



The South Asian

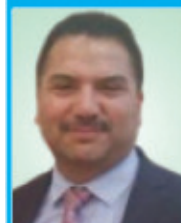


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New Russiagate evidence 'directly' points to Obama, DOJ will decide 'criminal implications': Gabbard

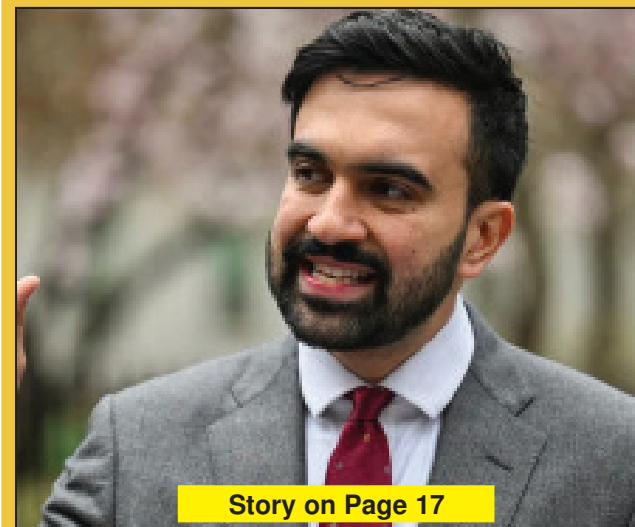
'There was a gross politicization and manipulation of intelligence by the Obama administration,' Gabbard said



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Who can defeat Mamdani? New York business leaders remain unsure

New York City's business leaders are split between supporting Andrew Cuomo or Mayor Eric Adams in an effort to defeat Democrat Zohran Mamdani. Cuomo remains in the race as an independent despite losing the mayoral primary to Mamdani, causing uncertainty among CEOs. Mamdani's plans have worried tycoons about taxes and a potential loss of investment.



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THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The Real Story Behind Jagdeep Dhankhar's Resignation

As theories float on why Jagdeep Dhankhar resigned from the Vice-President's post, here's the story that reveals what's at the heart of the surprising move. Written not with a hand-on-heart approach.



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"Big Heart...": Eye On Past Storm, Ex- Maldives Minister Praises India, PM

The PM will visit Male - the first foreign head of state to be hosted by President Muizzu - on July 25 and 26 to inaugurate India-funded development projects.



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American-born babies are American: Judge halts Trump birthright citizenship order

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'Hottest In The Room': Trump Praises Intelligence Chief Gabbard Over 2016 Election Rigging Report

Trump applauded Gabbard and said, "Tulsi, great job, and I know you have a lot more coming." They accused Obama of 'treason' and blamed him of efforts to tie Trump to Russia and undermine his 2016 presidential campaign.

(Our Staff Reporter) At a recent White House event, US President Donald Trump caused fresh controversy by praising Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard as "the hottest one in the room". He commended her newly released report that alleges former President Barack Obama orchestrated a plot to rig the 2016 election. "Oh, where's Tulsi? She's, like, hotter than everybody," Trump said. "She has all the documents. She found out that Barack Hussein Obama led a group of people and they cheated in the elections." He added, "They cheated without question. It's not even a quote."

"She told me, 'You've seen nothing yet,'" he continued. "We're very proud of you, Tulsi. They cheated so badly... and it shouldn't have been a loss. It was a big victory." The report which was recently made public, claims to uncover Obama-era



communications that show attempts to manipulate the outcome of 2016 elections. The report proves that there was no manipulation of vote totals. However, it implies that the absence of vote tampering undermines the broader finding of Russian interference in the 2016 election, something several bipartisan

investigations have long upheld. Trump applauded Gabbard and said, "Tulsi, great job, and I know you have a lot more coming." Trump accused Obama of 'treason' and blamed him of efforts to tie him to Russia and undermine his 2016 presidential campaign. The report claimed that the officials in the Obama administration

had been a part of a "treasonous conspiracy", and said that the intelligence claiming Trump had taken the help of Russian election interference was manufactured, a "groundwork" for a years-long coup against President Donald Trump. Four watchdog probes issued between 2019-2023 concluded that Russia did intervene in the 2016 election. Trump had gone on to label the probes as "hoax". However, Obama's spokesperson responded to the allegations. "Out of respect for the office of the presidency, our office does not normally dignify the constant nonsense and misinformation flowing out of this White House with a response," Patrick Rodenbush said in a statement. "But these claims are outrageous enough to merit one. These bizarre allegations are ridiculous and a weak attempt at distraction." It is worth noting that the timing of the report's release coincides with the focus around the Jeffrey Epstein case.

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Delhi Extends EV Policy to March 2026, Promises Stronger, Inclusive Overhaul

(News Agency) The Delhi government has officially extended its Electric Vehicle (EV) policy until March 2026, providing authorities more time to finalize a revised version that is currently under public consultation. The decision was approved during a cabinet meeting held at the Delhi Secretariat and chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. The extension comes in response to the need for broader dialogue and stakeholder feedback before rolling out a refreshed policy tailored to the city's evolving transportation and environmental

needs.

Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh highlighted that the government aims to shape the next phase of EV adoption with input from citizens, environmentalists, technical experts, and industry representatives. The current EV policy, initially launched in 2020, spurred notable growth in electric two-wheelers and e-rickshaws. However, challenges persist in areas such as public charging infrastructure, battery recycling, and end-of-life battery disposal. The policy had previously been extended several times, most

recently under the BJP-led administration, with the latest extension having expired on July 15. Officials from the Transport Department noted that the extension avoids any policy vacuum while allowing for meaningful improvements.

The upcoming version is expected to place strong emphasis on expanding charging access, refining subsidy structures, and establishing clearer rules for e-waste management.

The policy will also likely address the roles of public and private stakeholders in



building a more robust EV ecosystem. "There's no official release date for the new draft yet, but we're using this time to get it right," a senior official told NDTV. "The next EV policy for Delhi won't just be written for the people—it'll be written with them." The revised policy is being designed to align with Delhi's long-term environmental objectives and make the capital a national leader in clean mobility.

Indian Cities Face \$2.4 Trillion Climate Challenge by 2050, Says World Bank Report

heatwaves, and climate-related disasters, according to a new World Bank report released on Tuesday. The study, titled "Towards Resilient and Prosperous Cities in India", was prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and underscores the urgent need for resilient, low-carbon urban infrastructure to avoid significant future losses.

The report identifies Delhi,

Chennai, Surat, and Lucknow among the most vulnerable cities due to rapid urban expansion into flood-prone and heat-sensitive areas. It warns that annual economic losses from rain-induced flooding, currently estimated at \$4 billion, could rise to \$5 billion by 2030 and escalate to as much as \$30 billion by 2070 if corrective steps are not taken. It also highlights the growing risk of heat stress, citing a 71

percent rise in exposure to dangerous temperatures in India's 10 largest cities between 1983 and 2016.

If emissions remain unchecked, annual heat-related deaths could more than double, reaching over 328,000 by 2050. Additionally, high heat conditions could reduce working hours by 20 percent in major urban centers, potentially dragging down productivity.



(News Agency) Indian cities will require over \$2.4 trillion in investments by 2050 to counter the growing threats of floods,

India Extends Ban on Pakistani Aircraft Amid Rising Border Tensions and IAF Drill

(News Agency) India has extended its ban on Pakistani aircraft from entering Indian airspace until August 23, 2025, amid ongoing security concerns and an upcoming Indian Air Force (IAF) military exercise near the India-Pakistan border. The update was confirmed by Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol, who announced the continued restriction through a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), cit-

ing strategic considerations aligned with national security protocols.

This extension comes in direct response to Pakistan's earlier decision to bar Indian flights from its own airspace. According to the Pakistan Airports Authority, their closure will remain in effect until August 24 at 5:19 a.m. IST, highlighting the ongoing diplomatic strain between the two neighboring nations. The situa-

tion has intensified further as the IAF prepares for a large-scale military exercise scheduled from July 23 to 25 across Rajasthan's Barmer, Jodhpur, and surrounding border districts. This drill follows a series of Pakistani drone and missile intrusions during Operation Sindoor, when several districts in Rajasthan were targeted. Operation Sindoor was launched by India on May 7 in retaliation for a terror attack in Pahalgam



that resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians. The NOTAM issued for the exercise ensures civilian air traffic is kept clear of the design-

ated military zone, a precautionary measure aimed at avoiding any commercial aviation risk during potential aerial operations.

India and UK Set to Sign Major Trade Pact on July 24 During PM Modi's Visit

(News Agency) Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to embark on a four-day visit to the United Kingdom and the Maldives starting Wednesday, with a primary focus on strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in trade and investment. A key highlight of the UK leg of the

visit will be the signing of a long-anticipated trade agreement between India and the United Kingdom on July 24. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will accompany Prime Minister Modi during the visit, underlining the economic importance of the pact.



Modi Heads to London for Historic India-UK Free Trade Agreement Signing on July 24

(News Agency) Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit London on July 24 to formally sign a landmark free trade agreement (FTA) with the United Kingdom, according to officials cited by PTI.

He will be joined by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal during this key diplomatic mission aimed at boosting economic ties between the two nations.

The agreement, finalized on May 6, is designed to eliminate tariffs on several Indian exports, including leather goods, footwear, and apparel. In return, the UK will benefit from reduced import duties on products such as whisky and automobiles. The FTA is projected

to double bilateral trade between India and the UK, reaching an estimated \$120 billion by 2030.

Modi's trip will also include a visit to the Maldives, marking a four-day international tour focused on enhancing collaboration in trade, investment, and defense. The official itinerary underscores India's broader push to deepen its global economic partnerships.

After the formal signing in London, the agreement will undergo a ratification process in the British Parliament and will need final approval from India's Cabinet.

The full implementation of the deal is anticipated to take approximately one year.



Air India Clears Boeing Fuel Switches After Crash Probe Sparks Global Concern



India flight in Ahmedabad killed 260 people, leaving only one survivor. Investigators believe both engines were cut off moments before impact, citing evidence that the fuel control switches shifted positions seconds before the crash. In response, India's aviation regulator directed all domestic airlines operating Boeing jets to inspect the switches and report findings by July 21. Air India, which operates 33 Boeing 787 Dreamliners and 75 Boeing 737 jets under its budget carrier Air India Express, confirmed that the entire fleet had been examined. "In the

inspections, no issues were found with the said locking mechanism," the airline stated. The airline has faced operational challenges in recent weeks amid increased scrutiny and heightened safety protocols.

These disruptions have led to flight delays, cancellations, and mounting passenger concerns.

Adding to the troubles, an Air India Airbus A320 arriving in Mumbai from Kochi veered off the runway during heavy rain on Monday.

The aircraft suffered engine damage but all passengers and crew exited safely.

The incident caused a temporary runway shutdown at Mumbai International Airport. Air India, now privately owned by Tata Sons after a \$2.4 billion acquisition in 2022, has undergone a significant transformation.

Originally founded by the Tata family in 1932, the airline returned to its roots after decades of government management.

Since the takeover, Tata has invested heavily in modernizing the carrier, including a \$70 billion order for new aircraft, major digital upgrades, and refurbishment of over 60 legacy planes.

(News Agency) Air India follow a deadly crash last announced on Tuesday that it has completed precautionary inspections of fuel control switch locking mechanisms across its fleet of Boeing aircraft, with no defects detected. The inspections

Indian Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar Resigns Citing Health Concerns

(News Agency) India's Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar has stepped down from his post, citing medical reasons and the need to prioritize his health. The announcement came on Monday, with Dhankhar submitting his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu.

His departure marks an early exit from a role that typically spans five years.

Dhankhar had been serving as vice president since August 2022. In a formal resignation letter posted on social media platform X, the 74-year-old stated, "To prioritize health care and abide by medical advice, I hereby resign as the Vice President of India, effective immediately."

He extended his gratitude to President Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, and the Council of Ministers for their support during his tenure, describing his time in office as a period of learning and growth. Following the announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to social media to acknowledge Dhankhar's service to the nation.

"Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar Ji has had many opportunities to serve our country in various capacities, including as the Vice President of India," Modi wrote. "Wishing him good health." As vice president, Dhankhar held the second-highest constitutional office in India. In addition to serving as chair of the Rajya Sabha, India's upper house of Parliament, the vice president is also next in line to temporarily assume presidential duties if the need arises.



Air India Flight Escapes Disaster During Rainy Mumbai Landing, Engine Suffers Damage

(News Agency) A major mishap was narrowly avoided at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on the morning of July 21 when an Air India flight from Kochi veered off the rain-soaked runway during landing.

All passengers and crew were reported safe, but visuals from the scene revealed clear signs of damage to the aircraft's right engine nacelle and the runway itself.

The incident, described as a "runway excursion," occurred at 9:27 a.m. Images accessed by NDTV show grass lodged in the rear portion of the plane and damage to the nacelle, indicating that the engine may have struck the soft shoulder of the runway. Airport sources confirmed that the aircraft's wheel left the tarmac and entered a grassy area, breaking three signage boards and damaging four runway edge lights in the process. According to Air India, the aircraft has been



grounded for a detailed technical inspection, and both pilots have been temporarily removed from duty pending an inquiry into the cause of the excursion. Emergency response teams at the airport were immediately deployed, ensuring the safety of

all onboard. A statement from Mumbai Airport confirmed minor damage to the main runway 09/27, prompting authorities to activate the secondary runway 14/32 to maintain flight operations. The airport reiterated that passenger safety remains

the highest priority and advised travelers to check their flight status due to ongoing weather-related disruptions. The incident by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which is reassessing safety protocols

following the tragic AI 171 crash in Ahmedabad last month that claimed over 250 lives.

Mumbai, meanwhile, continues to experience relentless rainfall, leading to widespread waterlogging and travel delays across the city.

Indian Passport Rises to 77th in Global Rankings with Visa-Free Access to 59 Nations

(News Agency) India has made a significant leap in the 2025 Henley Passport Index, climbing eight places from 85th to 77th in

Macau offer visa-on-arrival entry. The index highlights India's improved diplomatic relationships and growing international reach,

fifth. The bottom of the index continues to be occupied by Afghanistan, with its citizens able to access only 25 countries without prior visas. In a notable shift, Saudi Arabia gained access to four new destinations since January, now standing at 91, while China has improved dramatically, climbing from 94th in 2015 to 60th in 2025, although it still lacks visa-free access to the Schengen Area. The United States and the United Kingdom, once leaders in global mobility, have slipped slightly in the rankings. The UK now sits in sixth place with visa-free access to 186 destinations, while the U.S. holds tenth place with access to 182. Henley & Partners CEO Dr. Juerg Steffen noted that as geopolitical uncertainty rises, individuals in nations like the U.S. and UK are increasingly exploring secondary citizenship options to secure greater global access. He emphasized that a passport today is not just a travel tool but a symbol of a nation's diplomatic strength and its citizens' strategic mobility.



the global passport rankings. The index, which evaluates passports based on the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa, now places India among countries with growing global mobility. Despite the jump in rank, the number of visa-free or visa-on-arrival destinations for Indian passport holders has increased modestly to 59. Indian citizens currently enjoy visa-free access to popular destinations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Maldives, and Thailand. Additionally, countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and

even as other global powers experience relative stagnation or decline in mobility. At the top of the 2025 index is Singapore, whose passport allows entry into 193 destinations without a prior visa, followed closely by Japan and South Korea with access to 190 destinations each. Several European nations, including Germany, France, and Italy, are tied in third place with 189 destinations. Meanwhile, countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden occupy fourth place, and New Zealand joins Greece and Switzerland in

India-US Mini Trade Deal Faces Delay Ahead of August 1 Deadline

(News Agency) A proposed mini trade deal between India and the United States is unlikely to be finalized before the August 1 deadline, according to a report from CNBC-TV18.

The development follows the conclusion of the fifth round of trade negotiations held in Washington last week, with talks now expected to resume in India during the second half of August. India's chief negotiator Rajesh Agrawal and Brendan Lynch, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, led the discussions in Washington.

The dialogue covered a wide range of sensitive issues, including agriculture, automobiles, tariffs on steel and aluminium, and SCOMET items, which include specialized chemicals and dual-use technologies.

Both countries had hoped to secure an interim agreement before August 1, which marks the end of a

suspension period for reciprocal tariffs announced by former U.S. President Donald Trump. While the tariffs were initially set to take effect in early July, implementation was delayed to allow more time for negotiations.

Although India has not yet been targeted in the initial wave of U.S. tariff notifications—which have already been sent to smaller nations like the Philippines, Moldova, and Sri Lanka—the possibility of duties being reinstated if no agreement is reached remains a concern. India is currently pushing for the removal of additional 26% tariffs and seeking relief on metals and automotive exports, while the U.S. is pressing for lower duties on industrial goods, electric vehicles, wine, petrochemicals, agricultural imports, and genetically modified crops.

The inclusion of agricultural items has sparked opposition from Indian farmers' associations, who have urged the government to protect domestic agriculture.

UK-India Trade Pact: The Empire, Finally, Shakes An Equal Hand

By Syed Zubair Ahmed

Seven years is a long time in politics and an even longer time in diplomacy. That's how long it took for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to set foot again in London. The diaspora stadium rallies are in the rear-view mirror now. This time, the mission is quieter, sharper, more strategic. No drum rolls or chants, just the quiet rustle of papers and pens. Because what PM Modi and his British counterpart Keir Starmer are about to do isn't just symbolic, it's historic. India and the UK have all but sealed the deal on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that's been nearly three years in the making. Think of it as a long, awkward courtship now heading for a registry office wedding. The engagement was announced on May 6 in a call between the two prime ministers; since then, legal scrubbing has been underway. What's been settled is no small thing - it's Britain's most ambitious post-Brexit trade agreement to date, and the first FTA India has concluded with a G7 nation. This is the economic handshake of the decade, a partnership between the world's fifth and sixth largest economies, and perhaps, just perhaps, the moment the old colonial script starts to get rewritten by the formerly colonised. The deal may appear not massively impressive outwardly, but its incremental advantages will serve both countries, both in good as well bad times.

Economies Intertwined

It is, in many ways, a tale of two countries shedding old skins. The UK, freshly single after its EU divorce, is looking around the world for new trading partners. And India, ambitious and increasingly assertive, isn't shy about who it sits across the table from anymore. If the British once extracted value from India, now Indian companies in the UK generate more than 91 billion pounds in revenue and provide over 100,000 jobs. There are close to a thousand Indian firms now operating in Britain, while the UK, for its part, has invested over \$36 billion in India. India's outbound investment into the UK stands at \$20 billion. These are not crumbs on the table; these are shared meals. And this isn't just a one-course affair. The bilateral relationship was upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership back in 2021. And since then, the two sides have been busy setting the table. There have been two meetings between the leaders in just the past year - most recently at the G7 in June - and now this London visit by Modi, his fourth as Prime Minister, is expected to seal more than just a trade pact. Expect

conversations with business leaders, high-level policymakers, and yes, a meeting with King Charles. Call it diplomacy with all the trimmings.

What's In The FTA For India?

But what's actually on the FTA menu? For India, access to the UK market for textiles, seafood, gems and jewellery - sectors that employ millions and shine on global runways. For Britain, it's about selling more Scotch, cars and cosmetics to an India whose middle class is rapidly burgeoning. Indian consumers could soon be sipping Glenfiddich and driving Mini Coopers without paying the kind of taxes that usually make those pleasures feel criminal. It's a win-win, unless you are a domestic carmaker or a local gin distillery. But then again, trade is never without its bruises.

Farm Sector, No-Go Area

Still, India held the line on what matters. There was pressure to open up the agricultural sector - something the Americans have also been pushing hard for. But Delhi didn't blink. The memories of WTO skirmishes, of long fights for food security clauses, of farmers marching through streets with placards and paddy in hand - they still loom large. The Indian farm sector is more than just a GDP figure; it is a social contract. It employs over 40% of the population, and no trade surplus is worth the political or human cost of destabilising it. The immigration card was played too, and Britain, as always, clutched it close to its chest. India wanted more mobility for its professionals, but London, wary of the optics and politics of migration, offered only a limited visa route for skilled workers: chefs, yoga teachers, maybe a few IT whizzes. Still, there was a significant Indian win - a social security exemption for short-term workers, ensuring they are not taxed twice for the privilege of working abroad. It's not glamorous, but ask any Indian expat and they will tell you: it's gold. Beyond trade and visas, the relationship is stretching into new terrain. The University of Southampton just opened a campus in Gurugram, the first foreign university to do so under India's new education policy. Other UK varsities are also eyeing the move. In defence and security, there is growing cooperation; in the health sector, the success of the Oxford-AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine and the co-development of a malaria vaccine remind us of how scientific collaboration can change lives. The UK is also a major financier of India's renewable energy push - another sign that this is not just about exports and imports, but about

how two democracies can co-create the future.

Trump's Shadow On The Deal?

Of course, lurking behind all this is the giant shadow of another suitor: the United States. President Trump - never one to miss a headline - has been promising an "imminent" trade deal with India for months now, claiming that Delhi is ready to open the gates wide for American goods. But behind the scenes, the dance is more discordant. Washington wants full access to India's agriculture, auto components and tariff structures. India is offering a firm handshake - but not a bear hug. At least not as yet. The stakes are high. Bilateral trade between India and the US reached \$190 billion last year. The target, as Modi and Trump once famously set, is \$500 billion. But it's easier said than done. Trump's tariff tantrums - 27% on Indian goods announced in April - have been paused, extended and now loom again. Delhi isn't thrilled, and rightly so. You can't build a long-term relationship with a partner who keeps threatening to change the locks.

The Deal With The UK Is A Big Deal

Which is why the UK deal matters so much. It sends a message, not just to Washington, but to Brussels, Tokyo, Canberra and others, that India is ready to play big on the global stage, but only on its terms. FTAs with Australia and the UAE have already been signed. Talks with the EU are ongoing. Canada was in the mix too - until political spats derailed the momentum. India is no longer the shy kid in class, afraid to speak up. It is drafting its own syllabus.

Empire Strikes Deals?

All of this, of course, has a poetic twist. For two centuries, Britain shaped India's trade rules to its own advantage - plundering raw materials, taxing salt, killing local industries in the name of "free markets". Now, as post-Brexit Britain shops around for partners, India has become the prized dance partner. The symbolism writes itself: a once-colonised nation now calibrates terms while the former empire waits for the ink to dry. The empire is striking deals, not back. And let's not forget the people behind these numbers. The 1.8 million-strong Indian diaspora in the UK forms a living bridge - cultural, economic, emotional. They are doctors, techies, restaurant owners, shopkeepers, journalists. They send remittances home, build businesses there and represent the best of what happens when borders don't block ambition. Every trade deal, every business summit, every new visa scheme touches their lives. So yes, it may be a short visit, but it is a long game. The handshake between Modi and Starmer is more than just protocol - it's a recalibration of history, a quiet rebalancing of power, a rewriting of the colonial ledger. The spreadsheets may still need legal scrubbing, the clauses fine-tuned - but the mood is clear: India is not just participating in the global economy. It's helping redesign it. As the pens are uncapped and signatures laid down, remember this: trade is never just trade. It is identity, ambition, memory, competition, dominance and imagination - folded into fine print. Just ask the founders of the East India Company. And in that fine print, a new chapter begins.



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Snapback To Reality: On Iran's 45-Year Slog To Nowhere



By Syed Zubair Ahmed

They have been saying it since 1979 - "Death to America". And for just as long (since 1975), the West has been sounding the alarm: Iran is weeks away from building a nuclear bomb. Forty-five years later, the rhetoric remains unchanged. America remains the most powerful country in the world, and Iran is still not a nuclear weapons state. But it is definitely a highly sensitive issue when it comes to diplomacy, foreign investment and joining the global economy. Now, with a new nuclear deadline looming, the shouting matches are back. Earlier this week, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined hands with the foreign ministers of the UK, France and Germany to deliver a crisp ultimatum to Tehran: cut a nuclear disarmament deal by the end of August or face the music of UN sanctions. This is not just bureaucratic posturing. If there's no agreement by then, the European trio plan to trigger the "snapback" mechanism, designed under the original 2015 Iran deal, which would reinstate all UN sanctions removed under that agreement. To be clear, Iran was once on a very different path. Back in 2015, during US President Barack Obama's tenure and with the full backing of European powers, the Islamic Republic signed a landmark nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Tehran agreed to dial down its nuclear ambitions in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. Inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency were active and frequent. Western

businesses had begun tiptoeing back into Iran. There was hope in the air, even if fleeting.

Trump's Unilateral Step

Then came Donald Trump's wrecking ball diplomacy. In 2018, he unilaterally tore up the deal, declared "maximum pressure", and reimposed sanctions. Iran retaliated predictably, by enriching uranium to dangerous levels and kicking out nuclear inspectors. Now, in a strange twist of irony, Trump, since he has been back in the White House, suddenly wants a new deal with Tehran - and fast. Rubio and the Europeans have given Iran until the end of August to play ball - or face full diplomatic isolation once again. They want the snapback in place before October, when Russia takes over the presidency of the UN Security Council. It might sound unfair to Iran, especially after it was attacked unilaterally by Israel, which humiliated the clerical regime at will. The 12-day war displayed cruelly Iran's shortcomings as a regional power. It was pulverised by the Israeli air force.

The Hate For America

Iran needs to recast its foreign policy to save itself from future humiliations and to emerge as a credible regional power. After all, how long can Iran keep playing the same hand - shouting slogans from 1979 while expecting a 21st-century economy? The Islamic Republic has spent over four decades defining itself by what it hates: America, Israel, the West, secularism, dissent and even Persian identity when it clashes with Islamic orthodoxy. It has poured billions into regional militias (Iran's notorious proxies)

from Lebanon to Yemen, obsessed over Israel's destruction and sacrificed its own youth to preserve this ideological arc. And what has it gained? Nothing. In Iran's clerical regime, nothingness connects with only nothingness. It's sterile, a wasteland. An ancient civilisation at the cusp of denouement. When you think of today's Iran, what comes to mind? A shrinking economy, inflation hovering around 50%, unchecked youth unemployment, capital flight, international sanctions and a currency that is now worth less than Monopoly money. Even the clerics' strongest allies, Russia and China, prefer quiet deals, not war rhetoric. Meanwhile, Israel, the object of so much Iranian fury, is not only still standing, it's thriving - and striking deep into Iranian territory at will. From assassinating nuclear scientists to air strikes on Syrian and Lebanese proxies, Israel has shown that it doesn't need to talk loudly when it can act lethally. Iran's stubborn refusal to change course has brought it neither justice for Palestinians nor prosperity for Iranians.

Time Is Running Out

If Iran is waiting for the world to blink first, it will be a very long wait. The US and its allies know time is running out. The JCPOA's snapback clause expires in October. It takes 30 days to activate, which means the deadline is now set. According to some sections of credible US media, the recent call between Rubio and the European foreign ministers was aimed at coordinating a

unified position: pressure Tehran, and if they don't comply, pull the trigger. What the Europeans are dangling in front of Iran is not just a warning, but an escape route: resume IAEA monitoring, remove 400 kg of uranium enriched to 60%, and stop playing the martyr. In return, sanctions relief, trade, and perhaps even Western investment could follow. As Indians, we, with a long history of deep friendship with Iran, feel bad for the country and its civilisation. But I will make a blasphemous argument in the eyes of Iran's ruling elites. I firmly believe it is time for Tehran to abandon its entrenched animosity towards the United States and Israel. The Islamic Republic must recognise that it has more to gain from a pragmatic recalibration of its foreign policy than from clinging to revolutionary dogmas that have outlived their strategic utility. Yes, the ruling clerics and their staunch supporters may think it's a maddening idea. After all, the Islamic revolution of Iran of 1979 was born out of stiff opposition to the US and other Western powers' perceived opposition to the revolution. But do not forget that the idea that there are no permanent enemies in international politics is not just a diplomatic cliché; it is a lesson Iran must now internalise. Iran should go beyond today and find events in history to learn and adapt to new realities.

The Ghost Of Nixon

Iran today faces a crossroads similar to that of China in the early 1970s. Mao's China, ideologically hostile to the West, recognised the strategic imperative of engaging with the United States. Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, while shocking to many, laid the groundwork for China's rise as a global power. Iran must now think about the future of its people. Or the Mullah rulers must consider Vietnam - a country that never invited war, yet was dragged into a brutal conflict that left its land and people shattered. The United States dropped more bombs on Vietnam than it did during all of World War Two. Napalm turned villages into fireballs, and entire generations were maimed or killed. Forests, once lush and teeming with life, were doused in Agent Orange, a deadly

herbicide that poisoned not just the trees but the bloodlines of those who lived beneath them. Children were born with deformities. Rivers ran black. And yet, from that scorched earth, Vietnam rose - not with vengeance, but with quiet resolve.

The War Museum In Vietnam

I still remember my first and only visit to Vietnam in 2019 - and more specifically, the emotional punch delivered by a quiet corner of the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City. Amid the graphic, haunting visuals of American war crimes, pictures of napalm-burned bodies and shredded villages, what moved me most was the serene presence of two life-sized white doves, their wings outstretched in silent flight. Powerful symbols of peace indeed - not revenge, not bitterness, not rage. Just peace.

Just imagine. The Vietnamese people - pulverised, humiliated and defoliated by American firepower in a war that remains one of the most brutal in modern history - chose to place doves, not bombs, at the heart of their war museum. It was as if they were saying: we remember, but we also forgive. The very idea that a country so wronged could turn its gaze towards reconciliation is humbling. Today, Vietnam and the United States are not enemies but partners, building trade, strategic ties and mutual trust, a friendship that defies decades of violence and venom.

Iran can do the same.

A Change Of Script

The ruling elite doesn't need to worry. Trump has not asked Tehran to change its flag or disband the Revolutionary Guard. The West is not demanding regime change either. They have learned from the devastating consequences of forcing it in Libya and Iraq. All Iran needs to do is retire its old, meaningless slogans that belong in a Cold War museum. It can stop pretending Israel doesn't exist; clearly, it's not going anywhere. In fact, Israel now enjoys near-open diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies - right in Iran's own backyard. The Abraham Accords were a strategic earthquake and Tehran, too busy shouting at the sky, barely noticed.

Air India Crash: We're All Terrified Of Flying Now, Thanks To Conspiracy Theories

By Sindhu Bhattacharya

The investigation into the tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 last month has become a subject of intense speculation, memes and long posts on social media. It has also quickly eroded public trust in the investigator as well as the process of investigation. This is a sad state of affairs and also a bit scary, since erosion of trust has triggered apprehensions among the travelling public about air travel. I know of many erstwhile frequent fliers, who thought nothing before taking a flight for work or leisure, now hesitating before making the next flight booking. Some have been barred from flying by families, others remain confused over which aircraft type to fly and whether to risk a long-haul flight, weighing the option of postponing the flight altogether.

Speculation Abounds

A million theories of what went wrong had already been circulated when the buzz reached a crescendo last week, after the Aircraft Accident

Investigation Bureau (AAIB) released a preliminary report. In a poorly worded and somewhat verbose report, the AAIB indicated that the cockpit crew could be responsible for the tragic accident, while seemingly absolving the aircraft manufacturer and other stakeholders. Two specific words or phrases in the report are telling. One, the use of the word "transitioned" in reference to fuel cutoff switches. Second, the report has quoted a part of the conversation between the two pilots, in which one is heard asking the other whether he "cut off". The report says the aircraft "achieved the maximum recorded airspeed of 180 Knots IAS at about 08:08:42 UTC and immediately thereafter, the Engine 1 and Engine 2 fuel cutoff switches transitioned from RUN to CUTOFF position one after another with a time gap of 01 sec". What does "transitioned" mean? Were they moved, or did the switches malfunction? Unless the AAIB was prepared to go further and clarify this, either way, what was the crying need to even mention the 'transitioning' of fuel switches in

a preliminary report?

The Cost Of Dilly-Dallying

As per ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) guidelines, a preliminary report of any accident should ideally be released within 30 days, and the investigator is expected to share "critical initial facts" to enable immediate safety actions globally. The 30-day deadline is meant to compel investigators to prioritise the collection and reporting of readily available, verified factual and circumstantial information, rather than waiting for exhaustive analysis. Obviously, then, the deadline is not meant to encourage speculation, which the AAIB seems to have encouraged, knowingly or unknowingly, by using vague terms like fuel switch transition.

Besides, experts have pointed out that while the ICAO norms encourage a preliminary report within 30 days, the AAIB charter has no such requirement, and in at least one previous air crash, the AAIB did not release any

preliminary report at all. So, the agency actually had the option of not going through the paces and releasing anything at all. That it chose to do so on the 30th day, past midnight, points to myriad pressures on the investigating team. The Western media thereafter made matters worse by speculating further on pilot suicide theories, quoting unnamed sources. Then, the second word or phrase which stands out in the preliminary report is the mention of a part of the conversation in the cockpit. The AAIB has chosen to reveal that one pilot asked the other about why he "cut off," and the latter replied he did not. Without spelling out which pilot posed the question and which one answered, a Pandora's box has been opened. Not only does providing just a sentence of the conversation in the cockpit fail to give the full picture of what transpired, but there is no clarity on what the pilots were actually talking about.

Questions With No Answers

Was this conversation about fuel cutoff or something else? If it was about fuel cutoff, which pilot posed the question? AAIB has

itself said that it recovered two hours of audio from the flight data recorders. The words "cut off" could have referred to anything - engine, instruments, etc, not necessarily fuel switches. What the preliminary report has also done is this: it has provided a virtual clean chit to Boeing & Co. The report says that at this stage of the investigation, "there are no recommended actions to B787-8 and/or GENx-1B engine operators and manufacturers". Again, a mere preliminary report need not have been in such undue haste to absolve either Boeing or any other stakeholder of negligence or faults. The report should have stuck to facts. It should have given out the sequence of events; details of the number of crew involved and their experience (without identifying them); number of casualties and number of injured; and the fact that both aircraft engines flamed out. Nothing else was needed in the preliminary report. Flaws are emerging even in the constitution of the probe team. Until recently, no senior pilot had been included in the team, since only Air India has a fleet of Dreamliners, and the AAIB probably wanted to

avoid allegations of any bias. Then, despite more than a month having elapsed, the AAIB has not found the time to launch an appeal for the public to depose with any evidence about the crash.

The Buzz In Parliament

As the buzz about the crash and the AAIB's insinuations gets louder, Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu has had to assert in Parliament that the AAIB is unbiased and has been conducting a probe based on rules and regulations. His comments follow an appeal by the AAIB itself, urging the media and the public to refrain from "spreading premature narratives that risk undermining the integrity of the investigative process". There are really only two options now to mend the situation: either AAIB release further details of the cockpit conversation and reasons for the crash, or it follow the dictum of 'Mum's the Word' and carry out further investigation out of public glare. Rebuilding public trust in the probe - and Indian aviation- itself is the need of the hour.



Tariff Blitz: Is India Becoming Collateral Damage In Someone Else's War?

By Syed Akbaruddin

In today's fractured world, great power rivalry is rewriting the rules of economic engagement. As the European Union (EU) and the United States tighten the screws on Russia, the knock-on effects land squarely on India. A slew of unilateral coercive measures is shrinking New Delhi's freedom to calibrate its foreign policy. The situation warrants discreet diplomacy and sober calculation, not slogans.

Escalating Ultimatums

The EU's eighteenth sanctions package, unveiled on July 18, slashes the price cap on Russian crude and bars the import of petroleum products refined from that crude in third countries. Indian refineries that bought discounted Russian oil and sold petroleum products to Europe now face exclusion and the loss of European finance, insurance and shipping cover if they continue handling Russian barrels.

Across the Atlantic, the proposed 'Sanctioning Russia Act' threatens secondary tariffs of up to 500% on goods from any country trading with Russia should a Ukraine peace deal remain elusive. US President Donald Trump warned of "very severe tariffs" of 100% on any state "feeding Russia's war machine". Senator Lindsey Graham, the prime mover of the bill in the Senate, admonished Brazil, China and India, and

said, "We're going to tear the hell out of you and crush your economy, because what you are doing is blood money."

The EU foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, has previously voiced similar sentiments, accusing buyers of Russian energy of "sharing responsibility" for prolonging the conflict. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has also warned that India, China and Brazil "might be hit very hard" if they continue to lean on Putin.

The message from transatlantic capitals is unmistakable. They are not only closing ranks against Russia but are also closing doors on those who refuse to fall in line. Compliance is no longer voluntary. It is being engineered.

New Delhi has pushed back, accusing the EU of "double standards", alluding to European purchases of Russian energy. The Helsinki-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air calculated that Russia has earned 913 billion euros from fossil fuel exports since February 2022. The EU accounts for 212 billion euros of that.

Policy Peril

Moral arguments aside, the economic risks are serious. Cheap Russian oil has helped India moderate inflation, and, paradoxically, the EU's lower price cap sweetens those discounts. Yet, a supply disruption triggered by the loss



of shipping, insurance or tanker cover, or by high US duties on Indian imports, would flip the equation. Each \$10 rise in crude prices adds an estimated \$14 billion to India's annual import bill. Refineries geared to EU markets may have to abandon Russian feedstock or surrender premium customers. Punitive US duties would bruise Indian exports of pharmaceuticals, apparel, and machinery, sap investor confidence, and threaten jobs. The sanctions debate is not academic. It touches the factory floor and the balance sheet.

India Has Been Here Before

As a diplomatic trench warrior, I have seen India weather such situations before. Western sanctions followed our 1998 nuclear tests. India held its nerve through restraint and engagement. During the US-Iran standoff in the Obama administration, India devised a rupee payment mechanism to keep Iranian oil flowing. In 2022, it secured a CAATSA waiver to import Russia's S-400 air defence system.

What is new now is the intensity of India's links with sanctioning partners. The EU is a vital source of trade, investment and technology. Prime Minister Modi and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged to clinch

a free trade agreement in 2025. The United States is India's largest export destination and key to its Indo-Pacific strategy. PM Modi and President Trump have set a \$500 billion trade target for 2030 and aim to sign the first tranche of a trade agreement this autumn. Also, negotiations are underway on reciprocal tariffs scheduled to take effect on August 1.

Meanwhile, India values its defence and diplomatic ties with Russia. The escalating sanctions are stress-testing India's three-cornered strategy. Walking a tightrope is hard enough. Juggling three flaming torches on that rope is quite another level of difficulty.

Engagement Strategy

Rhetoric won't ease tensions; deliberate diplomacy might. The EU financial measures bite only when buyers rely on European services. Moreover, tracing the origin of molecules in diesel or aviation fuel is technically fraught. It makes enforcement tricky, save at the Nayara refinery, where Rosneft holds a stake.

India should quietly pursue regulatory clarity and carve-outs that offer compliance flexibility, without surrendering principle. With Washington, the priority is to preserve strategic trust. India can signal, discreetly, its intent to avoid

dependence on any single supplier. Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri has pointed out that India now imports from 40 nations, as against 27 before the start of the Ukraine conflict. Diversification is not optics. It is a strategy, and it undercuts the claim that India is "feeding Russia's war machine". Geo-economic interdependence also favours dialogue. The American Action Forum estimates that imposing 100% tariffs on the top five buyers of Russian exports, including India, would hit roughly 40% of total US imports, accounting for more than \$1.3 trillion in goods. This could trigger supply shocks unseen since the pandemic. New Delhi can press this argument and, if necessary, seek a CAATSA-style waiver. A tariff war, it can convincingly show, would be a lose-lose outcome.

Holding the Centre

There is no virtue in grandstanding, nor wisdom in surrender. India's challenge is to retain economic and diplomatic space without becoming collateral damage in somebody else's contest. In an era where sanctions are the new missiles and tariffs the new trenches, India's credibility will rest on holding the centre calmly, clearly and on its own terms.



6 Ways China Beat Trump At Trade Negotiations - And What India Can Learn



By Aditya Sinha

Structural Patience

The June 2025 agreement between the US and China to ease export controls marked a significant turning point in their ongoing trade confrontation. Despite President Trump's bluster and maximalist rhetoric, the substance of the deal reveals a Chinese tactical victory. It was Beijing, not Washington, that dictated the pace, terms, and structure of the negotiation. China secured the removal of key US restrictions while offering limited, vague, and easily reversible concessions. There are six key factors that enabled China to extract concessions and stabilise the trade truce on its own terms.

Rare Earth Edge

First, the most potent lever was Beijing's precise restriction of rare earth exports, especially heavy rare earth elements such as dysprosium and samarium-materials indispensable to US defence systems, EV motors, and advanced electronics. Unlike the 2010s, China has since vertically integrated and state-centralised the entire rare earth supply chain, eliminating wildcat miners and enforcing stringent export licensing under "dual-use" military-industrial clauses. The result: a credible threat of supply chain paralysis for US defence and tech manufacturers. This forced Washington to prioritise the restoration of rare earth flows.

Building Pressure Within US

Second, China operationalised a suite of new legal instruments, including the Export Control Law and the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, to signal that Western companies could face legal jeopardy if they complied with US sanctions. This placed firms in a regulatory dilemma: violate US law or risk penalties in China. The ambiguity and scope of these laws added risk premiums to US restrictions and created stakeholder pressure within the US corporate sector to seek de-escalation.

Third, Xi Jinping operates within a system of centralised authority, long-term policy continuity, and near-total control of the narrative. Trump, by contrast, thrives on spectacle, rapid cycles of escalation, and reactive policymaking. China framed the negotiations as a test of national sovereignty and "economic bullying", allowing it to rally domestic support and present any compromise as strategic resistance. The lack of political cost for slow-walking talks gave Beijing structural patience.

Building Their Own

The fourth lever was state-orchestrated industrial substitution and technological resilience. The Huawei case epitomises this lever. Despite US restrictions on chipmaking equipment and AI accelerators, Huawei launched a 5G smartphone in 2023 using domestically produced chips via chiplet "stacking". The perception that Chinese industry could bypass Western tech reinforced Beijing's credibility and deflated US assumptions about sustained technological chokeholds. This industrial resilience signalled to US negotiators that restrictions were increasingly ineffective and self-harming.

Surgical Approach

Fifth, China pursued calibrated trade retaliation and tactical concessions. Rather than blanket retaliation, China issued surgical trade restrictions targeting politically sensitive US exports (e.g. ethane) while selectively granting rare earth export licences to European firms (such as Volkswagen suppliers). This fragmented the Western alliance and demonstrated Beijing's capacity to divide pressure coalitions. In contrast, the US suffered from coalition fatigue and domestic backlash from industry groups over export controls.

No Longer Dependent On Imports

Finally, declining Chinese import demand - especially from the US - provided a kind

of strategic insulation. Xi Jinping's shift towards economic self-reliance, emphasising industrial localisation, software substitution, and inward-focused stimulus, has structurally reduced China's import elasticity. China's imports have remained flat, while exports soared 33% since 2022. This makes tariff threats less effective because China no longer needs to import as much. As The Wall Street Journal noted, "China's vision of trade is exporting without importing." This reduces US leverage based on access to its own market. As the US presses India with a "take-it-or-leave-it" offer in bilateral trade negotiations - demanding sweeping access to India's agricultural, dairy, and pharmaceutical markets - New Delhi must draw critical lessons from how China successfully negotiated with Washington in June 2025. Unlike India, which is now reacting to ultimatums, China entered talks with pre-positioned leverage: a monopoly over rare earth exports, retaliatory legal frameworks, and an insulated domestic economy. India must shift its negotiation strategy from defensive tariff retention to assertive, leverage-backed diplomacy rooted in strategic chokepoints, industrial capability, and phased reciprocity.

India Has Its Own Strengths

First, India must build credible negotiation leverage rooted in operational chokepoints. China controlled the tempo of talks by targeting materials such as dysprosium that the US couldn't easily substitute. India has equivalent strengths in bulk generics, vaccine manufacturing, and digital services - critical nodes in global supply chains. Instead of pre-emptively offering tariff concessions, India should introduce targeted export approval mechanisms or destination-specific licensing for select pharmaceutical categories, such as complex generics and biosimilars, where US import dependence is structurally high. For digital services, India should temporarily pause new cross-border data transfer permissions in sectors such as fintech and health-tech until commercial access and data equivalence frameworks are secured from the U.S.

As Good As One Gets

Second, India must abandon the concessional mindset in market access negotiations and assert a strict reciprocity-based framework. If the US is demanding tariff reductions and the removal of quantitative restrictions in agriculture, dairy, and pharmaceuticals, India must counter with binding and verifiable commitments in return, such

as regulatory streamlining, mutual recognition of standards, and preferential access in US government procurement. These must be structured as enforceable deliverables, not political assurances. China played this game precisely: export licences for rare earths were selectively granted to allies and withheld from adversaries until key concessions were extracted. India cannot allow sensitive sectors to be opened without tangible, sector-matched gains. Concessions must be calibrated and time-bound, with sunset clauses if the US fails to reciprocate.

Look Deeper

Third, India must confront the regulatory asymmetry embedded in US trade practices. While headline tariffs may appear low, US non-tariff barriers - including sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, drug import protocols, and origin compliance measures - function as covert trade restrictions. Indian consignments are routinely rejected for minor technical infractions, creating a chilling effect on exporters. The recent \$500,000 consignment of Alphonso mangoes is one such example. These barriers are opaque, discretionary, and often non-negotiable. India must demand binding transparency commitments, risk-based inspection protocols, and pre-clearance mechanisms as preconditions to any tariff realignment. The US-UK "Economic Prosperity Deal" signed in May is a cautionary example: despite tariff concessions, the US retained core restrictions and gave London little commercial value. India must not accept an outcome where headline wins mask structural losses. Finally, India must impose its own negotiation architecture and sequencing. A modular, multi-phase agreement structure is essential. Begin with trade in services and digital commerce, where India enjoys a surplus and global competitiveness. Reserve tariff liberalisation in agriculture, processed foods, and medical devices for a second or third tranche, contingent on high-value quid pro quo, such as technology access, joint R&D platforms, and strategic investment windows.

The US cannot expect a full-spectrum agreement aligned to its electoral timeline. India's objective must be to maximise strategic value per concession, not to rush a deal for diplomatic closure. China won by controlling the tempo and scope of engagement. India must now do the same-with precision, leverage, and a clear-eyed view of national interest.

Trump, India, Pahalgam: When Terrorists Are Easier To Deal With Than Tariffs

By: Tara Kartha

Weeks after the Indian media engaged in a shrill diatribe against US President Donald Trump for claiming that he had ended the escalation between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, the public sentiment against the US seems to be softening, thanks to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announcing that the State Department is going to designate the Terrorist Resistance Front (TRF) as a terrorist organisation, with a specific reference to the Pahalgam attack. That's a handshake of no mean order, especially after a series of western 'analysts' had desired 'proof' of the outfit's involvement in the attack. All this, of course, occurs in parallel with Trump apparently threatening a 100% secondary tariff on anyone who trades with Russia. But hold on. That is a reference to a proposed legislation supported by both political parties, which demands that 500% tariffs be levied on states trading with Russia - India included. So, the 'tariff man' is being outpaced by his own Congress. Things are not always what they seem.

TRF Gets A Handle

First, the designation of the TRF as a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist' has been welcomed by Foreign Minister Jaishankar as a "strong affirmation of Indo-US Counter terrorism cooperation", as indeed it is. Earlier, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had stated that India's efforts at the United Nations to get a similar listing had been blocked by Pakistan, and even a reference to it removed from a press statement by the Security Council on Pahalgam. So, the US move is not something to be set aside lightly. The TRF is an interesting entity. It announced its presence on encrypted platform Telegram after the abrogation of Article 370 and when the Lashkar-e-Taiba took a back seat due to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The



TRF's name and imagery seems carefully chosen to avoid any "radical" religious flavour, as also to position itself as indigenous. But a series of attacks it has claimed, including against Makhan Lal Bindroo, a popular owner of a medical shop, as well as those against Sikh and Hindu schoolteachers, were clearly aimed at creating communal tensions. The outfit also threatened journalists and released 'lists' of those it was prepared to kill. Notably, the TRF was the first terrorist group to launch a twin drone attack, on the Jammu air base in 2021. In the Pahalgam incident, the group again claimed the attack on Telegram but back-tracked three days later as it became apparent that India was on the warpath and that the UN was getting ready to release a resolution. Unlike the LeT, the leadership of the TRF is diffused back in Pakistan, and their 'assets' are unknown. But their leaders in Pakistan have known and long-time Lashkar affiliations. One of them, Abu Qatal, who was shot in March this year in Jhelum, uses the same infiltration routes and is part of the United Jihad Council. So, if it walks, talks and looks like the LeT, it should be the LeT. The designation there is uncomfortable business for Rawalpindi - the now-famous 'lunch' of Field Marshal Asim Munir with Trump notwithstanding.

Working Groups Are

Working Hard

Now consider this. Just days earlier, on July 16, the Wavelength Forum held in New Delhi brought together Quad partners to strengthen subsea cable connectivity and resilience across the Indo-Pacific region. Organised under the US State Department's 'CABLES' programme, it highlighted the critical role of subsea cables in supporting the global digital economy and the importance of using trusted vendors for construction, maintenance, and repair. That underlined India's growing importance as a digital hub accounting for some 20% of global internet traffic, and the common concerns of members. This delivered on the Quad foreign ministers' joint statement, which itself was short and crisp, unlike the usual long-winded and fuzzy documents earlier. It announced the first Quad Critical Minerals Initiative, the first Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network field training exercise, and a Quad Ports of the Future Partnership in the works. Separately, a read-out of the meeting between Foreign Minister Jaishankar and Defence Secretary Peter Hegseth was rich in content, noting 'dangers of aggression in the 'Asia Pacific' (a rather surprising nomenclature). Coming up is the signing of the next 10 Year Defense Framework, and progress on advanced technology policy

reviews, which will take forward the landmark INDUS-X which has brought together innovators to US shores, as well as the launch of the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA), where our own innovators are racing ahead. Earlier, even as Operation Sindoor was unfolding, the Quad was holding a tabletop logistic exercise in Hawaii, while a joint working group on Aircraft Carrier Technology cooperation was held in May even as the operations wound down. In sum, there are more areas of cooperation that can be listed easily. And that's an ongoing process, set in place years ago, with the US administration showing every inclination to push all of this harder and faster.

That Public Glitch

Now consider the brouhaha on tariffs, which are announced with much fanfare even as a trade deal is being hinted at. That is not going to be easy as Trump wants access to agriculture, a sensitive area of Indian politicians and a huge voter base. True also that a bill sponsored by Senator Lindsey Graham, widely credited with urging a change of heart to Pakistan under Imran Khan, has sponsored a bill calling for the President to "increase the rate of duty on all goods and services imported into the United States from countries that knowingly engage in the exchange of Russian-origin uranium and petroleum

products to at least 500% relative to the value of such goods and services; that's the Trump administration's effort to get Russia to stop a wasteful and vicious war".

In Sum...

Much can be said about this pointless arm-twisting of countries like India, which did not start the war and have their own populations to think of in terms of inflation from rising oil prices. But the point is, relations between countries are not one composite whole. One may differ violently with one issue even while cooperating closely on another. True, with the Trump administration, there is a deliberate public confrontation in policy, but bureaucracies work quietly behind the scenes on sorting out issues with a country that is otherwise a 'Major Defence Partner', which for the first time, is becoming a two-way street. In other words, it is profitable for US companies to work here in this and other fields. It's a slow journey, but it's got to a place where a certain velocity has been achieved. After all, this is a path undertaken since at least George W Bush's days. The dangers of Trump linking trade with almost everything else persists - like pushing Apple to set up shop elsewhere - but the core relationship is in place.

That, in turn, is based on one unchanging principle of US policy; which is never to allow another country to overtake it. As China grows in absolute terms, that is one fundamental that will determine relations with India. The danger is that there are also those in Washington who see India as growing too fast for comfort. US bureaucracy would ideally like all 'partners' to just roll over and play dead. Delhi is hardly in that league, and is a hitch that needs careful manoeuvring. Think of a certain 'warming' of relations with China recently. It's a dangerous game, but it seems the present dispensation seems confident. There are squalls ahead.

Can India And China Be 'Frenemies'?

By Ashutosh

"China and India were not doomed to perpetual enmity. They could enjoy a long period of peace again, but to do so, China had to use force to 'knock' India back to the negotiating table," writes Henry Kissinger in his book *On China*, quoting Mao Zedong, the supreme leader of the Communist Party of China, in the context of the Indo-China War in 1962. After the initial attack on India, Mao suddenly decided to end the stalemate, and his army generals were puzzled by his move. Mao explained to them that he never wanted to defeat India; the whole military exercise was to bring India to the negotiating table.

Since then, there have been skirmishes on the border with Chinese troops, but never a war. The most recent skirmish was in Galwan, where troops from both countries fought with each other. During Operation Sindoor, however, the Indian Forces witnessed a unique phenomenon.

As deputy chief of armed forces, Lieutenant General Rahul Singh described that the Indian army was fighting two enemies on one border. He meant that along with Pakistan, China was also fighting a war against India; it used the theatre of war for testing its weaponry. By any definition, it was an enemy act.

Why Did China Risk Conflict?

In the larger context, it can easily be concluded that China was fighting a proxy war for Pakistan. It was a war between two civilisational countries that take great pride in their past. There was no reason for China to engage in a battle between the two traditional rivals who have fought five wars with each other. But it did. The question that needs to be asked is, why did China risk a major conflict with India? What was the purpose? Was it to force India to come to the negotiating table, as Mao had told his generals in October 1962? In this context, the picture posted by India's foreign minister, S. Jaishankar, on X, in which he was seen shaking hands with Chinese President



Xi Jinping, becomes important. Though Jaishankar was in Beijing to participate in the SCO foreign ministers' conference, the words he used in his post hint at a bigger picture. He wrote, "Apprised President Xi of the recent development of our bilateral ties. Value the guidance of our leaders in that regard."

It's hard to imagine that these words were for a country that had only weeks ago indulged in a major war-like action, and since then has also tried to impede India's economic growth? In recent days, China has deliberately tried to stop the export of rare earth material and specialised fertilizers to India, and it has recalled its more than three hundred engineers working for Foxconn. Does it mean that despite all kinds of bravado by the Modi government, India has calculated that China is too significant a country in the current global scenario, and that it is better to have a peaceful relationship with it?

China Needs Allies

We have to understand that foreign policy is not about friendship and personal relationships, but about furthering national interests. And if the Modi government has

decided to improve its relationship with China, then it is a good move.

China is presently at the cusp of a major transformation, from being a superpower to the number one country in the world. It needs allies and partners. China has made enormous progress since Mao's time.

In the 1970s, India and China were of approximately the same economic size.

Since Mao's departure, however, Deng's reforms have changed China beyond recognition. No other country in history has shown such remarkable economic growth as China has achieved in such a short time. In 40 years, China has not only become a \$19-trillion economy - second in the world after the US - but it has also become a technological superpower. Its recent technological breakthrough in the field of artificial intelligence and electric vehicles has shocked the Western world, particularly the US. The icing on the cake is that, unlike in America, China's technology is very cheap. Its electric motor car, BYD, has the potential to jolt Tesla's standing worldwide. Musk today is a worried man.

Similarly, China's extremely cost-effective DeepSeek poses an existential challenge to the US's AI market and technology. China has also shown during Operation Sindoor that it has evolved a much-advanced military technology that can achieve air dominance through a network of AI, sensors and the Internet.

Rational Thinking

No doubt, India has also progressed a lot since the 1991 economic reforms. It is the fastest-growing economy today and arguably the fourth-largest one in the world. But, it's not a \$5 trillion economy, yet, and struggles to match China's economic and technological heft. China today is a manufacturing giant and makes up for almost 31.6% of the world's manufactured goods. India is still a developing economy, with 80 crore people fed largely by the government. Its per capita income is only \$2,878, which places it at 143rd rank among 196 countries.

China, with its \$25,307 per capita income, is ranked 70th. India's manufacturing sector is sluggish, and despite recent initiatives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat,

its contribution to the global market is only 2.9%.

China, since Xi Jinping became its supreme leader, has become ambitious and is spreading its tentacles across the globe.

It has spread like a vice in Africa. In South Asia, it is working to diplomatically encircle India from all corners. Once, India was very proud of its historical ties with Russia, but not anymore.

Today, Russia is China's best friend - Moscow's awkward silence during Operation Sindoor is a pointer. Russia even called Pakistan a natural ally and partner recently. China's bitter reaction to the issue of the Dalai Lama's incarnation is also a hint to India's decision-makers. The point is, if India has to become Viksit Bharat by 2047, then it needs peace on its borders. It is in India's interest to have a good bilateral relationship with it and use that time to grow economically.

If India is seen as an adversary in Beijing and as an impediment to its goals, then friction is inevitable. Anyway, India cannot rely on Trump's America anymore. A little neighbourliness can go a long way.

Sleeping with married women: Does a crass joke reveal Trump-Epstein close ties?

Newly uncovered footage and photos have confirmed child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein attended Donald Trump's 1993 wedding, reigniting scrutiny of their old ties. Epstein's brother Mark shared a 1999 anecdote and said Trump's repeated jokes married women shows "the close relationship between him and Epstein". Trump has dismissed the reports as "fake".



By : Gaurav Kumar

Newly uncovered archival footage and photographs have reignited scrutiny of President Donald Trump's past ties with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. The most striking revelation is Epstein's confirmed presence at Trump's 1993 wedding to Marla Maples, which was not widely known until now, according to a CNN report. Additionally, an anecdote shared by Mark Epstein, Jeffrey Epstein's brother, paints an even closer picture of Trump-Epstein's past relationship. Speaking to CNN, Mark recalled a conversation Jeffrey had with Trump in 1999. "Jeffrey told me he asked Donald, 'How come you sleep with so many married women?'" Mark said. Trump's reply was "Because it's so wrong," Mark told CNN. Footage from a 1999 Victoria's

Secret fashion show in New York shows Trump and Epstein laughing and chatting together ahead of the runway event, CNN reported. The broadcaster's KFILE uncovered the raw footage during a review of archival video of Trump at events in the 1990s and 2000s. Trump and Epstein appeared together in at least one video among the limited archival footage reviewed. KFILE is the leading investigation team for the social and mobile generation. The newly surfaced photos and footage come as Trump's past ties to Epstein is under scrutiny. Trump hosted a party with "young women" that was only attended by the child sex offender, according to a report by The New York Times (NYT). The report came days after the Wall Street Journal stated that Trump sent Epstein a provocative birthday note

featuring a nude sketch of a woman along with a cryptic message.

TRUMP CALLS CNN REPORT 'FAKE NEWS', WHITE HOUSE TERMS REPORT 'OUT OF CONTEXT'

When the broadcaster contacted Trump this week for comment, he dismissed the outlet as "fake news". On being asked about the wedding photos, Trump responded, "You've got to be kidding me," before repeatedly calling CNN "fake news" and hanging up, CNN reported. The White House also rejected the report, calling it "out-of-context." In a statement to CNN, White House Communications Director Steven Cheung said, "These are nothing more than out-of-context frame grabs of innocuous videos and pictures of widely attended events to disgustingly infer something

nefarious. "The fact is that the President kicked him out of his club for being a creep. This is nothing more than a continuation of the fake news stories concocted by the Democrats and the liberal media," CNN quoted Cheung as saying.

MARK SAYS A JOKE INDICATES HOW CLOSE EPSTEIN WAS TO TRUMP

Epstein's brother, Mark, told CNN's Erin Burnett about his late brother's "very close" friendship with Donald Trump in the 1990s, according to the report.

"I know Donald was in Jeff's office a lot back in the 1990s," Mark said. Mark went ahead and shared the anecdote. "We were talking and – well, stick a pin in that – a couple of weeks or a week before that flight, I was talking to Jeffrey, and he told me that he was

talking to Donald, and he asked Donald, 'How come you sleep with so many married women?'" To which Trump replied: "Because it's so wrong," according to Mark. "Now, among guys, it was a funny line, and then when we were on the plane a week or two later, Jeffrey asked Donald the same question. I know he did that for my benefit so that I could hear Donald say it," Mark further added.

Again, Trump's answer was the same: "Because it's so wrong." "That's not the kind of question you ask a casual acquaintance," Mark said. Epstein, a financier who socialised with a range of politicians and powerful figures, was charged in 2019 with sex trafficking minors in Florida and New York. He was later found dead in his jail cell while awaiting trial, CNN reported.

Trump Claims 5 Jets Downed in India-Pakistan Clash, Sparks Fresh Debate Over Op Sindoor

U.S. President Donald Trump has reignited controversy over the recent India-Pakistan military standoff by claiming that five jets were shot down during the conflict. Speaking at a private White House dinner with Republican lawmakers, Trump referred to Operation Sindoor, India's retaliatory offensive launched after the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which left 26 people dead, including several tourists. The president did not specify whether the aircraft lost belonged to India or Pakistan.

Trump's vague assertion brought renewed attention to the intense four-day military exchange that followed India's air and missile strikes. Pakistan has claimed that it downed several Indian jets, including three Rafale fighters, and captured Indian pilots. However, these

statements remain unsubstantiated by concrete evidence. India has consistently denied losing Rafales or any personnel to capture. Indian Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan acknowledged aircraft losses in a May interview with Bloomberg TV but downplayed Pakistan's claims, stressing that the strategic objective outweighed the number of jets lost. General Chauhan emphasized India's swift tactical adjustments, which enabled precision strikes deep into Pakistan, including heavily defended airfields located over 300 kilometers away. Dassault Aviation's CEO Eric Trappier also refuted Pakistan's claims, labeling them as "factually incorrect." Speaking to French magazine Challenges, Trappier reaffirmed that no Rafales were lost in the conflict, hinting that further revelations could alter public understanding

of the engagement.

Trump further claimed that the ceasefire, announced on May 10, was brokered by the U.S. through diplomatic pressure, including trade negotiations.

He suggested that Washington halted a trade deal to pressure both nuclear-armed nations into de-escalation. India, however, has firmly rejected this narrative, maintaining that the crisis was resolved bilaterally without any foreign mediation. Operation Sindoor was initiated on the night of May 7 and involved a joint response by the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force. Over a span of 72 hours, India targeted what it described as terrorist infrastructure and military installations across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Trump Labels Canada 'Mean and Nasty' as Trade Dispute Escalates

U.S. President Donald Trump reportedly believes Canadians are being "mean and nasty" for their growing boycott of American travel and products, according to comments made by U.S. Ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra. Speaking at the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Foundation summit in Bellevue, Washington, Hoekstra suggested that the Canadian response to mounting U.S. tariffs—such as banning American liquor and avoiding U.S. travel—has influenced Trump's negative perception of Canada. The ambassador's remarks come amid

rising tensions between the two countries, with Canada pulling American alcohol from liquor store shelves and Canadian travel to the U.S. declining for six consecutive months. Hoekstra noted that while these actions are Canada's choice, they signal a hostile tone that Trump and his team interpret as unfriendly. His statement drew laughter when he joked about personally avoiding border checks while transporting U.S. liquor into Canada. B.C. Premier David Eby responded sharply, urging Canadians to remain committed to local support and domestic travel. "Clearly, our

efforts are having an impact," Eby stated, encouraging citizens to "keep buying Canadian" and to "stand strong together" in defense of jobs, the economy, and national sovereignty. The backlash stems from Trump's threats of further economic measures, including a 35 per cent tariff on Canadian goods starting August 1, a 50 per cent tariff on copper, and a staggering 200 per cent tariff on pharmaceuticals. Canada is already subject to 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminum under the

current trade policy. Meanwhile, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators visited Ottawa on Monday in an attempt to ease tensions and urge Canadians to return as tourists, saying simply, "we miss you." As the two countries remain locked in negotiations over a broader trade and security agreement, U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick reaffirmed that the tariffs are not going anywhere until Canada fully opens its market.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Dismisses Talk of End to Free Trade with Canada, But Signals Tariffs Will Stay

U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has rejected claims that free trade between the United States and Canada is over, calling such suggestions "silly," even as he signaled that tariffs on Canadian goods are likely to remain in place for now. Speaking during an interview on Face the Nation on Sunday, Lutnick emphasized that a large share of



Canadian exports already enter the U.S. tariff-free under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), known in Canada as CUSMA. "Virtually 75 per cent of all goods from Mexico and Canada are already coming tariff-free," he said. However, Lutnick also made it clear that President Trump's administration is not satisfied with the current trade dynamic. "Canada is not

open to us. Unless they open their market, they're going to pay a tariff," he warned. He cited long-standing griev-

ances about Canadian trade barriers and added, "This is an 80-year wrong that President Trump is trying to fix." The comments came shortly after Prime Minister Mark Carney acknowledged that Canada is seeing "almost free trade" with the U.S., but admitted there's little evidence Washington is willing to negotiate a fully tariff-free agreement at this time.

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Trump's AI plan calls for massive data centres. But can US power it?

US President Donald Trump's plan to boost artificial intelligence and build data centres across the US could speed up a building boom that was already expected to strain the nation's ability to power it. The White House released the "AI Action Plan" Wednesday, vowing to expedite permitting for the construction of energy-intensive data centres as it looks to make the country a leader in a business that tech companies and others are pouring billions of dollars into. The plan says to combat "radical climate dogma," a number of restrictions — including clean air and water laws — could be lifted, aligning with Trump's "American energy dominance" agenda and his efforts to

undercut clean energy.

WHAT AI MEANS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Massive amounts of electricity are needed to support the complex servers, equipment and more for AI. Electricity demand from data centres worldwide is set to more than double by 2030, to slightly more than the entire electricity consumption of Japan today, the International Energy Agency said earlier this year. In many cases, that electricity may come from burning coal or natural gas. These fossil fuels emit planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide and methane. This in turn is tied to extreme weather

events that are becoming more severe, frequent and costly. The data centres used to fuel AI also need a tremendous amount of water to keep cool. That means they can strain water sources in areas that may have little to spare. Typically, tech giants, up-and-comers and other developers try to keep an existing power plant online to meet demand, experts say, and most existing power plants in the US are still producing electricity using fossil fuels — most often natural gas. In certain areas of the US, a combination of renewables and energy storage in the form of batteries are coming online. But tapping into nuclear power is especially of interest as a way to reduce data center-

induced emissions while still meeting demand and staying competitive. Amazon said last month it would spend \$20 billion on data centre sites in Pennsylvania, including one alongside a nuclear power plant. The investment allows Amazon to plug right into the plant, a scrutinised but faster approach for the company's development timeline.

Meta recently signed a deal to secure nuclear power to meet its computing needs. Microsoft plans to buy energy from the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, and Google previously signed a contract to purchase it from multiple small modular reactors in the works.

New \$250 US Visa Fee to Impact Canadian Residents, Foreign Workers, and Some Citizens

A new U.S. policy is set to impose an additional \$250 Visa Integrity Fee on many non-immigrant visa applicants, including Canadian permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, and some Canadian citizens. The fee is part of the H.R.1 Act, also referred to by the U.S. administration as the "One Big Beautiful Bill," which was signed into law on July 4. Although an exact implementation date has yet to be announced, the fee is expected to take effect by late 2025. The \$250 fee will apply to any foreign national issued a non-immigrant visa for entry into the U.S. Non-immigrant visa categories include tourism and business visas (B-1/B-2), student visas (F/M), work visas (H-1B/H-4), and exchange visitor visas (J). Individuals from non-waiver countries such as India, China, Pakistan, Brazil, and Nigeria will be among those required to pay the new fee in addition to standard application

charges. This policy is expected to significantly affect Canadian permanent residents and temporary residents who are citizens of countries that require U.S. non-immigrant visas. While most Canadian citizens are exempt from U.S. visa requirements and the associated fee, exceptions do exist. Canadians applying for specific visa categories such as H-1B work visas, F-1 student visas, or diplomatic and government travel visas (A, G, NATO), as well as those in the K and E visa categories, will also be required to pay the \$250 fee. Those traveling under the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, which includes most European countries, Japan, Australia, and others, will not be affected. Canada is not part of the Visa Waiver Program because Canadian citizens typically do not need a visa or ESTA to visit the United States. The law also outlines that the Visa Integrity Fee is non-negotiable—

it cannot be waived or reduced. However, applicants may qualify for reimbursement if they fully comply with visa terms, do not overstay, and either leave the country promptly or adjust their status legally.

The refund process will be

handled by the Department of Homeland Security, though details on how and when applicants can apply for reimbursement remain unclear. Additionally, the fee will be adjusted annually for inflation, meaning the cost could rise over time.

U.S. Revokes Visa of Brazilian Judge De Moraes Over Bolsonaro Prosecution, Prompting Diplomatic Rift

The United States has revoked the visa of Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, citing his role in prosecuting former President Jair Bolsonaro and censoring conservative voices. The decision, announced Friday by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, marks a significant diplomatic escalation between the two nations. De Moraes, who presided over the high-profile trial alleging Bolsonaro's involvement in a 2023 coup attempt, also briefly banned Elon Musk's X platform in Brazil for failing to comply with court orders. The ban was later overturned by the Brazilian Supreme Court. De Moraes has been a central figure in

Brazil's judiciary crackdown on what authorities described as anti-democratic actions by Bolsonaro and his allies following the 2022 election. Rubio announced on social media that visas would be revoked not only for de Moraes but also for his fellow justices and their immediate family members. He accused the judge of leading a politically motivated campaign against Bolsonaro and fostering a system of censorship that extended beyond Brazil's borders to allegedly impact Americans. The Trump Media & Technology Group had earlier sued de Moraes, accusing him of silencing conservative viewpoints.

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New Russiagate evidence 'directly' points to Obama, DOJ will decide 'criminal implications': Gabbard

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard doubled down at a White House press briefing Wednesday, alleging the Obama administration promoted a "contrived narrative" that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. "There is irrefutable evidence that details how President Obama and his national security team directed the creation of an intelligence community assessment that they knew was false," Gabbard said. "They knew it would promote this contrived narrative that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to help President Trump win, selling it to the American people as though it were true. It wasn't."

Gabbard's comments come amid the declassification of a trove of documents from the U.S. intelligence community that allege the Obama administration politicized intelligence, and that U.S. intelligence organizations did

not have direct information that Russian President Vladimir Putin sought to support Trump's election in 2016. "All come back to and confirm the same report: There was a gross politicization and manipulation of intelligence by the Obama administration intended to delegitimize President Trump even before he was inaugurated, ultimately usurping the will of the American people," Gabbard said. Gabbard also said that the declassified documents have been shared with the Department of Justice and the FBI so those agencies can evaluate if any criminal implications stemming from the materials are warranted. "We have referred and will continue to refer all of these documents to the Department of Justice and the FBI, to investigate the criminal implications of this for the evidence," Gabbard said. "Correct. The evidence that we have

found, and that we have released, directly point to President Obama leading the manufacturing of this intelligence assessment. There are multiple pieces of evidence and intelligence that confirm that fact." On Tuesday, President Donald Trump accused former President Barack Obama of being the "ringleader" of investigations into whether his campaign colluded with Russia in the 2016 election. In response, a spokesperson for Obama labeled the accusations "bizarre" and said the new documents do not alter the conclusions of previous intelligence assessments, including a 2020 report from the Senate Intelligence Committee that was chaired by now-Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Out of respect for the office of the presidency, our office does not normally dignify the constant nonsense and misinformation flowing out of this White House with a response," Obama spokesman Patrick Rodenbush said in a statement. "But these claims are outrageous enough to merit one." "These bizarre allegations are ridiculous and a weak attempt at distraction," Rodenbush said. "Nothing in the document issued last week undercuts the widely accepted conclusion that Russia worked to influence the 2016 presidential election but did not successfully

manipulate any votes." A spokesperson for Obama did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Fox News Digital Wednesday. The newly declassified documents name Obama, in addition to other administration officials, including Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, CIA Director John Brennan, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, Secretary of State John Kerry, Attorney General Loretta Lynch and Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe. Fox News Digital previously reported that Gabbard sent a criminal referral to the Justice Department pertaining to the newly declassified material, but the agency did not disclose specifics regarding whom the criminal referral targeted. The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Fox News Digital on Wednesday.

Gabbard's appearance before reporters at the White House came just hours after she released a 2020 report from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, which said the intelligence community published "potentially biased" or "implausible" intelligence suggesting Putin sought to help Trump win the election, per the "unusual" orders of Obama.

"Big Heart...": Eye On Past Storm, Ex- Maldives Minister Praises India, PM

New Delhi: A year on from the India-Maldives diplomatic storm - precipitated by comments about Prime Minister Narendra Modi by three Maldivian ministers, and geopolitical red flags after the island nation seemed to getting friendlier towards China - ties between the nations appear to have been reset.

Mr Modi will visit Male - the first foreign head of state to be hosted by President Mohamed Muizzu - on July 25 and 26 to inaugurate development projects funded by India, and after the Indian government extended crucial financial support by rolling over the \$US 50 million Treasury bill for another year.

He will also celebrate the country's Independence Day and hold bilateral talks with Mr Muizzu, which will certainly include sounding Male out over national security concerns in the Indian Ocean Region.

Ahead of his visit, Maldives' ex-Foreign Minister, Abdulla Shahid, hailed the past relationship between the countries and India's history as a reliable first responder in times of emergency. "The relationship between Maldives and India has always demonstrated India is the first responder. Whenever we dial the international line India responds, first," he said.

"This is for many reasons. First and foremost, because Indian people have a big heart... they are most generous. Second, India is so close to Maldives, geographically. Whenever anything urgent and distressful happens in Maldives, India has never let us down..." Mr Shahid said. "We have always maintained an India-first foreign policy but in the past, election cycles have sometimes caused us to swing between a pro-China stance and a pro-India stance," he said. Mr Nasheed's 'pro-China stance' comment was seen as

a direct jab at his successor, Mohamed Muizzu, who has been seen as favouring Beijing over Delhi in his foreign policy matters. Scheduled for after the trip to the United Kingdom, where an India-UK free trade deal will be signed, the Maldives visit is key, a point underlined by Mr Shahid. "Despite the diplomatic tension, India decided that its relationship (with Maldives) is people-to-people... governments come and go and political parties change, but the relationship that exists between our two people is on a solid foundation and has never changed," he said. India and the Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and commercial links dating back centuries. And Delhi was among the first to recognise Male after it secured independence.

But all of that closeness was threatened in November 2023 after Mr Muizzu was elected on the back of a 'India, out' platform that highlighted the removal of Indian military personnel deployed there. And increasingly friendly ties with China - a Chinese spy ship masquerading as a research vessel was allowed to dock in February 2024 and Mr Muizzu travelled to Beijing to call for more Chinese tourists to his country, a move seen as a snub to Indians - raised red flags in Delhi. Mr Muizzu, however, continued to insist that India remains a key partner in efforts to secure regional stability, and that he was only working to ensure more opportunities for Maldives. Fortunately, after months of unease, ties began to improve, beginning with Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's visit to that country in August last year and the Maldives leader's visit to Delhi in October. Mr Muizzu met PM Modi on that trip, and told an English daily,



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Who can defeat Mamdani? New York business leaders remain unsure

With less than four months to go before the mayoral election, New York City's business elite are facing a political dilemma. As Democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani heads into the elections, major players in the city's business community are split on how to block his path to the mayoral post.

Many leaders feel that either Andrew Cuomo or Mayor Eric Adams needs to drop out for the other to have a chance against surprise Democratic mayoral primary winner Mamdani, news agency Reuters reported. After losing to Mamdani in the Democratic Party primary, Cuomo refused to bow out of the NYC mayoral race, setting up a four-way contest with current Mayor Adams and Republican Curtis Sliwa also in the fray.

Following Cuomo's announcement that he would stay in the race as an independent after losing to Mamdani, New York-based CEOs have yet to coalesce behind either the former governor or incumbent Adams in their bid to defeat Mamdani, according to Reuters. Several business leaders, speaking anonymously, expressed

support for Cuomo, while others favoured Adams, a former police captain elected mayor as a Democrat in 2021 but running as an independent this year, due to doubts about the former's chances, the report stated. Many leaders are taking a wait-and-watch approach, though others believe that could be a bad move, keeping another candidate from gaining momentum, according to the report. Mamdani's spokesperson, Jeffrey Lerner, criticised Cuomo over his decision to run for New York City mayor as an independent, accusing him of being hand-in-glove with billionaires.

"While Andrew Cuomo and Eric Adams are tripping over themselves to cut backroom deals with billionaires and Republicans, Zohran Mamdani is focused on making this city more affordable for New Yorkers. That's the choice this November," Lerner told The New York Times. The 33-year-old Mamdani won the June 24 primary with 56% of the vote, bolstered by young voters drawn to his social media presence and messaging focused on solving the city's affordability

crisis. Polling suggests he would prevail over a fractured field of Cuomo, Adams, and Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa, but some polls indicate Cuomo would win a head-to-head matchup against Mamdani in heavily Democratic New York, Reuters reported.

Business owners worry that Mamdani's plans – such as rent freezes, fare-free public buses, and government-run grocery stores – could raise taxes for residents and drive investment out of the city.

He has also called for a higher minimum wage and a new office to promote small businesses.

Mamdani's promise to freeze rent resonated particularly in Manhattan, where the median monthly rent for a flat sits at a record \$4,571. But flat owners say such a move would make buildings unliveable, Reuters reported last month. "A four-year rent freeze all but ensures these buildings completely crumble," said Kenny Burgos, chief executive officer of the New York Apartment Association, which represents several thousand

property owners and managers.

"I sympathise with folks who have an issue with the cost of rent and the lack of affordability, but there's a conversation to be had on policy that doesn't ignore the cost," Reuters quoted Burgos as saying.

So far, Mamdani has raised about \$820,000 (approximately Rs 6.85 crore) since the primary through July 21, according to the city's campaign finance board. Few prominent business leaders have publicly come out in support of Mamdani, who has received endorsements from unions that previously backed Cuomo. In recent days, Mamdani met with executives in a meeting organised by the non-profit Partnership for New York City, according to Reuters.

"He did a pretty good job of making the case that he was open to conversations, discussion and learning, and that he wanted to build a coalition that would represent all New Yorkers," Reuters quoted Kathy Wylde, president and chief executive officer of the group, as saying.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The Real Story Behind Jagdeep Dhankhar's Resignation

It was a muggy Monday in Delhi, the kind where the air feels like a wet blanket and tempers in the Rajya Sabha run hot as a tandoor. Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, the man with the gravitas and the serendipitas, is perched in his chair, presiding over the upper house with the patience of a saint and the wit of a seasoned stand-up comic.

He is bantering with the treasury benches, throwing shade at the Opposition, adjourning proceedings when the decibel levels hit fish market territory, and calling everyone back when they've had enough time to sip their adrak-wali chai.

Just another day in the life of India's Vice-President, no? No. By 10 pm, the Rashtrapati Bhavan drops a bombshell: Dhankhar has resigned. Health grounds. And just like that, the great Indian political circus lights up with speculation like it's Diwali. Now, let's get one thing straight. In India, resigning from a high-power post like the Vice-President's on "health grounds" is about as believable as Mithun Chakraborty dodging AK47 bullets in Gunda. Power is panacea! People do not resign from powerful positions citing health reasons because the posts guarantee top-notch medical care, AIIMS on speed dial, and government-funded trips to the best hospitals abroad. Why would anyone give that up?

Political analysts are scratching their heads, pundits are pontificating, and X is ablaze with theories wilder than Yogendra

Yadav's socialist fantasies. Some whisper that Dhankhar was nudged out to avoid a full-blown clash with the judiciary, given his tirades against their "overreach".

Others swear he was cosying up to the Opposition, much to the BJP's chagrin. And then there's the classic: "Sources say...", followed by a buffet of names for the next Veep, each more speculative than the last. From Nitish Kumar to Shashi Tharoor to Justice Chandrachud, media is orgiastically throwing up names every hour. Who has time for delayed gratification?

But here's what truly happened.

Jagdeep Dhankhar, the man who could out-talk a TV anchor, has been battling a dodgy ticker for a while. A heart ailment, the kind that makes doctors furrow their brows and scribble prescriptions before you can say "bypass". He has been in and out of AIIMS's cardio-thoracic department, and infamously fainted while at the Lieutenant Governor's. The man literally keeled over mid-handshake.

His personal doctors have been sounding the alarm for months: "Sir, you need treatment abroad. Like, yesterday." The AIIMS crew, not ones to mince words, told him to ditch the hectic schedule and avoid exertion. Running the Rajya Sabha is not exertion; it is a cardiac event in progress. The Rajya Sabha, for the uninitiated, is increasingly becoming a pressure cooker of chaos. Every session is a high-decibel soap opera. MPs shout, scream, and storm the well with Dhankhar

waving his invisible baton to no effect. The man's vocal, fearless, and loves a good controversy, all qualities that make him a stress magnet. Every furious speech and ensuing interruptions is enough to spike anyone's blood pressure, let alone a man with a history of heart trouble.

Enter Sudesh Dhankhar, his wife of nearly half a century, the real MVP of this story. She has been on his case for months, begging him to step back. "This job will kill you before the Opposition does," has been a constant refrain. He has been promising that he would take it easy.

On Monday, Mrs Dhankhar was watching the proceedings live. She saw his face contracted a couple of times and eyelids drooped as he tried to calm the house down. She saw that he couldn't take it easy even if he tried to. And that "trying to" is the single-biggest risk factor.

Backed by a team of doctors wielding CT scans and ultimatums, she arrived at his chambers and laid down the law: "It's today or never." Imagine the scene: Dhankhar, the man who's faced down Mamata Banerjee without flinching, staring into the eyes of his wife and a posse of cardiologists.

This one, he couldn't win. So, he said, "Okay". And just like that, the resignation letter was signed, sealed, and sent to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was a man listening to his heart. Literally and figuratively, because his wife and doctors gave him no choice. It's a story of love, health, and a

reluctant surrender to mortality. The entire BJP leadership was in shock and have still not figured out how to react. A disappointed Prime Minister just posted a half-assed tweet wishing him good health. The others have yet to.

The real story behind the Veep's resignation that you just read is all made-up, just a theory like the theories you have heard or read in the last two days. But this one at least has written proof. The resignation letter signed by Mr Dhankhar. Why is your theory more believable than mine? One may have more grains of truth than others but none is smooth truth.

Names for the next VP are being showered like petals on kanwar yatra. Everyone from retired bureaucrats to BJP loyalists to dark-horse candidates nobody's heard of. Everyone claims "exclusive info" from "reliable sources", and every news channel has a panel as many names as the windows on the screen. Speculation is our national sport and patience is as rare as a quiet day in Parliament. Why wait for the vice-presidential election when you can churn out a hundred hot takes in a single tweet?

Here's the kicker. Amid all this noise, the truth is quieter, simpler. So, maybe, just maybe, we can hold off on crowning the next VP. Let's wait for the election. Delayed gratification might not be in fashion, but it's a lot less stressful than this endless circus. Stress is the real heartbreaker. Ask Mr Dhankhar.

American-born babies are American: Judge halts Trump birthright citizenship order

US Judge Leo Sorokin's ruling marks the third federal court to block Trump's birthright order since the Supreme Court limited nationwide injunctions, signaling strong judicial resistance to the policy.

A federal judge on Friday blocked the Trump administration's attempt to end birthright citizenship for children born in the US to undocumented or temporary immigrant parents, calling the move unconstitutional and legally illogical.

The ruling by US District Judge Leo Sorokin in Boston marks the third federal court to stop the executive order in its tracks since the Supreme Court last month narrowed the authority of lower courts to issue nationwide injunctions.

But Sorokin ruled that an exception applied in this case, where more than a dozen states demonstrated real financial harm tied to the order.

"A patchwork approach to the

birthright order would not protect the states," Sorokin wrote, noting the high mobility of residents between states and slamming the administration's failure to explain how a more limited injunction would function.

"They have never addressed what renders a proposal feasible or workable. The defendants' position in this regard defies both law and logic."

The decision maintains a nationwide injunction that preserves birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment, pending further review by the courts. Sorokin added that his ruling is not the final word on the issue, but emphasized the constitutional implications of the executive action.

"The President cannot change that

legal rule with the stroke of a pen," Sorokin said. "Trump and his administration are entitled to pursue their interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment but for purposes of this lawsuit at this juncture, the Executive Order is unconstitutional."

The lawsuit was brought by a coalition of states led by New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin, who hailed the ruling as a critical defence of constitutional norms.

"American-born babies are American, just as they have been at every other time in our Nation's history," Platkin said in a statement. "I'm thrilled the district court again barred President Trump's flagrantly unconstitutional birthright citizenship order from taking effect anywhere."

Government lawyers had argued that the injunction should be limited in scope to states' financial interests. Still, Sorokin rejected the idea, saying the administration failed to offer any coherent legal or administrative plan for how such limits would work.

This is the third time the executive order has been blocked. Earlier this month, a federal judge in New Hampshire prohibited the rule in a class-action lawsuit. That decision went into effect after no appeal was filed. On Wednesday, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco also ruled against the order, upholding a nationwide injunction. A fourth ruling may be on the way. A Maryland judge said she would issue a similar decision if the appeals court agrees.

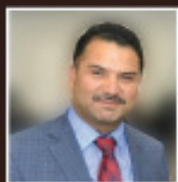
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About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

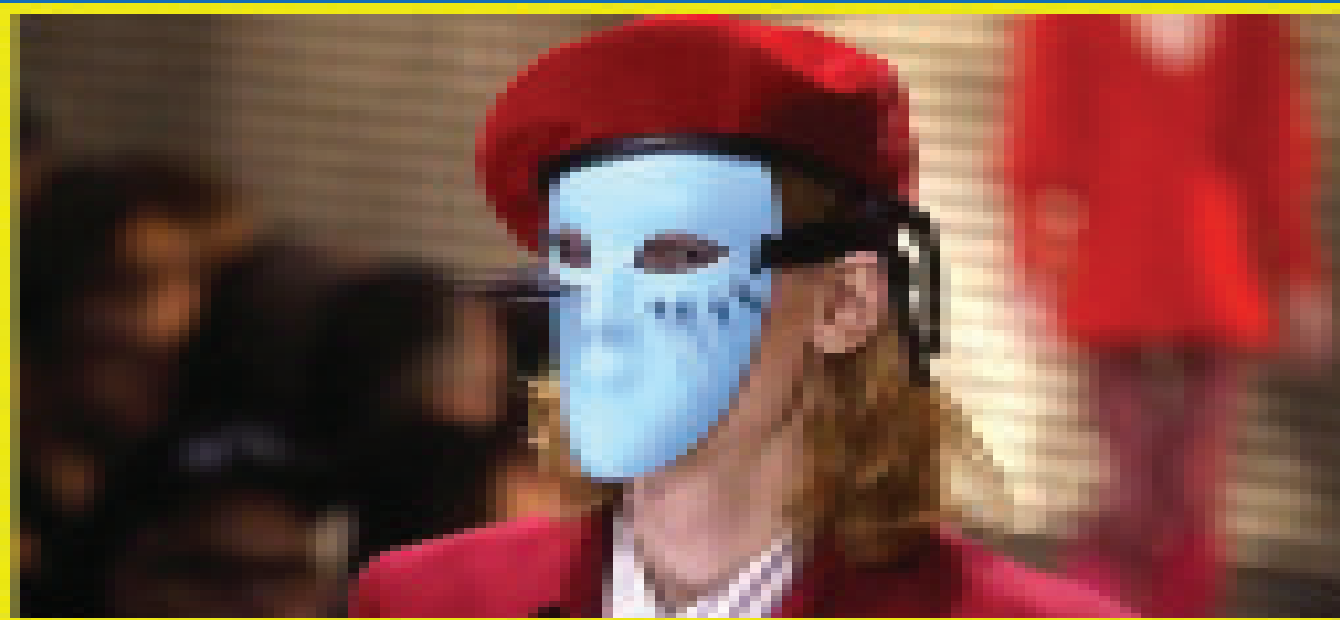
Sharanjit Thind Singh



MAD MEN

OF

NU WAY ADVERTISING



Gucci unmasks a harder, more masculine collection

Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele says the blackface controversy has had a deep impact on the company and provided a learning experience for everyone.

Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele says the blackface controversy has had a deep impact on the company and provided a learning experience for everyone.

Michele, speaking to reporters backstage after Gucci opened Milan Fashion Week on Wednesday, said the lessons were not linked to creativity but to how the company operates. Gucci announced it would hire directors for diversity and take other measures after facing a backlash for a balaclava sweater that evoked blackface.

Michele said he took full

responsibility for the misstep. He said after experiencing the "displeasure" of the controversy, "I hold on to the beauty of having learned. I learned a lot. This remains. It is not just a moment of emotion. I think it deeply affected the work of the company."

Alessandro Michele's latest collection for Gucci was shown under unrelenting, even blinding, strobe lights that the designer said in some way evoked the intensity of everyday life. A religious hymn played as the models walked deliberately, almost robotically.

Michele chose a mask as the

metaphor for the collection, noting that "clothing is our mask, which both shows and hides."

The show invitation was glued inside a paper-mache mask of Hermaphrodite, a homage to his exploration of genderless dressing. "The ancient world sang about the marvels of being between two sexes. Today it is one of the more difficult masks to wear, but being a hybrid is a blessing," Michele said.

Still, the combined menswear and womenswear collection had a tougher, more masculine edge, shrinking ever so slightly from the designer's gender-bending musings of past seasons. It was at its heart the exploration of the suit, with broad shoulders and unfinished edges and a stronger silhouette.

The looks also combined a sense of protection and also aggression with spiky accents on the looks and on belts worn cross body. An elaborate ruffle and lace collar peaked out of an overcoat, worn with baggy trousers. Boyish striped sweaters tucked into patterned jeans.

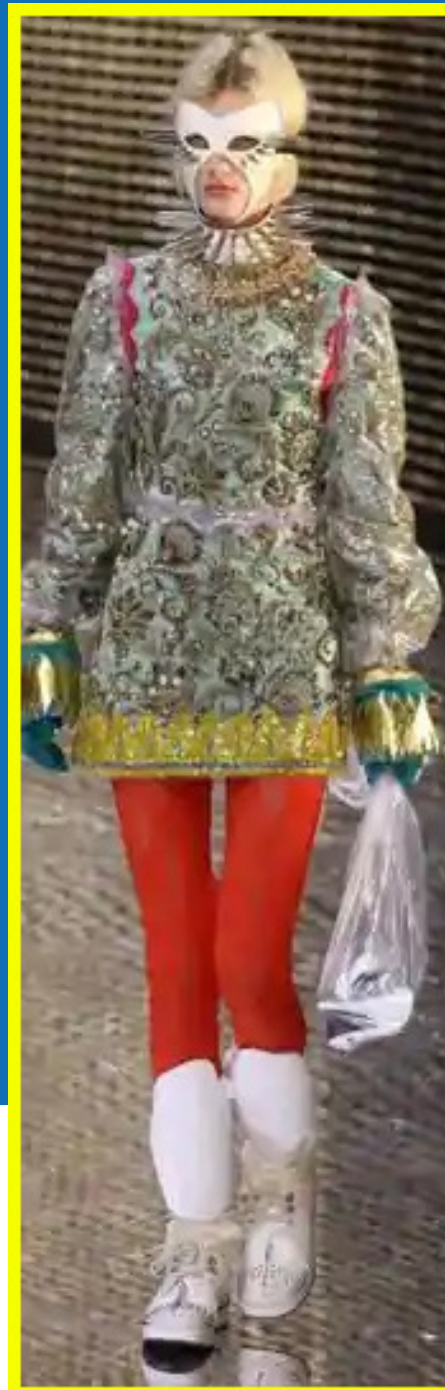
For women there were pretty silken shirts with pleated peplums over straight skirts. A gray jacket featured three concentric rounded collars, like shawls, worn with trouser pants.

Michele worked at Fendi as a young designer under Karl Lagerfeld. A day after the design legend's death, Michele recalled a man with the spirit of Peter Pan.

Michele said Lagerfeld called him "DJ" for his musical choices and insisted that the music be played at full blast.

"I loved him a lot. I am deeply sorry and not fully aware of the fact that he is no longer here. I have the impression that it is only news in the newspapers," Michele said.

Milan-based Austrian designer Arthur



Arbesser has little chance of cultural missteps in his collections. His inspiration is from the world around him — from the architecture outside his Milan studio, to the checkerboard tiles of his bathroom to the durable Loden fabrics of his native Austria.

"I don't even pretend to try to go too far. I just go where I am, and what I am surrounded with, and straightforward, honest collection, basically," Arbesser said backstage.

The color palette of the collection included muted checks in mango, lime and lavender, against larger contrasts of orange against dark blue. The contrasts playing well against the color-dotted rock-climbing wall backdrops.

The collection effused an urban modernity. Handkerchief skirts were worn with print blouses inspired by an abacus. Ribbed knitwear featured ruffle-y edges down the sleeves and long the hems. T-shirt dresses were overlaid with bodices and worn over stretchy jersey wear. A long Loden dress flowed monastically. Jackets belted over harlequin patterned tops and pleated business skirts.

"Literally, some of the things are my stuff. I mean this is my old tuxedo jacket when I was 18, and this is my boy scout pants from when I was a teenager. We just redid them in very feminine fabrics, and all the sudden they were working," Arbesser said.

Are boots the new sneakers? Here's how to wear boots with a dress



Winter is almost over and it's time to welcome spring. If you are busy packing off your winter footwear, you might want to keep at least one pair of your favourite boots aside. Boots with dresses and gowns are going to be big this spring. The trend is a hit on global ramps, right from Kate Spade's shows to those of Prabal Gurung. Fashion forwards are making the best of the trend. Michelle Obama's

high-high glittery boots by Balenciaga were quite the trendsetter. She looked spectacular in the yellow gown teamed with the boots. Models Bella Hadid and Sara Sampaio have also been rocking fun, flirty dresses with high ankle boots. Style experts say that styling your boots with dresses is a fun way to style your feminine clothing as it adds an element of sturdiness to the look.

Boots, the new sneakers

"The way sneakers became versatile and were seen being styled with everything from dresses to saris to joggers, boots, too, have become the most sought-after piece," says designer Anvita Sharma.

Style it right

Don't match your boots with your dress. "Picking colours from the same family is fine but you can't be matching it head to toe," says designer Nachiket Barve. "Also, if you are short, wearing ankle length boots with dresses would be unflattering. Wear a pair of tights in the same colour as that of the boots," he says.

Pay close attention to matters of the heart

Technology executives are notorious for believing they have special powers and are indestructible. They become obsessed with making money and achieving success — to the detriment of their health. I know because I am one of them.

Heart disease is the leading killer of adults in the US, and, according to The New York Times, Americans of south Asian extraction are four times as likely as members of the general population to develop it, and tend to do so a decade sooner.

The Times article cited a seven-year study by University of California San Francisco and Northwestern University named Mediators of Atherosclerosis in South Asians Living in America, or Masala, which followed more than 900 south Asians in Chicago and the Bay Area. They suffered from high blood pressure, high triglycerides, abnormal cholesterol, and type-2 diabetes at relatively low body weights.

I have a feeling that it isn't just my Indian friends in Silicon Valley who need to worry; heart disease is a common problem in the business world — also in India. Technology executives are

notorious for believing they have special powers and are indestructible. They become obsessed with making money and achieving success — to the detriment of their health.

I know because I am one of them.

I started a company back in 1997, which became one of the hottest startups of its time. All was great until the dot-com bubble burst and 9/11 compounded the economic shock in 2001. After a year of extremely long hours and incredible teamwork, we turned the company around and were on track for 200% annual growth rates and 25% profit margins. I was determined to make it as big a success as my previous startup, which we had taken public, and believed that nothing could stop me.

I was wrong. My body could stop me.



On a flight home from Mexico, where I went to take a short celebratory vacation, I started to feel a shooting pain in my left arm. It was as if electricity were passing through my veins. I ignored it — as I had ignored the back pain that I'd felt on the cruise to Cancún and my extreme nausea after climbing the Chichen Itza pyramid — because I thought I was indestructible.

Fortunately, my wife, Tavinder insisted that I see a doctor as soon as the flight landed. But I had not been sick in a decade and didn't have a personal physician. I didn't know whom to

call. So we just went to the nearest hospital: The University of North Carolina Medical Center. There, the nurse strapped an EKG monitor to my chest, reviewed the results, and started making phone calls. Then she pulled Tavinder aside to talk to her. Before I could understand what was going on, doctors had put me on a stretcher and taken me into an operating room, where I was sedated. I woke up to learn that I had been having a major heart attack and needed placement of two stents in my arteries. The doctor said that if I had checked in two hours later, I would not have checked out: I

would have ended up in the morgue. I share this story because I want others who are as careless about their health as I was to realise that they too are vulnerable. You may not subscribe to anything called a work-life balance, but your body certainly does. You need to monitor and nurture your body. I used to have an obsession with building businesses and forgot about building health. I was focused on the destination rather than on the journey. I caution you to not do the same. Get regular checkups; exercise; meditate; learn to relax. Do the things that are fun and good for the soul.

How exercise can help you fight jet lag symptoms

Exercise has been known to cause changes to our body clock. But can exercise help jet lag?



Finding it hard to cope with jet lag, shift-based work? Doing some exercise can shift the human body clock and help you adjust to the shifted schedules, suggests new research. The study, from the Arizona State University, showed that exercise can shift the human body clock with the direction and amount of this effect depending on the time of day or night in which people exercise. Exercising at 7 a.m. or between 1 and 4 p.m. advanced the body clock to an earlier time, and exercising between 7 and 10 p.m. delayed the body clock to a later time. Exercising between 1 and 4 a.m. and at 10 a.m., however, had little effect on the body clock, and the phase-shifting effects of exercise did not differ based on age or gender, the researchers explained. "Exercise has been known to cause changes to our body clock. We were able to clearly show in this study when exercise delays the body clock and when it advances it," said lead author Shawn Youngstedt, from the varsity, adding, "This is the first study to compare exercise's effects on the body clock, and could open up the possibility of using exercise to help counter the negative effects of jet lag and shift work."

Antarctic fungus can bring cheaper cancer drugs

At present, the anti-cancer drug costs around Rs 2,000 for a vial of 10,000 units, and the monthly cost of treatment ranges between Rs 10,000 and Rs 20,000.

Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, and National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Goa, have isolated a fungus from Antarctic soil and moss that can produce an anti-cancer drug used to treat Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL), which is a common form of childhood cancer.

The drug produced from the Antarctic fungi will be cheaper and lead to fewer side effects than the ones currently available in the market, according to researchers whose findings were published in the journal Scientific Reports this month.

ALL is a type of blood cancer where immature white blood cells are produced in excess. The chemotherapeutic enzyme currently in use to test ALL, L-Asparaginase, is isolated from bacteria such as E.Coli and E. Chrysanthemi grown in a liquid medium.

"The Antarctic fungus, on other hand, can be grown on solid mediums, mostly agricultural waste like rice husk and wheat bran and



does not need specialised medium, which brings down the cost of production," said Dr Devarai Santhosh Kumar, principal investigator and associate professor in the department of chemical engineering at IIT Hyderabad.

"The method can be easily scaled up. We already have the fungus stored in a frozen state so that we would not have to go back to collect samples for expansion of production," he added.

The National Cancer Registry programme puts the incidence of

ALL in various parts of India between 16.9 and 61.3 per million for boys and between 10.3 and 45.8 per million for girls under the age of 15. At present, the drug costs around ₹2,000 for a vial of 10,000 units, and the monthly cost of treatment ranges between ₹10,000 and ₹20,000. "The dosage depends on the height and weight of the patient. ALL patients have to take it from at least six months to several years, depending on when cancer goes into remission. Most people - six or seven of 10 in India - are not able to afford it.

Zareen Khan Calls Out Paparazzi for Objectifying Female Celebrities: “Focus on Our Faces, Not Our Bodies”

Bollywood actress Zareen Khan has spoken out against what she describes as a troubling and disrespectful trend in paparazzi culture—zooming in on female celebrities' bodies. In a recent interview with Hindi Rush, Zareen criticized photographers for capturing women from inappropriate angles and urged the media to adopt more ethical practices. “I cannot really understand today's paparazzi culture,” Zareen said. “I'm not saying all of them do it, but many zoom in on areas where there's absolutely no need to. It's disgusting.” She emphasized that celebrities are known by their faces and talents, not by invasive close-ups of their bodies, which she feels distort public perception and violate privacy. The actress, best known for her debut in *Veer*,

further questioned the common paparazzi game of posting anonymous close-up shots of body parts with captions like “Guess who?” She said such content misleads viewers and disrespects the individuals involved. “A celebrity is known by their face, right? So how can you show some random body part and ask ‘Guess who?’” she asked. Zareen's comments follow growing criticism from other female celebrities including Janhvi Kapoor, Shanaya Kapoor, Neha Bhasin, and Manushi Chhillar, all of whom have voiced discomfort with being photographed from behind or at awkward angles. Zareen added that the public seems increasingly fed up with this content, saying, “Earlier, I thought these videos were going viral because of this.”



Does 'Raj' in Yash Raj Films stand for Rajesh Khanna? The partnership that wasn't

Rajesh Khanna and Yash Chopra collaborated on two films - 'Ittefaq' and 'Daag' - before their legendary fallout. Both the films worked well, but despite the success of their partnership, the two didn't team for over a decade. 'Dark Star' by Gautam Chintamani narrates an interesting incident that might change the way you look at Yash Raj Films.



stories are to be believed, the circumstances in which Yash Chopra started his production house were far from rosy. It had been a decade since he started directing, and all his films had been for BR Chopra's production house, and it was Khanna, along with producer Gulshan Rai, who helped Yash in more ways than one when he decided to go independent. “What led to the rift between them remains a mystery. Chopra, in later

interviews, hinted that he didn't want to deal with Khanna's infamous “tantrums,” Khanna, on the other hand, claimed Chopra would make him work unnecessarily long hours. “Regardless, the success of 'Daag' should have ideally inspired a creative partnership between Rajesh Jhanna and Yash Chopra, who had seen a successful collaboration with 'Ittefaq' too. But that wasn't meant to be (sic),” Chintamani writes. Interestingly,

it was not just Chopra's journey that Khanna played a role in. According to the book, Khanna is believed to have discovered the iconic writing duo Salim-Javed. But like Chopra, they too eventually drifted away. Rajesh Khanna, the first superstar of the Hindi cinema, died on July 18, 2012 in Mumbai after a prolonged illness. He is survived by his wife, Dimple Kapadia, and daughters, Twinkle and Rinke Khanna.

Gautam Chintamani's 'Dark Star: The Loneliness of Being Rajesh Khanna', a story told through the actor's cinematic marvels and misses, includes an intriguing anecdote - one that may change how you look at Yash Raj Films (YRF).

One of India's biggest film production houses, YRF was founded by Yash Chopra, known for directing classics, and revolutionising Bollywood's idea of romance. And it all began with 'Daag: A Poem of Love' (1973). Starring Rajesh Khanna, Sharmila Tagore and Rakhee in the lead roles, 'Daag' was Chopra's directorial debut under his own production banner. That Khanna and Chopra didn't collaborate again for over a decade despite the roaring

success of the film is a well-known fact. What remains lesser known is the depth of their creative bond before the legendary fallout. As mentioned in 'Dark Star', Chopra had already established himself as a promising director but had worked only under his brother Baldev Raj Chopra's banner, BR Films. Yash Chopra wanted a fresh start, and in Rajesh Khanna, he saw that beginning. According to a section of the industry insiders, their rapport during the making of 'Daag' was so strong that they reportedly decided to co-produce the film. An excerpt from the book reads:

Even with Chopra's proven talent, the project may not have taken shape without Khanna's involvement.

The book further states: “If

Aamir Khan Returns to Singing After 27 Years, Reveals He'll Sing Two Songs in Upcoming Comedy

Aamir Khan is once again stepping behind the microphone, this time not for a one-off hit, but as a trained singer. Nearly three decades after charming audiences with Aati Kya Khandala in *Ghulam* (1998), the Bollywood icon is lending his voice to two songs in his upcoming untitled comedy. Unlike his previous casual foray into playback singing, this time Aamir is fully prepared, having undergone years of vocal training. Speaking about the project,

Aamir shared that the film is a lighthearted comedy in the spirit of legendary filmmakers Basu Chatterjee and Hrishikesh Mukherjee. “It's the kind of cinema we've forgotten how to make,” he said. “Sweet, innocent comedy. Nothing too heavy, no one's going to die. Just that warm, wonderful feeling you used to get from films back then.” Though Aamir only plays a cameo, he emphasized the role is significant—and made even more special by his contribution as a singer.





Sonam Bajwa Shoots Baaghi 4's Grand Dance Anthem, Fulfills Childhood Dream with Ganesh Acharya

Sonam Bajwa is all set to light up the screen with what's being called one of the biggest dance numbers of 2025. After a promising debut in Housefull 5, the rising star is quickly making her mark in Bollywood with high-profile projects including Baaghi 4, Deewaniyat, and Border 2. Her latest update has fans buzzing with anticipation. The actress recently took to Instagram to share a behind-the-scenes look at her experience filming a high-energy dance sequence for Baaghi 4, choreographed by the renowned Ganesh Acharya. For Sonam, the opportunity to work with Acharya on a full-scale dance performance was nothing short of a dream come true. "We shot a song for Baaghi today, and it was a dream to work with Ganesh sir," she wrote in her Instagram story. "I've

always wanted to do a dance number, and now it's finally happening. We've been shooting for a few days and it's going really well. We're all very excited." The song, reportedly shot over three days on an elaborate set in Mumbai, promises a spectacular visual treat. With elaborate choreography, vibrant visuals, and Sonam's dynamic performance, the sequence is already being positioned as one of the standout Bollywood dance anthems of the year. Sonam's graceful transition into Hindi cinema has not gone unnoticed. Known for her charm and strong screen presence, she's gradually building a diverse and exciting filmography. Baaghi 4 is expected to further cement her place among Bollywood's next wave of leading actresses.

Sara Ali Khan Reflects on Metro... In Dino, Compares Role to Kedarnath: "I'm Really Proud of Myself"

Sara Ali Khan, who made a powerful debut with Kedarnath in 2018, has once again found herself at the center of praise for her latest performance in Anurag Basu's Metro... In Dino. The actress recently opened up about the emotional depth of her role in the film, drawing comparisons to the honesty and rawness that defined her debut opposite the late Sushant Singh Rajput.

In an interview with ETimes, Sara said, "I'm about to say something that I haven't said in a long time, which is that I am really proud of myself. And the last time I probably felt this way was Kedarnath." She explained that her performance in Metro... In Dino doesn't rely on traditional Bollywood tropes like glamour, dance numbers, or exaggerated quirks. Instead, it's grounded in authenticity and restrained acting.

"I don't have the crutch of abs,

glamour, or 'Chaka Chak.' I'm not using my bubbly personality or loud voice. No rhyming sessions or knock-knocks — just pure performance," she added, emphasizing her growth as an actor and the evolution of her craft since entering the industry. Sara's debut in Kedarnath remains iconic not only for its emotional resonance but also for her chemistry with Sushant Singh Rajput, whose heartfelt performance still lingers in the minds of fans. The same sincerity is now being recognized in her portrayal alongside Aditya Roy Kapur in Metro... In Dino. Looking ahead, Sara is set to star alongside Ayushmann Khurrana in a spy comedy, marking yet another exciting chapter in her versatile film career. With Metro... In Dino, she seems to have rediscovered the creative fulfillment she once felt with Kedarnath — and audiences are here for it.

Isha Koppikar on Dreams, Burnout, and Mental Strength: "Change the Plan, Not the Goal"

In a candid and deeply motivating message to today's youth, actress Isha Koppikar opened up about the harsh realities behind ambition, failure, and mental well-being. Known for her roles in Bollywood and her grounded personality off-screen, Koppikar's latest insights cut through the glitz to speak about what it really takes to build a fulfilling life. Speaking with heartfelt honesty, Isha emphasized that dreaming without direction is a trap many fall into. "It is very important to dream," she noted, "but without a plan, it becomes an illusion. That kind of dreaming leads to exhaustion and confusion." She reminded young audiences that life begins after the applause fades — and it's

in that quiet that true resilience is tested. "Fairy tales end, but reality begins after that. Patience, planning, and mental strength are what matter." Reflecting on her own journey in the entertainment industry, Isha pointed out that success doesn't come overnight. She encouraged discipline, persistence, and a readiness to fail — all essential ingredients in a long-term plan. "Rejection is a part of it. So is passion. But the most important thing is to keep your goal intact, even if you have to change your approach." On the topic of burnout, she offered a refreshingly human perspective, urging young people to embrace rest as part of the process.



Akshay Kumar Fan Video Misleads Internet: Here's What Really Happened in London

A viral video showing Bollywood star Akshay Kumar seemingly losing his temper at a fan has sparked heated debate online, but insiders say the outrage is misplaced. The clip, which surfaced during Akshay's vacation in London, shows the actor visibly frustrated while confronting a man on a scooter. However, key context was left out—context that reveals a very different story from what social media initially portrayed.

Akshay Kumar, who was also seen with wife Twinkle Khanna at Lord's Cricket Ground during the India vs England Test match, was approached by a fan—later identified as a delivery driver—who requested a selfie. Sources close to the actor confirm that Akshay politely obliged. But after the photo was taken, the fan reportedly continued to follow him, filming relentlessly without consent. It was only after being trailed for some time that Akshay confronted the individual, resulting in the viral moment now being widely misinterpreted.

Insiders have emphasized that the video currently circulating online was selectively edited. In the original sequence of events, the selfie had already taken place. The continuous filming and pursuit by the fan is what led to Akshay's visible discomfort. The incident

reflects a growing issue faced by public figures today—the blurring of lines between fan enthusiasm and personal intrusion.

Though initial reactions online criticized the actor, many have since come to his defense. Public support is growing for the view that celebrities, like anyone else, deserve boundaries and privacy, especially when spending time with family. Fans are reminded that admiration should never cross into harassment, even unintentionally.



Kajol Admits She Doesn't Watch Her Own Films: "I'm Really Bad at It"

Despite being one of Bollywood's most iconic stars, Kajol has revealed that she rarely, if ever, watches her own movies. In a candid interview with IANS, the celebrated actress shared that she prefers reading over watching films and doesn't enjoy seeing herself on screen—even in her most acclaimed performances. "No, I don't. I'm really bad. I don't watch films, period. I am more of a reader, so I watch films very rarely," Kajol admitted. This may come as a surprise to fans who have long admired her work in classics like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. When asked which of her films she might enjoy revisiting in theatres, she mentioned those two beloved titles along with *Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha*. "I think it would be fun to watch *Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha* again," she said, hinting at a nostalgic return to cinema halls. Currently, Kajol is gearing up for the release of her next film *Sarzameen*, a poignant drama co-starring Prithviraj Sukumaran and Ibrahim Ali Khan. Speaking about her role, she said, "*Sarzameen* called for an emotional depth that really intrigued me as an actor. My character has so many layers—she is the emotional core of the story, and Kayoze's vision has portrayed it on screen in a compelling way." Kajol also praised Ibrahim Ali Khan for his performance in the film, noting how impressed she was by his portrayal of a complex character.



The curious case of 'Ladonia envoy': Inside UP man's fake embassy racket

Harshvardhan Jain ran a fake embassy in Ghaziabad, posed as envoy of fictional nations, used fake documents and cars to dupe people with job, business promises. Read on to know more about him and his operation.



By Arvind Ojha & Himanshu Mishra

In a bizarre tale that seems pulled straight out of an international espionage thriller, Uttar Pradesh's Special Task Force (STF) has busted a fake embassy operation running out of a lavish bungalow in Ghaziabad's posh Kavi Nagar area. The alleged mastermind, 47-year-old Harshvardhan Jain, presented himself as the ambassador of not one, but several self-proclaimed micronations - Westarctica, Seborga, Poulvia, and Ladonia. His ruse, which included diplomatic number-plated luxury cars, forged documents, and fake foreign connections, was used to defraud companies and individuals by offering jobs, overseas deals, and influence in return for hefty commissions.

A 'diplomat' without borders

According to investigators, Harshvardhan Jain created an entire ecosystem to support his claims. He adorned his rented white-painted bungalow with

flags of various countries and parked luxury vehicles with fake diplomatic licence plates outside. Inside, the 'embassy' resembled an international consulate, complete with forged Ministry of External Affairs seals, counterfeit diplomatic passports, and a series of elaborate stamps from imaginary countries.

STF officials say Harshvardhan Jain adopted the guise of a diplomat to manipulate perceptions and exploit aspirants hoping to land foreign projects or overseas employment. He told his victims he could facilitate government work or contracts in 'friendly' nations thanks to his so-called diplomatic status. Those 'friendly nations' were, in fact, fictional micronations recognised by no real-world government.

The Making of a Conman

Born into wealth, Harshvardhan Jain's early life showed promise. The son of JD Jain, once a top industrialist with marble mines in Rajasthan, he studied BBA in Ghaziabad and completed an MBA from the London College of Applied Science. But after his father's

death and subsequent financial losses in the family business, Jain took a dark detour. His turning point allegedly came in 2000, when he came in contact with controversial godman Chandraswami, who reportedly introduced him to international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi and London-based businessman Ehsan Ali Syed. Alongside Syed, Jain floated over a dozen companies in the UK, which authorities believe were used for laundering black money and conducting backdoor business deals.

Later, Jain moved to Dubai and partnered with shady businessmen to launch more shell firms, exploiting them to carry out 'liaison work' across Gulf and African nations. He reportedly made a small fortune by brokering fake business deals and facilitating illegal money transfers.

A Fraudulent Empire

After returning to India in 2011, Jain's activities came under scrutiny.

Ghaziabad Police

once arrested him for possessing an illegal satellite phone, a case that resurfaced during the current investigation.

But it was in 2012 that Jain took his scam global. That year, he was appointed as an 'advisor' by the self-declared principality of Seborga. In 2016, the so-called Kingdom of Westarctica named him an 'honorary ambassador'. Soon, Poulvia and Ladonia followed. Armed with fake credentials from non-existent nations, Jain began a new hustle: selling influence.

He falsely claimed diplomatic immunity, forged credentials, and ran what he called the "Westarctica Embassy" from his bungalow. Authorities say he would morph photos of himself with global leaders - including India's Prime Minister and foreign presidents - and display them to impress or dupe potential clients.

The Bust

On July 22, 2025, acting on central intelligence inputs, Noida's STF team raided the premises and arrested Jain. They were stunned to find: Jain was arrested at 11:30

pm from the residence, and a fresh FIR has been lodged under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and other applicable laws.

Not Just a One-Man Show?

While STF believes Jain operated independently, the magnitude of his deception has raised questions about possible links with a broader network. Officials are probing whether others - especially his past associates in Dubai and London - may have aided the racket, or used his operation as a front for money laundering or illegal remittances.

During interrogation, Jain reportedly admitted to operating a fake diplomatic network for several years and confirmed forging ties with dubious individuals in the arms and real estate trade.

Further investigation is underway to uncover the full scope of Jain's operations, his associates, and the victims defrauded in the name of phony diplomacy.

The cost of convenience: What we lost to 10-minute deliveries

Sure, instant delivery apps bring the world to your doorstep. But convenience comes at a cost - and it's not what you pay, it's what you miss.

By Medha Chawla

The year is 2006. I'm a 10-year-old in class 6, living in the middle of one of Delhi's busiest markets, Sarojini Nagar. Back then, it was a full-blown family market, buzzing with everything from clothes and footwear to electronics, furniture and stationery. I would often descend three floors to buy milk, bread, eggs or vegetables.

Whenever guests turned up unannounced, Mum would quietly slip me a Rs 50 note to fetch essentials. Like an obedient kid who obviously enjoyed these mini escapes from the four walls of home since there were no phones to stay glued to, I would rush through the busy lanes - without noticing the cool 'Sarojini ke kapde' hanging around the shops and walls - to Santosh Dairy. Even before I would say a word, the shop owner would guess if I was back again for a litre of Mother Dairy toned milk and 250 grams paneer. Other days, I would go first and say, "Bhaiya, ek kilo toned," only to be corrected that milk is measured in litres and not kilos. "Oh haan, sorry bhaiya," I'd mumble, grinning sheepishly.

Other errands included fetching tomatoes. The joy of being recognised, of being known! Some evenings, I'd manage to fill the steel pan of the weighing scale with exactly 1 kilo of tomatoes. No adjustments needed - no adding or removing a tomato - once the vendor placed the 1 kg weight on the other side. Oh, what a win that felt like!

These small market runs taught me more than I realised at the time: quick mental maths, conversations with strangers, backup plans when a shop was shut. So much unintentional learning! PS: Even the negotiation skills (though still questionable) came from that free dhaniya-mirchi! Even as we moved through several homes across Delhi-NCR, what made a new place feel like home was the act of discovering a local kiraana store-and slowly becoming a familiar face there. Especially for my mother, who had transitioned from a joint family setup to a nuclear one. Those small market interactions were more than errands for her.

Instant delivery services enter the scene

Then came Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart - offering 10-minute deliveries and one-click convenience.



Slowly and silently, they started replacing these tiny rituals. And while they've made things easier, they've also taken many intangibles. It's 2025. There's no such thing as a 9 to 5 anymore. Work spills into all hours, and even after office, most of us are still answering messages and emails. Who wants to go downstairs just for a tray of eggs? Well, I still do.

I enjoy picking up rice paper and fresh veggies after work to make dinner rolls. I'll grab milk, Holi colours, or even Shivratri samagri from the local shop when I can. But my mother? She's fully adapted. Even during Karwa Chauth, she ordered a pre-curated thali—sindoor, bangles, bindi and more—all delivered within minutes. It's efficient, no doubt. But sometimes I wonder: what happened to those small outings with Dad, where they handpicked everything with care?

Her day now begins with comparing prices on Zepto, Blinkit or Instamart. Whichever offers the best deal gets the order. In the evening, if the house help mentions a missing item, she's already reaching for her phone to place an order.

Earlier, her grocery runs doubled up as mini walks. They boosted her mood,

gave her steps (which the doctor says she needs many), and connected her to the neighbourhood. She'd stop to get a gas stove fixed, browse for a new suit, or snack on some fresh namkeen. Step count goals, anyone?

The hidden costs of overdependency on instant delivery

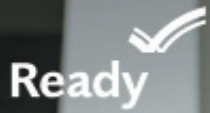
The sabziwala would not only help her pick the freshest produce but also proudly inform her when he had brought kathal especially for her. In winter, she'd handpick bunches of sarson saag and get them chopped right there. While at it, she would also bump into an old aunty and talk about things ranging from increased prices of suit stitching, health concerns to any new colony scandal. These small exchanges filled in the quiet spaces of the day. They made sure loneliness didn't. But it's not just her. Many of us are drifting in this direction - leaning more on apps, less on people. Our growing reliance on instant delivery is shrinking those everyday moments of interaction. The ones that quietly stitched our lives together.

That's not the only cost. There's

the financial one too. When you're too tired or too busy to plan your groceries, you end up ordering in pieces - adding things you didn't need just to hit the free-delivery minimum. Or paying more for one forgotten item. Whatever happened to monthly planning!

Then there's the emotional trade-off - instant gratification. It's so easy to cave in to a late-night craving and order a bowl of ramen after watching a Reel. Before you've even thought about whether you really need it, it's already on its way. That quick dopamine hit doesn't last long.

Of course, these apps are a blessing on tough days. When you're sick or short on time, they can be a lifeline. For people in under-served areas, they offer genuine access. This isn't about demonising convenience. But maybe, next time you feel like swiping through a grocery app, head to a local shop instead. You might return with more than just groceries. A smile, a chat, a sense of connection and perhaps a small win with the weighing scale. Sometimes, the cost of convenience isn't what you pay. It's what you miss.



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