

# The South Asian Insider

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# A Truce That Ends Nothing?

Inside the Fragile U.S.-Iran Deal Drawing Cries of 'Frozen Conflict'-and 'Nightmare' in Israel

*After 107 days of war that killed Iran's supreme leader, shut down a fifth of the world's oil supply and rattled markets from Mumbai to Manhattan, Washington and Tehran have struck an interim truce. Analysts are already calling it a prelude to permanent stalemate, while a furious Israeli public says Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been sidelined and humiliated by his own closest ally.*



**By Staff Correspondent**

**NEW YORK** — It took 107 days, the death of a sitting Iranian supreme leader, the closure of one of the world's most important shipping lanes and an oil shock that briefly sent crude toward \$120 a barrel. On Sunday night, President Trump declared it over. "Ships of the World, start your engines," he wrote on Truth Social, announcing that the United States and Iran had reached an interim deal to end their war, reopen the Strait of Hormuz and lift the U.S. naval blockade choking Iranian shipping.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose government helped mediate alongside Qatar, said the two sides had declared an immediate and permanent end to military operations "on all fronts, including in Lebanon." A formal signing ceremony is scheduled for Friday in Geneva, Switzerland, after the memorandum of understanding was exchanged electronically

over the weekend. Iran, notably, had not formally confirmed by Monday that it considers the deal in effect.

It is, on paper, the biggest diplomatic breakthrough of a war that few in Washington or New Delhi predicted would last this long, or cost this much. But almost as soon as the ink was announced, the deal itself became a Rorschach test: hailed by the Trump administration as a historic win, dismissed by independent analysts as a way station to permanent low-grade conflict, and denounced across the Israeli political spectrum as a betrayal that has left Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu more politically exposed than at any point in his career.

## **A WAR THAT REWROTE THE REGION**

The conflict began on February 28, 2026, when U.S. and Israeli forces carried out nearly 900 strikes in twelve hours under the American operational code name Epic Fury, targeting Iranian

missile sites, air defenses, military infrastructure and senior leadership. The opening wave killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who had led Iran since 1989, along with dozens of military and security officials. A missile strike on a compound near a naval base in Minab, in southern Iran, also killed roughly 170 people, many of them schoolgirls, in one of the war's most disputed and widely condemned incidents.

Iran responded within hours with missile and drone strikes on Israel, U.S. military installations and energy infrastructure across the Gulf, including tankers transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes. Iran's leadership, meanwhile, scrambled to fill an unprecedented vacuum. The Assembly of Experts named Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, as the country's third

supreme leader on March 8. Ali Larijani, the veteran security official who had been quietly designated to run day-to-day decisions in case of exactly this scenario, was himself assassinated on March 17 and replaced as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council by Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr. Hezbollah and the Houthi movement both joined the fighting against Israel within weeks, widening what began as a bilateral strike campaign into a multi-front regional war.

By the time the guns mostly fell silent, the human and economic toll was staggering. The Iran Human Rights Activists News Agency has estimated more than 650 people killed and over 2,000 wounded inside Iran; Israel recorded 28 dead and more than 4,200 injured from Iranian strikes, according to public casualty tallies. Brent crude, which traded near \$70 a barrel before the war, spiked to nearly \$120 in early March — a four-year high — as

Hormuz traffic collapsed and Gulf producers curbed output. U.S. gasoline prices were forecast at the time to peak near \$4.30 a gallon.

## **THE FINE PRINT**

The memorandum announced Sunday extends the ceasefire by 60 days, during which U.S. and Iranian negotiators are meant to settle the far harder technical questions: how much of Iran's highly enriched uranium gets downblended, how its nuclear program will be monitored and frozen going forward, and how much of the promised sanctions relief and access to frozen Iranian funds will actually materialize. American officials have linked that relief explicitly to Iranian compliance, raising the prospect, openly acknowledged by U.S. negotiators, that the war could end with its central nuclear dispute simply left unresolved. Markets reacted immediately. Brent crude fell to roughly \$83 a barrel Monday, its lowest level in about three months, and U.S.



crude settled near \$80.75, down close to 5 percent. But the celebration came with an asterisk: Iranian state media, via the Tasnim news agency, reported that Hormuz would remain toll-free for only 60 days, after which Iran and Oman would jointly administer the strait — a detail that appears nowhere in the American framing of the deal. Vice President JD Vance, asked about the discrepancy, told CNBC that the U.S. expects toll-free passage to continue over the long term. Whether Washington and Tehran are reading the same memorandum is, at this early stage, an open question.

#### WHY ANALYSTS ARE ALREADY CALLING IT A “FROZEN CONFLICT”

Even before this week’s announcement, regional analysts had concluded that a clean resolution was unlikely. Writing for *The Conversation* and presented through the University of New South Wales, one set of Middle East scholars argued the war was always more likely to settle into what conflict researchers call a frozen conflict: an unresolved standoff that persists below the threshold of full combat, punctuated by periodic flare-ups, similar in structure to the long-running India-Pakistan and North-South Korea standoffs, or the two-decade war the United States fought against the Taliban before withdrawing from Afghanistan.

Al Jazeera, examining the same question, noted that Israel has long managed unresolved conflicts with Hamas and Hezbollah through a strategy it calls “mowing the grass” — alternating quiet periods with periodic strikes rather than seeking a final settlement. Applying that approach to a state actor with Iran’s missile and drone reach, one analyst cautioned, carries far higher risk than mowing the grass in Gaza or Lebanon, since Tehran retains the capacity to retaliate against Gulf states and American shipping each time it happens. The underlying dispute that scuttled an earlier round of U.S.-Iran talks in Islamabad in April — Iran’s insistence on what it calls its inalienable right to enrich uranium for civilian purposes, against

Washington’s demand that enrichment capacity be eliminated — does not appear to have been resolved in this week’s memorandum. It has only been given a 60-day deadline.

#### NETANYAHU’S “NIGHTMARE”

If the deal’s durability is an open question abroad, its domestic politics in Israel are not. Israelis across the political spectrum reacted with fury on Monday, directing most of it at Netanyahu. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a longtime rival, said on Israeli public broadcasting that the country was paying for what he called Netanyahu’s hubris. “Iran emerged stronger; Israel emerged weaker,” Barak said, calling the outcome a strategic failure that belonged to Netanyahu alone. Opposition leader Yair Lapid, who is expected to challenge Netanyahu in elections that must be held before the end of October, told the Knesset the prime minister now faces a choice between a damaging rupture with Israel’s most important ally or a humiliating surrender of Israeli interests. The friction was not limited to Netanyahu’s rivals. President Trump himself, according to reporting from the BBC, used unusually blunt and profanity-laced language to criticize Netanyahu’s judgment after Israel struck Hezbollah targets in Beirut just hours before the deal was expected to be finalized Sunday — a strike that nearly derailed the agreement and prompted Iranian threats to walk away. Within Netanyahu’s own governing coalition, far-right ministers pushed back just as hard from the opposite direction. “Trump’s agreement does not bind us,” Israel’s far-right national security minister said, a position some hawkish coalition members have used to argue Israel should continue its Lebanon campaign regardless of the cost to the U.S.-brokered truce. For his part, Netanyahu told reporters Monday that he would keep working to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon “with an agreement, without an agreement.” Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro, now a fellow at the Atlantic Council, has pointed to a structural

vulnerability in Netanyahu’s position: because the ceasefire formally covers the Lebanon front, a single rocket fired across the border by Hezbollah could be enough to reignite domestic pressure on Netanyahu to resume strikes there — pressure he would find difficult to resist heading into an election year, and one that would hand Hezbollah, and by extension Iran, outsized influence over whether the broader truce survives.

#### WHAT COULD BREAK IT: AN ANALYSIS

*The following section reflects the editorial board’s own analysis of the public terms and political dynamics described above, not confirmed reporting of events that have not yet occurred.*

Several fault lines stand out. The first is the Hormuz timeline itself: if Iran’s 60-day toll-free window and Washington’s 60-day nuclear-talks deadline both expire around the same week in mid-August, any disagreement over the strait’s long-term administration could collide directly with the most sensitive phase of the nuclear negotiations, rather than being resolved separately and at lower stakes. The second is Lebanon, where the ceasefire’s durability rests less on Washington and Tehran than on Hezbollah and an Israeli government under domestic pressure to respond to any provocation, however small. The third is succession instability inside Iran itself: with a young, newly installed supreme leader and a security apparatus that has already lost one wartime steward to assassination, it remains unclear which Iranian institution can credibly guarantee that commitments made this month will hold for the two months it will take to negotiate the details. The fourth is Israel’s own election calendar, due to conclude before November, which gives Netanyahu and his rivals a powerful incentive to use the deal — or its collapse — as a campaign issue rather than a settled

fact. None of this guarantees the truce fails. It does suggest the analysts calling this a frozen conflict, rather than a peace deal, are arguing from more than pessimism alone.

#### WHY THIS MATTERS FOR SOUTH ASIAN HOUSEHOLDS

For readers of this publication, the more immediate consequences may be measured in rupees rather than rhetoric. India routes roughly 40 percent of its crude oil imports and the large majority of its liquefied natural gas through the Strait of Hormuz, and the months-long disruption had already pushed up India’s import bill, added to inflation and weighed on the rupee, which had weakened past 95 to the dollar during the worst of the crisis. On Monday, as Brent slid toward \$83 a barrel, the rupee strengthened roughly 0.7 percent in a single session, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi publicly welcomed the agreement and expressed hope it would bring regional stability. Indian officials and trade economists have estimated that sustained lower oil prices could narrow the country’s current account deficit by close to \$15 billion and ease pressure on more than 400 million middle-class households sensitive to fuel costs, though they caution global energy markets typically take months to fully normalize even after a deal like this one holds. The U.S. Treasury, for its part, had already granted India a temporary, 30-day sanctions waiver during the conflict to keep Russian oil shipments stranded near the Gulf moving, a measure Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent described as a deliberate short-term fix rather than a lasting change in policy.

*What happens next is straightforward, at least on the calendar: technical talks this week, a formal signing in Geneva on Friday, and a 60-day clock that starts the moment the ink dries. What happens after that is, by the admission of officials on both sides, considerably less certain.*

# Twenty Million Backdoors: How Knockoff Gadgets Are Turning U.S. Homes Into Unwitting Cybercrime Hubs

*Federal investigators, independent researchers and now The Wall Street Journal are converging on the same alarming finding: bargain streaming boxes and off-brand electronics sold through online marketplaces are quietly recruiting American households — including immigrant families seeking cheap access to overseas television — into sprawling criminal proxy networks.*

By Staff Correspondent

NEW YORK — Somewhere in a basement, a kids' playroom or a grandparent's living room, a no-name Android streaming box bought for \$25 to catch a cricket match or a Punjabi serial from home may be quietly doing something its owner never agreed to: renting out the family's internet connection to criminals on the other side of the world.

That is the unsettling picture emerging from a wave of new research and a Wall Street Journal investigation published this month, which found that millions of everyday consumer devices — especially knockoff electronics purchased through online marketplaces — have been infected with what cybersecurity researchers call residential proxy malware. The software quietly converts a home network into a backdoor that can be rented out to



anyone, including hackers, fraud rings and, increasingly, far larger criminal operations. The Digital Citizens Alliance, a Washington-based consumer-safety nonprofit, estimates that 20 million such backdoors are now sitting inside American homes.

The discovery is not an isolated alarm. It lands amid a yearlong string of law-enforcement disruptions, corporate lawsuits and threat-intelligence reports describing a consumer-electronics supply chain in which cut-rate hardware, sold under throwaway brand names on major e-commerce platforms, has become one of the most efficient on-ramps for organized cybercrime anywhere in the world.

**WHY A "BACKDOOR" IS WORTH RENTING**

Residential proxy networks are not new. They have a legitimate commercial life selling businesses access to ordinary consumer IP addresses for tasks like price comparison and ad verification. The trouble, researchers say, is that the very quality that makes those services valuable — a real, residential-looking IP address rather than an anonymous server — is also exactly what criminals want when they need traffic that doesn't look malicious. Because an attack appears to originate from an ordinary household rather than a data center or VPN, automated security systems are far less likely to flag or block it, the Dutch government's National Cyber Security Centre has explained, which is precisely what makes the schemes so durable.

**A SUPPLY CHAIN BUILT ON CHEAP HARDWARE**

Federal investigators have spent more than two years tracing the problem to its source: the bargain end of the consumer-electronics market. The pattern was first exposed in 2023, when researchers found a low-cost Android TV box known as the T95 — sold on Amazon — shipping with malware built in before it ever reached a customer's home. That campaign, dubbed BadBox, evolved into BadBox 2.0, which within two years had compromised more than a million smart TVs, streaming boxes, tablets, projectors and other internet-connected devices across more than 220 countries, according to the FBI and the threat-intelligence firm HUMAN Security. The bureau, working with Google, Trend Micro and the Shadowserver Foundation, disrupted communications between roughly half a million infected devices and their controllers last year — but investigators say newly compromised hardware keeps reaching store shelves faster than it can be intercepted. One researcher who helped expose the original scheme told trade press that a third version, "BadBox 3," is likely already taking shape.

In March, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center issued a fresh public-safety advisory describing how criminals compromise devices — including TV streaming boxes, digital picture frames and even aftermarket vehicle infotainment systems — either by configuring the malware



before a customer ever buys the product, or by hiding it inside the free movies, sports streams, pirated software and unofficial app stores that owners later install themselves. Once installed, the bureau warned, a single device can become one of millions of access points that criminals sell or give away for fraud, attacks and other illegal activity.

A second, newer botnet named Kimwolf has compounded the problem since last fall. Threat-intelligence researchers at XLab and Synthient say Kimwolf has compromised more than 2 million Android devices, largely TV boxes and streaming sticks, by scanning residential proxy networks for machines with an exposed remote-debugging service and breaking in from there — meaning the infection often travels through a proxy network and back out into the very home networks hosting it. Investigators have traced a significant share of Kimwolf's growth to IPIDEA, a China-based service researchers describe as the world's largest residential proxy provider. The malware family Kimwolf descends from, known as Aisuru, was responsible for the largest distributed denial-of-service attack ever publicly recorded — measured by Cloudflare at nearly 30 terabits of data per second.

#### A CROWDED YEAR OF TAKEDOWNS — AND A WHACK-A-MOLE PROBLEM

Law enforcement has not stood still. Google's Threat Intelligence Group moved against IPIDEA's infrastructure in January, after finding that more than 550 distinct threat groups had used its exit nodes in a single week, and that many of the apps funneling devices into the network never disclosed it to users. Dutch police announced in late May that they had dismantled a botnet of roughly 17 million devices tied to the proxy service Asocks. The actions echo a 2022 Justice Department operation that dismantled RSOCKS, a Russian-run proxy service that had compromised millions of devices worldwide and charged customers as little as \$30 a day for access to 2,000 hijacked machines.

Yet the takedowns illustrate the limits of enforcement as much as its reach. The threat-intelligence firm GreyNoise found that after the IPIDEA disruption cut the network's capacity by roughly 40 percent, related attack traffic fell sharply for a few months — only for operators to begin replacing the lost residential capacity with rented data-center servers, preserving

much of their reach. The network-security firm Infoblox separately reported that monthly internet lookups tied to residential proxy services climbed about 25 percent over the past year, topping 500 billion by this spring, and that more than 65 percent of its corporate customers had unknowingly generated traffic connected to proxy networks somewhere on their own systems.

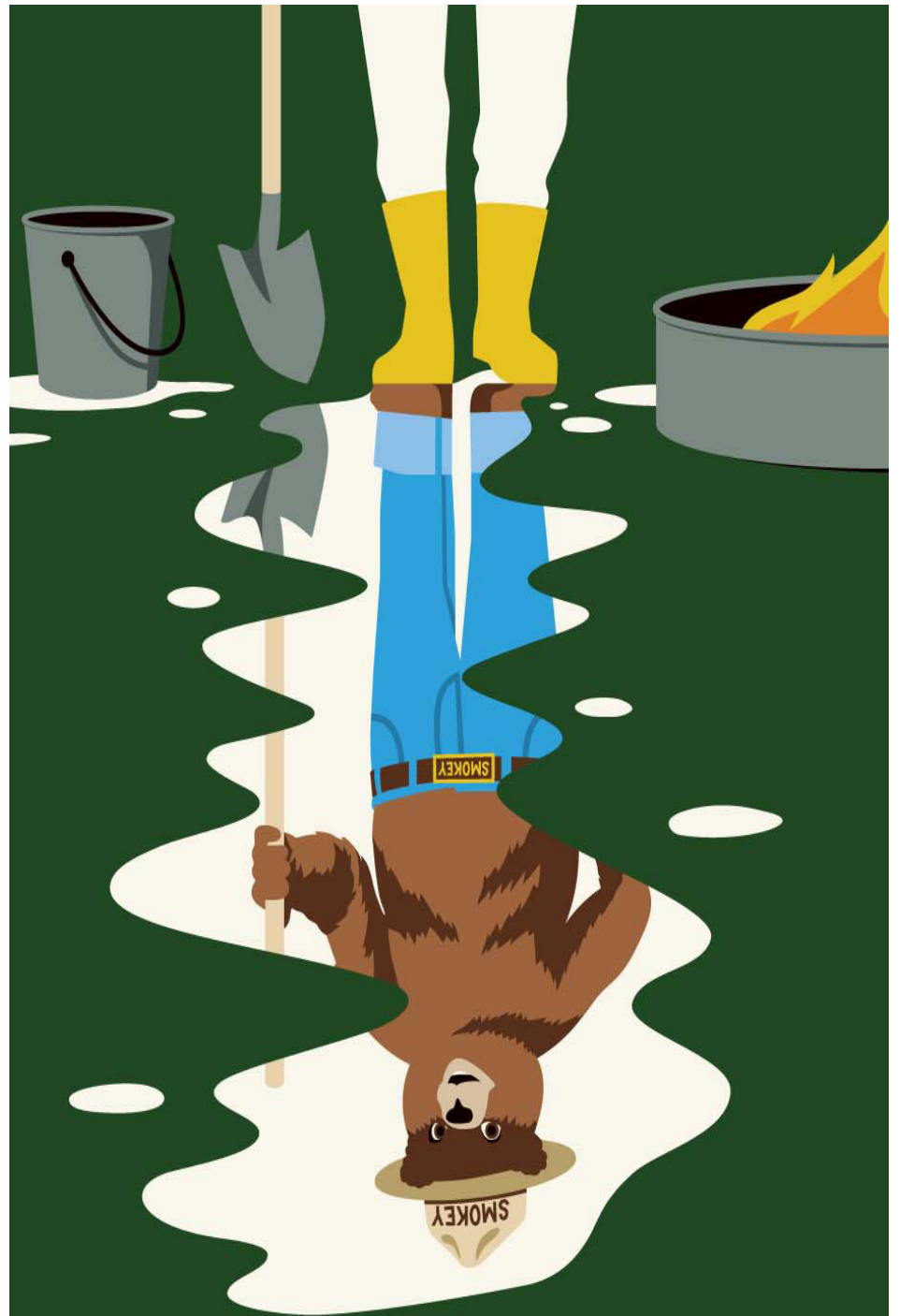
#### WHY THIS HITS HOME FOR DIASPORA FAMILIES

The FBI's advisory singles out a purchasing pattern with particular resonance for immigrant households, including many in the South Asian diaspora: devices marketed as "unlocked," pre-loaded with unofficial streaming apps, or capable of pulling in free sports broadcasts, overseas channels and pirated movies at no subscription cost. Budget Android boxes promising free access to cricket, Bollywood and South Asian satellite programming have circulated for years through online marketplaces, neighborhood electronics shops and word of mouth — precisely the category of device the bureau warns is most likely to arrive compromised, or to become compromised the moment a user installs an unofficial app to unlock that "free" content. Researchers caution there is no foolproof way to tell a clean device from a compromised one simply by looking at it; the FBI instead urges buyers to favor devices certified under Google's Play Protect program and to avoid sideloading apps from outside official app stores.

#### WHAT TO WATCH FOR

The bureau and private researchers point to a consistent set of warning signs: a device that runs hot or sluggishly without explanation, unexplained spikes in data usage, unfamiliar apps or app stores appearing on a TV box or tablet, and security features such as Google Play Protect mysteriously switching off on their own. Officials recommend keeping device firmware updated, buying only from manufacturers offering verifiable, certified Android builds, and routing home networks through equipment capable of flagging unusual outbound traffic. Consumers who suspect a device has been compromised can file a report with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov).

This report will be updated as the FBI, Google and independent researchers continue to track the scope of the BadBox 2.0 and Kimwolf botnets.



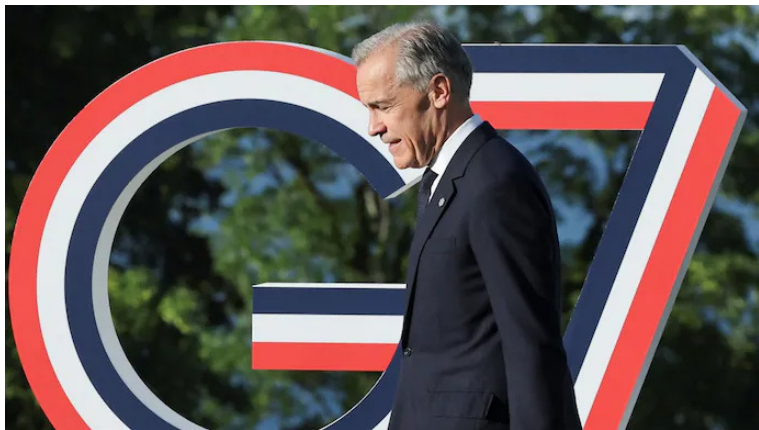
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# G7 no longer runs the world: Canada PM says India's presence shows new world order

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said this year's summit shows a recognition that global world order is changing and that countries outside the G7 have an increasingly important role in shaping international issues.



partners which bring a broader perspective and a broader element of the solution." "It's a recognition that the G7, if it ever did run the world, no longer runs the world or pretends to," he said. The Canadian PM noted that alongside G7 members, the summit will include leaders from India, Brazil, Egypt, Kenya and several Gulf nations. According to him, these countries will bring a wider range of perspectives to discussions on pressing global challenges.

Carney said the gathering could help define elements of a new international order at a time when geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and technological disruption are reshaping global affairs. He made the remarks ahead of the ongoing G7 Summit in France during his six-day visit to Europe. The G7 comprises Canada, France, Germany, Italy,

Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. **INDIA'S RISING GLOBAL INFLUENCE**

India's participation continues a long-running engagement with the forum despite not being a member of the grouping. Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in the French city of Evian on Tuesday for a two-day visit to attend the summit.

This year marks PM Modi's seventh consecutive appearance at the G7 Summit and India's 13th participation overall. The repeated invitations are a recognition of India's growing influence in global affairs and its role in addressing issues ranging from economic growth and climate action to security and development.

The summit also carries significance for New Delhi as PM Modi is expected to highlight the concerns and priorities of

developing nations, often referred to as the Global South. India has increasingly positioned itself as a voice for emerging economies and developing countries on issues such as climate finance, food security, energy access and sustainable development.

## WORLD LEADERS GATHER IN EVIAN

The summit brought together several of the world's most influential political leaders. Among those attending are US President Donald Trump, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The European Union is being represented by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa.

**By Staff Correspondent**

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said the Group of Seven (G7) no longer runs the world, describing India's participation in the summit as a reflection of a changing global order. Speaking at Trinity College Dublin, Carney said today's global challenges can no longer be addressed by a small group of advanced economies alone.

Carney said this year's summit shows a recognition that global governance is changing and that countries outside the G7 have an increasingly important role in shaping international issues. "More than half the meeting will include so-called outreach partners -- particularly India, the leaders of India, the leaders of Brazil, the Gulf states as well, the leader of Kenya, will be there. So a series of other

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# An Indian-Origin Sikh, A Dead Teenager: The Murder That Has Set Britain On Fire

The horrific details came to light last week when a court sentenced the 23-year-old Vickrum Digwa, a British-born man of Indian Sikh heritage, to life imprisonment.

By Staff Correspondent

Britain is witnessing a violent surge in anti-immigration sentiment manifesting in arson and pitched battles with the police. It is fuelled by a combination of high-profile violent crimes, public anxiety over migration and increasingly vocal interventions from far-right politicians, activists and influential figures on both sides of the Atlantic. Recent incidents involving non-White suspects have provided fresh ammunition to anti-immigration campaigners, even though one of the accused was born and raised in Britain while another had been granted the legal right to remain in the country indefinitely. Together, the cases have reignited a fierce debate about immigration, policing, national identity and the future direction of British society. Britain is boiling

## The Violence Of Last Week

On a cold December night in Southampton, England, 18-year-old Henry Nowak was walking home alone after spending the evening with friends when he encountered Vickrum Digwa, who was, as court revealed, carrying ceremonial blades associated with the Nihang Sikh tradition. After noticing one of the weapons, Nowak began filming Digwa on his phone. What started as a brief exchange between two strangers quickly turned deadly. Digwa stabbed the teenager four times, including a fatal wound to the chest. As he lay bleeding on the pavement, Nowak repeatedly told the police, "I have been stabbed. I can't breathe". Yet in a scene that would later shock Britain and the world, officers initially treated him as a suspect rather than a victim, handcuffing him as his life ebbed away. Officers did not respond to his cries and instead kept taunting him. Within minutes, he died from his injuries.

The horrific details came to light last week when a court sentenced the 23-year-old Vickrum Digwa, a British-born man of Indian Sikh heritage, to life imprisonment. It outraged everyone. One just couldn't believe the callousness of the policemen involved.

## Sikhs Facing Ugly Threats

The case also triggered an ugly backlash against ordinary Sikhs. Just a few days after Digwa was



jailed, a Sikh priest from his former Southampton gurdwara was assaulted while shopping and was subjected to racial abuse. Elderly and vulnerable Sikhs have since been advised to stay indoors as fears of reprisals have grown by leaps and bounds.

Nigel Farage's Reform UK and other critics pointed to the incident as evidence of what they describe as "two-tier policing", the belief that police and public institutions apply different standards depending on race, religion or political sensitivities. Whether one accepts that argument or not, the phrase has gained traction among sections of the British public who feel increasingly alienated from mainstream institutions. It is a sentiment that has become fertile ground for populist movements across Europe and the US.

The incident reminded many of George Floyd, whose repeated cries of "I can't breathe" went unheeded.

Elon Musk and others immediately raised their voices, saying that the treatment of Henry Nowak by British police in his final moments raised similar questions about institutional failure and deserved comparable scrutiny. US Vice-President JD Vance was also quick to comment, linking the killing to what he called the "mass invasion of migrants". Writing on X, Vance said Nowak had died "the same way a civilisation dies: abandoned and handcuffed by

authorities who neither trusted nor cared for him", adding that the "only response" was "righteous anger".

## The Difference

It is worth noting that Floyd died at the hands of a police officer, whereas Nowak was murdered by a private individual. But no one can deny that the treatment of both men by police in their final moments bears striking similarities. That is why, for many on the political right, both cases have become symbols of a broader debate about whether public institutions apply equal standards of justice, sympathy and accountability to all victims. The murder of Henry Nowak in Southampton should, in normal circumstances, have remained what it fundamentally was: a tragic criminal case involving a young man whose life was cut short in a senseless act of violence. Instead, it has become the latest front in a widening transatlantic political battle over immigration, policing, race, free speech and national identity. In the process, a grieving family has found itself at the centre of an argument that stretches far beyond Britain and increasingly defines relations between Donald Trump's America and Europe's political establishment. Before jailing Digwa, the court rejected his claims that he had been racially abused and had acted in self-defence, convicting him of murder and sentencing him to life imprisonment. Yet the case snowballed into a huge

controversy after the police bodycam footage showed officers handcuffing the dying teenager while initially appearing to accept claims that Digwa was the victim of a racist attack. The footage shocked many Britons and raised uncomfortable questions about police judgment and too much political correctness.

## Vance And Musk Outraged

The intervention of influential American voices transformed the case from a domestic controversy into an international one. US Vice-President JD Vance linked the killing to what he described as Europe's "mass invasion of migrants". Elon Musk accused British authorities and parts of the media of ignoring the case and drew comparisons with the extensive coverage given to the death of George Floyd in the United States. For many conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic, the image of a dying teenager being handcuffed by police became symbolic of a broader institutional failure.

The irony, however, is difficult to disregard. Digwa was not a recently arrived migrant. He was born and raised in Britain. Vance's wife is of Indian origin. Donald Trump's current and former wives are immigrants. Musk himself was born in South Africa before becoming an American citizen. Yet immigration has become the organising political issue around which much of the modern populist right now defines itself.

For its supporters, the issue is not merely migration but the belief that Western elites have become detached from public concerns about crime, integration and national identity.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government responded forcefully. Downing Street accused outside voices of exploiting a family tragedy and attempting to inflame tensions and divide British society. His ministers insisted that Britain would not be allowed to import America's highly polarised culture-war politics. Yet his government faces a difficult challenge. Public concern about immigration is genuine and widespread. Net migration remains far higher than many voters expected. Trust in political institutions has weakened. The result is that attempts to dismiss such debates often end up strengthening those who claim legitimate concerns are being ignored.

## Europe Under Pressure

The Henry Nowak case has landed in the middle of a much bigger argument that has been building across Europe for the past few years. From Britain and Germany to France, the Netherlands and Sweden, anti-immigration parties have gained support by arguing that mainstream politicians have lost control of borders and failed to address the social consequences of large-scale migration. Their opponents counter that crime involving migrants is routinely exploited to stigmatise entire communities and inflame public fears.

Starmer's challenge is not confined to Westminster. Across Britain, tensions over immigration have increasingly spilled onto the streets. In the last few days, Belfast witnessed nights of bloody violence over the stabbing of local teenager Stephen Ogilvy by a Sudanese immigrant. Vehicles and homes were set on fire, police came under attack and immigrants were targeted. Authorities say the suspect had been granted permanent residence in the UK nearly three years earlier. Just days before that, Southampton itself witnessed violent protests following the sentencing of Vickrum Digwa. Eleven police officers were injured as

demonstrators clashed with police, fuelled by anger over the treatment of Henry Nowak in his final moments and the perception that authorities had instinctively believed his killer's version of events.

Alarming, these incidents are part of a wider pattern. In May, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in London for a "Unite the Kingdom" rally led by anti-immigration activist Tommy Robinson, who urged supporters to prepare for what he called the "Battle of Britain". The rally reflected a growing sense among many voters that concerns over immigration, crime and social cohesion are not being adequately addressed by mainstream political parties. Whether justified or not, such sentiments have become increasingly influential in British politics. Indeed Britain has seen it all in recent times. In late 2024, the country was rocked by unrest following the Southport murders, in which three young girls were killed in an attack that horrified the nation. False rumours rapidly spread online claiming the suspect was a recently arrived asylum seeker. Although those claims later proved untrue, they triggered violent protests and riots in several towns and cities. The disturbances exposed a deep reservoir of public frustration over immigration and trust in institutions, frustrations that continue to shape political debate today.

Musk's Criticism of Britain

It was against this backdrop that Elon Musk and other American conservative figures increasingly turned their attention towards Britain. Musk repeatedly commented on the Southport unrest and at one stage suggested that "civil war is inevitable". The remarks prompted furious criticism from ministers who accused him of amplifying misinformation and deepening social divisions. To his supporters, however, Musk was merely articulating concerns that many ordinary people already felt but believed were being ignored by political elites.

Germany offers another revealing example. Following a series of attacks involving asylum seekers and migrants, immigration has become one of the most contentious issues in German politics. Musk openly endorsed the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany party and even addressed one of its campaign events by video link. Needless to say, German leaders reacted with alarm, accusing Musk of attempting to influence domestic politics. Yet Musk's support reflected a broader trend. Across Europe, populist parties increasingly see themselves as part of an international movement stretching from Washington to Budapest, Rome, Amsterdam and Berlin.

America's Culture War

European leaders view these developments with growing concern. Many believe an ecosystem of American commentators, influencers, activists and wealthy donors is helping amplify nationalist and anti-establishment movements across the continent. Some politicians go further and allege, without solid proof, that financial and media networks sympathetic to Trump's populist agenda are strengthening far-right parties in Europe. For European governments, the danger lies not merely in criticism from America but in the gradual import of America's political culture. European politics has traditionally been less polarised than that of the US. There have always been divisions, but they were often moderated by stronger political institutions, public broadcasters and a greater willingness to seek consensus. Many European leaders now fear that social media has eroded those buffers. Every crime, controversy or political dispute risks becoming another battlefield in an endless culture war.

Divided From Within

The timing could hardly be worse. Relations between Trump's America and Europe are already strained over NATO spending, Ukraine, Russia, trade policy and the Middle East. Immigration has now emerged as another source of

friction. What began as disagreements over border control and asylum policy increasingly reflects deeper differences about identity, democracy and the role of the state. To many European leaders, the American right is encouraging a style of politics that thrives on outrage and division. To many conservatives, Europe is simply refusing to confront uncomfortable realities, the main one being the influx of migrants. The tragedy of Henry Nowak may ultimately fade from the headlines. The larger argument almost certainly will not. It will soon find another trigger. What is unfolding is not merely a debate about one murder, or one police force or one government's response. It is a struggle over competing visions of Western society itself. One side believes political elites have ignored legitimate concerns about immigration, crime and cultural change for too long. The other fears that populists are exploiting individual tragedies to undermine social cohesion and democratic institutions. Neither side is likely to retreat. And that is why a fatal encounter on a Southampton street has become something far bigger than a criminal case. It has become a window into the growing ideological divide between Trump's America and Europe's political mainstream, a divide that is shaping politics across the Western world.

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## 2 Indian-Origin Students Killed After Being Swept Into Ocean While Resting On Beach In California



enforcement and rescue agencies responded and eight rescue swimmers entered the water in an effort to save the women. Both Nair and Sran were found alive and pulled from the ocean. One of the victims was airlifted by a Cal Fire helicopter to Yellow Bank Beach before being transported to a local hospital. The other was brought ashore at Panther Beach and carried to an ambulance.

Despite rescue efforts, Nair died shortly after being taken out from the water. Sran remained in critical condition at a local hospital before she also died on Saturday, June 13.

The tragedy has drawn attention to the dangers of the beach's keyhole area, which officials say can become hazardous when tides rise unexpectedly.

(By Our Staff Reporter) both from Fremont. The two Authorities in California have identified two Indian-origin college students who died after being swept into the ocean at Bonny Doon Beach, an area known for dangerous tides and powerful waves. The victims were Harshita Nair, 21, and Mahial Sran, 20, friends were reportedly resting near a keyhole rock formation at the beach on Wednesday, June 10, when rising tides swept them into the water. Emergency responders were alerted shortly before 5 p.m. after a witness called 911. Multiple law

## Jaishankar Lodges Protest With Rubio Over Sailors' Deaths

(By Our Staff Reporter NEW DELHI / WASHINGTON, D.C.-External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and lodged a strong protest following a U.S. Navy strike in the Gulf of Oman that killed three Indian mariners. Addressing the conversation on social media, Jaishankar wrote: "Spoke to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. I reiterated India's strong protest at the attacks by the US Navy in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners. Such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified." According to a U.S. State Department readout of the call, Rubio stressed that all commercial vessels operating in the Strait of Hormuz should immediately comply with orders issued by U.S. forces. The statement said Rubio underscored that violations of the U.S. blockade and the illicit transport of Iranian oil would not be tolerated as American forces seek to uphold

security in the strategic waterway. The diplomatic exchange came amid mounting tensions in the region following a U.S. strike on the Palau-flagged oil tanker 'Settebello' in the Gulf of Oman. The vessel was carrying 28 crew members, including 24 Indian nationals. According to Indian authorities, 21 Indian sailors were rescued, while three crew members were later confirmed dead. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said a U.S. aircraft fired on the vessel after it allegedly repeatedly failed to comply with instructions from American forces and was attempting to transport Iranian oil in violation of an ongoing U.S. blockade. Following the incident, the Ministry of External Affairs summoned U.S. Charge d'Affaires Jason Meeks for the second time in a week and lodged a formal protest over what it described as continuing attacks by U.S. naval forces on commercial vessels carrying Indian sailors in the Gulf of Oman.

## U.S. Lawmakers Denounce Indian Flag Tearing In Texas

(By Our Staff Reporter WASHINGTON, D.C. – Six Indian American members of the U.S. House of Representatives have strongly condemned the tearing of an Indian flag during an immigration-related protest outside Frisco City Hall in Texas and expressed solidarity with Indian Americans. Democratic Representatives Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, Ami Bera of California, Pramila Jayapal of Washington, Ro Khanna of California, Shri Thanedar of Michigan and Suhas Subramanyam of Virginia issued a joint statement after a demonstrator tore the Indian flag during a protest that included anti-India chants and rhetoric.

"We strongly support the constitutional right to freedom of expression for all Americans. At the same time, we condemn the tearing of an Indian flag outside Frisco City Hall alongside hateful anti-India rhetoric, which

continues to fuel anti-Indian violence and xenophobia. Acts of hate and intimidation targeting any community are unacceptable and have no place in our country," the lawmakers said. "The Indian American community is an important part of our nation and deserves to feel safe and respected. As Indian Americans and South Asian Americans face harassment, xenophobia and hateful rhetoric, leaders must speak clearly: hate targeting any community cannot be tolerated or ignored," the statement said. The members of Congress also reaffirmed their support for Indian Americans in Texas and across the United States. "We stand in solidarity with the Indian American community in Frisco and across the country. Everyone deserves to live with dignity and safety, free from fear, harassment and discrimination," they said.

## Aisha Wahab Leads Race For Vacant California Congressional Seat

(By Our Staff Reporter California state Senator Aisha Wahab emerged as the leading candidate in a special election to fill the vacant congressional seat left by former U.S. Representative Eric Swalwell, but unofficial results showed she fell short of securing an outright victory.

Complete but unofficial results released Tuesday, June 16, by the Alameda County Registrar of Voters showed Wahab receiving 45,380 votes, or 42.37% of the total.

Under election rules, a candidate must win more than 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff.

The final outcome remains uncertain as election officials continue to count and verify ballots. Results will be certified by June 25.

If Wahab does not reach the required majority, she will advance to a runoff election scheduled for August 18 against the next-highest vote-getter. Based on the latest results, BART Board Director and former Dublin Mayor Melissa Hernandez is currently in second place with 17,848 votes, or 16.66%. Indian-origin Rakhi Israni Singh is close behind with 14,160 votes, representing 13.22% of the vote. The special election was called after Swalwell resigned from Congress in April.



The Democrat, who represented California's 14th Congressional District since 2013, stepped down amid allegations of sexual assault. Swalwell, however, has denied all allegations. The winner of the current special election will serve only until January. The district's regular congressional election was held on June 2. If no candidate secures a majority in that contest, the top two candidates will move on to a November 3 runoff. As a result, residents of the district could end up voting as many as four times within six months to select one member of Congress if neither election produces a majority winner. California's 14th Congressional District is located in Alameda County and includes Hayward, Pleasanton, Livermore, Union City, Castro Valley, and parts of Dublin and Fremont.

## 24-Year-Old Indian Among 12 Killed In Missouri Skydiving Plane Crash

(By Our Staff Reporter A young Indian technology professional was among 12 people killed when a skydiving aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff in Missouri on Sunday, June 14, authorities have confirmed. The victim was identified as 24-year-old Sai Karthik Varma Datla, who was the only Indian national on board the aircraft that went down near Butler Memorial Airport in Bates County, about 80 miles south of Kansas City. Datla was a technology professional

cloud migration, automation and software deployment projects. The aircraft involved in the crash was a 2010 Pacific Aerospace 750XL, a single-engine turboprop



based in the Kansas City metropolitan area. According to his LinkedIn profile, he held a master's degree in computer science from the University of Central Missouri and worked in the healthcare technology sector. He was employed with AdventHealth and had previously worked for Capgemini. His professional experience included

plane commonly used for skydiving operations. Federal investigators said the plane was carrying a pilot and 11 skydivers when it crashed shortly before 11:30 a.m. All 12 people on board were killed. The United States Parachute Association also confirmed that its technology director, Jen Sharp, was among the victims.

# Sundar Pichai To Padma Lakshmi

## 26 Indian-Origin Achievers Among America's Top Immigrants By Forbes



The American dream has long been shaped by immigrants, and Indian-origin achievers have played an outsized role in that story. As part of the United States' 250th anniversary celebrations, Forbes unveiled a list of the 250 most successful living immigrants in America. Twenty-six Indian-origin personalities made the cut, spanning technology, business, academia and entertainment. Here are the top 10 names whose contributions have left a lasting mark on the US and beyond.



**Vinod Khosla:** Born in Pune, Vinod Khosla co-founded Sun Microsystems and later established Khosla Ventures, one of Silicon Valley's most influential venture capital firms, backing groundbreaking startups in AI, healthcare and clean energy.



**Naval Ravikant:** An entrepreneur and investor, Naval Ravikant co-founded AngelList and became one of the most respected voices in the startup world. He has invested early in companies like Twitter, Uber and Notion



**Hemant Taneja:** The managing director and CEO of General Catalyst, Hemant Taneja has helped shape the future of venture capital by investing in transformative companies across healthcare, AI and financial services.



**Sanjay Mehrotra:** The Kanpur-born businessman co-founded SanDisk and now leads Micron Technology, one of the world's most important memory-chip makers powering the AI revolution.



**Sundar Pichai:** From growing up in Chennai to becoming the CEO of Alphabet and Google, Sundar Pichai has emerged as one of the most influential technology leaders of his generation.



**Abhijit Banerjee:** The Nobel Prize-winning economist and MIT professor has transformed the field of development economics through pioneering research on poverty alleviation and public policy.



**Padma Lakshmi:** An author, television personality and food ambassador, Padma Lakshmi gained global fame through Top Chef and has become a powerful advocate for immigrant stories and cultural diversity.



**Satya Nadella:** The Hyderabad-born CEO of Microsoft has overseen the company's remarkable resurgence, steering it into the era of cloud computing and artificial intelligence.



**Bharat Desai:** The co-founder of IT services giant Syntel, Bharat Desai helped build one of the earliest Indian-American success stories in the global technology industry.



**Neerja Sethi:** Alongside Bharat Desai, Neerja Sethi co-founded Syntel and played a key role in turning it into a multibillion-dollar enterprise, making her one of the wealthiest self-made women in America.

# US would help India if attacked: Trump

The comments came as Trump repeatedly praised PM Modi and highlighted the growing partnership between Washington and New Delhi.



praised PM Modi and highlighted the growing partnership between Washington and New Delhi.

Trump then personalised the remark while referring to the Indian Prime Minister. "If anybody attacks that man, we're going to be there," he said. "Now, if there's a new leader, I'm not sure about it. If there's a new leader, I don't know about that. But if they're attacked and he's the leader, we're going to be there to help." The remarks drew attention because the United States and India do not have a formal mutual defence treaty, although the two countries have steadily deepened military cooperation over the past two decades. Earlier, Trump described relations with India as exceptionally strong. "We had, in particular, some very good conversations with Prime Minister Modi, India," he said. "A lot of

things are happening between the United States and India." The US President also pointed to expanding economic engagement between the two countries and expressed optimism about ongoing trade negotiations. Asked about a possible trade agreement, Trump said: "We're very close." He also praised PM Modi as a negotiator. "He's a very tough negotiator. He's one of the toughest, actually," Trump said. PM Modi, meanwhile, said the two countries had accelerated cooperation since their previous meeting in Washington. "We had an extremely productive meeting in Washington last year, and since then we have given new speed and new energy to our relations," the Prime Minister said. "We are working together on a number of areas." Trump also sought to reassure Indians

about the future of bilateral ties. "As long as I'm president, they have a great friend in the White House," he said. "They love India. They have tremendous respect for this man." The US President later described the overall relationship in unusually warm terms. "India can do anything they want with us," Trump said. "We have the best relationship." "We cannot be closer than we are. I don't think we can be any closer, both he and I and our nations." India and the United States have significantly expanded defence cooperation in recent years through military exercises, defence technology initiatives, intelligence sharing and growing interoperability between their armed forces. The two countries are also members of the Quad grouping alongside Australia and Japan.

(By Our Staff Reporter US President Donald Trump on June 17 said the United States would help India if it came under attack, offering one of his strongest public statements on defence ties with New Delhi during a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G7 summit. Trump made the remarks when asked about the defence relationship between the United States and India following talks with PM Modi. "I think it's a great relationship," Trump said. "I can tell you this, without having a contract. We don't have a contract. You have to write contracts. But if they were attacked, we would be there to help them." The comments came as Trump repeatedly

## Why India Has A Seat At The G7 Table Without Being A Member

India is not a formal member of the G7, which includes the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. Yet, it is regularly invited as a special guest, showing how much importance the group now gives to New Delhi's voice.

(By Our Staff Reporter The G7 may be a group of the world's richest developed economies, but when leaders sit down to discuss the biggest global challenges, one country that is almost always present is India.

India is not a formal member of the G7, which includes the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. Yet, it is regularly invited as a special guest, showing how much importance the group now gives to New Delhi's voice.

From the global economy and climate change to security and diplomacy, India's role has grown so much that major international decisions are increasingly difficult to shape without its involvement.

**India Has Become The Voice Of The Global South**

For decades, global institutions were largely dominated by wealthy Western nations. But many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have often felt that their concerns were missing from major discussions.

India has emerged as one of the strongest voices representing these nations. With its growing influence and diplomatic reach, New Delhi has positioned itself as a bridge between developed economies and the developing world.

For the G7, engaging with India is important because any global policy needs wider acceptance to succeed, especially among countries outside the traditional Western bloc.

**A Massive Economy And One Of The World's Biggest Markets**

**India's economic rise has made it impossible for global powers to ignore it.**

With a population of more than 140 crore people, India represents one of the largest consumer markets in the world. Its expanding digital economy, manufacturing push and technology sector have made it an important part of global growth plans.

As companies look to diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on a few countries, India has become a key economic partner. For the G7, cooperation with India is not just about trade - it is also about global economic stability.

**India's Role In Balancing China's Influence**

A major factor behind India's growing importance is its strategic position in the

Indo-Pacific.

China's expanding military and economic influence has become a major concern for several G7 nations. India, with its size, military capability and location, is seen as a crucial partner in maintaining a balance of power in the region. While global leaders may not always openly discuss this, India's



partnership has become central to efforts to build a stronger strategic balance in Asia. Climate Goals Cannot Be Achieved Without India

The world's climate targets depend heavily on India's participation.

As one of the largest countries by population and a rapidly growing economy, India's energy choices have a direct impact on global emissions. At the same time, the country has expanded

its renewable energy capacity and promoted initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance.

For the G7, working with India is essential if climate commitments are to translate into real action on the ground.

**A Major Democracy With An Independent Foreign Policy** India's position as the world's largest democracy also adds to its influence. On major international issues, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and tensions in the Middle East, India has maintained its own approach, calling for diplomacy and dialogue while keeping ties with multiple global partners. This independent foreign policy has allowed India to engage with different sides, making it a valuable partner in a world facing multiple crises.

**India Is No Longer Just A Participant**

India's presence at the G7 is no longer symbolic. The country now brings its own ideas and solutions to discussions on issues like digital infrastructure, food security, development and technology. The changing global order has made one thing clear: influence is no longer limited to traditional Western powers. Rising nations like India are playing a bigger role in deciding the direction of global affairs.

# Slovenian Tourist Says India's Payment System Is 'Years Ahead Of Most Countries'

(By Our Staff Reporter A Slovenian woman has caught social media's attention after praising India's payment system. In a now-viral Instagram post, Julija, who visited India during her gap year, said the country's payment system was years ahead of most nations and that she did not really have to use cash during her travels. Her post sparked online discussion, with many users echoing her admiration for India's cashless infrastructure, proving how digital financial tools have completely transformed the modern travel experience.

"One of the things that surprised me most in India was how little cash I actually needed. Almost everywhere I went, whether it was a small chai stand, a local restaurant, or even a random shop on the side of the road, people would just point at a QR code," Julija captioned the post. Describing it as one of the most 'convenient' payment systems,



Julija said simply using the QR systems I've ever seen while travelling," she said. "That said, I would still recommend carrying a debit or credit card and keeping some cash on you. India is incredibly digital, but having a backup payment option will save you a lot of hassle when you're in smaller towns, remote areas, or if the internet decides

"That's because of UPI, India's instant payment system. Instead of typing in bank details, people simply scan a QR code and the money is transferred within seconds. It's honestly one of the most convenient payment

to stop cooperating." As the post gained traction, social media users lauded the efficiency of UPI, whilst informing Julija that UPI can be used without the need for internet as well. "Two things I'm afraid of if I go to Western countries: 1) toilet paper, 2) no UPI!" said one user while another added: "You can

even use UPI without internet." A third commented: "What's amazing is that UPI system is instant transfer to bank account, meaning you can even cash out as soon as you get a payment through UPI."

## UPI's Success Story

Launched in 2016 by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI enables users to transfer money instantly, 24x7, using any mobile app linked to their bank accounts. In January 2026, UPI processed 21.70 billion transactions worth over Rs 28.33 lakh crore, reflecting its deep integration into everyday commerce. The International Monetary Fund, in its June 2025 report on growing retail digital payments, recognised UPI as the world's largest retail fast payment system by transaction volume. The 2024 ACI Worldwide report titled Prime Time for Real Time noted that UPI accounts for around 49 per cent of global real-time payment transaction volume.

## 3 Brazilian men charged after woman tossed from bridge without safety rope

(By Our Staff Reporter Three men face potential charges after a 21-year-old woman died when rope-jumping instructors allegedly launched her from a bridge without attaching the safety ropes meant to stop her fall, authorities said.

Maria Eduarda Rodrigues de Freitas, a 21-year-old student, died Saturday during a rope-jumping event at an abandoned bridge about 90 miles northwest of São Paulo, Brazil. Police investigator Andrea Levy told reporters Monday that the three instructors involved in the jump acknowledged that Rodrigues de Freitas was not connected to any safety equipment before she was launched from the bridge.

"They do not remember whether they forgot to attach [the ropes], or who was supposed to do it, or who failed to check. But the fact is the ropes were not attached to her," Levy said. The three instructors were arrested



following the incident and could face criminal charges, The Associated Press reported. Brazilian authorities said the three instructors were arrested on suspicion of homicide with "eventual intent," a legal concept under Brazilian law that generally applies when a person is deemed to have accepted the risk that a death could occur. According to Brazilian outlet G1, citing

investigators, the instructors were booked on the charge at the scene. Investigators said Rodrigues de Freitas requested to be launched from the bridge "airplane style," with two instructors lifting her above their shoulders while she stretched out her arms.

Video shared online appears to show two helmeted men tossing the young woman from the abandoned bridge moments

before the fatal fall. The instructors appear to be wearing harnesses connected to safety lines. Authorities said Rodrigues de Freitas fell approximately 130 feet. Brazilian media reported that Rodrigues de Freitas had purchased a guided hiking excursion that included the rope jump from the abandoned bridge. Rope jumping is an extreme sport that differs from traditional bungee jumping. Instead of elastic cords that create a vertical bounce, rope jumping uses low-stretch climbing ropes designed to transform a fall into a pendulum-like swing.

The City of Limeira identified Rodrigues de Freitas as a resident of Jandira and issued a statement expressing condolences to her family.

"At this moment of pain, the City of Limeira stands in solidarity with the young woman's family, friends and loved ones," municipal officials

said in a statement Saturday. The city said it would cooperate with authorities investigating the incident.

Rodrigues de Freitas was buried Sunday.

Levy told Brazilian television program "Jornal Nacional" that investigators were examining whether the group conducting the jump was authorized to operate at the site. According to G1, Levy said investigators believe a failure to verify the placement of the safety rope contributed to the fatality.

In a statement cited by G1, attorneys for the three instructors said their clients had experience conducting the activity and that the incident was the first fatality during their years of operation.

Authorities continue to investigate the circumstances surrounding the apparent safety failure, including who was responsible for ensuring participants were properly secured before jumping.

# 'Russia Has Lost Tremendous Numbers Of People': Trump Tells Putin To Make A Deal With Ukraine At G7



(By Our Staff Reporter) US President Donald Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in France, and encouraged Russia to make a deal to end the four-year war in Ukraine. Trump's remarks came on the second day of the G7 Summit, where leaders

discussed the ongoing Ukraine conflict. The discussions took place two days after the US and Iran confirmed a framework deal to end the war in the Gulf region. Speaking before his meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump noted that Russia and Ukraine have lost thousands of people due to the war, and also pointed out the

hostilities between Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Russia should make a deal. Russia has lost tremendous numbers of people, and so has Ukraine. Last month, they lost 35,000 soldiers between the two of them. This is on a monthly basis. And it's crazy what's going on there," he said after a bilateral meeting with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

"We had a meeting, and I spoke with President Putin on Sunday. It's sort of the same thing. I mean, they just keep going, fighting, losing soldiers. This is not since World War II; anything like this has not happened," he added.

Zelenskyy Says Trump 'Positive' On Ukraine Aid

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy told Reuters that Trump was "very positive" that the US can help Ukraine with more air defence missiles. He claimed there was unanimity among all G7 leaders that

Russia is not winning the war and has to make a deal as soon as possible.

He also posted images on social media showing the two leaders, along with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, talking on the sidelines of the G7 summit. "It is always important to coordinate positions," he wrote.

The Ukrainian President is pushing for greater international support to halt Russia's war, worried that the US is distracted by the conflict in Iran. He has also proposed face-to-face talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin to try to end the war. With Ukrainian drone attacks putting Russia on the defensive, European diplomats are seeking greater support for Kyiv after previous US positions were seen as favourable to Moscow. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said "there was real unity in the room" when Trump and the other G7 leaders discussed the conflict.

## Why was he slapped? Cockroach party founder speaks out on Jaipur assault

(By Our Staff Reporter) In his first key remarks after being slapped and assaulted during a protest in Jaipur, Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke on Tuesday attributed the incident to the growing "unemployment crisis" in the country. Speaking to reporters, Dipke, who rose to fame after starting the satirical new outfit last month, said such actions were a reflection of the lack of job opportunities faced by the youth.

being taken to the stage, 5-6 persons allegedly started slapping and assaulting him. Viral videos show a man pulling Dipke by a cloth he was wearing around his neck before slapping him. Another 3-4 youths are seen repeatedly slapping the CJP founder. The protest, organised by the Cockroach party over the alleged NEET

paper leak, flaws in the education system, and unemployment, drew hundreds to Shaheed Smarak. After the incident, Dipke spoke about it briefly from the stage. "Let them attack us, we will not raise our hands. I can get beaten up ten times more," he said. Five people have been arrested so far in connection with the incident.



## 'Do Not Attempt To Cross': US Military Says Hormuz Blockade Intact Until Peace Deal Signing

"What happened in Jaipur was the result of rising unemployment. If the person had a good job, he wouldn't have resorted to such actions," Dipke said. The CJP founder, who has been demanding Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the NEET and other paper leaks, urged the government to focus on creating better employment opportunities. "Youth are being given Rs 1,000-2,000 to carry out such things because there are no proper avenues of earning money. I request the government to provide better jobs to such people," Dipke further said.

**HOW ABHIJEET DIPKE WAS ASSAULTED?** The incident happened on Monday when Dipke was entering the protest site at Shaheed Smarak in Jaipur. Upon his arrival, Dipke was lifted by his supporters. However, just as Dipke was

(By Our Staff Reporter) The US military said on Monday that its naval blockade of Iranian ports remains in effect and will stay so until the peace deal between Washington and Tehran is formally signed, with the signing ceremony scheduled for June 19 in Switzerland.

"A military blockade of Iranian ports remains in effect restricting all traffic inbound and outbound from these ports," the US military said in an advisory note. "Do not attempt to cross until explicit direction is given.", reported Media.

Trump announced the agreement on Sunday and said he had authorised an end to the US naval blockade of Iranian ports as part of the deal, writing on Truth Social: "The Deal with the Islamic Republic

of Iran is now complete. Congratulations to all!" Monday's advisory, however, makes clear that the blockade physically remains in place until the signing goes through. The deal was mediated by Pakistan and Qatar. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif confirmed on Sunday that both sides had declared the "immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts," including in Lebanon. Tehran said the US naval blockade on its ports would be lifted immediately, while Trump said toll-free shipping through the Strait of Hormuz would begin on Friday. The war began on February 28, when the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran. Iran responded by closing the Strait of Hormuz, the 33-kilometre-wide waterway



through which a significant portion of global oil and gas trade moves, triggering a global energy crisis that lasted over 100 days. The United States subsequently imposed a naval blockade on Iran after Islamabad talks between the two sides failed in April. US Vice President JD Vance said the ceasefire could usher in a "new era" for the Middle East, adding: "Iran will never have a nuclear weapon." For

India, the blockade lifting carries direct commercial weight. India's West Asia exports hit USD 5.30 billion in May, near pre-war levels, but only after exporters rerouted shipments through Oman's Duqm, Sohar, and Salalah ports to bypass the closed strait. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said Monday that the opening of the Strait of Hormuz would be "good" for trade.

# Attempt to defame me: Bhagwant Mann after Akal Takht declares him 'anti-Guru'

(By Our Staff Reporter) Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has strongly denied allegations levelled against him by the Akal Takht, insisting that he is not the person seen in a controversial viral video and accusing political opponents of using religion as a tool to tarnish his image.

The row has escalated into one of the most significant confrontations between a sitting Punjab Chief Minister and Sikhism's highest temporal authority in recent years, after the Akal Takht declared Mann a "Guru Dokhi" and "Khalsa Panth Virodhi" and advised members of the Sikh community not to associate with him.

## CM MANN DEFENDS HIMSELF

Responding publicly to the Akal Takht's June 15 directive, Mann categorically denied any connection to the video at the centre of the controversy. He said that when he appeared before the Akal Takht earlier this year, he had clearly informed the clergy that the person seen in the footage was not him.

"When I appeared before the Akal Takht, I clearly told them that the person shown in the video is not me. Neither the physique nor the height of that individual matches mine," he said.

Mann said he was surprised that, despite his explanation, the Akal



Takht had proceeded with such a severe declaration. "It is unfortunate that people sitting on such important religious seats are doing all this on the direction of their political masters," he added.

While reiterating his respect for the institution of the Akal Takht, Mann alleged that certain political interests were attempting to defame him. "I totally disassociate myself from this video. This is nothing but an attempt to defame me," he said.

## WHAT TRIGGERED THE CONTROVERSY

The dispute centres on a viral video that Sikh religious authorities described as offensive and hurtful to Sikh sentiments. The controversy was further aggravated by remarks attributed to Mann regarding alleged

thefts from Guru Ki Golak, the donation boxes maintained at gurdwaras. In January this year, the Akal Takht summoned Mann to explain what it described as anti-Sikh remarks, objectionable conduct and his alleged involvement in the video controversy.

Mann appeared before the Akal Takht Secretariat on January 15 and rejected the allegations, arguing that the video was either fabricated or AI-generated.

According to the Akal Takht, Mann's office did not respond to a subsequent communication sent on January 27. The Sikh clergy then sent the footage to two government-recognised forensic laboratories for examination. Citing those findings, the Akal Takht announced on June

15 that it considered the video authentic and accused Mann of misleading the institution during his appearance. Following a meeting of the five Sikh high priests led by officiating Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj, the Akal Takht issued one of its strongest condemnations of a serving political leader.

The clergy declared Mann a "Guru Dokhi" (betrayer of the Guru) and "Khalsa Panth Virodhi" (opposed to the Khalsa Panth), and advised members of the Sikh community not to maintain social or religious ties with him.

The decision, according to the clergy, was based on forensic findings regarding the video and Mann's alleged false statements before the Akal Takht.

## IMPACT ON AAP, BHAGWANT MANN

The Akal Takht's directives do not carry legal force under Indian law. However, they continue to hold considerable religious and moral influence among sections of the Sikh community. Political analyst Professor Kuldeep Singh described the development as a natural progression of the controversy. He said that under normal circumstances, such a declaration could have caused significant political damage to Mann while benefiting those who raised the issue.

# Six men allegedly kidnapped two people at vacation resort, tortured them at boat ramp: FBI

(By Our Staff Reporter) Six men allegedly kidnapped two people at a Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort in Florida and tortured them, according to officials. The incident took place starting on the night of May 29 at Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort with one of the suspects "pressuring" a victim as well as a witness to go to a car show in a remote part of Broward County, Florida, according to a recently unsealed court document. Saul Alfonso Fajardo, 19, Justin Phihoang Le, 20, Amari Tamire Hill, 21, Anthony Teruel Hernandez, 18, Marikevies McNichols Jr., 19, and Weilen Hernandez, 20, were charged with kidnapping and conspiracy to commit kidnapping. Two victims, who weren't identified in court

documents, allegedly met up with "Saul" at the Margaritaville parking garage as well as a female suspect. After getting to the parking garage, the two victims were forced into two cars at gunpoint by several people, according to court documents. Officials said that Hill slammed one of the victims onto a car and forced him into the passenger seat. Phihoang then allegedly told the victim "If you try to get out, I'm going to end your life," further saying "I am going to kill you and your family." The victim complied, fearing for his life. An FBI agent wrote in an affidavit that all people were armed with semiautomatic weapons and were wearing "shiesty" masks with latex gloves on. The other victim was forced into a separate car, according to the

documents. The complaint states that Phihoang allegedly demanded that one of the victims give him money if he wanted to live, then forced him to call friends to try to get the money.

"If I don't get my money, every 10 minutes I'm going to take one of your fingernails," Phihoang allegedly told the victim.

The victim "observed a pair of pliers inside the car and believed they were going to pull his fingernails off, so he continued calling people in an attempt to get money," according to the criminal complaint. The victim in the other car was allegedly held at gunpoint. Both victims would be taken to a location one of the suspects referred to as "the spot," which was the

West Broward Boat Ramp. Once they were there, the FBI agent said both victims were "forced to kneel at gunpoint," adding that one of the suspects saw a tattoo on a victim. The two were allegedly robbed of their personal belongings, including phones, jewelry, clothing and other personal items. One of the victims was allegedly forced to send \$400 through Zelle.

"I'm gonna burn the tattoo off of you, you don't deserve to have it. I'm going to torture you," Phihoang allegedly said. "Don't cry," he allegedly said. "I will kill your family if you go to the police. We are not done."

The suspects even forced the two victims to strip in their underwear while demanding

money, according to the complaint, which added that Hill fired a round into the air while he was on a video call "in an attempt to let the person on the phone know they were serious."

The suspects at one point became concerned that the second victim's ankle monitor could disclose their location to police, and allegedly dropped him off within a subdivision of Cooper City, where the victim walked to a relative's home in nothing but underwear. The other victim allegedly observed the suspects "burning something" at the boat ramp, then heard someone say "We have to burn the evidence," according to the FBI agent. That's when the victim, "in fear for his life," began faking a seizure.

# America didn't give Elon Musk a trillion dollars. He earned every penny

## A young immigrant arrived in 1992 with ambition and built companies that transformed payments, space and transportation

(By Our Staff Reporter) When SpaceX went public on June 12 and Elon Musk became the world's first trillionaire on paper, the predictable reactions arrived almost immediately. Some viewed the milestone as a symbol of everything wrong with modern capitalism. Others celebrated it as the ultimate entrepreneurial success story.

Both sides are missing the bigger picture. The most important aspect of Elon Musk becoming the first trillionaire is not the size of his fortune. It is the fact that his journey could only have happened in a country that continues to reward innovation, risk-taking and the freedom to pursue ideas that most people initially dismiss as impossible. In 1992, Musk arrived in the United States as a young immigrant pursuing educational and entrepreneurial opportunities. Few could have imagined that three decades later he would build a collection of companies that would transform industries ranging from payments and transportation to aerospace, communications and artificial intelligence. That achievement deserves closer examination because history is filled with wealthy individuals. What makes Musk different is not simply the amount of money he has accumulated. It is the breadth of what he has built.

Many entrepreneurs spend their entire careers attempting to create a single successful company. Musk helped build PayPal, which fundamentally changed digital payments. He then used much of his fortune to pursue ventures that many investors considered reckless. Tesla challenged a century-old automotive industry and accelerated the adoption of electric vehicles worldwide. SpaceX dramatically lowered the cost of launching payloads into space while accomplishing feats that many believed only governments could achieve. Starlink is bringing internet connectivity to remote regions around the globe. Neuralink and his artificial intelligence initiatives continue to push the boundaries of what many thought possible. Whether one agrees with Musk politically is beside the point. The remarkable aspect of his story is that he repeatedly identified opportunities where others saw obstacles. He consistently pursued industries that incumbents considered untouchable and entered arenas where failure seemed far more likely than success.

**That is where America enters the story.** The United States remains one of the few places in the world where an entrepreneur with a compelling vision can access capital, recruit talent, challenge established competitors and attempt to build something revolutionary. Our system is far from per-



fect, but it continues to provide a level of economic freedom that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. Musk's success is not evidence that capitalism is broken. It is evidence that capitalism continues to reward individuals who create extraordinary value.

Critics often focus exclusively on the outcome. They see a trillion-dollar net worth and immediately ask whether anyone should possess that much wealth. A more productive question is how that wealth was created in the first place. Musk did not become a trillionaire by inheriting a dominant corporation or benefiting from a protected monopoly. His fortune is largely tied to companies that investors voluntarily assigned value because they believe those businesses have changed the world and will continue doing so in the future. How many people has Musk employed along the way?

How much payroll tax has he paid into our system? And how many millionaires has Musk made just by their being employed by his companies? The reality is that wealth on this scale is generally the byproduct of solving significant problems. Tesla forced legacy automakers to accelerate innovation. SpaceX transformed commercial spaceflight and strengthened America's leadership in space exploration. Starlink has provided communications infrastructure in places where traditional networks could not reach. None of those achievements were guaranteed. In fact, several came perilously close to failure. Musk has spoken openly about periods when both Tesla and SpaceX were on the brink of collapse. Most entrepreneurs would have retreated. He doubled down. That willingness to endure failure, criticism and uncertainty may be the most important lesson in his story.

At a time when many Americans question whether the American Dream still exists, Musk's rise offers a compelling reminder of what the dream was always meant to represent. It was never a promise of wealth. It was never a guarantee of success. It was the freedom to pursue ambitious goals, the opportunity to take risks and the ability to build something meaningful regardless of where you started. Elon Musk's trillion-dollar milestone will generate headlines around the world. Yet the more enduring story is not about a net worth figure. It is about a country that still allows exceptional individuals to pursue exceptional ideas. For all of America's imperfections, it remains one of the few places on earth where a young immigrant can arrive in this country with talent, ambition and an unconventional vision and eventually build companies that reshape the future.



# Stabbings followed by anti-migrant violence: Why Indians in Britain are worried

Anti-migrant riots in Belfast after the stabbing of Stephen Ogilvie have left many Indians staying indoors. The unrest, coming days after the Henry Nowak case, has deepened fears of wider backlash against migrant communities.



(By Our Staff Reporter) The Indian community in Northern Ireland's capital, Belfast, largely stayed indoors for the second consecutive night to protect themselves from anti-migrant violence. Homes, shops, and vehicles were set on fire during riots following the brutal stabbing of a man by a Sudanese migrant, Hadi Alodid, on June 8. Alodid has been charged with attempted murder, and his victim is fighting for his life in hospital. There are no reports of Indians being harmed. Yet, the incident has stoked fear among residents of foreign origin, as angry protesters raised slogans of "foreigners out" after a video of the gruesome killing was shared on social media by far-right activists.

Biji Jose from the Northern Ireland Indian Nurses Forum, who has lived in the province for 23 years, told the BBC that her colleagues are deeply concerned about their safety. Dr Satyvir Singhal, chairman of the Indian Community Centre in Belfast, said he has been advising Indians to stay at home if they can. "The people who are doing this violence don't differentiate between the communities, so people are definitely worried and hope for the best." The Indian High Commission in London told India Today on June 10 that the Indian consulate in Belfast "continues to remain engaged" with members of the community. There are about 10,000 Indians in Northern Ireland, mostly in Belfast, making them the third-largest ethnic group after mixed-race and black communities, according to the 2021 census.

## HENRY NOWAK AND SIKHS

For the Indian community, this is the second incident in 10 days that has heightened racial tensions and fears of violence. On June 1, a British-born Sikh man, Vickrum Digwar, was given a life sentence

for murdering an 18-year-old white youth, Henry Nowak, with his kirpan.

Sikh leaders have reported numerous incidents of physical and verbal violence against their community. Racial tension and attacks on Sikhs followed the release of police bodycam footage, which showed the man repeatedly telling police officers, "I can't breathe," as he lay dying in handcuffs after being stabbed by Digwar, who accused the victim of hurling racial abuse at him.

Britain's Sikhs have distanced themselves from Digwar and his family, condemning the murder and emphasising that this was a one-off case and that he didn't represent the community. Sikh leaders have called for a public inquiry into the "failures" surrounding Nowak's death. They also disputed that the weapon used in the murder was a kirpan — the judge called it a "large Sikh dagger" — which was in addition to another small kirpan he was wearing.

Nowak's murder sparked outrage and racial tension, stemming from the police arresting and handcuffing him after Digwar complained that he had been racially abused, while ignoring Nowak's pleas that he had been stabbed and couldn't breathe. The leader of the far-right Reform UK, Nigel Farage, said the case showed evidence of "two-tier policing" and called on the public to respond with "pure, cold rage".

Comparisons were drawn with the US black man, George Floyd, who died after a police officer knelt on his neck in 2020. His last words were "I can't breathe". Violent protests erupted in the English city of Southampton, where Nowak's murder took place. Five protesters were jailed for violent disorder on Wednesday.

## ELON MUSK AND FAR-RIGHT GROUPS

In both cases, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, has been accused of inflaming racial tensions. He tweeted about Nowak about 100 times, using his position as head of X, with 240 million followers, to first demand the release of police body camera footage of the murder and then to attack Britain and its police.

"Send the video to everyone you know showing how heinously Nowak was treated by the police in his dying moments and how the police cravenly kowtowed to his murderer," Musk wrote. Britain's prime minister accused Musk of interfering in British politics.

Again, Musk, himself a migrant in the US from South Africa, played a key role in the protests in Belfast. The far-right activist, Tommy Robinson — whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon — shared the video on X. Musk then messaged his followers, "Only by protesting REPEATEDLY and LOUDLY will there be any change!" He also reposted details of the planned protest in Belfast on X, where masked men were involved in attacks on migrants' properties.

Farage and another far-right British politician, Rupert Lowe (leader of Restore Britain and Musk's favourite), first demanded that the accused's identity and immigration status be disclosed. When the police acceded to their demand, they exploited the disclosure to attack the wider migrant population. Farage's party is now calling for a total visa ban on people from Sudan, a country riven by civil war since 2023. The Belfast stabbing suspect came to Northern Ireland via Dublin in the same year and was granted asylum.

## CRIME AND MIGRATION

Far-right leaders, backed by Musk, the

Trump administration and other activists in Europe, have been trying to portray such crimes as the result of mass migration in recent years. The US Vice-President JD Vance blamed Nowak's death on the "mass invasion of migrants", saying the "only response" was "righteous anger." Dominik Tarczynski, a far-right Polish politician who was banned earlier this year by the British government from entering the UK, sought to link the attack in Belfast to Nowak's death. He posted an image of the knife attack alongside one of Nowak in handcuffs. "Europe 2026 in two pictures," he wrote.

These leaders claim that migrants from Asian and African countries commit most crimes in the UK. However, in the list of nationalities of those convicted of violence in Britain between 2021 and 2024, the first six were European. Polish nationals topped that list with 1697 convictions. It's true that, proportionally, foreign nationals have had more convictions than British nationals for sexual crimes during this period. Last year, nationwide protests followed an Ethiopian asylum seeker's sexual assault of two 14-year-old girls and a woman in Essex, near London. Because of campaigns by far-right groups, many people in Britain believe migration to the country is rising, even though it has fallen to its lowest level in over a decade, according to a study by British Future, a think tank, published last month. British government data released last month showed that net migration in the year to December 2025 was 171,000 — its lowest level since 2012, excluding the Covid-19 pandemic. Even small-boat crossings by migrants from France, which have fuelled so much political debate and racial tension in the past few years, have come down.

# Hardliners and moderates: What do Iran's factions think of deal with US?

Factional divisions in Iran remain as leaders debate the implementation of deal with the US, amid fears of capitulation.

(By Our Staff Reporter) Tehran, Iran – The road leading to the signing the memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran has been difficult. And the announcement on Sunday that a deal had been reached does not mean that everything will be straightforward from now on, even after the planned signing of the deal on Friday in Switzerland. Factional differences remain in Iran, and they are likely to emerge during the implementation phase over the coming months. Here's a look at who stands where in Iran's political leadership and what they believe needs to happen so that Iran can avoid "capitulation" against the US and Israel.

Mojtaba Khamenei

The new supreme leader replaced his powerful slain father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, despite reportedly being wounded in the same air strike on February 28. But has not been seen or heard from publicly except for written statements attributed to him, and has not adopted a public position on the deal.

In the statements, Khamenei has predominantly focused on maintaining control over the Strait of Hormuz, and guarding Iran's nuclear and missile programmes as "national assets" that should not be surrendered.

This has prompted speculation and interpretations from different stakeholders. The ultraconservative Keyhan newspaper, whose editor-in-chief was selected by the senior Khamenei decades ago, said the incumbent supreme leader has deliberately not referenced the nuclear programme since coming to power.

This, the newspaper wrote in an editorial on Tuesday, could signal that the Iran believes the nuclear file to have "concluded" with no efforts necessary to reopen it – even though the US and Israel attacked Iran with a main stated goal of curtailing Tehran's nuclear ambitions. We are at a critical juncture in the history of the West Asia region, so there is no room for weakness or error, and no one has the right to undermine or, God forbid, surpass the red lines of the supreme leader," Keyhan wrote.

## IRGC, security apparatus

Many senior officials in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the security and intelligence apparatus were killed during the war. But those that remain are believed to be playing a key role in shaping how negotiations proceed with Washington. Generals such as IRGC chief Ahmad Vahidi and leaders at the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters of the armed forces and affiliated bodies have repeatedly stated readiness to re-



sume military operations if necessary, but have refrained from commenting on the provisions of the deal.

After spending decades and untold billions expanding the "axis of resistance" of allied armed forces across the region to rival the US and Israel, these officials have emphasised that Tehran will not abandon its allies, especially Hezbollah in Lebanon, and that they need to be included in any deal to protect them from Israel.

Esmail Qaani, the commander of the Quds Force that oversees the axis, on Monday night made his first public appearance in months to discuss the deal. "Bab al-Mandeb Strait is fully in the hands of the guys in Hezbollah, the Ansarallah [Houthis] in Yemen, and even some of the comrades and children of resistance who are not Yemeni," Qaani told state television during a studio interview, in reference to the strategic waterway that connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, which Iran has threatened to close if the war continues.

Qaani also made another significant point, explicitly backing Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and other figures leading the negotiating team with the US, after they came under fire from hardliners for agreeing to the deal.

Ghalibaf, the incumbent parliament speaker, used to be a senior IRGC commander who later entered politics. He is believed to be among the more pragmatic conservative figures within the establishment, who have backed a deal.

In a rare sobering state television message after Iran had reached a ceasefire agreement with the US in April, Ghalibaf said that the US and Israel were militarily much stronger than Iran, so they could

not be "destroyed", but a beneficial deal with them may be possible if achievements were secured on the field of battle. As the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), IRGC General Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, another top figure in the process, has previously said that Tehran would not "retreat" in any way, but the SNSC ultimately ratified and publicly communicated the understanding with the US.

## The hardliners

A number of hardliners within the establishment have shown their anger at the prospect of signing a deal with US President Donald Trump, the man who they believe ultimately gave the green light for the killing of former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and many others before him, chief among them Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani in 2020.

The hardliners believe that Tehran must not grant any major concessions in relation to its nuclear programme, must maintain control over the Strait of Hormuz and later impose a fee system for transit and environmental services rendered, and eventually expel US troops from the region.

A large number of hardline members of Iran's parliament, as well as figures affiliated with the Paydari Front political group led by Saeed Jalili, are members of this camp.

Saeed Jalili, a longtime representative of Khamenei in the Supreme National Security Council with a lengthy history of failed talks with the West, is believed to be among the chief opponents of the deal. Hours before the deal was announced this week, there were rumours that Jalili had been sidelined from his position, but there was no confirmation from the au-

thorities.

In addition to Keyhan newspaper, IRGC-affiliated outlets like Tasnim, Fars, Mehr and others have maintained a tough editorial line against the US.

## Government and reformists

The Iranian government, currently led by President Masoud Pezeshkian, has seen its power greatly diminished over recent years as hardliners outside the government became more prominent in the decision-making process.

But Pezeshkian, who is believed to be a relative centrist, and in favour of the deal, is still the head of the SNSC by law. He told a gathering in Tehran last week that Iran needs to end the current harmful state of "no war, no peace" with the US. He also has several key ministers with voting rights placed in the council. They include Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who has backed a negotiated settlement that also secures Iran's interests, particularly through the lifting of sanctions. Then there are reformists and moderates, such as former Presidents Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Khatami, as well as ex-Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who have mostly been sidelined in recent years after leaving government.

They have repeatedly endorsed the negotiating track to end hostilities and open up the struggling Iranian economy in order to save Iran from potential collapse. "Now is the time for the united support of the people – both supporters and critics of the system – to unite in supporting the negotiations and the negotiators, and to move towards an agreement, lasting peace, and a life free from fear and war," Khatami said, after the memorandum of understanding with the US was announced.

# Telegram working despite ban, raises doubts on India's tech ability to block it

India on Tuesday banned Telegram ahead of the NEET re-test on June 21. But hours after this ban, the app continues to largely work. It casts doubt on India's ability to block Telegram, which has some inbuilt tech safeguards against censorship and ban.

(By Our Staff Reporter) India banned Telegram on Tuesday ahead of the NEET re-test scheduled for June 21. The ban is expected to last until June 22. On the surface, it seems like a simple ban, similar to what has happened with various apps in India before, including TikTok and PUBG. But, hours later, Telegram continues to be accessible in India. The app is still working as it works, the Telegram website is still up and running, and t.me — the domain through which Telegram serves messages on web — still accessible.

Update: The app has been removed from Google Play Store, and will likely soon be removed from the iOS App Store. Although, this doesn't matter that much because Telegram remains widely available on tens of different app stores on the web, and through APKs.

Now there is chatter online that India may not succeed in putting a blanket ban on Telegram because the country does not have the technology at ISP level to block it. This is because Telegram has a number of technologies that it uses to evade bans and censorship. Or to put it another way, blocking Telegram could prove to be tricky. Nisarga Adhikary, the 19-year-old cybersecurity researcher who went viral after exposing flaws in CBSE's website, claims this ban may not even be possible. He wrote on X, "Blocking Telegram totally isn't even possible, Telegram is designed in such a way which easily allows people to use proxies and other methods of cir-

cumvention."

## India usually bans stuff with DNS blocking

Usually, when Indian government orders a ban on a website or app, the responsibility falls on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) like Jio or Airtel. These companies, which run the network, block websites or apps based on what you search for.

Normally when you search for a website, say Instagram, the request goes to your ISP's Domain Name System (DNS) which acts like the phonebook for the internet. The DNS then tells your phone where Instagram is, and lets you connect to it. Similarly, when an ISP is blocking a website, such as TikTok, the DNS at ISP level refuses to look for the app servers. Instead, it lies to the user that TikTok is not accessible. This leaves your device with no way to connect to the platform. Keep in mind that this is not the only way to block a website, but it is the most common.

## So why is Telegram different?

On X, a user who goes by the handle @kingslyj claimed that the traditional way of blocking a platform will not work on Telegram. The user said that Telegram didn't work like other platforms, particularly in this DNS area. The person wrote, "They cannot use current blocking infrastructure because Telegram doesn't do direct DNS lookups."

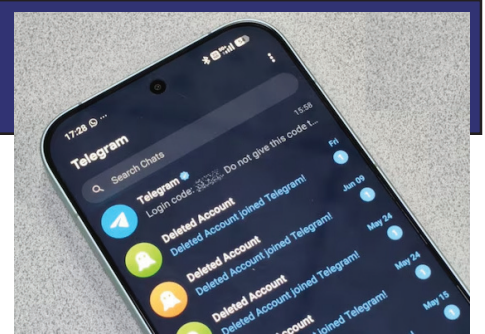
The user claimed that Telegram operates differently. Instead of the usual way we discussed before, Telegram sends en-

crypted requests to cloud servers, such as Cloudflare and Google. This means that your internet service provider will not know what you were requesting for. And as a result, it won't be able to block you from accessing Telegram. The user claimed that while there can be other ways to block Telegram, India may not have the tech infrastructure it needs to do so. The person added, "Existing infra (of Indian ISPs) isn't capable of dealing with that."

## Why is blocking Telegram tricky?

Now, DNS-level blocking is not the only way ISPs block websites and apps. They also have far more advanced tools. They can use methods like Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) to find patterns — or signatures — in internet traffic, and through these signatures they can identify an app and can block it.

For example, an app like Telegram will have a particular kind of traffic pattern, indicating where the traffic is going, how much is the volume, what is its packet size etc. Similarly, there is SNI filtering, which can let ISPs see what you are trying to access before the secure (HTTPS) connection is made between your computer or phone with an app or a website. But just the way there are different ways to block something, there are ways to avoid the ban and censorship. And Telegram, by its design, is an app that actively works to avoid bans and censorship. It does this by using an encryption technology called MTPROTO protocol. This protocol apparently lets the app fake its digi-



tal signature to ensure that its traffic looks like that of a normal website or app. In other words, MTPROTO protocol makes it difficult for DPI to sniff and single out Telegram from gigabytes of data flowing through ISP servers. The MTPROTO was probably the reason why Telegram ban in Russia resulted in not just a ban on the app, but also an accidental ban on hundreds of other legitimate services and apps because ISPs could not reliably detect only Telegram traffic. In addition to MTPROTO, Telegram also uses complicated routing and rerouting for its traffic. It tends to bounce its traffic through proxy servers by default, which again makes it difficult for ISPs like Jio and Airtel to reliably ban Telegram servers. It is this strange nature of Telegram that commentators are highlighting on social media. User kingslyj, for example, wrote: "Unstated and actual reason (behind ban) is for ISPs to figure out how to effectively block Telegram. They cannot use current blocking infrastructure because Telegram doesn't do direct DNS lookups. Telegram makes DoH requests which ISPs cannot intercept." This also means ISPs cannot carry out their Man In The Middle attack and then lie to users that server cannot be reached.

## Nancy Guthrie mystery exposes new threat targeting unsuspecting Americans letting down their guards

(By Our Staff Reporter) As the wrench attack theory is gaining traction as a possible motive for the Feb. 1 suspected abduction of Nancy Guthrie, experts are warning that criminals are increasingly sweeping the web for signs of wealth that could lead them to new victims.

"The bad guys in these cases and in many types of criminal cases utilize open source information and social media information to find their targets and the targets' vulnerabilities, the pressure point," said Lisa J. Miller, a retired detective and law enforcement executive at the Colorado Attorney General's Office. "News releases from companies describing wealth, social media posts showing off big expenditures, big toys, big homes. Many of us put at least some of our lives out there for everyone to see — and it's usually the happiest part."

Although wrench attacks can involve complicated crypto transactions, encrypted

chats and conspiracies that may cross international borders, the concept is simple: A "mastermind" plans the attack remotely and hires local muscle to carry out a physical abduction, which involves threats and violence to extract ransom. There have been 34 documented wrench attack incidents in the first four months of 2026, according to the cybersecurity firm CertiK — a 41% increase over last year. While Guthrie is the 84-year-old mother of NBC's Savannah Guthrie, Miller said relatives of the real targets can sometimes be hurt in wrench attacks because they are more accessible than the public figures themselves.

"Nancy Guthrie could have been viewed by someone watching [her 'Today'] seg-

ment as a vulnerability, Savannah Guthrie's pressure point," Miller said.

As a result, everyone could benefit from minimizing the amount of personal infor-



mation about them online. "Protecting ourselves requires the usual things we have all been told about before — restrict your social media profiles, never post photos of your home, know who the audience is when you post pictures of your children, family, visible signs of financial security,"

Miller said. "Monitor your online presence when it comes to what data is available about you online." "There are paid services that specialize in locking down your personal information as it appears online, she added, and some tech firms, such as Google, will help for free. "It's all easier said than done because we live in an ever-increasing digital world, where more people know and have the skills to mine open source information to get data about you," Miller said. "And who hasn't shared the pictures of the best and prettiest dogs in the world with people they love, or pics of their grandchildren?" "Not everyone who sees those posts is friendly — or even safe, she told Fox News Digital. "Safety in this digital world is very similar to advice I give women about their personal safety," she said. "Be aware." While the vast majority of documented wrench attacks have occurred in France, the United States is a distant second.

# \$500 million in value wiped out in a day: Turkey's Celebi on India ouster amid Op Sindoor

More than a year after being forced out of Indian airports in the wake of Turkey's support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, Turkish aviation services firm Celebi Aviation says India's revocation of the security clearance granted to its Indian arm wiped out up to \$500 million in value overnight.

(By Our Staff Reporter)

More than a year after being forced out of Indian airports in the wake of Turkey's military support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, the chairperson of Turkish aviation services company, Celebi Aviation, has said that the abrupt revocation of its security clearance, and the resulting seizure of equipment, transfer of employees and termination of contracts, wiped out an estimated \$500 million in value overnight. In an interview with Bloomberg, company chairperson Canan Celebioglu stated that the Indian government's decision effectively erased a market presence "meticulously crafted, stitch by stitch" since 2000. The ouster of Celebi Aviation followed Operation Sindoor, a four-day armed confrontation between India and Pakistan, where Ankara had openly backed Islamabad with weapons and personnel deployment. More than 350 Turkey-manufactured Bayraktar TB2 and Asisguard Songar drones were sent to Pakistan.

Before the crackdown by the Indian government in May 2025 (a week after Operation Sindoor), Celebi was a dominant force, managing ground-handling operations at nine major hubs, including New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. However, on May 15, 2025, just a week after Indian airstrikes hammered Pakistani terror camps and airbases, India's Ministry of Civil Aviation revoked the firm's security clearance with immediate effect after an uproar over the reported Turkish military help to Pakistan during the armed conflict with India. The Centre cited "security concerns" while revoking the licence of Celebi Aviation, adding that the move was taken, "recognising the seriousness of the issue and the call to protect national interests". The Centre's decision to revoke the operating licence of the Indian arm of Celebi Aviation, was in July upheld by the Delhi High Court.

**CELEBI BECAME INDIA'S LARGEST GROUND HANDLING FIRM, LOST IT ALL IN**



## ONE DAY

Before its security clearance was revoked by India, Celebi Airport Services India had grown into the country's largest ground-handling operator, managing critical airport infrastructure at nine major aviation hubs, including New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. The company handled around 58,000 flights and 5,40,00 tonnes of cargo annually across major airports in India.

The company's chairperson, Canan Celebioglu, told Bloomberg that the firm's two-decade presence in India was effectively dismantled overnight. According to her, the Indian government halted all operations of Celebi Airport Services India, seized company equipment and transferred its 10,000 employees to another operator, wiping out an estimated \$400 million to \$500 million in value.

"In a single day, the government transferred 10,000 of our employees to another company, and they reduced the value we created—perhaps 400–500 million dollars—to zero in a single day," Celebioglu told Bloomberg.

She said the loss was particularly painful because, according to her, the company had spent decades.

"Leave aside its monetary value... it really was a place that was meticulously crafted, stitch by stitch. We, the employees, have put in a lot of time and effort to get the government to change certain policies to get that sector back on its feet," she said.

Celebioglu, who described herself as being "a big fan of India", added it was her "second country".

"So this situation really shocked us. That really upset me," she said.

At the same time, she acknowledged the challenges of operating in a large and complex market like India, noting that doing business there inevitably came with difficulties.

"Because, after all, India is a different country. Even though we have some things in common, there are, of course, a lot of problems, difficulties," she told Bloomberg.

## WHY DID INDIA REVOKE CELEBI'S SECURITY CLEARANCE?

India's revocation of Celebi's security clearance came on the heels of Operation Sindoor. The four-day armed confrontation between India and Pakistan was sparked by New Delhi launching precise strikes on terror camps inside Pakistan and Pa-

kistan Occupied Kashmir on May 6, in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack. In Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, Pakistani terrorists gunned down 26 civilians.

During the confrontation, Ankara openly backed Islamabad. More than 350 Turkish-manufactured Bayraktar TB2 and Asisguard Songar drones were sent to Pakistan and were used to undertake strikes on Indian military and civilian installations.

Following the Pahalgam attack, and weeks before Indian forces had launched Operation Sindoor, a Turkish Air Force C-130 aircraft and a warship had reached Pakistan.

In fact, two Turkish military operatives were killed as part of Operation Sindoor, which revealed that Turkey not only helped Pakistan in its war against India with over 350 drones, but also with operators. In its May 2025 order terminating Celebi's security clearance, the Ministry of Civil Aviation cited security concerns as the main reason.

India's minister of state for civil aviation, Murlidhar Mohol said, "Recognising the seriousness of the issue and the call to protect national interests, we have taken cognisance of these requests and the Ministry of

Civil Aviation has revoked [the] security clearance of the said company."

Many of the key responsibilities of Celebi India were ground handling, cargo services, cargo security checks, passenger document checks and logistics coordination in Indian airports. Many in India voiced concerns as these services were deemed high-security risk due to the sensitive and tightly regulated nature of airport zones.

Celebi had approached the Delhi High Court to appeal against the revocation. The court, however, dismissed the petition, noting that it was "better to be safe than sorry" when it came to matters of national security. Despite Celebi maintaining that it had no meaningful ties to the Turkish state — including dismissing allegations that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's daughter, Sumeyye Erdogan, held a stake in the company — the writing was on the wall. With Ankara backing Islamabad during the India-Pakistan standoff, there was little prospect of a Turkish firm being allowed to continue operating in critical infrastructure zones, which are seen as key to national security.

# A Deal With a Revolution, Not a Nation

The Trump framework offers Iran a seat at the world's table. The question is whether Tehran wants one — or wants to overturn the table.

Henry Kissinger, who spent a career navigating the gap between a nation's stated ideology and its actual interests, put the Iranian paradox more precisely than almost anyone before or since. "Iran has to take a decision," he observed, "whether it wants to be a nation or a cause." For 47 years, the answer coming out of Tehran has been unambiguous: cause. Revolutionary cause. Theological cause. The export of Shia Islamist power across a crescent of proxy militias and client states stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Now the Trump administration is paying — diplomatically, geopolitically, and eventually perhaps financially — for the privilege of asking Kissinger's question one more time. Vice President JD Vance framed the emerging U.S.-Iran diplomatic framework in terms that are, on their face, reasonable: "What the agreement does is fundamentally set up a structure whereby if the Iranians behave like a normal country, then we want to treat them like a normal country and welcome them to the world economy." It is a sentence that almost writes itself as policy. It is also a sentence that contains, buried within its conditional clause, the entire weight of four and a half decades of history, ideology, and institutional design — none of which bends easily toward normalcy.

## What "Normal" Actually Requires

To understand the challenge, it helps to define terms. A "normal country" in the international relations sense is a state that pursues its interests primarily through conventional diplomacy, trade, and statecraft — not through the sponsorship of non-state armed actors, the explicit call for the destruction of other sovereign nations, or the elevation of religious revolutionary ideology above territorial pragmatism. Normal countries disagree. They impose tariffs. They spy on each other. They compete for influence. What they do not typically do is embed within their constitutions — as Iran's does — the explicit mandate to export revolution, nor do they maintain, as a core pillar of state identity, the chant "Death to America" as something between foreign policy and liturgy.

Iran's Supreme Leader is not a head of government in the conventional sense. He is the Vali-e Faqih — the Guardian Jurist — the earthly steward of Islamic revolutionary governance, accountable not to a domestic electorate but to a theological framework that frames the Islamic Republic's legitimacy in eschatological terms. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which controls vast swaths of the Iranian economy and its external military operations, is not simply a military branch. It is the institutional guardian of the revolution itself, its budget, its survival, and its expansion. Asking Iran to

"behave like a normal country" is, in structural terms, asking these institutions to voluntarily diminish their own *raison d'être*. That is not an argument against trying diplomacy. It is an argument for honest expectations about what diplomacy can and cannot do.

## The Pattern of Engagement

The United States has attempted various forms of diplomatic and economic engagement with Iran across multiple administrations — with results that should temper both cynicism and naive optimism in equal measure.

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), negotiated under the Obama administration and endorsed by China, Russia, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, was arguably the most ambitious attempt to integrate Iran into a normalized framework of international compliance. Its specific focus was narrow: constrain the nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. What it did not do — and was never designed to do — was alter Iran's regional behavior. In the years following 2015, Iran's support for Hezbollah deepened. The Houthi movement in Yemen received expanded military assistance. Iranian-backed militias consolidated influence in Iraq and Syria. Economic relief from sanctions did not travel into moderation of the revolutionary project; it traveled, at least in part, into the operational budgets of Iran's regional network.

This is the counter-argument to those who suggest that economic integration automatically produces behavioral moderation. The historical record from Iran is, at minimum, ambiguous. The Islamic Republic has demonstrated a consistent capacity to absorb economic pain — currency collapse, hyperinflation, sanctions-induced recession — without sacrificing the ideological architecture of the regime. Whatever the miseries of the Iranian population, the IRGC's budget and its external militia network have proven remarkably resilient to economic pressure. This is not because the regime does not feel the pain. It is because it has decided, structurally and ideologically, that the cause is worth the cost.

## The Trump Approach: Leverage or Legitimization?

The Trump administration's diplomatic posture toward Iran — notably more flexible than its own first-term "maximum pressure" campaign — reflects a recognition that pressure alone has not produced behavioral change. Iran has continued to enrich uranium. Its proxy network has remained active. The calculation appears to be: if pressure cannot compel change, perhaps structured engagement can incentivize it.

(Contd. on page 22)

# Re-Hyphenated

How Trump Brought Pakistan Back in From the Cold — and What It Costs India, and Us

For more than two decades, one of the quiet but consequential triumphs of American diplomacy was something most people never even noticed: the deliberate uncoupling of how Washington thought about India and Pakistan. They stopped being the same sentence. They stopped being the same problem. India was treated, at long last, as a rising global power with its own strategic weight. Pakistan was managed separately, as a complicated but necessary partner in the war on terror. The two countries, for the first time since Partition, were no longer joined at the hip in the eyes of Washington policymakers.

That policy — known, in the dry language of foreign affairs, as "de-hyphenation" — is now effectively over. Under President Donald Trump's second term, Washington has re-hyphenated South Asia with a speed that has surprised even seasoned observers of the region. The hyphen is back. And for the millions of South Asians living in the United States, the implications are personal, political, and profound.

## A POLICY 25 YEARS IN THE MAKING — DISMANTLED IN 12 MONTHS

The concept of de-hyphenation did not emerge from a single speech or summit. It grew gradually, shaped by Clinton's five days in India versus five hurried hours in Pakistan in 2000; by George W. Bush's landmark nuclear deal with New Delhi in 2006; by successive administrations' explicit framing of India as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific. By 2022, Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy promised to "support India's continued rise and regional leadership." India had been elevated, in

Washington's formal strategic calculus, to a category of its own.

The Modi government in New Delhi had worked systematically to accelerate this delinking. After 2014, India objected publicly if Western leaders combined visits to India and Pakistan on the same itinerary, viewing the "two-country" trip as an act of implicit equation. When Trump — in his first term — offered to mediate on Kashmir, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar publicly and firmly replied that any Kashmir discussion "will only be with Pakistan and only bilaterally." The message was clear: India is not one half of a troubled pair. It is a global power, and shall be treated as one. Twenty-five years of patient diplomatic architecture collapsed in roughly twelve months, beginning with the India-Pakistan military confrontation of May 2025.

## OPERATION SINDOOR, THE CEASEFIRE, AND THE NOBEL THAT WASN'T

The catalyst was Operation Sindoor — India's military response to cross-border terrorism in May 2025 — and what followed it. Trump intervened, claiming to have personally brokered a ceasefire by threatening to withhold trade deals from both nations. "Pakistan and India were really going at it," Trump told an audience, recounting his role in vivid detail. "I got on the phone with both of them... I said, 'I'm not doing trade deals with you two guys.'" India, quietly furious, denied any American role in the ceasefire, insisting it was a bilateral military communication that ended hostilities. Trump persisted. He sought a Nobel Peace Prize endorsement from both countries. Pakistan obliged. India did not. (Contd. on page 23)



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## By TSAI Editorial Board

(Members of The South Asian Insider Weekly's Editorial Board are experienced and respected journalists, who offer reasoned opinions based on hard facts, to encourage informed/constructive debate about the issues facing South Asian community in the United States.)

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# A Deal With a Revolution, Not a Nation

There is logic in this. Nations do respond to incentives, and the Iranian government — whatever the ideological commitments of its supreme leadership — contains factions with more pragmatic orientations. Iranian presidents from Khatami to Rouhani have, at different moments, signaled interest in a different relationship with the West. The question has always been whether those signals represent genuine decision-making authority, or whether the actual locus of power — the Supreme Leader, the IRGC — regards such overtures as tactical rather than strategic.

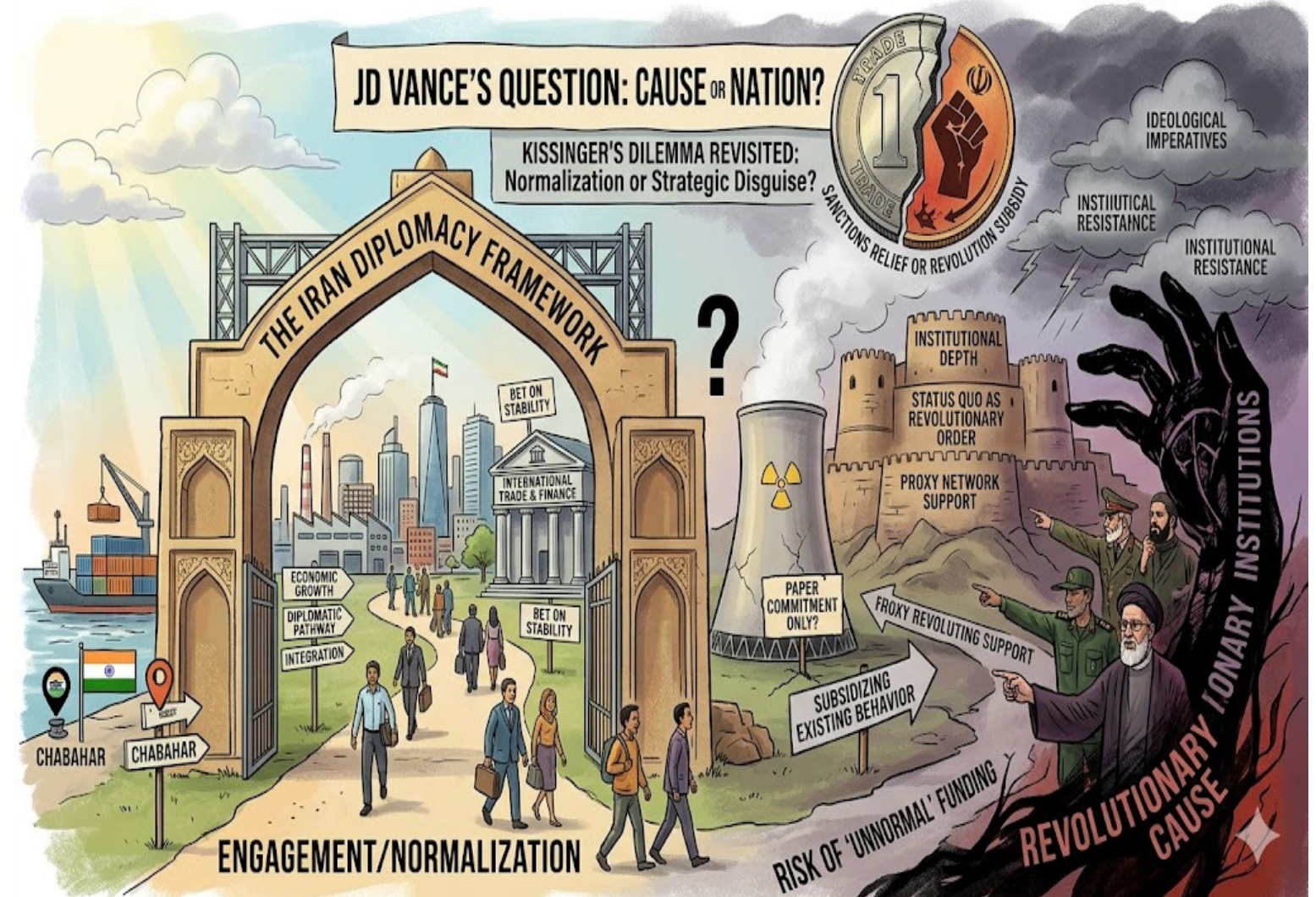
The danger in framing the current framework as Vance did is a different one: it risks creating the structure of normalization without the substance. If the agreement loosens sanctions, restores Iran's access to the international financial system, and provides economic relief in exchange for commitments on the nuclear program alone — leaving the proxy network, the regional expansion, and the underlying revolutionary ideology untouched — it will not have produced a "normal country." It will have produced a better-funded version of the existing one.

Critics from the hawkish right, including figures in the Israeli government and among Gulf Arab states, make precisely this argument. Their concern is not that diplomacy is wrong in principle, but that the wrong deliverable — sanctions relief — will be exchanged for a paper commitment on nuclear enrichment, while Iran's capacity to project conventional and unconventional military power across the region continues unabated.

Defenders of engagement argue the reverse: that keeping Iran economically isolated and diplomatically marginalized simply accelerates its nuclear program while driving it deeper into alliance with Russia and China. An Iran integrated into the world economy, the argument goes, has more to lose from adventurism and more incentive to stabilize its external behavior. It is a hypothesis worth taking seriously, even if the historical evidence for it, in the Iranian context specifically, remains thin.

## The Revolution's Institutional Depth

Perhaps the most underappreciated dimension of the Kissinger question is institu-



tional. Revolutionary states do not become normal countries simply because their leaders or populations tire of revolutionary sacrifice. The Islamic Republic has spent 47 years constructing a deep-state apparatus — the IRGC, the Basij, the Bonyads (revolutionary foundations that control significant economic assets), the religious establishment — whose institutional interests are bound to the perpetuation of the revolutionary order. These are not easily reformed or disbanded from the top. They are, in many senses, the top.

There is a precedent worth examining: China. For decades, Western policy rested on the premise that economic integration would produce political liberalization, that a China embedded in the global trading order would gradually converge toward something resembling normalcy by Western definitions. That premise has been substantially revised. China did become a full participant in the world economy. It did not become a "normal country" in the sense that the architects of its engagement had hoped. Its political system has hardened; its regional assertiveness has grown; the Communist Party's control has, if anything, intensified. Economic integration produced economic growth,

not political transformation. Iran is not China. Its economy is smaller, its leverage more limited, its institutional coherence more fragile. But the structural lesson — that economic engagement is neither necessary nor sufficient to produce ideological transformation — applies with some force.

## The View From the Region — and From New Delhi

India has navigated its relationship with Iran with notable and revealing pragmatism. It imports Iranian oil when sanctions allow, maintains development engagement through the Chabahar Port corridor, and has historically avoided moralizing about Iranian governance while protecting commercial and strategic interests. New Delhi's approach reflects a school of thought that the West sometimes struggles to adopt: that states can be engaged transactionally without endorsing their ideological character.

The Chabahar agreement — through which India has invested in Iranian port infrastructure as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asian markets, bypassing Pakistan — survived multiple rounds of American pressure. It reflects India's conviction that Iran,

whatever its revolutionary posture, is a geographic and economic reality that cannot simply be sanction-pressured out of strategic relevance.

If the Trump framework opens Iran to broader economic engagement, India stands to benefit — more oil supply, more Chabahar throughput, more regional connectivity. But India would likely be among the first to note, privately if not publicly, that a sanctions-lite Iran is not the same as a transformed Iran. New Delhi has long operated in the space between engagement and illusion, and it is unlikely to mistake the former for the latter.

## An Honest Accounting

The honest case for the current diplomatic effort is modest but real: it may, at the margins, slow Iran's nuclear program. It may create economic incentives for elements within the Iranian establishment to argue, internally, for greater pragmatism. It may reduce the near-term risk of military escalation in a region already stretched by the aftermath of multiple conflicts. These are not trivial goods. The honest case against naive optimism is equally straightforward: there is no structural evidence that the Islamic Republic of Iran, as currently constituted — with the

Supreme Leader in place, the IRGC as a sovereign institution within the state, and the revolutionary identity baked into its constitutional DNA — intends to become a "normal country." The government it operates is not designed to be one. JD Vance's formulation — "if the Iranians behave like a normal country, then we want to treat them like a normal country" — is a reasonable conditional. The question it leaves unanswered is the same question Kissinger identified half a century ago, and the same one that every American administration from Carter to Biden has failed to resolve: What happens when a state's entire institutional identity is organized around choosing cause over nation? The Trump administration may be asking the right question. That does not mean Iran is prepared to give a different answer than it has given for 47 years. And a diplomatic framework built on the hope that it will be, at best, a bet — and at worst, a subsidy to the revolution it was designed to constrain. The South Asian Insider Weekly publishes independent editorial opinions on geopolitics, diaspora affairs, and international policy. The views expressed in this editorial reflect the analysis of the editorial board and do not constitute an endorsement of any government's foreign policy position.

# Re-Hyphenated

That asymmetry — Pakistan's gratitude, India's rebuff — set the tone for everything that followed. To a president who prizes personal loyalty, India's refusal to validate his intervention was more than a diplomatic slight. It was a rejection. Pakistan, meanwhile, understood exactly what it had to offer: validation, flexibility, and a military leader who could deal directly.

## THE RISE OF 'MY FAVORITE FIELD MARSHAL'

The figure at the center of Pakistan's diplomatic rehabilitation is Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir — a former intelligence chief who ascended to become Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces, a newly created position that consolidated military authority in a single command. Munir grasped something about Trump that India's civilian foreign-policy establishment perhaps underestimated: Trump conducts diplomacy through individuals, not institutions. He responds to strongmen who can make decisions immediately, who project confidence, and who speak in terms of deals and results rather than multilateral frameworks and strategic patience.

Munir positioned himself accordingly. He presented himself as decisive, accessible, and transactionally useful. By the end of 2025, Trump was publicly calling him "my favorite field marshal" and "a great, great general." In a sequence remarkable in modern diplomatic history, Munir became the first Pakistani military chief to be hosted by a sitting U.S. President for lunch at the White House — a photograph that circled the globe and landed in New Delhi with the force of a deliberate message.

The contrast with India's channel to the White House could not be starker. India's most direct line runs through U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, a Trump loyalist who has worked to maintain contact. But the rapport between Trump and Modi — once hailed as a model of leader-level chemistry — cooled visibly after India's rejection of Trump's mediation claims. Leader-level contact was "limited" through much of mid-to-late 2025. While Trump was lunching with Pakistan's field marshal, Modi and Trump were exchanging formal statements.

## PAKISTAN AS AMERICA'S IRAN WHISPERER

The coup de grace of Pakistan's reinvention came not from military posture but from geography and contacts. When the second phase of the U.S.-Iran conflict in 2026 demanded backchannel communication, Pakistan was uniquely positioned to provide it. Islamabad had maintained relations with Tehran. It did not recognize Israel. It had publicly condemned U.S. strikes against Iran in June 2025 — a calculated move that allowed it to retain credibility with both Washington and Tehran simultaneously. And Munir, through intelligence channels honed over decades, had working lines into the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Pakistan hosted the U.S.-Iran peace talks in April 2026. The diplomatic windfall was enormous. The country that Washington had sanctioned in 2024, that faced bipartisan Senate legislation demanding personal sanctions on Asim Munir himself in March 2025, had within twelve months become America's indispensable mediator in the most consequential conflict of the current global era.

For India, this was not merely a strategic setback. It was a profound geopolitical humiliation. The country that had spent a generation building its image as a responsible, democratic, globally aligned major power watched as the United States elevated a military-led government with documented ties to terrorist organizations into the role of regional power broker and trusted intermediary.

## THE STRATEGIC COSTS: WHAT INDIA STANDS TO LOSE

The implications for India's strategic positioning are serious and deserve clear-eyed assessment. The U.S. State Department's 2026 strategic plan — a formal document outlining American foreign policy through 2030 — mentions India exactly once, in a sentence that reads more like a caution than an endorsement: "We will seek partnership with growing regional economies such as India, but on terms that advance U.S. security and economic interests and avoid repeating past mistakes." This is a remarkable departure from Biden-era language that pledged to actively "support India's continued rise."

The Quad — the four-nation grouping of the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan, designed

as a democratic counterweight to China's influence in the Indo-Pacific — has been quietly deprioritized. A leaders-level Quad summit appears to have dropped off Trump's calendar. Meanwhile, the U.S.-China relationship has taken a different shape than India expected: the 2025 National Security Strategy does not define China as a geopolitical rival. For India, which staked significant strategic capital on the assumption that Washington and New Delhi shared a common concern about Beijing, this recalibration is deeply unsettling. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau was blunt in March 2026 when he stated that the United States would not extend to India the same economic advantages it once gave China — the manufacturing and technology transfers that fueled China's rise. It was an honest articulation of American interest. It was also a clear signal: the U.S.-India relationship, under this administration, will be transactional and bounded. India will not be helped to become a strategic peer. It will be engaged on terms that serve Washington first.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA

For the more than four million people of Indian origin in the United States — and for the Pakistani-American community that is watching its home country's standing rise — these geopolitical shifts are not abstract. They arrive on dinner tables, in temple halls, in conversations between generations, in WhatsApp groups that light up at midnight with news from Islamabad, New Delhi, and Washington simultaneously.

Indian-Americans, many of whom lobbied hard over decades for their homeland to be taken seriously as a strategic partner of the United States, find themselves watching that investment erode. The same administration that invites Pakistan's field marshal for White House lunches has imposed 50% tariffs on Indian goods, implied that India is a "hellhole" from which immigrants abuse American birthright citizenship, and has refused to invest in the Quad as a serious security architecture. The emotional dissonance is real. The diplomatic math is uncomfortable.

Pakistani-Americans, conversely, have watched a country long associated internationally with instability and state-sponsored terrorism

rehabilitated in record time. The pride in that transformation is genuine. But they too must reckon with what it means that the rehabilitation rests almost entirely on the personal authority of a military chief in a country where civilian governance has been systematically weakened. The relationship between Trump and Munir is a relationship between two strongmen. Democratic institutions in Pakistan are not the beneficiary of Washington's renewed affection.

## AN HONEST ASSESSMENT: INDIA'S OWN ROLE IN THIS OUTCOME

Intellectual honesty demands that we not attribute the entirety of this outcome to American inconstancy. India's foreign policy choices have contributed to the friction. New Delhi's continued purchase of discounted Russian oil — which prompted Trump's 50% tariff escalation — placed principle against pragmatism in a manner that Washington found unacceptable. India's refusal to endorse Trump's mediation role, while entirely defensible on strategic grounds, was read in the Oval Office as ingratitude. India's preference for strategic autonomy — its reluctance to be publicly positioned as an American ally in the fullest sense — has always carried a cost. Under an administration that rewards explicit loyalty above all else, that cost has come due.

India's geopolitical thinkers describe this as a fundamental tension: the more Trump's actions have reinforced India's belief in strategic autonomy, the more those same actions have exposed how much India still needs American partnerships — for technology, for defense, for the economic ambitions embedded in the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision of becoming a fully developed economy by the centennial of independence. Self-reliance and interdependence are not easy to reconcile. That tension is not Trump's creation. But he has sharpened it considerably.

## THE LONGER VIEW: WHAT HISTORY TELLS US ABOUT AMERICA AND SOUTH ASIA

History offers a sobering perspective. The United States has never maintained a permanent alliance architecture in South Asia. It has always moved between partners based on transactional necessity. During the Cold War, Pakistan was Washington's frontline state against the Soviet Union. After 9/11, it was the essential partner in Afghanistan. After 2001 and through the 2000s, India's

economic rise and democratic credentials made it the preferred long-term bet. Now, with Iran demanding attention and Pakistan offering the backchannel, Islamabad has found its moment again.

None of this is permanent. American administrations change. Strategic priorities shift. What is instructive is that Pakistan has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for diplomatic resilience — repeatedly finding the one thing Washington urgently needs and making itself indispensable at the right moment. Whatever one thinks of the Pakistani military's domestic record, its strategic intelligence in this moment has been formidable. India, with all its democratic legitimacy and economic weight, would do well to study that resilience, even if it rejects the methods.

De-hyphenation, as a policy concept, was never absolute. Even Bush, even Obama, were tempted at moments to invoke Kashmir, to treat the India-Pakistan rivalry as a knot America could untie for its own purposes. The difference now is that the re-hyphenation is not reluctant or incidental. It is enthusiastic. It is embodied in a field marshal having lunch at the White House while Indian sailors are being killed by American naval action in the Gulf. It is structural, not episodic.

## WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

For the South Asian diaspora in the United States, the moment calls not for partisanship but for clarity. The India-Pakistan rivalry cannot be transplanted wholesale into American political discourse without distortion. Both communities deserve elected officials and foreign-policy institutions that treat their homelands as distinct actors with distinct histories, distinct governance records, and distinct relationships to democracy and the rule of law.

The re-hyphenation of South Asia in Washington is not, in the end, a story about who "wins" — India or Pakistan. It is a story about the fragility of diplomatic progress and the speed with which decades of careful positioning can be undone by the chemistry between two leaders, the leverage of a crisis, and a geopolitical moment that rewards opportunism over alliance. The hyphen is back. It will not be painless for anyone in the subcontinent, or for anyone here who still cares about what happens there.

# The AI Kill Switch, And Why Sovereign AI Just Became Non-Negotiable

The US government has ordered Anthropic to block access to its most advanced AI models-Claude Fable 5 and Mythos 5-for all foreign nationals worldwide. This restriction applies even to foreign nationals within the US, including Anthropic's own employees. Anthropic couldn't even comply selectively. The only way to follow the order was to shut the models down for everyone, everywhere, including American citizens. Overnight, a model that businesses around the world had built their workflows on simply disappeared. This is the worst fear of geopolitical experts and tech policy watchers, playing out in real time.

Sovereign AI proponents have long argued: if you don't own the model, you don't own your access to it. A single directive, in a single jurisdiction, can switch off a capability your business, or your country, has come to depend on. This is no longer a hypothetical situation for a policy paper. It happened. This Friday. And it makes the case for sovereign AI models trained, hosted, and governed within a country's own jurisdiction not a nationalist talking point, but a genuine continuity and security imperative. Which brings me to something else

that happened this week.

Anthropic founder Dario wrote a policy paper to highlight the gap between how fast AI moves, and how slowly governments respond. The irony is hard to miss. Dario's essay, "Policy on the AI Exponential," calls for governments to step in with thoughtful, binding regulation, because AI is moving too fast for slow institutions to keep pace. Days later, the US government stepped in. Just not in the way he was asking for. This is exactly the kind of blunt, unilateral, knee-jerk, security-driven intervention that founders and policy watchers alike have feared, the kind that smart regulation is supposed to pre-empt, not become.

Still, the essay itself is a seminal moment for all of us in the policy world. Not for what it says about AI, but for who is saying it. The founder himself.

Here is a founder building one of the most powerful AI systems on the planet, saying governments must step in with binding, enforceable law. Not self-regulation. When I entered public policy over a decade ago, the doctrine was: innovate first, regulate later. I lived it during the Uber era: technology outruns the regulator, and that's

fine, regulations will catch up later. AI has destroyed that philosophy. In four years, AI went from barely writing a line of code to writing most of the code at major tech companies. You cannot afford regulation to be slow when the technology is moving at this pace and rewriting itself every few months. And yet there are no easy answers. I think about this every time I sit across from a policymaker. In conversations with India's IT Secretary S Krishnan, more recently with UK AI Minister Kanishka Narayan, and with regulators across jurisdictions, the sentiment is the same: It is genuinely hard to be a policymaker right now. How do you balance twin objectives: Don't throttle innovation. But don't let a civilisation-altering technology, or your access to it sit in someone else's hands without guardrails. India's position has been considered: pro-AI, legislate when the need is clear. But these events suggest the need is already here on two fronts. Smart, anticipatory regulation of AI capability. And sovereign AI infrastructure, so that no country is one Friday-evening directive away from disruption.

**Shweta Rajpal Kohli**

## India reaches FY26 limit in EB-5 Visa category

### Indian applicants in the category must wait until the new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1.

The United States has exhausted all available Employment-Based Fifth Preference (EB-5) unreserved immigrant visas for applicants chargeable to India for fiscal year 2026, the State Department said.

As a result, U.S. embassies and consulates will not issue additional visas in the affected categories for the remainder of the fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30. The State Department said all available EB-5 unreserved visas for Indian applicants had been issued as of June 5. The EB-5 program grants permanent residency to foreign investors who make qualifying investments in U.S. businesses that create or preserve jobs. The affected unreserved visa classifications include C5, T5, I5, R5, RU and NU.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, EB-5 visas account for 7.1 percent of the worldwide employment-based immigrant visa limit, with 68 percent allocated to unreserved categories.

The law also imposes a per-country cap, limiting nationals of any single country to no more than seven percent of the total employment-based and family-sponsored immigrant visas issued annually.

The State Department noted that unused EB-5 reserved visas from fiscal year 2024 were made available to unreserved categories in fiscal year 2026 under the EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act of 2022. Despite the additional visa numbers, demand from Indian applicants exhausted the country's allocation before the end of the fiscal year.

"Since all available EB-5 unreserved visas for applicants chargeable to India in FY 2026 have been used, embassies and consulates may not issue visas in these categories for the remainder of the fiscal year," the State Department said in its announcement.

The annual visa limits will reset with the start of fiscal year 2027 on Oct. 1. At that point, U.S. embassies and consulates may resume issuing EB-5 unreserved



immigrant visas to qualified Indian applicants, subject to visa availability. In its May and June 2026 Visa Bulletins, the State Department had warned that rising

demand could lead to retrogression or the exhaustion of available visa numbers for Indian applicants before the end of the fiscal year.

# Will You Come Home?



ADIL ZAINULBHAJ

India has spent decades watching its best scientific minds build careers abroad. It now has a serious answer to the question of why they should come back.

Think about the last time you explained your research to someone at a dinner party. The polite nods. The moment when they asked what it was for, really, in the end. And the pause before you gave the answer you have given a hundred times, about the long game, about how science works, about patience.

Now think about what it would mean to work on a problem where the answer to that question was obvious. Where the scale was so large, and the need so visible, that you never had to explain the relevance. Where your work on clean energy fed directly into the world's largest renewable deployment. Where your research on AI ran on a digital public infrastructure used by hundreds of millions of people. Where your drug or your diagnostic reached a healthcare system that had no alternative.

That is what India offers right now. Not as aspiration. As fact.

The question Indian-origin researchers have always asked is not whether they want to contribute. It is whether the conditions exist to do it properly.

For a long time, the honest answer was: not quite. The funding was uneven. The bureaucracy was real. The gap between what was possible in a well-resourced Western university and what was available in India was wide enough that even researchers who deeply wanted to return did the math and stayed put. The pull of India was emotional. The friction was practical. Practical usually wins.

The Prime Minister Research Chair (PMRC) Scheme, launched this month by the Ministry of Education, is a serious attempt to change that arithmetic.

It is not another fellowship with a stipend that makes you feel appreciated but not compensated. The financial package is structured as a top-up to whatever researchers are currently receiving, with a competitive annual fee, a one-time research grant for project initiation that runs to several crores depending on seniority, residential and medical allowance, and full relocation support. Fellows can return to their parent

institution twice a year. The three-year engagement is designed to be a genuine commitment, not a sabbatical experiment.

There are 120 positions. Three tracks cover the full range of career stages. Young Research Fellows are early-career researchers within five years of their PhD, people at the moment when the habits and networks that define a scientific career are still being formed. Senior Fellows are mid-career scientists with five to ten years of post-PhD experience, researchers who have proven themselves and want their work to operate at a different scale. Research Chairs are the senior figures, ten-plus years out, with the standing to shape what an institution does rather than simply contribute to it. The 13 priority sectors are the ones worth paying attention to. Semiconductors, quantum computing, AI, clean energy, biotechnology, healthcare and medical technology, space and defense, critical minerals. These are not invented priorities padded out to look comprehensive. They are the areas where India has national missions already running, with funding committed and institutions already in place. A researcher working in any of these fields will find not just a lab but a direct line into policy. Host institutions are the IITs, IISc, and national laboratories under DST, DBT, CSIR, and ICMR. Not every institution in the country, curated ones that have the infrastructure to absorb and support incoming researchers without the fellow having to spend the first year sorting out basics.

For early-career researchers, particularly those on postdoctoral contracts in the US or UK, the timing matters more than it might appear. The research funding environment in the US has contracted. Visa uncertainty for Indian nationals is real and has not gone away. Academic hiring in many fields is tight. The window between PhD completion and a permanent position is longer than it used to be, and the outcome is less certain. Against that backdrop, a funded research position in India, with a serious grant, world-class students, and the scale of problems that only India can offer, deserves a genuine look rather than a reflexive no.

For senior researchers, the calculation is different but equally worth making. At a certain point in a career, the question is not what the next paper will be but what the body of work adds up to. A Research Chair in PMRC is not being asked to deliver papers. They are being asked to shape an institution, to build something, to use what they know to create capacity that will outlast them. That is a different kind of opportunity from anything a tenured position in the West typically provides.

The scheme is also honest about what

it asks. This is a three-year commitment, residential by design, with enough structure to ensure that fellows are actually embedded rather than just nominally affiliated. India has tried softer versions of diaspora engagement before, visiting positions, advisory roles, one-semester teaching stints. They have produced goodwill and occasionally good research. They have not produced the kind of sustained institutional change that a real presence over real time can create. PMRC is trying to do the harder thing.

For researchers with families, the practical questions are real and the scheme addresses them directly. IIT campuses and the cities around India's premier research institutions have good schools. Spouse employment support and OCI card facilitation are part of the package. Relocation support is not a vague promise. These are answers, not deflections.

India ranks third in global scientific publications and is the second

fastest-growing research producer in the world. Patents granted have grown tenfold in a decade. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation is operational. The infrastructure is there.

What PMRC is asking is whether the people who trained in India, built careers abroad, and carried that question about contribution somewhere in the back of their minds are ready to do something about it. Not someday. Now, while the window is open and the positions are real.

Applications are open for 45 days from June 1, 2026. The portal, the eligibility criteria, and the application process are all at [pmrc.education.gov.in](http://pmrc.education.gov.in). The contact for queries is [contact.pmrc@gov.in](mailto:contact.pmrc@gov.in).

The country that shaped you is asking a direct question. It would be worth taking seriously.

**Adil Zainulbhai is the ex-Chairman of Capacity Building Commission of India, which was set up by Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi in 2021, to help improve the Capacity of Indian Civil Service. Prior to that, he was Chairman of Quality Council of India.**



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For three years, the investing world treated artificial intelligence as a riddle to be solved from the outside. How big was the bubble, which trades would it ruin, where were the winners hiding. Commentators of all kinds opined from end of humanity doom narratives to "it's a bubble" valuation analysis. The show went on.

The larger shift was the one happening to the floor they were standing on. AI has stopped being one corporate theme among many and turned into something closer to a macroeconomic engine. Pimco has estimated that AI-related spending could add as much as \$14 trillion to global investment over five years, a sum it puts at roughly an eighth of world output. The big American cloud companies are on course to pour something like \$800 billion into AI data centres this year.

Kevin Warsh, newly installed at the Federal Reserve, has spoken of AI as a force that could dampen inflation and clear room to cut rates. Once a single theme begins to move output, prices and the cost of money, a portfolio can no longer treat it as optional. It turns into the climate everyone invests inside.

Elon Musk's rockets are not alone in defying gravity. So are AI valuations. Whatever makes AI impossible to avoid is also what has quietly disabled its pricing and this is missed by most folks. As the giants come to market, several index compilers have loosened their own rules so the shares qualify for inclusion sooner.

The big low-cost tracker funds that shadow those benchmarks then have to buy, on schedule, regardless of the number on the screen. Credit markets are warping in parallel, with Amazon, Alphabet and Meta said to have roughly doubled their borrowings to around \$300 billion in a matter of months, smudging the line that used to separate equity risk from debt risk.

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(The author is a business leader and columnist)



and the market has stepped back from the very work that would tell the two apart. From where India's savers sit, none of this is a far-off American show. The same automatic-inclusion logic reaches them through international and feeder funds, through the global passive complex, and through the simple reality that equity sentiment everywhere now follows a small cluster of American mega-caps.



# Elon Musk's well-deserved win causes the zero-sum left to freak out

**Musk's revolutionary vision of reusable rockets has created a company that dominates global satellite communications and leads space exploration**

Americans are cheering the extraordinary achievements of Elon Musk, who through sheer grit and brilliance has powered the United States to the forefront of the space race. Musk's revolutionary vision of reusable rockets has created a company that dominates global satellite communications and leads space exploration, putting within reach the ability to put data centers into orbit and create a human colony on the moon or perhaps eventually on Mars. In the process, Musk has become the world's first trillionaire.

As Musk said the day he sold a stake in SpaceX to the public: "That's what SpaceX is all about – it's to take the fiction out of science fiction and create an exciting, inspiring future for everyone." Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are not excited or inspired. The multi-millionaire senators and their leftist collaborators are seething, offended beyond comprehension that a single individual has become so rich. They view Musk's record-setting sale of equity in SpaceX and accumulation of wealth as an indictment of our capitalist society, though they have yet to explain how anyone has been injured by the entrepreneur's success. Indeed, they ignore the fabulous wealth that Musk has created for SpaceX employees: with the company's initial public offering last week, some 4,400 workers at the company reportedly became millionaires overnight, and some 400 are now each worth more than \$100 million. Those institutions that invested early on, including the University of North Carolina system, the University of Virginia and Washington University in St. Louis, have also benefited from early investments in SpaceX. While the investment committees at universities like Harvard and Columbia were focused on divesting companies producing fossil fuels or businesses with ties to Israel, some schools made a ton of money betting on Musk.

The Warren-Sanders crowd also ignores the gigantic benefit of providing cheap internet access to hundreds of millions of people around the world, which Musk's Starlink has done. As Bill Ackman posted on X: "Access to low-cost, high speed communications everywhere will allow children around the world to be educated, families to build businesses, and life-saving medical knowledge and care to be available everywhere."

Ackman's post was in response to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, the perpetually angry scold of U.S. exceptionalism, who claimed on X (ironically, another Musk-owned firm) that Musk's wealth is a "call to action to take on the unprecedented income and wealth inequality that now exists and the greed and power of a ruling class that is destroying the social fabric of America." That's the same Bernie Sanders who has accumulated millions of dollars while in public service and travels around the



country via private jet spouting socialism. If anyone is rending our social fabric, it is those destroying accountability through dumbing down law enforcement and border protections, encouraging antisemitism with bogus campaigns against Israel and undermining our public schools, denying (especially) minority kids of sharing in the American Dream. The Left has much to account for.

Democrats live in a zero-sum world. If someone becomes wealthy, they imagine it comes at the expense of someone else. California Governor Gavin Newsom posted on X: "Americans are struggling to pay for groceries and gas while Elon Musk becomes a TRILLIONAIRE." Did Musk drive up the cost of bread? Was he behind the massive welfare fraud and out-of-control spending that threatens California's economy and helps make it one of the most expensive places on earth to live? The fact that Elon Musk has created tens of thousands of jobs, put electric cars on the map, and developed Neuralink, which uses advanced technology to allow people to control computers and robotic arms with their thoughts, allowing hope for those with spinal injuries, for instance, is irrelevant. Socialists don't celebrate success and innovation, they celebrate mediocrity. Their policies do not aim to build wealth, but to redistribute it from producers to non-producers. Giving the government more control over the economy breeds inefficiency and corruption, and removed the incentives for individuals to innovate and create. In all of world history, there is not a single socialist country that has succeeded. Venezuela and Mexico are excellent examples of once-prosperous countries that have been plundered by leftists taking over the economy, countries where poverty is rampant and innovation nowhere to be seen.

European countries that adopted socialist taxation and embraced big government solutions to healthcare and climate change have changed direction as voters tired of their stagnant economies and limited opportunities.

Sweden, long championed by the Bernie Sanders crowd for its collectivist approach, ditched socialism in 1976 when Astrid Lindgren, beloved author of the Pippi Longstocking books, discovered that her country's tax code was forcing her to pay a marginal tax of more than 100 percent on her income. For every extra hundred dollars she earned, she had to pay the state \$102. In response, Lindgren wrote a scorching satirical fairytale, "Pomperipossa in Monismania," about an author forced to pay exorbitant taxes. It ignited a furious debate over Sweden's tax policies and resulted in the ouster of the Social Democratic party for the first time in more than 40 years. Last year, in Bolivia, the ruling leftwing party Movimiento al Socialismo was voted out of office for the first time in 20 years, with voters rebelling against inflation at 40-year-highs of 25%, depleted foreign currency reserves and shortages of fuel and medicine. Note to Bernie: socialism doesn't work. Capitalism does. It's that simple. As reported in the New York Sun, "At a 2019 CBS town hall, Mr. Sanders was pressed about joining the "millionaire class" that he long railed against. "I wrote a best-selling book," he said of his newfound wealth. "If you write a best-selling book, you can be a millionaire, too." Wasn't this "the definition of capitalism" and "the American Dream," he was asked in a subsequent town hall on Fox News. "What we want," Mr. Sanders said, "is a country where everybody has opportunity." That "everybody" includes Elon Musk. Thank God he chose America for that very reason.

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No JOMO only FOMO

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# Hormuz Is Reopening, But It May Never Matter Quite The Same Way Again

**Hormuz may never carry the traffic it had prior to the war, and its significance for global supply chains may be diminished, to an extent. Here's why**

US President Donald Trump recently announced that the US and Iran had reached a deal and that the Strait of Hormuz would be reopened soon. Coming over three months after the war started, however, many countries have by now explored alternate pathways to keep their economies running and to hedge against future disruptions.

## The India-Omani Partnership

India has been one of the worst hit countries by this war, in particular by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, as much of her energy imports from the Middle East transit through this critical waterway. While oil and gas are the most important, there are other major imports, like fertilizers, that also transit through Hormuz. Recently, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, revealed that India's oil marketing companies were losing Rs. 16,000 crore a day, something the recent fuel price hikes aim to address, to an extent. The rupee has fallen to a historical low to touch 95 to the dollar. Amidst these shocks, the news that the India-Omani Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has been actualised was met with much glee.

CEPA paves the way for more buoyant trade with the Oman Sultanate, especially facilitating Indian exports - a critical need for the economy currently. Most importantly, the location of Oman is significant now with all the tension around the Strait of Hormuz. Oman is located outside the Strait, directly on the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, and thus, goods can enter and exit its ports of Salalah and Duqm easily without having to go through Hormuz. Moreover, India also had a historical presence at Duqm. India's imports from Oman actually increased by 246.4%, rising from USD 430 million to nearly USD 1.5 billion, driven by higher purchases of crude oil and urea. The countries are now seeking to reactivate the proposal for the Rs.40,000-crore Oman-Gujarat deep-sea gas pipeline. The 2,000-km subsea project would bypass the Strait of Hormuz, offering a potentially safer and more direct route for natural gas imports, hedging against any similar disruptions in future.

## Oman's Sweet Spot

In fact, Oman is in a sweet spot now with its location outside the Strait of Hormuz as countries seek alternatives. One fifth of the world's energy supplies pass through Hormuz from countries of the Gulf like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE to mainly Asian markets. Consequently, Oman has increased its



oil exports to unprecedented levels, given that its ports are located outside Hormuz, enabling it to pump supplies to Asian markets. Beyond this, the gains from customs declarations have been remarkable. For example, revenues from declarations for shipments destined for Dubai alone jumped from \$270 million in March to \$2.16 billion in April.

More important is the Sultanate's new positioning as a reliable hub for maritime and air transport and shipping through its ports and airports. For instance, food exports to Gulf countries through Hormuz have also been disrupted. Currently, shipments are travelling from Omani ports through the Hatta border crossing between Oman and the UAE and further into the wider Gulf region and markets. This will enable Oman to reap continuous benefits even after the Hormuz crisis ends. It will also attract massive investments for strategic road and railway projects linking the Gulf states to Oman, and oil and gas pipeline projects that bypass the Strait of Hormuz, like the one with India. Oman will definitely aim to preserve the economic and geopolitical gains it achieved in the war.

## The Fujairah Terminal

Other countries, too, are hedging. For many like the UAE, whose economy depends majorly on energy exports, it is an existential threat. The world has lost 1 billion barrels of oil due to Iran's closure of the Strait, according to Dr Sultan Al Jaber, the UAE's Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology. Therefore, the country is now accelerating the construction of the West-East oil pipeline to double its oil export capacity to 4 million barrels per day by 2027 via the port of Fujairah, which lies around 70 nautical miles outside the Strait of Hormuz.

The Fujairah Oil Terminal FZC (FOT) is a

premier, 1.177 million cubic meter independent onshore storage facility in the UAE, specialising in crude oil and refined products. With the disruptions in Hormuz, its strategic significance for global supply through it has increased manifold. This is just as significant for India, as the Fujairah oil terminal can still send supplies to us while also ramping up oil production. According to data, UAE oil exports to India rose to around 619,000 barrels per day in April this year, a 43% increase from previous averages.

## Saudi And Iraq Look Elsewhere, Too

Saudi Arabia, OPEC's second largest oil producer has, similarly, diverted exports through its port of Yanbu on the Red Sea, via its East-West Pipeline. It consists of twin pipes that carry oil more than 1,200 km from the Abqaiq oil field in the Kingdom's Eastern Province to Yanbu. Interestingly, this pipeline, also known as Petroline, was built in 1981 during the Iran-Iraq war as an emergency route, with the singular objective of bypassing the Strait of Hormuz to avoid any crisis there and promote energy security. That has now paid off, with the pipeline reported to be operating at full capacity. In fact, Saudi exports of jet fuel to Europe through Yanbu has actually increased after the war broke out this year.

Like them, Iraq, another major oil producer, is also diversifying. As a major exporter through Hormuz, the Strait's closure has made it look elsewhere. It has begun exporting oil through Syria's Baniyas oil port, since early April. Iraqi fuel crossed through the Al-Tanf border crossing into Syrian territory, where from Baniyas on the Mediterranean coast Iraqi oil will make its way to global markets. With Syria's stabilisation and reconstruction, this route is sure to become a permanent one for at least some of Iraq's oil exports even after Hormuz reopens.

## Two Unintended 'Beneficiaries'

An unhappy fallout of the closure of Hormuz has been that it is essentially Asian markets that have been affected the most. These relied most on supplies through the strait, unlike, say, Israel, which together with the US began the war. While the US has benefited from oil sales, countries like India, Japan, South Korea have been vulnerable to the Hormuz crisis. They, too, have been looking for alternatives and have turned to non-traditional sources.

Two such "non-traditional" sources that have become beneficiaries are Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

On May 2, a Japan Times report noted how a tanker carrying some 45,000 kilolitres of crude oil from Azerbaijan arrived at an Eneos refinery in Yokohama, quoting officials at Eneos. The shipment of Azerbaijan oil arrived in Japan for the first time as it sought to diversify supply sources. Like India, Japan had also imported mostly Middle Eastern crude, and now has also procured US and Russian oil. This marks a major shift in its energy procurement as it diversifies its supply chains. It also stands to reason that once Hormuz reopens, Japan will no longer be totally reliant on the supplies through that route, at least not as much as pre-war levels. It has now also turned to Kazakhstan as an alternate source, which, logistically, will be cheaper for procurement than Middle-Eastern supplies.

Kazakhstan has also become a beneficiary of the Hormuz crisis. The loss of Middle-Eastern oil in global markets has translated into a surge in demand for Kazakh oil, and disruption in traditional trade routes has meant greater traffic along the country's Middle Corridor or the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, which traverses through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus to reach Turkey, Black Sea and Mediterranean ports to Europe. Kazakhstan has ramped up supplies to European markets as well as to Japan and countries like Bangladesh. Jihad Azour, director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Middle East and Central Asia Department, recently described Central Asia as a "transit hedge", offering alternative routes for trade and energy flows amid rising geopolitical uncertainty.

# Why Strength Training Beats Cardio For PMOS Fat Loss, Coach Explains

**A fitness coach explains how switching from intense cardio to strength training improved insulin sensitivity and reduced PCOS-related weight gain and bloating**

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), now renamed Polyendocrine Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS) to better reflect its broader metabolic nature, continues to affect millions of women worldwide.

A fitness influencer has now shared her experience of struggling with weight gain in this condition despite doing daily cardio for long hours. She explained how she later discovered that her approach may have been working against her body's hormonal balance.

In a post shared on Instagram, fat loss coach Sunaina wrote, "I used to do 45 minutes of cardio every single day. My weight didn't move. My bloating got worse. I was exhausted. Then I learned why."

Intense cardio raises cortisol lev-

els. In people with PMOS, higher cortisol directly promotes fat storage around the abdomen. The more cardio you do, it leads to greater retention of belly fat.

**The Switch That Changed Everything**

The change came from switching to dumbbell training at a slow to moderate pace three times a week. You can also add low-intensity walking to your routine. The influencer recommended, "not fearing heavy weight lifting." **Monday - Lower Body Strength** A lower-body strength routine focuses on heavy compound movements followed by targeted accessory work. It targets your quads, hamstrings and glutes. Perform exercises like squats, hip thrusts, Bulgarian split squats, Romanian deadlifts and leg press. This full session should

take about 60 minutes.

**Wednesday - Upper Body Strength**

The upper-body strength routine focuses on building power in your chest, back, shoulders and arms. It pairs pushing and pulling movements to keep your joints healthy and balanced. Some exercises include barbell bench press, bent-over rows, overhead shoulder press, lat pulldowns or pull-ups and more.

**Friday - Full Body**

The full-body strength routine maximises efficiency by targeting every major muscle group in a single session. It utilises compound movements to build overall power and core stability. Barbell deadlifts, incline dumbbell bench press, goblet squats and seated cable rows are some of the major exercises. The influ-



encer also suggested doing a "7-minute walk every 80 minutes, every day".

"Strength training builds muscle, which directly improves insulin

sensitivity, the root issue in PCOS. Walk to lower cortisol. Lift to fix insulin & hormones. That's the PCOS/PMOS formula," she concluded.

## Influencers claim nicotine is not the villain. So, did we get it wrong all this time?

**Social media influencers are pitching nicotine as a wellness aid when it comes to improving brain function. But how far or close are we to the truth? Is nicotine really not as dangerous? We asked experts.**

"Nicotine might actually be good for you."

A decade ago, that sentence would have got you mocked at. However, things seem to have changed now. You don't dismiss the claim at a glance. Why?

Because we live in an era where old health beliefs are constantly being challenged and every few weeks the internet discovers a new hack for better health. So, when nicotine begins showing up in conversations about cognitive performance and longevity, curiosity is almost inevitable. Because, even if the internet gets you a new breakthrough in science first, it feels normal.

Earlier, nicotine was associated with discussion around smoking and anti-tobacco warnings. Today, there are several videos online claiming that nicotine may not be the villain we once thought it was. There's probably more to its use and benefits.

But is it? The wellness claim on nicotine Several wellness influencers are

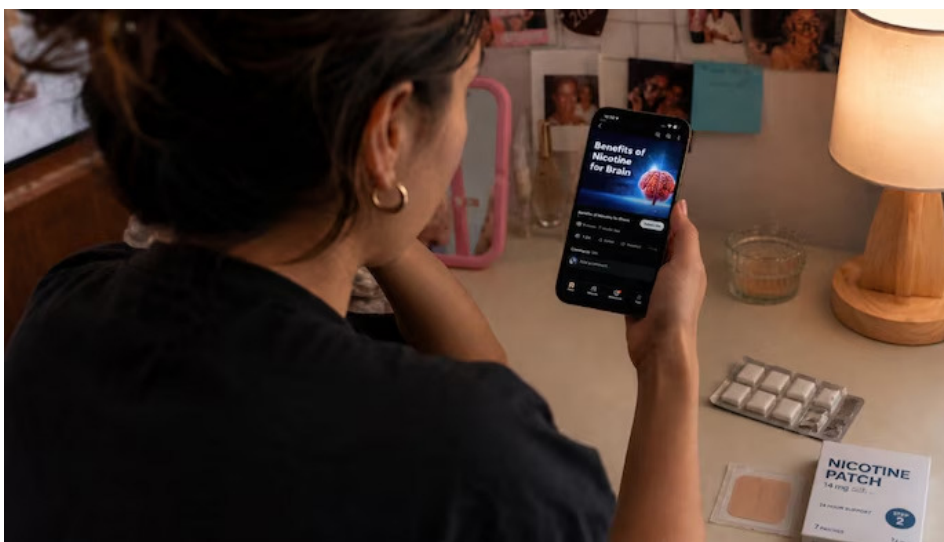
at the helm of this discourse on social media, where they claim it can help boost memory function, concentration and cognitive performance.

Dave Asprey, an American entrepreneur and popular biohacker, is one of

of these claims keep circulating across podcasts, Reddit threads and wellness forums, often backed by references to neuroscience studies, longevity research and sharper focus.

While the claims sound compelling, they often leave out an important distinction: nicotine is not the same thing as smoking, but neither does that automatically make it a wellness supplement. Naturally, we turned to experts in the field to unpack the truth. Reality check Nicotine replacement products (NRTs), such as gums and

patches, have long been used to help people quit smoking. That's because nicotine itself is not considered the main cancer-causing substance in cigarettes. Instead, the biggest health risks come from the thousands of harmful chemicals released when tobacco is burned, including several known carcinogens. Nicotine's role is different — it's the ingredient that keeps people hooked. And that is also part of the problem. At its core, nicotine acts like a chemical messenger. Once it reaches the brain, it sparks the release of compounds linked to pleasure, alertness and mood. It also taps into pathways that help regulate attention and memory, which helps explain why some users report feeling more focused after consuming it. "Nicotine can temporarily improve alertness and attention by stimulating nicotinic receptors in the brain. Calling it 'healthy' is misleading," Dr. Lancelot Pinto, consultant pulmonologist and epidemiologist, P. D. Hinduja Hospital and Medical Research Centre, Mahim, tells India Today. He further explains, "Research shows modest short-term improvements in attention and working memory, particularly in nicotine-naive individuals. The molecule may have neuroprotective effects against cognitive decline, but these are results from association studies and remain speculative, with no early degree of certainty." Unlike time-tested stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine is highly addictive and increases cardiovascular stress, putting vulnerable individuals, especially young adolescents, at greater risk. And that is why experts do not recommend it as a brain booster.



them. In several podcasts and interviews, he has shared how the isolated use of nicotine, in small amounts, can actually have certain cognitive benefits. Following suit, more wellness influencers on social media started talking about the same, arguing that nicotine has been vilified far beyond reason.

It all started a while back and versions

# This Bengali seafood classic just made it to world's best prawn dishes

TasteAtlas has revealed its list of the world's best shrimp and prawn dishes, and one beloved Bengali classic has swum its way onto the global ranking.



## Global list

West Bengal's Chingri malai curry clinched the 11th spot in the global ranking, which features over 80 dishes. It is also the only Indian dish on the list.

When it comes to Bengal and non-vegetarian food, seafood is a staple in almost every home. And among the many fish and seafood dishes that grace Bengali tables, few enjoy the kind of star status that Chingri malai curry does. The dish is a scrumptious combination of prawns simmered in a rich, creamy coconut milk gravy, flavoured with aromatics and spices that strike a delicate balance between sweet, savoury and mildly spicy. TasteAtlas describes it as a "traditional Bengali curry made with prawns cooked in coconut milk, often enriched with garam masala and mustard oil before being served with rice." In Bengal, it is often served dur-

ing celebratory occasions such as the Bengali New Year and weddings, and now also makes for a perfect lazy Sunday brunch. While the dish is immensely popular, there isn't one definitive tale that explains exactly how it came into existence. If local lore is to be believed, some trace its origins to maritime trade links with Southeast Asia. The word "malai" is believed to have evolved from Malay influence, and the use of coconut milk in the dish points to culinary exchanges that took place through trade routes connecting Bengal with present-day Malaysia and neighbouring regions. And Bengal is not the only place known for its prawn curry. The western coastal belt — Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala and other regions — also offers delectable prawn curry and rice combinations. Here, the curries tend to be a bit tangier and

spicier. The list features a variety of shrimp and prawn dishes from across the globe. Claiming the top spot is Tacos Gobernador, a Mexican seafood favourite that combines shrimp with cheese and tortillas. It is followed by Camarones al Mojo de Ajo, another Mexican classic featuring shrimp sautéed in butter with plenty of garlic, chilli and spices. The third position goes to Spain's Gambas al Ajillo, a popular tapas dish of shrimp cooked in garlic-infused olive oil. Close behind is Gambas a la Plancha, another Spanish favourite where whole shrimp are simply seasoned with salt and quickly grilled to let their natural flavours shine. Rounding out the top-ranked dishes is Bobo de Camaro, a beloved speciality from Brazil's Bahia region, made with shrimp simmered in a rich, creamy puree of cassava and coconut milk.

Every time a new global food ranking drops, there's a good chance an Indian dish has made the cut. It's true, Indian food is finding new fans around the world. The fun part is seeing which regional favourite everyone is talking about this time.

The excitement feels a little more special when the recognition goes beyond the familiar crowd-pleasers and shines a light on

regional gems locals have cherished for years. This time, the spotlight is on Bengal's seafood. It's aromatic, rich in spices and absolutely flavourful. International food and travel guide TasteAtlas has released its ranking of the world's Best Shrimp and Prawn Dishes, and one Bengali classic has secured a spot among the top dishes across the globe.

**Bengali dish makes it to glo-**

## This Japanese chef knows more about biryani than most of us

As more Indians fall in love with Japan's food, culture and travel experiences, one Japanese chef has spent years chasing the perfect biryani.

There are two kinds of people. Those who love savouring a good biryani. And those who love cooking one. Biryani and foodies share a long-standing relationship. Despite all the debates over whether Hyderabad does it best, or Kolkata's potato deserves the spotlight, or a biryani should be fiery, fragrant or somewhere in between, the love for the dish remains mutual. Several reports claim that biryani is often the most-ordered dish in India, we aren't second guessing that. But the passion for this dish is not exclusively Indian. Thousands of kilometres away from India, a Japanese chef is trying to perfect it. In fact, Takamasa Osawa, better known as "Biryani Osawa", has been at it for the past 15 years! There's something about the India-Japanese connection. India's fascination with Japan has never been stronger. More Indians are travelling to Japan than ever before, social media is flooded with reels about Tokyo cafes and Kyoto streets, anime has moved from niche fandom to mainstream culture, and Japanese food has become a regular part of dining. But while Indians are looking out for sushi, ramen and matcha, one Japanese chef has spent the better part of his life looking towards India for

biryani.

Earlier this year, the biryani chef also visited actor Ram Charan's home and cooked for him and his family. Videos from the visit quickly went viral among food lovers and fans alike. The actor reportedly praised the biryani for getting the balance just right - flavourful, fragrant and not overloaded with gravy.

And there's more to his story.

The Japanese chef who cooks biryani to perfection

The Tokyo-based chef has become something of a legend among biryani lovers. Today, Osawa runs a tiny 10-seater restaurant in Tokyo that serves only one type of biryani each day of the week. No side menu designed to please everyone. Just biryani. And perhaps, sometimes, with a side of soy sauce or wasabi. The restaurant, aptly named Biryani Osawa, has earned a Michelin Bib Gourmand recognition - Michelin Guide's award presented to restaurants that serve quality food at reasonable prices - and built a reputation among food enthusiasts for its la-

ser-sharp focus on perfecting a single dish. Osawa approaches biryani almost like a scientist, analysing ingredients, temperatures and techniques with obsessive precision. Japanese are known for their attention to detail and perfection and that might be a reason why this chef knows Indian biryani better than most Indians! No offence, please.

studying regional styles, cooking methods and the philosophy behind the dish. His culinary schools were not five-star kitchens, but cooks working in local restaurants and canteens. These are places where meals are economically priced and recipes carry the warmth of tips and tricks passed down through generations.

In an interview with Gulf News, he shared, "I would smile and ask politely if I could see the process, see inside the kitchens, and maybe because I was a foreigner and young, they would let me in. It didn't matter that I didn't know the language. I learned by smell, taste, touch, and sight." Osawa's story arrives at a moment when Indian food is enjoying unprecedented global attention. Biryani itself has become one of the world's most talked-about dishes. From Hyderabad and Kolkata to Lucknow, every version tells a different story, and Osawa wishes to understand and perfect each one of them. Perhaps that's why Osawa's pursuit resonates so deeply. Because biryani has never been a recipe that can be mastered in a weekend. It is a dish of patience, and endless regional nuance.

And if a Japanese chef can spend 15 years chasing the perfect biryani, perhaps the rest of us can finally stop arguing about which version is the best.



What makes his story remarkable is that he didn't simply learn how to cook biryani, he made it his life's work. It all started with a curiosity about a signboard that simply read "Biryani", and he decided to order a plate. A rice lover since childhood, one trip to Tamil Nadu is part of the reason why he has Michelin recognition today. Over the next 15 years, he travelled across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh,

## Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About It

### Enshit- tification

Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About It



**Cory Doctorow**

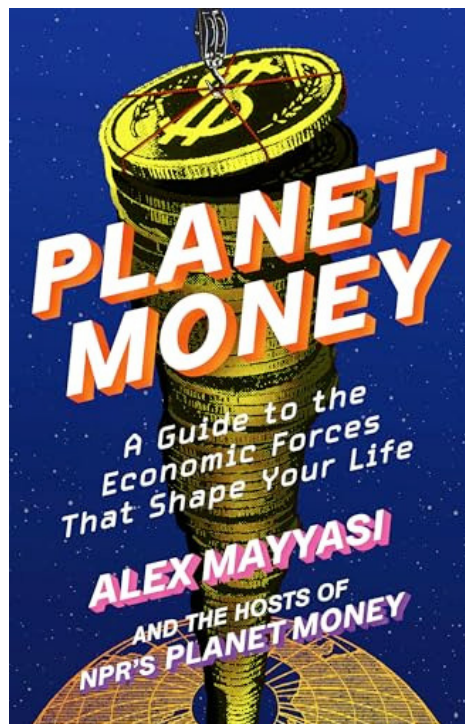
Enshittification: It's not just you?the internet sucks now. It's been enshittified. That was no accident, and it's not gonna fix itself. Here's how we'll disenshittify it so we can have a new, good internet. We are all living through the Enshittocene?the Great Enshittening?a time in which the services that matter to

us, that we rely on, are being turned into giant piles of shit. It's frustrating. Demoralizing. Even terrifying.

The once-glorious internet has degenerated into "platforms" that rose to dominance because they delivered convenient and delightful services efficiently and reliably. But once we were locked in to those services, the tech bosses turned on us, relying on our dependency to keep us using the services even as they got worse and worse. The platform bosses did the same to the companies that had flocked to their services to sell stuff to us. Once we were all locked in?businesses and users?the tech companies stripped out all utility, save the bare minimum needed to stave off total collapse.

In Enshittification, Cory Doctorow shows us where it comes from: not the iron laws of economics, or the great forces of history, but specific policy choices made by powerful people who ignored every warning about the consequences of those choices. These are choices that can be undone. Enshittification is a Big Tech disassembly manual, a road map for the seizure of the means of computation. It is a diagnosis, and it is a cure.

## Planet Money: A Guide to the Economic Forces That Shape Your Life



From the world's leading economics podcast comes an irresistible guide to the hidden world of everyday economics. Hello, and welcome to Planet Money!

Millions of listeners trust the world's leading economics podcast to explain the mysterious inner workings of the global economy and the forces that affect nearly every decision we make. Through expert research and delightful stories the Planet Money hosts help everyone see the world like an economist.

For their first-ever book, longtime contributor Alex Mayyasi and the hosts of NPR's Planet Money present brand new stories and insights gathered from more than a decade of reporting that reveal ways AI might help you or replace you, demystify dating markets, and show how pro sports' "dumbest" contract holds the secret to building wealth. Taking readers on adventures to a smartphone factory in Patagonia, a raisin cartel in California, and an Indigenous reserve in Canada that might just have a solution for the housing crisis, Planet Money shows how economics shapes our world, and how we can harness key principles to make our own lives a little richer.

## Muskism: A Guide for the Perplexed

Who on earth is Elon Musk and what is he doing? Is he a hero, a villain, or does he swing constantly between those two poles? According to the constant media gush

### MUSKISM

*A Guide for the Perplexed*



**Quinn Slobodian & Ben Tarnoff**

driven by his every act and pronouncement, Musk is best understood in personal terms. This book argues differently. Rather than seeing Musk as an individual, it sees him as an avatar of something called a playbook for our new postliberal age.

It's not that Musk himself holds a coherent set of beliefs; you could say his life is one long improvisation. And he's certainly never used the word Muskism – just as, a century ago, Henry Ford never used Fordism to define his own post-liberal modernity. In exploring the forces that have shaped Musk, from South Africa to Silicon Valley, Space X to DOGE, Quinn Slobodian and Ben Tarnoff outline the motifs and practices that have come to dominate our own crisis-ridden world.

Muskism, they show, speaks the language of crisis and emergency to invoke a less human where humans are purged from the productive process

and, through social media and video games, merged with the machine. This is a worldview in which the technocrat is king; which piggybacks on the state to achieve supremacy; and in which only a select few deserve salvation. If you enter, this book warns you, you will grind and you will live in the shadow of one man – but the rewards could be priceless and the alternative might be extinction.

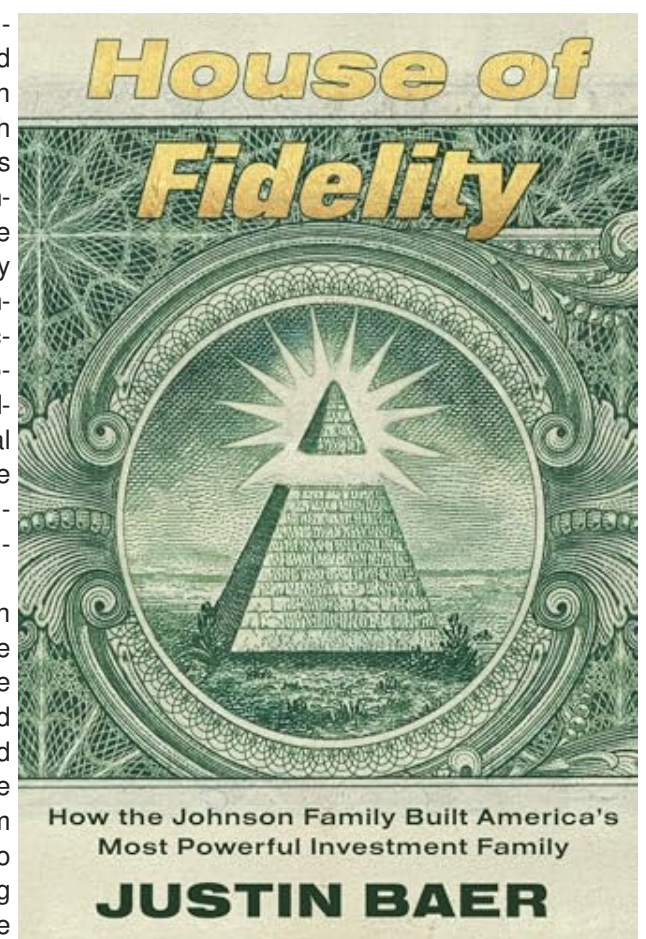
## House of Fidelity: The Rise of the Johnson Dynasty and the Company That Changed American Investing

The gripping, definitive account of the private family behind one of the most powerful financial institutions in the world.

When Edward C. Johnson 2d founded Fidelity in 1946, investing was a pursuit reserved for the elite. Today, more than \$15 trillion flows through Fidelity's customer accounts and investment funds—touching the lives of one in five American adults. Fidelity helped invent modern retail investing: democratizing access to mutual funds, introducing the 401(k), and upending the need for traditional brokers. But behind the scenes of this financial juggernaut is a family saga unlike any other.

In House of Fidelity, veteran journalist Justin Baer tells the definitive story of the Johnsons—a New England dynasty that fiercely guarded control of their company while reshaping Wall Street. From the founder's bold leap into Boston's insular investing circles, to the meteoric rise of Peter Lynch, to behind-

closed-doors battles over succession and legacy, Baer reveals a company and a family locked in a delicate balance of innovation, influence, and internal power struggles. House of Fidelity is a sweeping history of American investing—and the dynasty that came to define it.



# Are water bars the next big Indian luxury wedding trend?

Who knew water could do more than just hydrate. Today, it has the potential to become the next most talked about thing at luxury weddings.



"Excuse me, can I get a glass of water, please?"

It is one of the simplest requests you can make at a restaurant. At most, the server might ask whether you'd like it chilled or at room temperature. Maybe bottled, RO, or sparkling, if they're feeling particularly fancy. Water, after all, was never meant to be complicated. You drink it because you're thirsty, and your body needs it. Nobody expects a discussion on flavour notes, mineral composition, source altitude, or whether a bottle is worth Rs 500. And yet, here we are.

Water is no longer just something that quenches your thirst. The kind of water you drink increasingly says something about who you are—or at least who you want to be seen as. From luxury labels and designer bottles to curated mineral profiles, water is quietly transforming from a basic necessity into a lifestyle product, one that is marketed, experienced, and, in some circles, flaunted.

Recently, in a podcast, content creator Sakshi Shivdasani shared her experience of attending a wedding with a water bar. No lime soda or Blue Lagoon, but glacial water, spring water, mineral water and more. She mentioned that the groom's friends were observing 'Dry April'—a month-long break from alcohol—and that added on to the experi-

ence.

Water bars at weddings? It certainly doesn't sound impossible. After all, people are arranging everything from IV drips and hyper-personalised food and beverage stations to team games, bhajan clubbing, and all sorts of niche experiences at weddings these days. In comparison, a water bar seems fairly reasonable.

However, reasonable as it may sound, it did raise a lot of questions. Until then, the only 'fancy' water I had heard of was Evian—largely because of stories about Virat Kohli drinking it. That was pretty much my entire introduction to premium water.

The Reel opened the door to an entire world where water isn't just water, but a carefully marketed product complete with provenance, mineral composition, tasting notes, and a certain aspirational appeal.

Of course, when you come across something like this, you dig a little deeper. And that's where the intriguing stuff begins.

Not all water is the same. Much like wine tasting and wine sommeliers, water tasting and water sommeliers exist too, and the conversation around them is slowly gaining momentum. They're part of a growing movement within the water industry that aims to build awareness around the idea that water does

more than simply hydrate.

Avanti Mehta, water sommelier, brand manager at Aava Natural Mineral Water, explains a basic difference first: "There's natural mineral water, bottled straight from a single protected source with its minerals intact, and then there's packaged drinking water, which is RO-processed and stripped of minerals. It's kind of like the distinction between a real and a lab-grown diamond. One carries terroir, the geology of where it comes from, exactly like wine. The other is made by a machine and can be set up anywhere."

Apart from that, there's glacial water, alkaline water, natural alkaline water and more. Why are minerals important? Some minerals, such as magnesium and calcium, can make water taste fuller or slightly sweet, while sodium and bicarbonates can affect its softness, saltiness or smoothness. According to Reuters, Avni Biyani, co-founder of Foodstories, said sales of premium water at the retailer's three gourmet stores tripled in 2025. She noted that rising consumer demand led the chain to import Saratoga Spring Water from New York, marketed as having a "light and creamy" taste profile. Priced at Rs 799 for a 355-ml bottle, the product reportedly sold out within days of being stocked. So, yes, people

are ready to pay.

"Water menus have been established in European fine dining for years. Today, I already run tastings for our hospitality and retail partners, and I curate water-tasting dinners for HNIs and embassy events. I can see it extending naturally into hospitality, and even into concerts and weddings," Mehta says confidently. New wedding trend: Water bars "I think it has the potential to become a niche but meaningful part of premium weddings," says Archit Sahu, co-founder of Bas Paani. "Weddings have become increasingly experience-led, and hosts are constantly looking for thoughtful ways to surprise guests. A curated water experience feels less like a gimmick and more like a reflection of that broader shift towards conscious hospitality." Can you imagine a station just for water? Damini Oberoi, founder of Pune-based Q Events and Weddings explains what it may look like.

"A water bar can be a curated experience where guests are introduced to different types of premium waters sourced from various regions around the world, and then they can sample still, sparkling, mineral, glacier or artesian waters. The experience is designed to be interactive, educational and luxurious, adding a unique touch." "As planners, we are always looking for meaning-

ful ways to enhance guest experiences. I can see water bars working beautifully at wellness-inspired wedding weekends, luxury destination weddings, high-end brunches or intimate celebrations where guests have the time to engage with the experience. They could also be paired with gourmet dining experiences, tasting menus or health-conscious wedding concepts." Even Mehta thinks it's genuinely poised to be the next big trend. "Offering water and water-based drinks to guests is the oldest gesture of welcome we have, and a water bar simply dignifies that gesture." She adds, "Indian weddings have already elevated every other category. Water has been the one untouched constant, served as an afterthought. A water bar can be inclusive too. At a gathering where not everyone drinks alcohol, a water bar gives every guest something elevated to engage with." Experts say beyond the growing awareness around water, there are several factors that could make water bars the next big wedding trend.

## Luxury hospitality

Aaryandeep Singh, co-founder of Bas Paani, shares, "I think it is feasible in the Indian market, particularly at destination weddings, luxury celebrations and events where hospitality is a key focus. Like many experiential concepts, it will likely start at the premium end before becoming more familiar over time."

## Oberoi shares a similar sentiment.

"In bespoke, highly personalised experiences, today's luxury wedding clientele is increasingly looking for unique elements. Water bars could naturally appeal to this segment, particularly for intimate luxury weddings and destination celebrations."

And as the trickle-down theory goes, trends that start with the elite eventually make their way to a broader section of society.

"The early adopters are likely to be consumers who already value wellness, sustainability, premium hospitality. They are typically the same audience that embraces specialty coffee, artisanal food products and conscious luxury," Singh adds.

# Cadaver code: The dead is the teacher here. A nation needs to take lessons

**Giving our body for medical studies, knowing it will be dissected multiple times, is the highest form of donation. This is how cadavers are received, preserved, used with respect and disposed of. But India needs to urgently improve the process of final send-off for cadavers, which might help end their scarcity too.**

To treat the living, doctors need to learn from the dead. Every year, thousands of medical students across India run their scalpels through tissues and organs, getting a first-hand understanding of human anatomy. That is how the dead become their first teachers, and also their first patients. Not just medical students, even trained surgeons try out novel, life-saving surgical procedures on cadavers. I know there's a critical shortage of cadavers not just in India, but across the world. While there has been a rise in donors, one wrong message can wipe out gains made over decades. So, when Sejal Pawar, a third-year medical student, cracked a joke on cadavers at comedian Pranit More's show, infuriating most people, I thought of doing what journalists do — dive deep into the issue.

If you read on, you will find out how cadavers are received, preserved, used and disposed of in medical colleges in India. They do vary from state to state, and from one institution to another. But what doesn't change is the respect that doctors are taught to have for body donors.

All medical students in India in the first year of their MBBS course take the Cadaveric Oath, which honours the sacrifice of the donor and their family, while pledging to "show due respect and gratitude to this cadaver who will always remain our first teacher".

With over 800 medical colleges with close to 1.30 lakh MBBS seats, India tops the world in the number of such institutions. The increase in the number of medical colleges across the country has given rise to a demand for cadavers, which are essential for MBBS students. The sight of a corpse or severed body parts can be unnerving. Then there is the nauseating stench of chemicals, especially of formalin. Students are in their teens still, and some faint in the dissection rooms. Disease, difficult deaths and cadavers aren't easy to deal with at a young age, and might give birth to gallows humour. But everyone is mindful of the big sacrifice of the person lying on the table of the dissection room.



No one might know that more than Dr SB Ray, Professor and head of the department of anatomy at AIIMS New Delhi. He is also in-charge of the body donation programme at AIIMS, India's foremost government hospital.

"I see them walking into my office, telling me they want to donate their bodies so that students can learn and serve people better. Then I see their bodies being brought in by relatives," Dr Ray told India Today Digital.

## **CADAVERIC OATH AND RESPECT FOR THE DEAD AT MEDICAL COLLEGES**

Anatomy is one of the foundational subjects of the MBBS course. Study of medicine would remain just theory if not for the cadavers. The gap in theory and practice would ultimately go on to impact clinical practice and patient care.

A shortage of donated bodies, at times in India, makes around 50 students peer over a single cadaver. In an ideal situation, a group of 5-10 students should get a cadaver each.

While AIIMS New Delhi gets around 50 to 60 donated bodies a year, scores of medical colleges in India might receive two to three cadavers a year at best. Though there is no statewide data readily available in public, media reports from different years suggest an acute shortage of cadavers at medical colleges.

Medical colleges prefer donated bodies over unclaimed cadavers. Most unclaimed bodies undergo autopsy, and the cuts make the preservative chemicals drain out. Also, the health

profile and medical history of donors are known, making them ideal for research.

The concept of an afterlife, social and religious beliefs make body donation rare across the world.

"Doctors and students are very mindful that someone had donated their body for us to learn. Body donation is considered one of the highest forms of donation," said Dr Anuj Tiwari, internal medicine specialist and geriatrician, at HBT Medical College and Dr RN Cooper Hospital in Mumbai. Dr Ray, who has been involved in anatomical studies for over four decades, said a Cadaveric Oath is administered to all students across India. "The wording might vary a little, but the essence of the oath is to respect the donor for the gift of knowledge," he explained.

"For a person training to be a doctor, the cadaver isn't just the first teacher, it is the first patient too," he added. An assistant professor of anatomy from a government medical college in Assam, who requested ano-

nymity, said that respect for cadavers is emphasised in orientation classes for new medical students. "There is also a compulsory question on respect to cadavers in the first year's MBBS paper in Assam," he said.

So, we know that the medical fraternity receives bodies with respect and gratitude. But what about the send-off after they have been dissected over years? That's where improvements and a model draft law are needed, and we will get to it at the end after discussing how bodies are preserved and used in medical colleges in India.

## **HOW LONG ARE CADAVERS KEPT IN MEDICAL COLLEGES?**

Cadavers are mostly kept in a frozen state for two to four months in the case of surgical workshops for doctors, while they could be preserved for three to four years when used for medical students. "In very few cases, the donated bodies are frozen in cold storage and utilised for conducting cadaveric workshops. Since freezing the

dead body consumes large amounts of electricity, such methods are employed only for a shorter duration," according to *Embalmng and Whole Body Donation — A Practical Guide* by Dr SSSN Rajasekhar. According to the authoritative academic textbook, cadavers can be preserved for up to five years.

The assistant professor from Assam said that cadavers are kept in formalin tanks to preserve them for up to four years. The viscera, he said, were separated after the first dissection, and preserved separately.

"Some anatomical samples are preserved for decades because they help students learn specific structures. For example, certain cut sections of the body are kept together for years as teaching material, as long as the formalin can preserve them," said Dr Tiwari.

## **BOTH LEFT, RIGHT AGREE ON BODY DONATION; INDIAN MYTHOLOGY HAS AN EXAMPLE TOO**

Dr Ray of AIIMS said most people are interested in organ donation. "I have to explain that organs get old too, and have to be harvested during lifetime. They then pledge their bodies for research," he said. Dr Ray said that over the years, cadaver donations had gone up significantly at AIIMS New Delhi. "In a year, AIIMS New Delhi is receiving 50 to 60 donated bodies, and the number is only growing every year," said Dr Ray, adding, "Bodies come to us as donations. We do not have to go out and beg for bodies." This is in sharp contrast with the situation in scores of medical colleges across the country.

## **HOW ARE CADAVERS PROCESSED FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS?**

Bodies for medical studies have to be collected and treated immediately for preservation after the donor's death as cadavers become useless if there is any tissue decay.

"We segregate donations into two parts. One is for surgical workshops, in which case cadavers aren't preserved but frozen at -10 degrees Celsius. It is like a live patient for doctors when they operate on the body," said Dr Ray of AIIMS.

Surgical workshops are of the utmost importance for surgeons, be they from cardiac, neurology, dental or any other department. Newer methods

are tried and practised on cadavers as patients can't, obviously, be treated as guinea pigs.

Long-term preservation of cadavers is for medical students.

"For medical students, the cadaver is mostly preserved with the use of around 12 to 14 chemicals, which are applied through a perfusion pump," said Dr Ray.

Dr Tiwari of Mumbai's RN Cooper Hospital said that the chemical is pumped through arteries so that it reaches the entire body. "It is almost like a form of mummification," he said.

# \$250K for 250 Years: Resorts World Commits a Quarter of a million Dollars to Local Nonprofits Across New York City, the Hudson Valley and the Catskills in Honor of America's Semiquincentennial

**A Day of Giving™ will award 25 grants of \$10,000 each to community organizations making measurable local impact; applications are open now through June 29**

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QUEENS, N.Y. (June 15, 2026) — Resorts World today announced the launch of "A Day of Giving," a \$250,000 community investment initiative commemorating America's 250th anniversary. The program will distribute 25 grants of \$10,000 each to eligible nonprofit organizations creating measurable impact in the communities Resorts World serves across New York City, the Hudson Valley, and the Catskills. Applications open today, June 15, and must be submitted by June 29. Grant recipients will be announced on July 7.

The initiative invites local nonprofits, community groups, cultural institutions and charities to apply for support. Grants will be distributed across Resorts World's three New York properties: 15 awards totaling \$150,000 through Resorts World New York City, five awards totaling \$50,000 through Resorts World Hudson Valley, and five awards totaling \$50,000 through Resorts World

Catskills. Recipients will be selected through a random drawing among qualified applicants.

"As we mark 250 years of our nation's history, we wanted to honor the moment in a way that reflects who we are and the neighborhoods we're part of," said Michelle Stoddart, Senior Vice President of Community Development and Public Affairs at Resorts World New York City. "From New York City to the Hudson Valley to the Catskills, this \$250,000 commitment is about investing directly in the local organizations doing the work that makes our communities stronger. We can't wait to see the applications come in."

#### How to Apply

Applications are open now through June 29 at the QR code below. Eligible organizations are encouraged to apply early. Community members who wish to nominate a favorite nonprofit can share the application directly and ask the organization to note their

name in the referral section. A Day of Giving is part of Resorts World's broader commitment to the communities it serves and joins commemorations taking place nationwide ahead of the United States Semiquincentennial on July 4, 2026, which marks 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

To be eligible, organizations must be active IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofits in good standing that operate within or primarily serve communities in New York City, the Hudson Valley, or the Catskills. Applicants must demonstrate measurable community impact and designate the Resorts World property region most closely associated with their service area. Private foundations, family foundations, organizations applying through a fiscal sponsor, and organizations submitting multiple applications are not eligible.

# Yum! Brands Sells Pizza Hut for \$2.7 Billion, Closing a Storied Chapter

**The Louisville-based parent splits its struggling pizza chain in two, handing Western operations to private equity firm LongRange Capital and ceding the China business to a longtime partner, after years of losing ground to Domino's.**

Yum! Brands announced on Tuesday that it has entered into definitive agreements to sell Pizza Hut for \$2.7 billion in the aggregate, ending months of speculation about the future of one of fast food's most recognizable, and most troubled, brands. The transaction is structured in two parts: private equity firm LongRange Capital will acquire Pizza Hut's business outside mainland China for roughly \$1.5 billion, while Yum China Holdings, the Shanghai-based operator that already runs KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell across mainland China under license, will pay approximately \$1.2 billion for the brand's mainland Chinese operations.

The sale caps a strategic review that Yum's leadership set in motion in November 2025, when the company first signaled in an internal memo that it was evaluating Pizza Hut's future direction amid years of underperformance relative to its sibling brands KFC and Taco Bell. According to the company's announcement, Yum's board and leadership team concluded that a sale offered the strongest path to maximizing shareholder value while giving Pizza Hut an ownership structure better tailored to its distinct markets and competitive position,

under new owners with deep experience in quick-service restaurant operations.

The financial mechanics are detailed. Yum expects to receive about \$2.3 billion in net proceeds after taxes, closing adjustments, and transaction fees, and it has built in an earn-out opportunity worth up to \$75 million by 2030 under the LongRange agreement, tied to future acceleration in KFC China's system sales growth — a structure designed to keep Yum and Yum China financially aligned even after Pizza Hut changes hands. The company also expects to absorb roughly \$85 million in one-time separation expenses over the remainder of 2026 as it untangles Pizza Hut from shared corporate functions, supply chains, and back-office systems. Yum's management is expected to lay out the fuller financial impact of the transactions during the company's second-quarter earnings call on July 30, with both deals targeted to close in the third quarter, subject to regulatory approval. Beyond the balance-sheet details, the sale severs Pizza Hut's decades-long corporate kinship with Taco Bell, which along with KFC will remain under the Yum! Brands umbrella as the company narrows its focus to its two stronger-performing

chains. It is a quiet but symbolically significant moment for a company that built its identity, and much of Wall Street's understanding of the multi-brand restaurant model, around owning Pizza Hut, KFC, and Taco Bell together under one roof for nearly three decades. Investors appeared to approve of the streamlining: Yum shares rose to \$155.02 following the announcement. Pizza Hut's decline has been a slow-moving story rather than a sudden collapse. Brothers Dan and Frank Carney founded the chain in Wichita, Kansas, in 1958, began franchising it a year later, and took it public in 1969; by 1971 it had become the largest pizza chain in the world. That title slipped away in 2017, when Domino's Pizza overtook Pizza Hut on the strength of an early and aggressive bet on digital ordering and delivery technology. In the years since, Pizza Hut has struggled to make the same transition, attempting to shift away from its legacy sit-down dining and salad-bar format toward a delivery-and-carryout model, but consistently trailing rivals that built their operations around that model from the start. The brand's drag on Yum's overall financial performance is widely cited as the reason the strategic review

began in the first place.

The deal carries an additional layer of significance for readers in the South Asian diaspora, given Pizza Hut's substantial footprint on the subcontinent. In India, Pizza Hut and KFC operate under license to Devyani International Limited, the country's largest Yum! Brands franchisee, which earlier this year completed a roughly \$934 million merger with smaller rival Sapphire Foods to create a combined operator running more than 3,000 KFC and Pizza Hut outlets across India and neighboring markets, positioning it to compete more directly with Jubilant FoodWorks, the Domino's franchisee that has long dominated India's organized pizza market. Because Tuesday's sale covers Pizza Hut's business outside mainland China — a category that, on its face, would include the franchisor relationship governing Devyani's outlets in India — the transaction raises an open question for investors and franchise operators on the subcontinent: whether LongRange Capital, as the new owner of the global Pizza Hut brand and franchise system, will alter brand strategy, royalty structures, or growth support in a market that Devyani has been working hard to consolidate and modernize.

# SpaceX Strikes \$60 Billion Deal to Acquire AI Coding Agent Cursor

Elon Musk's rocket company, fresh off the largest IPO in history, moves to fold one of Silicon Valley's hottest AI startups into its rapidly expanding empire — a wager that software, not just satellites, will define its next phase of growth.

SpaceX announced on Tuesday that it has entered a definitive agreement to acquire Cursor, the artificial intelligence coding startup developed by San Francisco-based Anysphere, in an all-stock transaction valued at \$60 billion. The deal lands just days after SpaceX completed the largest initial public offering in history, raising \$75 billion and debuting on the Nasdaq at a valuation north of \$2 trillion, and it signals that Elon Musk's company intends to spend its newfound public-market currency aggressively on artificial intelligence rather than rockets alone.

The transaction is the formal consummation of an arrangement first disclosed in April, when SpaceX said it had obtained an option to either purchase

Cursor outright for \$60 billion later in the year or pay \$10 billion for a looser partnership. According to disclosures made in SpaceX's IPO filings, the company had agreed that if the acquisition fell through for any reason, it would owe Cursor a termination fee of \$1.5 billion along with \$8.5 billion worth of computing resources — an unusually rich breakup arrangement that underscored how central the AI coding relationship had already become to SpaceX's strategy well before Tuesday's announcement made it official.

Cursor, launched in 2022, has become one of the most widely used AI-powered coding tools among professional software developers. The product allows engineers to write, debug, and modify code through natural-language prompts, and it has been credited with helping popularize what the industry now calls "vibe coding" — a style of software development in which AI systems autonomously generate or rewrite large portions of a codebase based on conversational instructions. That positions Cursor in direct competition with Anthropic's Claude Code and OpenAI's Codex, both of which have raced to capture the same base of enterprise developers. Under the terms of the deal, Anysphere will become a wholly owned subsidiary of SpaceX once the transaction closes, which both companies expect to happen in the third quarter of 2026. For SpaceX, the logic of the purchase



extends well beyond rockets and satellites. The company merged with Musk's AI venture xAI in February, and Cursor's enterprise coding tools are widely seen as a way to give xAI's Grok chatbot a stronger foothold in a segment of the AI market where rivals have already converted technology into substantial recurring revenue. Acquiring an established coding agent with a loyal developer base is, in effect, a shortcut around the years it might otherwise take xAI to build comparable enterprise traction on its own. The deal also feeds directly into the \$28.5 trillion addressable market that SpaceX pitched to investors ahead of its IPO, a figure that folds together satellite connectivity, space infrastructure, and now enterprise software and AI tools under one corporate roof.

The numbers behind Cursor's business help explain the price tag. The company has scaled rapidly since its founding, and according to figures shared by the company, it has surpassed roughly \$4 billion in total annualized revenue as of early June, with about \$2.6 billion of that coming from business-to-business enterprise customers whose sales have been growing sharply. That growth trajectory, more than any single product feature, is what has made Cursor one of the most sought-after assets in the current AI boom and what allowed Anysphere's founders to negotiate a deal structure — paid entirely in SpaceX stock rather than IPO cash — that lets the rocket com-

pany preserve its freshly raised capital for launch infrastructure and data-center build-outs, including the Memphis, Tennessee compute complex that xAI has been expanding to train and run its models.

Markets reacted swiftly. SpaceX shares climbed nearly 10 percent in premarket trading on the news, adding an estimated \$247 billion to a market capitalization that already stood at roughly \$2.53 trillion, and pushing the stock to \$211.27 — more than 56 percent above its IPO price of \$135 just a week earlier. If those gains hold through the trading day, SpaceX would overtake Amazon to become the fifth-largest publicly traded company in the world by market value, a remarkable ascent for a company that only recently completed its transition from a private aerospace contractor to a public conglomerate spanning rockets, satellites, AI chatbots, and now developer software.

The deal is likely to draw scrutiny on competitive grounds given its size and the concentration it represents in a fast-consolidating AI tools market, and it will need to clear customary regulatory approvals before closing. But the broader signal for the technology sector, and for the large community of South Asian-origin engineers who populate Silicon Valley's AI labs and coding-tool startups in outsized numbers, is one of accelerating consolidation. AI coding agents

are no longer a niche developer convenience; they are being treated by trillion-dollar companies as core infrastructure worth tens of billions of dollars. That has real implications for India's IT services giants — firms such as Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, and Wipro, which have built their business models on large benches of human software engineers serving Western clients. As coding agents like Cursor, Claude Code, and Codex absorb more of the routine work those firms have traditionally billed for, the pressure to reposition around AI-augmented services, rather than headcount-driven delivery, will only intensify.

For now, the deal stands as the boldest evidence yet that Musk views SpaceX's public listing not merely as a financing event for Starship and Starlink, but as a launchpad — in the most literal sense available to him — for building an AI-and-software conglomerate to rival Anthropic, OpenAI, Google, and Microsoft. Whether Cursor's developer-first culture survives integration into a company built around rockets and satellites, and whether xAI's Grok ecosystem can absorb a \$60 billion coding business without losing the qualities that made Cursor popular in the first place, will be among the more closely watched corporate integration stories of the back half of 2026.

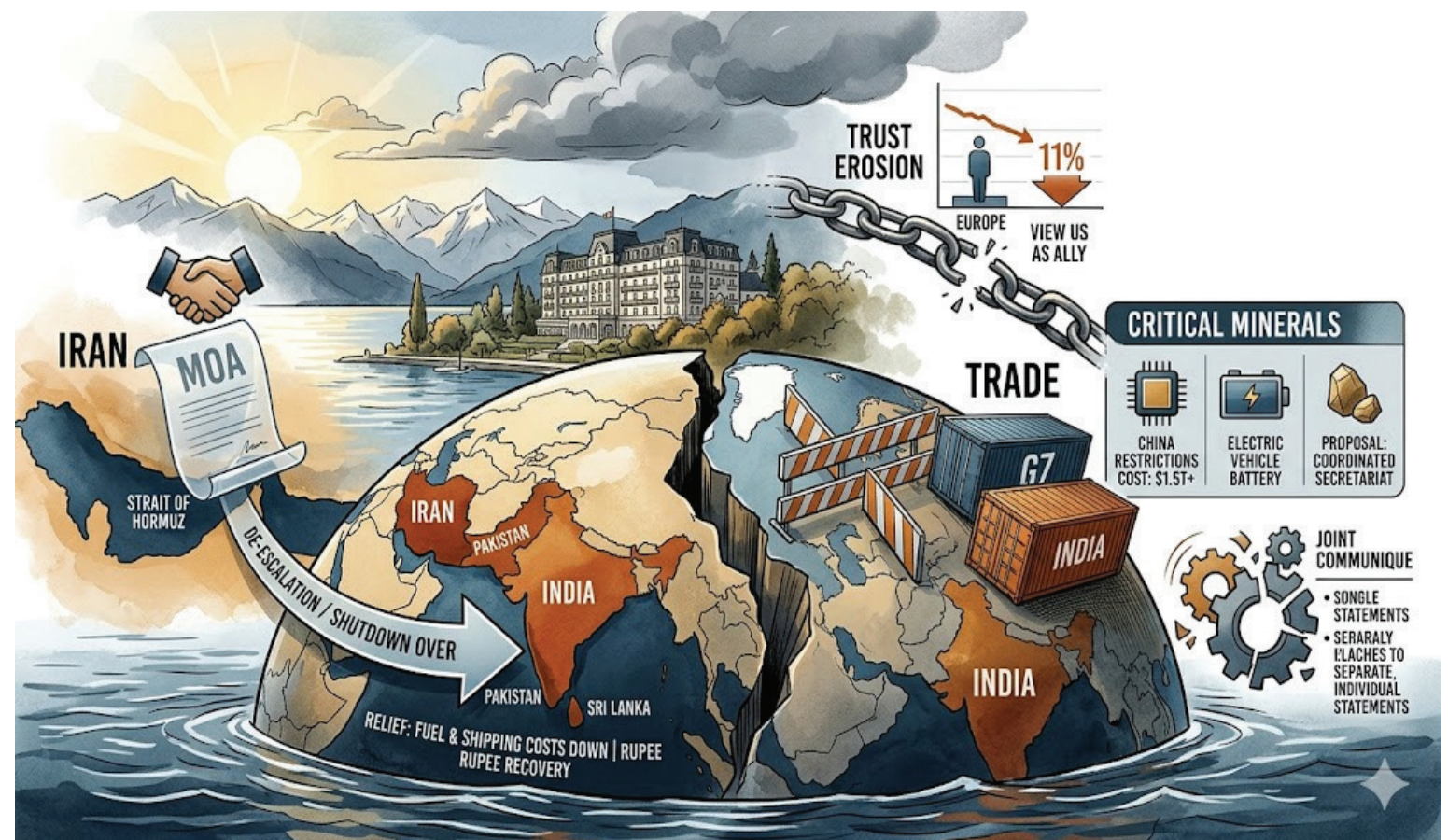
# A Snapshot From Évian: Trump Touts an Iran Deal as Allies Push Back on Trade

Leaders of the world's advanced economies gathered on the shores of Lake Geneva this week for a summit dominated by the Strait of Hormuz, a fraying transatlantic alliance, and an "America First" tariff agenda that allies are determined to soften.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

World leaders convened in Évian-les-Bains, France, from June 15 to 17 for the annual G7 summit, hosted this year under France's rotating presidency after Canada chaired last year's gathering in Kananaskis, Alberta. Joining the traditional seven — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States — alongside the European Union, the French hosts also invited leaders from Brazil, Egypt, India, Kenya, and South Korea to take part in select working sessions, part of an effort President Emmanuel Macron has described as building a summit of "convergence" rather than a closed club of seven economies. Ahead of the gathering, Macron had already chaired a video conference with G7 counterparts and representatives from China, India, Brazil, South Korea, and Kenya specifically to discuss macroeconomic imbalances and global economic governance, a sign of how much this year's agenda was shaped by concerns extending well beyond the traditional membership.

The dominant story arriving in Évian was Iran. President Donald Trump landed in France declaring that a memorandum of understanding aimed at ending the United States' conflict with Iran had already been signed, framing it as a potential breakthrough for global security and a chance to finally turn the page on one of Washington's longest-running adversarial relationships. Trump said he was unclear on when the full text of the agreement would be released, but he told reporters alongside Macron that vessels were already transiting the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow waterway through which a large share of the world's oil and gas exports pass, and which Iran had effectively shut down during the standoff — and doing so toll-free. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said at the summit that Canada stood ready to help keep the strait open, underscoring how central freedom of navigation through Hormuz has become to G7 economic security discussions. For readers across South Asia, developments at the strait carry outsized weight. The disruption to Hormuz shipping in re-



cent months has been a central driver of the energy-cost and currency pressures this publication has tracked closely, including the Indian rupee's slide to record lows against the dollar and the knock-on effects for fuel, fertilizer, and shipping costs across the subcontinent. Any durable de-escalation around the strait would be read in New Delhi, Islamabad, and Colombo less as a diplomatic footnote and more as a direct input into household energy bills and import costs in the months ahead, even as officials caution that a memorandum of understanding is not the same as a finalized, legally binding settlement.

Trade tensions provided the summit's other major undercurrent, and they proved harder to resolve than the Iran question. Even as several leaders expressed relief over the prospect of closure on the Gulf conflict, that relief was tempered by unease over fresh tariff threats Trump aimed at France specifically, along with broader warnings about immigration policy that unsettled some European hosts. The French presidency had set four trade priorities for the gathering: controlling industrial overcapacity, strengthening supply-chain resilience, modernizing the multilateral trading system,

and promoting safer cross-border e-commerce. Looming over those discussions was a Section 122 tariff deadline set for July 24 and ongoing Section 301 investigations into industrial overcapacity that trade analysts expect the administration to use as the basis for a successor framework to existing tariff arrangements, with coordinated enforcement mechanisms aligned among G7 partners rather than a single binding communique. Notably for this publication's readership, a senior U.S. administration official said ahead of the summit that Trump was seeking a "very good" trade deal with India, aimed at expanding American exports and reducing barriers for U.S. businesses operating there — a negotiation that bears directly on Indian exporters, IT services firms, and the broader trajectory of U.S.-India commercial ties.

Ukraine, which had been overshadowed in recent weeks by the Iran crisis, resurfaced as allies worked to push the war — now in its fifth year since Russia's full-scale invasion — back toward the top of Trump's agenda. Trump indicated that, with the Iran deal in hand, he intended to turn his attention to brokering peace between Russia and Ukraine, while also seeking to bring closure to ongoing fighting in Lebanon, sug-

gesting an ambitious, if uncertain, diplomatic agenda for the remainder of the year.

China loomed over the summit as well, even without a seat at the table. Beijing's export curbs on rare-earth minerals, critical to everything from electric vehicles to semiconductors, have reportedly cost each affected G7 economy an estimated \$1.5 trillion, fueling discussion in Évian of a possible coordinated critical-minerals secretariat among allies to reduce dependence on Chinese supply chains — one of the more concrete proposals to emerge from a summit otherwise short on binding outcomes.

That absence of binding outcomes was itself notable. G7 leaders were expected to forgo a joint communique for a second consecutive year, opting instead for a series of separate statements, a reflection of how difficult it has become to find consensus language under the current American administration's approach to alliance management. A survey published by the European Council on Foreign Relations found that only 11 percent of Europeans currently view the United States as an ally, down from 16 percent just six months earlier, a striking erosion of trust that several analysts said could shape how aggressively Trump

uses the G7 stage to press allies over what he views as insufficient support following the Hormuz disruptions. The scale of anxiety surrounding the gathering was visible well beyond the summit venue itself: Switzerland, whose border sits near Évian, imposed temporary controls along its frontier with France from June 10 to 19 to support French security operations, with the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, and Valais all involved in the heightened preparations.

As the summit drew to a close, the through-line for this publication's readers was less about diplomatic theater than about the practical channels through which Évian's outcomes will travel: energy markets sensitive to any durable Hormuz settlement, manufacturing and technology supply chains responding to critical-minerals coordination, and a U.S.-India trade negotiation that could reshape commercial terms for exporters and outsourcing firms alike. With the next G7 presidency passing to the United States in 2027, this year's gathering may be remembered less for a single communique than for the fragile, provisional nature of the agreements — on Iran, on trade, on critical minerals — that leaders carried away from the shores of Lake Geneva.

# This 350-year-old Indian palace made it to the world's most beautiful hotels list

A luxury heritage hotel in Khajuraho has featured on Prix Versailles' list of the world's most beautiful hotels for 2026.

When people talk about Indian hospitality, they often speak about warmth, generosity and the spirit of Atithi Devo Bhava. It has always been about making guests feel at home — sometimes with dhol beats, sometimes with garlands, and often with small gestures that make a stay feel just a wee-bit more special. But today, it's not just the warmth and service that's winning hearts. The architecture, design and sense of place behind some of the country's most remarkable hotels and restaurants are also earning global spotlight.

The latest recognition comes from Prix Versailles, a prestigious architecture and design award programme that celebrates outstanding hotels, restaurants and other spaces around the world. For 2026, India has scored a double win: a heritage palace in Khajuraho has been featured on the World's Most Beautiful Hotels list, while a stylish restaurant in Pune has made it to the World's Most Beautiful Restaurants list.

**Indian hospitality gets global spotlight**



**The Oberoi Rajgarh Palace, Khajuraho**

The Oberoi Rajgarh Palace in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh has been named among the World's Most Beautiful Hotels 2026 by Prix Versailles. The annual list features 16 properties from across the globe that stand out for their architecture, design and sense of place.

The 350-year-old palace combines heritage architecture with

modern luxury, offering scenic views, regal interiors and an immersive experience rooted in the history and culture of the region. Originally built by Maharaja Hindu Pat of the Bundela dynasty, the palace is a striking example of Bundelkhand's architectural legacy, thoughtfully reimaged with modern comforts and elegance.

Set amid the forested Maniyagarh Hills near Panna National Park,

the property was originally a fortress before being transformed into a luxury palace hotel. Prix Versailles praised its "princely grandeur" while describing it as one of the finest examples of Indian hospitality.

A night at The Oberoi Rajgarh Palace starts at approximately Rs 40,000, while the property's most luxurious stays can cost upwards of Rs 11 lakh per night.



The recognition adds to a growing list of international accolades for the property, which opened in late 2025.

**Rosso, Pune**

As for the World's Most Beautiful Restaurants 2026 list, Rosso in Pune has made the cut. It joins an international line-up of dining destinations recognised not just for their food, but also for exceptional design and ambience.

Nestled in Hotel Irada, which is also a working winery, Rosso is a beautifully-designed space known for serving delicious Italian food. The space blends Mediterranean influences with contemporary design. Its carefully curated interiors, warm textures and immersive aesthetic have helped it earn a place among the world's most visually striking dining destinations.

As travellers increasingly seek experiences that go beyond good food or comfortable stays, recognitions such as Prix Versailles highlight how design has become an integral part of hospitality. And India is on the map too.

## Why the Brazil rope jump is a death trap, even with a rope attached

Not attaching the rope was not the only issue at the popular rope-jumping spot in Brazil where a 21-year-old woman lost her life.

The world is still trying to make sense of the death of a 21-year-old woman during a rope-jumping activity in Sao Paulo, Brazil, after she was launched from a bridge without a safety rope. Viral videos from multiple angles show three men holding the woman in a "Superman" position before pushing her off the bridge, as people at the site can be heard screaming, "the rope, people, the rope." The incident occurred at a structure known as Ponte do Esqueleto (Skeleton Bridge) in a rural area near Limeira, a city in Sao Paulo state, Brazil on June 13.

After the shocking footage of Maria Eduarda Rodrigues de Freitas's death went viral, several other videos of people rope-jumping from the same spot are now circulating online, and they all point to the same conclusion: even if the rope had been attached, the setup was still dangerously unsafe. It was more like a death trap than an adventure attraction. Firstly, Maria did not lose her life during bungee jumping, as was widely reported. It was rope jumping. Rope jumping is a highly dangerous sport that requires extensive

technical knowledge, careful planning, and thorough preparation to be conducted safely.

Unlike bungee jumping which uses elastic cords, rope jumping uses low-stretch, nylon cord. If the jump goes wrong or is conducted by an untrained professional, a person is likely to suffer a violent jerk. This sudden jolt can put enormous strain on the neck, spine, and cause severe injuries.

There are a lot of technicalities involved to avoid this jerk risk. In rope jumping, the rope is usually anchored off to one side of the jump point instead of directly above it. This causes the person to swing in a wide arc like a pendulum after the rope tightens.

Additionally, if the equipment is old, damaged, or poorly maintained, the risk of an accident increases significantly. Ac-

cording to international bungee specialist Oliver Headon, the equipment shown in the footage of the recent tragic incident appeared to be quite old.



The large concrete pillars beneath the bridge made the already risky rope jumping activity even more dangerous.

Ideally, a properly designed system should ensure that jumpers stay well clear of these structures throughout the swing. Unlike a bungee-like straight drop, rope jumping involves a swinging motion, which means both vertical and sideways movement must be taken into account. If these move-

ments are not calculated properly, there is a risk of the jumper colliding with the bridge or its pillars. That's where the understanding of factors like rope length, anchor position, jumper weight, fall distance and rope properties comes into the picture. They all must be aligned to keep the swing path safe and controlled. The team must also know how different weather conditions can impact safety.

"Proper staff training, clear operating procedures, regular risk checks, third-party safety audits, insurance, correct safety margins, and proper equipment logs are all essential to ensure rope jumping is run safely," explained Oliver Headon.

But without SOPs and trained operators, you are essentially putting your life at serious and unnecessary risk. That was evidently the case at the accident spot. Oh, by the way, there was no formal or regulated company behind the event, but rather an independent group. The organisers even deleted their online profiles after the tragic death of the 21-year-old woman.

# Rashmika Mandanna Proves Denim Can Be Red-Carpet Worthy In A Rs.1.4 Lakh Zimmermann Dress

Rashmika Mandanna once again showcased her effortless fashion sensibilities while promoting Cocktail 2. Known for blending comfort with contemporary style, the actress stepped out in a chic denim ensemble that struck the perfect balance between structure and sophistication. For the promotional outing, Rashmika chose Zimmermann's Luna Denim Utility Midi Dress, carrying a luxury price tag of ₹1,41,100. The dress featured a structured silhouette with prominent utility-inspired details, including oversized flap pockets, contrast stitching, metallic ring accents, and statement gold-tone buttons running through the centre. While the upper half embraced a tailored aesthetic, the design flowed into a voluminous midi skirt, adding softness and movement to the look. The rich indigo denim gave the outfit a timeless appeal, while



the thoughtful tailoring elevated it beyond a conventional denim dress. The cinched waist beautifully defined Rashmika's frame, creating a flattering silhouette that felt both feminine and powerful.

**Minimal Styling, Maximum**

**Impact**

Complementing the statement dress, Rashmika opted for Zara Leather Mule Heels priced at ₹4,950. The neutral-toned footwear added understated elegance without distracting from the outfit's intricate detailing.

Styled by Priyanka Kapadia, the overall look embraced minimalism. Rashmika wore her hair in soft, loose waves that framed her face effortlessly, while her makeup remained fresh and radiant. Softly defined eyes, glowing skin, and a nude lip

enhanced her natural beauty. Delicate rings served as the only visible accessories, allowing the ensemble to take centre stage. Why The Look Works What makes this outfit particularly noteworthy is its seamless fusion of utility dressing and luxury fashion. Denim, often associated with casual wear, was transformed into a polished statement through Zimmermann's impeccable craftsmanship. The structured bodice, functional-inspired detailing, and dramatic skirt created a modern silhouette that felt both practical and glamorous.

The look also reflects a growing trend of elevated everyday dressing, where classic fabrics are reimagined through premium tailoring and refined design elements. Rashmika's styling further reinforced the idea that simplicity often delivers the strongest fashion impact.

## Zayn Malik Gives Rohit Gandhi & Rahul Khanna's Vice Jacket A Rock-Star Edge

For his Konnakol tour stop in Mexico, Zayn Malik leaned into his signature dark, understated aesthetic in Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Khanna's ensemble. The all-black look was a great fit on the rockstar and mirrored the balance this singer has mastered over the years.

The sharply cut jacket featured an asymmetric zip closure that lent it a modern, almost biker-inspired edge. We loved the embellished sleeves, where subtle tonal detailing really stood out on the stage, adding a grunge texture to the look. Underneath, Zayn layered the jacket over a black tank top, allowing his extensive tattoos to become part of the look itself. He styled the look with silver chains, stud earrings and a close-cropped buzz cut reinforcing his rugged yet polished persona. Zayn paired the jacket with relaxed black trousers.



About this look, Rahul Khanna observes: "The Vice jacket felt particularly right for Zayn because his style has always balanced sharpness with ease. There's a certain masculinity to the way he dresses; understated, textural, and never overworked, which aligns naturally with our design language. We've dressed Zayn before, and what continues to make him relevant is his ability to bring together refinement and rebellion. Whether he's on stage or off-duty, there's an authenticity to his style that makes every piece he wears feel effortless."

**What Does 'Konnakol' Mean?**

Zayn Malik's upcoming project Konnakol takes its name from an ancient vocal art form deeply rooted in South Indian Carnatic music. On his official website, the singer describes konnakol as "the act of creating percussive sounds with one's voice". The classical technique involves reciting rhythmic syllables and patterns in rapid succession to mimic the sound of percussion instruments, turning the human voice into an instrument in itself. For Zayn, who has described Konnakol as his "most culturally inspired project to date", the title signals a deeper exploration of his South Asian heritage. Yet this is far from his first musical nod to the region.

## Ticking All The Right Boxes: Priyanka Chopra Joins Rolex As Global Brand Ambassador

There's a certain kind of person Rolex has always been drawn to. The brand looks for people whose achievements have a quality of permanence to them. People who don't just reach the top of one field but keep moving, keep building, keep surprising. In 2026, that person is Priyanka Chopra Jonas.

The Swiss watchmaker has officially named the 43-year-old actor, producer, and entrepreneur as its newest global Testimonee, a title Rolex reserves for an exceptionally select group of individuals who embody the brand's values of excellence, precision, and enduring impact. It's a fitting match. Priyanka's story



doesn't follow a straight line, and that's precisely what makes it so compelling. She was crowned Miss World in 2000 — a moment that launched her into public life — but what followed wasn't simply a career. It was a series of reinventions, each more ambitious than the last. She became one of Bollywood's most bankable stars, with films like Bajirao Mastani, Fashion, and Barfi! cementing her place in Indian cinema's upper tier. Then came Hollywood — not a cameo or a courtesy role, but a lead in a network television series, a place in major studio productions, and a foothold

in an industry that doesn't open its doors easily.

Along the way, she launched Purple Pebble Pictures, her production house focused on telling stories from India's regional cinemas. She built Anomaly, a surprising haircare brand. She wrote a memoir. She

advocated for children's rights through UNICEF for over 15 years, serving as both a National Ambassador in India and a Global Goodwill Ambassador. She earned two National Film Awards, a Padma Shri, and a spot on Time magazine's list of the world's most influential people.

Her luxury portfolio already reads like a who's who of the world's most prestigious brands — Bvlgari since 2021, Bentley Motors announced just this April, alongside Max Factor, Obagi, Pantene, GAP, and Bumble. But Rolex sits in a different category entirely. To become a Rolex Testimonee is to be placed alongside a legacy of greatness that spans decades and disciplines such as athletes, musicians, explorers, filmmakers. It is, in many ways, the ultimate endorsement.

# Kareena Kapoor Stuns In Rs 1.3 Lakh Suit, Heels At Aamir Khan Productions' 25 Years

While attending the 25-year bash of Aamir Khan Productions and Lagaan, Kareena Kapoor was spotted in a Rs 41,000 pink suit paired with Rs 92,000 heels

Lagaan and Aamir Khan Productions will complete 25 years on June 15. To mark the milestone, Aamir Khan and director Ashutosh Gowariker hosted a special screening in Mumbai on June 13, attended by Bollywood A-listers, including Kareena Kapoor Khan and Salman Khan.

Needless to say, Bebo served glamorous looks. She was wearing a pink suit and posed with Aamir and Salman, both of whom she has shared the silver screen with in her career spanning over 26 years. Kareena Kapoor turned heads in a stunning pink suit. A quick search through Google Lens reveals that it was sourced from the shelves of Ekaya Banaras. Priced at Rs 41,975,



the silk suit was inspired by artist Amrita Sher-Gil. It featured intricate, handwoven cutwork Banarasi accents, adding detail to the silhouette

and reflecting light. Soft silk fit for the season. The flared kurta was paired with straight pants and a matching sheer dupatta. To elevate the look,

blending comfort and style. Its fluid drape makes it a perfect

Kareena opted for Aquazzura heels. The original price of the 85 embellished satin sandals is 835 euros (approximately Rs 91,874). A single pair includes 30 components, each hand-assembled by craftsmen.

Further elevating her look were statement, encrusted earrings by KK Jewels. The actor ditched a necklace and opted for rings and a bangle stack. For her hairstyle, Bebo opted for a classic neat bun. The actor's makeup was in tones of pink with a highlighted finish on the high points of her face. She painted her lips with a nude shade and lined her hazel green eyes with kohl. Her small bindi tied the whole look together.

## Zendaya, Tom Holland Rock The Red Carpet For Spider-Man: Brand New Day In Madrid



Zendaya and Tom Holland have begun their press tour for their new Marvel film, Spider-Man: Brand New Day. The couple have been dating since they first acted together in 2016 in Spider-Man: Homecoming. They rocked up to the red carpet in coordinating black looks and posed for paparazzi and fans alike. Actor couple Zendaya and Tom Holland attended a photocall at the Four Seasons Hotel in the Spanish capital.

Spider-Man: Brand New Day, which is among the most anticipated film releases on Sony and Marvel's upcoming schedule, is set to release in theatres on July 31. Tom Holland opted for a black suit paired with a red shirt, a styling choice widely interpreted as a reference to his Spider-Man character, reported the Tribune. Zendaya was styled by Law Roach in a Christian Cowan gown with a fitted corset-style bodice. Making a case for the comeback of the fringe, the actor wore a black strapless dress with a sweetheart neckline. The dress was draped in an asymmetrical fashion and featured a thigh-high

slit with black fringe hanging from it. She wore a favourite pair of black red-bottom heels, the Louboutins. Zendaya styled her hair in a wet look, with the pixie cut bob gelled back and a few tendrils of hair falling on her face. For jewellery, she wore a pair of blue and white beaded string earrings and a gold and silver watch.

For her glam, the actor kept things subtle with brown-lined lips and a hint of gloss to top it off. Not a fan of going OTT with her makeup, she kept things subtle with blush and a winged eyeliner.

Their Madrid visit follows a reported dinner in the La Latina district on Sunday, where they sampled Spanish cuisine ahead of their public engagements. The promotional tour is set to continue throughout the week.

Holland is scheduled to attend an event at Plaza de Colón to meet supporters ahead of Spain's opening World Cup match against Cape Verde. Both of them are expected to appear on the popular Spanish television programme El Hormiguero with host Pablo Motos.

# Top Women-Led Crime Thrillers On OTT: What To Watch On Netflix, Prime Video, JioHotstar And More



## Killer Soup

Where To Watch: Netflix

It is about an ambitious nurse-turned-home-cook who dreams of opening a restaurant. However, her husband refuses to fund her dream. The woman seeks solace in an extramarital affair with a massage therapist who happens to be her husband's near-identical lookalike. When her husband catches them, a chaotic confrontation ends in his accidental death. (Image: IMDb)



## Black Widows

Where To Watch: Zee5

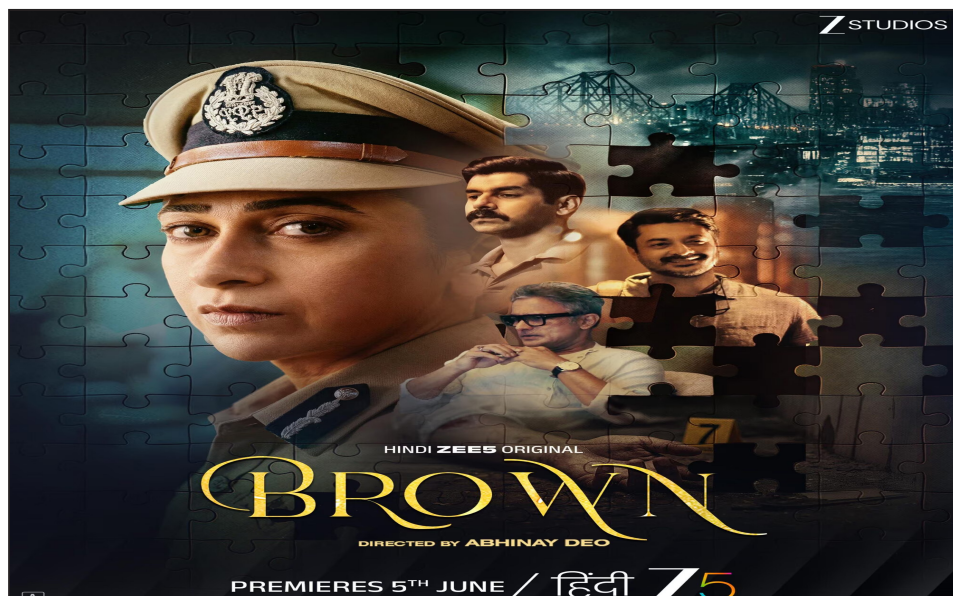
Three women are trapped in unhappy marriages and dream of life free from their abusive, selfish, and controlling husbands. When a boating trip ends in what appears to be a fatal accident, the women believe they are finally rid of their problems. However, their relief is short-lived as unexpected twists, police investigations, and shocking revelations threaten to expose their secrets.



## Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo

Where To Watch: JioHotstar

From a remote, heavily fortified mansion, she runs a massive, covert cartel producing a potent, glowing-pink drug called "Flamingo," all cleverly disguised as a traditional handicraft cottage industry. Flanked by her equally formidable daughters-in-law and daughter, these women protect their multi-million dollar empire with lethal force, navigating intense power struggles, fierce family dynamics, and brutal underworld violence.



## Brown

Where To Watch: Zee5

A disgraced and alcoholic police officer haunted by personal tragedy, is pulled back into active duty after the brutal murder of the daughter of a powerful businessman. Partnered with a fellow grieving deputy, the officer must navigate a landscape of institutional corruption, family cover-ups, and a serial killer on a grim mission.



## Dahaad

Where To Watch: Amazon Prime Video

After a series of women are found dead under seemingly ordinary circumstance in rural Rajasthan, determined police officer suspects there's more to the cases than meets the eye. As she digs deeper, she uncovers a chilling pattern that points to a serial killer who has managed to evade suspicion for years.



## Delhi Crime

Where To Watch: Netflix

After the horrific gang rape of a young woman shakes Delhi, DCP Vartika Chaturvedi and her team launch an intense manhunt to track down the perpetrators before they can disappear. Working against the clock, she navigates public outrage, political pressure and the emotional toll of the case while pursuing justice. In the second season, she is tackling a series of brutal murders and

# Why 33-Year-Old Alia Bhatt's 18-Year-Old Alpha Casting Is A Massive Win For Female Representation In Bollywood

**Alpha centres on a chilling premise: Bobby Deol's character assigns an 18-year-old Sita (Alia Bhatt) her first high-stakes mission as a birthday "gift"**

The recently released teaser for Aditya Chopra's *Alpha* gave the internet exactly what it was waiting for - a dark, sleek, and highly visceral look at what is being positioned as India's first female-led spy film. Set within the YRF Spy Universe, the film traces the origin story of Sita, a girl raised and trained to be a weapon.

Directed by Shiv Rawail, the teaser centres on a chilling premise: Bobby Deol's character assigns an 18-year-old Sita (played by Alia Bhatt) her first high-stakes mission as a birthday "gift."

Off screen, however, Alia Bhatt is 33 - a mother, a leading star, and a global luxury ambassador.

At first glance, this may seem like standard casting. But within the context of Bollywood's long-standing patterns, it signals a broader shift in how female actors are perceived and positioned - not entirely, but significantly.

For decades, Hindi cinema has followed an unwritten rule: male stars can remain romantically and professionally "young" for as long as their stardom sustains them, while female actors operate within a far stricter timeline. Male stars have routinely played characters far younger than their real age well into their forties and fifties. Female actors, in contrast, have often faced an unspoken 'expiry date,' with leading roles thinning out once they cross their late twenties or enter different phases of life.

In that context, Alia Bhatt playing an 18-year-old in a major, female-led action film is not just about performance - it directly challenges a long-standing industry bias.

## The Industry's Age Divide

The imbalance is not always overt, but it is visible. Films like *Radhe* (2021) and *Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan* (2023) continue to pair Salman Khan opposite significantly younger actresses, while Shah Rukh Khan, well into his late 50s, has fronted roles written as much younger in films like *Pathaan* (2023). Similarly, *Samrat Prithviraj* (2022) cast Akshay Kumar alongside a much younger co-star, Manushi Chhillar. These choices reflect



that the industry often relies on styling, narrative framing, and even visual treatment to preserve the 'youth' of male stars. At the same time, the youth of their female co-stars is treated as essential to the story's credibility. For actresses, the arc has historically been far more restrictive. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, stars like Madhuri Dixit and Raveena Tandon - both at the peak of their careers - were gradually steered towards secondary or maternal roles after marriage or once they crossed their 30s.

A particularly striking example remains Shefali Shah, who played Akshay Kumar's mother in *Waqt: The Race Against Time* (2005), despite being younger than him in real life. Similarly, actresses like Tabu, Vidya Balan, and Rani Mukerji have largely moved into niche, content-driven spaces rather than mainstream romantic leads opposite major male stars of a similar age.

The message has been clear for decades: male actors can age while remaining central to the narrative; female actors are expected to adapt or step aside.

## How Alpha Changes The Narrative

### Alpha disrupts this long-standing formula.

Alia Bhatt, at 33, is not only playing an 18-year-old but is also headlining a large-scale action franchise. Crucially, she is not positioned as a romantic interest - she drives the narrative. Directed by Shiv Rawail, the film places her at the centre of a

gritty, high-stakes, and psychologically layered story. Her character is not ornamental but complex, intense, and firmly rooted in action.

This distinction matters. Alia playing younger is not about visual appeal - it is about character depth and storytelling.

For years, male actors have been allowed to "de-age" purely through star power and screen persona. Female actors, however, have rarely enjoyed the same flexibility. That said, there have been exceptions. Sridevi returned with

English Vinglish (2012) and reclaimed narrative space on her own terms. Vidya Balan carried films like *The Dirty Picture* (2011) and *Kahaani* (2012), proving that female-led stories could command both critical and commercial success. Kangana Ranaut headlined *Queen* (2014) and *Manikarnika* (2019), reinforcing the viability of women-led narratives.

Yet these remained exceptions rather than the norm in mainstream, big-budget franchises.

**Alpha begins to bridge that**

gap.

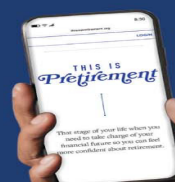
By allowing a 33-year-old actress to convincingly portray a teenager while anchoring a large-scale action film, it signals that performance outweighs numerical age.

This moment becomes even more significant when viewed alongside Alia Bhatt's filmography. From *Udta Punjab* to *Raazi*, *Darlings*, and *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, she has consistently chosen layered, character-driven roles.

Her progression maps a clear arc - from survival (*Udta Punjab*) to resistance (*Darlings*) to authority (*Gangubai Kathiawadi*) and now to a fully weaponised protagonist in *Alpha*. By stepping into a full-scale action franchise, she expands the definition of what a mainstream Hindi film heroine can be - not just emotionally complex, but physically dominant and narratively central. Alia Bhatt's casting ultimately reinforces a larger truth: longevity in cinema should not be dictated by numbers, but by talent, presence and the ability to evolve. And in an industry that has long imposed limits on its women, that shift feels both necessary and overdue.

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# Welcome To The Jungle Trailer Released : 5 Hilariously Chaotic Moments That Prove Bollywood's Blockbuster Comedy is Back!



absurd as it gets: Paresh Rawal and Rajpal Yadav set out to make a fake 2,000 crore movie with a washed-up, flop actor (played by Akshay Kumar). They gather a massive crew, dress up in army uniforms for a shoot, and end up getting mistaken for the real army by actual jungle bandits. It's essentially Bollywood's wildest comedy one would witness ever. If you need a solid laugh, here are 5 hilarious moments from the trailer that will have you giggling...

## 1. The "2000-Crore Fake Film" Pitch

Right out of the gate, Paresh Rawal's character drops the ultimate meta-joke on modern Bollywood box office obsession. When explaining the master plan to shoot a totally fake movie proudly labeled as "Bollywood's first 2000-crore fake film."

Why it cracks us up: It's a hilarious, self-aware dig at how every big-budget movie nowadays promises to cross thousands of crores, except here, they are doing it with zero script and 100% fraud.

## 2. Kiku Sharda Flattening

part of this jungle military crew. He gets a dialogue line in the trailer, but it's edited with hilariously frantic, rapid-fire cuts. Why it cracks us up: Fans on Reddit have already pointed out how the editors had to use multiple quick cuts just to get Daler Mehndi to deliver a single comic line. It's so chaotic that it becomes pure, intentional comedy gold.

## 3. Akshay & Suniel Shetty's Nostalgic Banter

Watching Akshay Kumar and Suniel Shetty back on screen together is an instant shot of 2000s nostalgia. Akshay plays a declining, desperate actor who has delivered a string of massive flops, and Suniel is right there to remind him of it with sharp, deadpan roasts.

Why it cracks us up: Their effortless, bickering chemistry hasn't aged a day. When Suniel's character questions Akshay's "star power" while they are stuck in a literal jungle, the timing is so sharp you can't help but chuckle.

## 4. Daler Mehndi's Rapid-Fire Cuts

In a bizarre twist of casting genius, pop icon Daler Mehndi is

## Rajpal Yadav

Visual comedy is where this cast shines, and there is a physical gag in the trailer where Kiku Sharda accidentally lands directly on top of Rajpal Yadav.

Why it cracks us up: Rajpal Yadav's iconic face of pure, breathless despair while being absolutely crushed by Kiku is peak slapstick.

## 5. The "Traffic Signal" Logic in the Jungle

When the cast gets ambushed by jungle bandits and everything goes south, the characters try to apply city logic to a survival situation, leading to a ridiculous argument about a "traffic signal" or rules in the middle of a dense forest.

Why it cracks us up: It's classic Farhad Samji dialogue logic leading you to laugh at the sheer absurdity of people arguing over city traffic etiquette while staring down gun-toting dacoits. The movie hits theaters on June 26, 2026 internationally through Marudhar Entertainment and this jungle looks beautifully unhinged!

## 5. The "Traffic Signal" Logic in the Jungle

When the cast gets ambushed by jungle bandits and everything goes south, the characters try to apply city logic to a survival situation, leading to a ridiculous argument about a "traffic signal" or rules in the middle of a dense forest.

Bollywood is finally giving us a hefty dose of pure, unadulterated comedy, and honestly, after a long season of intense spy thrillers and gritty action sagas, we desperately need it. The trailer for

Welcome To The Jungle just dropped, and it is glorious and chaotic.

Directed by Ahmed Khan and boasting a massive ensemble cast, the plot is as delightfully

# He Borrowed Money To Make Music, Failed And Then Cleaned Toilets In Canada, Is Now A Top Singer

This popular singer-actor also used to distribute newspapers while his wife used to clean utensils in a mall.



Gippy Grewal is one of the biggest names in Punjabi entertainment. He is a successful singer, actor, producer and filmmaker. He first gained fame through music albums such as Chakkh Lai, Phulkari and Desi Rockstar. Songs like Angreji Beat and Phulkari became massive hits, helping him emerge as one of the leading Punjabi singers of the 2000s and 2010s.



After conquering the music industry, Gippy successfully transitioned into films and became a major star of Punjabi cinema. He made his acting debut with Mel Karade Rabba and went on to headline blockbuster films such as Carry On Jatta, Jihne Mera Dil Luteya, Manje Bistre and Ardaas. He also has a production house. But while Gippy might be a big name in the showbiz world today, do you know it was not always the case?



In a recent interview with Bharti TV, Gippy opened up about his journey and revealed he had to borrow money to make his first album, which sank. When his second album also did not work, he moved to Canada but struggled to make ends meet.



"After getting married, they say your stars align. One song from the third album was picked up, and that worked. That became my first hit. It was playing at every wedding. That song changed my life," Gippy said while talking about his first hit song, Phulkari.



However, the song's success did not help him a lot. "I used to work as a security guard back then. Even though my song was a hit, I had to make money to survive and for my family. I knew that until I have a high income as a performer or singer, I needed to work to pay the bills," he added.



Gippy further recalled that he used to distribute newspapers with his wife. They also used to work in a mall, where his wife used to clean trays and he used to sweep. "I had to do everything. I had to clean the toilets also," he said.