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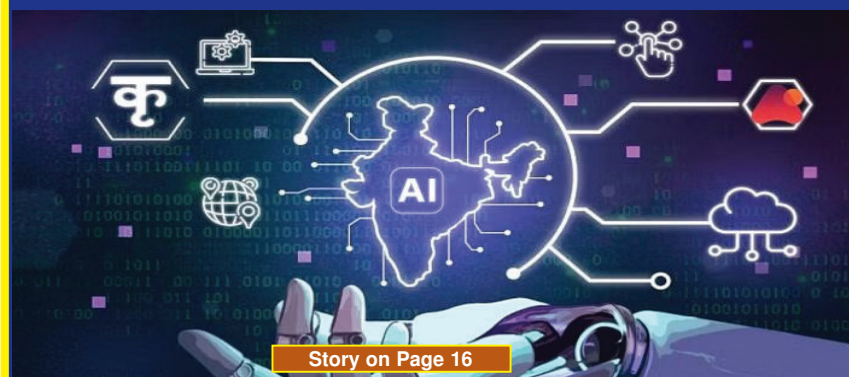
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AI thinks it's smart. Chimps may beg to differ.



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Gangster
Anmol Bishnoi,
2 fugitives
wanted in
Punjab among
200 Indians
deported by US

Anmol Bishnoi, Lawrence Bishnoi's brother wanted in Baba Siddique case, to be deported to India

(By Our Staff Reporter) NEW DELHI: Anmol Bishnoi, the younger brother of jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and one of India's most-wanted organised crime fugitives, has been removed from the United States and is being brought to India, people familiar with the matter said.

Anmol is expected to land in New Delhi on Wednesday, a person aware of the matter said, hours after the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) informed the family of Baba Siddique, a former Maharashtra minister, who was shot dead in Bandra on October 12, 2024, that Anmol had been removed from American soil.

"This email is to inform you that ANMOL BISHNOI has been removed from the United States... The offender was removed on November 18, 2025," the email said. Siddique's family released a screenshot of the email.

Anmol, a native of Punjab's Fazilka district, had been on the run since fleeing India on a forged passport. Investigators said he exited India via Nepal before moving through Dubai and Kenya and eventually reaching the US. He was detained in November last year that set in motion the deportation process that concluded on Tuesday.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) counts Anmol Bishnoi among India's 'most wanted' and had announced a reward of ₹10 lakh for information leading to his arrest.

Officials said Anmol faces at least 18 criminal cases in India, including the conspiracy to murder former Maharashtra minister and NCP leader Baba Siddique, who was shot dead outside his son Zeeshan's office building in Bandra East on October 12. He was shot by three armed assailants and sustained three bullet injuries.

Shortly after the incident, a social media post was uploaded by Shubham Lonkar, a suspected member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, claiming responsibility for the murder. More than two dozen people have been arrested in this case.

Baba Siddique's son



Zeeshan, a former lawmaker from the Congress, told HT: "After learning that Anmol Bishnoi was in the United States, we registered as registered as victims of crime (commissioned by him as per Mumbai police) with various departments of the United States. We used to get regular notifications from them relating to Anmol Bishnoi, and on 18th of November, we were informed by the federal government that they have removed the offender

from their land. ... We want the Mumbai Police to arrest and question him to find the motive behind my father's killing and also in the firing outside actor Salman Khan's residence. Anmol is an Indian citizen so he should be brought back to India. He is a threat to society."

Anmol is also wanted for the firing outside actor Salman Khan's Bandra home in April 2024 — an attack that investigators suspected was carried out at the behest of the

Bishnoi network. His role in the May 2022 killing of Punjabi rapper Sidhu Moosewala remains one of the most significant cases against him, with agencies alleging he coordinated the plot while operating from abroad. A

senior NIA official said that Anmol functioned as Lawrence Bishnoi's principal overseas handler, directing extortion rackets, issuing threats and coordinating assignments through encrypted channels.

"His presence abroad helped the syndicate build links with criminal groups across West Asia, East Africa and North America. With his deportation confirmed, we are now preparing to take his formal custody," he said, asking not to be named.

His return will also unlock crucial details about the Bishnoi syndicate's global operations and reshape several ongoing terror, murder and extortion probes," he said, asking not to be named.

Indian-origin pregnant woman and unborn baby killed in BMW crash in Sydney, teen driver charged

(By Our Staff Reporter) A 33-year-old Indian-origin woman, who was 8 months pregnant, died along with her unborn child after being struck by a car in Sydney's Hornsby suburb, Australian authorities said, as per a report by 9 News. The victim, Samanvitha

Dhareshwar, was walking with her husband and their 3-year-old son on Friday when the fatal crash occurred. She was just weeks away from giving birth to her second child. According to a report by 9 News, the New South Wales Police said that a Kia Carnival had slowed down to allow the family to cross the footpath. At that moment, a BMW sedan driven by 19-year-old Aaron Papazoglu allegedly collided with the Kia, causing it to surge forward and hit Dhareshwar with force. Emergency services

arrived promptly, and efforts, both Dhareshwar and her



paramedics treated her at the scene before she was rushed to Westmead Hospital. But despite unborn baby could not be saved. NSW Police Traffic and Highway Patrol Command Assistant

Commissioner David Driver described the crash as "very confronting" for first responders. "It's particularly tragic when people pass away and indeed when there's children involved," Driver said, adding, "This is a terrible, terrible story." Police investigation ongoing Papazoglu was taken to the hospital for mandatory testing and later released. After police reviewed dashcam footage of the incident, officers arrested him shortly after in Wahroonga. The 19-year-old was taken to Hornsby Police Station and charged with dangerous driving occasioning death, negligent driving (occasioning death) and causing loss of foetus - death of a pregnant woman, according to reports. The 48-year-old man driving the Kia Carnival was unharmed. Police investigations into the crash are ongoing.

Madina Bus Tragedy: High-Level Indian Delegation To Visit Saudi Arabia Tomorrow, Says MEA

This visit is to coordinate efforts with Saudi authorities, including the ministry of Haj and Umrah. The delegation is expected to take part in the last rites of the deceased

(By Our Staff Reporter) The ministry of external affairs has announced the immediate dispatch of a high-level delegation after the tragic bus accident near Saudi Arabia's holy city of Madina, which resulted in the deaths of several Indian Umrah pilgrims, primarily from Telangana. The bus accident took place early on Monday (November 17), involving Indian nationals, most of whom appeared to be Indians. More than 40 Indians were travelling on the bus, which was reportedly on its way from Mecca to Madina when it collided with an oil tanker around 1.30 am (IST). According to the ministry of external affairs (MEA), a high-level delegation will visit Saudi Arabia on Wednesday (November 19) to provide



assistance and oversee relief measures. This visit is intended to ensure the "fullest assistance" and coordinate efforts with Saudi authorities, including the ministry

of Haj and Umrah. The delegation, which will be led by Andhra Pradesh governor Justice SAbdul Nazeer, is also expected to take part in the last rites of the

deceased. He will be accompanied by Arun Kumar Chatterjee, secretary (consular, passport, and visa division and overseas Indian affairs) of the MEA. The Centre

expressed its profound sorrow at the tragic accident, stating: "We extend our deepest condolences to the bereaved families and wish for the speedy recovery of the injured." Relief operations are underway and the Indian mission in Jeddah rushed officials to the site of the accident to assess the situation. The Embassy of India, Riyadh and the Consulate General of India, Jeddah, said they are working closely with the local authorities to expedite the identification of mortal remains. The Centre is facilitating the travel of the families of the deceased to Saudi Arabia. The MEA reiterated that the government remains "fully committed to supporting Indian nationals affected by this tragedy and is working to ensure swift and effective assistance".

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Al Falah university founder Javed Ahmed Siddiqui arrested by ED in money laundering case

Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui is the founder and managing trustee of Al-Falah University, which is facing probe in “white collar” terror module case.

(News Agencies)-New Delhi: Investigation Agency as the The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday arrested Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui, chairman of the Al-Falah group, in connection with its money laundering case linked to alleged fraudulent claims of accreditation and financial irregularities by the group's flagship institutions. Siddiqui, who has also been chancellor of Al-Falah University in Faridabad since 2014, was taken into custody under Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after investigators examined material seized during search operations conducted earlier in the day. The group's Al-Falah Medical College, spread across a 72-acre campus in Faridabad, has been at the centre of one of India's largest terror probes in years. Police believe the prime suspects - including faculty member Umar Un Nabi, who has been described by the National

Investigation Agency as the suicide bomber behind the Red Fort blast- used a room at the medical college to plot logistics and transport routes for ammonium nitrate intended for multiple blasts across the NCR. The Hyundai i20 that exploded near Red Fort was parked inside the campus for nearly 20 days, police said. The ED probe, however, stems from two FIRs registered by the Delhi Police Crime Branch, alleging that Al-Falah University, Faridabad, falsely claimed to be accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and misrepresented its eligibility under Section 12(B) of the UGC Act to mislead students and parents. The UGC has clarified that the university is recognised only under Section 2(f) as a state private university and has never been eligible for central grants. A senior ED official said Siddiqui, who has been managing trustee



of the Al-Falah Charitable Trust since 1995, exercised complete control over the trust and its network of educational institutions. "Despite the group's rapid expansion since the late 1990s, investigators say its financials do not support such growth," he said. During searches at 19 locations in NCR on Tuesday, including the university and the residences of

key personnel, the ED claimed to have uncovered evidence of large-scale fund diversion. Officials said proceeds of crime running into crores of rupees were routed to family-owned entities, with construction and catering contracts allegedly awarded to firms linked to Siddiqui's wife and children. The agency seized ₹48 lakh in cash, digital devices, documents and

identified multiple shell companies believed to be part of the laundering network. The ED official said evidence of fund layering, diversion and recovery of cash established Siddiqui's culpability, leading to his arrest. "He was produced before a court to seek custodial remand. Further investigation is underway," he added.

Probe Agency Attaches Rs 51.70 Dubai-Based Assets In SBI Fraud Case

(News Agencies)- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached nine luxurious foreign immovable properties located in Dubai (UAE) in the Rs 1266.63 crore State Bank of India (SBI) fraud case allegedly done by Advantage Overseas Private Limited (AOPL), the agency said on Tuesday. The attached properties are in the form of apartments and commercial spaces, worth Rs 51.70 crore. These properties were attached on November 17. ED said the move was taken in the matter of bank fraud committed by AOPL, its directors, guarantors, and related persons, including its main director and significant beneficial owner, Shrikant Bhasi, which caused wrongful loss of Rs 1266.63 crore to SBI. As per the ED, the attached properties belong to Shrikant Bhasi, who gifted them to his daughter. ED's Bhopal zonal office attached these foreign immovable properties located in Dubai under



the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. ED said these foreign assets, situated in Centurion Residence - Dubai Investment Park Second, Dubai Silicon Oasis, Liwa Heights (Al Thanyah Fifth), Business Bay, and World Trade Centre Residences, were found to be acquired out of Proceeds of Crime (POC) generated in connection

with the bank fraud case where SBI, Shahpura branch has incurred wrongful loss to the tune of Rs 1266.63 crore. ED said its investigation revealed that Shrikant Bhasi, who exercised strategic control over AOPL and its associated entities, had acquired the said foreign properties in Dubai. "These properties were later deliberately

gifted to his daughter through gift deeds executed in 2022-2023, without any consideration to hide the POC. The properties were acquired from funds generated by AOPL and its group entities through illegal merchanting trade transactions, diversion of bank funds, fabrication of documents, circular trading, and layering of illicit proceeds," the financial

probe agency mentioned in its statement. During the investigation, ED said, it was revealed that 12 Foreign Letters of Credit (FLCs) amounting to USD 200 million (approximately Rs 1266.63 crore) were devolved upon SBI between April and May 2018 after AOPL failed to fulfil the mandatory margin requirements and could not infuse funds at the time of LC rollover. "Due to depletion of Fixed Deposit margins and the company's failure to honour its obligations, the bank was compelled to make payments to overseas suppliers, resulting in substantial loss to the public sector bank. These devolved LCs constitute a major component of the POC, which were subsequently layered and laundered through related entities and used for acquiring foreign assets," it said. The ED further said its investigation has also uncovered a network of domestic and foreign entities used for layering, diversion of funds, and acquisition of assets in India and abroad.

The 'Ten-Year Itch' in India-US Defence Relations

It's the ten-year itch again! India and the US signed a ten-year framework last month for the US-India 'Major Defence Partnership', signalling, as many in the media put it, "stable ties in the India-US defence sector". To watchers in the Indian strategic circuit, however, it is 'yawn-time' once again. Human memory may be short, but it is not so imbecile as to inhibit differentiation between historical experience and political hyperbole. In matters of national interests, no country is indispensable. This is especially true if one side of the pact is a superpower and the other has an acutely adverse power gradient. The India-US defence relationship can be analysed through four historical periods.

The Beginning Of The Soviet Friendship

In the 1950s, over-riding India's misgivings, the US brought Pakistan into its sphere of influence through the South East Asia Treaty Organisation and Central Treaty Organisation treaties;

meant to oppose the spread of communism, the fact is that modern American arms like Patton tanks and F-86 Sabre and F-104 Starfighters were used by Pakistan against India in the 1965 and 1971 wars. India's attempts to get modern assets frustrated - after the US refused to sell modern aircraft after the disastrous 1962 war with China - when the Soviet Union stepped in with the MiG-21 fighter, initiating a stable, dependable and long-term relationship with the USSR (and then Russia).

The 1970s and '80s are coloured by the memory of the US Navy's 7th fleet, led by the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise entering the Bay of Bengal in support of Pakistan's debauchery in East Pakistan. It took a decade for the relations to stabilise and, come the 1990s, the Indian media and the political establishment went gaga over the 'Kicklighter proposal' of setting up an India-US defence technology group.

(Contd on page 16)

Beyond the Headlines: Time to Pivot to Affordability and Security

For years, the promise of the Jeffrey Epstein files loomed large over the political landscape, a symbol of long-awaited transparency and a reckoning for the powerful. Now, with President Donald Trump's signature on the bill compelling the Justice Department to release the remaining documents, that chapter is effectively closed. This moment—a win for public disclosure, regardless of one's political affiliation—marks a critical turning point. It is time to declare victory for transparency and, immediately, pivot our collective focus toward the urgent, practical crises that govern the lives of most citizens: affordability and security. The fascination with past scandals, however compelling, is a distraction from the very real economic pain felt at kitchen tables across the country. Affordability is not an abstract concept; it is the daily struggle to balance a budget strained by persistent inflation, even if the headline rate has cooled. Americans are watching their purchasing power erode, primarily in the sectors that matter most: housing, healthcare, and groceries. Rent and mortgage payments are increasingly out of reach for middle-class families. Childcare costs often rival or exceed college tuition. This affordability crisis is a foundational threat to the American dream, demanding focused legislative and executive action—not just rhetoric. Every hour of political capital spent dissecting flight logs is an hour not spent tackling the rising cost of prescription drugs or the looming insolvency of the Social Security system. Equally

pressing is the need for renewed focus on national and international security. While we are distracted by domestic drama, the global landscape remains volatile. Geopolitical tensions, particularly in regions like the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe, demand sober, strategic leadership. Simultaneously, our security concerns have evolved. Cyber warfare is now a critical vulnerability, with state actors actively probing our critical infrastructure, from the electrical grid to financial networks. Furthermore, the crisis at the border remains a core issue of national security and sovereignty that requires comprehensive, effective solutions, not politicized gridlock. These challenges—foreign espionage, critical infrastructure defense, and border integrity—are current and immediate. They require the full attention of the administration and Congress now. The release of the Epstein files grants us an opportunity. It is the moment to satisfy the need for accountability in one area and then decisively move on. We, as a nation, must resist the gravitational pull of sensationalism. The measure of a functioning democracy is not its ability to indulge in perpetual scandal, but its capacity to deliver tangible, sustainable results for its people. Our leaders have been given a clear signal: the public demands attention be paid to the pocketbook issues and the threats to our way of life. Let's put the files behind us, take a deep breath, and start the necessary work of securing a more affordable and safer future.

The Field Marshal's Shadow: How One General is Redrawing Pakistan's Power Map

The recent, almost theatrical, praise bestowed upon Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, by US President Donald Trump—who publicly dubbed him his "favorite Field Marshal"—is more than just a diplomatic flourish. It is a stark symbol of a profound shift in Pakistan's power architecture, one that sees the military not just influencing, but openly dominating the nation's fragile democratic facade. Field Marshal Munir's consolidation of power, which now rivals that of past military strongmen like Zia ul-Haq or Pervez Musharraf, is a chilling testament to the fragility of civilian rule in Pakistan. Crucially, this power grab has been executed not through a traditional military coup, but through a calculated "constitutional coup." The recent passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment effectively rubber-stamps this supremacy.

By elevating Munir to the rank of Field Marshal (only the second in Pakistan's history) and simultaneously creating the new, powerful position of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) which he will also hold, the civilian government has legally enshrined the military's primacy. The implications are staggering: Munir now commands all military services, oversees the country's nuclear assets, has a tenure extended until at least 2030, and, most alarmingly, enjoys near-absolute, lifelong immunity from legal prosecution. This legislative maneuver places the Field Marshal above the reach of the judiciary and future civilian governments, essentially neutering checks and balances.

The Parliament, which passed this amendment with compliant haste, has all but stripped itself of meaningful authority. Pakistan's hybrid system,

where the military governed from behind a democratic curtain, has now evolved into a legally sanctioned authoritarian state, where civilian politicians are relegated to the role of obliging spectators. The warmth emanating from Washington, epitomized by President Trump's public affection and the unprecedented number of high-level meetings, only emboldens this trajectory. For a military leader facing intense domestic criticism over political interference, an official White House embrace—even one driven by transactional calculus over counterterrorism and regional stability—lends powerful, undeniable legitimacy. It signals to the world that key Western capitals are willing to engage with Pakistan's de facto power broker, regardless of the implications for its democracy. For the people of Pakistan, the rise of the 'Favorite Field Marshal' represents the formal burial of democratic pretense. It is a moment where institutional clarity—the separation of powers—has been replaced by institutional centralisation.

This concentration of authority, especially over nuclear assets, introduces significant regional risk and deepens the domestic crisis. The history of Pakistan is littered with the eventual downfalls of all-powerful generals. While Munir has succeeded in consolidating unparalleled constitutional and political authority in the short term, the long-term consequences of hollowing out democratic institutions may yet destabilize the very security he seeks to guarantee.

The cheers from Washington may be welcome today, but history suggests that the ultimate price of a constitutional dictatorship will be paid by the Pakistani nation.

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Editor in Chief

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Tel: 646 875 8495

Managing Editor:

Amaninder Singh Thind

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com

Aruna Singh

Resident Editor (New Delhi)

Mailing Address:

NuWay Media Group Inc.

223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4

Manhattan, New York 10018

For General and Advertising Inquiries:

thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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We Need to Make America, America Again



America is losing its unique American identity, and it's happening with not just the blessing of judges and politicians, but also their active participation.

The United States was founded on three fundamental principles: Individual liberty, a free market economy, and personal responsibility. But all three are being turned on their heads.

The election of Zohran Mamdani, an anti-Semite

communist Muslim, as mayor of what was the center of capitalism, should have shocked everyone.

Mamdani is a 34-year-old Ugandan native who didn't become a U.S. citizen until 2018 and has never run so much as a Kool-Aid stand.

As a result, New Yorkers can look forward to a loss of private property rights, crippling taxation, and a rise in crime due to a diminished police presence.

In addition, at least 10 other un-American Marxist Mamdani clones won local races across the United States this month — an off-year election. We can expect many more at the 2026 midterms. Mamdani's campaign came to the attention of Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk, who gave a warning a few months before his assassination.

"It's not Islamophobia to notice that a man who wants

to globalize the intifada is about to run America's largest and once greatest city," he said.

"It's not Islamophobia to notice that Muslims want to import values into the West that seek to destabilize our civilization."

Kirk concluded that "It's cultural suicide to stay silent."

A month later, Kirk addressed the broader issue of immigration in general.

He believed that the sharp decline of married, 30-year-old homeowners from 1960 to the present was attributable to a breakdown of the social compact.

To address it, he believed we need a sharply decreased non-American influence in the United States and suggested: 1 - Mass deportations 2 - Stop the H-1B scam 3 - Dramatically reduce legal-immigration 4 - End chain migration and the Visa Lottery All too often government figures bend over backwards to accommodate immigrants who commit crimes or engage in dangerous behavior. Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg released an Algerian migrant taxi driver who was charged with sexually assaulting late-night female passengers on two separate occasions.

The cabbie, Mohammed Bellebia, 34, was arrested on Dec. 19, 2024 and charged in both cases. Later, he was permitted to plead guilty to disorderly conduct and was given a conditional release.

Well, what the heck, sexual assaults may be acceptable in Algeria, as a form of flattery, right?

Remember the Indian immigrant, Harjinder Singh, who made an illegal U-turn on a Florida divided highway, resulting in the deaths of three people?

It turned out that he was given a commercial driver's license (CDL), despite the fact that he couldn't speak, understand, or read English.

He was later charged with and pled not guilty to three counts of vehicular homicide and three counts of manslaughter.

In response, Secretary of

Transportation Sean Duffy restricted the ability of non-U.S. citizens to obtain CDLs, and last week Duffy announced that California had illegally issued 17,000 CDLs.

"After weeks of claiming they did nothing wrong, Gavin Newsom and California have been caught red-handed," said Duffy. "Now that we've exposed their lies, 17,000 illegally issued trucking licenses are being revoked."

However, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals blocked the Department of Transportation from enforcing its restrictions on foreign CDL holders.

It ruled that the government failed to follow proper procedure and didn't provide sufficient justification for how the rule would promote safety.

Meanwhile, last month another illegal alien commercial truck driver was under the influence of drugs when he rear-ended several vehicles at high speed with his rig, killing three people.

We're supposed to believe in free markets, not socialism.

Also, this is supposed to be America, not Uganda, Algeria, India, or the Tower of Babel

More than a century ago President Theodore Roosevelt warned America about immigrants who refuse to assimilate to our way of life.

"There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag. . . We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language. . . and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people."

That quote, along with our founding principles of individual liberty, free market economy, and personal responsibility, should be prominently displayed in the offices of every judge, district attorney, and politician in America.

And it wouldn't hurt for New York City voters to review it also. If we're going to survive as a nation, America has to become America again.

From Pariah To Power Player: Mohammed Bin Salman's White House Return & The F-35 Deal



Mohammed bin Salman at the White House—this is more than a diplomatic visit—it is a statement. For the first time since the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi (which US intelligence concluded MBS likely authorised), the Kingdom's de-facto ruler returns to Washington. In that sense, the trip is two-fold: reconciliation and realignment. The US-Saudi relationship, strained by human rights issues and regional tensions, is being reset. The optics are clear: Riyadh re-enters the Washington corridor as a partner, not a pariah.

Yet, beneath the surface lie tensions and questions: How much has really changed? Is this a rehabilitation of MBS, or just a strategic convenience? That ambiguity will colour much of what follows.

THE F-35 DEAL: STRATEGIC WINDFALL OR SECURITY GAMBLE?

Perhaps the most headline-grabbing element of this visit is the announcement by Donald Trump that the US intends to sell the advanced F-35 Lightning II fighters to Saudi Arabia. From a purely transactional perspective, it is a big deal:

- Saudi Arabia reportedly wants up to 48 of these jets.
- For the US, it deepens defence ties with a major arms client and signals a renewed emphasis on the Gulf amid China's growing presence.
- For Riyadh, it's about prestige, deterrence (especially vis-à-vis Iran) and the sense of being a major global player.

But the deal is not without its red flags:

- US national-security officials warn that transferring such advanced tech risks exposure to China, especially given Saudi-China cooperation.
- Israel remains worried about its qualitative military edge; until now, it has been the only Middle Eastern country with F-35s.
- Congressional scrutiny will be heavy, given human-rights concerns and the precedents this sets.

In short: this is a strategic leap—but also a risk. Beyond fighter jets, this White House visit will likely focus on a trio of converging ambitions:

- Artificial Intelligence & Investment: Washington sees Riyadh not just as an oil partner but as a technology and investment node.
- Civil Nuclear Cooperation: Saudi Arabia is seeking access to civilian nuclear tech and possibly enrichment capabilities, with US involvement.
- Normalisation with Israel: The US continues to push for Saudi entry into the fold of regional diplomatic change; Riyadh insists that Palestinian statehood progress be part of any deal.

Taken together, these are not just arms deals and business investments. They map a new architecture of diplomacy: where defence, technology and geopolitics converge, and Saudi Arabia emerges as more than an oil-partner—it be-

comes a technological and strategic node.

CONTRADICTIONS & CAVEATS

No major diplomatic shift is without its contradictions. This one is rich in them:

- Human rights looming large: The Khashoggi killing remains unresolved in many eyes; the US intelligence community still assesses MBS as likely responsible. The decision to welcome him back signals that strategic interests have outweighed earlier moral strictures.

- Technology leakage risk: Advanced military systems like the F-35 carry sensitive tech. With Saudi Arabia's increasing ties to China, concerns about unintended access or coercive transfer cannot be dismissed.

- Israel's qualitative edge vs. Saudi modernisation: Granting F-35s to Saudi Arabia without conditionality risks eroding Israel's military superiority—something US' Middle East strategy has long emphasised.

- Symbol vs substance: The big announcements may prove to be more symbolic than deeply binding. For example, military sales can be revoked or delayed; diplomatic commitments softened; technology safeguarded only partially.

In short: the triumphal headlines risk overshadowing the intricacies and unresolved dimensions of the deal.

SPORTING PAGEANTS AND POWER OPTICS: CRISTIANO RONALDO IN THE MIX

Amid all the high-stakes diplomacy and defence deals, another figure enters the scene: Cristiano Ronaldo. It was reported that Ronaldo will visit the White House to meet Donald Trump, in the run-up to the 2026 FIFA World Cup (which the US will co-host).

Ronaldo is one of the most recognisable athletes globally. His presence adds a softer diplomatic veneer to the visit, suggesting that sport and statecraft are intertwined.

Also, Ronaldo plays club football for Saudi side Al-Nassr FC—an important reminder that Saudi Arabia's soft-power am-

bitions (sports, celebrity, global brand) underpin its broader strategic posture. The meeting coinciding with the Crown Prince's Washington visit amplifies media coverage, while also hinting that the events may be choreographed to project an image of convergence: US, Saudi, sport, diplomacy. So, while Ronaldo's inclusion adds the sparkle, it also raises questions about the depth of the underlying agenda. A global celebrity meeting doesn't guarantee substance. However, it may serve as glamour cover for strategic deals.

STAKES AND IMPLICATIONS

What happens next will test whether this is a durable shift or a headline in search of its follow-through:

- Congressional review and oversight: The F-35 sale will require export licences and political buy-in. With human rights and regional security concerns in play, US lawmakers may demand conditions or delay approval.

- Regional arms dynamics: If Saudi Arabia receives F-35s, other regional players—UAE, Iran, Turkey—may respond, potentially escalating an arms race in the Gulf rather than stabilising it.

- Technology safeguards: The US must define clear export controls, training regimes, maintenance controls and vetting of Saudi-China interactions to ensure advanced systems are not compromised.

- Diplomatic linkage: Will the defence deal anchor broader goals—Saudi-Israeli normalisation, deeper US-Saudi investment, a pivot from China—or drift independently? The alignment of arms, technology and diplomacy is a delicate triangle.

- Reputation vs Realpolitik: The US is choosing strategic alignment over past moral-red lines. If that triggers backlash (domestically or internationally), the credibility cost could outweigh the gains.

In sum: For both men—Trump and MBS—this visit offers legacy-building potential. For observers, the question re-

mains: can the headline polish stand up to the sub-text of accountability, security and credibility?

TECH TITANS AT THE TABLE: ELON MUSK, BUSINESS AND DIPLOMACY

We're not done yet. There's another layer: the attendance of Elon Musk at a White House dinner hosted by Trump in honour of MBS. Musk is expected to be among the guests at the Tuesday evening dinner. Remember Trump's high-profile visit to Saudi Arabia, where he flaunted his tech mogul friend to the Crown Prince, a symbolic meeting between two of the world's most influential figures and the two richest individuals in the room.

That said, Musk's presence at the White House dinner signals the merging of technological leadership, corporate power and state diplomacy. It underlines that the US-Saudi agenda is not just defence and oil—but tech, AI, investment, and business elites.

Musk—and by extension, Tesla and his broader ventures—offer Saudi Arabia a link to cutting-edge tech and innovation.

This is, in many ways, a historic moment: the return of the Crown Prince to Washington, the potential sale of F-35s to Saudi Arabia, the inclusion of Ronaldo in the diplomatic dance, and now the tech-heavy presence of Elon Musk and top corporate players. It signals Saudi Arabia's resurgence on the world stage and America's recalibrated approach to the Gulf—where defence, technology, sport and investment all converge.

Yet, it is also fraught. The interplay of armaments, soft diplomacy, global sport, and shifting alliances doesn't guarantee smooth outcomes. The tightrope between strategic interest and ethical consistency remains precarious. For Trump, MBS and Musk, this visit offers legacy-building potential. For the world watching, the question remains: will the badges of power translate into stable architecture, or simply grand theatre?

By Grihu Atul

Bihar 2025: Caste cracks, development pitch, or 'subaltern Hindutva' magic?

Bihar's 2025 verdict signalled a major shift, with weakening caste loyalties, broader social representation, and voters increasingly prioritising development, welfare, and governance over traditional identity-based politics.



The Bihar electorate gave the National Democratic Alliance a resounding mandate. The scale of this victory — a more than three-quarters majority — suggests a weakening grip of caste identity on voting behaviour.

For decades, Bihar politics has been synonymous with caste calculations. The famous Muslim-Yadav coalition formed the backbone of the Opposition's politics, while upper castes and other backward classes aligned differently across electoral cycles. However, the 2025 results challenge these notions.

In 2020, five caste groups — Yadavs, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Muslims, and Koeris/Kushwahas — accounted for 56 per cent of total MLAs. This figure declined to 49 per cent in 2025. While the Mahagathbandhan still derives 69 per cent of its MLAs from these five dominant groups, the NDA has achieved far greater social diversification with only 44 per cent of its legislators coming from these communities. This 25-point gap shows that coalitions need to broaden their social bases.

Muslim-Yadav dependence

The percentage of Muslim-Yadav MLAs in 2025 was half of what it was in 2020 (from

29.2 per cent to 15.2 per cent), while Non-Yadav OBC and EBC MLAs have surged to nearly 40 per cent of the Assembly (37.4 per cent vs 28 per cent).

This redistribution suggests that voters from marginalised groups, who were previously considered consolidated vote banks, may have exercised their franchise based on broader considerations, such as development and freebies, rather than caste identity alone.

Breaking hereditary seat patterns

Another fascinating dimension observed in Bihar was the declining hold of specific caste groups on particular constituencies. In 2020, there were 105 seats where the same social group had won three consecutive polls (2010, 2015, 2020). Another 113 seats saw victories by the same caste group in two out of three elections. This meant that approximately 90 per cent of seats had strong caste-based hereditary patterns.

In 2025, only 81 seats had four consecutive victories by the same caste group, while 63 seats had three out of four victories. The hold of caste on seats has thus declined from 90 to 60 per cent, one of the most significant shifts in Bihar's electoral landscape in recent decades.

North vs South Bihar

North Bihar, with 140 seats, houses 75 per cent of the state's Muslim population. South Bihar, with 103 seats, has approximately the remaining 25. In 2020, the BJP swept North Bihar, winning 86 seats, suggesting polarisation had an impact in the region. However, in South Bihar, where caste dynamics traditionally held stronger sway, the party managed only 39 out of 103 seats.

The 2025 elections were conducted in two phases, with Phase 2, comprising 122 seats, where 65 per cent of Bihar's Muslim population lives. A terror attack in New Delhi on the eve of polling may have influenced a very high turnout. Interestingly, the NDA's performance remained remarkably consistent across both phases: 103 seats in Phase 1 and 99 in Phase 2.

Muslim-majority seats

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of analysing these results concerns the 61 seats where the Muslim population exceeds the state average. In 2025, the NDA won 45 of these seats, while the Mahagathbandhan secured only 11; the All India Majlis-e-Mittehadul Muslimeen won five. This represents 74 per cent of Muslim-majority seats going to the NDA.

This is a significant escalation

from 2020, when the NDA had won 33 such seats (54 per cent) compared to the Mahagathbandhan's 23 and the AIMIM's five. The progressive increase in NDA's performance in Muslim-majority constituencies suggests a clear trend, though its interpretation remains contentious.

The number of Muslim MLAs also touched a historic low of 11 this time, representing just 4.5 per cent of the Assembly, compared to 19 MLAs (7.8 per cent) in 2020 against an estimated population of 17.7 per cent. Notably, the Seemanchal region, which houses 27 per cent of the state's Muslim population, accounts for 64 per cent of Muslim MLAs (the highest ever contribution). Muslim political representation has become increasingly concentrated in specific geographic pockets rather than being distributed across the state.

Polarisation or development?

The critical question that emerges from this data is whether the NDA's landslide victory, particularly in Muslim-majority areas, represents successful polarisation similar to Uttar Pradesh's "subaltern Hindutva" model, or whether it reflects a genuine decline in caste-based voting in favour of development and governance issues.

The NDA recorded a strike rate of 90 per cent on seats where Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath campaigned. The answer is likely nuanced. The consistent performance across regions with varying demographic compositions, the diversification of social representation within the NDA, and the weakening of hereditary caste holds on specific seats — all suggest that caste may no longer be the sole or even dominant determinant of voting behaviour.

Development initiatives, welfare schemes, infrastructure projects, and governance performance appear to have gained traction as electoral considerations. However, the sharp decline in Muslim representation and the NDA's dramatic gains in Muslim-majority constituencies do raise questions about the nature of social consolidation that may have occurred. The concentration of Muslim MLAs in Seemanchal and the overall reduction in their numbers suggest that while caste barriers may be weakening for some communities, new forms of political consolidation may be emerging.

Caste declining, but not disappearing

The Bihar elections undoubtedly mark a watershed moment in the state's political evolution. However, it would be premature to declare the end of caste in Bihar politics. Caste remains important, though its hold has clearly declined. The real transformation appears to be that voters are increasingly willing to look beyond caste when other factors present compelling alternatives.

Whether this shift represents a fundamental realignment or a temporary disruption will only become clear in future electoral cycles. What is certain is that Bihar's political parties can no longer rely on caste arithmetic alone to secure victories.

By Amitabh Tiwari

Bihar rejected Rahul Gandhi's divisive politics. Voters are nobody's fools

Voters in Bihar don't want dynastic politics, minority politics, or caste politics—all dead ducks flogged by the Congress Party in its regressive, divisionary, divisive game.

Watching the victory celebrations for the monumental landslide victory of the NDA in the Bihar elections at the BJP headquarters, I had an epiphany. You can't play around with the dignity of the people—insulting the intelligence of the electorate doesn't go down well. And it results in a resounding slap on the face by way of an election rout, the kind faced by the ubiquitous Mahagathbandhan and the Jan Suraaaj Party in Bihar. The people of Bihar have exercised their agency with quiet dignity. They discarded caste politics and the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) axis that had them bound to a particular ideology. Instead, they have rewritten the M-Y formula to suit their own voice—mahila and yuva voice—by voting for progress, law and order, development, and gender parity. The voice of the state is loud and clear; Viksit and Surakshit Bihar is the call of the day. Modi hai to mumkin hai (If there is Modi, anything is possible).

Let us analyse the reasons for the resounding win and the NDA's 202-seat tally in Bihar. The BJP was the single largest party at 89 seats, followed by Nitish Kumar's JD(U) at 86. The INC had a paltry six, and Prashant Kishor's party failed to open their account with a Golden Duck. Prime Minister Modi called this win a victory of social justice and democracy, stating that the NDA had replaced tushtikaran (policy of appeasement) with santushtikaran (satisfaction). It is now more than clear that the people of Bihar are nobody's fools and have rejected the negativity surrounding the Gandhi siblings. They have said "tata bye bye" to the politics of caste and appeasement.

Vote for development and progress

In 2017, Modi had slammed Lalu Prasad Yadav for the lack of road development in Bihar.

"Some people used to say roads are meant for those who

have cars, and not the poor. No one has damaged the country as much as these people with distorted mentality," Modi said.

The people of Bihar have thrown out the 'visionaries' whose vision was for a Bihar mired in poverty and despair. Nitin Gadkari's promise of America-type highways has ignited the aspirations of the people. From 2005 to 2025, the length of National Highways in Bihar doubled from 3,639 km to 6,147; State Highways increased from 2,382 km to 3,638 km, and Major District Roads (MDR) went from 8,457 km to 16,296 km. Now, people can aspire to travel in cars, and with road access, even the poor can travel by road.

Appeal to Bihari pride

In January 2024, Karpoori Thakur, the first Non-Congress socialist leader from Bihar, was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna. He was known as Jan Nayak for his unwavering commitment to social upliftment. He was a progressive leader who implemented the Karpoori Formula for proportional reservation in order to benefit the underrepresented.

The people of Bihar turned this recognition into a vote for the NDA and allies.

Birthplace of socialist leaders

PM Modi recognises the legacy of socialist leaders from Bihar, such as Jayaprakash Narayan, whose invaluable contribution to the history and development of India seems to have been forgotten by our youth. He had the "inimitable distinction" of being an active participant in three mass movements in the country, including the Quit India movement, the 'Bhudan' movement, and the movement against corruption in Independent India.

To Narayan goes the credit for bringing all non-Congress parties under a collective umbrella of the Janata Party, the

predecessor of Bharatiya Janata Party in 1977. These progressive, educated leaders have often been neglected and ignored by the elitist Congress.

End of Jungle Raj

The term 'Jungle Raj' is a metaphor for the complete breakdown of law and order and governance in Bihar during the Lalu Prasad-Rabri Devi era of 1990-2005. It was coined by the Patna High Court way back in 1997 during an oral observation on the state of civic conditions in Patna. The period was marked with rampant crime, ransom raj, caste politics, nepotism in bureaucracy, governance collapse, and political patronage of criminals. The return of Jungle Raj was clearly 'returned to pavilion' by the people of Bihar, who used the ballot box to bat for a crime free, progressive future.

It is time to leave the field open to batters such as Nitish Kumar and Chirag Paswan, who will lead the state to progress and prosperity. The loss of the MGB alliance could also be attributed to the reflection of Tejashwi Yadav's political convoy of 50-plus vehicles with gun-toting extremist youth, reminiscent of the heydays of Jungle Raj. Bihar's youth are not interested in this kind of political clout.

Chhathi Maiya as cultural representation of India

Chhath Puja is one of the few Hindu festivals celebrated without idols; it is a festival of simplicity and celebrates nature at its most powerful through the worship of the Sun. There has been a cultural revolution recognising the importance of this ancient festival and its significance in the Hindu faith. It's a renaissance taking Hindus back to nature.

Expat Biharis are also taking pride in the resurgence of a festival that is close to their roots, especially among the Indian-origin diaspora in the Caribbean, Mauritius, and Fiji.

Chhathi Maiya has become an icon of community spirit and egalitarian practice, honouring the roots of Bihar through cultural integration.

Viksit, Surakshit Bihar

Development in Bihar is growing by leaps and bounds under Kumar and the NDA alliance. Katta Raj has been demolished. Modi has promised to take Bihar's makhana to global markets. His infrastructure push has seen many new mega bridges spanning across the Ganga at different locations. The Patna metro and the Patna-Gaya highway are infrastructural projects launched by the NDA. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has resulted in over 60 lakh housing units for the poor. There is a visible shift from the ground level, and the people have voted for a developed, secure Bihar.

M for mahila

The NDA has provided a safe atmosphere for women in Bihar by doing away with the katta sarkar. A woman-centric election poll plank was announced, and women have happily and enthusiastically voted for a state free of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana aims to empower women through self-employment and livelihood opportunities. One woman from each family in the state will receive a financial award of Rs 10,000 via direct transfer, with the possibility of further financial support. Reservations for women in local bodies, jobs, and initial seed capital of Rs 10,000 for women-led startups are other benefits that won over women voters.

Women have outnumbered men at the polling booth with a whopping 71.6 per cent of women casting their ballot, nine points above the 62.8 per cent turnout of men.

SIR and EVM

Every time the Congress loses an election under the able leadership of Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, the ghost of

the paper ballot system is resurrected from the dead like a holy spectre. Yet we have forgotten the days of booth capturing, poll-related anarchy, violence, and goonda raj, which went along with the paper ballot system. "Results truly surprising, polls were unfair" was the Gandhi scion's statement, rather than conducting an introspection on the poll debacle, since Congress contested 61 seats and won only six. It is apparent that the voters in Bihar don't want dynastic politics, minority politics, and certainly not caste politics, all three dead ducks flogged by the Congress Party in their regressive, divisionary, and divisive game. The SIR was an election house-keeping project mandated by the Constitution, and the Opposition has found a new scapegoat to divert attention from the debacle that is their coalition.

Youth voice

The Gen Z in Bihar have been concerned about unemployment, poverty, and their future, especially after youth protests in neighbouring Nepal and Bangladesh. Gandhi has been constantly 'inspiring' Gen Z and urging them to take his allegations 'seriously'. Bihar's youth, however, have opted to register their protest by voting for change and development, and by voting out Jungle Raj. The youth have voted for better education, development, and employment opportunities. Kumar has promised to create 1 crore jobs in the state.

The NDA tsunami has been brought to power on the votes of the women, youth, and farmers.

Bihar has reposed its confidence in the Constitution, and it is high time we move away from the regressive caste politics of yore. Bad blood and bad mouthing don't go well with people. India Today's data shows that as of 2024, nearly 9 per cent of IAS officers come from Bihar. Let us not insult the intelligence of our Bihari brethren by assuming that they can't scope out what's right and wrong. There is no 'Vote Chori' in Bihar; only dil ki chori.

By MEENAKASHI LEKHI

Hasina stares at death, India at diplomatic dilemma

Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death by the country's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). The ICT found her guilty on several charges ranging from murder to torture during the student-youth agitation last year.

The verdict has surprised none. Hasina's son and her advisor Sajeeb Wazed Joy told Reuters in an interview a day before the verdict that they "would possibly go for a death penalty" for Hasina. Some in Bangladesh anticipated a life sentence -- that would be opposed by Islamist groups like the Jamaat-e-Islami and bring them to the streets. Such a mobilisation was needed to counter the Awami

League's serial protests which began with the Dhaka lockdown on November 13.

But most expected that ICT would serve the death penalty on Hasina and her Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. Leading Bangladeshi columnist and YouTuber Masuda Bhatti had said in a post a day prior to the verdict was announced that "ICT will seek to hang Hasina because top Jamaat leaders were hanged during her reign by the same ICT for war crimes during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War." There is good reason to believe Masuda because the ICT trials have been more a play of political vendetta and less about fair trial.

Hasina herself has made similar allegations, even challenging the interim government headed by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus to take the trials to International Crimes Tribunal at the Hague. "If they took my case to Hague, they would be able to prove nothing against me because there is no concrete evidence. So they are trying me in this kangaroo court whose verdict will be predictable," Hasina said ahead of the verdict. Hasina and Kamal were both tried in absentia, a fairly common practice in Bangladesh. In many such trials, the accused absconders are not even provided legal representation, though a death sentence is only possible when the court appoints defence counsel for the accused, as has been the case

with Hasina and Kamal. Though Hasina's in-absentia trial in Bangladesh may not attract much attention, columnist David Bergman says the international response could be different.

"Outside Bangladesh, many

begin.

"It is telling, that the state-appointed defence lawyer never requested additional time to prepare. When asked on the first day of the trial why he had not sought an adjournment, he replied

trials -- if her trial is seen as less than fair in the West, India may find it easy to resist Bangladesh pressure to send her back.

In any case, India will find itself caught between the rock and the hard place. If it does not send

to stop those attacking public property.

Despite much of its top leadership fleeing to India and thousands of its leaders and workers in jail, mostly on trumped-up charges, the Awami League remains formidable at the grassroots. Yunus's visible failure in managing law and order or in handling the economy has made it unpopular much sooner than one would have thought. "Agei bhalo chilam [was better before] is what one gets to hear often from people at the grassroots -- rickshawallahs, garments workers, farm labourers et al.

That groundswell is something the Awami League will surely tap into. People don't mind

commentators, human rights organisations, and legal analysts may well view it rather differently.

In-absentia trials are inherently controversial; most jurisdictions prohibit them, and no international criminal tribunal currently permits them. The sole exception -- the Special Tribunal for Lebanon -- allowed in-absentia trials only under a statute guaranteeing the right to a full retrial if the accused later surrendered," Bergman wrote recently.

He argued that the court-appointed lawyer, though an experienced criminal advocate, has no background in international criminal law. Moreover, the court appointed him to represent both former ministers simultaneously.

"It is difficult to understand -- assuming the judges were motivated by a concern for fairness -- why separate counsel were not assigned. Putting to one side the burden of work on the shoulders of this lawyer, the two accused could easily have conflicting defences; for instance, the home minister might seek to shift responsibility to the prime minister, or vice versa," said Bergman.

Bergman is no admirer of Hasina and has been a vocal critic of the ICT trials against the Jamaat-e-Islami leaders a decade ago. He raised another important point about the Hasina trials -- that the defence lawyer received the full body of prosecution evidence a mere five weeks before the trial

that he would do so "when necessary" and that he was "ready to cross-examine the first witness." Any competent lawyer genuinely representing the interests of Hasina or Kamal would have pressed strenuously for an adjournment under such circumstances," Bergman said.

He raised another valid issue -- Hasina's defence counsel did not produce a single defence witnesses. So though the prosecution has produced some evidence, Hasina has not had adequate defence. In reality, a court-appointed counsel is never really a substitute for a defence team with enough resources to produce evidence in defence.

Bergman, who was critical of the in-absentia trial of Abul Kalam Azad in 2013 for very similar reasons during Hasina's regime, argues that since the current involves a former prime minister, now based in neighbouring India, any shortcomings in the proceedings will attract far greater global scrutiny.

PRESSURE ON INDIA

Since the interim government has made it clear it would immediately try to implement the Hasina verdict, it would mount pressure on India to extradite her. Yunus's National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, during his visit to Delhi this week, is likely to raise this issue strongly. India will come under pressure to send Hasina back. Much depends on how the West views the Hasina

Hasina and Kamal back, it will stand accused of sheltering convicted criminals. If it does, it will be seen as dumping a trusted ally who took refuge in India because she believed Delhi will not let her down. This has much implications for India's regional strategy.

By all indications so far, India will not send her back. That surely complicates India's relations with Bangladesh, where the interim government seems to be on an overdrive to befriend Pakistan, even substantially develop military-to-military ties.

VIOLENCE LOOMS LARGE

With its back to the wall, Hasina's Awami League will now have no alternative but to intensify its agitation. Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy has said a major confrontation is now on cards and violence cannot be ruled out. Joy and Hasina have both said there can be no election in Bangladesh without the Awami League. The interim government has said lifting the ban on Awami League is not likely, specially with party cadres resorting to violence during the ongoing protests.

This would leave the Awami League with no option other than waging an intense agitation to block the elections promised in February and attempt at toppling the Yunus-led interim government. The Bangladesh police chief has promised to tackle any violence firmly, issuing shoot-to-kill orders

corrupt Awami Leaguers, who misused powers, to be brought to book. But they certainly don't want the ban on Awami League, the party that led the country's war of Independence and ruled the country for half its post-independence era. Yunus promised a fair and inclusive election. How can there be an inclusive election without the Awami League which still has the support of close to half the electorate?

WIN-WIN FOR YUNUS

The verdict on Hasina is likely to lead to uncertainties over the elections. But for Yunus, it is a possible win-win. The Awami League may not be immediately able to intensify the agitation to a point where Yunus is forced to step down. On the other hand, violence by Awami supporters may provide Yunus the *raison d'être* for a massive crackdown and good reasons to delay the elections. If the Awami League fails to build up a strong enough agitation, Yunus may be able to push through an election without the Awami League. That would bring to power a political dispensation favourable to him. He may even be able to bargain for Presidency. If he ends up as the country's President, which he wants, he not only secures immunity from prosecution but also ends up as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. So his influence in policy making remains considerable.

By Subir Bhaumik



Indian car drivers, rising rage and the evolution of 'hit and run' culture

If Sanjeev Nanda and his BMW represented the entitled carelessness of wealth, today's drivers represent its weaponised rage.

It costs under Rs 5,000 to replace a car's broken side view mirror. But Manoj Kumar, a 32-year-old Kalaripayattu martial arts trainer, decided that that wasn't enough. The mirror was worth the life of the man who had damaged it. On the night of 25 October, delivery executive Darshan N, 24, accidentally brushed his scooter against Kumar's car. According to reports, Darshan apologised and sped away with the pillion-rider G Varun to complete their delivery. In response, Kumar took a U-turn, chased the men over two kilometres through Bengaluru traffic, and eventually rammed their scooter from behind. The impact threw both the riders into the air: While Darshan died on the spot from severe head injuries, Varun was admitted to the hospital.

Forty minutes after the incident, Kumar and his wife Aarati Sharma returned to the scene of crime wearing masks and collected the broken mirror fragments and car parts that might connect them to the killing. They understood exactly what they had done. Some news reports have floated the notion that the mirror damage was the result of a "prank gone wrong", as if that mitigates what the couple did.

When Kumar made that U-turn he knew that on Indian roads it is permissible for you to execute someone for supposedly disrespecting you. This is especially true if you kill a pedestrian or someone in a vehicle smaller than yours. And if you're careful about the evidence, you might just get away with it.

This isn't merely a case of road rage gone too far. Road rage suggests a certain loss of control, but Kumar and his wife were in complete command. What sets this incident apart is the level of calculation, aggression, and disregard that went into killing over a perceived insult—and it's part of a pattern that has made Indian roads a slaughterhouse.

Days after Kumar was charged with murder and arrested, another Bengaluru incident surfaced. A 23-year-old software engineer, Sukruth Keshav Gowda, allegedly rammed his car into a family of three on a two-wheeler because the rider had honked at him at a traffic signal. Gowda had earlier attempted to

muddy the narrative and suggested that he'd lost control over the car's power steering. But CCTV footage contradicted his claim and showed his car hitting the scooter from behind, launching the family into the divider. The accused later said that he was "irritated" by the honking. This deadly instinct has travelled further out from cities. In Madhya Pradesh's Ganeshpura village, a BJP leader's nephew allegedly ran over farmer Ram Swaroop Dhakad with a Thar SUV. According to the victim's family, the BJP leader, Mahendra Nagar, was threatening small farmers in the area to sell their land, but Dhakad had refused. The accused assaulted the farmer's daughters, and when his wife tried to intervene, they crushed him. Dhakad died due to his injuries.

Thar's reputation

We see the Thar wielded as an instrument of violence, reappearing in video after distressing video. In Jammu, a 20-year-old student named Mannan Anand ran over a senior citizen on a scooter twice. After reversing into and knocking over the older man, Anand calmly stepped out of his vehicle, abused the unconscious man, and drove away. There is no panic or terror in the accused's demeanour—only the cool composure of a man who knows he will not have to pay for his crimes.

In Haldwani, after a speeding Thar ran over and killed a 55-year-old man, the passengers took their own sweet time to get out of the car. In the CCTV footage of the incident, you see them in no rush to check on the victim's condition or call for help. Instead, they first inspect and fuss over the damage to the bumper of their vehicle.

Minimal provocation. Maximum force. All aided by a certainty that the vehicle grants its owner the right to extract instant retribution through lethal punishment.

Beyond the killings, the Thar's connection with a perception of lawlessness, is impossible to ignore. A spate of incidents—including thieves using a Thar to tow away a stolen Scorpio in Gurugram and a property dealer

being mowed down by an ACP's son in Faridabad—led Haryana's DGP, OP Singh, to issue a controversial statement. The SUV has become so synonymous with aggression, that Singh said that the "Thar is not a car, it's a statement". He associated the vehicle explicitly with "dadagiri" and suggested that those who drove it were crazy. You might not agree with Singh's expression. But you know him to be instinctively right, especially when you're being tailgated by a Thar with black windows on a Gurugram highway in the middle of the night.

Prateek Singh, a 28-year-old road safety awareness YouTuber

self it wants to represent. If it becomes the vehicle of the loud, it will soon lose the respect that made it desirable. If it reclaims its identity as the vehicle of the explorer, it can rightfully join the company of enduring icons."

Carelessness to rage

The Thar—and by extension, other bulky SUVs—has come to signify anarchy in India, in the same way that the BMW once signified a dangerous apathy and indifference. In 1999, Sanjeev Nanda, the grandson of a Navy Chief, drove his BMW through Delhi while drunk, and killed six people including three police officers. He fled the scene. The de-

Chattoopadhyay, founder of the Indian School for Design of Automobiles and former brand manager for the Gypsy, points to the deliberate construction of a muscular, formidable image.

"Vehicle purchases are right-brain decisions, driven by the idea you want to project, maybe as someone not to be messed with," he told me. Chattoopadhyay said that some people choose SUVs partly because India's roads are full of potholes and undulations, and a high-clearance vehicle makes practical sense. "But that doesn't explain why someone would choose a Thar or Scorpio over a Venue or Creta," he said. "A black Thar or a Scorpio also symbolises a 'bahubali.'" In the series Mirzapur, for instance, the gangster Kaleen Bhaiya moves around in a Scorpio while his lackeys drive Thars.

And the marketing has leaned into this. Chattoopadhyay doesn't believe that the vehicle creates this mindset, but it plays on it. He contrasts this with Honda's iconic campaign when it launched its motorcycles in the USA in the 1960s. The iconic line, "You meet the nicest people on a Honda" was a deliberate attempt to distance the category from the violence associated with biker gangs. "Has any Indian brand played up to that persona?" he asks. "Instead, we do black editions, which is so silly in a country like India."

A hapless response has come in from no less than the Union Transport Minister, Nitin Gadkari. Last year, he called road deaths "a dark issue for my ministry... one of our failures." His diagnosis was that "there is a problem with society. There is neither fear, nor respect for the law." It's a remarkable admission of defeat from the man responsible for India's road safety. Four hundred people die on Indian roads every day, and we account for 11 per cent of the world's crash-related deaths, despite having only 1 per cent of its vehicles.

But then again, the dead are almost always delivery workers, farmers, two-wheeler riders, pedestrians. Some lives are simply worth less than others. An Indian road is where that hierarchy finds final proof.

By Karanjeet Kaur



based in Lucknow, told me that "Thar owners think that they own the road." They tend to be younger men, and very few buy it for its off-roading capabilities.

In the past, he's documented videos of Thars driving on the wrong side and blocking roads. Several of these drivers, Singh said, perform dangerous stunts for Instagram Reels. These videos, in turn, get massive views and positive comments, which reinforces their behaviour. "The biggest problem is that there are no consequences for this misbehaviour," he said. "Drivers know they will be taken to the thana, made to sit there for a few hours, and get a challan. But no strict action will be taken against them." Singh, who also owns a Thar, said that when people see him following traffic rules, they are often surprised.

To be clear: the Thar doesn't create violent drivers. But it has become the vehicle of choice for men who want to be seen as untouchable. Shubhranshu Singh, former CMO at Tata Motors and Royal Enfield, has written that the Thar "must decide which idea of

fining feature of that crime was callousness and a ruthless disregard for human life. Nanda treated his victims as collateral damage—as obstacles who had the misfortune of being in his path. After years of acquittals and retrials, the Supreme Court eventually reduced his sentence to time already served, along with community service and a fine. In the early aughts, the BMW became a symbol of how the privileged could kill and still be insulated from meaningful consequences. Nanda's crime was that he simply didn't care enough to slow down. Now, India is home to a whole host of supercars and with it come more entitled owners. Recently, a video went viral of a Lamborghini Aventador driving through a closed toll gate without consequence. But the psychology of most modern drivers in the present era is different. It is premised on proactive hostility. The modern driver identifies other people on the road as prey, with targets painted on their backs. If Nanda represented the entitled carelessness of wealth, today's drivers represent its weaponised rage. Avik

Asim Munir Is Playing With Fire, And Pakistan May Get Burned

Pakistan's new strongman, Asim Munir, is attempting one of the most audacious power grabs in the country's history. In less than a year, he has centralised military control, revived proxy networks, issued nuclear threats, and opened simultaneous fronts with India and Afghanistan. This hyper-militarised posture might project strength in the short term, but it rests on a dangerously fragile foundation. Pakistan is battling a weak economy, an angry population, and two insurgencies, in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, that have only grown deadlier. As he expands his powers, Munir is lighting fuses on every front and Pakistan may be the one that gets burned. Pakistan's parliament has rarely looked as diminished as it did on the night it rushed through the 27th Constitutional Amendment, an extraordinary move that entrenched Field Marshal Asim Munir's authority while hollowing out the very institution meant to hold the military accountable.

The scene itself was telling: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was not even in the country when the amendment bill was approved by his cabinet. He was in Azerbaijan on an official visit, joining the cabinet meeting through video link as his coalition raced to pass the most consequential military-empowering legislation in decades.

The symbolism was impossible to miss. The civilian head of government was a remote participant, while the legislation being approved in his name dramatically reduced the autonomy of the office he holds. The 27th constitutional amendment was pushed through with unusual speed underlining the political pressure behind it.

Lawmakers were handed a bill that effectively rewrote Pakistan's civil-military relationship: it granted the army chief unprecedented powers over the navy and air force, formalised his expanded role in national security and economic decision-making, and created lifetime legal immunity for him and his top brass. What made the episode even more striking was that many parliamentarians admitted privately they had seen the text only shortly before the session began. Yet the bill sailed through both houses with minimal debate, even though it stripped parliament of oversight mechanisms that had existed since the 1973 Constitution. Real power had migrated decisively away from the prime minister's office.

By endorsing a legal structure that elevates the army chief above traditional civilian hierarchies, parliament effec-

tively signed away its own relevance. Pakistan has seen constitutional amendments rushed through before, but few carried such long-term consequences for democratic authority.

This was a legal normalisation of military supremacy.

Asim Munir's Moment

The rushed manner in which the bill was pushed has Asim Munir written all over it. The region is at the brink with fires stoked on all fronts: This may hurt Pakistan but for Munir, this is his moment. Munir's ascent has been astonishing even by Pakistan's turbulent standards.

At the beginning of 2025, he was an army chief commanding a widely disliked hybrid government. Imran Khan's supporters were hitting the streets. Western capitals viewed Islamabad with caution, China was frustrated with the military's inability to protect CPEC projects, and Pakistan was close to default. Yet within months, Munir emerged as the most powerful military ruler since Zia-ul-Haq.

Spinning the beating Pakistan received at the hands of India during Operation Sindoor into a victory, Munir promoted himself to field marshal in a wave of patriotic fervour. And after a bloody conflict with Afghanistan, he pushed his power grab further. Pakistan's parliament, stripped of independence, passed the 27th Constitutional Amendment, gutting the Supreme Court and granting him lifetime legal immunity and control over the navy and air force.

Unlike Musharraf, who still operated behind a facade of legality, Munir has now entrenched himself as a field marshal for life. And he has championed Pervez Musharraf's old playbook of power grabs, proxy terror, and nuclear brinkmanship. The problem is that he is doing this at a moment when Pakistan is least equipped to handle the blowback: its economy is fragile, politics is brittle, and the state is simultaneously picking fights with both India and Afghanistan. It is a reckless posture that could push Pakistan into an escalation cycle it cannot control.

Flying Too Close to the Sun

Munir's recent actions tell the story of zealous overconfidence. On American soil, he has issued nuclear threats. He has ordered strikes inside Afghanistan even as Pakistan faces a spiralling TTP and BLA insurgencies. He is carrying out drone strikes inside Pakistan in the name of counter terror operations, but leaving a trail of civilian casualties in the wake. And under his watch, India is facing an aggressive threat from Pakistan-

based terror groups, the Jaish-e-Mohammad-linked Delhi blast being a glaring example.

This militarised overconfidence is being fed by two factors: Trump's personal indulgence extended to his "favourite field marshal" and new financial backing from Saudi Arabia. Asim Munir has courted Donald Trump with a mix of flattery, promises of mineral access, and a controversial cryptocurrency deal involving World Liberty Financial, a firm majority-owned by the Trump family. The US president now speaks of him in glowing, personalised terms, ignoring warnings from ethics watchdogs and former officials that Trump's business entanglements are bleeding into US foreign policy.

The 27th Amendment has created, in the words of Pakistani commentators, a "constitutional coup" that pushes the country closer to a Kim Jong-un model than a functioning democracy. Munir's allies argue that Pakistan needs a "hard state" to impose order and revive the economy. But the opposite is true. No country modernises while its army tight-

ens its grip on business interests and economic policymaking. Pakistan has already seen decades of hollowing-out under the military's thumb. Munir's consolidation will only deepen the rot.

Externally, Pakistan faces a combustible neighbourhood. The Taliban regime it once nurtured is clashing with it at the border and sheltering groups waging deadly attacks on Pakistani soil. Islamabad is close to open war with Kabul. The fear of another confrontation with India also lingers. In this environment, Munir's gamble is stark. He believes he can secure his position through nuclear brinkmanship abroad and constitutional erasure at home shielded by Trump's favour and Gulf money. But Trump is temporary and Gulf money is conditional. In a few years, both will be gone. What will remain then is a Pakistan isolated, overextended, and potentially trapped in conflict on two fronts. History has not been kind to Pakistani generals who overreached and this is why Munir is playing with a fire that may consume him and his country.

By Shubhangi Sharma

**THIS IS AN AD
THAT SAYS YOU
SHOULDN'T
DRIVE HIGH**

Curtailing Punjab Powers: Is There Any Political Vendetta?

Jag Mohan Thaken

Why do the people of Punjab feel that the state's powers, hold, and authority are being curtailed? What indications are reflecting this impression? Are dismantling the structure of Punjab University Senate, weakening the Punjab's role in Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), controlling the clutch, gears, breaks and race of Chandigarh administration by the centre downsizing the Punjab's share in its functioning mere a coincidence? Probably not, these actions themselves speak about some conspiracy; political observers think so. Punjab political leaders, setting aside their affiliations, also allege on the same lines.

Supporting the students, who are agitating over the issue of downsizing the senate of Punjab University (PU) by the centre, Leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Assembly, Partap Singh Bajwa, while giving a statement on 10th November, alleged, "From Parliament to our universities, the BJP is dismantling every democratic space and replacing it with control, nomination, and blind obedience. Panjab University was built on the spirit of autonomy, debate, and academic freedom — values that the BJP simply cannot tolerate. This is not reform. This is the death of democracy on our campuses."

"The youth of Punjab will not allow Panjab University — a living emblem of our intellectual and cultural legacy — to become a pawn in the BJP's political game," he said. "If the Centre continues this undemocratic interference, it will face stiff and united resistance from the people of Punjab", Bajwa warned.

On November 15, Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal exhorted all political parties and social organisations to rise above party lines to support the issue of Panjab University.

Raising an alarm for the future step of the BJP led central government to bring the Chandigarh administration system under its clutches, Badal said, "PU issue is the first attempt to capture a prestigious institute of Punjab, and that after this, attempts are lined up to change the character of Chandigarh."

He said that he had learnt that a separate recruitment policy for Chandigarh was being prepared. He said that when the state was reorganised in 1966, it was decided to post officers in a ratio of 60:40 from Punjab and Haryana, and now attempts are being made to create a separate cadre for Chandigarh along the lines of other UTs.

Commenting over the posting of outsiders in Chandigarh by the centre, the Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, raised the issue of maintaining the status quo of the 60:40 ratio in the intake of service personnel from Punjab and Haryana in the functioning of the UT of Chandigarh, and said that it is the need of the hour. He said that it is a matter of grave concern that officers of the IAS and the PCS have been excluded from key positions in the Chandigarh administration. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that posts in departments such as Excise, Education, Finance, and Health are being opened to cadres like the state UT cadre (DANICS), thereby adversely affecting the role of the state of Punjab in the effective functioning of the UT administration.

Why the Punjab Chief Minister and SAD Supremo Sukhbir Singh Badal are showing concern about the outsiders' entry in Chandigarh administration? Is Punjab's share of officers in Chandigarh administration being decreased by the centre? Indian Express (IE) in its web edition dated 6th November, reports, "Once regarded as a close-knit force run by homegrown officers deeply familiar with the city's pulse, the Chandigarh Police today function under a markedly different structure — one increasingly steered by officers from outside cadres."

"Over the past decade, the city's more than 6,000 personnel-strong police force has undergone a quiet yet defining transformation, with key command posts now largely held by officers from the AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram, and Union Territory) and DANIPS (Delhi Andaman and Nicobar Islands Police Service) cadres, reducing the once-dominant role of Chandigarh Police Service (CPS) officers. Either the IGP (Inspector General of Police) or DGP (Director General of Police) — who have always been the IPS officers from the AGMUT cadre — heads the Chandigarh Police. Eight IPS (Indian Police Service) officers currently serve in the Chandigarh Police, of these, six top posts are headed by AGMUT officers, and two others — SSP (Chandigarh Police) and SSP (Traffic and Security) — are headed by officers of Punjab and Haryana respectively. Another top post — SP (Crime and Commandant IRBn) — is headed by a DANIPS cadre officer", adds IE.

On the issue of Panjab University, the state Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann also pleads that the university has a deep connection with the people of Punjab adding that it is only Punjab which has been supporting and nurturing this University for the last 50 years. Now at this stage, he said that we do not understand why Haryana wants to affiliate its colleges with

Constitution clearly demarcated areas in which the Union and the States have to function to exercise their respective authority. He said that Federalism remains one of the basic pillars of our Constitution but unfortunately, there has been a trend towards centralization of authority during the past 75 years. Mann underlined that the state governments, being at the cutting edge, are in a much better position to understand, address and solve the problems of their people.

Vehemently pleading for handing over Chandigarh to the state of Punjab, the Chief Minister said that after the reorganization of the state Indira Gandhi Agreement of 1970 explicitly stated that "the capital project area of Chandigarh will, as a whole, go to Punjab, which was a clear commitment from the Central Government. He said that the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, signed on July 24th, 1985, between the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, explicitly reaffirmed that Chandigarh will be transferred to Punjab. However, C M Mann bemoaned that despite all promises Chandigarh was not transferred to Punjab which has bruised the psyche of every Punjabi.

Voicing the issue of Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), the Chief Minister forcefully opposed the proposal to appoint a whole-time Member in BBMB from Rajasthan as the board is a body constituted under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, which concerns only the successor states of Punjab and Haryana. He said that Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh are already represented as ex-officio members, and creating additional whole-time posts will only increase expenditure most of which is borne by Punjab without serving any useful purpose. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that Punjab has already submitted a panel for appointment of Members and the Government of India should continue with the original arrangement of one Member each from Punjab and Haryana. The Chief Minister said that Punjab is always at the mercy of BBMB and its bureaucratic controls adding that in case the control of the headworks is also taken away from Punjab, Punjab will be facing huge difficulties in controlling floods. Do these steps of the central government to curtail the hold of Punjab, as alleged, in different institutions, reflect indications of some political vendetta? Is there any dense smoke of conspiracy being aired over the Punjab to make the atmosphere of the state hazy?



JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Panjab University, when they have already been affiliated for the last 50 years with Kurukshetra University, an A+ NAAC accredited university. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that he fails to understand What Has changed for Haryana to now seek this affiliation having ignored Panjab University for the last 50 years.

The Chief Minister said that as far as funding of Panjab University is concerned, Punjab has always financially supported this University and is committed to doing this in the future also, as per a mutually consultative process. He said that the Centre's recent attempts to restructure the university's governance have been seen as interference in Punjab's rights and to its state identity and autonomy. Bhagwant Singh Mann cautioned that Panjab University is not just an academic institution but forms an integral part of Punjabi identity adding he urged for the restoration of democratic processes, including the announcement of elections for the original 91-member Senate.

Punjab Chief Minister has also raised his voice, where he is smelling that the role of Punjab is being shortened. He has vehemently reiterated claim over Chandigarh, Panjab University, river waters besides advocating genuine federal structure in the country before the Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the 32nd meeting of the Northern Zonal Council held on 17th November, 2025.

Flagging the issues, the Chief Minister said that the Indian

Iran ends visa-free entry for Indians; New Delhi warns of job fraud, kidnappings

The latest decision marks a major shift in the country's travel policy, which earlier allowed Indians to travel to the country without obtaining a visa, in an attempt to strengthen diplomatic ties.

(News Agencies) The Iranian government on Monday decided to put an end to its one-way visa-free entry for Indian citizens, starting from November 22. From that day, Indian nationals need to hold a visa to travel to the country, or even to use the country's airports as key transition points. Following the decision, the Ministry of External Affairs has issued a set of fresh advisories, highlighting issues like kidnapping and job fraud. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has accordingly suspended the visa waiver facility available to ordinary Indian passport holders visiting Iran with effect from 22 November 2025. This measure is intended to prevent further misuse of the facility by criminal elements. From this date, Indian nationals with ordinary passports would be

required to obtain a visa to enter or transit through Iran," the MEA said. "All Indian nationals intending to visit Iran are strongly advised to remain vigilant and avoid agents offering visa-free travel or onward transit to third countries via Iran," it further noted. "The attention of the Government has been drawn to several incidents of Indian nationals being lured to Iran on false promises of employment or with assurances of onward transit to third countries. These individuals were tricked into journeying to Iran by taking advantage of the visa waiver facility available for ordinary Indian passport holders. On arrival in Iran, many of them were kidnapped for ransom," it emphasised. Under the new rules, Indians now have to apply for an Iranian visa in advance and



possess the visa before boarding their flights. In addition, travellers who are not travelling to the country, but using it as a transit route through several other countries in Central Asia, also need to obtain a valid Iranian visa. All airlines are also now advised to check the visa status of the

people who are flying with them. The latest decision marks a major shift in the country's travel policy. Earlier, Indians were allowed to travel in the country without a visa under certain conditions. The earlier policy was aimed at improving and deepening diplomatic ties with several

countries from Central Asia and India. It was also introduced to ensure a greater number of tourists in the country. India and Iran have always enjoyed good diplomatic ties. As Iran boasts of great cultural and historical heritage, many Indians flock in every year.

This is revenge, not justice: Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed on death verdict

(News Agencies) Sajeeb Wazed Joy, son of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, condemned the death sentence handed down to his mother as a political vendetta rather than a legitimate judicial process. In an exclusive interview with India Today TV, Wazed described the International Crimes Tribunal's conviction of Hasina for "crimes against humanity" — relating to alleged incitement, ordering lethal force, and failing to prevent mass killings during the 2024 student uprising — as a "complete mockery of justice." He argued that the trial was deeply flawed, "Everyone knew this sentence was pre-determined. The trials were rushed... finished within 100–140 days," he said. "The unelected, unconstitutional and undemocratic government amended the laws, which can't be done without parliament." Wazed also claimed that Hasina was not allowed to choose her own defence lawyers; instead, the court effectively imposed one for her: "She was not permitted her own defence attorneys...it's a complete mockery of justice." He added, "Right now, there is no rule of law in Bangladesh. Any legal appeal will have to wait until the rule of law is restored, at which point, the verdict will be overturned."

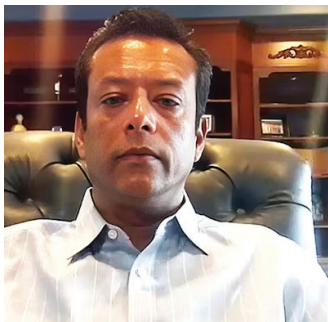
REVENGE, NOT JUSTICE; NO

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OTHERS

Wazed went on to argue that the sentencing is not about justice but revenge. He said the Muhammad Yunus-led interim regime, which he called "unelected" and "illegal", has shielded its own side from accountability. "They have actually passed a law which provides immunity for the killings of all the police officers and all our party activists," he said. He charged that hundreds of Awami League activists were detained, while many policemen were killed during the unrest — yet only Hasina's side is being prosecuted. "How can you have justice only for one side but no justice for the other side at all? That is not justice," he said.

THE SENTENCE AND HASINA'S RESPONSE

Hasina, 78, was convicted in absentia by Bangladesh's special International Crimes Tribunal. She was found guilty on multiple counts, including giving incitement to violence and ordering the use of lethal weapons, drones and helicopters. In her first reaction, Hasina, speaking from exile in New Delhi, called the verdict "biased, politically motivated delivered by a rigged tribunal" under an "unelected government with no democratic mandate." Meanwhile, Wazed warned that under the present "illegal regime," there is no genuine rule of law: "The courts are just rubber-stamping everything."



INDIA has a Congress-sized hole. And the fix begins with a little humility

(News Agencies) 2020 and now. Everywhere else, a direct BJP-Congress fight is a non-contest after its heady wins in Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi and now Bihar, Narendra Modi's followers can believe his invincibility is back. And India's politics is back to being a one-horse race. His opponents, at the same time, will think about what they are doing wrong, why doesn't anti-incumbency hurt him or his partners, and how did INDIA bloc lose the momentum of the summer of 2024. They could begin by asking themselves some hard questions. More specifically, they have to ask Congress party. The devastating post-Lok Sabha slide of the Opposition is mostly owed to the Congress. Without a Congress revival there can be no challenge to the BJP. In West Bengal and Tamil Nadu Mamata Banerjee and M.K. Stalin can still keep him at bay. Kerala has its own peculiar politics, but the BJP is growing and almost entirely at the cost of the Congress. In states where Congress piggybacks on a vote-bank rich regional party, it's a liability. Check out Uttar Pradesh with Akhilesh Yadav's SP in 2017, Bihar with RJD in

2020 and now. Everywhere else, a direct BJP-Congress fight is a non-contest after its heady flicker of 2024. And yet, the Congress retains just over 20 percent votes nationally. Whether 44 seats in 2014 or 99 (with alliances) in 2024, it has remained intact. One in five Indians simply vote for the Congress symbol. Let's see it this way. In 2024 the Congress polled 21.4 percent of the vote. That is more than the aggregate vote share of the next eight parties, from NDA and INDIA alliances. It's a lot of votes to begin with. How does the party see this? There are two upshots, one leading to the other. The first, that the Congress does not need 37 percent (BJP's approximate Lok Sabha vote) to beat Modi. Even a 5 percent shift can change India's politics. The BJP with 31-2 percent vote may still stay in power, but it will be in a genuine coalition. It can also open up the leadership race within the BJP. Does the Congress have the skills, guts and most importantly the humility to think about finding just that additional 5 percent? From 22 to 27 percent? Humility

Birmingham councillor pictured with alleged drug smuggler in Pakistan says 'had no idea'

Birmingham Labour councillor Waseem Zaffar says he had no idea the man was wanted by police when he was twice pictured with him in Mirpur



second they are sitting apart, among a bigger group at a resort nearby, close to a river, that is a popular spot during hot weather for locals to gather. Cllr Zaffar confirmed he only knew of Billu as a high-profile member of the Mirpuri community, well known to local dignitaries and politicians, and had no idea of the drug smuggling allegations. He said: "I have met this individual in Mirpur, Pakistan, but he is neither a friend nor a relative, and I have never hosted him. I had no knowledge or reason to suspect any criminal activity during those encounters. "I only became aware of his alleged involvement in drug offences in recent months and I immediately informed the Police and Crimestoppers of all relevant information. I strongly condemn illegal drug activity and those involved in it." He said he also notified the Labour Party locally, because of the potential for negative coverage of the pictures. Coun Saqib Khan paid a heavy price after he attended the family wedding of his brother in Pakistan, losing his selection to represent the party in 2026. He has since chosen to remain a member of the Labour Party.

(News Agencies) A Birmingham councillor said he had 'no idea' a man he was twice pictured with in Pakistan was an alleged international drug smuggler wanted over trafficking heroin into the city. Coun Waseem Zaffar said he was shocked to learn Raja Arshad Billu was wanted for smuggling heroin through Birmingham Airport when he met him briefly during visits to Mirpur in Pakistani Kashmir.

When he did find out earlier this year that Billu was wanted by UK police, he said he immediately notified the authorities and shared the little insight he had into his whereabouts.

It is the second time a Birmingham Labour councillor has been asked to explain if they were aware of the fugitive status of alleged drug dealers on the run from British justice.

Fellow Labour councillor Sadiq Khan, who represents Small Heath, was criticised last month after it emerged he had attended the wedding of his brother Fahan in Kashmir, who at the time was on bail for serious drugs offences in the UK. Fahan was later sentenced in his absence to four years in jail for his part in running drugs between Birmingham and Aylesbury.

Coun Khan denied any knowledge of his brother's criminal activity and said he too notified the police as soon as he became aware of his brother's criminality. In the aftermath the Labour Party announced it had

reviewed the councillor's candidacy to stand for the party again in 2026 and decided he was no longer suitable. Coun Zaffar said he had no relationship with the man known as Raja Arshad Billu, who has been wanted by police in the UK since 2014. Billu, then 29, was one of two men accused of importing heroin in rice cookers after an operation by the National Crime Agency centred on Birmingham Airport. His fellow suspect Qaiser Khan, of Bevington Road, Aston, admitted his part in the drug smuggling operation and was later jailed for seven years. But Billu fled the country while on bail, before he could be charged. A rice cooker with around 1.3 kilos of heroin was found at Billu's address in Blackford Road, Sparkhill. Billu was separately named as the alleged ringleader of a massive multi million drug trafficking operation based out of Mirpur earlier this year. He is currently awaiting trial and has been paraded in front of the Pakistani media over the case. Mirpur Police seized over four kilograms of heroin, more than 10 million rupees worth of local and foreign currency, a cache of weapons and ammunition, gadgets and cars as part of their operation. They are in contact with UK authorities and Interpol over the case. In response to BirminghamLive inquiries, Coun Zaffar confirmed the photos received by BirminghamLive showed him with Billu and dated from around 2021. In one photo they are pictured with another

man in a house in Mirpur; in the

The 'Ten-Year Itch' in India-US Defence Relations

This writer was doing his staff course in the US in 1992 and mentioned this in a paper as proof of an improvement in our defence relationship. "Who is Kicklighter?" asked the American officers (Admiral Kicklighter was the Commander of US Pacific Command)! The fact that India did not figure in the security and 'friendship' environment of US policymakers was driven home. Later events have only confirmed that.

Remember The Not-So-Great '90s?

India's friend, the Soviet Union, collapsed in the 1990s. But what stands out for New Delhi in that decade is the American-led wide-ranging, multi-sectorial sanctions following India's nuclear tests in 1998. The beginning of the 21st century started a thaw, with both countries calling each other 'natural allies' due to their democratic traditions. Many deals for transport aircraft and helicopters for the Indian Air Force (IAF), artillery guns for the Army and naval equipment were signed - and US defence companies made handsome monies through these contracts. The standout deal was the 2008 India-US nuclear agreement, but a simple question begs an answer: for all the brouhaha of those years, what extraordinary event has actually matured on ground from the nuclear deal that was termed 'pathbreaking'?

And then came the 'India-US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative' (DTTI) of 2012, trumpeted as something that would cut bureaucracy and enhance cooperation in niche areas. Pushed by the US Under Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter, it was to enhance cooperation by overcoming impediments created by the bureaucratic structures of the two countries. To do that, the nodal officers were high-ranking officials: the Secretary of Defence Production from India and the Under Secretary for Defence Acquisition for the US side. The giveaways, however, were the listed four

'pathfinder' technologies - chemical and biological warfare clothing, mobile hybrid power systems, hand-held UAVs and roll-on roll-off ISR modules for C-130J aircraft. These, in layman's terms, were chicken-feed compared to the promised cutting-edge technology.

Don't Fall For It

Later, seven working groups were formed under the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) - once again with media fanfare - but all have only resulted in numerous seminars, meetings and international travel for officials. In between, India was declared a Major Defence Partner in 2016, and in August 2018 was accorded Strategic Trade Authority Tier 1 (STA-1) status that, on paper, allowed US manufacturers to sell dual-use technology to New Delhi. The iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies) followed in 2022; the fact remains that the US (or for that matter, any country) would not part with critical technologies, despite all these acronym-rich pacts and treaties being signed.

And now comes the 'Major Defence Partnership' agreement signed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Pete Hegseth, US Secretary of War. But this was followed immediately with US-China rapprochement through the Trump-Xi Jinping meeting in South Korea on October 30. Only people with a blinkered sense of history would not see the negative import for India of the US disavowing China as being its "most consequential strategic competitor", as enunciated in its 2022 National Defense Strategy document. Pete Hegseth, after the Trump-Xi Jinping meeting, tweeted that "...peace, stability, and good relations are the best path for our two great and strong countries. As President Trump said, his historic "G2 meeting" set the tone for everlasting peace and success for the U.S. and China."

Is India becoming the world's next big consumption powerhouse?

As the world grapples with economic uncertainty and sluggish growth, India is quietly scripting a remarkable story of resilience and resurgence. With the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revising its growth forecast upward and the country consistently outperforming global peers, India is entering a new economic era, a consumption that could redefine global markets. Fuelled by a booming middle class, rising incomes, and a youthful population, India is poised to become the world's most dynamic consumer economy. The question is no longer if India will lead but how far and how fast. This steady growth momentum is significant in the context of a continuing global slowdown and economic weakness that may restrict global growth to around 3%. Primarily, what drives India's GDP stands supported by the vibrant domestic

economy, which is booming because of multiple reasons, like a strong demographic base, a large pool of skilled labour force, and a burgeoning middle class with enormous purchasing power, all of which make India a consumption powerhouse. In the overall income pyramid, India's middle class is the fastest-growing segment, currently representing 31% of the population. According to a PRICE ICE report, the segment is expected to reach 38% by 2031 and 60% in 2047, and India also has more than one billion people that are expected to make up the middle-class category when the country turns 100, the report estimates. This ever-growing middle class carries huge potential to drive growth and enhance discretionary spending, making India a cynosure of global brands. That's why large MNCs, including premium food and

beverage makers, luxury fashion brands, carmakers, and FMCG giants are seeking market access in India, which promises not only large volume growth but also good profit margin. This is evident in the recently-signed FTA between India and Britain in which the UK has been keen on securing low-tariff market entry for their premium products such as luxury cars. Despite facing some temporary setbacks from the US administration's higher tariffs, India is poised to grow as a manufacturing hub of the world and a large base of the affluent middle class. In fact, nearly 70% of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption, led by private consumption. Thus, domestic consumption serves as the backbone of India's growth and the economy is expected to withstand any external shock that may arise from sanctions and trade

restrictions. Strong economic indicators such as comfortable foreign exchange reserves, a manageable current account deficit, and surging foreign investments signify increasing global trust in India's long-term growth story. These impact the overall per capita income of the Indian population at large. Other notable features are rapid urbanisation and quality human resources. The urban population is expected to exceed 40% by 2030. Tier-2 and tier-3 cities are becoming new consumption hubs, with rising demand for organised retail, premium malls, entertainment content, branded apparel, QSRs, and electronic gadgets. Further, with the median age of the population being 29 years, India is estimated to have the largest youth population in the world. This segment plays a significant

role in not only the production of goods and services but also consumes most of the products and services in the country. In the past decade, the Indian economy has expanded sharply. In FY15, the GDP was worth Rs 106.57 lakh crore, and it is expected to touch Rs 331 lakh crore in FY25 — more than tripling in ten years. In tandem with this economic expansion, capital markets also surged to unprecedented levels, lifting retail investor participation from 4.9 crore in 2019 to 13.2 crore by 2024-end. The Nifty Consumption Index (TRI), which can be considered as a proxy to the growth of consumption-related companies in India, has also delivered 13.4012% returns which is 1.30% more compared to the returns generated by Nifty 50 TRI during the same period (Source: ICRA MFI 360).

AI thinks it's smart. Chimps may beg to differ.

For something so admired, so synonymous with merit, the concept of intelligence is remarkably poorly understood. Our society operates on the assumption that people with greater intelligence deserve access to better schools and better jobs. Many people believe that animals with higher intelligence deserve to be treated more humanely, or at least not used for food. Our tech leaders obsess over comparing human intelligence with the latest AI systems. Many claim that once these systems surpass us in intelligence, they will quickly enslave us, destroy us, or solve all our problems. How can we compare human and machine intelligence when we can't decide which species — cats or dogs — is more intelligent? Scientists who study human or animal behavior and brainpower tend to view intelligence differently, breaking it down into abilities they can actually measure. What impressed them was a recent paper providing experimental evidence that chimpanzees can use reasoning to weigh different strengths of evidence, draw rational conclusions, update beliefs, and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their own knowledge. This finding refutes centuries of philosophy that

equated reason with human uniqueness, but it makes sense in evolutionary terms, given our relationship to chimps and the understanding that human traits were inherited and shaped by natural selection rather than bestowed by gods. "It's the strongest evidence yet that we share the planet with another rational being," said Duke University evolutionary anthropologist Brian Hare, who praised the new research in a commentary piece for Science. The significance isn't about measuring the amount of

chimp intelligence, but in understanding how our animal relatives think. Intelligence is a little like the concept of nobility, said Alison Gopnik, a psychology professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who has pioneered techniques for studying the cognitive abilities of babies and children. Nobility is a social construct that conflates social status with positive character traits and has been used for centuries to justify the hoarding of power and wealth. Gopnik explained that in our culture, intelligence is often

seen as a mysterious, magical substance people are born with in varying quantities. "It's this really funny kind of folk idea, and it's very prevalent among AI researchers," she said, "and it doesn't make any sense from the cognitive science perspective." What does make sense, she said, is the latest evidence showing that animals can reason. The project was similar in some ways to experiments she's conducted with preschool-age children. The researchers worked with orphaned chimps rescued from the wild and living at the

Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Uganda. Participation was voluntary — interest varied, but in each of the five parts of the study, between 15 and 23 eager subjects participated. The chimpanzees were asked to choose between two canisters that might contain a treat, such as apple slices. In some cases, the researchers used a transparent window to let the chimps see where the treats were, while in others, they shook the containers so the animals could hear whether anything was inside.

Gangster Anmol Bishnoi, 2 fugitives wanted in Punjab among 200 Indians deported by US

In a significant coordinated deportation operation, the United States has sent back 200 Indian nationals, including alleged gangster Anmol Bishnoi, two fugitives wanted in Punjab, and 197 undocumented migrants. The flight, which has already departed from the US, is scheduled to land at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport at 10 am on Wednesday, officials confirmed. Bishnoi, the younger brother of jailed gang leader Lawrence Bishnoi, is wanted in several high-profile criminal cases across India, including the murder of former Maharashtra

minister Baba Siddique and the April 2024 shooting outside actor Salman Khan's residence. He is believed to have been travelling on fraudulent Russian documents, moving between the US and Canada until he was eventually traced and detained. Investigators allege he continued running gang operations from abroad via encrypted communication platforms.

HELD IN US WITH ELECTRONIC MONITORING

Sources added that after being detained in California last year, Anmol remained in police custody and was

placed under an ankle monitor, a GPS-enabled electronic device used to track suspects, parolees and individuals under judicial supervision. These monitors are typically used for people released on bail, those under house arrest, people freed on probation or parole, or anyone placed under court-ordered surveillance. The device is usually a black strap with a small, locked tracking box, which cannot be easily removed. His final deportation is being carried out from Louisiana, officials said.

VICTIM'S FAMILY KEPT PURSUING US AUTHORITIES

NCP leader and former MLA Zeeshan Siddique, son of the late Baba Siddique, said he received an email confirming that Anmol had been "removed" from US territory. He said his family had registered a victim contact status with US agencies, which entitled them to official updates. He urged the Centre to ensure his immediate arrest upon landing. He also said he had repeatedly written to US authorities detailing his father's killing and the suspected role of the Bishnoi network.

Trump and Mamdani form an unlikely alliance at White House meeting

Donald Trump and Zohran Mamdani, the New York City mayor-elect, walked out of their meeting on Friday afternoon with an unlikely alliance, agreeing to work together on housing, food prices and cost-of-living concerns that have defined both their political appeals to working-class voters. "We agreed a lot more than I would have thought," Trump said in the Oval Office, sometimes jumping in to shield Mamdani from aggressive questioning from the press.

The sit-down – which many had anticipated would be contentious, given months of intense rhetoric in which Trump branded Mamdani a "communist lunatic" – instead produced camaraderie, warm words and concrete pledges of cooperation between the Republican president and the self-described democratic socialist who secured a commanding electoral victory earlier at the beginning of November with over 50% of the vote. "I feel very confident that he can do a very good job," Trump said after the meeting, offering praise for his ideological opposite. "The better he

does, the happier I am. I will say there's no difference in party. There's no difference in anything, and we're going to be helping him to make everybody's dream come true, having a strong and very safe New York."

The president congratulated Mamdani on his mayoral victory, describing it as "an incredible race against smart people" – and the two politicians shook hands.

Trump added that he had already seen signs the young politician might surprise both conservative and liberal observers alike. For Mamdani, the meeting represented vindication of his strategy to focus the discussion on economic issues rather than ideological divides. He described the meeting as "productive" and "focused on a place of shared admiration and love, which is New York City".

"We spoke about rent, we spoke about groceries, we spoke about utilities, we spoke about the different ways in which people are being pushed out," Mamdani told reporters after emerging from the Oval Office.

Trump added: "We had some

interesting conversation, and some of his ideas really are the same ideas that I have." He pointed to their agreement on lowering crime and building housing. The meeting marked the first face-to-face discussion between the combative Republican president and the defiant democratic socialist. For Mamdani, a leftwing state assemblymember until his shock primary victory, the sit-down presented an early test of his ability to negotiate with a president who controls vast federal resources that the city depends upon. Mamdani's team made the first move in reaching out for a meeting, all while Trump earlier threatened to withhold federal funding from New York if Mamdani took office, though he has since suggested a more conciliatory posture, telling Fox News: "I'm so torn, because I would like to see the new mayor do well, because I love New York." The administration has deployed multiple pressure tactics ahead of the meeting. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have signaled plans to escalate

operations in New York City, while a number of rightwing congressional Republicans suggested investigating whether Mamdani's citizenship is valid, despite his naturalization in 2018 after immigrating from Uganda as a child.

Mamdani's team spent Thursday preparing for the encounter through calls with Kathy Hochul, New York's governor, Chuck Schumer, the Senate minority leader, Hakeem Jeffries, the House minority leader, and the civil rights leader Al Sharpton to strategize the approach. He also spoke with Robert Wolf, the former chief executive of UBS Americas and a known ally of Barack Obama.

When asked on Thursday whether he feared receiving hostile treatment similar to the contentious Oval Office meeting between Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's president, earlier this year – where Trump accused Zelenskyy of "gambling with world war III" – Mamdani brushed aside concerns. "I'll stand up for New Yorkers every single day," he replied.

USDA's SNAP Faces 'Right-Sizing' Changes

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he will meet New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani at the White House on Friday, telling WABC and posting online that Mamdani had asked for the sit-down. Trump said the meeting will take place in the Oval Office. The city already is uneasy about its political direction. Mamdani, a self-described democratic socialist, won the mayor's race promising sweeping changes that critics warn could push New York into

a hard-left experiment at a time when crime, out-migration of business leaders and residents, and budget shortfalls are top concerns. •Trump made Mamdani a national target early in the campaign, warning repeatedly that electing him would send New York "over the cliff." He called Mamdani a "pure communist," someone who "will destroy the city faster than anyone before him." He also cautioned that federal funding could be imperiled if Mamdani attempted to shield

migrants from federal enforcement or obstruct ICE operations. Mamdani brushed off those threats, saying Trump was using New York as a political prop. He argued that the president was trying to bully the city rather than address real policy disputes. The mayor-elect's proposals — rent cancellation, expanded tenant power over landlords, a reset of policing priorities and major redistributive programs — intensified anxiety. •Critics said the agenda

risked accelerating the loss of high earners and small businesses, deepening the fiscal strain New York already faces. As Election Day approached, the back-and-forth escalated. Trump mocked Mamdani's agenda in rallies across the country and told supporters that New Yorkers "are not ready for what they're about to get." Mamdani countered that Trump was nationalizing the mayoral race to energize his own base. Mamdani aimed directly at the president

US urges India to extradite man who stabbed Andhra techie, her son to death

More than eight years after 38-year-old Sasikala Narra, a techie from Vijayawada, and her six-year-old son were stabbed to death in their New Jersey apartment, US authorities have filed charges against an Indian national, Nazeer Hameed. The Burlington County Prosecutor in New Jersey on Tuesday (US time) also requested the Trump Administration and the Government of India to extradite Hameed, who reportedly fled to India after

allegedly committing the double homicide. DNA from Hameed's work laptop, which he used while working for an MNC in Chennai, matched the blood found at the crime scene. Prosecutors said Hameed, who was in the US on a work visa, was a colleague of Narra's husband at a New Jersey-based company and lived in the same apartment complex. The Burlington County Prosecutor's office said they sought Nazeer's DNA sample, but he denied the

request. "We worked with our federal partners and authorities in India to approach Nazeer about giving a DNA sample. Nazeer Hameed declines that request," CBS News quoted Lieutenant Brian Cunningham of the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office as saying. However, investigators said they were determined to get a DNA sample. In 2024, they obtained a court order requesting that the company Hameed

worked for in India to send them his company-issued laptop so they could gather DNA evidence, CBS reported. "Ultimately, a DNA contributor was able to be obtained from the laptop, which matched the DNA from the unknown blood droplet recovered from the crime scene," Cunningham said. The Burlington prosecutor has urged the US government and the Government of India to extradite accused Nazeer Hameed.

Floral Park attorney sentenced for \$1.7M escrow theft

A Floral Park-based real estate attorney was sentenced Wednesday for stealing more than \$1.7 million from the escrow accounts of over 30 clients, officials said. He later spent the money on adult entertainment, nightclubs and other personal expenses as well as to fund his law practice, according to the Nassau County District Attorney's office. Terrance Dougherty of Oyster Bay had pleaded guilty in September to 13 counts of second-degree grand larceny and

one count of first-degree scheme to defraud. On Wednesday, he was sentenced to 3-1/2 to 10-1/2 years in prison. The court also issued civil judgments totaling \$1.79 million for 32 victims. "Terrance Dougherty threw his life and career away for a good time on his clients' dime," Anne Donnelly, Nassau's district attorney, said in a news release about the sentencing. Donnelly described Dougherty as a "thief who blew through more than a million dollars, spending down the

escrow funds in his business trust account until it was almost zeroed out." She said that in "just five days, this defendant unbelievably spent nearly \$200,000 at gentleman's clubs in New York City and on Long Island. He was living it up while his clients faced having nowhere to live ..., [s]eeing their dreams of home ownership dashed, their financial stability jeopardized and their sense of security forever tainted. Terrance Dougherty is a disgrace to the legal profession,

and he will find no luxury accommodations over the next decade in state prison." Officials said Dougherty maintained an attorney trust account holding client funds from real estate transactions, including down payments and sale proceeds. Between March 2021 and November 2024, he handled at least 32 clients' transactions. Investigators found he withheld funds, causing many transactions to be canceled or closings to proceed without the necessary

money, according to authorities. A review of the defendant's account showed that \$1.79 million in client funds was deposited between March 2021 and November 2024, leaving a balance of \$5.35 by Nov. 29, officials said. Records show he withdrew money through cash, transfers to another business account, and credit cards, using it between May and August 2024 for personal expenses, including visits to gentleman's clubs, nightclubs, luxury hotels and restaurants.

Kala Bhairava: A dimension beyond the cycles of time

For many, "Shiva" evokes a highly-colored calendar art image. While the image is not without its own charm, reducing this sophisticated conception of the divine to a single rudimentary form is tragic. Traditionally, it is said that Shiva should not be named because to name him is to curtail him. And yet, his innumerable names point to the many indescribable mysteries of creation. Kala Bhairava is a unique manifestation of Shiva, which is in the form of time. Scientists have recently recorded gravitational waves on the fabric of space-time – a confirmation of the Einsteinian idea that our experience of the physical world is relative. This also confirms a time-honoured Yogic insight that sees time as the fundamental basis of creation. Time is always ticking away, but cannot be pinned down. It is this powerful, ineffable dimension that holds the entire universe together. We called this dimension Kala. One



aspect of time is the result of the cyclical movement of physical reality: a single rotation of Earth is a day, a revolution being a year, etcetera. From the atomic to the cosmic, everything physical is in cyclical motion. But time is, fundamentally, Kala, which also implies darkness or space. Only in time is space possible; so, space is seen as a consequence of time. Because of space, form is possible. Because of form, all physical reality becomes possible. And so, the Yogic tradition has the same word for time and space:

Kala. Even gravity is a small by-product of time. It is a force that manages the time-space relationship and allows Kala to find expression. When the dark no-thingness of Kala reverberates and takes form, physical existence begins. The spiritual process anywhere in the world is always about transcending the physical, because form is subject to cycles. Kala Bhairava is seen, therefore, as the one who shatters the compulsive cycles of birth and death, being and non-being.

The Story of Markandeya and Kala Bhairava

There is a beautiful story in the Indian culture. Markandeya was a child for whom a choice was made before he was born. His parents had to choose between having a son who would live for a hundred years but would be a fool, or a son who would be a brilliant, shining being but live only for sixteen years. The parents were wise and they chose the latter, and they bore a brilliant, shining child of enormous capabilities. But as days passed and years rolled by, they were worried for their child and became very tortured as the date of his death came close. They explained to Markandeya about the boon they had received and the choice they had made. But Markandeya was phenomenally wise and knowledgeable, and he knew the ways of life. So, when the moment of his death came – when the god of death, Yama, came to claim his life –

Markandeya did one simple act. There was a linga that was particularly consecrated as Kala Bhairava. Markandeya just held the linga. The moment he held the linga, time came to a standstill, and death could not approach him. Yama was held right there. Within Markandeya, that dimension of consciousness had opened up where he was not available to time anymore. They say he continued to live as a fifteen-year-old boy, never turning sixteen because he came in touch with that dimension of consciousness which we refer to as Kala Bhairava. It is only because time exists that there is something called death. Kala Bhairava is that dimension of consciousness that can go beyond time.

Going Beyond Time

One dimension of Yoga is that you are able to go beyond physical nature. If you bring your physical body to a certain state of ease, in a way, you have control over time.

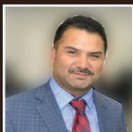
The Beginning

MAD MEN

OF

NU WAY ADVERTISING

About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh



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Why modern marriages need maintenance, not expiry dates

The latest debate taking over the internet is whether marriages should come with an expiry and renewal date — all thanks to Kajol and Twinkle Khanna's show 'Two Much'.

Two Much on Amazon Prime is making headlines a bit too much, and for reasons the audience already knows well (we'll take that as a given). The show has been serving up some truly problematic moments lately, from debates on emotional vs physical cheating to asking Farah Khan about her "relevance" in the industry today. Let's just say the icks are plenty.

The content may not be substantial, but it has definitely handed viewers enough fodder to chomp on. And the one stirring up the latest backlash is Kajol.

In the most recent episode, featuring Kriti Sanon and Vicky Kaushal, co-host Twinkle Khanna threw out a provocative question: "Should marriage have an expiry date and a renewal option?"

Kajol was the only one who said yes.

What followed next was predictable. Her take, that marriages might benefit from an expiry or renewal model, set off a fresh round of social-media noise. What people are really arguing about isn't how long a marriage should legally last. It's what we expect marriage to do, and what we expect it to be without ever learning how to keep it alive.

Not broken. Just under-maintained

"Most modern marriages are not 'failing' so much as they're under-maintained," says Dr. Chandni Tugnait, psychotherapist and founder-director of Gateway of Healing. It's a neat image: we treat relationships like self-charging devices when they're actually more like living things that need care, repair and upgrades as life changes.

Older generations often stayed put for samajik reasons. Today the option to leave exists, and that's progress. However, the trouble is, freedom can be misread as disposability. And perhaps that is why with the slightest of discomfort in a relationship often people start assuming that their relationship is over. Tugnait's point lands on the practical: emotional literacy, conflict navigation, repair conversations and boundaries

aren't instinctive. They're skills we don't teach. The result? Even otherwise good relationships begin to feel heavy.

Maintenance looks boring. That's the point

Absy Sam, founder and psychotherapist at Bright Counselling, calls emotional maintenance the homework couples put in to keep attachment alive. Now, what does that look like in day-to-day life? Emotional check-ins: Not surface small talk, but "How are you really feeling about us?"

Ongoing curiosity: Treating your partner as someone who evolves, not a fixed character from your wedding photos.

Conflict hygiene: Learning to argue without annihilating each other, then repairing. Shared and separate space: protecting couple rituals while allowing individual growth. Regular recalibration: Revisiting roles, money, intimacy and parenting as life moves on.

"Love is the feeling; maintenance

is the behaviour," Absy says. "When maintenance stops, the small avoidances pile up: resentments unspoken, apologies never made, needs minimised. Soon there's emotional numbness, and people call that falling out of love."

Expiry date talk

When someone jokes that marriages should have expiry dates, it isn't always flippant. Tugnait reads it as exhaustion, fear or disillusionment. For some it's burnout, imagining an easy exit from a relationship that no longer nourishes. For others it's pragmatic: if careers, friendships and priorities evolve, why assume romantic contracts should be forever without check-ins? We could hear that split clearly when we talked to people. Take Sushmita Marik, for instance, a 31-year-old professional who has just stepped into motherhood. For her, the idea of an "expiry date" on marriage feels almost disrespectful to what the

institution stands for. She sees it as a bond built on mutual trust, the kind that gathers depth over years. "If you start treating a marriage like a subscription," she says, "the whole foundation of loyalty and commitment collapses." To her, the argument doesn't signal modern thinking — it signals impatience, a reluctance to do the emotional work a long-term relationship needs. When we spoke to Rivika Saha, a deputy manager at a public sector bank, she echoed a similar discomfort, but from a more cultural lens. She points out that marriage, in our traditions, isn't just a partnership but something believed to carry across lifetimes, the whole saat janmon ka bandhan idea. "If you believe in that, an expiry date doesn't even make sense," she says. For her, this urge to timestamp everything reflects a clash between old values and new anxieties, not a trend worth embracing. Pulling in a male perspective, Shivarjun Das, an

HRMS consultant, doesn't dismiss the need for change but worries about losing the essence of the institution. "Marriage grows out of respect," he says. "And respect shouldn't have a shelf life." His concern isn't about romanticising tradition; it's about preserving the emotional stability that relationships need to survive. He feels the expiry-date narrative comes from people confusing personal evolution with disposability. Put together, these voices reveal a deeper pattern: when people talk about wanting an exit clause, they're not actually rejecting marriage itself. They're reacting to the emotional fatigue that builds up when relationships are left without care, tools, or support. Which is why the expiry-date debate is less about timelines and more about the pressure cooker modern marriages have become, overloaded, under-supported, and missing the emotional maintenance no one ever taught us to do.

How social media is fuelling the rise of travel dysmorphia

Travelling has become the aspiration everyone is holding dear. It's no longer the dream of a privileged few but a lifestyle marker for many today. And with the omnipresence of the internet, the pressure of curated #wanderlust is almost inevitable. Simply put, travel is becoming exhausting, and not just physically. What people are now experiencing has a name: travel dysmorphia. It has nothing to do with physical appearance, but everything to do with feeling insecure, inadequate or "less travelled" compared to peers. The term has been coined by yours truly, 'the internet.' It basically reflects the feeling that one hasn't adequately travelled as much as others. It's not a medically diagnosed condition, but it's certainly one that can take a toll on mental well-being. According to a survey by Talker Research, one in ten Americans admit to experiencing travel dysmorphia. And honestly, it isn't shocking because FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has only grown sharper. You would be lying if you have never saved a reel because it's either viral, aesthetic, and/or you really wish to explore that hidden beach behind a cave.

When travel becomes the crisis

When you read "travel dysmorphia," the mind does, even for a flick of a second, go back to "body dysmorphia" — a mental health condition where you constantly feel that your

body has flaws or is defective compared to others. And then, you spiral into anxiety, feeling distressed and more.

While this term is not a medical condition yet, it works on a similar emotional blueprint: inadequacy, self-criticism, anxiety about not measuring up, and bit of existential crisis too. In fact, in the same survey, of about 2,000 adults, less than half of the participants felt satisfied with how much they have travelled in their lifetime. That dissatisfaction is quite telling.

And then, there's social media, of course!

The algorithms had definitely messed with our brains as with the bucket lists too. But sometimes, behind all the rose-tinted Instagram filters, all that exists is disappointment, because not many people know the BTS (behind-the-Insta story) ordeals. And the pressure is relentless. Travel isn't just a hobby any more; it's a trend to keep up with. According to the survey, here are the biggest triggers driving the "I haven't travelled enough" feeling: Holiday posts from friends and relatives 32 per cent say even casual travel-related conversations raise the pressure 47 per cent of Gen Z blame influencer content Turns out, people these days feel "embarrassed" about not having enough travel experiences, and it only serves

as a reminder of how "behind in life" they think they are. What might sound vain and ridiculous, travel dysmorphia is only getting real with time and new social media forms of expression — and experts totally agree. Speaking with India Today earlier, Dr Nandita Kalra, supervising counselling psychologist at Rocket Health, explains that social media affects one's self-worth, identity and validation. "Many people now measure self-worth through visibility. 'If I'm not part of what's trending, do I still matter?' This mindset disconnects people from their authentic preferences. Instead of asking, 'Do I like this?' they ask, 'Will this be liked?' That constant chase for the next thing creates emotional emptiness."

Before you pack your bag

The idea of travel has always been about taking a break, rejuvenating, discovering yourself, or maybe just coping with grief. So, the moment the idea of chasing sunsets, being "beach bums," or dreaming of waking up in clouds becomes performative more than a private feeling of euphoria, the idea of travel becomes counteractive. Maybe you are planning your next trip based on where the gram is, what's trending. While it's not inherently a bad thing, however, what is important is to do your own research and, also, maybe not compare.

After The Hunt Trailer: Julia Roberts, Andrew Garfield walk into a moral minefield



Director Luca Guadagnino and actor Julia Roberts will receive the Gotham Awards Visionary Tribute, while their film *After The Hunt* is set for global streaming debut.

A tense new academic battlefield is about to unfold on screen. Prime Video has unveiled the trailer for Luca Guadagnino's psychological drama 'After The Hunt', and it teases an unsettling mix of power, memory, and moral ambiguity, all anchored by a formidable Julia Roberts. The film begins streaming Thursday, November 20, and brings together a striking ensemble including Ayo Edebiri, Andrew Garfield, Michael Stuhlbarg, and Chloe Sevigny. After The Hunt premiered earlier this year at the Venice Film Festival before a selective theatrical rollout. In the story, Roberts plays a university professor whose life spirals into ethical complexity when one of her students (Edebiri) accuses a colleague (Garfield) of misconduct. As she navigates the professional minefield of academia, a long-buried secret from her own past threatens to resurface, forcing her to confront the limits of integrity, loyalty, and self-preservation. Written by Nora Garrett, the film is

positioned firmly as a psychological thriller and carries an R-rating for its themes and tone. Guadagnino directs with a signature quiet intensity, exploring institutional power dynamics and the fragile lines between truth and perception.

The film is produced by Brian Grazer, Luca Guadagnino, Jeb Brody, and Allan Mandelbaum, with Karen Lunder, Justin Wilkes, Alice Dawson, and Garrett serving as executive producers. Both Guadagnino and Julia Roberts have been honoured with the Gotham Awards' Visionary Tribute this year. The Gotham Film and Media Institute describes the accolade as a recognition of "groundbreaking collaborations that push the boundaries of storytelling in film." •Following 'After The Hunt', Guadagnino is already set to reunite with Amazon MGM Studios for his upcoming AI-driven film Artificial, featuring Mary Rylance, Garfield, Monica Barbaro, Billie Lourd, Cooper Hoffman, Jason Schwartzman and others.

The day Dharmendra 'died'

Incredible how rapidly the rumour of Dharmendra's death spread, and how many responsible people believed it—from Rajnath Singh to Yogi Adityanath. Who are we in comparison?

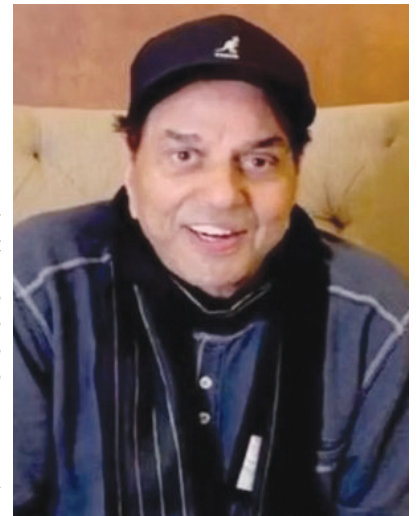
Oh dear lord! Cover me with eternal shame. Mea Culpa. I did something unspeakably awful—a nostalgic, sentimental Instagram post on He-Man of India, Dharmendra, which ended with a poignant #RIPVeeru. I was embroiled in the fake news controversy, which had swiftly created a tsunami across social media. So many of us—seasoned mediawallas—jumped the gun and posted heartfelt condolences for a beloved actor who was ailing. But alive. Incredible how rapidly the rumour of his death spread, and more importantly, how many responsible people believed it—from Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, misled by their tagda intelligence reports. Who are we in comparison? Tributes started pouring in. This isn't the first time fake news about a celebrity's death dominated headlines. Lata Mangeshkar was killed off several times during the past few years, till she finally died in 2022, aged 92. Such was the devotion and love for Mangeshkar, we wanted her to live forever. Ditto for

Dharmendra. But with Dharmendra, the story is a little different. Given his advanced age (89), and the fact that he was in the ICU of Mumbai's prestigious Breach Candy Hospital, the tragic "news" didn't seem entirely implausible.

From superstar to superbeing

Here's the thing — why did so many of us fall for it? Why did I? For one, I got calls from senior editors of national publications requesting me to urgently write Dharmendra's obituary. Why me? Well...I was the one who dubbed him "Garam Dharam" way back during the naughty Stardust magazine days. It was a tag that stuck, one that he more than lived up to. "Is the news confirmed?" I asked the first editor who was breathing down my neck. "Our on-the-ground sources are reporting from the hospital and they have cross-checked it," I was told. By then, every television channel was flashing the news of his death, and my phone was ringing nonstop. To add to the suspense, a few media friends were exchanging information over WhatsApp chats. "Arrey, my wife's good

friend is a junior doctor INSIDE the ICU. She's saying the news is pakka." I had a tight deadline (5 pm), and was focusing on recalling a few old stories from the Stardust zamana, relying more on memory than archives (surprisingly and shockingly, Stardust has not maintained comprehensive archives). Later the same night, I received more calls from film industry sources. Some of them had exchanged notes about the actor's touch-and-go condition at Zarin Khan's prayer meeting. Actor and film producer Sanjay Khan's wife of 60 years had suddenly passed away in Srinagar, leaving her loved ones shattered. A despicable video from the ICU was also circulating, with disturbing footage of sobbing family members. It was around then that Dharmendra's daughter Esha Deol issued a heartbreaking appeal to the public, pleading with the media not to spread rumours about her father. Meanwhile, there was a heavy movement of Bentleys, Maybachs, and Range Rovers belonging to Bollywood's top stars arriving at the hospital to meet



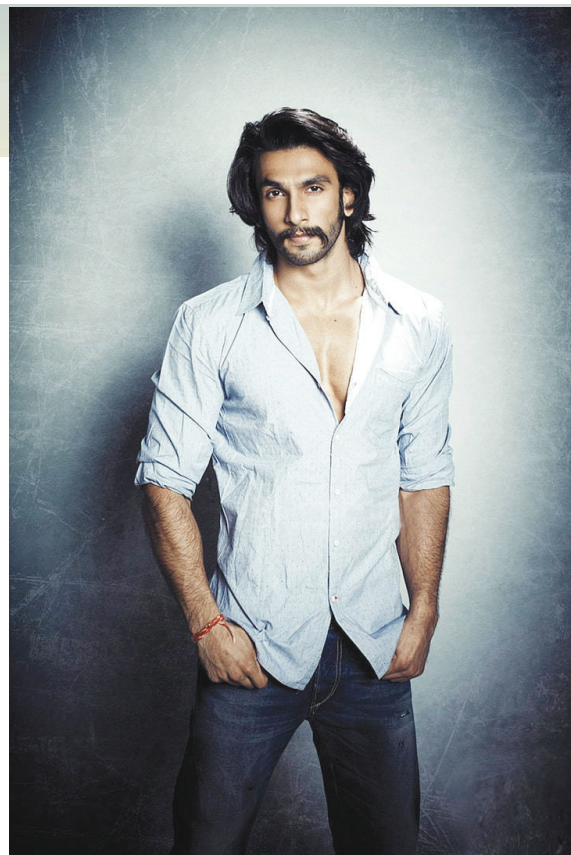
the family. Speculation raged. "Must be condolence calls." Obituaries were still being filed. "Come on, ya. The family must be waiting for Sunny to arrive from London before announcing the news." None of this is a justification for killing off a dearly beloved hero—the original He-Man of the silver screen. But when objectively analysed, all the optics led to just one conclusion, a tragic one. But lo and behold! A miracle took place.

Internet reacts to Dhurandhar trailer: Dear CBFC, don't mess up this time

The trailer for the upcoming film 'Dhurandhar', headlined by Ranveer Singh, has sparked a flurry of reactions on social media. With its depiction of intense violence, users are both praising the film's style and expressing concern over its content.

The much-awaited trailer of 'Dhurandhar' is finally out. Headlined by Ranveer Singh, the 4-minute trailer has ignited a range of reactions across social media platforms. Among the positive reactions, one user shared, "A 4-minute trailer without revealing anything, a 4-minute trailer that still feels short, a 4-minute trailer that manages to hype you up. Aditya Dhar, you have my attention. The dialogues, the music, the action, the cast has me hooked, super excited now for Dhurandhar (sic)." Another viewer compared the trailer to 'Animal' and said, "After Animal, 'Dhurandhar' is the only trailer that's giving me I-CAN'T-MISS-IT-IN-THEATRE vibes. Excellent, but the only issue is we don't know how many scissors CBFC is going to use on it. Forget about A certificate, with this much

violence, an uncut release looks difficult (sic)." Technical aspects of the trailer have also been praised. A third user commented, "The editor needs to get a raise. 4-minute trailer cut without revealing any spoilers from the film. Giving enough to boost the hype with glimpses of the craziness. Great shots throughout. Also, another banger track (although not better than the 1st one, but still catchy). (sic)" Despite the enthusiasm, some voices have called for caution regarding the level of violence. Stand-up comedian Amit Tandon shared his concern and wrote, "'Dhurandhar' trailer is too gory. Can we please cut out the first 15 seconds? (sic)"



Dinesh Vijan announces seven new horror-comedies after Stree 2, Thamma

Dinesh Vijan announces major expansion of Maddock Films' horror-comedy slate, outlines technology's impact on filmmaking.

Dinesh Vijan, founder of Maddock Films, has announced the studio's plan to produce seven new horror-comedy films over the next five years, marking a significant expansion of its supernatural franchise content with character-driven cinema. The announcement follows the commercial success of 'Stree 2' and the recent release of 'Thamma', both part of Maddock's growing horror-comedy universe. Vijan emphasised the importance of strategic growth, stating, "At an award event, Vijan said that cinematic universes grow best when not stretched too thin." The upcoming slate includes a variety of projects designed to balance franchise storytelling with character-driven cinema. One notable title is 'Ikki', directed by Sriram Raghavan and based on the life of Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, the youngest recipient of the Param Vir Chakra. The film features Agastya Nanda and Dharmendra. Vijan described the project as a reflection of the studio's broader vision, saying, "Vijan described it as a project that reflects the studio's intent to balance franchise content with character-driven cinema." Vijan attributes Maddock's success to its focus on distinct narratives rather than formulaic approaches. He explained, "The sweet spot is three to four films over a few years," he said, emphasising that Maddock is focused on nurturing franchises that endure, rather than reacting to short-lived industry patterns.

• Despite several big-ticket films underperforming recently, Maddock's culturally rooted stories, ranging from comedies to folklore-inspired fantasies, have continued to resonate with viewers. Vijan credited this stability to choosing "bold, distinctive narratives" and tapping into India's cultural depth instead of relying on formulaic storytelling. He noted



that the real competition for cinema today is not other studios, but the smartphone, which has shifted consumer attention to bite-sized video content. This shift has pushed Maddock towards a platform-neutral approach, where IPs can transition seamlessly across theatrical releases, OTT platforms, and mobile formats. Calling AI a major disruptor, Vijan predicted that rapid advancements -



especially in photoreal imagery and cost-efficient VFX- will transform filmmaking economics within the next 18 to 24 months. While these innovations promise higher production quality and broader reach, they also mean that "every storyteller will be able to create," escalating the battle for viewer attention. Among Maddock's key upcoming releases is 'Ikki', a war drama directed by Sriram

Raghavan and inspired by the life of Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, the youngest recipient of the Param Vir Chakra. The film features Agastya Nanda in the lead role, with Dharmendra playing a significant character. Vijan called 'Ikki' one of Maddock's most emotionally impactful projects, reflecting the studio's intent to balance commercial franchises with high-calibre, prestige cinema.

Tom Cruise, Dolly Parton, Debbie Allen, Wynn Thomas receive honorary Oscars

Tom Cruise, Dolly Parton, Debbie Allen and Wynn Thomas received honorary Oscars at the 2025 Governors Awards. .

Tom Cruise, Dolly Parton, Debbie Allen, and Wynn Thomas were recognised for their significant contributions to film during the 16th Governors Awards at the Ray Dolby Ballroom in Ovation Hollywood, Los Angeles, on Sunday, November 16. The annual event honoured these four influential figures with honorary Oscars, highlighting their achievements across acting, music, choreography, and production design. Tom Cruise received the Academy Honorary Award presented by director Alejandro G. Iñárritu, who is currently working with Cruise on a yet-untitled film scheduled for release in October 2026. Cruise, known for his roles in celebrated films and for his lasting impact on the industry, gave an emotional acceptance speech after receiving the award. In his remarks, Cruise focused on the collaborative and transformative nature of cinema. He said, "The cinema, it takes me around the world," Cruise said. "It helps me to appreciate and respect differences. It shows me also our shared humanity, how



alike we are in so, so many ways. And no matter where we come from, in that theatre, we laugh together, we feel together, we hope together, and that is the power of this art form. And that is why it matters, that is why it matters to me. So making films is not what I do, it is who I am." Cruise has previously received four Oscar nominations,

including Best Actor for 'Born on the Fourth of July' and 'Jerry Maguire', Best Supporting Actor for 'Magnolia', and Best Picture as a producer for 'Top Gun: Maverick'. This honorary Oscar recognises both his past achievements and his ongoing influence within the industry. Earlier in the evening, Debbie Allen was presented with an

honorary Oscar by Cynthia Erivo. Allen, a distinguished choreographer and actor, was acknowledged for her lasting impact on dance and performance in film and television. Wynn Thomas, a production designer celebrated for his extensive body of work, also received an honorary Oscar, marking his contributions to cinematic visual storytelling. Veteran singer, actor and businesswoman Dolly Parton was honoured with the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award. Due to health concerns, Parton could not attend the ceremony in person and instead delivered her speech through a pre-recorded video message. The award recognises her philanthropic work and influence beyond her musical career. • The event drew a significant number of actors and industry professionals to the red carpet, including Jennifer Lawrence, Michael B Jordan, Sydney Sweeney, Leonardo DiCaprio, Dwayne Johnson, and Emma Stone.

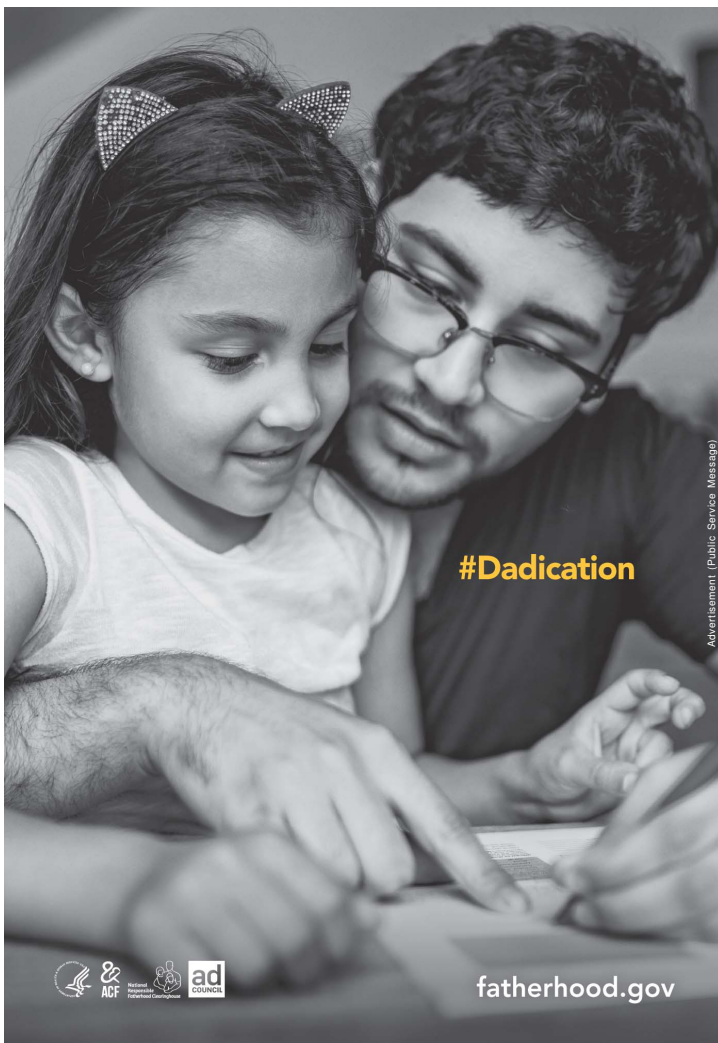


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US says sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil already cutting Russia's oil revenue

The US Treasury says sanctions on Russian oil majors are lowering revenues and sales. The two largest buyers of Russian oil have been China and India.

The US Treasury said on Monday that US sanctions against Russian oil majors Rosneft and Lukoil are already reducing Russian oil revenues and are likely to reduce the quantity of Russian oil sold in the long term. The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a statement that its analysis of the initial market impact of the sanctions announced on October 22 showed they "are having their intended effect of dampening Russian revenues by lowering the price of Russian oil and therefore the country's ability to fund its war effort against Ukraine." The Treasury action was among the strongest US sanctions since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the first direct sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump against Russia since taking office in January. The sanctions set a November 21 deadline for companies to wind down

dealings with Rosneft and Lukoil. Violators could be cut off from the dollar-based financial system. But it was unclear how Treasury will enforce the sanctions. The two largest buyers of Russian oil have been China and India. The OFAC analysis said that several key grades of Russian crude were selling at multi-year-low prices and noted that nearly a dozen major Indian and Chinese purchasers of Russian crude have announced intentions to pause their purchases of Russian oil for December deliveries. LSEG Workspace data on Monday showed benchmark Urals crude loaded at Russia's Black Sea oil hub of Novorossiysk URL-NVRSK traded at \$45.35 per barrel on November 12, the lowest level since March 2023. At that time, Russia was just beginning to assemble a "shadow fleet" of tankers to avoid a G7-led price cap of \$60 a barrel imposed in December 2023. Brent crude



futures LCOc1 were \$62.71 on November 12 and traded at \$64.03 on Monday. Urals Novorossiysk rose to \$47.01 on Monday. Loadings resumed at the Black Sea port after being suspended by a Ukrainian

drone and missile attack. Reuters reported earlier this month that Russian oil discounts to Brent had widened as major Indian and Chinese refiners cut purchases in response to the US sanctions.

A Treasury spokesperson said the sanctions were "starving Putin's war machine" and the department "is prepared to take further action if necessary to end the senseless killing" in Ukraine.

Anil Ambani offers to give virtual statement in money laundering case



Anil Ambani has offered to make himself available for recording his statement through video conference in relation to a money laundering case under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), a spokesperson for the Reliance

Group chairman said. This comes after the 66-year-old industrialist missed the second summons issued by the ED after he failed to appear for the first time before the agency on November 14. The ED has summoned Anil Ambani in

connection with a FEMA probe linked to the Jaipur-Reengus highway project. Reliance Infrastructure had awarded an EPC contract for constructing the stretch, which the NHAI has been operating for more than four years. The investigation

centres on allegations that Rs 40 crore from the 2010 project was siphoned off through Surat-based shell companies and routed to Dubai. The ED suspects the trail may be part of a larger international hawala network worth over Rs 600

crore. "Anil Ambani, for about 15 years, from April 2007 to March 2022, always served as a non-executive director at Reliance Infrastructure Ltd, not in charge of the day-to-day operations of the company. The matter is 15-years-old, dates to 2010, and concerns issues related to a road contractor," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson clarified that the contract awarded for the construction of the highway was a purely domestic contract with no foreign exchange component involved. Anil Ambani is not a member of the Board of Reliance Infrastructure. •The industrialist has been questioned once by the ED in a money laundering case linked to an alleged Rs 17,000-crore bank fraud against his group companies.

The problem with your cup(s) of matcha

Matcha isn't just another fleeting trend, it went viral across the world and never really left. But as the internet debates its side effects, it's only fair to ask whether you should be worried about your matcha obsession.

Matcha, often dubbed the "Gen Z green juice," traces its origins to Japan. While it has long been a staple there, the drink has turned into a global fad, so much so that people are now brewing business ideas around it. This green tea powder, celebrated for its nutritional and wellness benefits, has found its way into smoothies, coffees, cakes, cookies, and even cocktails. But now, the internet has a new claim: it may cause hair fall, especially among women. Such claims first surfaced around midyear but soon faded away. However, the internet is buzzing about them again. So, we decided to set the record straight - not just about the hair fall concerns, but also other potential side effects and how to get your matcha right. PS: Don't put that cup of matcha down just yet. Read on to find out what experts say about whether it's truly everyone's cup of tea.

Spilling the tea about matcha

At its core, matcha is just powdered, shade-grown green tea leaves. It began as part of Japan's traditional tea ceremony but is now a global sensation. It is loaded with antioxidants called catechins, which help reduce inflammation. It also contains L-

theanine, an amino acid that slows caffeine absorption, making it a comparatively better beverage option than regular coffee. Broadly, based on quality, matcha is classified into three categories: ceremonial grade, premium grade, and culinary grade. The highest is ceremonial grade, made from the youngest, most tender leaves, and ideal for traditional tea ceremonies. Premium and daily grades are slightly more robust and popular for making lattes or for everyday drinking. Meanwhile, culinary grade matcha, often divided into further subcategories, is more intense and slightly bitter, making it suitable for cooking, baking, or smoothies without the premium price tag. But just like a coin, it turns out even the matcha story has two sides. Despite being known as a healthy beverage, its potential side effects are what everyone is talking about now. Viral claim: Matcha causes hair fall. Is this viral claim true, though?

Not quite. At least, that's not how experts say. "Matcha itself doesn't directly cause hair fall. In fact, its antioxidants (especially EGCG) may protect hair follicles and support scalp circulation. However, excessive caffeine intake from multiple cups daily

can raise cortisol levels in sensitive individuals, potentially contributing to hormonal hair shedding," Vidhi Chawla, dietician and founder of FISICO Diet and Aesthetic Clinic, tells India Today. Now, this is where the confusion brews about iron deficiency and its connection with hair fall. So, can matcha cause iron deficiency? Possibly, but terms and conditions apply. This is possible if matcha is consumed in excess. Matcha is rich in tannins and catechins, which can inhibit iron absorption from plant foods. In such cases, the body's ferritin (the protein that stores iron) levels can drop, leading to shedding and thinning of hair. "Low ferritin (iron stores) is a major cause of hair thinning in Indian women. When combined with stress or poor sleep, this can worsen hair shedding," says Twincy Ann Sunil, clinical nutrition and dietetics, Apollo Spectra Hospital, Bengaluru.

Digestive issues

Tea is known to have certain gastric effects when consumed in excess. Similarly, the caffeine and L-theanine content in this green tea can stimulate gastric acid production too, according to experts. On an empty stomach, it may lead to bloating, acidity, or

nausea. To avoid discomfort, it's best to drink matcha after a light meal or snack, not first thing in the morning.

Menstrual cycle

This, once again, is an effect that can occur only when matcha is consumed in excess. Experts agree that excessive caffeine can amplify PMS symptoms, cause cycle irregularities, or worsen anxiety and cramps in caffeine-sensitive women. However, when consumed in moderate amounts (about one cup daily), matcha is unlikely to affect menstrual cycles significantly. Quality Matcha lovers, take note! The beverage can become problematic if you compromise on quality. Cheap, low-grade versions may not only taste bitter but can also cause health issues.

Should Indians drink matcha?

Viral trends keep surfacing, some fade away like a whisper in the wind, while others actually leave an impact and stay. Matcha belongs to the latter. But here's the thing: wellness and food-related fads don't always translate the same way everywhere. What works for one culture may need a little tweaking in another. For instance, the matcha tea culture has been a part of Japanese

tradition for centuries. And there's no denying how several concepts from Japan — like Ikigai, Hara Hachi Bu, and Wabi-Sabi - have become global markers of healthy, mindful living. But when the same green ritual travels to India, the story changes slightly. Our tropical climate already increases body heat and dehydration risk. And matcha, being a warming and stimulating drink, can add to that. That's why it suits mornings or cooler seasons better than hot afternoons. Both experts point out that Indian diets are typically carbohydrate-heavy and low in antioxidants, so matcha can still offer a valuable polyphenol and chlorophyll boost. However, those prone to acidity or heat-related issues - like migraines, acne, or PCOS flares - should go easy and limit their intake to just a few times a week. Clearly, the world is not giving up on the green drink and even health experts sort of approve of it. Just a little moderation, some body awareness, and you're good to go. Here are a few quick notes on how to match up with your matcha: Look for ceremonial-grade matcha (lower bitterness, higher antioxidants), mostly. Whisk gently using a bamboo whisk to avoid oxidation.

6 ancient 10-minute yoga poses to sharpen memory and boost focus

Modern life constantly demands our attention, whether it is work, studies, digital screens, or daily responsibilities. As a result, many people struggle with forgetfulness, poor focus, and mental fatigue. While there are many techniques to improve concentration, ancient yoga continues to stand out for its holistic benefits. Yoga is not only about physical flexibility; it also helps improve brain function, mental clarity, and emotional balance. Certain poses are especially effective in increasing blood flow to the brain, stimulating the nervous system, calming stress, and supporting memory retention. The best part? You only need 10 minutes a day to feel the difference. •Here are six ancient yoga poses that are easy to practice, beginner-friendly, and

scientifically known to support better memory and sharper focus. 1. Padmasana (Lotus Pose): The Memory-Boosting Posture Padmasana is one of the oldest meditation poses in yoga. Sitting in this posture calms the mind, improves breathing, and sharpens awareness.

Benefits:

Enhances concentration and memory Reduces stress and anxiety Improves posture and breathing Helps the mind stay alert and balanced How to do it: Sit on the floor, cross your legs, and rest your hands on your knees. Keep your spine straight and close your eyes. Focus on your breath for 1–2 minutes. 2. Vajrasana (Diamond Pose): A Simple Pose for Mental Clarity Vajrasana enhances digestion and helps calm the nervous system. When your

body relaxes, your mind automatically becomes clearer.

Benefits: Improves focus and attention span Reduces stress-related brain fog Helps stabilise

the brain and relaxes the mind.

Benefits:

Reduces anxiety and mental stress Improves memory and concentration Helps control

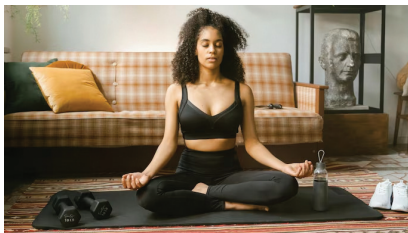
negative thoughts

How to do it: Sit comfortably, close your ears with your fingers, inhale deeply, and make a humming sound while exhaling. Repeat 5–7 times. 4. Balasana (Child's Pose): The Best Pose

to Reset the Mind Balasana relaxes both the brain and the body. It releases tension from the spine and increases blood circulation to the head. Benefits:

Reduces mental fatigue Calms overactivity in the brain Helps improve focus and emotional balance How to do it: Kneel, bend forward, and rest your forehead on the floor. Keep your

arms beside your body or extended forward. Hold for 1–2 minutes. 5. Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand): The Ultimate Memory-Boosting Inversion Often called the "queen of yoga poses," Sarvangasana improves blood flow to the brain and strengthens the mind. Benefits: Boosts memory and cognitive function Enhances focus and alertness Reduces stress and improves sleep How to do it: Lie down, lift your legs upward, and support your lower back with your hands. Keep your legs straight and hold for 20–30 seconds. (Avoid if you have neck issues.) 6. Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend): A Pose to Calm and Focus the Mind This gentle stretch relaxes the spine and reduces stress hormones, helping your mind feel lighter and clearer.





Bhajan Clubbing goes big, and it's selling out like a concert

Picture this: a group of young friends at an event, banging heads, hands in the air, dancing to the rhythmic beats and singing their hearts out together. Sounds like any other live band gig or EDM night, right? Only, it's not. This is bhajan clubbing - a growing trend among Indian Gen Z where devotional music replaces bass drops, the only high is collective chanting, and steaming cups of chai, and not booze, fuel the night.

India has always been big on devotion, spiritual community gatherings and that whole coming-together energy. But what's popping up now is a fresher, looser take on spirituality. It's less about rigid rituals and more about personal connection, a moment to breathe, and a space to shake off everyday stress.

After fake shaadis, bhajan clubbing is the new subculture taking off with the youth. Unlike traditional jagrans or kirtans, these bhajan-jamming sessions are far more relaxed.

Kolkata-based Prachi and Raghav, the sibling jamming duo known as Backstage Siblings, even created a separate social media handle dedicated entirely to bhajan jams and satsangs after their devotional performances went viral, kickstarting the buzz around the trend. Sumiran Satsang is where they sell tickets for their upcoming bhajan shows.

What's drawing youth to spirituality

"What you're seeing is not a fad - it's a cultural correction. For decades, spirituality was packaged as something that belonged to elders. But India's youth have always been spiritually curious, they just lacked formats that spoke their language. Bhajan clubbing brings devotion into spaces where young people already exist: music, community,

rhythm, energy," says Prithviraj Shetty, a young entrepreneur in faith-tech and founder of Bhagvad Gita For All. But what's drawing them toward spirituality? Many experts point to elevated stress levels and increasing mental health challenges as key factors influencing this shift.

"Gen Z is the most anxious yet self-aware generation. They grew up with instability, a pandemic, economic uncertainty, intense competition, and constant online comparison. Spirituality offers the very things their environment lacks: certainty, inner grounding, and meaning. Unlike earlier generations that followed spirituality as tradition, Gen Z follows it as self-care," says Dr Chandni Tugnait.

"They're not seeking rituals; they're seeking regulation. They want practices that soothe the nervous system, reduce overwhelm, and give them tools to cope with emotional chaos," Dr Tugnait adds. And bhajan clubbing is their way to make spirituality flexible, accessible, and compatible with their lifestyle.

The Krishna Das, Radhika Das craze

Talking of spirituality in modern times, we have long had the likes of Krishna Das (whose musical gatherings have also been attended by Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli, as seen in viral clips). Radhika Das and Acyuta Gopi have also been touring globally, chanting Hindu hymns and devotional music at their concerts - of course, with priced tickets. But the new bhajan clubbing scene is more dynamic, an unexpected blend of dance-floor energy and devotion.

Think a DJ playing Sanskrit shlokas with heavy bass behind them, or a brother-sister duo hosting a jamming baithak where the music is entirely

devotional. The crowd isn't just the elderly, but jovial young faces.

"At its core, music has always been a universal healer. Bhajans, in particular, possess a certain frequency that soothes the mind, regularises breathing, and aligns feelings. When these sacred sounds are offered in a youthful, engaging atmosphere, they become more relatable to a generation that seeks meaning but often feels disconnected from traditional rituals," says Dr Sundeep Kochar, a celebrity astrologer and life coach.

What psychologists say

"The rhythmic chanting naturally reduces stress hormones like cortisol while creating collective belonging, something Gen Z desperately needs in our fragmented, digitally saturated world. What makes this powerful is the neurological impact. Repetitive mantras quiet mental chatter, sharpen focus, and regulate breathing, essentially training the nervous system to self-soothe," adds Dr Pragya Arora, Senior Psychologist at a mental wellness platform called coto.

The matcha-obsessed, stuck-in-a-situation generation may not look spiritual at first glance, but they're the ones driving the massive boom in modern spirituality. From spiritual travel and a strong faith in astrology to turning gurus like Premchand Maharaj and Aniruddhacharya (fondly called Pookie Baba online) into full-blown social-media sensations - the youth is powering this rise.

"Young users are approaching wellness holistically. 67 per cent combine therapy with spiritual guidance. This indicates that they are not choosing one over the other, but rather integrating both to build emotional resilience and clarity. Additionally, 84 per cent view

tools like astrology and tarot as pathways to self-discovery, rather than as superstition or mere fortune-telling," Tarun Katial, founder and CEO of coto.

The impact of Gen Z's spiritual pull

India's religious and spiritual market was valued at about USD 58.5 billion (Rs 4.8 lakh crore) in 2024, and it's expected to grow by around 10 per cent every year through 2034.

Bhajan clubbing is simply the latest addition, where people actually buy tickets to attend these part-party, part-prayer gatherings. And social media is playing the catalyst.

"Gen Z, influencers, and content creators - people consuming and sharing in real time - are helping spread good things widely. Events like Radhika Das's kirtan concerts, where 8,000 people showed up in Delhi at Yashobhoomi Convention Centre (November 16), show how devotional gatherings have become huge. Everyone was singing, dancing, and celebrating devotion together. Social media deserves a lot of credit for this," says Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni, founder of Temple Connect and temple management company International Temples Convention and EXPO.

Nirvaan Birla, a singer who also performs devotional concerts as part of his Sound For The Soul initiative, agrees that Gen Z has really taken ownership of this movement. "They're showing up in huge numbers - not just to listen, but to participate: to sing, to chant, to immerse themselves," Birla tells India Today.

So next time, it might not be a Coldplay concert triggering a sold-out rant on social media, but a bhajan-clubbing night. Just don't be surprised.

By Medha Chawla

INDIA has a Congress-sized hole. And the fix begins with a little humility

Without a Congress revival, there can be no challenge to the BJP pan-nationally. Modi's party is growing, and almost entirely at the cost of the Congress.

After the Lok Sabha stumble 18 months ago, the spectacular wins in Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi and now Bihar, Narendra Modi's followers can believe his invincibility is back. And India's politics is back to being a one-horse race.

His opponents, at the same time, will think about what they are doing wrong, why doesn't anti-incumbency hurt him or his partners, and how did INDIA lose the momentum of the summer of 2024. They could begin by asking themselves some hard questions. More specifically, they have to ask Congress party. The devastating post-Lok Sabha slide of the Opposition is mostly owed to the Congress.

Without a Congress revival there can be no challenge to the BJP. In West Bengal and Tamil Nadu Mamata Banerjee and M.K. Stalin can still keep him at bay. Kerala has its own peculiar politics, but the BJP is growing and almost entirely at the cost of the Congress. In states where Congress piggybacks on a vote-bank rich regional party, it's a liability. Check out Uttar Pradesh with Akhilesh Yadav's SP in 2017, Bihar with RJD in 2020 and now.

Everywhere else, a direct BJP-Congress fight is a non-contest after its heady flicker of 2024. And yet, the Congress retains just over 20 percent votes nationally. Whether 44 seats in 2014 or 99 (with alliances) in 2024, it has remained intact. One in five Indians simply vote for the Congress symbol. Let's see it this way. In 2024 the Congress polled 21.4 percent of the vote. That is more than the aggregate vote share of the next eight parties, from NDA and INDIA alliances.

It's a lot of votes to begin with. How does the party see this? There are two upshots, one leading to the other.

The first, that the Congress does not need 37 percent (BJP's approximate Lok Sabha vote) to beat Modi. Even a 5 percent shift can change India's politics. The BJP with 31-2 percent vote may still stay in power, but it will be in a genuine coalition. It can also open up the leadership race within the BJP. Does the Congress have the skills, guts and most importantly the humility to think about finding just that



additional 5 percent? From 22 to 27 percent?

Humility brings us to the next question. How does the Congress see its one-in-five vote share? A perpetual inheritance and therefore, continue seeing itself as India's Grand Old Party or more specifically, India's party of power by default.

That means it believes that inevitably and soon enough, voters will realise how stupid they were to vote for Modi. And then where else will they go, but to return 'home' to them? This is disrespectful of competitive politics. If 11 Modi years have not 'awakened' people from this 'nightmare,' when will that 'soon enough' be?

Instead of seeing itself as India's GOP, can the Congress reboot as a Modi-era startup with a committed 20 percent vote as its initial capital? Since any startup must have a Unique Selling Proposition (USP), this is the Congress party's. But after generations of being the default party of power, beginning afresh as a startup needs humility. That Rahul Gandhi and his increasingly apolitical praetorian guard haven't displayed lately. If anything, even mild criticism draws the vilest social media abuse. That's the only area where the Congress beats the BJP now.

Congress's repeated failures to build on its inherited capital bring us to its unquestioned

leader, Rahul Gandhi.

Since 2013, Rahul Gandhi has built his pitch over what's wrong with Modi, RSS and the BJP. It was communalism first, the death of Judge Brijgopal Harkishan Loya next, Rafale purchase, Adani and Hindenburg, Ambani-Adani and "Modi ji ke mitra" (the Modi cronies), vote-chori through the Election Commission and social inequalities, which he was going to address through a caste census. If all bombed so devastatingly, it's telling him something.

If Congress had that humility, it would read its history. In 1971 Indira Gandhi promised India a better future and the combined Opposition gave a call to remove her. She swept that election with the counter: they say Indira hatao (remove Indira), and Indiraji says garibi hatao (eradicate poverty). You decide. Given India's demographics, voters will always be predominantly young, looking at the future more than lean into the past.

And positive agenda is way more likely to work with them than bitterness, contempt or fear of the incumbent for voters to reach that 'anybody but my current leadership' fury, disappointments have to be much deeper. We've seen both of these play out in 1977 (Mrs Gandhi, post-Emergency) and Rajiv Gandhi, 1989. The rout of the UPA in 2014 was only

marginally because of negativity. It was the success of Modi's positive promise of "achche din" (better days).

What is Rahul Gandhi's equivalent of 'achche din'? What's he promised since the loss in 2014? Some giveaways like NYAY, free bus rides and power, cash doles. On each Modi ups the offer. He owns the treasury.

Rahul's permanent angry young man act isn't working. It worked for Amitabh Bachchan in the mid-seventies when India battled about 30 percent inflation, deep poverty and hopelessness. In any case, real politics isn't a Manmohan Desai movie. In today's equation, Modi is promising Viksit Bharat. Rahul hasn't moved on from vote chori and caste census. As Bihar shows, people have rejected the first. And Modi has made the second his own.

Anger in any aspect of life can be a useful ploy if used wisely, deliberately and with the greatest discretion. You also must know where to stop and return to that wagon of positivity. Let's borrow from Rahul's father and call it the Mera Bharat Mahan (Make India Great Again) train.

Modi will play you and that's fair in politics. Deep, chronic anger, however, will walk you into unforced errors. In just the week leading up to the first round of Bihar voting Rahul made two pitches he

had better reflect on. One, that the same 10 percent (caste) elites control the Army, as with the other institutions and power centres. Second, that Jay Shah controlled all of Indian cricket. This is when the armed forces have peak adulation post-Op Sindoor and Indian men and women have won three ICC trophies and an Asia Cup (where they beat Pakistan three times) in succession. In any case, the Army and cricket are the holiest of India's holy cows. You either have to be nuts to take them on. Or very, very angry. It won't get you any votes.

It's evident there can be no challenge to Modi without a rejuvenated Congress party. To be worthy of leading this challenge the Congress has to shed anger, disdain, even contempt for Modi and try some humility. Why does Modi keep winning and us losing is a good question to begin with. The best beginning to fighting an all-conquering rival is to show him some respect, not arrogance. Without that reboot, their party will melt away like so many arrogant "main bhi soon-to-be unicorn" startups. Or, the way it's going, even the regional partners will begin to see Congress as an unaffordable liability and move away, finding modus vivendi with Modi rather than fight him. Just like Chandrababu Naidu.

By SHEKHAR GUPTA

Sara Sharif: How one trial laid bare the brutally short life of a 10-year-old schoolgirl

From one abusive household, to foster care to the home where she would die - the 10-year-old never stood a chance against her controlling and tyrannical father

"She was beautiful, an angel, lovely, bubbly," a weeping Urfan Sharif told the Old Bailey as he recounted his daughter Sara Sharif's love of eating chicken biryani and playing guitar.

Yet just days later, he would take full responsibility for her traumatic death, admitting to a campaign of abuse that had seen the 10-year-old suffer more than 25 fractures, bite marks, a traumatic brain injury and a burn caused by a hot iron.

Over the course of his trial, horrifying details emerged of the brutality inflicted upon the "happy" and "sassy" schoolgirl, whose father told police officers that he had "legally punished" her after she was naughty.

Phoning their non-emergency 101 line after fleeing to Pakistan on 10 August last year, Sharif told Surrey Police that he was a "cruel father" who hadn't intended to kill his daughter but had lost his temper. Yet it quickly emerged that she had been repeatedly attacked in the months before she was killed. Trapped in the family home in Woking, she was the victim of repeated beatings and scaldings, forced to leave school and carry out laundry chores for her stepmother while wearing a hijab to obscure her growing number of bruises and wounds.

Despite the concerns of neighbours who overheard screaming and crying, and the questions raised by her primary school teachers as to the reason behind her injuries, social services were unaware of the full scale of the brutality the young girl was facing.

Both her father and stepmother were found guilty of her murder, while her uncle Faisal Malik convicted of causing or allowing her death. Their appeal bids to reduce their sentences have been rejected, with Sharif set to serve a minimum term of 40 years, Batool to serve 31 years and Malik to spend 16 years behind bars.

Born in 2013 to Sharif and his former wife Olga, Sara's short life had not been easy. The couple, who had met online in 2009 shortly before Sharif's visa was due to expire, soon accused one another of abuse and acrimoniously split in 2014, with Sara sent into foster care. After Olga made allegations of

domestic abuse against Sharif, Sara was placed back in her mother's care while her father was ordered to carry out a domestic violence perpetrator programme by Guildford family courts in 2016.

A course assessment, where he only attended 10 out of 16 sessions, found that he was "very manipulative" and was unable to listen, show empathy or explore past behaviours.

Under cross-examination, he denied allegations that he swore and hit Sara's mother and claimed he was the victim. He repeatedly refuted the suggestion he was the common denominator, given that three of his previous partners had accused him of locking them in rooms and hiding their passports.

Despite the concerns of social services given Sharif's history of alleged domestic violence, he was awarded custody of Sara in 2019 after the young girl made allegations of abuse against her mother.

Instead of providing his young daughter with a safe haven after years of being passed from home to home, she was met with abuse and degradation while his new wife Beinash Batool stood by and watched. As early as May 2021, when she was just seven years old, Batool had messaged her sister: "Urfan beat the crap out of Sara. She's covered in bruises, literally beaten black."

"I feel really sorry for Sara, poor girl can't walk. I really want to report him."

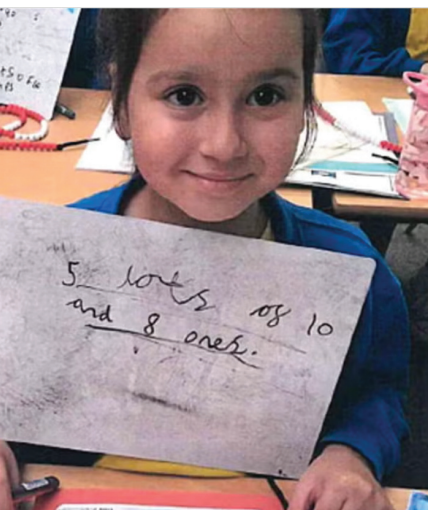
Given that Sharif left his phone in Pakistan and failed to provide details to access his Google Drive, Batool's distressing updates to her sisters are one of the key pieces of evidence which linked Sara's injuries to his violent outbursts.

Other messages in February 2022 heard that Sara had begun vomiting when she ate, was suffering from anxiety and that Sharif was beating her as she was being "naughty".

In another message, she wrote: "[I]f something happens to Sara I will not be able to forgive myself." Despite this, Batool never reported her husband to social services and helped cover up Sara's bruises by keeping her out of school, with the abuse inflicted upon the young girl only

escalating.

While the family lived in a cramped flat in West Byfleet, neighbours reported hearing constant screaming and crying, with Batool overheard losing her temper and the sound of locked doors rattling.



During her time living above the couple from November 2022 until April 2023, Chloe Redwin told jurors she frequently heard an adult female voice shouting "Shut the **** up", "Shut the **** up you bastard" and "Shut the **** up, you c****", while a young girl could be heard screaming.

On one occasion, another neighbour had approached their flat after the distressing sounds had reached "fever pitch", only for Batool to slam the door in her face.

After they moved to a semi-detached council house in Woking along with Sharif's brother Faisal Malik, their new neighbour Judith Lozeron noticed that Sara was never seen smiling, and was told she was being homeschooled due to being bullied for wearing a hijab. Despite Batool's claims that her decision to wear a headscarf in January 2023 had been due to the girl's interest in Islam, the prosecution told jurors it was indicative of the need to conceal her injuries.

Her primary school had recorded that Sara had a bruise under her left eye in June 2022 and then in March 2023, a bruise on her chin and a dark mark on her right eye. She gave conflicting accounts of how she had sustained her injuries, and the

school contacted Children's Single Point of Access for advice, and it was agreed that a referral to social services was needed.

Yet after the Easter holidays, she failed to return to join her classmates and was kept at home, at the constant mercy of

driver confessed he had beaten her as he was angry at her for vomiting and soiling herself.

Her dirty clothes were found outside, while the brown packing tape used to restrain her was found in the bins outside as the three defendants sought to cover



her controlling father.

Four months later, she was found dead in her bunk bed in an empty house, with a handwritten note next to her body reading: "It's me Urfan Sharif who killed my daughter by beating. I swear to God that my intention was not to kill her. But I lost it. I am running away because I am scared."

A post-mortem examination revealed the horrific nature of her death. Sara had endured 71 recent injuries, which included bleeding on her brain, multiple bruises on her lungs, a rare broken hyoid bone in her neck, and a large area of ulceration across her buttocks from an iron burn.

Human bite marks were present across her body, with the evidence indicating that she had been hooded, beaten and restrained while scalding water had been poured over her ankles.

In a shocking admission to the court which left jurors open-mouthed, Sharif admitted to throttling her with his bare hands and battering her with a cricket bat, metal pole and mobile phone, even whacking her in the stomach as she lay dying.

After six days of claiming that his wife was to blame, accusing her of "psycho" behaviour, the taxi

their tracks. Traces of her blood were found on the kitchen floor, a vacuum cleaner and the cricket bat following a police search, while the Marks and Spencer belt was found in an outbuilding. Within two hours of her death, the trio had booked flights to Islamabad for the following day, with Batool heard calmly organising the details over the phone with a travel agency.

Upon arriving in Islamabad in the early hours, Sharif alerted the police to his actions and sparked an international manhunt, but failed to return to the UK until over a month later when Pakistani authorities began arresting his wider family to assert pressure.

"When you left for Pakistan you had no plan to come back. Your plan was to go away so you could get away with what you had done," the prosecutor accused Sharif, after he claimed he had returned voluntarily.

However, his credibility was shredded and jurors convicted both him and Batool of murdering the schoolgirl, while his brother was convicted of causing or allowing her death.

Mr Justice Cavanagh adjourned sentencing until next Tuesday, telling jurors the case had been "extremely stressful and traumatic".

India's agricultural paradox—rising output, rising imports, and a shrinking trade surplus

A curious shift has been occurring within India's trade data. Despite the nation celebrating unprecedented foodgrain harvests and increased horticultural production, the latest official figures from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics indicate that agricultural and allied imports have increased over two consecutive years, rising from \$52.67 billion in 2022-23 to \$62.52 billion in 2024-25.

In contrast, exports have remained relatively stagnant. As a result, there is a diminishing net surplus in a sector where India should be strengthening its global competitive advantage. The concern is not that India is increasingly reliant on imports across all sectors — some strategic imports will invariably be economically justified — but rather that the trade deficit is tightening specifically in commodities where domestic production capacity exists but remains underutilised.

This discrepancy between potential and actual performance encapsulates the core of India's agricultural paradox, with the data presenting a compelling narrative. The chart illustrates that while exports have remained robust, they have exhibited fluctuations: approximately \$52.67 billion in 2022-23, decreasing to \$48.30 billion in 2023-24, before rebounding to \$51.87 billion in 2024-25. In contrast, the trend in imports tells a different story. They experienced a slight decline from \$33.79 billion to \$31.97 billion in 2023-24, followed by a significant increase to \$36.96 billion in 2024-25. Consequently, the agricultural net surplus has contracted from about \$18.88 billion in 2022-23 to \$16.33 billion in 2023-24, and further to \$14.91 billion in 2024-25. In short, although exports showed recovery in the last year, the more rapid and consistent rise in imports has progressively diminished the surplus.

What matters is the direction of the trend: imports are increasing at a more rapid pace than exports, even in sectors where India has traditionally enjoyed a natural competitive strength. Subsidy hunting and the cropping trap To understand the rationale behind why India imports what it is capable of producing domestically, it is essential to examine policy design rather than merely agricultural practices.

For several decades, agricultural policy has prioritised price stabilisation and the protection of political constituencies over fostering long-term competitiveness. This has resulted in a system that incentivises the pursuit of subsidies rather than productivity enhancement. This has resulted in a system that is highly effective in ensuring

the availability of staple goods, yet it is less responsive to the rapidly expanding sectors that currently influence both domestic consumption patterns and trade balances.

Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) power subsidies and low-cost fertilisers provide farmers with incentives to focus on a limited range of crops that the state promises to procure. While this clustering is a rational choice for farmers, it incurs a national cost: the underdevelopment of sectors where demand has outpaced supply. Although urban consumption patterns have diversified, cropping



patterns have not followed suit.

When processors and retailers cannot rely on consistent domestic quality or timely availability, they turn to imports. The import data from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S) vividly illustrate this trend, with rising import values for edible vegetables, fruits and nuts, cocoa preparations, milling products and processed foods. This phenomenon does not stem from an inability of Indian farmers to produce these goods. Rather, the economic incentives associated with subsidy-backed crops are significantly stronger than those offered by the free-market economics of diversification.

The political certainty of MSP procurement outweighs the uncertain profits associated with competing in high-value horticulture or food-processing supply chains. Furthermore, this policy framework is intricately linked with state-level electoral cycles, resulting in slow change. Governments prioritise price stability to mitigate the political risk of food inflation, perpetuating the existing cycle. Imports as a policy safety valve In response to sharp price increases, governments frequently mitigate import restrictions or reduce tariffs in order to expedite the entry of essential goods into the market. These interventions offer short-term consumer stability and help smooth volatility. However, they come with a trade-off.

When imports readily address domestic gaps, there is a diminished incentive for firms and supply chains to invest in enhancing local production, improving storage facilities, or upgrading quality standards. The ease of importing may inadvertently decelerate domestic capacity building. Over time, this leads to a pattern where imports become the default response to supply constraints. Farmers, prioritising reliability, may find diversification into new crops less appealing, favouring markets with predictable returns. Consequently, India's import expenditure increases even in

sectors where natural conditions and farmer capabilities suggest strong domestic potential.

This does not imply that India is incapable of manufacturing these items; it indicates that the existing framework makes it easier to import them than to establish robust domestic supply chains. This pattern is evident in the data. Edible oil imports remain structurally high despite India's suitability for oilseed cultivation. Imports of cocoa preparations have increased as demand surpasses domestic capacity. Dairy imports tend to rise in years when domestic production tightens. India's reliance on fertiliser imports exemplifies a broader trend.

According to the Department of Fertilisers, approximately one-third of India's urea requirements and a significant portion of phosphatic and potassic fertilisers are imported, despite the existence of domestic production capacity in several sectors. This dependency increases when global prices decrease or when domestic gas supplies become constrained. The convenience of importing, coupled with heavily subsidised retail prices, often results in long-term investment in domestic production and nutrient balance being deprioritised. As the demand for crop diversification grows, ensuring more resilient fertiliser supply chains will be crucial for strengthening India's overall agricultural competitiveness. These are not isolated occurrences but reflect a

broader structural challenge: the system is designed to maintain stability rather than enhance competitiveness. A forward-looking strategy would aim to retain the stabilising benefits of trade while also bolstering incentives for domestic investment, diversification and value addition. The objective is not to restrict imports but to ensure that India's inherent agricultural strengths translate into a broader, more resilient export surplus.

The cost of an underperforming trade surplus The diminishing agricultural trade surplus is a tangible concern, impacting the resilience of India's balance of payments. Historically, agriculture has served as a reliable buffer against fluctuation in services or manufactured exports. As services exports increase and manufactured exports fluctuate, agriculture was expected to provide stability. However, it is currently losing its footing. Countries that dominate global food markets, such as Brazil, Argentina and Thailand, utilise their agricultural surpluses as macroeconomic stabilisers. Despite its natural resources, India is relinquishing this advantage.

The rising imports of products that India has the potential to produce domestically result in higher foreign exchange outflows and increased vulnerability to global commodity price fluctuations. The opportunity cost is immense. If India had aligned its production potential with competitive supply chains, its agricultural trade surplus could have been two or three times its current level.

Such a surplus could have offset energy import expenses or alleviated currency pressures. Instead, India is increasingly importing goods that its farmers could profitably cultivate. The issue stems from a policy design problem rather than productivity. Fortunately, the path forward is clear. Addressing subsidy distortions, enhancing quality infrastructure, promoting storage and cold-chain investment, establishing predictable tariff regimes, and shifting procurement incentives towards diversification can restore balance to the system. The budgetary emphasis on oilseeds mission programs, and horticulture clusters is a step in the right direction, but sustained commitment is essential. India's farmers require enhanced competitiveness rather than increased protection. As illustrated in the chart, the country stands at a critical juncture. Agricultural imports are rising, exports have stagnated, and the surplus is diminishing. However, this trend is not destiny; it is a consequence of past decisions and can be reversed by the choices made now.

Trump's feud with Marjorie Taylor Greene fuels new MAGA rift before 2026 midterms

Their once-unquestioned alliance has broken down at remarkable speed in recent weeks. Trump, who returned to office with full Republican control of Washington, initially counted Greene among his most aggressive defenders.

The political alliance between US President Donald Trump and Georgia congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has ruptured publicly, exposing cracks within the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement as the 2026 midterm elections draw closer. Their once-unquestioned alliance has broken down at remarkable speed in recent weeks. Trump, who returned to office with full Republican control of Washington, initially counted Greene among his most aggressive defenders. When he addressed Congress earlier this year, Greene stood directly behind him waving an American flag and wearing a red "Trump was right about everything" cap. That partnership has now fallen apart. Greene was the first to sharpen her criticism, publicly questioning Trump's foreign-policy priorities and urging him to focus on domestic issues. She also pushed for the release of documents related to his involvement in the Jeffrey Epstein case, arguing that the administration should show more transparency. In recent weeks, she intensified attacks on Trump, claiming that she — not Trump



— embodied the real "America First" message. "I believe in the American people more than I believe in any leader or political party," she wrote on X, adding that voters "deserve so much better than how they have been treated by both sides of the aisle." Trump

begins to ROT!" By Friday night, he was openly signaling support for a potential primary challenge against her. Greene responded by accusing the president of putting her in danger. She wrote that "aggressive rhetoric attacking me has historically led to death threats and multiple convictions of men who were radicalised by the same type of rhetoric being directed at me right now. This time by the President of the United States." She said private security firms had contacted her with warnings and described a "hot bed of threats" fuelled by someone she said she had "supported and helped get elected". The feud comes as the House is set to consider whether to release the files to the public, with speaker Mike Johnson saying he would put the bill to a vote this coming week.

GREENE APOLOGISES FOR HER ROLE IN 'TOXIC POLITICS'

In her first interview since Trump withdrew his support, she told CNN the remarks were "hurtful", adding: "The most hurtful thing he said, which is absolutely untrue, is he called me a traitor and that is so extremely wrong."

10-year-old boy among 2 people killed in Newark mass shooting, 3 others injured

A 10-year-old boy and a 21-year-old woman were killed in a mass shooting in Newark on Saturday evening, as gunfire erupted along the 300 block of Chancellor Avenue, authorities said. Three others — an 11-year-old boy, a 19-year-old man and a 60-year-old man — were wounded in the attack in New Jersey's largest city. The shooting took place at around 7 pm (local time), according to the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. The two fatally injured victims were rushed to University Hospital, where they were pronounced dead. Police said the three surviving victims remain in stable condition. Residents reported hearing multiple shots in quick succession, followed by screams. By Sunday morning, at least 17 evidence markers were scattered across the pavement. Detectives and uniformed officers swept through the residential area with flashlights, inspecting debris and what appeared to be a discarded jacket as they searched for clues. Newark Mayor Ras Baraka condemned the killing in a stark statement that linked the

shooting to another tragedy earlier in the day — the death of a two-year-old who fell from an apartment window. "Today was a dark and devastating day in Newark as a small child fell to his death from an apartment window this afternoon and two more innocent souls died in a shooting on Chancellor Avenue," Baraka said. "Our city mourns the loss of the baby, and the depraved and senseless killing of a 21-year-old woman and a 10-year-old boy taken from their parents as their young lives were just blossoming," he added. Baraka vowed that the city would "not rest until there is justice for the parents and families left behind in unspeakable pain and grief," urging the gunman to surrender. "We urge the killer to turn himself in, as there is no safe place to hide."

POLICE HUNT GUNMAN

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office said the investigation remains active. A \$10,000 reward has been offered for information leading to an arrest. Tipsters can contact the prosecutor's office via its hotline at 1-877-TIPS-4EC.



Local outlet NJ.com described the area as a largely residential neighbourhood made up of single-family homes. Residents of a nearby apartment building on Leslie Street were temporarily prevented from re-entering their building after the shooting as police sealed off the block. Newark, a city of more than 300,000 residents, has struggled with fluctuating crime levels in recent years. Violent crime rose by 13 per cent in the year leading up to May 2024, according to data from the Newark Public Safety Collaborative at Rutgers University.

Trump signs order to lift tariffs on beef, coffee, fruits amid price concerns

US President Donald Trump took action on Friday by signing an executive order to eliminate tariffs on a wide range of commodities, including beef, coffee, and tropical fruits. This move comes in response to growing consumer complaints about high prices. The decision follows a wave of Democratic victories in off-year elections earlier this month. Economic concerns were the top issue for voters in Virginia and New Jersey, signalling a shift in priorities that Trump couldn't ignore. The elections served as a reminder of how inflation and rising prices have become a major headache for many Americans, the Associated Press reported. In April, Trump imposed tariffs on a broad group of countries. He and his administration have maintained that these tariffs don't affect

consumer prices. However, the evidence shows otherwise. The high cost of beef, in particular, has become a focal point, and Trump had previously stated his intent to act on these soaring prices. Tariffs on Brazil, a key beef exporter, have been partly blamed for the surge, according to the Associated Press. The new executive order removes tariffs on other items, such as tea, fruit juice, cocoa, spices, bananas, oranges, tomatoes, and some fertilisers. Many of these products are not produced domestically, adding weight to the argument that such tariffs only burden consumers. Trump's order came shortly after the US reached agreements with



Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Argentina. These tariffs on coffee was also part of agreements aim to reduce import the plan, aiming to boost and bringing back manufacturing jobs. Yet, voters policies have strengthened the economy. Earlier this centred on promises of now face the reality of higher economic revival, with an emphasis on reducing inflation and housing. Despite this, Trump remains defiant, insisting his

Fox News host slams H-1B 'cheap labour' Trump backs release of Epstein files scheme, says 70% of holders are Indian in U-turn, says got nothing to hide

Fox News host Will Cain sparked a fresh debate over the H-1B visa programme with an on-air segment that



quickly went viral among conservative influencers. Cain criticised the programme as a mechanism that allows major corporations, particularly tech firms, to recruit foreign workers at significantly lower wages than their American counterparts. The host's comments come as the Trump Labor Department opens nearly 200 investigations into alleged H-1B misuse.

Cain sharply called out the discrepancies in the H-1B programme: "That's a little hard to stomach when we hear we're not talented or skilled enough, when you consider most are entry-or-junior level." According to Cain, "70% of H-1B visa holders come from India, and another 10-15% from China, while 80% of H-1B approvals are for entry and junior-level jobs!" He pointed out that these figures were in stark contrast to claims that Americans aren't skilled enough for these roles. "It's definitely to the benefit of corporations, tech companies — that can hire foreign workers... cheaper than American workers," Cain added, calling attention to how companies often bypass native talent for cheaper foreign labour. This theme of exploiting foreign workers for cost savings echoed the criticisms made by Oculus and Anduril founder Palmer Luckey, who described the H-1B program as "obviously a program to try and replace American workers with slave labour that can't ever escape."

US President Donald Trump on Sunday night called on House Republicans to support legislation compelling the public release of Jeffrey Epstein's files, marking a sharp reversal from his earlier opposition to the move. "House Republicans should vote to release the Epstein files, because we have nothing to hide," Trump posted on Truth Social. Trump's major policy reversal follows signals from potentially dozens of Republicans that they are prepared to defect and support releasing the documents. In July 2019, Jeffrey Epstein was arrested on federal sex-trafficking charges for allegedly recruiting dozens of underage girls between 2002 and 2005 to his Manhattan mansion and Palm Beach estate for paid sexual acts. He was found dead in his Manhattan jail cell on August 10, 2019; authorities officially ruled the cause of death as

suicide by hanging. Trump, who was once a close friend of Epstein, continues to face persistent questions about what the files might reveal regarding their past relationship.

VOTE ON RELEASING EPSTEIN FILES

The House is set to vote this week on a bill requiring the Justice Department to make the files public. Supporters of the bill seem to have sufficient support for passage in the House, but its prospects in the Senate remain uncertain. Also, Trump would also have to sign off on the release of the documents if it passes both chambers. The legislation has garnered support from both Democrats and certain Republicans.

Republican Representative, Thomas Massie, a co-sponsor of the bill, told ABC News on Sunday that up to 100 Republicans might vote in favour.

Trump to sue BBC for \$5 billion over edited speech despite broadcaster's apology

US President Donald Trump has announced he will sue the BBC for up to \$5 billion next week, following the broadcaster's admission and apology for wrongly editing a video of a speech he gave on January 6, 2021. Trump said the error caused "overwhelming reputational and financial harm" and insisted the BBC's

apology was insufficient.

ERROR SPARKS LEGAL THREAT

Trump's lawyers had set a Friday deadline for the BBC to retract the documentary, apologise, and pay compensation, or face a lawsuit of no less than \$1 billion. The BBC admitted the editing was an "error of judgement" and

issued a personal apology to Trump on Thursday, but rejected any claim of defamation and said it would not rebroadcast the programme. Speaking aboard Air Force One, Trump told reporters, "We'll sue them for anywhere between \$1 billion and \$5 billion, probably sometime next week. I think I have to do

that, I mean they've even admitted that they cheated. They changed the words coming out of my mouth."

The disputed documentary, part of the BBC's flagship Panorama programme, spliced three excerpts from Trump's speech to create the impression he was inciting the Capitol riot.

Green card boost for Indians as EB-1, EB-2 dates advance in December visa bulletin

The US December 2025 Visa Bulletin brought encouraging progress for Indian employment-based green card applicants, while family-based categories remain largely unchanged. This update offered renewed hope for skilled Indian workers awaiting their green cards.

The US State Department's December 2025 Visa Bulletin delivers a rare month of forward movement for Indian employment-based green card applicants, even as family-based categories remain locked in place. The bulletin's cutoff dates determine which applications the US government will now process. Anyone whose priority date, the day their petition was first filed, is earlier than the published cutoff moves ahead. Anyone with a later date remains stuck in the queue.

For India, every major employment line sees an advance:

EB-1 moves to 15 March 2022

EB-2 shifts to 15 May 2013

EB-3 progresses to 22 September 2013 EB-4 jumps to 1 September 2020, and the Religious Workers category returns after being unavailable in November EB-5 cutoff date leaps five months to 1 July 2021, offering the strongest relief of the month. The forward movement means a larger set of Indian professionals and investors now fall before the updated cutoff dates and can inch



closer to a final green card. The story is different on the family side. Final Action Dates for F1, F2A, F2B, F3 and F4 show no change. The only minor shift: F2A applicants are allowed to file one month earlier. For most family-based categories, the backlog remains unchanged. USCIS will continue using Dates for Filing for both family and employment streams, allowing eligible applicants to submit adjustment-of-status paperwork earlier, lock in priority dates, and obtain work and travel documents even when a green card number is not yet available.

Overall, December brings meaningful progress for India's EB applicants, led by the EB-5 jump, while family categories remain frozen in longstanding delays.

US House heads toward vote on releasing Epstein files after Trump backtracks

The US House of Representatives is poised to vote as early as Tuesday on a measure that would force the public release of Justice Department investigative files tied to Jeffrey Epstein, after President Donald Trump abruptly withdrew his opposition. With Republican support solidifying and a bipartisan petition already meeting the threshold to trigger a vote, passage is viewed as virtually assured. Trump's shift late on Sunday marked a big turnabout. For months, he and senior aides had pressed House Republicans to block any fresh disclosures from the long-running federal investigation into Epstein, the wealthy financier and convicted sex offender who moved within elite social circles that once included Trump. "House Republicans should vote to release the Epstein files, because we have nothing to hide," Trump wrote on social media. "And it's time to move on from this Democrat Hoax perpetrated by Radical Left Lunatics in order to deflect from the Great Success of the Republican Party." Democrats, and several Republicans, counter that the records are official

Justice Department documents with clear public-interest value. Epstein was convicted on multiple state and federal counts linked to the abuse and trafficking of underage girls. He died in a Manhattan federal jail in 2019 in what authorities ruled a suicide, weeks after his arrest on new federal charges. If the measure clears the House, it must pass the Senate before reaching Trump's desk.

TRUMP STEPS UP ATTACKS ON CRITICS

Epstein and Trump socialised in New York and Palm Beach circles in the 1990s and 2000s, alongside other figures from business and politics. Trump has repeatedly stressed that he cut ties with Epstein long before the financier's crimes came to light and has accused political opponents of trying to smear him. Emails released last week by a House committee showed Epstein claimed Trump "knew about the girls," though the meaning of the phrase was unclear. The White House dismissed the emails, insisting they offered no evidence of wrongdoing by Trump.



Trump last week ordered the Justice Department to examine prominent Epstein material yielded no new investigative leads, told Trump she would proceed immediately. House Speaker Mike Johnson said a vote to release the files could help settle allegations about Trump's past association with Epstein.

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Venezuela's Maria Machado dedicates Nobel Prize to Trump
Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2022 and ended Donald Trump's dream of winning the prize, praised the US President for supporting the Venezuelans working to establish democracy and end President Nicolas Maduro's dictatorship.

British and Indian prime ministers promote trade deal during visit by Starmer

The American Dream turned nightmare, Gujaratis in Peril in US Motel Business?

The Road from Patna to Pennsylvania Avenue: How Bihar's Verdict Will Shape Modi's Hand in US Trade Talks

Big Crackdown Coming: India To Audit All Cough Syrup Makers

Brazilian influencer's death after 'fox eyes' surgery exposes beauty culture's dark side

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Who Is Ashley Tellis, Indian-American Expert Charged Over Top Secret Files

Inside India's Scariest Scam, And How To Stop It
Digital scams are proliferating as India's elderly population embraces the internet. Scammers are highly effective, preying on the vulnerabilities of seniors, such as respect for authority, fear of legal trouble, and loneliness.

Starship Hits the Bullseye: Lands in Indian Ocean and Crashes Exactly Where Musk Predicted

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Not just fake paneer, India has an egg problem as well

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US-India Diplomacy in Focus: Modi-Trump Meeting Eyed Ahead of Quad Summit

India's Enduring Fascination: From Delhi 'Baba' to Ram Rahim and Asaram, The Saga of Godmen

From Prison: Waits to Murders
The shocking death of Gaurang Chavhan's husband's murder case will be a topic of discussion.

SRK Enters Billionaire Club For First Time See Bollywood's Top 5 Richest

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