kumarapala Solanki and the Pashupata Acharyas rebuilt and sustained the shrine as a great centre of worship and learning. Vishaladeva Vaghela and Tripurantaka protected its intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Mahipaladeva and Ra Khangar were instrumental in reviving worship after destruction. Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar, whose 300th birth centenary is being marked, ensured the continuity of devotion in the most difficult of times. There were the Gaekwads of Baroda, who safeguarded the rights of pilgrims. And of course, our soil is blessed to have

nurtured brave personalities like Veer Hamirji Gohil and Veer Vegdaji Bhil, whose sacrifice and courage have become a part of Somnath's living memory.

In the 1940s, when the spirit of freedom swept across India and the foundations of a new republic were being laid under the leadership of towering figures like Sardar Patel, one thing continued to trouble him deeply...the condition of Somnath. On 13th November 1947, during Diwali time, he stood next to the dilapidated ruins of the temple with seawater in his hands and said, "On this auspicious day of the (Gujarati) New Year, we have decided that Somnath should be reconstructed. You, people of Saurashtra, should do your best. This is a holy task in which all should participate". On one clarion call of Sardar Patel, it was not only the people of Gujarat but also the people of the whole of India that

responded enthusiastically. Unfortunately, fate did not allow Sardar Patel to witness the fulfilment of the dream he had so passionately championed. Before the restored Somnath Temple could open its doors to devotees, he had departed from this world. Yet, his impact continued to be felt over the sacred shores of Prabhas Patan. His vision was championed by Shri KM Munshi, ably supported by the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar. In 1951, when the Temple was complete, it was decided to call the President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, for the ceremony. Overcoming strong objections from the then Prime Minister Pandit Nehru, Dr Prasad graced the ceremony, thus making it even more special and historic.

My mind also goes back to October 2001, when I had just taken over as Chief Minister. On October 31, 2001, the Jayanti of Sardar Patel, the Gujarat Government had the honour of organising a programme to mark 50 years since the Somnath Temple opened its doors. It also coincided with the 125th birth anniversary celebrations of Sardar Patel. The then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the then Home Minister LK Advani attended the programme.

During his speech on 11th May 1951, Dr Rajendra Prasad said that the Somnath Temple proclaims to the world that anything with unparalleled faith and love cannot be destroyed. He expressed hope that this Temple will live in the hearts of people. He also said that the restoration of the Temple was a fulfilment of Sardar Patel's dream, but taking that spirit forward, it is important that we restore prosperity to the lives of people. These are important and inspiring messages he

gave.

This is the path we have been walking for over a decade. I consider it my good fortune that, inspired by the principle of "Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi", from Somnath to Kashi, Kamakhya to Kedarnath, Ayodhya to Ujjain, Trimbakeshwar to Srisaillam, our team has had the opportunity to equip our spiritual centres with the latest facilities while at the same time preserving their traditional character. This, along with efforts to improve connectivity, ensures more people can visit them. It boosts the local economy, secures livelihoods and deepens the spirit of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat".

The struggles and sacrifices of those who laid down their lives to protect Somnath and those who rebuilt it time and again will never be forgotten. Countless individuals from different corners of India contributed to restoring its glory. They saw every part of Bharat as sacred, bound together by a sense of oneness that transcended geography. In a world often marked by divisions, this spirit of unity is

more relevant than ever.

Somnath will continue to stand tall in all its glory because the sense of unity and shared civilisational consciousness lives on in the hearts of every Indian. As a tribute to this, remembering the extraordinary courage of a thousand years, there will be special Pujas at Somnath for the next thousand days. It is gladdening to see several people donating for these pujas as well.

I urge my fellow Indians to travel to Somnath in this special time. When you stand on the shores of Somnath, let its ancient echoes speak to you. You will not only be overwhelmed by devotion but will also feel the strong pulse of a civilisational spirit that refuses to fade, that is unbroken and unyielding. You will experience Bharat's unconquerable spirit and understand why, despite every effort, our culture remained undefeated and you will have the opportunity to behold the vision of eternal triumph. It will surely be unforgettable.

Jai Somnath.

Fearless Voice of the Community

The South Asian Insider

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Social Media and Political Violence: A Complex Relationship



US Acknowledges 'Armed Conflict' Against Terrorist Drug Cartels



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When Vajpayee Broke Silence: Inside The Day India Went Nuclear

It was a hot afternoon on May 11, 1998. At that point in time, I was working as a correspondent covering the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and parliament with the news agency ANI.

I received a call from Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's office that he would address a news conference in the next two hours or so. I was asked to rush to the prime minister's house at "7 RCR", as it was then known, along with my camera team. I was taken aback; wondered why this sudden news conference by the prime minister.

I immediately rushed to my editor's cabin and informed him that Vajpayee was going to address a news conference at 5 pm or so, if I remember correctly.

The first question he asked was: "Is J Jayalalithaa withdrawing support to the Vajpayee government?"

This speculation had been doing the rounds in the corridors of power. It remained a hot topic of discussions among politicians and the media. The sudden announcement of a news conference to be addressed by the prime minister himself made journalists curious. Vajpayee was not known for holding sudden news conferences.

We rushed to the prime minister's house. After going through many security checks, we finally entered the lawns. The setting is still engraved in my mind. We were early; the officials were still placing a podium for Vajpayee to stand and address the media. We saw Pramod Mahajan, who was Vajpayee's adviser then, telling some officials to bring the national flag.

"Pramod ji, what's the big news?" I went up to him and asked.

"Just wait. You will hear from the man himself," he said.

Mahajan was usually accessible to journalists and was known for sharing timely information with the press. His response left me wondering why he did not share what the conference was about.

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I rushed towards my car along with my cameraperson and used a walkie-talkie set in the car to give details to the office. I told them to book a satellite feed to play the Vajpayee statement announcing

India's nuclear tests to Reuters, then ANI's partner. Those days, live TV broadcast was a rarity and used sparingly, only by the state broadcaster. The office reacted swiftly, and it was in less than 25 minutes of Vajpayee making the statement that I was at Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited to uplink the statement. The duty editor at Reuters told me to hold for a second as BBC, CNN, and many more news networks in the world wanted to carry Vajpayee's comments live.

It's exactly 28 years today, but I still get goosebumps thinking about May 11, 1998. A lazy day to the most talked-about day till today. With these tests, India announced that it was a nuclear power, a status the world recognises and cannot be undone.

Naveen Kapoor



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Crimes against women in India: What concerns America?

Jag Mohan Thaken

Why did the U.S. Embassy & Consulates in India have to issue advisory to warn the U.S. women travelling to India? What fears do they have in their minds? On 18 June, 2025, it issued a Travel Advisory to India – highlighting the increased caution in India due to crime and terrorism mentioning that some areas have increased the risk. Summarising – “Violent crime and terrorism occur in India. Rape is one of the fastest growing crimes in India. Violent crimes, including sexual assault, happen at tourist sites and other locations. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning. They target: tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, government facilities.”

Showing the country's limitations, the advisory states, “The U.S. government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in rural areas. These areas stretch from eastern Maharashtra and northern Telangana through western West Bengal.

Due to the risks, U.S. government employees working in India must obtain special authorization to travel to these areas.” The advisory further states, “If you decide to travel to India: Do not bring a satellite phone or GPS device. Possessing a satellite phone or GPS device is illegal in India and may result in a penalty of \$200,000 or jail time of up to three years. Do not travel alone, especially if you are a woman. Read travel tips at Women Travelers. Review your personal security plans and stay alert to your surroundings.

Enrol in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to get alerts and make it easier for us to find you in an emergency.”

What is the ground reality?

Has the U.S. warning some solid and reasonable base or it is just “fulfilling a formality”? Let us examine.

Just an example we are quoting here. Media reports reveal – “The ground reality was unfolded when Malkajgiri Commissioner of Police (CP) Sumati, a senior IPS officer, faced harassment by several men during a special midnight operation, while she was conducting a plainclothes operation to assess the safety situation for women on the Hyderabad streets on the intervening night



of May 6, 2026 between 12 midnight and 3:30 am. Within these three hours, nearly 40 men, unaware that they were confronting a senior police official, approached her with inappropriate offers and vulgar remarks, many appearing intoxicated.”

This incident exposed the safety of women that when even a bold and fearless lady police officer has to face such a situation, then what shall be the intensity of harassment and lewd remarks when an ordinary woman has to visit during the nights?

A tragic incident, which reveals the horrific face of Indian society, occurred on the first day of May 2026 in Nasrapur, in Pune district of Maharashtra, where a three-and-a-half-year-old girl was reportedly sexually assaulted and murdered by a 65-year-old man. Hindustan Times, quoting the Police, states that the Police suspect that after the sexual assault, the accused allegedly killed her by hitting her face with a stone, and to conceal the evidence, hid the body under a heap of dung.

Taking serious note of Nasrapur incident, on May 8, 2026, The National Commission for Women (NCW) has expressed serious concern over the existing parole framework governing convicts involved in heinous crimes against women and children. Hon'ble NCW Chairperson Smt. Vijaya Rahatkar stated that the Commission will soon submit recommendations to the Central Government seeking a complete prohibition on parole for individuals convicted in cases of rape, aggravated sexual assault, and other serious offences against women and children.

The Hon'ble Chairperson observed that the Nasrapur, Bhor incident has raised serious con-

cerns regarding public safety and the confidence of women in society. She emphasized that in such cases, the protection, dignity, and security of women and children must remain paramount. The Commission will also recommend comprehensive systemic reforms to strengthen the justice delivery mechanism in cases involving crimes against women and children. The proposed recommendations include the expedited establishment of Special Fast Track Trial Courts to ensure swift disposal of such cases, enhanced coordination during investigation and trial proceedings through dedicated legal and subject experts, and the creation of an independent and time-bound mechanism for prompt evidence examination, witness statement recording, and completion of investigations.

What does the NCRB report reveal?

The latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report for 2024, released on 6th May, 2026, shows that India saw 4,41,534 cases related to crimes against women in 2024, in comparison to 4,48,211 cases in 2023 and 4,44,256 in 2022. However, there was a decrease of 1.5% in crimes against women in 2024 compared to 2023, but still the horror is hovering over women safety.

Under other Major Crimes: India recorded 29,536 cases of rape, 48,303 cases of assault with intent to outrage modesty, and 15,609 cases of sexual harassment.

Commenting over the crimes against women with special mention of Haryana state, in a press statement on May 8, 2026, the former Union Minister, CWC member and General Secretary of All Indian Congress Commit-

tee, Kumari Selja, an MP from Haryana, has expressed deep concern over the latest NCRB report, stating that the rise in crimes against women in Haryana under BJP rule is a matter of serious concern. She said the NCRB data clearly indicates a weakening law and order situation in the state.

Kumari Selja said that according to the NCRB report, Haryana ranks highest in the country in cases related to trafficking of minor girls, while crimes against women continue to rise steadily. She termed the situation unfortunate for a progressive state like Haryana. Kumari Selja said Haryana should have emerged as a model state in development, education, employment and social security, but instead it is increasingly making headlines for crime, fear and insecurity. She added that concerns regarding the safety of women and girls are growing among families across the state. She further stated that rising drug abuse and unemployment are major contributors to the increase in crime. With employment opportunities shrinking for youth, incidents of crime and gang violence are continuously increasing, posing a dangerous signal for society. Kumari Selja demanded that the state government take strict and effective measures to curb crimes against women. She also called for a crackdown on drug networks and a special drive to create employment opportunities for youth. Selja said that Claims and publicity alone will not improve the situation. The government must deliver results on the ground. Selja added that the Congress party would continue to strongly raise issues related to the safety and dignity of women, youth and the common people, while holding the government accountable for its responsibilities.

Dr. Sushil Kumar Gupta, State President of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Haryana, has also launched a scathing attack on the BJP government in Haryana, citing the latest NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) report, he said that this report is a blot on Haryana's reputation and proves that the already weak law and order situation in the state has completely collapsed.

In a media release of May 8, 2026, Gupta alleged that this report shows Haryana's shameful record in girl trafficking. Dr. Gupta said that according to the NCRB report, 44% of the total cases of minor girl trafficking across the country are in Haryana alone, which is shameful in itself. The trafficking of two innocent girls every day is the biggest proof of the BJP government's failure.

On the other hand, the BJP led Central Government claims that the government attaches highest importance to the matter of preventing and countering crimes against women and children including crimes of human trafficking. In a press release by PIB on February 11, 2026, it pleads that the Government has undertaken a number of legislative and schematic interventions to combat trafficking, protect and rehabilitate victims of trafficking.

But in the same release, the union government, which seems to escape liability, states that “Police” and “Public Order” are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. The responsibility to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens including investigation and prosecution of crimes related to human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of the victims of trafficking or seducing or soliciting for the purpose of prostitution rests with the respective State Governments and they are competent to deal with it.

However, the Government of India supplements the efforts of the States/ Union Territories by providing them guidelines on preventing and countering the crime of human trafficking, in the form of various advisories issued from time to time. Will mere issuance of advisories help in curbing the menace of crimes against women? Aren't some hard hammers needed to nip the evil?

Why India, Israel And UAE Are Building A Security 'Trilateral' Of Their Own

Three countries, separated by geography but converging in threat perception, are quietly constructing one of the most consequential strategic partnerships of this decade. India, Israel and the United Arab Emirates do not share a formal alliance treaty, a mutual defence pact, or a joint command structure. What they share is something more operationally durable: a common adversary network, a common set of conclusions drawn from repeated experience, and an expanding web of institutional agreements that are steadily translating shared threat assessment into coordinated strategic action.

That convergence is no longer theoretical. It is documented, incremental and accelerating.

A Common Threat, Not a Common Patron

Most strategic alliances in modern history have been assembled around a common patron - typically a great power offering security guarantees in exchange for alignment. The India-Israel-UAE alignment is not that. It has no single convening power, no Washington or Moscow at its centre. It has emerged from the ground up, driven by the consistent operational experience of three countries that have each absorbed attacks from radical Islamist networks over decades and reached strikingly similar conclusions about the nature, direction and financing of that threat.

The network these three countries are responding to does not observe national borders in any meaningful sense. Hamas leaders have shared public platforms with Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed commanders in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In August 2025, Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar met a senior Hamas official in Doha, with both sides explicitly framing Kashmir and Palestine as dimensions of the same ideological struggle. The financing channels sustaining these organisations move through intermediaries operating simultaneously across South Asia and the Gulf. The targeting doctrine, when examined across recorded attacks from the Kashmir valley to the Negev to the energy infrastructure of the Arabian Gulf, is remarkably consistent: identify civilians or critical infrastructure, strike with maximum visibility, and generate enough political pressure on the targeted government to demand public restraint.

That consistency of method and genealogy is the single most important factor drawing India, Israel and the UAE into closer institutional alignment. This is not a partnership of convenience assembled against a temporary threat. It is a partnership of documented, repeated experience.

The Institutional Architecture Taking Shape

What distinguishes the current phase of this alignment from earlier, more informal expressions of shared interest is the pace at which it is being institutionalised.



In January 2026, India and the UAE formalised a bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership through a letter of intent covering joint defence manufacturing, advanced military technologies, special forces cooperation and counter-terrorism coordination. That agreement formalised a relationship that had been operationally active since at least 2014, but its formalisation matters. It signals mutual confidence in the durability of the arrangement and a willingness to deepen interdependence in domains that carry genuine strategic risk.

The I2U2 framework, grouping India, Israel, the UAE and the United States, has provided a broader multilateral scaffolding for cooperation in food security, clean energy and infrastructure. The Desert Eagle and Gulf Star joint military exercises have built operational familiarity between forces. India's defence cooperation with Israel, which provided critical systems deployed during Operation Sindoor in May 2025, represents a relationship forged through decades of co-development and field-tested in active conflict.

None of these structures emerged from a single diplomatic moment. They are the layered product of decades of bilateral engagement, gradually consolidated into something that now resembles - without quite being named as such - a trilateral security and economic architecture.

The Human Dimension and Its Strategic Weight

Any analysis of this convergence that treats it purely as an elite-level strategic calculation misses a dimension that gives it unusual political durability: the human stakes are immediate and quantifiable.

Approximately 3.5 to 4.3 million Indian nationals reside in the UAE alone. Across the Gulf region as a whole, roughly eight million Indian citizens live and work - a diaspora whose safety, livelihoods and remittances constitute a direct and non-negotiable Indian national interest. When a drone strikes energy infrastructure in the UAE, injuring Indian nationals, it is not an abstract geopolitical event in New Delhi. It is a domestic security concern with a human face. India's interest in Gulf stability does not require strategic

theory to justify. It is empirical, immediate and deeply felt across Indian society.

This human dimension also constrains the political room for strategic ambiguity. Indian governments face domestic accountability for the safety of citizens abroad in ways that pure realpolitik calculations do not fully capture. That accountability reinforces, rather than undermines, the strategic case for deeper engagement with the UAE's security architecture.

The Global Disruption Context

The India-Israel-UAE alignment is also taking shape against a broader backdrop of accelerating disruption in the global economic and security order - disruptions that are simultaneously stress-testing existing multilateral frameworks and opening space for new regional architectures. The global trading order faces compounding pressures: the restructuring of supply chains away from single-source dependencies, the intensifying competition for critical mineral access, the fragility of maritime chokepoints from the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, and the weaponisation of energy infrastructure as an instrument of coercive statecraft. All three countries have direct and material stakes in the stability of these systems.

Israel's technological depth in cybersecurity, precision systems and agricultural technology complements India's manufacturing scale and emerging defence production capacity. The UAE's capital base, geographic position as a logistics and financial hub, and its unmatched connectivity across the Global South give the partnership a commercial and infrastructural dimension that extends well beyond security coordination. Together, the three countries represent a concentration of complementary capabilities that none of them possesses individually - and that becomes more strategically valuable precisely as the broader international order becomes less predictable.

The Isolation Thesis and Why It Fails

A strand of commentary has argued that Israel's strategic standing has been per-

manently damaged by the conduct of its military campaign in Gaza, and that the country has emerged from October 7 in a condition of deepening regional isolation. The civilian suffering in Gaza is serious and demands honest engagement. That is not contested.

But strategic isolation is not measured by social media sentiment or the volume of protest in Western capitals. It is measured by what a country's partners are actually doing. On that metric, the isolation thesis is difficult to sustain. The UAE has not reversed the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain condemned the recent Fujairah attack without diplomatic hedging. India deepened its defence cooperation with Israel through the very systems that executed Operation Sindoor. The countries that concluded, well before October 7, that radical Islamist networks represent the primary regional security threat have not revised that conclusion since - and they have not revised their relationships accordingly.

The gap between what governments say in multilateral forums and what they do in bilateral security and economic partnerships has rarely been wider. Attending to what is being built rather than what is being declared is a more reliable guide to the actual trajectory of regional order. What the Architecture Reveals

The India-Israel-UAE alignment is not a replica of Cold War bloc politics, nor is it the kind of formal treaty alliance that dominated twentieth-century strategic thinking. It is something more adapted to the contemporary environment: a networked partnership between states that have reached independent but convergent conclusions, prefer to maintain strategic autonomy while building operational depth, and are willing to institutionalise their cooperation in defence manufacturing, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism coordination and economic integration simultaneously. That combination - security convergence reinforced by economic interdependence, anchored in human demographic stakes, and driven by consistent operational experience rather than external pressure - is precisely what gives this alignment its distinctive durability. Summit declarations fade. Institutional investments, joint exercises, co-produced defence systems and strategic economic partnerships do not dissolve between election cycles.

The events of the past twelve months, Operation Sindoor, the formalisation of the India-UAE Strategic Defence Partnership, the Fujairah strike, are not isolated data points. They are chapters in a continuous process of alignment whose logic becomes clearer, not murkier, each time the threat network that animates it acts. The trilateral architecture being built between India, Israel and the UAE is still incomplete. But its direction is unambiguous, and its foundations are deeper than most observers have yet recognised.

By Aditya Raj Kaul

The Great Gulf Divorce: The UAE Has Broken From The Arab Order - But For What, Really?

For half a century, the UAE survived by balancing Arabia, America and Iran. Now, it seems to have chosen a side.

Between May 4 and 10, the UAE was struck by drones and missiles, with vital installations, including the Fujairah Oil Industry Zone, being hit. Even though Iran's Revolutionary Guards formally denied these strikes on May 4, they occurred after the US made a fresh naval attempt to open the Strait of Hormuz (Project Freedom). But while the US suspended the operation by May 6 (after the strikes on Fujairah), skirmishes between US naval forces and the IRGC Navy led to the United States bombing Iran's Qeshm Island and Bandar Abbas port on May 7. Iran's retaliation has specifically targeted the UAE along with US naval forces; the Emirati Defense Ministry issued announcements on May 8 that it was "dealing with missile and drone attacks originating from Iran".

Iran's special focus on hitting the UAE has long been clear across this war. According to the Wall Street Journal's May 11 report, this had also led to unprecedented Emirati (unacknowledged) strikes on Iran's Lavan refinery on April 8 as the ceasefire began to take shape (which Iran had responded to with reciprocal strikes). Overall, the UAE has faced more drone/missile strikes than Israel - more than, in fact, what other GCC states have suffered combined. Among other aspects, these Iranian strikes represent a major challenge to the UAE's attempt at "strategic breakout" - a categorical break to decades of geopolitical alignment with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This attempt was crystallized on May 1, when the UAE quit the OPEC after spending 59 years as the second most powerful member of the world's largest oil cartel.

The Saudi Shadow

Since its formation in 1971, the UAE has had to contend between two foreign policy objectives - leveraging its economic might to project power and avoiding misalignment with Saudi Arabia on regional geopolitical choices. This equation was established firmly by Riyadh early, when it made the recognition of the UAE contingent upon the concession of the Buraimi Corridor - which otherwise made the UAE a border state to Qatar - through the 1974 Treaty of Jeddah.

For the UAE, this concession was necessary to pre-empt a dangerous rivalry, if not to gain an uneasy and considerably larger ally. Functionally, this meant that the UAE's geopolitical choices would necessarily have to align with Saudi Arabia or keep Riyadh in confidence. This meant that in the decades since, while Iran has been the UAE's most potent threat, the Emirates has consistently sought to build its

bargaining power vis-à-vis both Tehran and Riyadh. Indeed, by 2009, US officials assessed that "while publicly expressing close ties with Riyadh, the UAE privately regarded the Kingdom as its second greatest security threat after Iran".

In the subsequent decade, the UAE kept Iran diplomatically and economically engaged, especially at times when Riyadh maintained distance (such as in 2013-14 during negotiations for the US-Iran nuclear deal), and has consistently ranked among Iran's top regional trading partners; the annual UAE-Iran trade reached roughly \$29.2 billion (despite US sanctions) by early 2025.

However, ultimately, the Emirati objective was not to seek ideological reconciliation with Tehran but to craft an independent approach to enhancing deterrence against the Islamic Republic, without being held down by Saudi sensitivities. To offset its lack of geographic and military-industrial depth necessary to achieve this, the UAE's preference has long been to build a robust security relationship with both the United States and Israel. This has led to the UAE categorically aligning itself with Washington militarily, unlike the more partnership-of-equals strategy prioritised by Saudi Arabia, America's oldest Arab ally and a state that prides itself on its civilisational status and strategic depth. For Iran itself, this Emirati strategy has often caused discomfort, but Tehran has historically reciprocated the UAE's modus vivendi by keeping diplomatic and economic channels open.

MBZ Arrives

It is by 2017 that the UAE found fresh space to draw Saudi Arabia closer to the Emirati position vis-à-vis the US and Israel. Becoming de facto ruler of the UAE himself in 2014, Mohammad bin Zayed had already come to share a mentor-mentee relationship with Riyadh's Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), who became Crown Prince in 2017 and is primed to become the first Saudi king from a new generation.

MBS's disregard for strict ideological rigor, unlike past Saudi kings, and preference for ruthless modernisation and economic diversification was a natural fit for MBZ, who leveraged his relationship with Washington to help sideline former Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef and personally lobbied for MBS with the incoming first Trump administration in 2016.

In subsequent years, both MBZ and MBS jointly launched the Saudi-Emirati intervention in Yemen against the Iran-backed Ansar Allah (Houthis), collectively criticised the final iteration of the US-Iran Nuclear Deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action),

formalised a quartet against Doha (with Egypt and Bahrain, which past Saudi Kings had opposed) that blockaded Qatar diplomatically and economically for nearly four years, and launched the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council in June 2018 to bypass the GCC (which was also seen as favouring Qatar).

That the Emirates has sought to be in control of this relationship has become evident over the years, such as in 2019, when the UAE diverged from Saudi Arabia in its response to Houthi attacks on Saudi and Emirati oil installations, by seeking diplomatic conciliation and restarting maritime security talks with Iran.

The Yemen Flashpoint

In Yemen itself, the UAE significantly drew down its support to the Saudi-led effort to reinstate the internationally recognised Yemeni government in exile (in Saudi Arabia) but maintained its support for the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC). That the UAE's gamble with MBS was paying off was proven by the fact that both states survived this period of friction. Indeed, after the UAE itself formally established ties with Israel in 2020 through the Abraham Accords, MBS-led Saudi Arabia was primed to follow suit, having also reconciled with Iran by March 2023. Saudi Arabia joining the Accords would undoubtedly have proven to be the crown jewel of Abu Dhabi's regional strategy. However, MBS - who is still not the de jure Saudi ruler - remained cautious, given that Saudi Arabia was the custodian of Islam's holiest sites and the self-proclaimed leader of the Arab world, and had to be cognisant of Israel's non-fulfilment of its commitments towards Palestine, made both in the Abraham Accords and the first Trump administration's Israel-Palestine peace plan. Thus, any space for MBS to push through normalisation was decisively erased after Israel's wars on Gaza - which Arab states officially deem a genocide - Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen began in 2023.

Did The Abraham Accords Backfire On UAE?

Saudi Arabia's cold feet vis-à-vis Israel left the UAE with little choice but to compensate by reinforcing its own partnerships with Washington and Tel Aviv. Crucially, rather than bring Saudi Arabia in line, the 2020 Abraham Accords significantly worsened the UAE's relationship with Tehran. In that year, then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called the UAE a "traitor to Arab states and to Palestine", IRGC leaders asserted that the Emirates would be held responsible for any regional threat to Iran's security, and the Guards' Kayhaan

newspaper termed the UAE a "legitimate and easy target" for Iran. Across 2021 and 2022, as the UAE further institutionalised its security partnership with Israel and the US through joint military drills, Khamenei continued to urge the UAE to return from its path of "sin", the IRGC warned that countries inviting Zionists were "living in glass houses" and state-affiliated media continued to characterise the UAE as an "outpost for the enemy" (language reserved for the UAE given the scale of its military alignment with Washington, compared to Saudi Arabia). Through 2024, the year Israel and Iran traded unprecedented direct attacks, the IRGC specifically characterised Israeli presence in the UAE as a potential reason for Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz in self-defense.

Ultimately, the UAE-Iran modus vivendi broke decisively with the February 28 US/Israeli war on Iran. Already on the eve of February 27, the UAE faced a twin threat - an Iran that had publicly declared the UAE a principal target for its retaliation to US-Israeli attacks, and a Saudi Arabia that, while under the same US security umbrella, had gone the farthest from the UAE's regional posture.

A Strategic Breakout

As Iran carried out its promised threat in response to US-Israeli attacks, the UAE faced a debilitating poly-crisis in the initial weeks of the war across sectors, but especially its prized tourism sector centered around Dubai, which it championed as an island of stability and economic growth. As of May 8, hotel occupancy in Dubai was projected to fall to 10% of its pre-war figures.

From Iran's perspective, it had already created an implicit Overton window in the Arab world for greater strikes on the UAE, compared to Saudi Arabia, which Iran characterises as a civilisational partner in the Islamic world, and which has not yet normalised ties with Israel. In any case, Riyadh was still able to export oil through its Western ports and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait remained open (with Iran not having urged the Houthis to close it, yet). Moreover, by December 2025, the Saudi-UAE rift in Yemen had blown open in the public domain, shattering the convention of keeping differences quiet, as Saudi forces struck UAE-backed STC targets. Similar differences had erupted in both Sudan and in the Horn of Africa, while later in 2026, Saudi Arabia also effectively replaced the UAE as Pakistan's principal economic backstop.

(Bashir Ali Abbas is a Senior Research Associate at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi. Views are strictly personal.)



President Trump needs to finish the war against Iran once and for all

Regimes run by lunatics cannot have arsenals of missiles and mines, period

My mornings begin with coffee — how did I ever get through high school without coffee? — and the “News Items” newsletter from John Ellis, longtime NBC News poobah whose reputation for fairness and seriousness led his hobby of collecting key stories and circulating a summary of them to friends and family to become an influential summary of the key stories from overnight as well as the obscure and the incredible (but always true and very well sourced).

John’s missive had been my 6 AM companion for so many years that when he decided to expand the shop, I was one of scores of recipients who said “Hey, I’ll invest a few bucks to grow that project — the country needs one newsletter that does not spin and can’t be spun,” and over the next many years it’s grown into a replacement for the long march through the legacy outlets for an AM update on the world’s news.

“News Items” doesn’t have a slant, so when it opens with a “Well that really matters!” moment, I paused and considered its vast implications. Wednesday’s “News Items” began this way: “1. The Trump administration’s public portrayal of a shattered Iranian military is sharply at odds with what U.S. intelligence agencies are telling policymakers behind closed doors, according to classified assessments from early this month that show Iran has regained access to most of its missile

sites, launchers and underground facilities. Most alarming to some senior officials is evidence that Iran has restored operational access to 30 of the 33 missile sites it maintains along the Strait of Hormuz, which could threaten American warships and oil tankers transiting the narrow waterway. People with knowledge of the assessments said they show — to varying degrees, depending on the level of damage incurred at the different sites — that the Iranians can use mobile launchers that are inside the sites to move missiles to other locations. In some cases they can launch missiles directly from launchpads that are part of the facilities. Only three of the missile sites along the strait remain totally inaccessible, according to the assessments.” Having given up on the New York Times years ago — and the already infamous “rape-trained dogs” column from Nicholas Kristof must have sent more subscribers who relied on the platform for actual news as opposed to recipes and puzzles or The Athletic to the exits — I would not have known about that report early yesterday but for “News Items.” So declared the opening words of the key judgments of the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on “Iran’s Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities.” The CIA might have had collaborators in the broader Intelligence Community in that enormous “swing and a miss” of an NIE 19 years ago, but the

damage it did in handcuffing President George W Bush regarding Iran in his closing months was vast. Of course President Obama spent eight years trying to find ways to welcome Iran into the community of nations — including the now infamous pallets of cash Obama sent the IRGC as part of the JCPOW — perhaps not realizing because of that 2007 NIE that the Islamic Republic was and would always remain a rogue and dangerous theocracy run by a two lunatic dictators in succession since 1979, fanatics whose whole plan was to build and use nuclear weapons to end first Israel and then any other opponent of its end-times apocalyptic vision including the U.S. if it could build the missile capable of reaching the homeland. No update and improved NIE was ever leaked even after Israel pilfered the entire Iranian nuclear file. But we know Team Obama was ideologically predisposed to play and lose the three-card monte Iran has been playing with the world for half a century. That’s a longer way of saying that (1) the new assessment could be as wrong as 2007’s, but (2) hope isn’t a strategy especially when it comes to the battle with Iran. This time, as with 2007, the president ought to again go with the Intelligence Community’s assessment. Which should mean that the next wave of planning for massive strikes on Iran’s arsenal should already be far advanced. Iran’s immediate response the to the

February 28 attacks was to lash out not just at Israel and U.S. bases, but at a dozen other countries and their militaries and infrastructure. Like the proverbial wounded beast, the lunatic regime went wild. Noted. Iran wasn’t chastened or changed by the massive blows that rained down on it. Rather, the lunatics that remained regrouped and doubled and tripled down on vengeance.

It is relatively calm now with President Trump in China, but the “News Items” summary of the New York Times’ summary of the intelligence leak should mean the resumption of strikes when President Trump returns.

There is no point to negotiation with the third string fanatics in Tehran. There is only the path of sustained degradation of their capabilities and strangulation of their economy. Perhaps the Artesh will tire of not getting paid. Perhaps some colonel in the IRGC figures out how to gather enough other colonels to pull off a coup. There are paths forward, but hard to see how internal resistance to the crazies atop the regime congeals absent military means combined with an economic vise. None of the paths forward should include leaving Iran as it is. Lunatics in the neighborhood shouldn’t have hand guns or rifles. Lunatics on the world stage shouldn’t have missiles, mines, drones and enriched uranium. It really is that simple. Alone or with Israel and our Gulf Allies, President Trump has to finish the job.

Pakistan Allowed Iran To Park Military, Spy Aircraft While Mediating Talks: Report



Despite positioning itself as a neutral party and mediator during the Iran-US conflict, Pakistan “quietly allowed” Iranian military and surveillance aircraft to park on its airfields, according to American officials quoted by CBS News. US officials told the broadcaster that Pakistan may have effectively shielded the aircraft from possible American airstrikes.

However, Pakistan on Tuesday denied the CBS News report claiming Iranian aircraft at Nur Khan Airbase were linked to military activity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan claimed the planes arrived during ceasefire talks to support diplomatic and administrative efforts involving Iran and the US. Islamabad stressed the aircraft had no military role and accused the report of spreading misleading speculation.

“Pakistan categorically rejects the CBS News report regarding the presence of Iranian aircraft at Nur Khan Airbase as misleading and sensationalized. Such speculative narratives appear aimed at undermining ongoing efforts for regional stability and peace. Following the ceasefire and during the initial round of the Islamabad Talks, a number of aircraft from Iran and the United States arrived in Pakistan to facilitate the movement of diplomatic personnel, security teams, and administrative staff associated with the talks process. Some aircraft and support personnel remained temporarily in Pakistan in anticipation of subsequent rounds of engagement,” reads Pakistan Foreign Affairs post on X.

Meanwhile, Pakistan also said it remains committed to facilitating dialogue, peace and regional stability.

“The Iranian aircraft currently parked in Pakistan arrived during the ceasefire period and bear no linkage whatsoever to any military contingency or preservation arrangement. Assertions suggesting otherwise are speculative, misleading, and entirely detached from the factual context. Pakistan has consistently acted as an impartial,

constructive, and responsible facilitator in supporting dialogue and de-escalation,” the statement further added. The US officials also claimed that Iran sent civilian aircraft to neighbouring Afghanistan, though it remains unclear whether any military aircraft were among those flights.

According to the report, the aircraft movements appeared to be part of a broader Iranian effort to protect its remaining military and aviation assets as the conflict escalated.

US officials further alleged that Tehran deployed multiple aircraft, including an Iranian Air Force RC-130 — a reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering variant of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules tactical transport aircraft — to Pakistan Air Force Base Nur Khan near Rawalpindi. The strategically important airbase had sustained heavy damage during Operation Sindoor in 2025 and is located near Pakistan’s military headquarters.

Pakistan Rejects Claim

A senior Pakistani official denied the allegations while speaking to CBS News. “Nur Khan base is right in the heart of [the] city, a large fleet of aircrafts parked there can’t be hidden from [the] public eye,” the official was quoted as saying. However, an Afghan civil aviation official told the broadcaster that an Iranian civilian aircraft belonging to Mahan Air landed in Kabul shortly before the conflict began. The aircraft reportedly remained parked at Kabul airport after Iran shut its airspace. The Afghan official further claimed that following Pakistani air raids on Kabul in March amid tensions with the Taliban government over alleged support for Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Taliban aviation officials decided to move the aircraft to Herat airport near the Iranian border for safety reasons and to avoid possible bombing of Kabul airport by Pakistani fighter jets.

According to the official, it was the only Iranian aircraft left in Afghanistan.

Taliban chief spokesperson Zabihullah

Mujahid denied the claims. “No, that’s not itself to Washington as a mediator true and Iran doesn’t need to do that,” and stabilising force while also Mujahid told CBS News.

trying not to alienate Tehran or Islamabad appeared to be walking China, Iran’s most influential a diplomatic tightrope — projecting international ally.

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Why India, Israel And UAE Are Building A Security 'Trilateral' Of Their Own

Three countries, separated by geography but converging in threat perception, are quietly constructing one of the most consequential strategic partnerships of this decade. India, Israel and the United Arab Emirates do not share a formal alliance treaty, a mutual defence pact, or a joint command structure. What they share is something more operationally durable: a common adversary network, a common set of conclusions drawn from repeated experience, and an expanding web of institutional agreements that are steadily translating shared threat assessment into coordinated strategic action.

That convergence is no longer theoretical. It is documented, incremental and accelerating.

A Common Threat, Not a Common Patron

Most strategic alliances in modern history have been assembled around a common patron - typically a great power offering security guarantees in exchange for alignment. The India-Israel-UAE alignment is not that. It has no single convening power, no Washington or Moscow at its centre. It has emerged from the ground up, driven by the consistent operational experience of three countries that have each absorbed attacks from radical Islamist networks over decades and reached strikingly similar conclusions about the nature, direction and financing of that threat.

The network these three countries are responding to does not observe national borders in any meaningful sense. Hamas leaders have shared public platforms with Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed commanders in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In August 2025, Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar met a senior Hamas official in Doha, with both sides explicitly framing Kashmir and Palestine as dimensions of the same ideological struggle. The financing channels sustaining these organisations move through intermediaries operating simultaneously across South Asia and the Gulf. The targeting doctrine, when examined across

recorded attacks from the Kashmir valley to the Negev to the energy infrastructure of the Arabian Gulf, is remarkably consistent: identify civilians or critical infrastructure, strike with maximum visibility, and generate enough political pressure on the targeted government to demand public restraint.

That consistency of method and genealogy is the single most important factor drawing India, Israel and the UAE into closer institutional alignment. This is not a partnership of convenience assembled against a temporary threat. It is a partnership of documented, repeated experience

The Institutional Architecture Taking Shape

What distinguishes the current phase of this alignment from earlier, more informal expressions of shared interest is the pace at which it is being institutionalised.

In January 2026, India and the UAE formalised a bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership through a letter of intent covering joint defence manufacturing, advanced military technologies, special forces cooperation and counter-terrorism coordination. That agreement formalised a relationship that had been operationally active since at least 2014, but its formalisation matters. It signals mutual confidence in the durability of the arrangement and a willingness to deepen interdependence in domains that carry genuine strategic risk.

The I2U2 framework, grouping India, Israel, the UAE and the United States, has provided a broader multilateral scaffolding for cooperation in food security, clean energy and infrastructure. The Desert Eagle and Gulf Star joint military exercises have built operational familiarity between forces. India's defence cooperation with Israel, which provided critical systems deployed during Operation Sindoor in May 2025, represents a relationship forged through decades of co-development and field-tested in active conflict.

None of these structures emerged from a single diplomatic moment. They are the layered product of decades of

bilateral engagement, gradually consolidated into something that now resembles - without quite being named as such - a trilateral security and economic architecture.

The Human Dimension and Its Strategic Weight

Any analysis of this convergence that treats it purely as an elite-level strategic calculation misses a dimension that gives it unusual political durability: the human stakes are immediate and quantifiable.

Approximately 3.5 to 4.3 million Indian nationals reside in the UAE alone. Across the Gulf region as a whole, roughly eight million Indian citizens live and work - a diaspora whose safety, livelihoods and remittances constitute a direct and non-negotiable Indian national interest. When a drone strikes energy infrastructure in the UAE, injuring Indian nationals, it is not an abstract geopolitical event in New Delhi. It is a domestic security concern with a human face. India's interest in Gulf stability does not require strategic theory to justify. It is empirical, immediate and deeply felt across Indian society.

This human dimension also constrains the political room for strategic ambiguity. Indian governments face domestic accountability for the safety of citizens abroad in ways that pure realpolitik calculations do not fully capture. That accountability reinforces, rather than undermines, the strategic case for deeper engagement with the UAE's security architecture.

The Global Disruption Context

The India-Israel-UAE alignment is also taking shape against a broader backdrop of accelerating disruption in the global economic and security order - disruptions that are simultaneously stress-testing existing multilateral frameworks and opening space for new regional architectures.

The global trading order faces compounding pressures: the restructuring of supply chains away from single-source dependencies, the intensifying competition for critical mineral access, the fragility of maritime chokepoints from the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, and the weaponisation of energy

infrastructure as an instrument of coercive statecraft. All three countries have direct and material stakes in the stability of these systems.

Israel's technological depth in cybersecurity, precision systems and agricultural technology complements India's manufacturing scale and emerging defence production capacity. The UAE's capital base, geographic position as a logistics and financial hub, and its unmatched connectivity across the Global South give the partnership a commercial and infrastructural dimension that extends well beyond security coordination. Together, the three countries represent a concentration of complementary capabilities that none of them possesses individually - and that becomes more strategically valuable precisely as the broader international order becomes less predictable.

The Isolation Thesis and Why It Fails

A strand of commentary has argued that Israel's strategic standing has been permanently damaged by the conduct of its military campaign in Gaza, and that the country has emerged from October 7 in a condition of deepening regional isolation. The civilian suffering in Gaza is serious and demands honest engagement. That is not contested.

But strategic isolation is not measured by social media sentiment or the volume of protest in Western capitals. It is measured by what a country's partners are actually doing. On that metric, the isolation thesis is difficult to sustain. The UAE has not reversed the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain condemned the recent Fujairah attack without diplomatic hedging. India deepened its defence cooperation with Israel through the very systems that executed Operation Sindoor. The countries that concluded, well before October 7, that radical Islamist networks represent the primary regional security threat have not revised that conclusion since - and they have not revised their

relationships accordingly.

The gap between what governments say in multilateral forums and what they do in bilateral security and economic partnerships has rarely been wider. Attending to what is being built rather than what is being declared is a more reliable guide to the actual trajectory of regional order.

What the Architecture Reveals

The India-Israel-UAE alignment is not a replica of Cold War bloc politics, nor is it the kind of formal treaty alliance that dominated twentieth-century strategic thinking. It is something more adapted to the contemporary environment: a networked partnership between states that have reached independent but convergent conclusions, prefer to maintain strategic autonomy while building operational depth, and are willing to institutionalise their cooperation in defence manufacturing, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism coordination and economic integration simultaneously.

That combination - security convergence reinforced by economic interdependence, anchored in human demographic stakes, and driven by consistent operational experience rather than external pressure - is precisely what gives this alignment its distinctive durability. Summit declarations fade. Institutional investments, joint exercises, co-produced defence systems and strategic economic partnerships do not dissolve between election cycles. The events of the past twelve months, Operation Sindoor, the formalisation of the India-UAE Strategic Defence Partnership, the Fujairah strike, are not isolated data points. They are chapters in a continuous process of alignment whose logic becomes clearer, not murkier, each time the threat network that animates it acts. The trilateral architecture being built between India, Israel and the UAE is still incomplete. But its direction is unambiguous, and its foundations are deeper than most observers have yet recognised.

(Aditya Raj Kaul is a Senior Executive Editor, National Security & Strategic Affairs, NDTV)

US proposes H-1B minimum wage hike, likely to make hiring foreign workers costlier

The US has proposed to increase the minimum wages paid to hire an employee under the H1B visa program by 30 per cent over the previously fixed limits, a move the administration claims will help prevent foreigners from undercutting wages of US nationals.

The new rule, proposed by the US Department of Labour on March 27, seeks to increase the minimum wages for four categories from the entry-level to the most-experienced, contending that the existing wage levels were fixed 20 years ago and fail to adequately protect US workers. According to the proposed rule 'Improving Wage Protections for the Temporary and Permanent

Employment of Certain Foreign Nationals in the United States', the prevailing wage for entry-level foreign workers was USD 73,279 per annum, USD 98,987 (Level II), USD 121,979 (Level III) and USD 144,202 (Level IV).

The new rule, which is now open to public comments till May 26, seeks to increase the prevailing wages for entry-level workers to USD 97,746, a hike of 33.39 per cent over the old rates, USD 1,23,212 (Level II, 24.47 per cent), USD 1,47,333 (Level III, 20.79 per cent), and USD 175,464 (Level IV, 21.68 per cent). The prevailing wages differ from city to city. According to the Department of Labour, the current methodology allows employers to hire foreigners

at wage levels significantly below those paid to similarly employed US.

The proposed changes will dramatically increase the prevailing wage levels used in the H1B, H1B1, E-3, and PERM labour certification programs. The proposed rules have received mixed responses, ranging from overwhelming support to opposition, contending that smaller companies may no longer be able to hire freshers for entry-level jobs, given the higher prevailing wages.

The window for public comments closes on May 26, following which the Department of Labour will examine the responses and notify the final rule. The Trump



administration, in its first term, had initiated changes to the prevailing wages in 2020 without prior notice or comments, and the move had to be shelved after it ran into legal challenges.

Last year, the administration imposed a USD 1,00,000 fee for

H-1B candidates outside the US through a presidential order issued on September 19, 2025. The same presidential order directed the Secretary of Labour to initiate rulemaking to revise prevailing wage levels under the H-1B program.

India's best defence is to electrify everything, says Sagar Adani



As tensions rise in the Middle East from the ongoing US-Iran war and risks grow around key shipping routes, energy markets have been reminded how quickly price shocks can travel. India, a major importer of fossil fuels, is

exposed whenever the world's supply lines tighten. At the Economist's Resilient Futures Summit in New Delhi, Sagar Adani, Adani Group Executive involved in the group's energy portfolio delivered a plain

insight—in this century, energy access will decide resilience, and India's best defence is to electrify everything.

"We've all seen how conflict in one region can disrupt supply chains across continents," he said, warning that energy shocks can hit economies overnight.

Adani said India's long-term constraints, water security, food systems, and digital growth, all run into the same bottleneck: reliable, affordable energy. He pointed to a wide gap in consumption: India's per-capita energy use is about one-third of the global average and roughly one-fifth of China's, he said

To become a developed

economy by 2047, India would need to add nearly 2,000 gigawatts of new capacity over the next two decades, while keeping energy affordable and increasingly clean, he added.

The International Energy Agency has said India will be the largest source of global energy-demand growth through 2035, as urbanisation and rising incomes push consumption sharply higher. That means what India builds, and how fast it electrifies, will shape global energy markets for years.

The message had a clear policy shape. Renewables must scale fast, Adani said, but land limits and intermittency mean India

also needs a broader mix — hydro, efficient thermal power and nuclear — to ensure firm supply when conditions are not ideal.

At 31, Adani has become one of the public faces of the group's energy push. Public profiles say he joined the Adani Group in 2015 after studying economics at Brown University, and has been credited within the group with building out its solar and wind portfolio at Adani Green Energy. The work, though, did not start in boardrooms. After Brown, he went straight into the field, beginning with the group's first solar plant in the interior of south India.

Elon Musk, Tim Cook, and Boeing CEO among executives joining Trump on China trip

US President Donald Trump will be accompanied by several top American business leaders during his visit to China this week, as Washington and Beijing seek to strengthen economic ties and extend a fragile trade truce.

According to a White House official cited by Reuters, the delegation will include Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Apple CEO Tim Cook, GE Aerospace CEO Larry Culp and Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg. Senior executives from major US firms including Meta, BlackRock, Blackstone, Micron, Mastercard, Qualcomm and Visa are also expected to join the trip, a White House



official told Reuters. The visit comes as the US and China prepare to discuss mechanisms and investment. Reuters earlier reported that China is expected to announce purchases involving Boeing aircraft, American agricultural products and energy supplies during the summit.

Industry sources said Boeing and Chinese officials have been in talks over a potential deal involving about 500 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft along with dozens of widebody jets powered by GE engines. If finalised, the agreement would mark China's first major Boeing order since 2017 and could become the

largest aircraft order in aviation history.

Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg had earlier expressed optimism that the Trump administration could help secure the long-awaited China order.

The two sides are also expected to discuss extending a trade truce that currently allows the flow of rare earth minerals from China to the US. However, it remains unclear whether any extension agreement will be finalised during the trip.

Others attending the visit include Cargill CEO Brian Sikes, Coherent CEO Jim Anderson and Illumina CEO Jacob Thaysen.

PM Modi's appeal to avoid buying gold for a year rattles jewellery markets



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal urging Indians to avoid buying gold for a year amid economic stress linked to the West Asia crisis has triggered anxiety across the country's jewellery and bullion markets, with traders fearing a sharp hit to demand, jobs and wedding-season business.

From Mumbai's iconic Zaveri Bazaar to Delhi's Chandni

Chowk and Kolkata's Bowbazar, jewellers and bullion traders are worried that the Prime Minister's remarks could create uncertainty among buyers at a time when the industry is heavily dependent on wedding-related demand.

Traders and jewellers are worried not just about lower sales during the wedding season, but also about the ripple effect a demand

slowdown could have on thousands of karigars, goldsmiths and workshop labourers dependent on the jewellery trade for daily income. "This appeal has created a stir among traders associated with the jewellery and gold business across the country," Brijesh Goyal, Chairman of the Chamber of Trade & Industry (CTI), told IndiaToday.in over a phone call.

He noted that India consumes around 700-800 tonnes of gold annually and remains among the world's largest gold consumers. "If consumers stop buying gold for a year, consumption could fall from nearly 800 tonnes to around 500 tonnes," Goyal said.

The industry's concerns stem from the fact that India is the world's second-largest gold consumer after China, where

demand extends beyond weddings and festivals to household savings and investment purchases. Small jewellers, goldsmiths, karigars and workshop operators fear that any sustained decline in demand could severely impact livelihoods across the jewellery ecosystem, much of which operates through small businesses and informal labour networks.

"Small jewellers, artisans and goldsmiths are worried that they may face difficulty paying salaries to workers if sales decline substantially," Goyal said, adding that layoffs could become a possibility if the slowdown persists. The jewellery industry is also worried about the impact on key buying periods such as Dhanteras, which account for a significant share of annual gold

sales in India.

"In India, gold is deeply connected with weddings, traditions and household savings. Such appeals create fear among buyers and can affect purchasing decisions," Goyal said.

According to him, the industry fears losses running into nearly Rs 10,000 crore if gold demand witnesses a prolonged decline following the Prime Minister's remarks. An industry source, who did not wish to be named, said he was shocked by the Prime Minister's appeal given the possible impact it could have on the sector. "The gold and jewellery industry is huge. It is not just about customers buying jewellery. Thousands of families, karigars and labourers depend on this ecosystem for their livelihood," the source said.

The source added that if consumers significantly reduce gold purchases, weak demand could eventually trigger large-scale job losses across the industry. "The government should come out with some clarification because this has created uncertainty in the market," the source added. CTI has now sought a meeting with the Prime Minister to present the concerns of traders, jewellers and small businesses associated with the sector. "We want to meet the Prime Minister and explain the possible impact this could have on jewellers, small traders, karigars and workers dependent on the industry," Goyal said. However, market experts said the government's concerns over rising gold imports stem from growing pressure on India's external balances.

Rupee sinks to all-time low of 95.58 against US dollar amid crude oil shock

The rupee plunged to a fresh all-time low of 95.58 against the US dollar on Tuesday, as surging crude oil prices and mounting concerns over tensions involving Iran rattled financial markets and intensified pressure on India's external balances.

The sharp fall comes a day after the rupee had already logged its steepest single-day decline in more than a month, closing at a then-record low of 95.31 per dollar. Currency traders and analysts said the rupee remains under severe pressure due to soaring crude oil prices, heavy dollar demand from importers and continued foreign fund outflows from Indian markets.

Brent crude prices have surged sharply since the Iran conflict escalated earlier this year, worsening concerns around



India's import bill and current account deficit.

India imports more than 85% of its crude oil requirements, making the rupee particularly vulnerable whenever global energy prices spike.

The latest weakness in the currency also comes amid growing fears that the fragile US-Iran ceasefire may collapse. News agency Reuters reported that US

President Donald Trump recently described the April ceasefire as being "on life support", reviving fears of prolonged disruption in the Gulf region and further volatility in oil markets. Traders believe the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already stepped into the forex market multiple times over the past few sessions to slow the rupee's fall.

Reuters also reported on Monday

that state-run banks were likely selling dollars on behalf of the RBI after the rupee weakened sharply during trade.

The central bank has been deploying a mix of intervention measures in recent weeks, including tighter forex market regulations and steps aimed at easing dollar demand from oil companies.

However, analysts warn that sustained pressure from elevated crude prices and foreign outflows could continue to weigh on the rupee despite RBI action.

A Reuters poll of currency analysts earlier this month projected the rupee to remain around the 95-per-dollar mark over the next year, although some warned that prolonged geopolitical escalation could push the currency towards 97-98 levels.

Pronto bags fresh \$20 million funding, valuation jumps to \$200 million



Pronto, an instant home services startup, has raised another \$20 million in its Series B funding round, pushing the company's valuation to \$200 million just two months after its previous fundraising, reported Reuters.

The fresh investment came from venture

capitalist Lachy Groom. Earlier in March, the startup had raised \$25 million at a valuation of \$100 million from investors including General Catalyst, Epiq Capital, Glade Brook Capital and Bain Capital Ventures. Pronto offers quick home services such as laundry, kitchen preparation and home cleaning, with services starting from Rs 125. Workers are available within 15 minutes through the platform.

The startup competes with Urban Company's Insta Help service and Lightspeed-backed Snabbit.

Founder and CEO Anjali Sardana said a

large part of the new funding will be used to expand the company's workforce as demand continues to rise sharply. According to Sardana, Pronto's bookings have jumped from around 3,000 a day at the beginning of December to more than 26,000 bookings daily now, the report mentioned.

She said the company has been increasing supply quickly, but demand is still growing faster.

Pronto is also adding new services such as car washing and gardening. The company has started testing home cooking services as well. Like many fast-

growing startups, the platform currently offers discounts to customers while ensuring stable payouts for workers. Sardana said the company has reduced burn per booking by 55% over the last quarter. She added that the startup remains well-funded for the next one to two years. Sardana also said discounting is likely to continue for a long period because of strong competition and the need to build customer habits.

A recent note by BofA Securities said the next 24 to 36 months are expected to remain "burn heavy" for businesses in this segment.

Rethinking your travel plans due to the Iran–US conflict? You are not alone

If your summer itinerary suddenly feels uncertain or significantly more expensive, you're not alone.

As tensions simmer between the US and Iran, the ripple effects are being felt far beyond geopolitics. For Indian travellers, it's showing up in the most immediate way possible: longer routes, pricier tickets, and a growing sense of unpredictability.

Why your flight may no longer take the same route

The biggest disruption isn't visible on your ticket, it's in the airspace your flight can no longer use. Airlines operating between India and long-haul destinations like Europe, the UK, and North America often rely on West Asian air corridors, some of the busiest and most efficient in global aviation. But with the current geopolitical tensions, airlines are increasingly avoiding sensitive or restricted airspaces, opting for longer, more circuitous routes. This means:

Extended flight durations

Higher fuel burn

Operational complexity for airlines

And inevitably, higher fares for passengers.

As per inputs from Aircruise Travels Pvt Ltd, routes connecting India to Europe, the UK, and parts of North America are currently the most impacted, particularly those that traditionally pass through or near West Asian airspace. Transit hubs such as Dubai, Doha, and



Abu Dhabi are also seeing operational adjustments.

Ticket prices are climbing — and not just because of demand. The fare surge isn't incidental. "Airlines to key European destinations have increased by approximately 20–25%, while routes to the US are seeing a sharper uptick of 25–30%," says Bharatt Malik, Senior VP- Flights and Hotel Business, Yatra Online Limited.

He adds that even relatively stable corridors are seeing some pressure, with short-haul destinations like Southeast Asia witnessing increases of 5–12%. There are multiple reasons behind this:

Rerouting of flights, which increases flying time and fuel

consumption

Unprecedented surge in the ATF (aviation turbine fuel) prices

Peak summer demand, which was already pushing fares up. Together, they're creating what travellers are now experiencing as a perfect storm.

Travellers are still flying, just more cautiously

Interestingly, the appetite to travel hasn't disappeared. It's just evolving. According to Malik, there has been a 20–25% rise in advance bookings, driven by peak summer travel. But at the same time, behaviour is shifting.

"Travellers are becoming more cautious. Many are adopting a wait-and-watch approach, opting for flexible or last-minute bookings, and in some cases

rescheduling or rerouting their trips to avoid impacted regions," he says.

In other words, people aren't cancelling plans, they're recalibrating them.

Where travellers are heading instead

With long-haul routes becoming more unpredictable and expensive, travellers are pivoting to destinations that feel simpler, closer, and more stable.

As per Punya Marwah, the current favourites include:

Thailand

Bali (Indonesia)

Vietnam

Georgia

Maldives

There's also growing interest in slightly farther but relatively

stable routes like Japan and Australia, though these come with longer travel times and higher costs. These destinations are benefiting from:

Minimal airspace disruption

Shorter flight durations

More predictable pricing

So, which routes are actually affected?

In practical terms, here's how it breaks down for Indian travellers: Most affected

India to Europe (via West Asia)

India to UK

India to North America (especially routes using Middle Eastern corridors)

Moderately affected

India Middle East (due to operational adjustments at hubs)

Least affected (for now)

India Southeast Asia

India Indian Ocean destinations (Maldives, Sri Lanka)

Airlines are still operating, but often via longer alternate paths, sometimes adding anywhere between 30 minutes to a few hours to total travel time, depending on the route.

Industry insider advice

The advice from industry insiders is consistent:

Book flexible tickets

Track route changes

Be open to alternative destinations

Because while the desire to travel remains unchanged, the way we get there is increasingly shaped by forces far beyond our control.

The Goa charm that refuses to die down

Goa is the "worst place to be" for some people. Especially the ones who have had experiences bitter enough to never come back again. On the other hand, "Yaar Goa chale kya?" is a line that slides into every travel conversation. The trip may or may not make it out of the group chat, but the desire remains. It might just be that one place unchecked on the bucket list, but Goa's spot remains.

Contradictory? It is. We'll get into the details.

According to SOCIAL's latest report, Voices of the Hood, 51 per cent of people still choose Goa as their top travel destination in India. For Gen Z and millennials, its enduring appeal is driven by beaches, nightlife, music culture, and social travel experiences symbolising freedom, friendship and carefree



getaways.

Similarly, Booking.com, in its Indian summer travel trends report, notes that Goa remains a top choice for beach holidays. Across multiple travel reports and surveys — whether around honeymoon destinations or short escapes or long weekends — Goa consistently features among India's most searched travel

destinations. But what about overtourism, growing friction between locals and tourists (btw, the cab struggle is real) and the recurring discourse around Goa being "overhyped"? We asked travellers whether they would still choose the destination despite the criticism.

Here's the interesting bit:

"Of course! I am not a travel buff

per se, but I do want to have that Goa trip once. For me, Goa has the legacy of 'chill'," says Prateek Grewal, a public relations professional. A 27-year-old Atima Bakshi shares, "I have been to Goa for my brother's wedding but did not get the chance to explore it except for one scooty ride. I am all in to explore the local hinterlands and all, but I do definitely want to go to that 'Dil Chahta Hai' spot and do a monsoon trail too." For Ayush Saunik, a Delhi-based software engineer, Goa is a vibe that no other place can beat. "I want to ride the coastal roads there and I absolutely love seafood. It's been my teenage obsession, so it checks out on my to-do list. And honestly, kuch bhi karlo, Goa jaisi parties Delhi mein toh nahi milegi." (It's hard to find Goa-like parties in Delhi no matter how

hard you try.) "For me, Goa is sun, sand, salt, chilled beer as early as 8 am, and ocean therapy. There's something deeply calming about just standing in the waves with the sea breeze around you. And then there's the food — the seafood, the prawn curry rice, the unique Konkani flavours you find even in the smallest beach shack or homestay and, of course, Vitamin Sea! I genuinely feel Goa's charm lies in these simple sensory experiences," Harshita Mathur, who visits Goa every year with her family, tells India Today. Lately, there have also been incessant discussions around how Goa has become an expensive tourist destination and that Indians can plan international trips to Thailand or Vietnam on similar budgets. But people like Mathur see it differently.

Masala dosa to malpua, 11 Indian dishes crack World's Top 100 pancakes



Pancakes and dosa?

Before you argue about India's dosa being in the pancake category, we know what you are thinking. It's not exactly how we would like to associate it. But let's not get into the technicalities for a brief moment. Let's just concentrate on the recognition for a bit.

The food guide TasteAtlas has released its latest April edition of the Top 100 Pancakes in the World. Tucked between French crepes and Latvian potato pancakes are some very desi stars and more than just dosas.

Here are some of the amazing Indian dishes on the list:

Masala dosa at 6th position

Dosa, Tamil Nadu, at 15th position

Paper dosa, Tamil Nadu, at 35th position

Appam from Kerala at 60th position

Pesara dosa from Andhra Pradesh at 63rd position

Uttapam, Tamil Nadu, at 74th position

Neer dosa, Karnataka, at 84th position

Malpua at 85th position

Kallapam, Kerala, at 95th position

Rava dosa at 96th position

Pitha, Odisha, at 98th position

What makes these Indian "pancakes" stand out isn't just flavour, it's

fermentation, technique, and Indian spices. The dosa batter, for instance, is fermented overnight to develop that signature tang. It takes some culinary patience to make the perfect circle, with crisp edges and soft centres.

Also, can we talk about accompaniments? While the rest of the world is busy with maple syrup, we're out here dunking our so-called 'pancakes' into sambar, scooping chutney, and occasionally arguing about which state does it best. (Correct answer: depends on who you ask.)

While the list mostly associates these dishes with a single state, many of them are made and loved across regions. Dosa and uttapam, for instance, are staples across South India, while appam is most closely associated with Kerala and Tamil Nadu, though it's enjoyed in other states too. In fact, pitha is also commonly found in West Bengal and Assam.

Malpua is often offered at Puri's famous Jagannath Temple, and is a regular at the sweet counters of many Indian weddings. Case in point: every state may serve these dishes with its own distinct flavours.

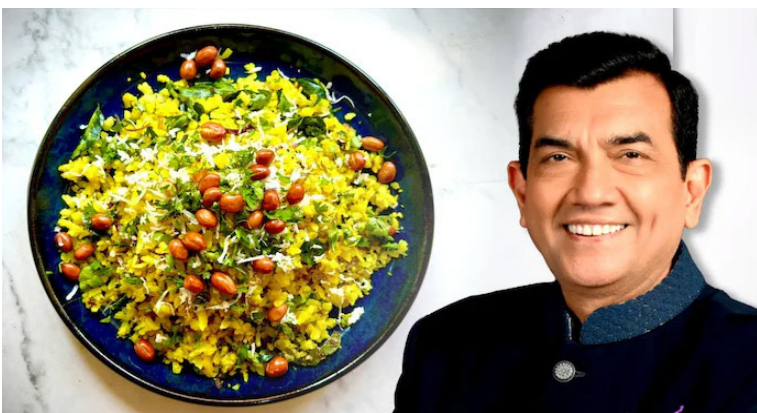
The list is based on 8,811 ratings. The idea, according to its official website says,

is to "promote excellent local foods, instil pride in traditional dishes, and arouse curiosity about dishes you haven't tried." The food guide list includes everything from stuffed crepes to street-style savoury wraps.

In addition to these Indian dishes, the list is led by Kartupeu pankukas from Latvia, a crispy potato-based pancake traditionally served with sour cream and lingonberry sauce. Close behind are Crepes sucrées from France—thin, delicate pancakes usually paired with sweet toppings like fruit or chocolate. The third spot also goes to classic Crepes, again from France, highlighting just how iconic this style is. At number four are Nutella crepes, a richer, dessert-like variation from France. Rounding off the top five is Jianbing from Tianjin, China, a popular savoury street food loaded with eggs, sauces, and fillings. Earlier this year, TasteAtlas released its Best Food 2026 list, and India showed up across several top 100 categories. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Lucknow found their place on the global food map.

So the next time someone offers you pancakes, just ask: Do you mean dosa?

Is poha an unhealthy breakfast option? Sanjeev Kapoor says yes



Is poha a common breakfast at your home? For many Indians, it is almost a weekly staple—light, comforting and quick to make. In some households, it is even paired with crispy jalebis for that perfect sweet-savoury combination. Celebrity chef Sanjeev Kapoor doesn't approve of it as a healthy breakfast though. Speaking with Smita Prakash on the ANI podcast, the Padma Shri awardee shared his views on the popular breakfast dish and said that it may not be as healthy as many people assume.

During the podcast, the chef casually busted some food myths and also served some spicy takes on "underrated food cities", "overrated street food" and much more. During the discussion, Prakash quipped about how, according to her, "poha is

overrated." Taking it further, Kapoor explained how poha is more like a comfort food for Indians. "Poha is a comfort food but yeh sab dekhne walon ke liye hai, yeh koi healthy nahi hai. Agar aapka rice kharab tha, toh poha usse aur zyada kharab tha." (For all the viewers, poha is not healthy at all. If rice is considered unhealthy, poha is even worse.) That opinion may come as a surprise to many Indians, especially in cities like Indore where poha-jalebi is almost an emotion. But according to the chef, one should avoid it. There, there. We can hear the hearts break. He further divulged that poha may lead to insulin spikes early in the morning as well.

The poha debate

Essentially, poha is made with flattened rice, typically tempered

with mustard seeds, curry leaves, onions, peanuts and some spices. However, every home has its own style and version of preparing it.

Some add more vegetables, some like it with a bit of lemon squeezed over it, and some have it in a more indulgent manner—sprinkled with sev or crunchy mixture.

Now, for the health angle, it largely depends on how it is prepared and portioned. Part of its popularity comes from the fact that it is light on the stomach, comforting and quick to prepare, making it an easy breakfast choice for busy mornings. When cooked with vegetables, peanuts and minimal oil, it can also offer a decent mix of carbohydrates, fibre and healthy fats. Now, a common mistake Indians make is overloading on refined carbs and under-consuming protein. Meanwhile poha is primarily carbohydrate-heavy and relatively low in protein on its own, which means it may not keep everyone full for long or provide sustained energy. If consumed regularly, without properly-balanced nutrients, it may contribute to quicker insulin spikes, especially when paired with sugary items like jalebi.

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The Invisible Scars of War: Understanding The Impact Of Crisis On Mental Health



Wars, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises are affecting millions of lives across the world, leaving behind more than just physical destruction. In these uncertain times, fear, anxiety, and stress are becoming more common, with many suffering from long-term mental health conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As conflicts, wars, and humanitarian crises continue to affect

different parts of the world, millions of people are living in fear, uncertainty, and emotional distress. The current global situation has once again highlighted how deeply crises affect not just physical safety, but also mental health. Constant exposure to disturbing news, displacement, loss of loved ones, financial instability, and fear for the future can leave lasting psychological effects on individuals and communities alike.

According to the World Health Organization, almost everyone affected by emergencies experiences some form of psychological distress. While many people gradually recover with time and support, others may develop serious mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research by organizations like UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross has also shown that prolonged exposure to violence and instability can affect emotional well-being for years.

How Does Crisis Affect Mental Health?

Conflict situations disrupt daily life in several ways. Families may be separated, homes destroyed, education interrupted, and healthcare services limited. Social isolation, unemployment, uncertainty, and the fear of losing loved ones can increase stress levels significantly. Chil-

dren are among the most vulnerable, as exposure to violence and instability during formative years can affect their emotional development, sleep patterns, learning abilities, and sense of security. Another major factor affecting mental health during crises is continuous exposure to distressing information online. Social media and 24-hour news cycles often make people feel overwhelmed, anxious, and emotionally exhausted. Experts from the American Psychological Association suggest that repeatedly consuming traumatic news content can increase anxiety and emotional fatigue, even among people who are not directly affected by the conflict.

Tips To Overcome Mental Load

Experts recommend mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). This can include community support, emotional care, psychological first aid, and pro-

fessional mental health treatment. Being prepared in advance and including mental health support in disaster planning can reduce long-term impacts.

Here are simple ways to manage your mental health:

Limit Overexposure to Distressing News

Staying informed is important, but constantly watching disturbing images or updates can increase fear and stress. Mental health experts recommend taking regular breaks from news and social media to avoid emotional burnout.

Talk and Seek Emotional Support

Sharing fears and emotions with trusted friends, family members, or counselors can reduce feelings of isolation. Emotional support plays a major role in coping with stress and trauma.

Maintain Daily Routines

Simple routines such as regular meals, proper sleep, exercise, and staying connected with loved ones can provide emotional stability during uncertain times. Small habits often help people regain a sense of control.

Steer away from harmful substances

Don't use harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol, or tobacco to cope with what you're feeling. Though these may seem to help you feel better in the short term, they can make you feel worse in the long run. These substances are also dangerous and can put you and those around you at risk of diseases or injuries.

FAQs on Mental Health During Crises

How are people affected by conflict and crisis?

Most people affected by emergencies experience stress and emotional distress, as well as real concern for loss of life or livelihoods.

How does war impact mental health?

Around one in five people who have faced war or conflict in the last decade may develop mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

Who gets the most affected by war, conflict, and crisis?

People already living with serious mental health conditions are more vulnerable during crises and require both medical care and necessities for support

Can House Mice Carry Hantavirus? Here's All You Need To Know

With recent headlines putting Hantavirus back in focus, many people are asking an understandable question: Can the common mice found in homes and gardens spread hantavirus, too? The short answer: usually no—but it is a little more nuanced than that.

Here's what health experts and global public health agencies say.

What Is hantavirus?

Hantavirus is a group of viruses carried mainly by certain rodents. In humans, it can cause serious illnesses such as Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) in the Americas and Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) in Europe and Asia. While rare, these infections can be severe and even life-threatening.

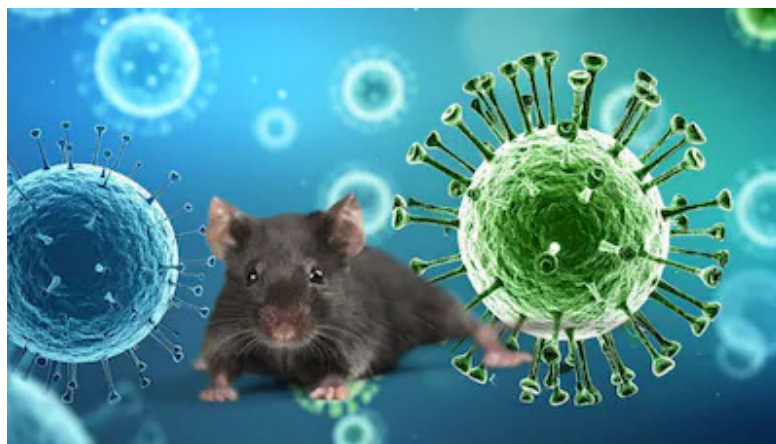
People usually get infected after exposure to infected rodent urine, droppings, saliva, or nesting material—especially when contaminated dust becomes airborne and is inhaled.

Do Common House Mice Carry Hantavirus?

This is where confusion often starts. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), not all mice and rats carry hantavirus. The main carriers depend on the species and region.

In North America, the most common carrier is the deer mouse, a wild rodent found in rural and wooded areas. Other wild ro-

dents, such as cotton rats, rice rats, and white-footed mice, can also carry certain strains. Typical urban house mice—the small mice commonly found in kitchens, basements, and city homes—are not considered the primary carriers of the hantaviruses that cause HPS in North America. That means: finding a house



mouse in your home does not automatically mean hantavirus risk.

Who Is At Most At Risk?

Your risk goes up if you clean garages, sheds, barns, attics, or cabins that may have been closed for a long time. Live or work in rural areas where wild rodents are common. Sweep or vacuum rodent droppings (which can aerosolise virus particles).

In fact, the CDC specifically warns against dry sweeping or vacuuming rodent droppings. Instead, contaminated areas should be disinfected and cleaned while wet.

Early symptoms to watch for

Hantavirus often starts like the flu, making it easy to miss early on. Symptoms may include fever, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, nausea or vomiting. As it progresses, some people may develop a cough, shortness of breath, or breathing difficulty.

If you have symptoms and recent rodent exposure, seek medical care immediately.

How To Keep Rodents And Disease Risk Out Of Your Home

1. Seal cracks and holes: Check around pipes, vents, windows, and door gaps. Use steel wool or caulk to block entry points.
2. Store food in airtight containers: Open food on kitchen counters is an open invitation for rodents.
3. Dispose of garbage regularly: Use bins with secure lids and clean spills around trash areas.
4. Eliminate moisture: Fix leaking pipes and clogged drains—rodents love damp spaces.
5. Reduce clutter: Old cardboard boxes and messy storage spaces make perfect nesting spots.
6. Don't leave pet food out overnight: Outdoor or balcony pet bowls can attract rodents fast.
7. Clean safely: If you find droppings, then ventilate the room first. Wear gloves, spray droppings with disinfectant or diluted bleach, wipe, don't sweep.

Can A Healthy Relationship Help You Heal Emotionally?

What Rashmika's Heartful Confession About Vijay Means



Romance used to be measured by intensity. If it hurt badly enough, if it consumed you completely, if it felt impossible to live without someone, then it was considered real love. Films glorified emotional chaos, songs romanticised heartbreak, and relationships built on anxiety were often mistaken for passion. But have you ever experienced a relationship that didn't just make you happy, but actually made you feel lighter, safer, and more whole?

As Vijay Deverakonda celebrates his 37th birthday on 9 May, actress Rashmika Mandanna's candid confession during a conversation with anchor Suma Kanakala about her husband Vijay has sparked admiration about the transformative power of healthy relationships. Her words, "Luckily, I have a partner who has healed me from a pain he didn't cause" — resonate deeply because they highlight a profound psychological truth: the right relationship can support emotional repair without erasing the past. Rashmika Mandanna has spoken openly about a previous relationship in which she felt trapped and had "no choice," describing it as a source of significant emotional pain. During the promotion of her film *The Girlfriend*, she credited Vijay Deverakonda with helping her heal from that heartbreak. She emphasised that he provided comfort, care, and a sense of peace, helping her see a different, more positive world. In one emotional speech, she expressed gratitude, saying she hoped everyone could have a "Vijay Deverakonda" in their lives, someone who offers unwavering support.

What A 'Healing Relationship' Means?

Psychologists have long suggested that healthy relationships can influence emotional recovery.

Research published by Psychology Today and therapists working in attachment psychology often describe safe, stable relationships as spaces where the nervous system slowly learns that not every emotional connection leads to fear, abandonment or instability.

This does not mean a partner "fixes" someone, emotional healing remains deeply personal work. However, supportive relationships can create conditions where healing feels possible. Consistency, reassurance, emotional availability and calm communication all help reduce chronic emotional stress responses that many people carry from previous relationships, childhood experiences or periods of emotional trauma.

In simple terms, healthy love can sometimes feel unfamiliar because it is peaceful.

Why Emotional Safety Is More



Attractive Than Drama

Modern relationships are also changing because people themselves are changing. After years of conversations around mental health, boundaries, emotional burnout and therapy culture, many are beginning to prioritise stability over emotional chaos. On one hand, social media still glorifies dramatic romance. On the other, there is growing exhaustion around toxic relationship patterns disguised as passion. This is where celebrity relationships like Rashmika and Vijay's become culturally interesting. Their public image has largely remained understated, private and friendship-led rather than

performative.

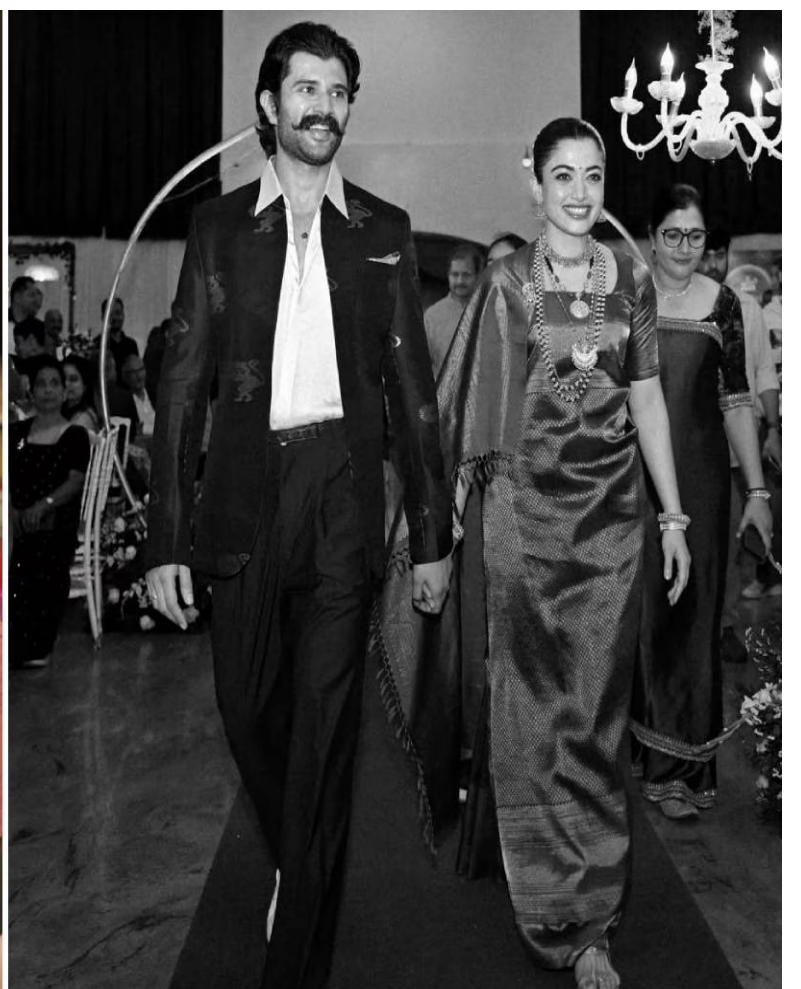
Many younger people now describe their ideal relationship less as "intense" and more as "safe", "soft", "calm" or "grounding". In psychology, this often connects to the idea of secure attachment, where partners feel emotionally accepted without constantly fearing rejection or emotional unpredictability.

Can A Relationship Truly Help You Heal?

A healthy relationship can support emotional healing by offering trust, emotional regulation and stability. Meanwhile, it cannot replace therapy, self-work or personal accountability.

Experts note that healing rela-

tionships provide several key benefits. They reduce chronic stress, improve emotional resilience, and foster a stronger sense of self. When someone feels truly seen, valued, and supported without judgment it becomes easier to process old pain and build healthier patterns. Rashmika's description of Vijay encouraging her dreams, respecting her independence, and offering companionship mirrors these qualities. Her public appreciation of how he "showed me what being in peace feels like" and helped her become the woman she always wanted to be speaks to the quiet power of such a dynamic.



Indian Influencer In Dubai Wants To Quit Content Creation, Looks For A Corporate Job: "Not Stimulating"

"In the clip, she explained that while social media careers often appear glamorous from the outside, she no longer finds the lifestyle personally fulfilling."

An Indian-origin influencer based in Dubai has gone viral after revealing that she wants to leave full-time content creation and return to a conventional corporate job, despite achieving financial success as a creator. Twinkle Stanly recently shared a candid video discussing what she described as the harsh reality of influencer life. In the clip, she explained that while social media careers often appear glamorous from the outside, she no longer finds the lifestyle personally fulfilling.

Stanly stressed that her decision has nothing to do with money. She said she is currently earning more than ever before and is financially doing extremely well through content creation. However, she admitted that the lifestyle has begun to feel emotionally draining and intellectually unstimulating.

According to Stanly, one of the biggest challenges has been the repetitive nature of influencer work. She described her daily routine as revolving around checking social media platforms, managing brand collaborations, posting content, and tracking engagement metrics, which eventually left her feeling creatively exhausted.

She also said that the lack of structure and routine, often considered one of the biggest advantages of influencer life, became difficult for her over time. While influencers enjoy flexibility and independence, Stanly explained that she personally thrives in environments that involve pressure, teamwork, deadlines, and professional challenges.

In a follow-up video shared days later, she reiterated that influencing no longer feels intellectually stimulating to her. She said she misses the sense of friction and mental engagement that traditional workplaces can provide.

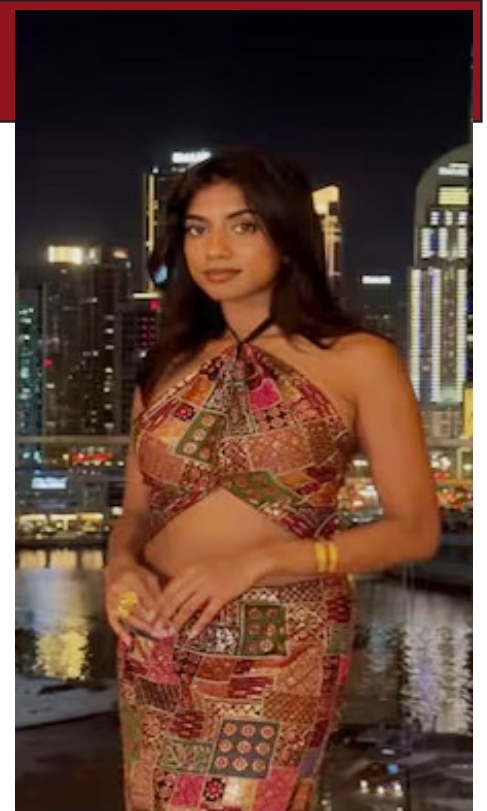
"Being an influencer has been the most rewarding job I've had in terms of opportunities, finances, travel, and SO much more. But it has also been lonely and not as stimulating as I wished. I've also realized that for me to be interesting on social media, I need to create a fun, interesting, engaging life for myself. And I'm hoping that finding a job that I can fall in love with again will help with that. But who knows, I might change my mind again," she wrote in the caption of the video.

Stanly originally entered content creation

while balancing a demanding corporate career alongside major personal life transitions. As her online presence grew, the income from influencing eventually surpassed her corporate salary, prompting her to become a full-time creator.

Now, after spending years outside the corporate ecosystem, she admitted she feels uncertain about returning. She said she is actively searching for jobs but is unsure how her current skills and experiences will translate into a traditional workplace setting. "I also don't know if I can actually go back to a job. I also don't know what kind of jobs look like for me," she said.

Her comments sparked widespread discussion online. While some social media users were surprised that someone would voluntarily step away from a successful influencer career, many others related to her experience. Several people agreed that financial success alone does not guarantee fulfillment and said that structure, collaboration, intellectual stimulation, and professional growth can sometimes feel more meaningful than complete freedom and flexibility. One user wrote, "Not everything in the world is about



money. There are so many different factors that make our life more fulfilling." Another said, "This is honestly so refreshing to see. In a world where most people hit a certain level of success and then settle into comfort, you are choosing to lean back into growth again. That takes a different kind of mindset."

Wildflowering: The Softest Dating Trend That's Winning Hearts in 2026

Dating can sometimes feel like a race. Curate the perfect profile, make the perfect impression, find the perfect match. But 2026 is witnessing a subtle shift, and it is being ushered in by a soft trend called 'wildflowering'. Unlike most trends, this isn't loud or filled with pressure. It's a non-performative romantic exploration where daters let connections grow naturally. One dating app user explained the trend as, "Let love grow freely, like wildflowers." The trend basically lifts off the pressure of labelling a relationship immediately and allows people to explore emotional connections more openly. Think of it as less, "Where is this going?" and more, "This makes me happy. I wanna see where it leads." No wonder both GenZ and Millennial daters are leaning toward this trend.

Well, as the name suggests, this trend takes cues from how wildflowers bloom: freely, unforced, and in their own time. Ravi Mittal, Founder & CEO of QuackQuack says, "In the dating world, it shows up in many forms, like building connections without diving into commitment or treating every interaction as a calculated move."

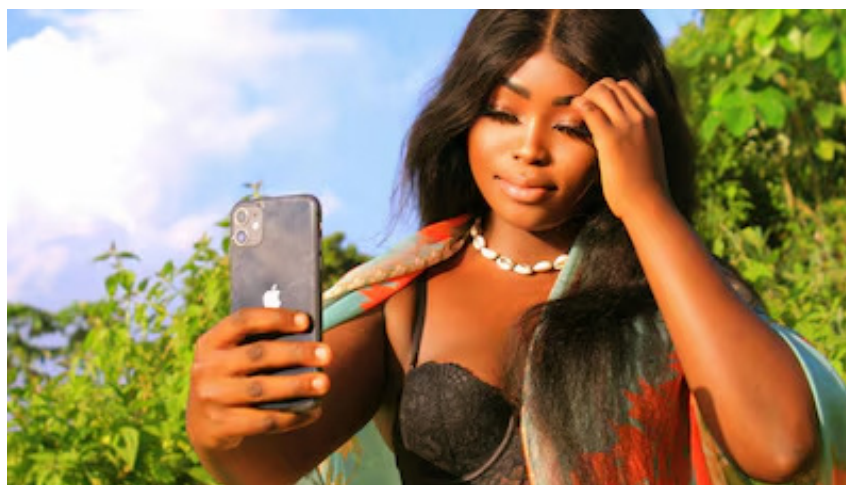
Why is it gaining traction in 2026?

Modern dating is amazing in so many senses, but like all good things, this too came with some flaws. Between the ghosting, situationship dilemma and the constant pressure of figuring things out before time runs out, people were tired of performing. Wildflowering is the pause and reset they badly needed. It gave young

daters a chance to catch their breath and just enjoy the process of falling in love.

What makes it resonate with modern daters?

Craving for authenticity: GenZ daters especially are drifting away from curated perfection. For this genera-



tion, dating is not something that fits neatly into a box. Ravi Mittal says, "They are not chasing the 'perfect' bio that hits all the spots anymore, nor are they trying to play by the unspoken dating rules, like you should never reply immediately or you must define your connection in at least a month of chatting. This generation believes that every individual makes up their own rule. They come with their own rhythm, expectations and ways of connecting. For them, wildflowering is the answer to all their problems. It allows them to

seek love without overthinking every step." Mental health matters: Loving is great, but loving yourself is greater. The modern daters understand that the best way to love someone is to first love and understand yourself. No rush, no pressure, these are not just trendy terms. It truly allows people to create an emotionally safe space where relationships grow, and so do the people pursuing them. This approach allows people to seek connections without the burnout.

A reset: Dating once came with a lot of checklists. Wildflowering is the perfect reset button for that. Surveys show that more than 47% of people are more inclined toward intentional spontaneity today. They want to approach dating with more openness and fun.

Ravi Mittal says, "Wildflowering is a trend that gained popularity because of dating apps. Virtual platforms for dating do not promote fast-paced dating, as some would like to believe. On the contrary, people have been able to slow

down and explore because of dating apps."

Here is how the trend translates on the app-

Low-pressure chatting: Conversations don't come with strategies and a timeline. They can just exist without the pressure of taking one direction over another immediately.

Friends-first: Several dating app users are starting with the friends-first connections, where they take their time to build a solid foundation based on friendship, leaving room for romance to grow organically.

Alia Bhatt Captures The Audrey Hepburn-Spirit In A Hand-Painted Voluminous Gown At Cannes 2026

Alia Bhatt's looks ahead of her 2026 Cannes appearances have been a mix of structured power-dressing and landscape-inspired couture. On her way out of Hotel Martinez the actress was seen channeling princess vibes in a breathtaking pastel ball gown.

Styled by the visionary duo Rhea Kapoor and Sanya Kapoor, Alia's gown was a bespoke collaboration that blurred the lines between fashion and fine art. The foundation was a custom, full-circle ball gown by designer Yash Patil's label, That Antique Piece. It featured a precision-sculpted bodice with delicate spaghetti straps, angular cups, and a dramatic drop waist that screamed 1950s glamour. The true magic lay in the fabric. Artist Basuri Chokshi treated the gown as a landscape, hand-painting an homage to the French Riviera directly onto the ombre-dyed silk organza and tulle. Dreamy strokes of lav-

ender fields, Mediterranean blues, and sun-drenched yellows turned the voluminous skirt into a romantic vista of the South of France.

"To Cannes With Love ABK"

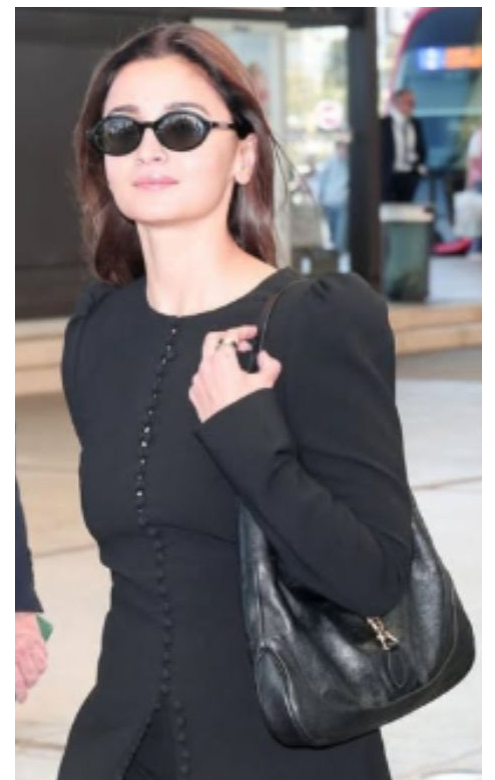
While the Chopard yellow diamonds and classic Manolo Blahnik mules added a high-jewellery finish, it was a hidden detail that set the internet ablaze. Stitched discreetly was a personal message: "To Cannes With Love ABK." Fans quickly decoded the initials as Alia Bhatt Kapoor, a rare and sweet nod to her personal life amidst the global spotlight.

Earlier in the week, she landed in Cannes in a sharp, monochromatic Carolina Herrera look.

Papped at Nice Airport, Alia leaned into a sleek, all-black ensemble with a button-down blazer featuring distinctive puffed shoulders and a nipped-in waist, paired perfectly with matching Camila skinny

pants from the designer's Spring 2026 collection. The look struck a balance between a high-fashion power suit and effortless travel grace.

As the Global Brand Ambassador for Gucci, Alia elevated her monochromatic fit with the house's iconic Jackie 1961 Medium Shoulder Bag in black leather. She shielded her eyes from the French sun with Gucci round-frame sunglasses, adding a retro, movie-star edge to her gait. For footwear, she didn't compromise on elegance, opting for the classic Manolo Blahnik Carolyne 70 Black Satin Slingback Pumps proving that a sharp heel is the ultimate accessory for a Cannes debut. Following her viral 2025 Gucci saree, she has continued to experiment with "fusion" silhouettes this year, leaning heavily into the "Vocal for Local" sentiment by choosing Indian drapes for major global evenings.



There's Coffee In My Cocktail!

Why Cafés And Bars Are Chasing The Same Buzz

There was a time when coffee announced the beginning of the day and cocktails signalled its end. Now, increasingly, the two are arriving at the same table. I have woken up to coffee on many days (reluctantly so, being an avid tea drinker) but add a little alcohol to it and suddenly the brew tastes more delectable.

In cafés across India, evening orders are beginning to look different. The person who spent the afternoon nursing a pour-over is now ordering an espresso martini. Cold brew appears with tonic water and orange peel. Nitro beers carry notes of plum and cocoa. In many cosy corners around the Capital, to be specific, coffee is now showing up smoky, sparkling, savoury, even fermented to mimic wine or whiskey.

This World Cocktail Day, we are finding it harder to ignore the coffee in our cocktail. Start with Pour Over Coffee Roasters in Khan Market, and you'll learn that coffee cocktails have emerged naturally out of modern café culture. "Coffee has long played a role in cocktail culture, from coffee liqueur-based classics to globally popular drinks like the Espresso Martini and White Russian," says co-founder Aditya Sharma. "Much like fine spirits or wine, coffee has always been appreciated for its complexity, flavour profiles, body, acidity, and texture."

What has changed, however, is the way people want to experience those flavours. Coffee is no longer confined to flat whites and cappuccinos (thankfully so). Consumers are increasingly comfortable encountering it in cocktails, beers, tonics, and low-alcohol drinks. Sharma describes coffee cocktails as existing "at the intersection of hospitality, modern café culture, and beverage creativity."

And perhaps that intersection was inevitable. The rise of specialty coffee has already trained urban consumers to think about origin, acidity, roast profiles, fermentation, and mouthfeel. The language of coffee has

quickly begun resembling the language of alcohol – open to experimentation.

A Buzz In My Brew, Please

At Fort City Brewing, co-founder Ashish Ranjan believes coffee has evolved into "a cultural flavour language." Brewers, he says, are no longer using coffee merely because roasted flavours work well in stouts. Instead, specialty coffee is opening up "a much wider canvas." That experimentation has resulted in drinks like One Night Stand, Fort City's fruited cold brew dunkelweizen on nitro made in collaboration with Caarabi Coffee Roasters. Inspired by a fruited espresso martini, the beer uses an anaerobically processed microlot that brings notes of cocoa, strawberry, and plum into the glass. "It can introduce layers of acidity, fruit, roast, cocoa, spice, or fermentation character depending on the origin, roast profile, and processing method," Ranjan says.

That complexity is also changing how bartenders and roasters work together. Brewing method suddenly matters as much as spirit selection. A cold brew behaves differently in a cocktail than espresso does. According to Bharat Singhal from Bili Hu Coffee, the choice of brewing equipment can completely alter the final drink. "A Vietnamese style phin is good to brew coffee when making a cream or milk based cocktail," he says. "A cold brew is good when there are lighter ingredients in cocktail or when using tonic water in the drink." Espresso, meanwhile, works best when shaken with chocolate, spice, or fruit syrups because of the thicker texture it creates. The level of detail can feel surprisingly technical, but that is exactly what makes this moment different from earlier coffee trends. India's consumers have become more adventurous in a relatively short time. "Specialty coffee when introduced to India, came in directly after we were just learning to spell cappuccinos," says Singhal. "There was a dis-

connect and it intimidated most people." Cocktails, strangely enough, helped soften that intimidation. Coffee became easier to approach when folded into something playful and social. And brewers like Bharat are championing the same. "I have hosted workshops for coffee cocktails alongside Yungdup Lama and Rohan of Sidecar took a filter coffee martini to World Class London in 2020. We ourselves play a significant role in educating bartenders and mixologists on how to use coffee in cocktails. At Monkey Shoulder's annual championship, we brewed a boulevardier with aero press. At recently concluded championships of Campari, we brewed a coffee that was uniquely fermented and had fruity notes, almost like port wine of coffee. At a world class championship in the past, we brewed Monsooned Malabar coffee that had unique notes of petrichor," he adds. The rise of espresso martinis has obviously helped. But the larger trend is driven by a generation of young, more fun, drinkers who no longer separate cafés, breweries, and bars into rigid categories. One flows into the other. People work from cafés in the afternoon and return to the same spaces for cocktails at night. The modern café increasingly functions as a social space first and a coffee shop second. "What starts as curiosity quickly becomes craving," says Ranjan. "Drinkers are far more fluid than they were 10 years ago. They move seamlessly between cafés, cocktail bars, and breweries." The drinks themselves are also becoming softer around the edges. Coffee cocktails fit neatly into the rise of low-ABV and non-alcoholic drinking culture – beverages that offer complexity and stimulation without necessarily leading to excess. At Pour Over Coffee Roasters, cold brew lemonade and orange cold brew tonic have already found loyal audiences, while new experiments include a savoury non-alcoholic coffee drink with tomato and jalapeño.

Mouni Roy archives wedding pics, husband Suraj deletes Insta account amid rift buzz

Amid separation rumours, actor Mouni Roy has reportedly archived or removed several pictures with husband Suraj Nambiar, including their wedding photos. Suraj's Instagram account appears to have been deleted, too.



Social media was on full detective mode all of Tuesday, after rumours of trouble between actor Mouni Roy and her husband Suraj Nambiar began doing the rounds. The chatter started in the morning when fans noticed that the couple had unfollowed each other on Instagram. By evening, the buzz grew louder after users

pointed out that Suraj's Instagram account appeared to have been deleted.

Adding fuel to the speculation, fans also observed that no pictures of Suraj, including the couple's wedding photographs, are currently visible on Mouni's Instagram profile. So far, neither Mouni nor Suraj has issued an official statement reacting to the rumours.

In the middle of all the online buzz, a clip shared by a fan account on Instagram drew concerned reactions in the comments section. In the video, Suraj, while walking through a crowd, is seen quickly stepping in to help Mouni up, hold her care-

fully and escort her towards their car.

When did Mouni and Suraj get married?

Mouni Roy married Suraj Nambiar on January 27, 2022, in Goa. After pre-wedding festivities, including haldi and sangeet ceremonies, the couple celebrated a traditional Malayali wedding and a Bengali wedding ceremony, followed by a post-wedding pool party.

Suraj, who hails from Bengaluru, is a businessman and investment banker who reportedly lived in Dubai before marrying Mouni. Over the years, the couple frequently shared glimpses of their relationship on

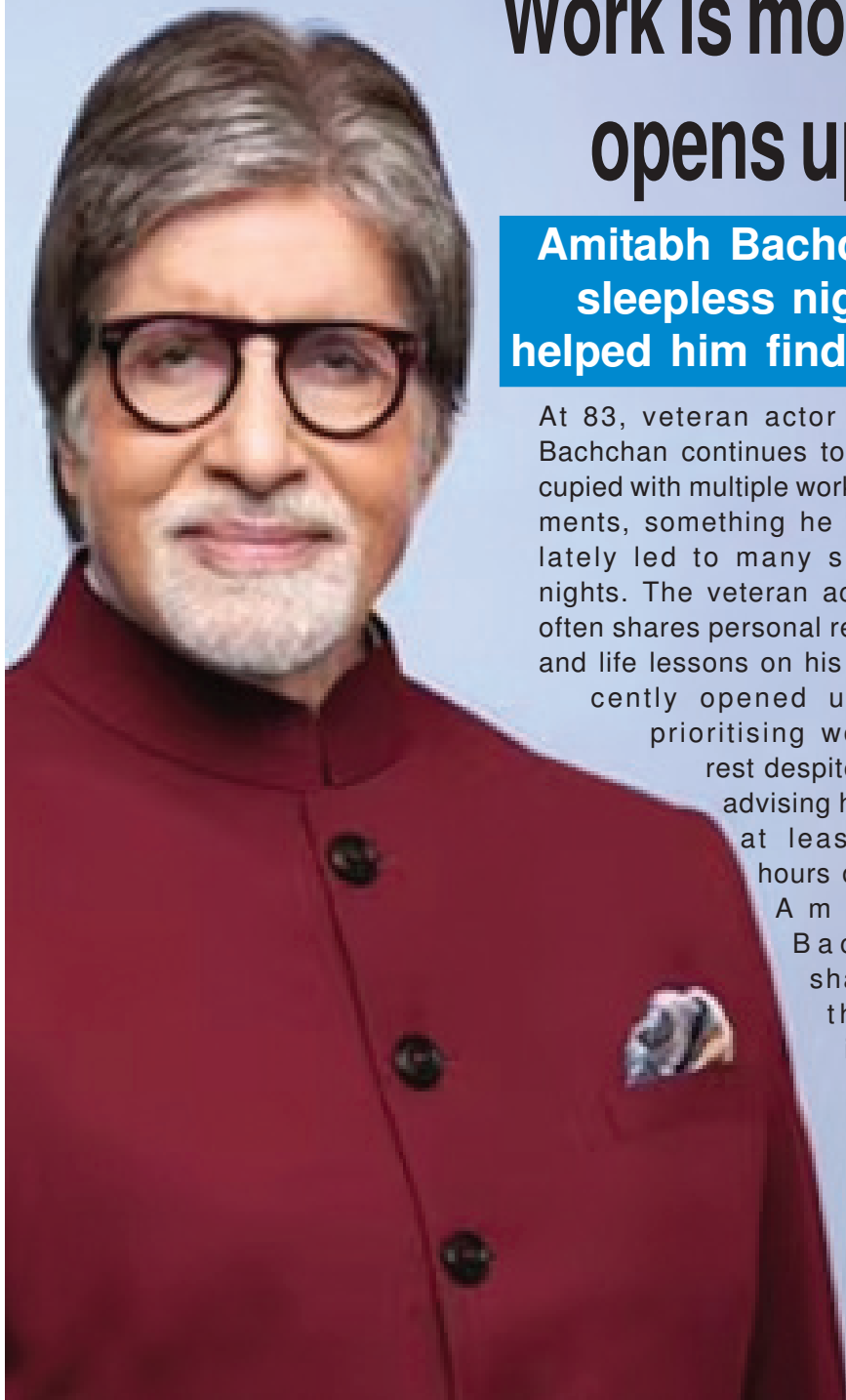
Instagram, posting photographs from holidays, date nights and celebrations, until the recent separation rumours surfaced online.

Mouni remains one of the most recognised faces on Indian television and has featured in popular shows such as Kasturi, Devon Ke Dev...Mahadev and Naagin. She has also participated in reality shows, including Nach Baliye 6, Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 7 and Zara Nachke Dikha. Most recently, she hosted Temptation Island India.

Apart from television, Mouni has also appeared in films such as Brahmstra: Part One – Shiva, Gold and Made in China.

Work is more important: Amitabh Bachchan opens up about sleepless nights at 83

Amitabh Bachchan said his work commitments are causing sleepless nights despite advice to rest. He added music helped him find calm through long hours and late-night work.



At 83, veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan continues to stay occupied with multiple work commitments, something he said has lately led to many sleepless nights. The veteran actor, who often shares personal reflections and life lessons on his blog, recently opened up about prioritising work over rest despite doctors advising him to get at least seven hours of sleep.

Amitabh Bachchan shared the thoughts in a post on his personal blog, where he often writes about

his life and experiences.

Amitabh Bachchan experiencing sleepless nights

In the same post, Big B also wrote about how music helps him during late-night work sessions, describing it as a source of peace and comfort. He reflected at length on the effect of music, saying it brings calm and can offer "the peace of slumber" even during long hours of work.

"No sleep process takes over at this hour of the morning from the night before. Why? Because work is more important than sleep... medical says it's not right... must get 7 hrs minimum... the body grows, develops, and repairs in the sleep hours... so what does one do? (sic)," he wrote.

He went on to say that music has been helping him find peace at night. "As I work, I am glued to the EB Blog, but in the silence of the night, that gentle music on slide guitar-sitar rendering some of the most soulful classical

meditation solos... aaah!! There is no better cure for the soul than this (sic)," he wrote.

Reflecting further on music and its effect, Big B added, "It is the chord that ties the soul to the Almighty... that invisible thread unseen, yet felt despite its absence... I feel... so it strums the strings within... put it on and softly it shall give you the peace of slumber... the seven notes that have invaded all music in whichever part of the world, are the universal commonness of mankind... respect it, and it shall respect you (sic)."

On the work front

The actor recently concluded his hosting stint for the 17th season of Kaun Banega Crorepati, continuing his long association with the quiz show.

In films, he was last seen in Kalki 2898 AD, directed by Nag Ashwin. The film also featured Prabhas, Deepika Padukone and Kamal Haasan in key roles.

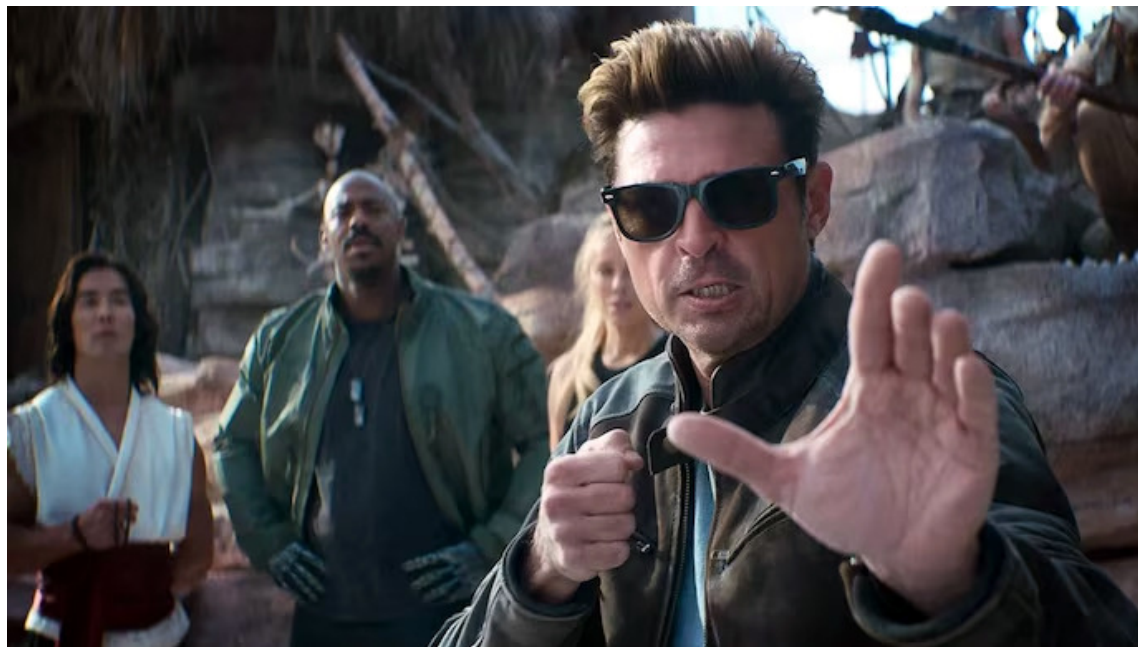
Mortal Kombat II review: Karl Urban's arcade bloodbath is dumb fun done right

The film brings Earthrealm into the long-delayed tournament against Shao Kahn's forces. Leaning fully into camp and carnage, Karl Urban's arcade bloodbath is dumb fun done right. Here is our review.

There are films that aspire to attain prestige, and then there are Mortal Kombat films, where a man can get punched through a portal, sliced in half, set on fire and still somehow find time for a one-liner. Mortal Kombat II understands exactly what franchise it belongs to. Mercifully, it does not pretend otherwise.

Director Simon McQuoid's sequel arrives louder, bloodier and far more self-aware than the 2021 reboot. This time, the film finally delivers what the previous instalment oddly delayed: the actual tournament. The result is a chaotic, occasionally exhausting, but undeniably entertaining spectacle that treats absurdity not as a flaw, but as its entire personality.

Set after the events of the first film, Mortal Kombat II throws Earthrealm into direct conflict with Shao Kahn's (Martyn Ford) expanding Outworld forces. Familiar faces return – Liu Kang (Ludi Lin), Sonya Blade (Jessica McNamee), Jax (Mehcad Brooks), Raiden (Tadanobu Asano) and Scorpion (Hiroyuki Sanada) - while the sequel introduces fan favourites like Kitana (Adeline Rudolph), Jade (Tati Gabrielle) and, most importantly, Johnny Cage, played by Karl Urban. The stakes, naturally, involve the fate of worlds. The solutions, equally naturally, involve breaking bones in increasingly imaginative ways. The film's biggest upgrade is tone. Mortal Kombat II finally embraces the campy excess that made the games iconic in the first place. There are gruesome fatalities, ridiculous dialogue, neon-drenched arenas and enough slow-motion carnage to satisfy fans who grew up memorising finishing moves instead of algebra formulas. And right at the centre of this madness is Karl Urban, who walks into the film like he understands the assignment better than anyone else. His Johnny Cage is washed-up, vain, unserious and deeply entertaining. Urban plays him with the perfect balance of parody and sincerity, never trying too hard to make him cool. The performance works because Cage himself knows he is ridiculous. In a film full of grim-faced warriors dis-



cussing destiny, Urban's self-aware chaos becomes oddly refreshing. Adeline Rudolph's Kitana also leaves a strong impression. The film gives her more emotional weight than characters in this franchise usually receive, and Rudolph manages to ground the fantasy chaos with genuine conviction. Jessica McNamee continues to bring sharpness to Sonya Blade, while Hiroyuki Sanada's Scorpion once again proves that screen presence can often do more than dialogue.

Visually, the sequel is a major improvement over its predecessor. The arenas feel larger, stranger and more alive, almost as if the filmmakers have finally stopped being embarrassed by the video-game origins. The action choreography is slick, brutal and often delightfully insane. One portal fight sequence, in particular, feels ripped straight out of an arcade fever dream in the best possible way. Where the film works best is in its complete commitment to spectacle. Mortal

Kombat was never built on subtlety. This is a universe where people freeze opponents, tear out spines and return from death with minimal explanation. The sequel wisely stops overexplaining and simply starts having fun.

But the film also suffers from the same problem that plagues many video-game adaptations: the story mostly exists to transport characters from one fight scene to another. The emotional arcs are thin, the dialogue swings wildly between intentionally

cheesy and accidentally clunky, and several characters feel less like people and more like selectable avatars waiting on a gaming screen.

The pacing becomes uneven in the second half as well. Once the novelty of the violence settles in, the film occasionally starts resembling a very expensive compilation of boss battles. Some emotional beats arrive abruptly, while others disappear before they can properly land. The film wants you to care about sacrifice and destiny, but its real interest clearly lies in creatively destroying bodies.

Still, there is something almost admirable about Mortal Kombat II's commitment to excess. It does not chase sophistication. It chases entertainment. And for the most part, it succeeds.

This is not high art, nor does it aspire to be. But as a gloriously chaotic midnight-movie experience filled with flying limbs, campy energy and unapologetic arcade madness, Mortal Kombat II delivers enough fun to earn its "Flawless Victory" moment, even if the film itself is far from flawless.

The Rivals of Amziah King trailer: Matthew McConaughey fights to save his family

The first trailer for actor Matthew McConaughey's upcoming crime-drama, *The Rivals of Amziah King*, has been released. Directed by Andrew Patterson, the film features McConaughey as Amziah King, a businessman and musician whose business and family come under threat. The trailer introduces Amziah (McConaughey) as a bluegrass musician living in rural Oklahoma while running a honey-making business. As he reunites with his estranged foster daughter, he finds himself facing new enemies in town.

The film marks McConaughey's return to acting after a six-year hiatus. Alongside McConaughey, the cast includes Angelina LookingGlass, Kurt Russell, Scott Shepherd, Cole Sprouse, Tony Revolori and Rob Morgan. They play the friends, rivals and competitors

drawn into the conflict around Amziah's booming honey business. The film's official synopsis reads: "Set within the deep backwoods of rural Oklahoma, the



film follows the charismatic and musically gifted Amziah King (McConaughey) who herds a bluegrass-playing band of misfits while overseeing the premier honey-making operation in town. When Amziah's estranged foster daughter (Angelina LookingGlass)

unexpectedly returns, he leaps at the possibility to renew connection and creating a family business. But the honey game is ruthless, and Amziah's rivals threaten to destroy everything he has built." *The Rivals of Amziah King* is written and directed by Patterson, whose first film, *The Vast of Night*, received three nominations at the 2021 Critics' Choice Super Awards. The crime-drama will be released in theatres in a limited capacity on August 14, 2026. Black Bear Pictures will distribute the film in a wide release on August 21, 2026.

McConaughey is known for the film, *Dallas Buyers Club*. He won the Best Actor award at the 86th Academy Awards for his role in the film. The actor also did a voice cameo in the 2024 Marvel superhero film, *Deadpool And Wolverine*.