

The South Asian Insider

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The \$6.5 Billion Anatomy of Corruption: Inside the Largest Healthcare Fraud Takedown in U.S. History

In the largest coordinated healthcare fraud takedown in American history, the Justice Department charged 455 defendants - doctors, nurses, corporate executives, and fugitives hiding from Cyprus to Vietnam - for stealing \$6.5 billion from Medicare, Medicaid, and the American patient. Here is how the fraud worked, who is charged, and what it means for a system built on trust.

2026 NATIONAL HEALTH CARE FRAUD TAKEDOWN

- 455 DEFENDANTS CHARGED IN 56 FEDERAL DISTRICTS ACROSS 46 STATES & TERRITORIES
- \$6.5 BILLION IN FALSE CLAIMS
- \$182+ MILLION IN CASH, VEHICLES, AND OTHER ASSETS SEIZED
- 1,079 PROVIDERS SUSPENDED
- 1,403 PROVIDERS REVOKED
- THE LARGEST COORDINATED HEALTH CARE FRAUD ACTION IN DOJ HISTORY

EXAMPLES OF ALLEGED FRAUD SCHEMES

- ATHLETE DIES AFTER CARDIOLOGIST CLEARED HIM IN 11 SECONDS
- UNNECESSARY WOUND GRAFTS BILLED FOR MILLIONS PER PATIENT
- PROCEEDS USED TO FUND \$4.6 MILLION BEACH RESORT IN THE PHILIPPINES
- \$3.76 BILLION IN EQUIPMENT CLAIMS NEVER DELIVERED - FLED TO CYPRUS
- MOTHER-DAUGHTER BILLED MEDICARE (MOTHER WAS IN FEDERAL PRISON)

TODD BLANCHE
ACTING ATTORNEY GENERAL

ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.
SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DR. MEHMET OZ
CMS ADMINISTRATOR

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The Billion-Dollar Body Count

In the largest coordinated healthcare fraud takedown in American history, the Justice Department charged 455 defendants - doctors, nurses, corporate executives, and fugitives hiding from Cyprus to Vietnam - for stealing \$6.5 billion from Medicare, Medicaid, and the American patient. Here is how the fraud worked, who is charged, and what it means for a system built on trust.

(By The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigative Desk)

The press conference room at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., on June 23, 2026, was unusually crowded for a Tuesday morning. Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche stood at the podium flanked by FBI Director Kash Patel, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz — a full tableau of the Trump administration's senior health and law enforcement apparatus. What they had assembled to announce was, by any measure, extraordinary: the 2026 National Health Care Fraud Takedown, resulting in charges against 455 defendants in 56 federal districts across 45 states and territories, for schemes involving more than \$6.5 billion in false claims submitted to Medicare, Medicaid, and other government health programs.

It was, Blanche said, the largest coordinated healthcare fraud enforcement action in the history of the Justice Department — a claim that requires some immediate qualification. The \$6.5 billion figure is the second-largest dollar amount ever charged in a single healthcare fraud operation; last year's takedown, targeting \$14.6 billion in false claims, still holds the record. But in terms of the breadth of federal-state-international coordination, the number of defendants, and the novelty of tools deployed — including data analytics, international fugitive apprehension, and a newly created FBI Most Wanted Fraudsters List — the 2026 takedown represents a genuine escalation of the government's war on healthcare fraud.

'This is just the beginning,' Blanche said at the podium. 'If you seek to harm or cheat Americans, we will find you.'

What the press conference didn't fully convey — what no press conference about healthcare fraud ever quite does — is the human texture of what is alleged in these cases. The \$6.5 billion in false claims is not an abstraction. It corresponds, case by case, to specific acts of

betrayal: a cardiologist who approved a student athlete's cardiac test results in eleven seconds and cleared him to play sports, knowing he had an enlarged heart, and whose patient died of sudden cardiac arrest on a basketball court twenty-four days later. A Texas nurse practitioner who billed Medicare more than a million dollars per patient for wound grafts she applied to people who didn't need them, and used the proceeds to build a \$4.6 million beach resort in the Philippines. A Miami man who submitted \$3.76 billion in fraudulent claims for medical equipment that was never delivered, then wired the money overseas and fled to Cyprus. And a mother-daughter pair who billed Medicare for wound care services while the mother — the licensed nurse practitioner listed as the provider of record — was serving time in federal prison.

I. THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE TAKEDOWN

The 2026 National Health Care Fraud Takedown was conducted over approximately two weeks, beginning June 8 and culminating in Tuesday's announcement. The operation represents a collaboration between the DOJ's Health Care Fraud Strike Force — first established in 2007 — and an unprecedented roster of partner agencies: the FBI, HHS's Office of Inspector General, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and all 50 state Medicaid Fraud Control Units, the largest state-level participation in the program's history.

The Strike Force has, since its founding, charged more than 6,200 defendants tied to over \$45 billion in alleged fraudulent billing. The 2026 takedown adds a significant chapter. According to the DOJ, the operation resulted in: 455 defendants charged, including 90 doctors and licensed medical professionals; 295 defendants charged in Medicaid fraud schemes representing over \$518 million in false claims — the largest Medicaid fraud charge count in department history; seizure of

more than \$182 million in cash, luxury vehicles, jewelry, and other assets; suspension of billing privileges for 1,079 providers by CMS; revocation of billing privileges for 1,403 additional providers; resolution of 48 civil monetary payment settlements generating over \$73 million; and over 1,400 provider exclusions.

Perhaps most striking is the addition of an international dimension. In cooperation with the governments of Estonia, the Philippines, and Turkey, the DOJ apprehended multiple fugitives who had fled the United States to avoid prosecution — a development that signals a new phase in federal healthcare fraud enforcement.

II. THE WOUND CARE GOLD RUSH: SKIN GRAFTS AS A FINANCIAL INSTRUMENT

If there is a single fraud typology that dominates the 2026 takedown, it is the exploitation of amniotic wound allografts — synthetic skin substitutes, derived from placental tissue, that are legitimately used to treat chronic, difficult-to-heal wounds. What prosecutors allege, across multiple cases, is that these products became the instrument of a systematic fraud machine, in which the medical utility of the graft was irrelevant and the billing opportunity was everything.

The numbers are almost incomprehensible. According to the DOJ's Health Care Fraud Unit, between approximately 2021 and 2024, providers billed Medicare over \$4 billion for a single company's allografts, resulting in over \$2 billion in actual payments. The company at the center of the scheme — whose vice president of sales

"CMS is done playing catch-up. We're deploying advanced data analytics to expose fraud networks, freeze suspicious payments, and shut down bad actors before they can do damage." - CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, June 23, 2026

was charged in the District of Arizona — did not manufacture its allografts. Instead, it acquired them from tissue banks, relabeled them, and resold them at a 2,000 percent markup, charging up to \$1,450 per square centimeter. The defendant is alleged to have paid kickbacks of approximately 40 percent of the purchase price — roughly \$500 to \$600 per square centimeter — to marketers and medical providers who participated in the scheme.

These kickbacks, prosecutors allege, created perverse incentives that caused providers to apply allografts to patients who did not need them — including hospice patients whose wounds were superficial, infected, or actively healing — without coordinating with treating physicians, and to areas far larger than the actual wound. The fraud was, in other words, not merely financial. It was medical: people were subjected to unnecessary procedures because their wounds were more valuable to the fraudsters than their health was.

In the Southern District of Texas, a nurse practitioner was charged in what prosecutors describe as a \$906 million scheme — one of the largest individual cases in the entire takedown — in which she allegedly applied medically unnecessary allografts and billed Medicare more than \$1 million per patient on average. The government seized over \$30 million in bank accounts, a \$594,000 Ferrari 296 GTS, seven

other high-end vehicles, an \$865,000 custom Bulgari necklace, and \$1 million in other luxury jewelry. She also allegedly used the proceeds to fund the construction of a \$4.6 million beach resort in the Philippines.

In the Middle District of Florida, three defendants — including nurse practitioner Leigh Tesar of Sarasota — were charged in an \$118 million allograft scheme. Tesar allegedly targeted Medicare patients, including some whose wounds were infected or unlikely to heal, and billed for allografts that investigators say were unnecessary, ineligible for payment, or never provided. Two nurses — Walter Presha Jr. of Ellenton and Koby Evans of Apollo Beach — were charged alongside her for allegedly referring Medicare patients to Tesar in exchange for illegal kickbacks.

The sheer scale of allograft fraud alarmed CMS enough that the agency took administrative action even as criminal cases were being developed. Beginning January 1, 2026, CMS reduced Medicare's payment for allografts to \$127 per square centimeter — down from a rate that had been generating extraordinary profits. According to the DOJ, if CMS had not acted, the Part B premium increase caused by allograft payments alone would have cost every Medicare beneficiary in the country an extra \$11 per month.

The result has been dramatic: Medicare claims for allografts, which totaled \$14.4 billion in

SELECTED CASES: WOUND ALLOGRAFT FRAUD

Southern District of Texas — Nurse practitioner charged in \$906 million scheme; billed Medicare \$1M+ per patient on average. Seizures include \$30M in accounts, \$594K Ferrari, \$865K Bulgari necklace, \$4.6M Philippines beach resort.

Middle District of Florida — Nurse practitioner Leigh Tesar (Sarasota) charged in \$118M scheme. Co-defendants Walter Presha Jr. (Ellenton) and Koby Evans (Apollo Beach) charged with kickback referrals.

District of Arizona — VP of Sales for allograft company charged in nationwide kickback scheme. \$4B in Medicare billings, \$2B in payments. Company marked up products 2,000%; paid 40% kickbacks.

Southern District of Florida — DOJ seized over \$27M in fraudulent Medicare payments from 12 'bust-out' clinics that billed for allografts never provided to patients.

2025, have plummeted to approximately \$100 million since the start of 2026. The fraud market was not merely enabled by Medicare's payment structure — it was entirely dependent on it.

III. THE HOSPICE RACKET: BILLING THE DYING AND THE DEAD

Hospice fraud is among the most morally corrosive categories of healthcare fraud — not merely because of the dollars involved, but because of who it targets. Hospice care is designed for people at the end of life, people whose last weeks and months are supposed to be characterized by comfort, dignity, and the presence of those they love. Fraudsters who exploit hospice billing are, by definition, monetizing human mortality.

In the Los Angeles case, Oren David Shachar, 59, of Van Nuys, was charged — alongside Abraham Shin, 66, of Corona, and Jeannie Choi, 57, of Torrance — in a 16-count indictment alleging conspiracy to defraud Medicare of approximately \$27 million. Prosecutors allege the scheme involved a particularly grotesque mechanism: Shachar allegedly enrolled patients who were not terminally ill in hospice programs and, after some patients died, billed Medicare for a few days of hospice services purportedly delivered to the recently deceased — then created fake, backdated medical records claiming a physician had seen the patients. The purpose of the backdated records was to manipulate outlier data metrics used by Medicare to detect suspicious billing patterns.

The \$27 million in fraudulent claims is notable in itself, but the scheme's logic is representative of a broader pattern the government says it found in hospice billing nationwide: patients who don't need hospice enrolled because hospice billing is lucrative; patients who die used as billing vehicles for phantom care; and falsified records created to cover the tracks.

A separate San Fernando Valley case involved a man charged with operating hospice care companies that fraudulently billed Medicare approximately \$27 million. In Southern California overall, federal law enforcement arrested five defendants as part of the takedown, including a Whittier woman who participated in a scheme that submitted nearly \$270 million in fraudulent claims to Medi-Cal for expensive

prescription drugs.

IV. THE STUDENT ATHLETE WHO DIED: CARDIOVASCULAR FRAUD AND ITS COSTS

Among the cases in the 2026 takedown, one stands apart — not for the dollar amount involved, but for what it says about the ultimate cost of medical fraud when the incentives of financial crime override the obligations of clinical care.

In the Southern District of Florida — and with parallel proceedings in Tarrant County, Texas — cardiologist Dr. Jason Finkelstein, 53, was charged in an \$89 million scheme involving fraudulent cardiovascular screening tests conducted on student athletes. According to the indictment, Finkelstein's practice marketed its services to student athletes and their schools by exploiting parental fears about sudden cardiac arrest — the leading cause of death among young athletes during exercise. The pitch: get screened, protect your child.

What Finkelstein allegedly did with the results was the antithesis of protection. Prosecutors allege he routinely rubber-stamped test results as normal without personally

"Despite knowing that these kids could be high risk, the defendant rubber-stamped test results as normal without reviewing them - sometimes in mere seconds." - DOJ Indictment, 2026

reviewing them — sometimes approving test results within seconds of accessing the images. In one instance that has become the symbolic heart of the government's case against him, the defendant allegedly signed off on a set of 63 cardiovascular test result images as normal within approximately 11 seconds of accessing them. Those images showed a student athlete with an enlarged heart — a condition that, if not properly managed, dramatically increases the risk of sudden cardiac arrest during exertion.

The student was cleared to play. Twenty-four days later, that student collapsed and died on a basketball court.

The young athlete's mother provided a statement about the case, which was read by Dr. Oz at the Department of Justice press conference. The government says Finkelstein knew the risks. In one documented communication, he wrote to a colleague that "these kids could be high risk ... one of them drops dead on the field,

INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE CASES

Ibrahim Hilmi (Miami ?! Cyprus) — \$3.76B in false Medicaid/Medicare claims for phantom medical equipment. Apprehended in Kyrenia, Cyprus.

Herb Kimble (Philippines) — \$1.2B telemedicine/DME scheme. FBI's first Most Wanted Fraudster, captured 4 days after listing.

Estonia Defendants — Two members of Hilmi's organization, previously charged in \$10.6B scheme, apprehended in Estonia and extradited to EDNY.

Khalid Satary (UAE) — \$547M genetic testing Medicare fraud. Released on bond, fled country. Believed in UAE. Now on Most Wanted Fraudsters list.

Emylee Thai (Vietnam) — \$90M genetic testing scheme. Cut ankle monitor, fled via private charter with fake passport. Now on Most Wanted Fraudsters list.

they're coming after both of us.' He apparently accepted that risk as a cost of doing business.

The \$89 million figure represents what prosecutors allege was billed to insurers for the medically unnecessary tests. But the human cost — one young life, ended prematurely because a physician chose billing over care — is not reducible to dollars.

V. THE MEDICAID SURGE: A RECORD IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

Buried within the headline figure of \$6.5 billion in alleged fraud is a subset that received particular attention from officials on Tuesday: the Medicaid component. The 2026 takedown includes 295 defendants charged with Medicaid fraud involving more than \$518 million in false claims — the largest number of Medicaid fraud defendants and

the largest Medicaid fraud loss charged in DOJ history.

Medicaid fraud differs from Medicare fraud in important ways. Medicare is a federal program serving seniors and certain disabled individuals; Medicaid is jointly funded by federal and state governments and serves lower-income Americans, including children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities. Because Medicaid is administered at the state level, prosecuting Medicaid fraud requires the kind of federal-state coordination that has historically been difficult to sustain. The 2026 takedown's deployment of all 50 state Medicaid Fraud Control Units is a meaningful operational achievement.

The cases span an extraordinary range of schemes. In Illinois, defendants were charged with submitting \$67 million in false Medicaid claims for behavioral health services that were never provided. In Saratoga County, New York, Joseph Carl and Randolph 'Randy' Ekstrom

were charged with conspiracy in a \$4.2 million Medicaid fraud and kickback scheme involving taxi transportation — submitting claims for Medicaid-covered medical transport that either never occurred or was inflated. In Albany, New York, taxi operators and employees were charged in a separate \$660,000 Medicaid transportation fraud scheme.

In California, five individuals were arrested for allegedly submitting nearly \$270 million in fraudulent claims to Medi-Cal for expensive prescription drugs — among them Christina Mareik, 61, of Whittier, also known as Christina Marie Sanchez Hernandez.

Utah Attorney General Derek Brown, whose state participated in the takedown, issued a blunt statement: 'Defrauding Medicaid isn't a paperwork problem — it's theft from every Utahn who pays into this system and plays by the rules. These defendants treated a program meant to help vulnerable people as their own personal ATM.'

VI. THE INTERNATIONAL HUNT: FUGITIVES FROM CYPRUS TO VIETNAM

The 2026 takedown is the first in the program's history to feature what the DOJ is calling 'unprecedented international cooperation' — and the cases that illustrate that cooperation are among the most dramatic in the entire operation.

In the Southern District of Florida, Ibrahim Hilmi of Miami was charged in connection with \$3.76 billion in false claims for urinary catheters, wound dressings, and other durable medical equipment that was never provided to patients. Hilmi's companies submitted the claims, used company bank accounts to move the fraud proceeds — including millions of dollars wired overseas — and then he fled. Federal agents tracked him to Kyrenia, in northern Cyprus, where he was apprehended and returned to the United States, making his initial appearance in the Southern

District of Florida.

Two other members of Hilmi's alleged organization had been charged in last year's takedown. They were apprehended in Estonia, extradited to the United States, and made their initial appearances in the Eastern District of New York on June 12. The full scope of the scheme — combining this year's \$3.7 billion with the previously charged portion — represents one of the largest individual healthcare fraud cases ever brought.

The Philippines produced a second international capture. On June 4, the FBI announced the creation of a Most Wanted Fraudsters List — a new initiative modeled on the long-established Most Wanted list. The list's first published fugitive was Herb Kimble, wanted in connection with a \$1.2 billion telemedicine and durable medical equipment fraud scheme. On June 8 — four days after his name was published — Kimble was apprehended in the Philippines and returned to the United States.

The speed of Kimble's apprehension after being named on the new Most Wanted list is, the DOJ suggests, partly a demonstration of the list's value as a law enforcement tool. As of Tuesday, two new names were added to the list: Khalid Satary, wanted in a \$547 million genetic testing Medicare fraud scheme, who fled the country after being released on bond and is believed to be in the United Arab Emirates; and Emylee Thai, wanted in a \$90 million genetic testing Medicare fraud scheme, who cut off her ankle monitor, obtained a fake passport, and fled to Vietnam via private charter.

The international reach of the fraud — and the international reach of enforcement — reflects a broader truth about modern healthcare fraud: it is not local crime. It is transnational organized financial crime that happens to use American healthcare programs as its mechanism of extraction.

VII. OPIOIDS IN THE MIX: WHEN FRAUD BECOMES ADDICTION

The 2026 takedown is not solely a financial crime story. Woven through the healthcare fraud cases is a separate but related thread: the alleged illegal diversion of prescription opioids and other controlled substances by licensed medical professionals.

According to the DOJ, 36 defendants — including 28 licensed medical professionals — were charged in connection with the illegal diversion of prescription opioids and other controlled substances that resulted in patient harm. In the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, three defendants were charged with conspiracy to unlawfully distribute controlled substances.

In Albany, New York, Dr. Douglas Cline and nurse practitioner Laurie McKenna agreed to pay \$500,000 to resolve civil actions brought by the United States involving unlawful opioid prescribing practices; both were barred from DEA registration for 20 years.

The inclusion of opioid diversion cases alongside billing fraud cases is not accidental. The two categories of misconduct often overlap: a physician willing to prescribe opioids without adequate clinical justification is often the same physician willing to certify unnecessary procedures or sign off on fraudulent billing documentation. The corruption is not siloed. It is systemic.

The DEA has tracked 928 administrative cases since October 1, 2025 seeking to revoke authority to handle or prescribe controlled substances — a number that suggests the 36 defendants charged this week represent only a fraction of the licensed prescribers whose conduct has drawn federal scrutiny.

VIII. THE TECHNOLOGY SHIFT: FROM 'PAY AND CHASE' TO PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

Perhaps the most significant long-term implication of the 2026 takedown is not the number of defendants or the dollar amount, but the shift in enforcement methodology it represents.

For decades, healthcare fraud enforcement operated on a 'pay and chase' model: Medicare and Medicaid would pay a claim, discover months or years later that it was fraudulent, and then

try to recover the money after the fact. The model was structurally inadequate. By the time the government identified a fraudulent billing pattern and built a criminal case, the fraudsters had often collected millions or billions of dollars, and in many instances had already transferred the proceeds overseas or spent them on assets that were difficult to recover.

The 2026 takedown signals a meaningful departure. According to the DOJ, the Health Care Fraud Unit's Data Analytics Team has been deployed to detect anomalous billing patterns before payments are finalized — or, in some cases, to identify suspicious patterns in real time and freeze payments before the money leaves the system. In the Southern District of Florida, investigators used what the DOJ calls a 'follow and seize the money' approach, resulting in the seizure of over \$27 million in fraudulent Medicare payments from 12 clinics that billed for allografts never provided — an approach that prevented those funds from ever reaching the fraudsters.

CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, speaking at the Tuesday press conference, framed the shift in stark terms: 'CMS is done playing catch-up. We're deploying advanced data analytics to expose fraud networks, freeze suspicious payments, and shut down bad actors before they can do damage to the programs that millions of Americans depend on.'

The DOJ and CMS also announced a new data-sharing agreement on Tuesday: the Fraud Division will be provided cloud computing space within CMS's infrastructure, allowing prosecutors and data scientists to work directly with claims data at a scale and speed previously unavailable. This kind of integration between prosecutorial and administrative functions is genuinely novel — and if sustained, could fundamentally alter the economics of healthcare fraud.

IX. ARE OTHER INVESTIGATIONS ONGOING? THE BROADER ENFORCEMENT HORIZON

The 2026 takedown is, as Acting AG Blanche said at the podium, the beginning rather than the end. Several lines of investigation are clearly

ongoing, and the operational infrastructure assembled for this year's action suggests it will be sustained and expanded.

The newly created FBI Most Wanted Fraudsters List, with two new additions announced Tuesday, is explicitly designed as an ongoing deterrence and apprehension tool. The addition of Khalid Satary and Emylee Thai — both fugitives in genetic testing fraud schemes — signals that the government's scrutiny of genetic testing billing, a category that has seen explosive growth and exploitation in recent years, is nowhere near complete.

The Medicaid expansion is similarly open-ended. Acting AAG Colin McDonald noted Tuesday that the Acting Attorney General had recently authorized an enhancement for the Health Care Fraud Unit to investigate Medicaid fraud nationwide — a significant jurisdictional expansion that will generate additional prosecutions in coming months and years.

The North Texas cases also hint at deeper investigations. Alongside the publicly announced charges against cardiologist Jason Finkelstein, newly unsealed indictments in the Northern District of Texas revealed a Frisco counselor accused of using TRICARE fraud proceeds to fund luxury purchases, and a wound-care executive accused of paying tens of millions of dollars in kickbacks while accumulating luxury homes, vehicles, and a private jet. A superseding indictment involving physicians Olubayo Idowu and James Lou Carlisle Jr. and nurse practitioner Vaughn Brozek alleges a kickback scheme tied to ambulatory EEG testing in which patients were paid to undergo testing and physicians received shares of insurance reimbursements — with diagnoses allegedly exaggerated or fabricated to justify the tests. The indictment alleges more than \$25 million in fraudulent claims.

Beyond the specific cases, the structural conditions that generate healthcare fraud have not changed. Medicare and Medicaid together represent

approximately \$1.6 trillion in annual federal spending — the largest single pool of federal expenditure in the domestic budget. The programs operate through a decentralized network of providers, billing agents, intermediaries, and subcontractors whose conduct cannot be fully monitored in real time. And the penalties, historically, have not been deterrent: even a large fraud scheme, if discovered after five or ten years, may have generated enough profit that the expected value of the enterprise remained positive even accounting for the risk of prosecution.

The government's answer to that calculation is the one on display this week: overwhelming force, applied simultaneously, with consequences that are visible and public. Whether it changes the underlying mathematics of healthcare fraud depends on how consistently, and how durably, that force is applied.

X. THE POLITICAL FRAMING: DOGE, RFK, AND THE ADMINISTRATION'S ANTI-FRAUD BRAND

The 2026 National Health Care Fraud Takedown did not arrive in a political vacuum. It is, in important ways, a product of the broader ideological project of the second Trump administration — particularly its emphasis on government waste, fraud, and abuse as organizing principles for domestic policy.

The White House Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, led by the administration and working alongside the DOJ and FBI, provided the institutional architecture for the 2026 action. FBI Director Kash Patel explicitly credited 'the leadership of President Trump, Vice President Vance, and the White House Task Force' in his statement at Tuesday's press conference. HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — whose profile in healthcare policy has been defined by skepticism toward established medical institutions — described the alleged fraud as 'particularly disturbing' and signaled HHS's commitment to expanded enforcement.

The presence of Dr. Mehmet Oz at the podium — a television personality and politician turned

CMS administrator — added a note of populist theatricality to the proceedings. But the substantive policy action Oz described, the reduction of allograft payment rates and the deployment of data analytics, are real and meaningful administrative changes that have already demonstrably reduced the scale of one category of fraud.

The administration's critics will note that the Medicaid fraud crackdown arrives in a political environment where the same administration has proposed deep cuts to Medicaid funding through congressional reconciliation legislation. There is an apparent tension in simultaneously charging 295 people with Medicaid fraud while also proposing to restructure and reduce the program that funds the care those fraud defendants allegedly stole from. Supporters of the administration will argue that fraud enforcement and program reform are complementary, not contradictory — that the resources wasted on fraud are resources that would otherwise serve legitimate beneficiaries.

Whatever the political context, the enforcement action itself is real. Four hundred and fifty-five people have been charged. Three international fugitives have been apprehended. More than \$182 million in assets have been seized. The pharmacist who billed for drugs never dispensed, the nurse who certified phantom home health visits, the corporate executive who paid kickbacks to doctors willing to apply unnecessary wound grafts to elderly and hospice patients — all of them now face the federal criminal justice system.

EDITOR'S NOTE

All defendants named in this report are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law. This report is based on the DOJ's official press release (June 23, 2026), the HHS Office of Inspector General takedown page, and reporting by The Wall Street Journal, The Hill, CNN, NBC News, the Associated Press, the Deseret News, WUSF, the Indianapolis Recorder, Becker's ASC, NBC DFW, and Fox News. The South Asian Insider Weekly will continue to report on developments in the 2026 National Health Care Fraud Takedown as they emerge.

The Fixer Who Got Fixed

How Frank Carone — Brooklyn powerbroker, former City Hall gatekeeper, and the most trusted man in Eric Adams's orbit — allegedly turned New York's migrant crisis into a private cash machine, and what his arrest reveals about the rotted infrastructure of the Adams years.

(By The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigative Desk)

The federal agents arrived at Frank Carone's Manhattan apartment in the early hours of Wednesday morning, June 24, 2026 — more than three years after the scheme they allege he executed, and more than three years since the migrant crisis that made it possible. The arrest, which set off a cascade of developments across the city before most New Yorkers had poured their first coffee, is the latest — and perhaps the most consequential — act in the long legal unraveling of the Adams years.

Carone, 56, a former Marine, Brooklyn Law graduate, and longtime consigliere to Eric Adams, was taken into custody by the FBI along with his brother, Anthony Carone, as well as two others: Yan Po Zhu, a Queens hotel owner, and Crystal Chen, an employee of Zhu's Microtel hotel in Long Island City. By midday, a federal grand jury indictment returned on June 12 — sealed for nearly two weeks — was unsealed in the Eastern District of New York, laying out in cold, granular detail what prosecutors say was a scheme to exploit the desperation of tens of thousands of newly arrived migrants for personal profit.

The total bribery amount, according to the indictment: approximately \$120,000. For the man who helped architect a mayor's rise to power, who spearheaded New York City's bid to host the 2024 Democratic National Convention, and who sat on the board of the Museum of Modern Art, the number feels almost bathetically small. And yet it stands as a precise representation of how the Adams administration allegedly worked: a city in crisis, an emergency procurement process thrown wide open, and men who believed their proximity to power entitled them to skim from it.

I. THE MAKING OF A BROOKLYN POWERBROKER

To understand Frank Carone's

alleged crime, you must first understand Frank Carone's rise — because the indictment only makes sense against the backdrop of a career built entirely on access, leverage, and the quiet business of knowing who needs what from whom.

Carone was born in 1969 in

"In total, Zhu and Chen paid approximately \$120,000 to F. Carone in exchange for an Emergency Shelter Contract for the Microtel." - Federal Indictment, EDNY, June 12, 2026

Canarsie, Brooklyn, one of those densely ethnic, deeply machine-political neighborhoods that have always produced more than their share of fixers. After a stint in the United States Marine Corps from 1993 to 1995, he earned his law degree from Brooklyn Law School and began building the two interlocking careers — legal work for private clients and organizational work for the Brooklyn Democratic Party — that would define his professional life for the next three decades.

His law firm partnership with Frank Seddio, the former Assemblyman and Brooklyn Democratic Party boss, was formative. Seddio ran the Kings County Democratic Committee with an iron grip for years, controlling judicial nominations and parceling out favors with the precision of a chess grandmaster. Carone stood beside him and watched. He learned what power looked like from the inside: not speeches or press releases, but the management of relationships, the careful cultivation of dependency. When Seddio faced a palace revolt at a raucous 2018 party meeting from younger reformers, Carone was in the room, on the right side.

In 2011, Carone joined the law firm Abrams Fensterman, a Brooklyn institution that functioned as something of a political ecosystem unto itself — advising campaigns, representing real estate developers seeking rezonings, and navigating the labyrinthine

world of city contracting. His practice 'exploded,' as Politico once put it. He secured city contracts for developers others called 'reviled.' He represented nursing homes, hospital systems, and taxi fleet owners — all industries deeply entangled with city government. He helped

lobbyists navigate controversial land-use disputes. By the time Eric Adams launched his 2021 mayoral campaign, Carone was arguably the single most networked private lawyer in Brooklyn.

II. THE YEARS AT CITY HALL

Mayor Eric Adams named Frank Carone his chief of staff in January 2022, shortly after taking office. The appointment was, to those who followed New York City politics, something close to inevitable. Carone had been Adams's lawyer, fundraiser, and closest political confidant for more than a decade. He had championed Adams's run for Brooklyn Borough President in 2013 and his successful mayoral campaign in 2021. He was the man who, more than anyone else, had built the political machinery that put Adams in Gracie Mansion.

At City Hall, Carone was, in the description of Crain's New York Business, 'instrumental in forming the administration's policy.' He was the gatekeeper

to the mayor — the person whose approval you sought before seeking the mayor's, whose relationship you had to have if you wanted your project moved, your issue advanced, your concern heard. Among his projects: repairing the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway waterfront, shepherding the city's ultimately failed bid to host the 2024 Democratic National Convention, and shepherding negotiations over a potential New York City Football Club stadium in Queens.

But it was the spring and summer of 2022 that would prove determinative — not just for Carone, but for the entire Adams administration. Southern state governors, including Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida, had begun busing migrants to Democratic-run cities in a political gambit that was both a provocation and, inadvertently, a stress test of urban governance. New York, with its 'right to shelter' legal obligation, was hit harder than almost any other American city. By the end of 2022, the city had committed to housing more than 60,000 migrants and asylum seekers, spending billions of dollars on emergency shelter contracts with hotels, converted facilities, and humanitarian relief organizations. The procurement process, operating under emergency rules that bypassed normal competitive bidding, was a gold rush.

The culture that quote captures — spoken by Timothy Pearson, an Adams associate assigned to monitor migrant shelter contracts, according to

court papers from a related case — appears to have infected the Adams orbit broadly. Donors to the mayor's campaigns and legal defense fund found themselves, according to prosecutors in multiple cases, receiving preferential access to shelter contracts worth millions. A 'right to shelter' designed to protect the most vulnerable was becoming, in the hands of those closest to power, an instrument of extraction.

III. THE MICROTEL SCHEME: A GRANULAR ANATOMY

The mechanics of the alleged Carone bribery scheme, as laid out in the federal indictment, are both straightforward and damning.

Yan Po Zhu owned the Microtel Inn & Suites in Long Island City, Queens — a modest commercial hotel in a neighborhood that had seen explosive residential development over the preceding decade. Crystal Chen worked for Zhu at the property. Sometime in the summer of 2022, as the city's social services apparatus scrambled to place thousands of arriving migrants, Zhu and Chen sought to have their hotel included in the city's emergency shelter network.

There was a problem. The New York City Department of Social Services had initially rejected the Microtel's application. The reason: neighbors and community boards in the Long Island City area were already pushing back on the high density of shelters in their neighborhoods, and city officials

KEY FIGURES IN THE INDICTMENT

Frank Carone — Former Chief of Staff to Mayor Eric Adams; founder, Oaktree Solutions. Charged with bribery, wire fraud, and money laundering conspiracy.

Anthony Carone — Frank's brother; attorney at Abrams Fensterman. Alleged conduit for bribe payments laundered through his law firm account.

Yan Po Zhu — Owner of the Microtel Inn & Suites, Long Island City, Queens. Alleged to have initiated and funded the bribery scheme.

Crystal Chen — Employee of Zhu at the Microtel. Named as co-conspirator in the indictment.

Arthur Aidala — Defense attorney for Frank Carone. Called the indictment 'weak' and 'based on purely circumstantial evidence.'

Todd Shapiro — Spokesperson for former Mayor Eric Adams. Issued statement calling Carone a committed public servant; said the case is 'an ongoing legal matter.'

had flagged the hotel as unsuitable for this purpose given the resistance it had generated.

So Zhu and Chen did what, apparently, many people seeking favorable city action did during the Adams years: they went looking for the right person to call.

According to the indictment, from June 2022 through December 2023 — a period that spans Carone's final months as chief of staff and his subsequent private-sector career — Carone agreed to accept bribes from Zhu and Chen in exchange for steering the emergency shelter contract to their hotel. The mechanism was fraternal: the payments were funneled through Anthony Carone, Frank's brother, who was a lawyer at Abrams Fensterman — the same firm Frank had 'retired' from upon taking the City Hall job.

The money moved through what the indictment calls 'Law Firm #2 Account' — a bank account controlled by Anthony Carone. From there, according to prosecutors, Frank Carone received the funds and deployed them for personal use, including paying personal credit card bills and transferring money to a separate bank account of which he was the sole beneficial owner.

In exchange, Frank Carone interceded on behalf of the Microtel. The Social Services Department, which had rejected the application, was overruled. The hotel received its emergency shelter contract.

The text messages captured in the indictment are brief, but illuminating. In September 2022, as the scheme was apparently progressing, Yan Po Zhu sent Frank Carone a message: 'Thank you my big guy.' It is exactly the kind of casual, nearly affectionate communication that defines the culture the indictment is describing — a world in which corruption, when it functions, doesn't feel like corruption. It feels like friendship. Gratitude. Reciprocity.

The Carone brothers and Zhu, the indictment notes, socialized frequently. They attended gatherings at Zhu's Long Island home. This wasn't a purely transactional relationship. It was, in the language of machine politics, a relationship — and like all such relationships in the Adams world, it apparently had a price.

IV. THE FALL FROM CITY HALL TO THE PRIVATE MARKET

Frank Carone left City Hall in January 2023, after roughly a year as chief of staff. The circumstances of his departure were framed publicly as pre-arranged — Adams had said their agreement was that Carone would help establish the administration and then return to private life. That may be true. It is also true that Carone's continued presence at City Hall had generated considerable conflict-of-interest attention, given the breadth of his prior private-sector relationships.

What came next was, by any measure, a rapid and lucrative reinvention. Carone helped launch Oaktree Solutions, a consulting and lobbying firm that quickly attracted clients across multiple industries. His partners included Jeff Lewis, Governor Kathy Hochul's former chief of staff, and Daniel Tietz, another former Hochul administration official — a bipartisan roster that signaled Oaktree's ambitions were statewide, not merely municipal. Gary Jenkins, Adams's former head of social services — who

"Donors appeared to get good returns on their investments in Team Adams: migrant shelter contracts, a billionaire building owner snagging a \$60 million city lease." - The City, December 2025

had himself resigned early in 2023 amid a Department of Investigation inquiry into allegations he covered up shelter violations — also joined Oaktree briefly before departing in summer 2024.

The firm's client list reportedly included some of the most prominent names in New York real estate, as well as interests with business before the city and state. In September 2024, Carone had helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for Adams's re-election campaign, including \$50,000 from his own clients. A Politico report from June 2023 noted that Carone was 'expected to chair' Adams's re-election effort.

Behind the scenes, federal scrutiny was intensifying. In May 2024, prosecutors in the Eastern District of New York issued grand jury subpoenas to several of Oaktree Solutions' clients after obtaining the firm's bank records, according to people familiar with the matter. The subpoenas covered a range of businesses, heavily weighted toward real estate. As 2024 progressed,

investigators appeared to focus more sharply on real estate partnerships and other ventures tied to Carone specifically. In January 2026, The Real Deal first reported that federal prosecutors in Brooklyn were scrutinizing Carone's business dealings and his time inside City Hall.

The grand jury returned its indictment on June 12, 2026. It was sealed for nearly two weeks before federal agents moved on Wednesday morning to make the arrests.

V. THE SIMULTANEOUS NYPD RAIDS: A SECOND FRONT OPENS

The Carone arrest was not the only extraordinary law enforcement action to unfold in New York City on the morning of June 24, 2026. In a parallel — and prosecutors say entirely separate — investigation, FBI agents and NYPD Internal Affairs Division investigators executed search warrants at the homes of current and former high-ranking New York Police Department officials.

Among those whose homes were searched: Jeffrey Maddrey,

the former Chief of Department — once the highest-ranking uniformed officer in the NYPD — who had resigned in late 2024 following allegations that he had demanded sexual favors from a subordinate in exchange for opportunities to earn overtime pay. The investigation into Maddrey, according to law enforcement sources, has expanded into broader allegations of bribery — specifically, that Maddrey accepted payments in exchange for granting favors, promotions, and assignments within the department.

Also swept up in the warrant activity: James McCarthy, the current NYPD Assistant Chief and commanding officer of Manhattan South, and Tarik Sheppard, the former Deputy Commissioner of Public Information who retired in 2025. In response to the investigation's scope, NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch — who was appointed by Adams but has positioned herself as a reformer — announced that McCarthy's duties were being modified and that he was being transferred and

"I have to get mine. Where are my crumbs?" - Timothy Pearson, Adams associate, quoted in federal court papers

replaced by Assistant Chief Melissa Eger.

The NYPD probe grew out of the earlier federal investigation into Maddrey, which was led by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York — a different federal jurisdiction from the Eastern District, which is handling the Carone case. That geographic and institutional distinction matters: the EDNY and SDNY are independent offices with their own priorities, grand juries, and prosecutorial cultures. The fact that both are simultaneously advancing major corruption cases rooted in the Adams era suggests not coordination so much as coincidence — the natural result of investigations that were set in motion years ago and are now arriving at their conclusions.

VI. THE ADAMS CORRUPTION ECOSYSTEM: CARONE IN CONTEXT

Frank Carone's indictment is significant not merely as an individual case but as a capstone on what has become the most sweeping public corruption investigation into a New York City mayoral administration in modern memory — a reckoning that The City has compared, not implausibly, to the era of Boss Tweed.

The prosecutorial arc began before Adams's own indictment, which came in September 2024, charging the then-mayor with conspiracy to defraud the United States, wire fraud, solicitation of illegal campaign contributions from foreign nationals, and acceptance of a bribe. Adams pleaded not guilty and maintained his innocence throughout. The case against Adams alleged that he had accepted over \$100,000 in improper gifts, including lavish international travel funded by Turkish officials, in exchange for pressuring FDNY officials to expedite the opening of the new Turkish consulate in Manhattan despite safety concerns. It alleged conduct going back to his days as Brooklyn Borough President.

What followed was one of the most dramatic prosecutorial collapses in recent memory — not because the case was weak, but because of what happened at the highest levels of the Trump

Justice Department. In February 2025, the DOJ instructed Southern District prosecutors to drop the case against Adams. The stated rationale: that the indictment was interfering with Adams's ability to cooperate with the Trump administration's immigration enforcement agenda. U.S. Attorney Danielle Sassoon refused the order, saying there was no 'good-faith basis' for dismissal, and resigned rather than comply. So did the acting heads of the DOJ's Criminal Division and Public Integrity Section, as well as five other prosecutors. It was the largest mass resignation of senior federal prosecutors in decades.

Federal Judge Dale Ho, presiding over the case, was withering. In an April 2025 ruling dismissing the indictment — at the Justice Department's request, but with prejudice rather than without, meaning Adams cannot be re-tried — Ho wrote that the DOJ's rationale for dropping the case 'smacks of a bargain: dismissal of the Indictment in exchange for immigration policy concessions.' He dismissed the case not because he found it lacking, but because a court cannot compel prosecution.

Even as Adams's own case dissolved, prosecutions of his associates continued and multiplied. Among those charged or caught up in investigations: Mohamed Bahi, Adams's Chief Liaison to the Muslim Community, charged with witness tampering and then agreeing to plead guilty for his role in orchestrating a straw donor scheme for the mayor's campaign. Erden Arkan, a Turkish contractor, pleaded guilty to arranging illegal 'straw donations' funneled from foreign sources into Adams's 2021 campaign. Ingrid Lewis-Martin, a longtime Adams advisor, pleaded not guilty to bribery, money laundering, and conspiracy in a case involving her son and two real estate developers. Jesse Hamilton, a deputy commissioner, and fundraiser Tian Ji Li were indicted for alleged corruption involving a city lease. Former NYPD Commissioner Edward Caban and his twin brother James Caban were investigated; Caban resigned.

Frank Seddio, the Brooklyn



Democratic machine boss who had been Carone's longtime law partner, was also criminally charged. Zhan Petrosyants, a close friend of Adams, was charged with defrauding Geico of millions in insurance schemes — and one company formed by Carone and fellow attorney Howard Fensterman, Financial Vision, was named as a defendant in a related civil fraud action, accused of allowing fraudulent insurance claims to be billed through it. Carone and the firm said they were victims, not participants.

It is a gallery of rogues that paints a systemic picture: not a few bad actors who happened to find themselves near the mayor, but an entire ecosystem in which the expectation of personal enrichment from public access had become normalized. 'I have to get mine. Where are my crumbs?' Timothy Pearson had asked. Carone, if prosecutors are right, was not asking. He was taking.

VII. THE DEFENSE, THE DENIALS, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

Frank Carone's attorney, Arthur Aidala — a prominent New York criminal defense lawyer — did not mince words in response to Wednesday's indictment. He called the case 'weak,' based on purely circumstantial evidence, and 'not worth the paper upon which it is printed.' In a statement, Aidala said: 'Today's indictment is a sad day for our criminal justice system. It epitomizes the government first finding a target and then spending three years and

enormous taxpayer resources to find a crime.'

Carone also retained Andrew Goldstein and Russell Capone of Cooley LLP — a firm with deep white-collar defense experience. Goldstein, notably, is a former SDNY prosecutor who previously served as lead counsel for the House Intelligence Committee's investigation into Russian election interference.

Todd Shapiro, a spokesperson for Eric Adams, issued a carefully worded statement that did not address the substance of the charges. 'Frank Carone has dedicated decades of his life to public service, the legal profession, and helping countless individuals, businesses, and charitable organizations throughout New York,' Shapiro said. 'This is an ongoing legal matter and my prayers are with his family.'

The arraignment was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon in federal court in Brooklyn, where Carone, his brother Anthony, Yan Po Zhu, and Crystal Chen were expected to appear. The charges in the indictment include bribery, wire fraud, and money laundering conspiracy — federal offenses that, if sustained, carry substantial prison sentences.

Abrams Fensterman, the law firm where Anthony Carone works and where Frank Carone was previously a partner, issued a statement through Shapiro — who serves as spokesperson for both Adams and the firm — emphasizing that 'Abrams Fensterman had

no involvement in the matters referenced in the indictment and is not a subject of the government's allegations.' The firm noted that Frank Carone had no relationship with it during the period in question.

VIII. ARE OTHER INVESTIGATIONS ONGOING? THE BROADER LANDSCAPE

The short answer is: yes, almost certainly. The Eastern District of New York's investigation into Carone had, by May 2024, already cast a wide net over Oaktree Solutions' client list — including real estate interests — and investigators were reported to be examining real estate partnerships and other ventures tied to Carone that extend well beyond the Microtel contract. Whether additional charges or defendants emerge from that ongoing inquiry remains to be seen.

Separately, the Southern District of New York's investigation into Jeffrey Maddrey appears to be accelerating. The search warrants executed Wednesday at the homes of Maddrey, James McCarthy, and Tarik Sheppard suggest that probe is moving toward potential charges, though no arrests had been made as of Wednesday morning. The SDNY, which previously handled the Adams indictment, has demonstrated that its interest in Adams-era misconduct is far from exhausted.

Beyond New York, the

"The latest sign that prosecutors are continuing to hone in on the previous administration." - Associated Press, June 24, 2026

migrant shelter contracting scandal raises questions that are geographically and institutionally broader. The emergency procurement model deployed during the 2022 migrant surge — in which normal competitive bidding rules were suspended and billions were allocated through expedited processes — was not unique to New York. Chicago, Denver, Boston, Washington, D.C., and other major cities all faced similar pressures, deployed similar emergency mechanisms, and all shared the same vulnerability: when the normal guardrails of procurement are removed in the name of urgency, the space created is not neutral. It is an invitation.

Whether federal investigators are scrutinizing shelter contracting in other cities is not publicly known. What the Carone case demonstrates is the template: an official with procurement influence, a private party seeking a contract, a family member as intermediary, and a law firm account as laundromat. It is not a complicated scheme. It doesn't need to be.

IX. THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED: WHAT WEDNESDAY MEANS

By the afternoon of June 24, 2026, the political landscape in New York City looked profoundly different from even the day before. The night of June 23 had been a victory celebration for current Mayor Zohran Mamdani, whose Democratic allies had swept three Congressional primary elections. The new administration represents a sharp break from the Adams era — ideologically, aesthetically, and temperamentally. And yet the past would not let the present be.

For those watching Wednesday's cascade of events — the Carone arrest, the NYPD search warrants, the unsealed indictment — what emerged was something more than a corruption scandal. It was an institutional reckoning. The Adams years, which began with the promise of a no-nonsense, law-enforcement-experienced mayor who would restore order after the

pandemic chaos, had devolved into something that future historians will study as a case study in how access to government power corrodes without institutional integrity to check it.

Frank Carone was not, in the public imagination, a corrupt figure. He was a fixer. A power broker. The man who got things done in Brooklyn and, eventually, in City Hall. He was the one you called when you needed something moved, something unlocked, something navigated. For decades, that role made him invaluable. It also, if prosecutors are right, made him the ideal architect of precisely the kind of scheme described in Wednesday's indictment.

A text message from a hotel owner: 'Thank you my big guy.' One hundred and twenty thousand dollars. A migrants' emergency shelter contract awarded to a hotel that city officials had already rejected. And three years of investigation that ended, at last, with federal agents at his door before sunrise.

All of it, for \$120,000. That is the number that will follow Frank Carone into whatever comes next. In a city that routinely moves billions through its budget, it is a strikingly modest sum for such an enormous risk. But that, too, is part of what the indictment tells us about the Adams era: that in that world, the expectation of personal enrichment had become so normalized that the question of risk barely seemed worth asking. The crumbs were there. You were supposed to take them.

EDITOR'S NOTE

All defendants named in this report are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law. This report is based on the federal indictment unsealed June 24, 2026 in the Eastern District of New York, reporting by The City, CNN, NBC News, the Associated Press, the New York Daily News, Gothamist, The Real Deal, and amNewYork, as well as public records. The investigation is ongoing. The South Asian Insider Weekly will continue to report on developments as they emerge.

Meta Makes A \$900 Million Super-App Move In India

(News Agency) : Meta Platforms Inc. is spending \$900 million on an Indian fintech whose founder will run WhatsApp globally. Is this just an expensive talent hire? Perhaps. But I think the motivation runs deeper. Mark Zuckerberg may be trying to revive the super-app idea. The global tech firm announced this week that it will own 20% of Bengaluru-based Cred, which rewards people who pay their credit-card bills on time. Cred's founder and Chief Executive Officer Kunal Shah will move to Meta as the head of its flagship messaging service. With an estimated 500 million-plus users, India is WhatsApp's largest market. But how to make them do more on the app than just communicate?

This is where a super-app enters the picture, as a one-stop shop for users to arrange travel, order food, get entertained, pay online, save money, take a loan, or buy micro-insurance. China's WeChat is one such colossus; Alipay is another. Indonesia also has two: GoTo and Singapore-based Grab. But surprisingly, the world's most populous nation hasn't yet yielded a homegrown digital utility for daily needs. Large Indian

conglomerates like the Adani Group, Jio, and the Tata Group have all tried and failed to capture the crown.

Zuckerberg has also displayed similar ambitions before. A decade ago, he approached the Indian data market with the promise of Free Basics, a walled garden in which the Silicon Valley behemoth and its partners would have been the banyan tree providing shade from high data costs. When that plan didn't fly with authorities, and data prices crashed when tycoon Mukesh Ambani entered the Indian wireless market in 2016, the Silicon Valley behemoth switched its attention to promoting WhatsApp as a facilitator of online payments.

Being able to mirror Tencent Holdings Ltd.'s success with WeChat Pay could have spawned India's first super-app, but Facebook Inc. (as Meta was then called) didn't get the chance. Instead, Alphabet Inc.'s Google Pay and Walmart Inc.'s PhonePe stole the lead and built solid moats over the so-called Unified Payments Interface, a platform shared across India's banks. Stuck in a regulatory logjam, Zuckerberg waited for a very long time to scale up the service. As I



wrote six years ago, WhatsApp got a raw deal.

Then a lot of other things happened. Zuckerberg pivoted toward - and later abandoned - the metaverse. His concept of a blockchain-based world money was shot down by regulators. He threw Meta's immense weight into the AI race, investing heavily to capture the frontier of open-source intelligence. Amid all this tumult, however, WhatsApp remains a potentially underharvested field. Although restrictions on onboarding users for the payments function went away in December 2024, Meta doesn't even have a 1% share of the record 23 billion transactions that took place on UPI last month.

Not only is Cred slightly ahead, but more importantly it has some of India's highest-spending online customers. Therein lies the attraction to Zuckerberg of both Cred and its founder. Shah breaks the stereotypes of an Indian techie. For one thing, he isn't an engineer. A philosophy graduate from Mumbai, Shah built Cred around the idea that in a deeply unequal society like India's, people climbing the economic ladder have a strong yearning to signal their superiority to others. To create a sense of exclusivity, he allowed only people with high credit scores to join his platform. The strategy paid off. Today, Cred processes more than 40% of India's credit-card bills. Although

Cred has ruled out any sharing of members' data with Meta, some critics are asking if the deal is evidence of American tech companies' increasing control over the vast financial data generated by Indian consumers. The nationality of the investor, however, is a sideshow. Online consumers in India are being routinely fleeced by "dark patterns" - design elements in apps and websites that trick users into overpaying, or paying for things they never wanted. Shah's challenge will be to create a fair one-stop commercial portal that doesn't abuse its knowledge of the customer to act against her. Realizing this vision requires a shift from pure utility to high engagement while staying within the limits of India's new personal data protection act. Meta may have secured the right visionary. But with just 17 million monthly active users, Cred is a niche business. To give Zuckerberg his elusive super-app, Shah will have to do the exact opposite of what made him famous: shift from rewarding the 1% of society that he has served so far to empowering the hundreds of millions in the middle of the pyramid. That is the ultimate test for both him and his new boss.

A million AI satellites in orbit? Elon Musk says StarMind is coming

Elon Musk has confirmed that "StarMind" will be the name of SpaceX's proposed AI satellite constellation. The project aims to place AI-powered computing infrastructure in orbit, with reports suggesting the network could eventually include up to one million satellites.

(SAI Bureau) : SpaceX's futuristic AI-in-space project now has an official name. Elon Musk has confirmed that the satellite network will be called "StarMind". This is a plan that could eventually see as many as one million AI-powered satellites operating in orbit. The confirmation came after an X user shared a post about a recent trademark filing by xAI, asking whether StarMind would be the name of SpaceX's proposed AI satellite constellation. Musk responded with a one-word reply, "Yes." The brief exchange quickly drew attention online, especially because it comes amid reports that SpaceX has already approached the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding plans for a massive network of AI-focused satellites. According to details discussed in regulatory filings and reports, StarMind is very different from SpaceX's existing Starlink satellite network. While both projects rely on satellites operating in space, their purpose is not the same. Starlink was designed to provide internet connectivity around the world.

Its satellites act as communication relays, moving data between users and networks. In simple terms, Starlink satellites function like space-based internet infrastructure, helping people access high-speed internet even in remote areas.

StarMind, however, is being envisioned as a giant computing network in space. Instead of simply transmitting information, these satellites would perform AI-related computing tasks directly in orbit. The idea is to equip satellites with powerful onboard processors and use large solar arrays to supply the energy needed for AI workloads, Teslarati reported.

If the concept works as intended, users could send AI requests that are processed in space rather than at a traditional data centre on Earth. The results could then be transmitted back to users within milliseconds. This would allow AI models to handle tasks such as answering queries, running inference workloads, and generating responses without relying entirely on terrestrial computing infrastructure.

The project could also benefit from SpaceX's Starship rocket. The report suggests that each Starship launch may be capable of carrying between 30 and 50 AI-focused satellites, potentially allowing the company to rapidly expand the constellation once production begins. One of the key reasons behind the concept is the growing challenge of building large-scale AI data centres on Earth. As demand for AI computing rises, companies are facing issues related to land availability, electricity consumption, water requirements, and local regulatory approvals.

Space offers a different environment. Satellites can draw power from the Sun and operate in the vacuum of space, which naturally helps with cooling. Musk has previously suggested that space-based computing could become one of the most cost-effective ways to deploy AI infrastructure within the next few years. The company is reportedly planning to launch two AI1 prototype satellites in early 2027. Larger-scale

manufacturing is expected to begin later that year at a facility known as Gigasat.

Beyond supporting xAI's chatbot Grok, the StarMind network could potentially serve a much wider customer base. Businesses, developers and organisations around the world could theoretically use the orbiting AI infrastructure to run computing workloads without depending entirely on ground-based cloud facilities.

The project remains in its early stages, and many technical and regulatory challenges still lie ahead. However, Musk's confirmation of the StarMind name offers the clearest indication yet that SpaceX is seriously pursuing the idea of turning space into the next frontier for artificial intelligence computing.

If the company succeeds, StarMind could become one of the most ambitious space technology projects ever proposed, combining satellite infrastructure, AI computing and reusable rockets on a scale that has rarely been attempted before.

Lotus magazine hosts devotional Yoga Day event cherished by 200 guests on Long Island

A Lotus in the Mud online magazine organized a multi-faceted, multifaith celebration in Hempstead, NY, focusing on devotion for spiritual evolution, with a powerful panel discussion as the centerpiece.



Long island, New York (By Our Staff Reporter) : Over 200 people cherished a devotional Yoga Day celebration on June 14 organized by ALotusInTheMud.com, wellness and spirituality magazine. The program at the Vedic Heritage Hanuman Temple in Hempstead, NY was like modern satsang: meditation, movement, music, dance, dialogue, and community engagement. Padma Bhushan Dr Dattatreya Nori was the Chief Guest. The Indian Consulate, New York, was represented by Mahesh Yadav, Consul.

Esteemed panel discusses the path of devotion

The centerpiece of the program curated by Lotus Founder and Editor Parveen Chopra was a panel discussion with the theme, 'Devotion as a Superhighway to Spiritual Evolution.' As moderator, he said that according to Indian philosophy, there are four paths to self-realization: Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Gyan Yoga and Raja Yoga. The path of bhakti is the sweetest and accessible to all.

The four esteemed panelists were: Ordained Buddhist nun Lama Aria Drolma, author and banker Yakub Mathew, finance executive and artist Nayan Kisnadwala, and yoga teacher Sharon Epstein. They agreed that devotion is both a gift that is received and a discipline that must be cultivated. And that personal effort walks hand in hand with divine grace.

Padma Bhushan Dr Nori's advice for equanimity

Padma Bhushan 2026 awardee and internationally renowned oncologist Dr Dattatreya Nori, who has founded three Shirdi Sai Baba temples in NY-NJ area, reflected on the deeper dimensions of yoga and meditation in his address as chief guest.

"Being the witness keeps you away from all the problems," he said, emphasizing the yogic practice of observing thoughts and emotions without identifying with them.

He also recommended cultivating equanimity, noting that "dualities of life are apparently contradictory, but inherently complementary."

Shri Mahesh Yadav, Consul at the Indian

Consulate, described yoga as "one of India's most profound gifts to humanity" and said devotion strengthens the yogic journey by nurturing "humility, compassion, surrender and a deep connection with the divine." He commended A Lotus in the Mud for sharing such spiritual messages with a growing global readership.

Continuing the Indian tradition, the evening began with a ceremonial lamp-lighting, to the accompaniment of Vedic mantras by Ashok Vyas, attended by panelists and presenters as well as community leaders including Ravi Bhooplapur, Anil and Renu Jain, Kamlesh Mehta, Prof. Indrajit Singh Saluja and Abhishek Mishra.

A treat for the eyes, ears and the mind

Lama Aria led a Loving-Kindness Meditation for world peace while cultural performances included devotional singing by Budh Prakash Jasuja and his daughter Nanki, and Radha-Krishna themed dance items by Preya Patel and students of her Vivarta Arts. Anne Moffatt (Aanya Prarthana) engaged participants with Chair Yoga and a Ribbon Dance session. Prominent people in the audience included Dr Unni Mooppan, Animesh Goenka, Jasbir Jai Singh, Gobind Munjal, Indu Jaiswal, Nilima Madan, Rashmin Master, Sharanjit Singh Thind, Varinder Bhalla, Jyoti Gupta, Bina Sabapathy, Sushma Kotahwala, and Paresh Raval.

Parveen acknowledged monetary contributions by Mukund Padmanabhan, Abhishek Mishra, and India Association of Long Island. He thanked Vedic Heritage Inc for allowing him to hold the program in Pandit Jasraj auditorium, and media support by The South Asian Times, The Indian Panorama, South Asian Insider, The Indian Eye, Hum Hindustani, Bollywood Insider and Preetnama.

The event concluded with a charity auction of artworks by Nayan Kisnadwala conducted by Renu Jain, with the proceeds intended for Lotus magazine and Vedic Heritage Inc. Piya Jyoti Kachroo served as master of ceremonies. All enjoyed a healthy, vegetarian meal outdoors after the program.

About A Lotus In The Mud

A Lotus In The Mud is a non-profit online magazine dedicated to sharing wisdom

and practices from multiple traditions as well as cutting-edge science to promote health, happiness, and inner peace.

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ad COUNCIL NHTSA

Indian American Night organized by The Indian American Forum

Event was organized successfully, drawing enthusiastic participation from the community, says release by the organizers.



(By Our Staff Reporter) : Indu Jaiswal, President Vimal Goyal, and founder Dr. Bobby Kumar Kalotee was joined on stage by Town Supervisor Hon. Jen DeSena, Park Director, and members of the Asian American Advisory Board, Executive Members of IAF. The program began with Ms. Hanika Reddy Parvathala performing the American National Anthem, followed by the Indian National Anthem sung by Bina Sabapathy, by Lakeside Theatre. Indian American Forum Chairperson Srinivasan, and Vimal Goyal.

50,000 Walkers Across 100+ Cities Launch 'America250' with Historic BAPS Charities Walk-Run

(By Our Staff Reporter) : As the United States begins its countdown to the 250th anniversary of its founding, BAPS Charities kicked off the historic milestones this spring with its largest-ever "Spirit of Service" Walk-Run. More than 50,000 participants laced up their running shoes across more than 100 cities in North America, turning local parks, town squares, and community centers into vibrant hubs of civic engagement and national pride.

A Historic Milestone for Service

The annual event took on a deeper significance this year

by officially aligning with America250, the nationwide multi-year initiative celebrating the United States' semiquincentennial. By focusing on the core theme of volunteerism, the walk-run highlighted the vital role that community service has played in shaping the nation over the last two and a half centuries. Each participating city organized its own local route, allowing residents to come together to support neighborhood initiatives while contributing to a massive, continent-wide movement.

Local Impact, National Unity
From major metropolitan areas

to small suburban communities, the walk-run raised crucial awareness and funds for diverse local charitable causes, including food banks, first responders, and educational programs. "The Spirit of Service Walk-Run has always been about neighbors helping neighbors," said a BAPS Charities representative. "Partnering with America250 allows us to celebrate the beautiful history of American volunteerism while making a tangible, positive impact on our local communities today." The massive turnout underscores a growing public desire for unity and active citizenship as



the nation approaches its historic 250th birthday. Organizers hope momentum from this spring's



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JAMIESON GREER HEADS TO INDIA AS TRADE DEAL NEARS

U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Jamieson Greer traveled to New Delhi from June 22 to 24, 2026, for high-level talks with India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and other senior Indian officials. The visit was aimed at advancing negotiations on a Bilateral Trade Agreement rooted in the joint statement issued by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi on February 13, 2025. U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor confirmed that Greer and Goyal held multiple sessions. Greer subsequently traveled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for additional trade talks. Despite productive discussions, no definitive interim deal was announced by the conclusion of the three-day New Delhi visit, though both sides described the negotiations as ongoing and constructive.

US BACKS INDIA WITH \$428 MILLION DEFENSE SUPPORT DEAL

The United States has approved two defense support packages for India totaling \$428.2 million, both notified to Congress by the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The larger package, valued at \$230 million, covers long-term sustainment support for India's M777A2 Ultra-Light Howitzers, including spare parts, repair and return services, training, and technical assistance. The principal contractor is BAE Systems of the United Kingdom. A second package, valued at \$198.2 million, provides follow-on sustainment support for India's AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, with Boeing and Lockheed Martin as principal contractors. Neither package involves new major defense equipment. The Pentagon stated the sales advance U.S. foreign policy objectives by strengthening the strategic relationship with India and enhancing India's capacity to address current and future threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

INDIAN AMERICANS TAKE PRIORITIES TO CAPITOL HILL

Nearly 200 Indian American delegates from 25 states descended on Capitol Hill on June 23, 2026, for the fourth annual Capitol Hill Day organized by the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS). Delegates visited more than 125 congressional offices, making it the largest gathering in the event's history, up from roughly 70 delegates in 2023. The advocacy agenda centered on five policy areas: Indo-Pacific trade and security, the U.S.-India strategic partnership, Indian American contributions and concerns, immigration reform for U.S. innovation, and critical minerals supply-chain security. Khanderao Kand, FIIDS Chief of Policy and Strategy, called it a moment to translate community influence into policy impact. The day concluded with

a U.S.-India Partnership Summit and dinner on Capitol Hill. Speakers included Reps. Raja Krishnamoorthi, Shri Thanedar, and Suhas Subramanyam, along with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Bethany Morrison.

TIMES SQUARE EMBRACES THE SPIRIT OF YOGA

The Consulate General of India in New York, in collaboration with the Times Square Alliance, celebrated the 12th International Day of Yoga at Times Square on June 21, 2026, drawing nearly 10,000 participants from a wide range of nationalities. The day-long event featured seven yoga sessions held from sunrise to sunset. This year's theme was Yoga for Healthy Ageing, reflecting global emphasis on longevity and well-being. The chief guest was Padma Shri Guruji Dr. H.R. Nagendra, yoga guru to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and president of S-VYASA University, who spoke on the timeless relevance of yoga and meditation. The New York State Senate passed a resolution calling on Governor Kathy Hochul to officially declare June 21 as Yoga Day in New York, and Delaware's Governor Matt Meyer issued a formal proclamation recognizing the day. Similar celebrations took place at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and across cities including Sugar Land, Texas.

INDIAN NATIONAL CHARGED IN VISA FRAUD CONSPIRACY USING STAGED ROBBERIES

Mitul Patel, 40, an Indian national unlawfully residing in Worcester, Massachusetts, has been charged with conspiracy to commit visa fraud as part of a broader federal crackdown on a staged-robbery scheme designed to fraudulently obtain U nonimmigrant status, commonly known as a U Visa. The U Visa is a federal immigration benefit available to victims of certain violent crimes who assist law enforcement. Federal authorities allege that Mitul Patel paid the scheme's organizer, Rambhai Patel, to participate as a staged victim in a fake armed robbery of a convenience store in 2023. Rambhai Patel, identified as the ringleader of the scheme, previously pleaded guilty and was sentenced to more than 20 months in prison and ordered to forfeit \$850,000. The wider conspiracy involved staged robberies at at least six stores across Massachusetts and other states. In April 2026, a federal grand jury in Boston indicted ten additional defendants connected to the scheme. The charge of conspiracy to commit visa fraud carries a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000.

HARMEET DHILLON CHALLENGES CALIFORNIA

HANDGUN SALES RESTRICTIONS

Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon, head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, sent a formal two-page letter on June 24, 2026, to California Governor Gavin Newsom and State Attorney General Rob Bonta, announcing that she has authorized the filing of a federal complaint against the state over its so-called Glock Ban and its restrictive Handgun Roster statute. The Glock Ban, enacted through Assembly Bill 1127 signed by Newsom in October 2025, is set to take effect July 1, 2026. It prohibits licensed firearms dealers from selling semiautomatic handguns classified as machinegun-convertible, a designation that covers virtually all Glock-style pistols. Dhillon argued that the law violates citizens' Second Amendment rights. The DOJ also challenged California's existing Handgun Roster, which restricts which pistols dealers may legally sell. Dhillon issued a document-retention order to state officials and gave California until 5:00 p.m. Eastern time on June 30 to enter pre-suit settlement negotiations, warning that any resolution must include immediate cessation of enforcement, acknowledgment of the laws' unconstitutionality, and a court-enforceable consent decree. The DOJ framed California's enforcement as a pattern or practice of law enforcement misconduct under 34 U.S.C. Section 12601.

ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S REMARKABLE RISE AS A KINGMAKER FOR PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani cemented his status as the dominant force in New York Democratic politics on June 24, 2026, after all three congressional candidates he endorsed won their primary races. Former New York City Comptroller Brad Lander defeated incumbent Rep. Dan Goldman in the 10th Congressional District; activist Darializa Avila Chevalier, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, unseated incumbent Rep. Adriano Espaillat, chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, in a Manhattan-Bronx district; and state Assembly member Claire Valdez won the open 7th Congressional District over Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, who had the backing of the outgoing Rep. Nydia Velazquez. All three winning candidates share Mamdani's progressive economic platform and ran on ending U.S. support for Israel. The results are seen as a significant blow to the Democratic establishment and have raised national questions about the party's ideological direction heading into the 2028 cycle. Republicans moved quickly to use the results to paint the broader Democratic Party as socialist.

DR. SATHEESH KATHULA TAKES CHARGE AS IAPC CHAIRMAN

Dr. Satheesh Kathula was formally inducted as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Indo-American Press Club (IAPC) on June 21, 2026, at a ceremony held at the Kerala Center in Elmont, New York. The event was attended by more than 100 community, business, and media leaders from across the New York tri-state region and was also livestreamed globally. The oath of office was administered by IAPC Founding Chairman Ginsmon Zachariah and former Chairman Kamlesh Mehta. Dr. Kathula is a practicing oncologist and Clinical Professor of Medicine at Wright State University's Boonshoft School of Medicine in Dayton, Ohio, and a former president of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. He holds advanced certificates from Harvard and Stanford. At the ceremony, Dr. Kathula announced that IAPC's next International Media Conference will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, from October 23 to 25, 2026. Seven community leaders received Lifetime Achievement Awards at the event. Founded in 2013, IAPC now operates 15 chapters across the United States and Canada.

NY SENATOR CHUCK SCHUMER APPOINTS DR. GUNISHA KAUR TO US COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

U.S. Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer announced on May 21, 2026, the appointment of Dr. Gunisha Kaur to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for a two-year term. Dr. Kaur, a Sikh American physician and human rights researcher, makes history as the first member of the Sikh community to serve on the Commission. She serves as an Associate Professor of Anesthesiology at Weill Cornell Medicine, where she is also the Salvatore Family Medical Director of the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights and founding director of the Human Rights Impact Lab. Her research focuses on displaced populations including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and has been published in leading journals including The New England Journal of Medicine, JAMA, and The Lancet. Dr. Kaur holds degrees from Cornell University, Weill Cornell Medical College, and a Master of Arts in Medical Anthropology from Harvard University. USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan legislative branch agency that monitors the right to freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. The Sikh Coalition, which advocated for her appointment, called the selection a milestone given the deep relevance of Sikh history to USCIRF's core mission.

The Dollar's Dilemma

There is an old Wall Street axiom that the most dangerous thing you can do with a gun is point it at someone who is already building a door. Washington has spent the better part of the last decade pointing the dollar at adversaries, allies, and the merely inconvenient — and the world has been quietly building doors ever since.

The dollar's supremacy was never simply an economic fact. It was a political bargain — the United States would provide global liquidity, open markets, and relative predictability, and in return the world would do its business in American currency, hold American debt, and accept American financial infrastructure as the plumbing of international commerce. That bargain is fraying. Not because the dollar is weak. It is not. But because the trust that underpinned it has been systematically eroded by the very power that issued it.

The pattern is now familiar. Sanctions against Iran. Sanctions against Russia. Threats of secondary sanctions against anyone who trades with either. The freezing of Russian sovereign reserves — nearly \$300 billion held in Western institutions — after the invasion of Ukraine. Each action was presented as a tool of coercive diplomacy. Each action was also a lesson to every central bank on earth: the dollar is not a neutral currency. It is an instrument of American foreign policy. And if your foreign policy ever diverges from Washington's, your reserves could be next. The response has been neither sudden nor hysterical. It has been methodical. India has expanded its rupee trade settlement framework with Russia, the UAE, and several African nations. China has accelerated the internationalization of the renminbi through its Cross-Border Interbank Payment System. Saudi Arabia has quietly opened discussions about pricing some oil sales in currencies other than dollars. The BRICS bloc — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and its newer members — has been exploring the architecture of a common settlement mechanism, however embryonic. None of this amounts to the imminent death of the dollar. The dollar remains the world's dominant reserve currency, accounting for roughly 58 percent of global reserves. The euro is a distant second. The renminbi barely registers. The dollar's network effects — the depth of U.S. Treasury markets, the scale of dollar-denominated trade, the sheer inertia of global financial plumbing — are not dismantled in a decade. But the direction is unmistakable. The dollar's share of global reserves has declined meaningfully over the past twenty years. That trend is now accelerating.

What makes this moment particularly consequential for the South Asian diaspora is that the stakes are not abstract. When the rupee weakens against the dollar —

A currency that functions as a weapon eventually repels the users it depends upon.

and it has set record lows repeatedly over the past two years — the cost of remittances rises, imports become more expensive, and the savings of ordinary families on both sides of the Atlantic are quietly taxed by a currency dynamic they had no hand in creating. The rupee's travails are not simply a function of India's own fiscal management. They are downstream of the dollar's global dominance and the monetary tightening cycles of the Federal Reserve, whose decisions are made for American constituencies with global consequences that no one elected them to impose. The deeper irony is that America's financial coercive power and America's financial supremacy are, in the long run, in tension with each other. A currency that functions as a neutral medium of exchange attracts users. A currency that functions as a weapon repels them. The United States cannot indefinitely be both the world's banker and the world's financial sheriff without eventually forcing its customers to find another bank.

Washington's political class has not yet fully reckoned with this arithmetic. There is bipartisan enthusiasm for sanctions, for secondary penalties, for dollar weaponization as a first resort rather than a last one. The Treasury Department has become one of the most powerful tools of American foreign policy — but its power is partly self-consuming. Each deployment makes the next one marginally less effective, because each deployment accelerates the world's incentive to route around it.

What should America do instead? That is a longer conversation — one that involves restraint in the use of financial tools, renewed investment in multilateral institutions, and a recognition that the dollar's global role is a privilege that requires maintenance, not merely assertion. But the first step is acknowledgment: that the dollar's dominance is not a natural law. It is an agreement. And agreements require that both parties see value in the arrangement. For readers of this publication — for the Indian-American entrepreneur in New Jersey, the Punjabi remittance sender in Queens, the South Asian banker navigating currency hedges in Manhattan — the dollar's dilemma is not a think-tank abstraction. It is a household reality. The world's monetary architecture is shifting, slowly and then all at once. America would do well to notice before the door is already built.

By Sharanjit 'Sunny' Thind

By Sharanjit 'Sunny' Thind

The New Nonalignment

The Global South is done choosing sides. Washington still hasn't figured out what that means.

For seven decades, American foreign policy operated on a binary it treated as a law of nature: you were either with the United States or you were against it. The Cold War enforced this logic with the discipline of nuclear stakes. After 1991, it persisted on sheer momentum, dressed up in the language of the liberal international order. Today, that binary is not merely contested. It is obsolete. And the nations that have moved beyond it are not the outliers. They are the majority.

Call it the New Nonalignment. It is not the nonalignment of the Nehru era - the somewhat idealistic, occasionally self-righteous posture of newly decolonized nations seeking to stay above the fray of superpower competition. The new version is harder-edged, more transactional, and considerably more sophisticated. Its practitioners are not avoiding choices. They are making multiple choices simultaneously and profiting from the resulting leverage.

India is the exemplar. In 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine and Washington called on the world to isolate Moscow, India declined. It continued purchasing Russian oil at discounted rates - oil that, refined in Indian facilities, made its way in various forms to European markets desperate for energy. India simultaneously deepened its defense procurement relationship with the United States, accelerated its participation in the Quad, and signed a landmark technology partnership with Washington that former U.S. officials described as the most consequential strategic agreement in decades. India bought Russian weapons and American jets. It attended G7 summits and SCO meetings. It abstained on United Nations resolutions condemning Russia while simultaneously condemning the principle of territorial annexation in general terms. This was not incoherence. It was strategy.

India bought Russian oil and American jets. It attended G7 and SCO summits. This was not incoherence. It was strategy.

Vietnam is another case study. A country that fought a devastating war against the United States within living memory has become one of Washington's most significant strategic partners in Southeast Asia - while maintaining a formal defense relationship with Russia that dates to the

Soviet era and a complex economic interdependence with China that it has no interest in severing. The Vietnamese leadership has been explicit about this: they want friends everywhere and enemies nowhere. They are succeeding on both counts.

The Gulf states have refined this approach to an art form. Saudi Arabia hosts American military infrastructure while simultaneously deepening its relationship with China - which now receives the majority of Saudi oil exports. The UAE has built a financial center explicitly designed to attract capital from sanctioned Russian oligarchs and Chinese sovereign wealth funds alongside Western private equity. Both nations have joined the expanded BRICS framework while maintaining their security relationships with Washington. The Saudis recently priced a portion of their Chinese oil sales in renminbi - not to repudiate the dollar, but to remind Washington that they have options.

(Contd. on page 13)



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By TSAI Editorial Board

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

Editor in Chief

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Tel: 646 875 8495

Managing Editor:

Amaninder Singh Thind

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com

Mailing Address:

NuWay Media Group Inc.

223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4

Manhattan, New York 10018

For General and Advertising Inquiries:

thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.

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The Indian Political League auction: When defections become the new normal

The images tell a story that would once have embarrassed Indian politicians. In Delhi, Trinamool Congress MPs preparing to switch sides appeared perfectly comfortable being seen in the company of senior BJP leaders and Union minister Bhupender Yadav. There was little attempt at secrecy, let alone discretion. In Maharashtra, Shiv Sena rebels travelled in chartered aircraft, stayed in luxury hotels and negotiated their political future under heavy security cover. They looked less like elected representatives wrestling with matters of conscience and more like executives negotiating a corporate takeover.

What is striking is not the act of defection itself. Indian politics has witnessed defections for decades. It is the complete absence of concern for public perception. There was no attempt to explain a shift in ideology, no appeal to principle, no effort to persuade voters that a larger cause was at stake. The message seemed simple: politics is a transaction and everyone knows the terms of the deal.

Even access to state resources now appears part of the bargain. As one Shiv Sena MP candidly admitted after switching sides: "If I want development funds for projects in my constituency, I have to switch." Perhaps this is the most significant political change of our times. Defections are no longer viewed as a betrayal of the electoral mandate. They have become normalised, accepted as just another instrument in the pursuit of power.

Predictably, every criticism of defections is met with the same response from BJP supporters. What about the Congress? Did defections not occur under Congress rule? Wasn't "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" coined long before Narendra Modi and Amit Shah came to power? The answer is yes. Defections are as old as Indian democracy. Under the Congress system too, opposition governments were dismissed, legislators switched sides to gain office, settle factional disputes or align with the dominant party of the day. Political opportunism flourished. But that is also why the whataboutery misses the point. The issue is not whether defections existed before. The issue is whether they have changed in character.

Under the Congress era, defections were largely a symptom of a dominant-party system. Today, they have become a strategy for creating and sustaining one.

That distinction matters because it helps explain one of the most important shifts in contemporary Indian politics. Over the last decade, the BJP, under Narendra Modi and

Amit Shah, has emerged as perhaps the most formidable electoral machine independent India has witnessed. Its organisational strength, financial resources, communication apparatus and leadership structure have few parallels. Its electoral success deserves acknowledgement.

But that success has also produced a new political logic. Winning elections is no longer merely a means to exercise power. Electoral expansion itself has become an objective. Viewed through that prism, defections are not accidents. They are acquisitions.

Look at the pattern. The Congress government in Madhya Pradesh collapsed after the departure of Jyotiraditya Scindia and his loyalists. Maharashtra witnessed first the split in the Shiv Sena and then the division of the NCP. Across the North East, the BJP has steadily expanded by absorbing leaders and legislators from rival parties.

The objective often appears larger than winning a legislative vote. It is to weaken rival parties structurally, reduce their capacity to challenge the BJP and steadily expand the ruling party's political footprint.

The BJP, that once prided itself on ideological commitment and cadre loyalty, now recruits extensively from rival camps. Critics jokingly describe it as the "Bharti Janata Party", but the joke contains a deeper truth. The party has become extraordinarily successful at attracting, absorbing and redeploying political talent from across the political spectrum.

This marks a significant evolution in the BJP's own political journey. The BJP of Atal Bihari Vajpayee sought to expand primarily through alliances, social coalitions and voter outreach. Vajpayee understood that political growth came through persuasion.

The BJP of Modi and Amit Shah has often expanded through an M and A model (mergers and acquisition), absorbing leaders, legislators and sometimes entire political formations into its fold. Both approaches seek growth. The methods, however, are fundamentally different.

Supporters would argue that this merely reflects political reality. Ambitious politicians naturally gravitate towards successful parties. That is undoubtedly true. Yet the process does not occur in a political vacuum.

Repeatedly, opposition parties have alleged that investigative agencies, financial pressure and institutional leverage create incentives for politicians to reconsider their loyalties. The perception has become deeply embedded that the BJP is not merely India's largest political party but also its most effective political "washing machine" guaranteeing immunity from prosecution. Democracies depend not only on the impartiality of institutions but also on public confidence in that impartiality. That confidence has been seriously eroded.

Equally troubling is the

manner in which the anti-defection law has been progressively circumvented. Introduced in 1985 to curb political horse-trading, the law increasingly resembles an obstacle course to be navigated rather than a constitutional principle to be respected.

The latest developments in West Bengal are a case in point. An obscure intermediary political vehicle—the Nationalist Citizenship Party of India—is reportedly being used to facilitate defections while navigating around the anti-defection law. The ingenuity is dubbed a "masterstroke". The implications for democratic accountability are far less admirable.

More troubling is the inordinate delays in jurisprudence. Cases involving party splits and disqualifications drag on for months and sometimes years. The unresolved Shiv Sena split remains perhaps the most striking example of judicial delay. By the time a verdict emerges, governments have survived, ministers have enjoyed office and political realities have become entrenched.

The larger concern goes beyond the fate of any individual party. It concerns the meaning of elections themselves. When citizens vote, they are choosing more than a candidate. They are choosing a party, a symbol, a programme and a political vision. If that mandate can be altered repeatedly through post-election

manoeuvres, the voter's choice becomes negotiable.

This is not an argument against political realignment. Parties evolve. Alliances change. Leaders can alter their views, especially in a political culture where inner-party democracy is weak. But if defections become routine instruments of power rather than exceptional acts of conviction, democracy risks becoming less a contest of ideas and more a marketplace of political assets.

Which brings us back to those images from Delhi and Maharashtra. The politicians involved appeared entirely unconcerned about being seen as participants in a political auction. There was no fear of public disapproval because the political culture itself has changed. Defections no longer require moral justification. Success is justification enough. The story of defections in contemporary India is no longer merely about politicians changing parties. It is about the transformation of politics itself—from ideology to acquisition, from persuasion to aggregation, from conviction to transaction. And that may be the most consequential political shift of our times. For when parties can acquire legislators as easily as corporations acquire companies for a price, elections cease to be the democratic verdict. They become merely the opening bid in an increasingly immoral Indian Political League.

By Rajdeep Sardesai

The New Nonalignment

What is striking is not that these nations are pursuing their own interests. That has always been the operating principle of international relations. What is striking is how poorly Washington has adapted to a world in which middle powers have the economic weight, the diplomatic bandwidth, and the historical confidence to pursue those interests across what used to be clearly delineated Cold War lines.

Part of the problem is institutional. The U.S. foreign policy establishment was built to manage a world of blocs. Its reflexes are alliance management, sanctions regimes, and the cultivation of dependence. When a country like India or Turkey or Indonesia refuses to fall neatly into a camp, the Washington response oscillates between pressure, puzzlement, and attempted inducement - none of which addresses the underlying reality that these nations have simply concluded that the Cold War menu is no longer on offer. Part of the problem is also rhetorical. American foreign policy speaks the language of values - democracy, human rights, rules-based order - with a sincerity that is frequently undercut by its own selective

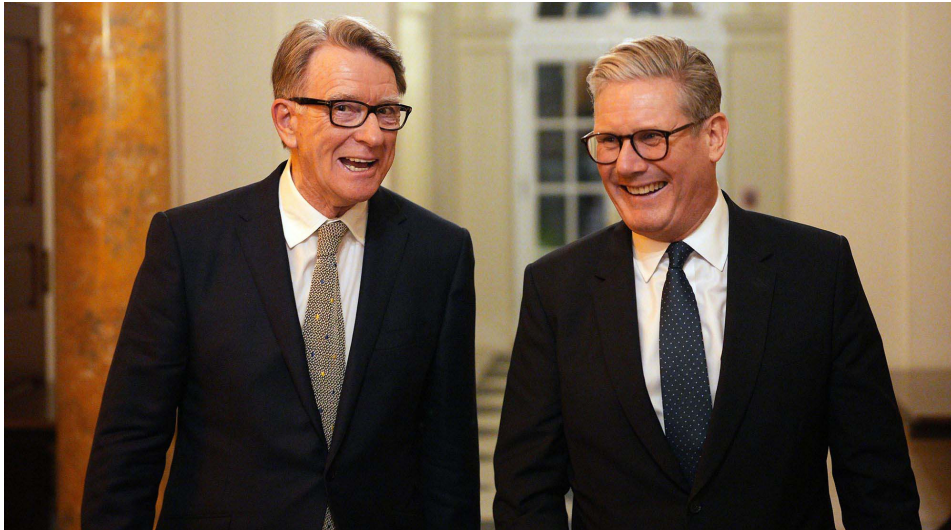
application. The Global South has not missed the inconsistency between Washington's response to the invasion of Ukraine and its response to other conflicts. That inconsistency is not merely hypocritical in their eyes. It is evidence that the rules-based order is, in practice, an order whose rules are made and suspended by those with the power to do so. The New Nonalignment is, in part, a rational response to that observation. For the South Asian diaspora in America, this geopolitical realignment is personal in ways that official Washington rarely acknowledges. When the United States presses India to choose sides, it is asking Indian-Americans to inhabit a contradiction - to celebrate their homeland's rise while endorsing a foreign policy framework that treats India's sovereign choices as problems to be managed rather than expressions of a legitimate national interest. The diaspora understands instinctively what the policy community in Washington struggles to articulate: that India's nonalignment is not anti-Americanism. It is self-determination.

The harder question is what an American foreign policy adequate to this moment would

look like. It would require accepting, as a starting premise, that the United States is no longer the sole architect of the international order - that it is one very powerful node in a multipolar system, and that its influence depends less on coercion than on attraction. It would mean engaging with countries like India, Vietnam, Brazil, and Indonesia on the basis of mutual interest rather than hierarchical expectation. It would mean distinguishing between partners and clients, and recognizing that the most valuable partners are those with the independence to say no. None of that is easy. Much of it runs against the grain of how American power has understood itself for eighty years. But the New Nonalignment is not going away. The nations practicing it are getting wealthier, more confident, and more skilled at managing multiple relationships simultaneously. Washington can adapt to that reality, or it can continue to be surprised by it. The world will not wait for the choice.

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Why Britain can't hold on to its PMs



Britain is preparing to have a new prime minister, the seventh in just over ten years.

After insisting for weeks that he would not quit, Keir Starmer announced his resignation on the morning of June 22. Hours after the announcement, Andy Burnham, a newly elected MP from Manchester, took his seat in the House of Commons (the British equivalent of the Lok Sabha). Burnham, until recently the mayor of Manchester, is set to succeed Starmer.

This is the fourth time in seven years that a British prime minister has been ousted not by voters but by their party — Labour, in Starmer's case. Standing outside 10 Downing Street, he made it clear he was not going of his own accord but had been forced: "The question my party is asking now is whether I am best placed to lead us into the next general election. I have heard the answer of my parliamentary party to that question, and I accept that answer with good grace."

With his resignation, Starmer has bowed to the inevitable after a growing rebellion against him, sparked by Labour's heavy losses in the local elections, just two years after his landslide victory in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Many voters abandoned Labour in favour of far-right Reform UK, which has consistently topped opinion polls for more than a year.

Andy Burnham is seen as the only Labour leader who can take on Reform, led by maverick anti-immigration activist Nigel Farage. Last week, Burnham defeated the Reform candidate by a huge margin in the Makerfield by-election in Manchester, further pressuring Starmer to quit.

IT BEGAN WITH BREXIT

The roots of Britain's current political instability can be traced to Brexit, which marks its tenth anniversary this week. A few months after addressing a successful joint public meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at London's Wembley Stadium, Britain's then-prime minister, David Cameron, decided to hold a referendum on

whether to leave the UK's membership of the European Union.

Cameron was fed up with the daily anti-Europe campaign by right-wingers in his party who believed EU membership was holding back the country's progress and allowing an unlimited number of migrants into Britain from Europe. He was confident of winning the June 2016 referendum in favour of remaining in the EU.

But the Brexit campaign, with the slogan "take back control" of Britain's destiny, led by Boris Johnson of the Conservatives and Nigel Farage, carried the day. By a small majority, British voters decided to leave the EU. Cameron had to resign.

Instead of calming the political temperature, Brexit deepened divisions within the Conservative Party. Cameron's successor, Theresa May, also resigned. Johnson succeeded her, but his conduct during the Covid-19 pandemic prompted a rebellion, leading to his resignation after just over three years. The next Conservative leader was Liz Truss, who won the party election against Rishi Sunak and became prime minister. But she pandered to the party's far-right and produced a budget that wreaked havoc in the markets, forcing her to leave office after just 44 days. Rishi Sunak was crowned as leader and prime minister without an election, as he was seen as the only person capable of steering the economy. Yet daily attacks on him by the party's right-wing MPs left him so weak that he presided over the worst defeat in his party's history for a hundred years.

IMMIGRATION AND THE RISE OF REFORM

Brexit was supposed to bring economic prosperity and greater control over Britain's borders. But it worsened the British economy, as the largest market for its products was lost. Imports from the EU became more expensive. Promised investments were also absent. To make matters worse, both legal and illegal migration increased. Under Boris Johnson, the government allowed hundreds of thousands of

skilled migrants to fill jobs left by EU nationals who returned home after Brexit. Net migration reached a record 7,45,000 in 2022, according to Migration Watch UK!

Farage launched a scathing attack on what he called the Boris wave of migrants. The Conservative governments were also criticised for failing to control illegal migration, mainly arriving by small boats from France. One of the main reasons the Sunak-led government suffered historic losses in the 2024 elections was its inability to control the crossings. Millions of Conservative voters and hundreds of its members, including some former ministers, defected to Reform.

Farage and his party have never looked back. His campaign has fuelled such anti-migrant sentiment in the country that most voters still believe migration is rising, even though, under Starmer, net migration in 2025 fell to 1,71,000, the lowest since the pandemic. In last month's local elections, which hastened Starmer's downfall, Reform's success has been largely credited to the anti-migration campaign.

PARTY INFIGHTING

But Starmer's problems can't be blamed solely on the migration issue. To his credit, his government has taken a tough line, not too far from Reform's, on controlling both illegal and net migration. However, as right-wing members had damaged the Conservative Party and undermined their governments, Labour's left-wing members worked hard to damage Starmer. They forced him to U-turn on multiple issues. To improve fiscal health, Starmer wanted to raise taxes, cut the huge welfare budget, and maintain a cap on government financial support for up to two children, but he was forced to reverse those plans.

There have also been divisions within the party over support for Israel. Many pro-Palestinian members were unhappy with Starmer for his support for Israel. He was aware of allegations of anti-Semitism against the party under his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn, and didn't want to lose Jewish members of Labour. Some members even broke from Labour and contested local elections independently on a pro-Gaza platform.

WILL BURNHAM BE ANY BETTER?

Unless there is a contest, Andy Burnham is going to be crowned Britain's next prime minister, like Sunak, without having to fight a leadership election. Wes Streeting, who resigned as health secretary and announced he would challenge for the leadership, has already declared his support for Burnham. His welcome by more than 200 Labour MPs on Monday suggests that

he is on his way to lead the party and the country.

Burnham is a much more experienced politician than Starmer, who became prime minister without having served even as a junior minister. Burnham served as a minister in the previous Labour government and has extensive experience of running Britain's third-largest city, Manchester, as mayor. He was responsible for the city's regeneration and economic development. He faced criticism for not doing enough to control and bring to justice Pakistani-origin grooming gangs that sexually exploited young white girls in the town of Manchester. He denied those charges.

Not much, though, is clear about Burnham's foreign policy. He is likely to continue Britain's support for Ukraine and to increase cooperation with the EU. In the past, he backed Britain's eventual rejoining of the bloc, but in recent weeks, he has tried to downplay it. As the prime minister, Burnham may not have very cordial relations with Trump, who is not a fan of left-oriented politicians.

SHOULD INDIA BE CONCERNED?

Some Indians are concerned that he may be less India-friendly than Starmer, who signed the India-UK trade deal last year. They fear the Pakistani lobby may try to influence him, but as a seasoned politician, Burnham is unlikely to be swayed. As mayor, he has worked with Manchester's Indian community and even led a delegation to India in 2022 to boost the city's trade and cultural ties. That led to Indian investment in Manchester. As prime minister, one expects Burnham to strengthen the UK's relations with India further. Burnham's main focus will be to reunite his Labour Party and to face the challenge from Reform UK. Unlike Starmer, Burnham is a better communicator, but will he be able to deliver on his party's promises? Britain's economy needs tough decisions, and the business community is a little sceptical of him because of his past statements about increased borrowing and higher taxes. He has tried to calm them by promising to respect financial discipline. The enthusiasm on the left wing of Labour about Burnham suggests it expects him to follow a socialist agenda. But Britain's electorate is more centrist. That's the reason it chose to vote for Labour, led by Starmer in 2024. If Burnham confronts the left, as Starmer did, and tries to bring in tax and welfare reforms, he will be accused of betrayal. That could begin his downfall, and Britain may end up having yet another leader before the next general election. Impatience with leaders runs deep in political parties.

By Hanna Ziady

Yoga: India's ancient gift for a modern world in crisis



Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self. These words capture the essence of what we celebrate on June 21, when the world observes International Yoga Day—not merely as an annual event, but as a global tribute to India's ancient knowledge tradition that guided humanity toward balance of body, mind and soul. Today, as the world grapples with rising stress, depression, lifestyle diseases, environmental imbalance and social fragmentation, India once again stands as a beacon of hope for humanity through yoga. This is an invaluable gift of India's cultural and spiritual heritage—one that the global community is now embracing with genuine recognition.

Yoga emerged from India's ancient Indian Knowledge System, with its principles systematically elaborated in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Maharishi Patanjali's YogaSutras—texts that form the foundational canon of this holistic knowledge tradition. In Indian thought, yoga is not merely physical exercise; it is a holistic way of living. Its purpose is to connect the individual to oneself, to society, to nature and ultimately to the highest consciousness.

The relevance of yoga has grown even more in the rush of modern life. Technology has made daily tasks easier, yet stress, anxiety and mental imbalance have surged alongside it. The severity of this crisis is stark: according to a comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School researchers published in *The Lancet*, one in two people worldwide will experience a mental disorder at least once in their lifetime. The World Health Organisation also considers mental health challenges to be a major global concern.

According to the organisation, around 359 million people worldwide are affected by anxiety disorders. In such a time, yoga has emerged as an effective medium for establishing balance between body and mind. Regular yoga practice not only strengthens physical health, but also plays an important role in the development of mental peace of mind, emotional stability, and a positive outlook.

The purpose of the Indian Knowledge System has always been the welfare of all creatures and nature. The summum bonum of Indian thought is "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" and "Sarvajana Hitaya,

Sarvajana Sukhaya." Our ancient tradition aspired for maximum happiness for all, cultivating knowledge that serves the individual, society and the world together—yoga is its highest expression. Beyond physical health, yoga spreads happiness, wellbeing, and longevity without any medication. That's why it embodies the common belief in our tradition of Shatayu and Chirayu (long-life).

It also establishes a balance between humanity, society, and nature, awakening global welfare. Guided by "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family) and "Loka Samast Sukhino Bhavantu" (let all beings be happy), yoga offers the world a path to peace, health, and harmony.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world realised the usefulness of Yoga. Yoga and pranayama helped millions of people maintain health and mental balance while people were confined to their homes and facing physical and mental challenges. This experience proved that yoga is not only a means of treatment of disease, but the basis of a healthy lifestyle.

The commencement of International Yoga Day is also a result of India's initiatives. India's resolution in the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 received support from a record number of countries and June 21 was declared International Yoga Day. This was a significant achievement of India's cultural diplomacy. Perhaps for the first time, the world community has recognised an ancient Indian tradition on such a large scale. Today, yoga is being practised in almost all countries of the world. The number of yoga centres in the US, UK, France, Japan, Australia and many other countries is constantly increasing.

The greatest feature of yoga is its universality. Yoga is the science of human welfare. This is why people from different cultures, languages and lifestyles accepting it intuitively. The message of yoga also conveys the Indian spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', in which the entire humanity is considered one family. Yoga has also been recognised as an important part of holistic education in the National Education Policy 2020. The objective of the policy is not only to ensure intellectual development, but also to ensure the physical, mental, emotional and moral development of the students.

Yoga, meditation in schools and efforts to promote subjects related to Indian knowledge tradition are part of this broader approach. For today's younger generation, yoga is not only a means of health, but also a means of self-discipline, self-confidence and character building.

It is also important that yoga is not limited to a one-day event. It is often seen that big events are organised on International Yoga Day, but after that yoga does not become a part of life. The real benefits of yoga can be realised only if it becomes a part of the daily routine. A few minutes of yoga practice every day can also bring positive changes in a person's life. A healthy body, a calm mind and a balanced life do not require any expensive means, only regular practice and resolution are required. India today is moving towards the target of 'Developed India 2047'. As much as economic progress is essential in this journey, it is also necessary to build a healthy, self-confident and mentally

empowered society. Yoga can play an important role in achieving this goal. It is not only a matter of personal health, but also related to national productivity, social harmony and human resource development. International Yoga Day reminds us that India's ancient knowledge traditions still have the potential to give direction to humanity. Yoga, which was once considered limited to Indian ashrams and gurukuls, has now taken the form of a global health movement. It is not only a matter of pride for India, but also a reminder of our cultural responsibility to adopt this priceless heritage of ours and pass it on to future generations. The real message of Yoga Day is that a healthy body, a calm mind and a balanced life are the cornerstones of a happy society and a prosperous nation. If we can make yoga a part of life rather than an event, not only will there be a change in individual life, but India will also be able to play its ancient role of guiding the world again.

By Prof Dinesh Prasad Saklani

Quitting smoking was hard.

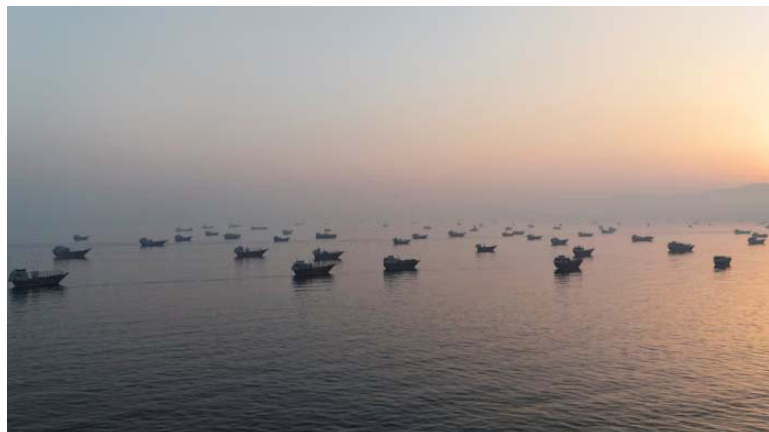
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How the Strait of Hormuz oil crisis is really going to cost India



There is a specific figure Indian households are being encouraged to disregard right now: \$124.85. This amount represented the cost of a barrel of oil on 31 March. The reason we're not talking about it yet isn't that we paid for it; rather, someone else paid for it on our behalf and hasn't sent us the bill yet. Over a period of four months, Indian households observed stable petrol and cylinder prices, despite a conflict occurring two thousand kilometres away that disrupted nearly half of the country's energy supply. Currently, it is being cautiously communicated that the crisis has subsided. Crude oil prices have decreased. The Strait of Hormuz, we were told, had reopened. Exhale, except that even as I write this, Iran has declared the strait closed again, shipping traffic has stalled, and the United States insists it never closed at all. Nobody, including the ships currently sitting still in the Gulf, seems to agree on whether this crisis is actually over. The sense of relief that many felt, while understandable, may be somewhat premature. This is not due to the resurgence of danger, but rather because the economic implications of this

crisis were not primarily about the war itself. Instead, they pertain to fiscal illusion—something every economist recognises but is less visible to the general public. It is the reassuring notion that a cost not immediately apparent has not actually been incurred. It is simply an economic version of a credit card; the obligation remains even if the statement has not yet been issued. Examine the actual price of the Indian crude basket, which reflects the cost incurred by our refiners, rather than a benchmark ticker number. In January, the price was a manageable \$63 a barrel. By the end of March, at the peak of the Hormuz crisis, it had nearly doubled, reaching \$124.85. That trend has been depicted in various forms in most of our publications this year. However, what is less frequently noted is the current situation: even after the ceasefire and subsequent relief, the price remains approximately 20 per cent higher than at the beginning of the year. It represents a new, elevated floor that has been overlooked because the trend is now favourable. The less visible aspect is more intriguing and significantly more challenging to discern. When global crude oil prices

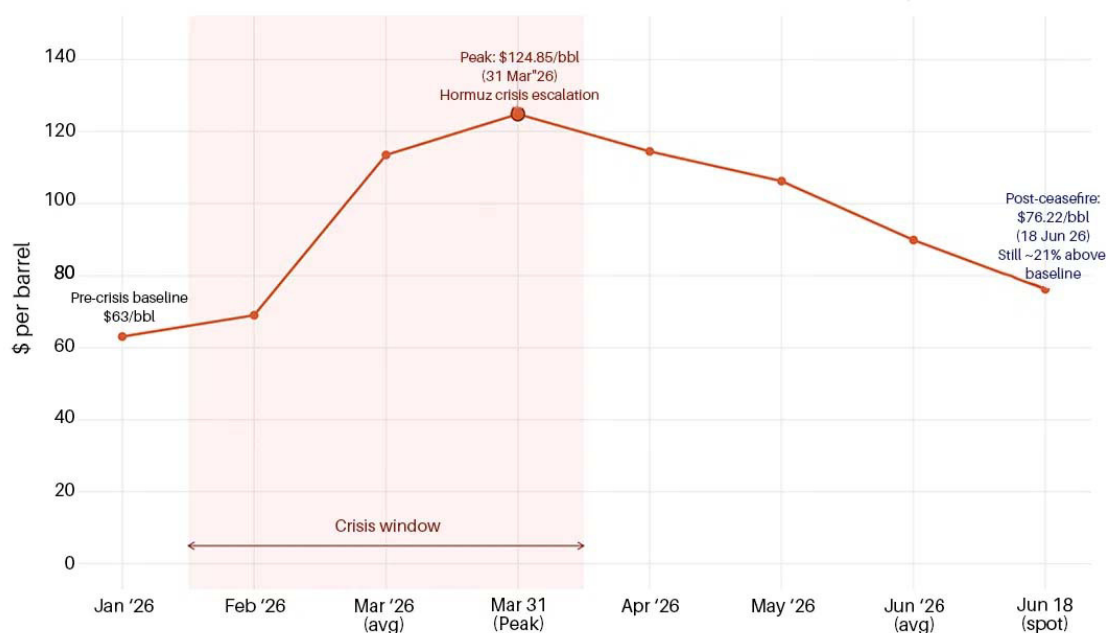
increase significantly, governments encounter a critical decision: whether to immediately transfer the cost to consumers, or to mitigate the impact by absorbing the shock temporarily. India has opted to absorb the impact, relatively maintaining retail prices while state oil marketing companies bear a greater portion of the burden. This decision is not contentious; most governments, regardless of their political orientation, adopt this approach

earlier financial strain. However, this figure remains comparable to the borrowing levels seen during the 2008-2009 crisis, and this is before the complete cost of the Hormuz disruption has been accounted for. The issue is not one of mismanagement but rather that the financial repercussions of this year's crisis have not yet fully materialised. Given that India has encountered this pattern twice before, it should proactively plan for it rather than react to it later.

should be required to publish a standing quarterly disclosure of their under-recoveries and borrowing levels. This would ensure that deferred costs are visible in real time, much like the RBI's approach to more sensitive data. Second, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve's successful model, developed in partnership with the UAE for crude oil, should be expanded to include a substantial buffer of LPG and natural gas. These

INDIA'S OIL IMPORT BILL, MAPPED TO THE HORMUZ CRISIS

Indian Basket crude price (\$/bbl) - the actual price Indian refiners paid, not a benchmark proxy



Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC), Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. 'Crude Oil FOB Price (Indian Basket)' - table postings dated 01.04.2026 and 19.06.2026

ThePrint

to deal with external shocks, as price stability is crucial for households during crises. However, economics has a word for what tends to follow such a decision, and it isn't relief; it's deferral. India has previously lived through this mechanism twice. In 2008-2009, the total under-recovery on sensitive petroleum products amounted to Rs 103,292 crore, and in 2012-2013, it increased to Rs 161,029 crore. In both instances, the actual cost did not appear in the financial records of that year but emerged approximately 18 to 24 months later, typically as a recapitalisation of the oil companies that were initially asked to absorb the cost. As of March 2026, the outstanding borrowings of oil marketing companies stand at Rs 110,668 crore, down from Rs 134,466 crore a year earlier, indicating some alleviation of the

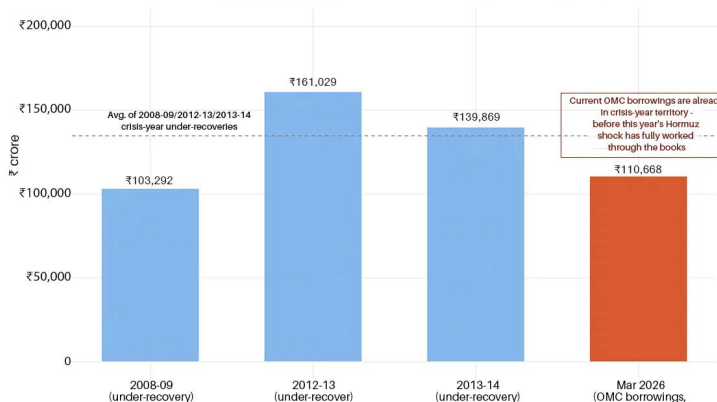
Additionally, there is a less conspicuous parallel that merits acknowledgement: although new gas exploration is progressing in the Andaman Basin and Assam, experts involved in these projects estimate that commercial production is still eight to 10 years away. Thus, while addressing future vulnerabilities at a decadal pace, the current year's vulnerabilities are still being processed at the pace of an accounting cycle. In essence, we are borrowing time in the present in the hope that future supply will arrive in time to repay it. **The way forward** None of this is a cause for alarm; rather, there is a need for enhanced transparency, which India is well-equipped to establish institutionally. Three measures could facilitate this process. First, oil marketing companies

fuels were the most challenging to reroute during the recent crisis. Third, the exploration initiatives in the Andaman and Assam regions should be treated as a long-term national project with clearly defined milestones and a dedicated financing plan, rather than being subsumed into the transient optimism of a single news cycle. Wars end, but ledgers don't themselves automatically. The Strait of Hormuz crisis will officially conclude when it is no longer a headline. However, deferred financial obligations will eventually need to be addressed. The critical decision for India is whether to confront this issue now, while there is still an opportunity to strategise, or to delay once more, mistaking the interim silence between the crisis and the invoice for a free pass.

(TSAI Editorial Team)

INDIA HAS BEEN HERE BEFORE – ON THE FISCAL SIDE

Total under-recovery on sensitive petroleum products vs. current outstanding OMC borrowings (₹ Crore)



Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC), Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. 'Subsidy/Under-recovery on Petroleum Products' historical table, 'Borrowings of OMCs', snapshot of India's Oil & Gas Data, May 2026 (published June 2026)

ThePrint

The Fragile Promise of US-India Partnership in a Fragmenting Global Economy

In an era defined by great-power competition and economic uncertainty, the United States and India stand at a pivotal juncture. Their deepening strategic ties—forged in shared concerns over an increasingly assertive China—offer one of the most consequential partnerships of the 21st century. Yet this relationship remains fragile, tested by protectionist impulses, divergent priorities on trade, and the complex realities of global supply chains. As Washington seeks to decouple from China in critical sectors, can New Delhi truly emerge as a manufacturing powerhouse and reliable strategic counterweight? Or will mutual suspicions and policy missteps undermine the very goals both nations profess to share?

The foundations of this partnership have strengthened notably in recent years. In February 2025, President Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the U.S.-India COMPACT, a broad initiative encompassing military partnership, accelerated commerce, and technology cooperation. This built on existing frameworks like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) and culminated in plans for a 10-year defense partnership announced later that year. Commitments include expanded co-production of defense systems such as Javelin missiles and Stryker vehicles, increased joint exercises under the Quad umbrella, and ambitious targets to double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030.

The Quad itself—comprising the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia—continues to serve as a cornerstone of Indo-Pacific strategy. The May 2026 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi advanced practical cooperation on maritime surveillance, critical minerals supply chains, energy security, and port infrastructure, underscoring a collective push for a free and open region amid concerns over unilateral changes to the status quo.

These developments reflect a clear convergence on strategic threats. Beijing's border tensions with India, militarization in the South China Sea, and economic coercion have pushed New Delhi closer to Washington. For the U.S., India represents an indispensable partner in countering Chinese influence without the entanglements of formal alliances. Democratic values, though imperfectly practiced in both capitals, provide a rhetorical and normative glue that authoritarian rivals cannot match. Yet strategic alignment alone cannot paper over economic frictions. The promise of "China+1" diversification has

drawn significant interest to India. Multinationals, wary of over-reliance on Chinese manufacturing amid tariffs, export controls, and geopolitical risks, have looked to India for electronics, pharmaceuticals, solar components, and defense production. India's manufacturing FDI has grown, supported by policy incentives and its vast domestic market.

However, India's ability to capitalize fully remains constrained. Infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory hurdles, and a persistent trade deficit with China (exceeding \$100 billion in recent years) highlight structural weaknesses. Chinese exports continue to dominate key segments, while India's own protectionist tendencies—high tariffs on certain goods and emphasis on self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat)—sometimes clash with American expectations for open markets.

U.S. policy has sent mixed signals. While strategic cooperation advances, trade relations have been turbulent. In 2025, Washington imposed additional tariffs on Indian goods partly linked to New Delhi's continued purchases of Russian oil. A February 2026 interim trade agreement provided some relief, lowering reciprocal tariffs and securing Indian commitments to reduce barriers on U.S. agricultural and industrial products. Yet lingering disputes over market access, intellectual property, and labor standards persist. Protectionism in both capitals risks turning a potential virtuous cycle into a zero-sum game.

From an American perspective, the stakes are high. Decoupling from China—never complete, but real in technology and strategic sectors—requires alternative partners with scale, stability, and innovation capacity. India, with its young demographic dividend, vibrant private sector, and democratic credentials, fits the bill better than most alternatives. Success in semiconductors, AI, quantum computing, and clean energy under initiatives like TRUST and iCET could create resilient supply chains less vulnerable to Beijing's leverage.

For India, the opportunity is transformative. Becoming a manufacturing hub could generate millions of jobs, boost exports, and elevate its global standing. Strategic partnership with the U.S. enhances defense capabilities and technological prowess against regional threats. Yet over-dependence on any single partner contradicts New Delhi's long-standing doctrine of strategic autonomy. India's balancing act—maintaining ties with

Russia for energy and defense, engaging BRICS partners, and cautiously managing China relations—reflects pragmatic realism rather than equivocation.

The editorial challenge lies in navigating these tensions without illusion. Shared democratic values are important but insufficient when economic interests diverge. Washington must temper its transactional instincts and recognize that lecturing India on Russia or demanding rapid agricultural liberalization ignores political realities in New Delhi. India, meanwhile, must accelerate domestic reforms—labor laws, land acquisition, ease of doing business—to make "Make in India" more than a slogan. Joint ventures in defense and tech require greater trust and fewer restrictions on technology transfer.

Protectionism poses the greatest near-term threat. U.S. tariffs, while aimed at China, can inadvertently slow the very diversification they seek to encourage. India's retaliatory impulses or insistence on high local-content requirements risk deterring the very investment needed for scale. Both sides should prioritize a comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement that addresses core

concerns while locking in gains from COMPACT. Multilateral avenues, including deeper Quad economic initiatives on critical minerals and supply chains, offer a way to institutionalize cooperation beyond bilateral frictions.

The human dimension matters profoundly. For millions of Indians, economic growth through manufacturing means pathways out of poverty and into the middle class. For Americans, resilient partnerships reduce strategic vulnerabilities and support domestic revitalization. In a world where authoritarian powers exploit economic dependencies, a successful U.S.-India economic-security nexus would demonstrate that democracies can compete and thrive together.

The partnership is not destined to fail, but neither is success guaranteed. It demands sustained leadership, pragmatic compromise, and a long-term vision that transcends electoral cycles. As China continues its rise and the global order fragments, Washington and New Delhi must choose cooperation over caution. The alternative—a world of heightened risks and missed opportunities—serves neither nation nor the broader cause of a stable, prosperous Indo-Pacific.

(TSAI Editorial Team)

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The Great American Medical Heist

How Health Care Fraud Bleeds the System, Betrays the Sick, and Demands Reckoning

By Sharanjit 'Sunny' Thind

Every year, the United States loses an estimated \$300 billion — some analyses put the figure closer to \$500 billion — to health care fraud. That is not a rounding error. That is a systemic hemorrhage large enough to fund the entire Veterans Administration budget several times over. It is money stolen from taxpayers, siphoned from Medicare and Medicaid, and extracted from the very people who need care most. And yet, despite decades of enforcement, fraud remains the most lucrative white-collar crime in America. The scale of this problem is not merely a fiscal footnote. It is a moral emergency — one that demands editorial candor, legislative courage, and institutional accountability.

The Many Faces of Medical Fraud

Medical fraud is not a single crime. It is an ecosystem of deception that spans specialties, geographies, and criminal hierarchies. Its most common manifestations include: billing for services never rendered; upcoding — charging for more complex procedures than were actually performed; unbundling — splitting a single procedure into multiple billable components; prescribing unnecessary tests, treatments, or durable medical equipment; kickback schemes between physicians and pharmaceutical companies or device manufacturers; and outright identity theft using stolen patient Medicare numbers to generate fraudulent claims.

The most organized schemes operate like criminal enterprises. In South Florida, Southern California, and parts of New York and New Jersey — all regions with large Medicare populations and dense provider networks — federal prosecutors have dismantled billing rings running tens of millions of dollars annually. In June 2024, the Justice Department's National Health Care Fraud Takedown charged nearly 200 individuals across the country, including physicians, pharmacists, and clinic operators, in schemes totaling over \$2.7 billion in fraudulent claims.

Who Are the Perpetrators?

The profile of a health care fraudster is frustratingly broad. At the apex sit organized criminal networks — sometimes with ties to drug trafficking organizations — that recruit physicians, pay patient recruiters known as 'cappers,' and operate ghost clinics. These operations fake entire patient rosters and billing histories. Below them are individual providers who exploit loopholes: the orthopedic surgeon who routinely upcodes procedures; the psychiatric group that bills for sessions that lasted minutes,

if at all; the home health agency that certifies patients as homebound when they are not. Medicare Advantage plans — the private-insurance arm of Medicare — have become a particular vulnerability, with insurers themselves facing allegations of systematically overcoding patient diagnoses to inflate federal reimbursements.

Pharmaceutical fraud adds another layer. Manufacturers have paid billions in settlements for off-label drug promotion and physician kickback schemes. The opioid crisis, itself partly fueled by fraudulent prescribing incentivized by marketing payments, represents perhaps the deadliest convergence of fraud and public health catastrophe in American history.

The Real Victims: Patients Denied Care

The economic damage is severe. But the human cost is worse. When fraud inflates costs across a system already stretched to breaking, the consequences fall hardest on those with the least power. Medicaid patients in states with chronically underfunded programs find physicians unwilling to accept their insurance — partly because fraudulent providers have prompted tighter reimbursement controls that penalize honest ones. Medicare beneficiaries discover their annual caps consumed by equipment they never received. Patients with genuine complex diagnoses face prior-authorization denials from overburdened reviewers trained to be skeptical because fraud has taught the system distrust.

There is also a subtler harm: when public dollars earmarked for community health clinics, rural hospital subsidies, or preventive care programs are drained by fraud, those programs shrink or disappear. The elderly woman in rural Georgia who cannot find a primary care physician within fifty miles is, in part, a casualty of a system robbed blind elsewhere.

The Economic Toll

The Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office have repeatedly flagged improper payments in Medicare and Medicaid as a systemic budget threat. In fiscal year 2023, estimated improper payments across both programs exceeded \$100 billion. These are not just losses to the federal treasury — they translate directly into premium increases for private insurers, higher out-of-pocket costs for patients, and constrained budgets for states that jointly fund Medicaid.

Small and mid-size employers, the backbone of the American economy, face insurance premiums that have risen in part because fraud inflates the actuarial baseline against which all claims are priced. The small business owner in Queens or Cleveland who

cannot afford to cover her workers is paying, invisibly, for the ghost clinic in Miami.

Enforcement and Legislation: What Must Be Done

The federal toolkit is not empty. The False Claims Act, the Anti-Kickback Statute, and the Stark Law form the legal architecture of health care fraud enforcement. The HHS Office of Inspector General and the FBI Healthcare Fraud Unit conduct sophisticated investigations. But enforcement remains chronically under-resourced relative to the scale of the problem.

Congress must act on several fronts simultaneously. First, mandatory real-time claims analytics should be codified into law — not merely encouraged as a CMS best practice. The data exists to flag aberrant billing patterns within days; the will to act on it must be legislated. Second, the Anti-Kickback Statute should be strengthened to close the 'value-based care' exceptions that have become exploitable loopholes. Third, whistleblower protections must be expanded and their financial rewards streamlined — qui tam relators under the False Claims Act have returned tens of billions to the federal government, and that pipeline must be protected and incentivized.

Provider enrollment must be tightened. Currently, Medicare and Medicaid credentialing can be exploited by shell

entities. Biometric authentication, real-site inspections for all new provider applications, and mandatory enrollment moratoria in fraud-saturated markets are not radical proposals — they are operational imperatives.

At the legislative level, the MEDIC Act — the Medicare Drug Integrity Contractor program — needs renewed funding and expanded mandate. State attorneys general, often the first responders to Medicaid fraud, need federal co-financing for investigative capacity. And sentences for health care fraud must reflect its scale: a scheme that steals \$50 million from Medicare should not carry a lighter effective sentence than a bank robbery for \$50,000.

Health care fraud is not a victimless crime committed in the abstract corridors of billing departments. It is theft from the sick, the elderly, the disabled — the most vulnerable Americans — committed in broad daylight by licensed professionals who swore oaths to do no harm. It is subsidized by our collective indifference and enabled by regulatory gaps we have failed to close. The good news is that the tools exist. The data is available. The legal framework, imperfect as it is, can be strengthened. What is required is political will — and the editorial courage to name this crisis for what it is: a betrayal of the public trust at the scale of a national emergency.

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The Iran Paradox: 2 Things That Can Derail The Peace Process

The US-Iran peace process is well and truly on. In accordance with the provisions of the 14-Point MoU that was signed on June 16, the first round of talks were held in Burgenstock, Switzerland, on June 22. It resulted in the agreement for a roadmap of 60 days, which involves many confidence-building measures before the really tricky issues are discussed and agreed upon. Coming in the backdrop of many doubts and apprehensions if and when the talks will take place, mainly due to the continuing ceasefire violations in Southern Lebanon and the occasional threat from President Trump of restarting the war and bombing Iran, this roadmap is indeed a welcome step. However, the bigger question is not the the roadmap itself but whether it can finally lead to an acceptable deal that can ensure lasting peace in the region, battered by war and instability for almost three years since the outbreak of Gaza war in October 2023.

The Roadmap

The roadmap is a follow-up of the 14-Point MoU, which was digitally signed by President Trump and President Pezeshkian on June 16. It calls for the formation of a high-level committee for political oversight, technical working groups on nuclear and sanctions issues, and a dispute resolution mechanism. It provides for a communication line to be established between parties, especially Iran and the US, to ensure safe passage for commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz - a key provision of the 14-Point MoU. Some of the other key provisions of the roadmap are:

A de-escalation and monitoring unit will also be created to ensure compliance of the ceasefire and the cessation of military operations in Lebanon.

Iran to receive sanctions waiver from the US Treasury Department to sell crude oil, gas, and petrochemical products freely for a period of 60 days, up to August 21, 2026.

An agreement with Qatar regarding the release of Iran's frozen assets.

A working group on nuclear file, which will commence talks on the future of Iran's nuclear



programme. It also involves Iran permitting IAEA inspectors to return to the country provided that other critical conditions as per clauses 1 (Lebanon ceasefire), 4 and 5 (Strait of Hormuz), 10 (removal of sanctions on oil sales) and 11 (unfreezing of Iranian funds and assets) of the MoU have been implemented.

Why A Deal Is Still Elusive

The MoU and the roadmap are already facing severe criticism both in the US as well as Israel. Many are terming it as America's abject surrender to Iran, while most are questioning the whole purpose of the war if at the end of it, Iran had to be awarded with revocations of sanctions and unfreezing of funds and assets. More importantly, the MoU terms clearly indicate that none of the two primary objectives of the war in Iran, i.e., complete destruction of its nuclear programme or its ballistic missiles programme, has been achieved. On the third implied (or desired) objective of regime change in Iran, the outcome of the war has been contrary to the intentions. Not only has the regime survived but the war has cemented the hold of the regime in Iran, with an added factor of the Revolutionary Guards having tighter control over critical issues, as well as an elusive Supreme Leader who may well turn out to be more hardline than the previous one.

Precedents of previous deals and MoU do not inspire confidence either. Most recent is the 'Board of Peace' in Gaza. Established

under the chairmanship of President Trump himself, it may have ended the war in Gaza formally. But little has moved beyond it. Despite the '20-Point Plan' that laid out the charter for peace and was formally endorsed by the UN Security Council on November 17, 2025 (UNSC Resolution 2803 of 2025), not much has moved.

Even though Phase-1 of the Gaza ceasefire was largely successful in returning all hostages back to Israel and pulling back Israeli forces to the 'Yellow Line', it is the Phase-2 that was more critical to the future of Gaza. That had three vital components. The first is the establishment and positioning of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), second is the disarming of Hamas and demilitarisation of Gaza, and third is the governance of Gaza by a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee, with oversight and supervision by the "Board of Peace". However, all that remains on paper.

Israel continues its operations in the Gaza strip with impunity, Netanyahu has called for expansion of territory in Gaza under Israeli control from the current 53% to 70%, and the officially reported toll of people killed in Gaza since October 10, 2025 (the day ceasefire came into effect) has crossed 1,000. Also, there is neither any clarity nor consensus on the provision of troops by partner countries for the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) in Gaza, which is to

be led by Major General Jasper Jeffers from the US. Plus, of the estimated USD 20 billion required for reconstruction of Gaza, there is hardly any money in the kitty yet. The war in Gaza thus remains an unending saga of despair, frustration and human tragedy.

There is, therefore, the fear that the Iran peace process may face a similar fate. While it is clear that neither Iran or the US have any appetite for more war, the possibility of talks extending for months and years on two crucial issues - the nuclear and the ballistic missile programmes - may turn this roadmap into an unending saga.

The fear of the US and/or Israel reneging on a deal in the future also poses questions about the prospects of lasting peace. The previous two instances, of June 2025 - when Israel launched strikes into Iran just when US-Iran nuclear talks were progressing well - or February 2026, when Oman announced an agreement on key issues of nuclear programme between the US and Iran, do not inspire confidence. Also, the previous nuclear deal with Iran, signed in July 2015 and ratified by the UN Security Council, was unilaterally revoked by the US in May 2018 under President Trump's first term. All these precedents put into question not only the success of the roadmap but also the guarantees that a deal, if agreed upon, will actually endure. The implementation of the

roadmap has started in earnest, from both ends. The steady movement of ships across the Strait of Hormuz, the removal of sanctions on sale of Iranian crude oil and gas and the commencement of defreezing of Iranian money, offer hope. Iran's commitment to permit IAEA inspectors back into Iran along with reports of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire holding for the past 48 hours, offers hope. However, the road ahead is anything but easy. The real test of the process will come about when the technical details on the nuclear file commence. The ballistic missile programme may not be part of the 14-Point MoU, but it is likely to crop up in the discussions later. A war that started with the aim of bringing down the Iranian regime on its knees within days and weeks has finally ended in a stalemate, with Iran, ironically, emerging stronger than ever. Most of its demands have been incorporated into the 14-Point MoU, and, if implemented, it could result in the end of Iran's global isolation and the punitive western sanctions that it has endured for over three decades. Whether Iran uses this opportunity to build confidence and trust with its regional partners to ensure lasting peace and prosperity or ends up posing a greater threat to regional peace is perhaps the most vital factor that will define the success of the roadmap in the coming weeks and months.

By Col (Retd) Rajeev Agarwal

How India's maitrata doctrine benefits from the US-Iran truce



Diplomacy has many forms. From economic, cultural, and e-diplomacy to others, such as data, export, and even gastronomic diplomacy. Many of these were on display during the recent G7 meet. Last week, several world leaders gathered in France to discuss one of the most debilitating stalemates of our time, one that is making the world spin out of control.

Simultaneously, the world bore witness to one of the biggest and most visible festivals of cultural diplomacy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, throughout his 12 years in office, has ensured that India receives its much overdue global recognition for indigenous, holistic and healthcare practices and that the summer solstice is observed as the International Yoga Day.

The juxtaposition of the two diplomatic events is striking. One reflected the quiet power of culture, whilst the other reflected the enduring relevance of dialogue. Together they underscored a fundamental truth—whether through soft power or statecraft, lasting influence is built by engagement, not confrontation. As I write this, US Vice-President JD Vance would have arrived in Switzerland to further ratify the tenuous ceasefire pact signed by US President Trump in Versailles on 17 June.

India at G7

India has had a very public participation at the G7 Summit in Evian, with PM Modi taking centre stage at many of the events. India's growing diplomatic importance was further reinforced as Modi attended the Outreach Session as

a special invitee.

Even though India is not a formal member of the G7 (formerly G6), we are regularly invited as a key partner nation. Because of India's immense economic scale, population and leadership across the global south, the other members often actively advocate for New Delhi's presence at the table.

India is uniquely positioned to bridge the divide between advanced, industrialised economies and emerging market economies. The country is also a champion for reform of international financial and developmental institutions, all while pushing for equitable representation for developing nations. India is also central to supply chain diversification, clean energy transitions and AI governance discussions. So it made sense why both India and G7 nations were happy to accept French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation, because we are increasingly being viewed as an essential stakeholder in global governance.

India even brought up several relevant issues related to energy, security, freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, supply chains and regional stability in the Middle East at the 52nd summit. In fact, it was Modi who highlighted the urgency of reopening the Strait of Hormuz during his meeting with Trump last week. Modi emphasised the absolute importance of finding a reasonable solution to end the US-Iran war. India's reiteration for peace and diplomatic solutions has also contributed to the current truce.

14 points of peace

The interim agreement between the US and Iran to pause hostilities and open the strait of Hormuz contains 14 points that will tentatively peace for 60 days, at least until Vance and his Iranian counterparts have time to work around the nitty-gritty for a permanent solution. The current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) states the "Immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon, and undertake from now on not to initiate any war or any military operation against each other, and to refrain from the threat or use of force against each other, and ensuring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon."

Immediate concessions include a complete cessation of armed hostilities, instantaneous removal of the US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz (to be completed within 30 days), mutual undertaking to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other country. The MoU further states that Iran must arrange safe passage of commercial vehicles from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman, without any charges or levies, and a \$300 billion deal to be worked out for the reconstruction and economic development of Iran. All sanctions against Iran imposed by the West, including UN bodies, will be removed. In return, Iran has committed that it shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons.

"Until the termination of

sanctions, the US Department of the Treasury will issue waivers for the export of Iranian crude oil, petroleum products, and derivatives, and all associated services, including banking transactions, insurances, transportation, etc," the agreement read.

International consequences of the US-Iran peace pact

The tentative peace pact between the US and Iran is definitely significant. It not only brings an end to months of conflict, but its implications extend far beyond the two countries involved.

Trade routes to Europe and even North America have been under disruption for months. The reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is a crucial factor in this agreement, since one-fifth of the world's oil container traffic passes via this body of water. The restoration of maritime traffic through this critical chokepoint has the potential to stabilise global energy markets, reduce volatility in oil prices and ease inflationary pressures across all those economies dependent upon imported oil. A phased easing of sanctions, which is what Iran has been demanding vociferously and the release of the Iranian frozen assets, will also go a long way in bringing peace to the region and the world at large. Iran is alleged to have a Nuclear Weapons Program, which it has denied throughout. It remains to be seen if an agreement can be reached for a structured and diplomatic process to address this. Both sides so far appear to be on the same page that issues need to be sorted through negotiations across the table rather than military conflict. And this is the message that Vance seeks to send out at the Lake Lucerne summit.

"Can we change relations in the Middle East permanently, or do we go back to doing things the old way, which is not our preference, but is certainly very much something that can happen," Vance said ahead of his visit to Switzerland.

Issues that could still derail the talks are: Israel going head-to-head with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the elephant in the room—Iran's "yes-you-have-it-no-we-don't" nuclear weapons program.

Benefits for India

During the conflict, India had energy anxiety as 85 per cent of our crude oil is imported. A pact to end the war ensures that India's energy crisis ends when oil tankers can safely transit the Strait of Hormuz. Further, nearly one in five seafarers is Indian, which ensures a safe passage for merchant ships ensures the maritime safety of our seamen. Lower freight and insurance costs and greater stability for India's exports to the Gulf are other benefits.

One of the most significant long-term ramifications of the ceasefire is the oil trade that India has with Iran. It is not our war, and India has historically maintained cordial relations with the Middle East. The energy needs of 1.5 billion people cannot be dependent on a war that benefits only a few.

Another long-term implication is the resumption of Iran's Chabahar port construction. India can continue investing in this strategic maritime port, which would open doors to trade with Afghanistan and the rest of the Middle East, bypass routes via Pakistan, and counterbalance growing Chinese influence through the Gwadar Port in Balochistan. This could be a strategic long-term gain from any sustained Iran-US rapprochement.

India's geopolitical strategy of maitrata or friendship has led to widespread cordiality. Through PM Modi's diplomatic outreach, India is friends with the Middle East, Israel, the US, Iran, and Russia. India is not conflicted to take sides if the ceasefire fails and can engage all sides without facing constant strategic pressure. This aligns well with India's doctrine of strategic autonomy. The Lake Lucerne Summit will determine the permanence of the process of peace. There are mainly two aspects to this process, one of course is the language of the MoU, but the second is the interpretation of that language, not only for communication, but more importantly, the implementation of the same principles on the ground for bringing permanence to the peace beyond engaging in the process of peace and discarding war.

By Meenakshi Lekhi The Print

The AI Overhaul: What India Can Learn From China's Massive University Shakeup



China has carried out the most sweeping university overhaul in the past five years. It has eliminated 12,200 undergraduate programmes and introduced 10,200 new ones. The changes touched more than 30 per cent of all Chinese university courses. The discontinued programmes share a common thread: arts, humanities, foreign languages, general management. Fields Beijing believes will have no demand in the future economy. The replacements are mostly in artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced computing, and quantum technologies. Top Chinese universities now offer degrees in embodied intelligence, the science of how AI interacts with the physical world. For children as young as six, algorithm literacy is now taught alongside reading and arithmetic.

We in India need to sit with this news for a moment. The disruption in jobs and economic value is no longer speculative. AI, machine learning, robotics, and quantum computing are already restructuring industries, compressing skill cycles, and redrawing the map of what human labour is worth. India's own Economic Survey 2024-25 acknowledged the double edge: AI will automate economically valuable tasks at scale, and the workers most exposed are those

in the middle and lower wage brackets. Precisely the cohort that the university system is meant to uplift.

The challenge India faces is not simply unemployment. It is something more corrosive: mass unproductivity. A structural mismatch between what tens of millions of young Indians are trained to do and what a rapidly evolving economy will pay them to do. The World Economic Forum estimates that 63% of India's workforce will require significant upskilling and reskilling by 2030 to adapt to AI and advanced automation.

The demographic dividend India prizes so highly is not a guaranteed asset. Handed to an underprepared workforce, it becomes a liability.

History has already run this experiment. India rode the IT wave of the 1990s because it had a critical mass of English-speaking engineering talent when the world needed it. It became pharmacy to the world because health sciences had been quietly nurtured over decades. Every economic wave India has successfully caught was preceded, years earlier, by an education system that produced the right skills at the right moment. The AI wave is cresting now.

China has done this at a far bigger scale. In 1985, under Deng Xiaoping's Four Modernizations,

Beijing restructured its education system around a single purpose: industrialisation. Vocational enrolment surged from 5 per cent in 1978 to 36 per cent by 1985, redirecting large numbers of high school students into technical training. University admissions were state-directed to produce engineers, scientists, and technicians. The factory of the world that swept global markets in the 1990s was not built in Shenzhen. It was built in Chinese classrooms a decade earlier.

In 1991, when India launched its own economic reforms, the two countries were roughly comparable in GDP and per capita income. Today, India is a \$4.1 trillion economy. China is \$19 trillion, nearly five times larger. That divergence was partly engineered through a long-term bet on human capital.

China is making a similar bet again. In 2024, its gross R&D spending reached \$785 billion, positioning it at the forefront of global innovation investment. That is more than ten times India's total outlay. Meanwhile, India's R&D spending has remained anchored at less than 1 per cent of GDP.

This column is not an exercise in self-flagellation. The IITs and IIMs have produced world-class talent. India's space programme is a genuine point of national pride. The National Education Policy of 2020 is a serious

document. Its emphasis on multidisciplinary, computational thinking, and early technology exposure reflects real intent. India plans to roll out an AI curriculum across all schools from Grade 3 beginning 2027. The government has announced a Centre of Excellence in AI for Education.

But a framework is not real-world transformation. Intent is not implementation. The NEP's ambitions are being tested against a baseline that, in large parts of the country, is still fighting for basic literacy. Introducing algorithm literacy where reading literacy is absent is a Himalayan task.

The private sector deserves scrutiny here. India's private universities and schools have expanded aggressively for two decades on the promise of employability. How many have genuinely restructured their programmes for the AI era, not merely rebranded them? How many are still offering the same outdated engineering syllabi, the same general management degrees, dressed in new prospectus language? Regulatory and accreditation bodies must ask harder questions. Autonomy should be a privilege earned through demonstrated relevance.

What India needs is a genuine convergence of policymakers, industry, research institutions,

and academia, operating at a speed this sector has never attempted. Industry must stop being a passive consumer of educational output and become an active co-designer of it. The gap between what engineering colleges teach and what technology companies need has been a challenge for decades. In the AI era, it becomes dangerous. Policymakers must match ambition with action. China's current reforms are backed by a planned \$300 billion commitment to AI infrastructure and a mechanism to track how AI creates and displaces jobs in real time, so that education policy can respond dynamically, not retrospectively. India needs an equivalent instrument suiting our domestic realities and economic planning. The decisions made now on curriculum, R&D investment, and the rationalisation of what we teach and why, will determine whether India participates in the AI economy as an innovator or as a vendor of cheap labour with an expensive degree. China made its education bet in 1985 and collected its dividend for thirty years. It is placing its next bet right now, with a clarity of purpose. The question for India is not whether it has noticed. It is whether it has the institutional will to act at the required scale and the required speed.

By Vinay Sarawagi

The Great Surrender: Why This Is America's Worst Humiliation In Over 50 Years

A week after US President Donald Trump signed an agreement with Iran to end the war, the US lifted oil sanctions against the Islamic country for 60 days. Money will start flowing into Iran, and that too in dollars, reversing a decades-old policy of tough sanctions and isolation of Tehran. The US Vice-President, JD Vance, says Iran has agreed to invite nuclear inspectors after talks in Switzerland, from which it briefly pulled out after Trump's expletive-laden attack on its leadership and threats to bomb the country again. Tehran insists it has made no new commitment to the US. On Saturday, it again closed the Strait of Hormuz after Israel's attacks on its proxy, Hezbollah, in Lebanon.

This suggests how much the US and Israel's war has favoured Tehran. The memorandum of understanding that Trump signed in Versailles, France, last week was described by Iran's lead negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, as "a record of US failure". It has already been condemned by Trump's critics as a 'surrender' document - ironically, for the president who, in March, had demanded "unconditional surrender from Iran". In return for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which had been open before the war, the MoU commits the US to lifting its blockade of Iranian ports, waiving all sanctions and unfreezing assets it held abroad. The 14-point document also includes a \$300 billion reconstruction fund for Iran, effectively reparations. The US also agreed to withdraw its forces from the vicinity of Iran within 30 days of the final deal.

Unprecedented Humiliation There is no precedent in recent US history for an American president accepting such humiliating terms. America's humiliation has been compounded by Trump's defence of allowing Iran to retain its arsenal of ballistic missiles, whose destruction was a key

aim of the war. Speaking at the G7 summit last week, Trump said, "I mean, they have to have some, because other people have some. You got to have some." He added, "Am I going to let Saudi Arabia have missiles, but they can't have them?" The Saudis, who have relied on US protection, must be horrified. Iran is only required to maintain a status quo on its nuclear programme until the final deal in 60 days. In defence, Trump said he wanted to avoid an economic catastrophe that could have ensued had the war continued. He said he didn't want to be compared with Herbert Hoover, who was president during the 1929 market crash that led to the Great Depression. The US conservative website, the Bulwark, argued that Trump had, in effect, acknowledged that "he had to choose between surrender" to Iran and "economic disaster".

This is the second time in five years that an American president has been forced to accept a hasty, inglorious retreat from a foreign war. Joe Biden did so in 2021, withdrawing from Afghanistan and leaving the country in the hands of the brutal Taliban. But Trump's decision is far worse and more humiliating than Biden's and has parallels with the US retreat from Vietnam in 1973.

Iran And Vietnam Wars

Although there is no direct comparison between Trump's Iran war and the Vietnam war, which lasted for decades, cost 58,000 US lives and involved several American presidents, some parallels can be drawn if we compare the final phases of the two conflicts and how they ended. Richard Nixon became the US president in 1969, when the US public was already growing tired of the Vietnam War. Nixon and his formidable national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, didn't want to abandon South Vietnam. They first tried to increase bombardments of the communist North Vietnam,



issued new threats and ultimatums, but that didn't work either, as has been the case with the Iranians. The Soviets relished America's plight, as did the Chinese and Russians during the Iran conflict. Nixon then decided to withdraw American forces from South Vietnam. He reached an agreement with North Vietnam to end the war in 1973. Two years later, North Vietnamese troops marched into Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, marking the United States' crushing defeat. Like Nixon, Trump tried to bomb and bully Iran into submission, but that didn't work. Taking a cue from the North Vietnamese approach in 1968, the Iranians employed horizontal escalation, expanding the conflict across the wider Gulf region. That approach, combined with the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which controls one-fifth of the world's energy supplies and other vital components of the global economy, compelled Trump to agree to a deal on Iran's terms. As Nixon was forced to leave the vital question of South Vietnam to end the unpopular war, Trump had to leave the issue of Iran's nuclear programme for later negotiations.

Squandering US Leverage

After campaigning against US involvement in foreign conflicts, Trump was lured into launching the disastrous war with Iran by Israel's Prime Minister,

Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli leader convinced Trump that the Islamic regime was at its weakest point in decades and that a joint US-Israeli attack would deliver a quick and total victory, including the overthrow of the Islamic regime. That would have given Netanyahu a huge boost in the October elections and secured Trump's place among the most powerful US leaders in history. But Iran stood firm despite the loss of thousands of lives and severe damage to its military and civilian infrastructure. Previous US presidents dismissed Netanyahu's arguments for starting a war with Iran. Obama chose a diplomatic solution and signed the multilateral Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme in 2015, which Trump later tore up despite Tehran's compliance. Obama and other presidents kept the threat of force against Iran in reserve but didn't use it because their advisers warned it would be too risky. Trump ignored them all. Once the use of force fails, the threat to repeat it no longer works. That is what has happened with Iran.

Nightmare For Israel

Thanks to Trump's decision to join Israel's war, Iran is now more powerful. It has a more radical and dangerous regime for Israel and its Gulf neighbours. It still holds a large stock of missiles and launchers, according to US intelligence. Trump's deal has given diplomatic cover to Iran's

proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah. Israel is, therefore, less safe, Netanyahu is politically much weaker, and Trump may have recorded his name in history books as a president who capitulated to extricate himself from a misconceived war. The fear in Israel is that an emboldened Iran will drag the nuclear talks on beyond the 60-day period, as there is no longer the constraint of US sanctions. Many blame Netanyahu for this plight, as it was he who campaigned against the JCPOA and twice started the war with Iran when the talks on the nuclear programme were on. After its victory in the war, Iran can challenge Israel's status as the regional superpower. No other war since Vietnam has exposed America's helplessness as much as the one with Iran. This is the worst defeat for the superpower since the Vietnam War, another sign of its decline. The second war in Iraq (2003-2011) and the one in Afghanistan left a trail of destruction and were criticised for creating further problems for the region and the countries involved. But the US still retained its image as the world's strongest power, capable of influencing events in its favour. The disaster in Iran has left America diplomatically weaker and militarily exposed. Thanks to Trump, Iran has discovered a new weapon, the Strait of Hormuz, which it can use at will to create economic havoc, and the US can't do much about it.

By Naresh Kaushik

Iran told US no Hormuz tolls, talks will end if details are untrue: Trump

Donald Trump said Iran had assured the United States that ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz would not face tolls, insurance fees or any other charges.



(SAI Bureau) : Seeking to calm fears that Iran could begin charging ships to pass through Strait of Hormuz, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Tehran had assured it would not impose tolls, insurance fees or any other charges on vessels transiting the strait. In a post on Truth Social, Trump said Iran had informed the US that there would be "NO TOLLS, NO INSURANCE COSTS, & NO OTHER CHARGES OF ANY

KIND" on ships using the strategic waterway. "If this is false information, negotiations would end, immediately!" Trump wrote. Questions over potential shipping charges emerged after reports and comments from Iranian officials claimed Tehran would play a greater role in managing traffic through Strait of Hormuz following ongoing negotiations. Discussions involving Iranian and Omani officials on maritime services in the waterway fuelled

speculation that transit fees could eventually be introduced. The Strait of Hormuz carries roughly a fifth of the world's seaborne oil trade and remains one of the most strategically important shipping routes in the world.

TRUMP DENIES MONEY TRANSFERS TO IRAN

The US President also rejected reports that the US had transferred money to Iran as part of ongoing negotiations. "Additionally, no money has been given to Iran, or released from their money to them, by the US," Trump said. Instead, Trump said Washington planned to release some Iranian funds under US control to finance purchases of American agricultural products, including corn, wheat and soybeans. "We will be releasing some of their money, that is totally controlled by us, to our farmers and ranchers," he said, adding that

the food would be supplied exclusively from the US because it was "desperately needed" in Iran.

UNFROZEN IRANIAN FUNDS TO BUY AMERICAN CROPS

It also shed light on a broader proposal under discussion during the US-Iran negotiations involving billions of dollars in frozen Iranian assets. US Vice President JD Vance recently outlined a mechanism that would allow Iran access to some of its frozen funds while giving Washington oversight over how the money is spent. According to him, the proposal was conceived by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and developed in coordination with Qatar. "We wanted to make sure that we set up a process where if we ever unfreeze Iranian assets, we can ensure that money goes to help the people of Iran and not to fund terrorism," Vance said after high-level talks in Burgenstock, Switzerland.

Under the proposed framework, any unfrozen Iranian funds would be subject to approval by both US and Qatari authorities before being used to purchase American agricultural products, including corn and wheat, for Iran. The proposal appears aimed at addressing concerns among Iran critics who argue that sanctions relief could indirectly strengthen Tehran's regional influence. US have long maintained that strict oversight and humanitarian spending restrictions can prevent funds from reaching armed groups or military activities. The arrangement would resemble a mechanism used during former President Joe Biden's administration. In 2023, Iranian funds held in South Korea were transferred as part of a prisoner exchange deal and could only be used for approved humanitarian purchases such as food and medicine under US-monitored channels.

Bangladesh to buy Chinese jets used by Pak in Op Sindoor. What it means for India

(Our Staff Reporter) : Bangladesh is reportedly set to move forward with one of its most ambitious military acquisition plans to date. The Dhaka-based news outlet, Daily Waadaa, reported that the Tarique Rahman-led administration is expected to advance plans to acquire 24 Chinese J-10CE fighter jets during the PM's visit to China this week. Officials cited by the publication stated that Dhaka hopes to officially sign the procurement agreement by August. The J-10CE is the export variant of the Chengdu J-10C, a highly capable 4.5-generation multi-role fighter jet. The same jet is also used by India's Western neighbour, Pakistan, and was deployed in the aerial skirmishes that took place during Operation Sindoor, tangling with Indian Air Force jets like the SU-30MKI, Sepecat Jaguar, and the Dassault Rafale. haka's pursuit of the platform aligns with its "Forces Goal 2030" defence modernisation programme, which was originally launched in 2009. Should the deal materialise, it will represent one of the most significant

leaps in capability for the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF), which has long operated a motley and increasingly obsolete mix of legacy jets from China and Russia. At the same time, though, it will also deepen Bangladesh's dependence on China, and increase Beijing's diplomatic and military influence in India's eastern neighbourhood.

WHAT IS THE J-10CE, AND WHY IS BANGLADESH BUYING IT?

The J-10CE is the export variant of the Chengdu J-10C, and is widely considered one of China's most capable 4.5-generation combat aircraft available on the international market outside fifth-generation stealth platforms. Powered by the WS-10B afterburning turbofan engine, the aircraft can approach speeds of Mach 1.8 while maintaining a robust combat radius and endurance tailored for air defence and maritime strike missions.

Featuring a delta-wing and canard aerodynamic configuration supported by digital fly-by-wire controls, the platform

delivers exceptional agility during dogfights and missile-evasion scenarios. This manoeuvrability is paired with a substantial payload capacity, as the fighter can reportedly carry up to 5,600 kilograms of ordnance, including air-to-air missiles, bombs and precision guided munitions across 11 hardpoints. This enables the J-10CE to carry out a wide range of missions, from hunting enemy fighters, to bombing ground targets.

This multi-role capability might be especially valuable for Bangladesh, which maintains a relatively modest air force due to economic and budgetary constraints, and therefore needs to prioritise versatile aircraft that can perform a wide range of missions efficiently. A key strength of the J-10CE is its modern electronics package. Its advanced AESA radar can detect and track multiple targets simultaneously while resisting enemy jamming efforts. The aircraft is also equipped to carry the Chinese long-range PL-15 air-to-air missile, which can engage enemy aircraft at considerable distances before

they are able to strike back.

Consequently, the acquisition of J-10CE fighters would dramatically enhance the capabilities of the Bangladesh Air Force. The BAF currently operates a modest fighter fleet of roughly 40 to 44 aircraft, consisting primarily of around 36 obsolete and ageing Chengdu F-7/J-7s (a Chinese derivative of the Soviet MiG-21) and eight Russian-origin MiG-29s.

BANGLADESH AIR FORCE MIGHT GET A BOOST IF THE J-10CE DEAL MATERIALISES

With the J-10CE and its wide array of advanced munitions, Bangladesh might gain the ability to undertake a much broader range of missions.

The planned purchase forms a key component of Dhaka's ongoing military modernisation programme titled Forces Goal 2030, that was launched in 2009. Under this programme, Bangladesh has acquired a broad spectrum of equipment — from small arms and tanks, to submarines and frigates — with China emerging as the dominant supplier for much of this hardware.

Bill Gates reveals 3 affairs, blackmail fears in bombshell Epstein testimony

US lawmakers sought Bill Gates' testimony after the release of additional documents by the Justice Department renewed scrutiny over his past interactions with the disgraced financier, who died in a jail cell in 2019.

(SAI Bureau) : During a closed-door testimony before a US congressional panel, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates revealed that he had affairs with three women and accused late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein of blackmailing him over the alleged relationships.

The revelations emerged during the US House Oversight Committee's investigation into Epstein's network and associations. Lawmakers sought Gates' testimony after the release of additional documents by the Justice Department renewed scrutiny over his past interactions with the disgraced financier, who died in a jail cell in 2019. Gates, who appeared voluntarily before the committee on June 10, told lawmakers that Epstein knew about two affairs involving Russian women — bridge player Mila Antonova and nuclear physicist Karima Nigmatulina — and later acknowledged a third affair involving medical entrepreneur Alice Jacobs Nesselrodt. "These affairs had nothing to do with my interactions with Epstein, but they were painful for my family," Gates said, according to the testimony transcript, released on Tuesday. "Epstein was working to use information about my infidelities — in addition to many lies that he layered on top — to pressure me to re-engage with him."

Gates has denied any involvement in Epstein's crimes and said his decision to "maintain contact with him was a mistake."

"I know he was convicted. I knew about that. I was willing to take a chance on meeting with him in a limited role," Gates said, explaining that his meetings with Epstein were primarily linked to discussions about philanthropy.

EPSTEIN TRIED TO BLACKMAIL?

During questioning, Gates suggested Epstein may have been looking for ways to exploit knowledge of his personal life. Gates told lawmakers that Epstein "contemplated blackmailing me" after learning about his affairs, though he said the alleged attempt never materialised. "He never blackmailed me, but looking at these emails, it raises a serious probability that he contemplated blackmailing me," Gates said.

The comments were linked to a 2013 email draft written by Epstein that referenced allegations involving Gates' personal life and his former employee Boris Nikolic, who had been a mutual connection between the two men.

Gates described the communication as an apparent attempt by Epstein to gain leverage.



"Who knows if he ever sent it to Dr. Nikolic, but it looks like he's musing on using a mixture of facts and falsities as an effort, almost like a blackmail, to advance some goal," Gates told the committee.

STD CONCERNS CLAIM DISMISSED

During the testimony, lawmakers also questioned Gates about claims contained in Epstein-related documents that alleged the Microsoft founder had concerns about a sexually transmitted infection after an

affair.

Gates denied ever having an STD and rejected claims that he secretly provided medication to anyone.

"I never had an STD... I may have indicated some concern about whether I had an STD; I don't recall that. But I never had an STD. I never gave medicines to anyone covertly," Gates said.

He acknowledged that it was possible he had discussed such concerns with Boris Nikolic, a mutual friend of Gates and

Epstein.

MEETINGS BETWEEN GATES, EPSTEIN

Gates said he met Epstein around 12 to 14 times, along with two video calls, over a four-year period. According to documents released by the Justice Department, the two continued to meet even after Epstein's 2008 conviction on sex offence charges. Gates said Epstein repeatedly claimed he could help connect him with wealthy donors for philanthropic initiatives, but those promises ultimately did not materialise. The released files also included photographs of Gates with women whose identities were redacted.

A spokesperson for the Gates Foundation said Gates "took responsibility for his actions" during a February town hall meeting with employees. The scrutiny has also widened to the Gates Foundation, which announced in April that it had launched an external review of its past interactions with Epstein. Emails released by the Justice Department in January also showed communication between Epstein and members of the foundation's staff.

Pak threatened to wipe out Israel over Mossad plot to kill Munir: Brazilian journo

(Our Staff Reporter) : Israeli intelligence agency Mossad plotted to assassinate Pakistan's military chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, and the entire delegation when it was in Geneva, Switzerland, for the Iran peace talks, claimed Brazilian journalist and geostrategic expert Pepe Escobar. The sensational claim was, however, rejected by a Pakistani journalist.

Pakistan is trying to play the role of a mediator between the US and Iran, and the initial agreement has been named the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding. Further talks on the Islamabad MoU took place in Geneva and was attended by top officials, including US Vice President JD Vance. The sensational claim of Mossad's plot to assassinate Asim Munir was made by Brazilian investigative journalist and geopolitical analyst Pepe Escobar during a podcast hosted by Mario Nawfal, a political commentator and internet personality. Escobar claimed that Pakistani military intelligence had "intercepted" what he described as "ultra-credible information" suggesting that Mossad was preparing to kill Munir and potentially other members of the Pakistani delegation during the high-level negotiations in Switzerland.

Israeli leaders criticised the Iran-US peace agreement, saying it wasn't kept in the loop. Israel's military offensive in Lebanon also threatened to unravel the deal. Israel said it wouldn't stop the Lebanon operations as Iran-backed militia Hezbollah remained a threat to it. During the podcast, Mario Nawfal asked Escobar about reports of friction between Pakistan and Israel behind the scenes of diplomatic negotiations. "Pakistani military received an ultra-credible information that the Mossad was preparing, under orders by Netanyahu, an assassination attempt against Asim Munir and maybe the rest of the Pakistani

delegation going to Switzerland," Escobar said. Pepe Escobar said that Pakistani authorities responded through diplomatic intermediaries after getting to know of the alleged Mossad plot.

"The Pakistanis sent a direct message through the usual intermediaries. I would bet it would be Oman, in this case, directly to Israel, saying, 'If you touch our delegation, we're going to wipe you off the map, period.' I'm quoting. This is what our source told us," he said. Pakistan is the only Islamic country with nuclear weapons. Israel too has been acknowledged as a nuclear power. Escobar's claim has not been independently verified and has not been confirmed by the governments of Pakistan and Israel. There is also no evidence supporting the claim made by Escobar.

The allegation of Munir's assassination emerged days after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif led Pakistan's delegation to diplomatic engagements linked to efforts aimed at reducing tensions between Washington and Tehran. Munir was part of the high-level Pakistani delegation. Pakistani journalists have also rejected Escobar's claim, calling it a "story unsupported by facts". Both Israel and Pakistan have considered each other as enemies, and neither country has a strategic partnership. Pakistan doesn't even recognise Israel as a state. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif earlier sharply criticised Israel during discussions surrounding regional ceasefire efforts between the warring parties. Asif described Israel as "evil" and "a curse for humanity" and accused it of committing genocide in Lebanon. Israeli officials were swift in rejecting the accusations made by Pakistan's Defence Minister and questioned whether Islamabad could act as a neutral mediator while senior government figures were making such statements.

IRAN WAR COSTS HIT 80 BILLION DOLLARS --CONGRESS DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY



WASHINGTON, D.C. (News Agency): The financial toll of the United States war against Iran has reached staggering proportions, with the Pentagon sending lawmakers a supplemental spending request of approximately 80 billion dollars to cover military costs -- a figure confirmed to be more than double what Defense

Secretary Pete Hegseth and the Pentagon comptroller told lawmakers during Congressional hearings earlier this year. The Wall Street Journal first reported the scale of the request, which has rattled Capitol Hill even among Republican allies. The White House Office of Management and Budget has not yet made a formal request to Congress, but Hegseth has been making rounds on Capitol Hill to prepare the ground. A top deputy defense secretary briefed senators on the Iran funding request last week, according to two individuals familiar with the situation. The push for emergency war funding comes at an already fraught political moment. Congressional Republicans are deeply skeptical of the memorandum of understanding that President Donald Trump recently concluded with Iran, with some comparing

it unfavorably to the Obama-era nuclear deal. The Iran war, launched on February 28, 2026 when the United States and Israel began large-scale strikes on Iranian targets, has now lasted four months with no formal declaration of war from Congress. To compound fiscal pressures, the White House has also requested a 1.5 trillion dollar Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2027 -- a nearly 50 percent increase over current funding levels. Lawmakers from both parties have indicated they will not support the combined spending figures without significantly greater transparency on war objectives and exit conditions. The episode underscores the widening gap between the Trump administration's conduct of the Iran campaign and Congressional oversight, a tension that came to a head this week with a Senate war powers vote.

SENATE PASSES WAR POWERS RESOLUTION REBUKING TRUMP ON IRAN

WASHINGTON, D.C. (SAI Bureau) :The United States Senate passed a war powers resolution this week rebuking

meaningless," but the measure exposed fractures within the Republican caucus at a sensitive moment in U.S.-Iran

negotiations. Several Republican senators broke with the White House, expressing anger at the drip-feed of information surrounding a memorandum of understanding that Trump signed with Iran following

months of open hostilities. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, Republican of Mississippi, issued a sharp statement declaring that the MOU

concessions just as American battlefield leverage appeared strongest.

Senator Tim Kaine, Democrat of Virginia, argued that the relative calm created by the MOU created the "perfect time for Congress to step back and ask ourselves what the next chapter should be, rather than allowing one man to make that decision." The war powers resolution passed with some bipartisan support but fell far short of the two-thirds majority that would be required to override a presidential veto. Congressional sources note the vote nevertheless serves as a political marker heading into appropriations battles over the 80 billion dollar Pentagon supplemental request and the overall 1.5 trillion dollar defense budget proposal.



President Donald Trump's conduct of the undeclared war against Iran, a symbolic but politically significant rebuke that nonetheless carries no legal force and will not reach the president's desk. Trump dismissed the vote as "poorly timed and

"negotiates away the victories of Operation Epic Fury in ways that are completely out of step with the president's goals." The comment reflected broader Republican discomfort with a deal seen as offering Iran significant

concessions just as American battlefield leverage appeared strongest.

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Iran is separately seeking the release of approximately 100 billion dollars in frozen financial assets. The White House has stated it can ensure those funds would be used for humanitarian purposes only, though no enforcement mechanism has been detailed. Critics on Capitol Hill, including several Republican senators, have questioned whether the financial concessions were offered too early in the negotiating process, before Iran has committed to concrete, verifiable steps on its nuclear program. Administration officials have argued that the economic measures were necessary to keep the ceasefire framework intact and to maintain Iranian engagement at the negotiating table in Switzerland.

U.S. PARTIALLY LIFTS IRAN OIL SANCTIONS UNDER CEASEFIRE TERMS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Our Staff Reporter) : The United States Treasury Department has waived existing American sanctions on Iranian crude oil and petrochemical products as part of the interim deal reached between the Trump administration and Tehran, a move that delivers a significant and immediate financial lifeline to the Iranian government while permanent nuclear negotiations continue. The Treasury confirmed in an official statement that the waiver covers the production, delivery, and sale of crude oil, petrochemical products, and petroleum products of Iranian origin, and remains in effect through August 21, 2026. Critically, the waiver also permits the United States itself to import crude oil and petroleum products of Iranian origin for domestic use. The sanctions relief represents a dramatic reversal from the maximum pressure campaign that President Trump reinstated against Tehran following his withdrawal from the Obama-era Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action. Iranian oil and gas exports had been heavily sanctioned since that decision, driving Iran's economy into crisis and ultimately, according to analysts, contributing to the conditions that escalated into open military conflict.

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U.S. AND IRAN HOLD NUCLEAR TALKS IN SWITZERLAND - IAEA INSPECTIONS ON THE TABLE

LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND (SAI Bureau)

:The United States and Iran resumed high-stakes negotiations in Switzerland this week in an effort to translate a recently signed memorandum of understanding into a durable, verifiable framework for ending the two countries' military conflict and curbing Tehran's nuclear program. Vice President JD Vance, who delayed a separate foreign trip to lead the American delegation, said after the first day of talks that Iran had agreed to allow nuclear inspectors to return to the country. He described it as a "very, very good" opening session. Iran's foreign ministry tempered that assessment, stating that real negotiations on the nuclear issue had not yet formally begun, and that no inspections were yet scheduled. President Trump confirmed in a Fox News interview that U.S. inspectors would accompany the International Atomic Energy Agency when it enters Iran to review nuclear sites. "They've agreed to it, they've agreed to the inspectors," Trump said, while adding that he saw no rush in getting them in immediately. The two sides did agree to establish a direct line of communication to prevent incidents and miscommunication in the Strait of Hormuz, where commercial shipping has been disrupted since Iran closed the waterway earlier in the conflict. Iran, the United States, and Lebanon also agreed to create a deconfliction cell to enforce ceasefire terms on all fronts. The 14-point MOU signed by Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian the previous week calls for an end to military strikes, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz for 60 days on a toll-free basis, and the lifting of the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports, among other provisions. Iran's ballistic missile program and its network of regional allies were not included in the current framework.

CONGRESS MOVES SECOND RECONCILIATION BILL -- 72 BILLION DOLLARS FOR ICE AND CBP

WASHINGTON, D.C. (News Agency) : Congressional Republicans are advancing a second major budget reconciliation bill this year, known informally as Reconciliation 2.0, that would provide approximately 72 billion dollars in new funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection through 2029, dramatically expanding the infrastructure of federal immigration enforcement under a funding mechanism that bypasses normal Senate rules requiring 60 votes for passage. The House passed the legislation, designated Senate Bill 2, on June 9 by a narrow margin. The Senate took it up after returning

from the Memorial Day recess, though internal Republican disagreements over specific provisions -- including a proposed 1.8 billion dollar fund to compensate alleged victims of what the administration calls "weaponization" by the Justice Department under the Biden administration -- have slowed its path to final passage. Of the total funding, more than 38 billion dollars would go to ICE and more than 26 billion dollars to CBP. An additional 1 billion dollars is earmarked for the Secret Service for security enhancements connected to the East Wing Modernization Project at the White House. Senate Democrats, who have withheld support

for a final fiscal year 2026 spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security absent guardrails on immigration enforcement following the deaths of two U.S. citizens at the hands of federal agents earlier this year, have no votes in the reconciliation process. Budget reconciliation allows legislation to pass with a simple Senate majority of 51 votes.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota has cautioned members against broadening the bill into a vehicle for additional tax code changes, warning such expansion could reopen parts of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act signed by Trump on July 4, 2025.

SECURE AMERICA ACT ENACTED -- 69.5 BILLION DOLLARS IN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT SPENDING

WASHINGTON, D.C. (SAI Bureau) : Congress passed and the Trump administration enacted the Secure America Act in June 2026, allocating 69.5 billion dollars to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection through fiscal year 2029, representing one of the largest single investments in immigration enforcement infrastructure in American history. The legislation was advanced through the budget reconciliation process, which allowed Republicans to pass the measure without Democratic support, requiring only a simple Senate majority. The law significantly expands federal immigration enforcement funding while limiting traditional congressional oversight mechanisms and bypassing the standard appropriations process.

The Secure America Act operates alongside the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, Trump's signature reconciliation package signed into law on July 4, 2025, which itself included 325 billion dollars in combined immigration enforcement and

defense spending. Together, the two reconciliation laws represent an extraordinary reorientation of federal spending priorities, funded in part through more than 1 trillion dollars in cuts to Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and other safety net programs enacted under the first bill. Critics, including immigration advocacy groups and Democratic lawmakers, have argued that the absence of congressional oversight provisions creates a system of unchecked executive power over enforcement operations. The American Immigration Council noted that funding is available at agency discretion over a 51-month period, with no directives on how resources must be allocated among deportation, detention, border security, and legal processing operations. The law also significantly increases fees on asylum applications, Temporary Protected Status filings, and motions in immigration courts, transforming immigration into what advocacy groups have described as a pay-to-play system.

U.S. CLEAN ENERGY TAX CREDITS PHASE OUT UNDER ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL

WASHINGTON, D.C. (News Agency) : Key federal incentives for electric vehicles, residential solar installation, home wind turbines, and energy-efficient home improvements are expiring this month as provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law by President Trump on July 4, 2025, take effect, marking a significant policy reversal from the Biden era's aggressive subsidization of domestic clean energy adoption. The federal tax credit for installing electric vehicle recharging property is no longer available for property placed in service after June 30, 2026. The residential clean energy credit covering solar panels, solar water heaters, wind turbines, geothermal heat pumps, fuel cells, and battery storage technology expired for improvements made after December 31, 2025. The tax credit for making energy-efficient home improvements also expired at the end of 2025. The tax credit for energy-efficient commercial buildings is no longer available for construction beginning after June 30, 2026.

The legislation also phases out transferable tax credits in dedicated markets and imposes tighter documentation requirements on solar and wind supply chains under enhanced foreign entity of concern provisions. Green hydrogen production credits are set to terminate by December 2027. Wind and solar projects are protected by safe harbor provisions if construction began by June 2026 or if projects come online by December 2027, providing a limited runway for existing development pipelines. The changes represent the most sweeping rollback of clean energy fiscal policy since the Inflation Reduction Act was passed in 2022. Industry groups have warned the combined effect could stall tens of billions of dollars in planned investment and cost hundreds of thousands of clean energy jobs in manufacturing, installation, and related sectors. The administration argues the credits represented market distortions that unfairly disadvantaged conventional energy producers.

GILGO BEACH KILLER REX HEUERMAN SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON

NEW YORK (Our Staff Reporter) : Rex Heuermann, a Long Island architect who became one of the most notorious serial killers in American history, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in June 2026 after pleading guilty to murdering seven women and admitting to killing an eighth victim connected to the Gilgo Beach serial killings, a case that haunted law enforcement for more than three decades. Heuermann, who worked as a prominent architect in Midtown Manhattan and maintained a seemingly ordinary family life in Massapequa Park on Long Island, was arrested in July 2023 after investigators used advanced DNA analysis and cell phone records to link him to victims whose remains were discovered along a stretch of Ocean Parkway near Gilgo Beach on Long Island's South Shore beginning in 2010. The killings,

however, spanned a far longer period. Prosecutors established that the murders began in the early 1990s and continued through approximately 2010, making

Heuermann one of the most prolific serial killers in New York State history. Victims were predominantly women who had advertised escort services, and their remains went unidentified for years in some cases. At sentencing, prosecutors presented evidence that Heuermann had carried out meticulous planning over decades to evade detection, including disposable phones and sophisticated counter-surveillance behavior. The case reignited broader conversations about the vulnerability of sex workers to violence and the institutional failures that allowed so many murders to go unsolved for so long. The resolution of the case drew widespread attention from law enforcement across the country and was seen as a landmark application of genealogical DNA techniques and digital forensics in cold case investigations.



KEIR STARMER RESIGNS AS UK PRIME MINISTER -- BURNHAM TO SUCCEED HIM

LONDON (SAI Bureau) : Keir Starmer announced his resignation as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on June 22, 2026, succumbing to months of mounting pressure from within his own Labour Party following a series of devastating electoral setbacks and a collapse in public confidence that culminated in Andy Burnham's emphatic victory in the Makerfield by-election just days earlier. Starmer, who led Labour to a historic landslide general election victory less than two years ago in 2024, announced his decision outside 10 Downing Street in a brief televised statement. "The question my party is asking now is

whether I am best placed to lead us into the next general election," he said. "I have heard the answer of my parliamentary party to that question, and I accept that answer with good grace." The leadership timeline calls for nominations to open July 9 and close by July 16, the start of the summer parliamentary recess. Starmer said he would remain in post as prime minister until a new leader is chosen and confirmed that he had informed King Charles III of his decision. The crisis had been building since local elections in May 2026, in which Labour lost control of 35 councils and approximately 1,500 council seats -- roughly 60 percent of the seats

contested. The far-right Reform UK party made dramatic gains, and Starmer was publicly called on to resign by the Scottish Labour leader and by departing cabinet ministers including Health Secretary Wes Streeting. Burnham, the former Mayor of Greater Manchester who entered Parliament by winning Makerfield, has confirmed he will contest the leadership. Streeting, long seen as a potential rival, announced he would endorse Burnham instead. If unopposed or if no rival candidate secures the required 81 MP nominations, Burnham could become Britain's seventh prime minister in ten years within weeks.

RECORD JUNE HEATWAVE BAKES BRITAIN AND FRANCE



LONDON / PARIS (SAI Bureau) : A severe and prolonged heatwave gripped western Europe this week, with temperatures in the United Kingdom and France expected to break historical June records, straining power grids, disrupting transport networks, and prompting public health warnings across both countries. The heat event, driven by an unusually persistent high-pressure system drawing air northward from North Africa, arrived amid an already challenging week for the United Kingdom as political turmoil surrounding the resignation of Prime Minister Keir Starmer compounded pressure on public services and emergency response capacity. In France, authorities activated emergency heat protocols, urging the elderly, young children, and those with chronic health conditions to remain indoors during peak afternoon hours and to seek access to air-conditioned public spaces. Hospitals in both countries reported elevated admissions for heat-related illness, and several outdoor sports events and public festivals were cancelled or modified. The heatwave coincides with the early weeks of the 2026 FIFA World Cup being hosted across North America, drawing ironic attention to the contrast between sweltering stands in European cities watching matches on jumbo screens and the international sporting spectacle unfolding thousands of miles away. Climate scientists noted the episode is consistent with projections that extreme heat events in northern Europe will become more frequent, more intense, and longer-lasting under continued climate change scenarios. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service confirmed that 2026 is tracking as one of the hottest years in recorded history, continuing an unbroken pattern of temperature records set over the past decade.

FORMER DUP LEADER JEFFREY DONALDSON CONVICTED ON ALL 18 CHARGES

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND (News Agency) : A British court delivered a devastating verdict against Jeffrey Donaldson, the former leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, finding him guilty on all 18 charges brought against him, including one count of rape involving two victims who were children at the time the offenses were committed.

In a related but separate trial of the facts, a jury found that his wife, Eleanor Donaldson, had aided and abetted five of the offenses. The verdicts mark one of the most significant criminal cases in the history of Northern Irish politics, shattering the reputation of a man who had spent decades as one of the most prominent unionist politicians in the region and one of the architects of the post-Good Friday Agreement political landscape. Jeffrey Donaldson had led the DUP from 2021 until his abrupt resignation in

March 2024, when he stood down amid reports that police were investigating allegations against him. He had publicly denied any wrongdoing at the time of his resignation.

The charges covered offenses spanning a prolonged period and involved multiple victims. The inclusion of a rape conviction and the finding that offenses were committed against children when the victims were minors significantly elevated the gravity of the case and drew condemnation from across Northern Ireland's political spectrum, including from within unionism itself. Sentencing is expected in the coming weeks. Legal experts anticipate a substantial custodial sentence given the severity of the charges and the vulnerability of the victims. The case has reignited debate about structures of accountability within political institutions in Northern Ireland.

ALBANIANS PROTEST JARED KUSHNER LUXURY RESORT PROJECT ALONG ADRIATIC COAST

TIRANA, ALBANIA (Our Staff Reporter) : Mass protests have gripped Albania every day since the beginning of June 2026, with tens of thousands of citizens rallying against a proposed luxury resort development along the country's Adriatic coastline that is tied to Affinity Partners, the investment firm led by former White House senior adviser and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner. The flashpoint is a stretch of shoreline including Dalani Beach, which protesters consider a public natural heritage site. The Albanian government's approval of the development, which opponents say bypassed normal regulatory and environmental review processes, has fueled accusations of political favoritism and corruption at the highest levels. Protest organizers have drawn explicit connections between the Albanian government's close relationship with the Trump administration and what they describe

as the expedited processing of permits and approvals for the Kushner-linked project. The demonstrations have brought together a broad coalition including environmental activists, legal advocates, opposition parties, and ordinary citizens who fear the loss of access to one of the few remaining undeveloped sections of Albania's Riviera. Kushner's Affinity Partners fund has invested in



property developments across several countries in recent years, often in regions where the firm has cultivated political relationships. The Albania project has attracted scrutiny from transparency advocates who argue the pattern raises conflict-of-interest concerns given Kushner's ongoing proximity to

Trump administration policy circles. The Albanian government has defended the project as a significant foreign direct investment expected to generate tourism revenue and employment. Prime Minister Edi Rama has dismissed the protests as politically motivated. Demonstrators have vowed to continue daily demonstrations until the development approval is revoked.

NORWAY BANS AI FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

OSLO, NORWAY (News Agency) : Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store announced this week that the government is implementing new school guidelines that generally prohibit the use of generative artificial intelligence by primary school pupils and impose significant restrictions on its use by older students, making Norway one of the first European countries to adopt formal AI usage rules for schools across the full range of grade levels. The policy, which takes effect at the start of the next academic year, reflects a growing concern among Norwegian educators and policymakers that unsupervised AI use is undermining the development of foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking among younger students. Officials also cited risks to academic integrity and the challenge teachers face in assessing genuine student learning when AI tools are used to generate work. For older secondary students, the guidelines impose restrictions rather than an outright ban, allowing limited use of AI in clearly defined contexts where the educational purpose can be demonstrated and where the student's own work and reasoning can be independently assessed. The announcement positions Norway at the forefront of a global conversation that educational authorities in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and across the European Union are wrestling with simultaneously. Countries have arrived at widely varying positions, ranging from outright bans in classroom settings to active promotion of AI literacy programs. Norway's education ministry noted that the policy will be reviewed regularly as the technology and its educational implications continue to evolve. Teacher unions broadly welcomed the announcement, saying it provides long-needed clarity for classroom practice.

IRAN'S NEW SUPREME LEADER ENDORSES U.S.-IRAN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

TEHRAN, IRAN (Our Staff Reporter) : Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, released a written statement on June 18, 2026 declaring that he endorsed the 14-point memorandum of understanding concluded between the United States and Iran, a critical development that signaled the new leadership's willingness to pursue a negotiated end to the four-month conflict even as hardline factions within Iran pushed back sharply against the terms.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the late Ali Khamenei who was killed in American and Israeli strikes in February 2026, assumed the role of Supreme Leader in a country devastated by months of military attacks on its nuclear infrastructure, military assets, and civilian facilities. His endorsement of the MOU was seen by American negotiators as essential to the framework's credibility and survivability. However, Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher

Ghalibaf, a key hardline figure and chief negotiator on the Iranian side, publicly characterized the deal as "America's declaration of defeat," claiming the MOU resulted from Iranian resistance rather than coercion. His comments, delivered on Iranian state television, reflected the deep internal tensions within the Iranian government over how to frame a deal that requires significant nuclear concessions. The 14-point MOU calls for Iran to commit to not acquiring a nuclear weapon, a 60-day ceasefire extension, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping, and the lifting of the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports. Enforcement mechanisms for Iran's nuclear commitments remain under negotiation. The framework does not address Iran's ballistic missile program. Technical talks between the two sides in Switzerland continued this week as negotiators sought to flesh out the details of a longer-term permanent agreement.

ALAN GREENSPAN, ARCHITECT OF MODERN AMERICAN MONETARY POLICY, DIES AT 100

WASHINGTON, D.C. (SAI Bureau) : Alan Greenspan, the economist who served as chairman of the Federal Reserve under four presidents over more than 18 years and who shaped American capitalism through some of its most consequential decades, died on Monday, June 22, 2026, at his home in Washington, D.C. He was 100 years old. The cause of death was complications of Parkinson's disease. His death was announced by his wife of 29 years, NBC News chief Washington and foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell. "He was a giant of a man who helped shape the U.S.," Mitchell said. "He had irrational exuberance for baseball, the Washington Commanders, tennis, golf and music, especially jazz. He will be remembered for his brilliance and his kindness." Greenspan was appointed chairman of the Federal Reserve by President Ronald Reagan in August 1987 and was reappointed by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, serving until January 31, 2006, the second-longest tenure in the position in history.



His 18-and-a-half year leadership spanned the 1987 stock market crash, the savings and loan crisis, the longest peacetime economic expansion in American history from 1991

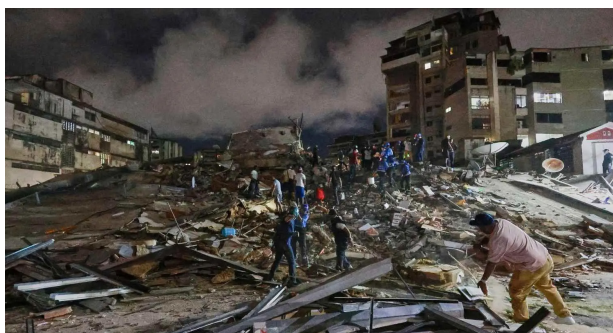
to 2001, the Asian financial contagion, the dot-com collapse, and the September 11 aftermath. The Federal Reserve remembered him as having "achieved a sustained era of price stability that supported economic growth and helped anchor the public's confidence in the institution." The New York Times called him "the pre-eminent economic policymaker of his time." But his legacy carries a shadow: critics have

long argued his advocacy for financial deregulation and low interest rates created the conditions for the 2007-2009 global financial crisis and the Great Recession.

In his final public act, Greenspan in January 2026 signed a joint statement with former Fed and Treasury officials denouncing the Trump administration's criminal probe of current Fed Chair Jerome Powell as an "unprecedented attempt to use prosecutorial attacks" to undermine the central bank's independence.

VENEZUELA STRUCK BY CATASTROPHIC TWIN EARTHQUAKES -- 164 DEAD, THOUSANDS FEARED BURIED

CARACAS, VENEZUELA (Our Staff Reporter): Venezuela was struck by a pair of devastating and powerful earthquakes on the evening of June 24, 2026, the largest seismic event to hit the country in more than a century, killing at least 164 people, injuring at least 971, and collapsing buildings across the capital Caracas and the coastal state of La Guaira, with the true toll feared to be far higher. The first earthquake, measuring 7.2 in magnitude, struck near the town of San Felipe in Yaracuy state, approximately 100 miles west of Caracas, at 6:04



p.m. local time. Just 39 to 40 seconds later, a larger 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck near Yumare, also in Yaracuy state, according to the United States Geological Survey. The USGS issued a red alert for potential fatalities, estimating that casualties could run into the thousands and noting a substantial probability of the death toll exceeding 10,000 as rescue operations continue. La Guaira, Venezuela's main port state north of Caracas, was declared a disaster zone. More than 100 buildings collapsed in that state alone,

according to the United Nations humanitarian affairs agency. In Caracas, entire neighborhoods were devastated, with towers of rubble replacing multi-story apartment blocks in areas including Alta Mira, Palos Grandes, and Los Palos Grandes. Acting President Delcy Rodriguez -- who assumed the role after the U.S. capture of President Nicolas Maduro in January 2026 -- declared a nationwide state of emergency and called for national unity. President Trump pledged immediate U.S. assistance and dispatched search and rescue teams, medical resources, and humanitarian supplies. Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador also offered aid. A tsunami advisory was briefly issued for coasts within 300 kilometers of the epicenter but later expired without a major wave event being recorded.

Yesterday's militants in Punjab are martyrs for today. BJP's hope in a non-Hindu majority state

Think of an opposition leader calling militants “shaheed” or martyrs. You could trust the right-wing ecosystem to jump to its feet and label him as anti-India and anti-national. Or, they would simply label him a part of the “tukde-tukde” gang, someone who sympathises with those who wanted to disintegrate India. However, there was no such outrage when Maharashtra minister and senior BJP leader Girish Mahajan said as much and more earlier this month at the Damdami Taksal Sikh seminary, once headed by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Mahajan called the Army's Operation Blue Star a “black day”. He called those killed in that operation “shaheed.” Mahajan then went on to draw a parallel between the Indian Army's actions in 1984 and Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions of the Golden Temple. BJP leaders, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani, had supported Operation Blue Star. Advani, in his autobiography, *My Country, My Life* (2008), wrote that the BJP had “ultimately forced” Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to “use the military and liberate the Golden Temple from its anti-national occupants.”

Lessons in history

But Mahajan, like many others, may contend that it's the Advaniled BJP's history much of which has changed in the Modi-Shah era. In August 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a sharp departure from the Government of India's and his own party's stated line on Operation Blue Star, calling it “an attack on Akal Takht.” “It was in Mizoram that Indiraji acquired the habit of using the army against own people,” Modi said in the Lok Sabha, alleging that civilians had been attacked by the Indian Air Force in 1966. In Mizoram, the Mizo National Front (MNF) had declared independence from India on 1 March 1966. It wanted to capture the Army and paramilitary bases. The idea was to raise the flag of

an independent Mizoram for at least 48 hours until Pakistan raised their cause in the United Nations. Indira Gandhi ordered the air strike to prevent the MNF from overrunning the Assam Rifles outpost in Aizawl. Modi was probably not briefed properly about why the Indian Air Force did what it did in Mizoram. Or, he got swayed in his own rhetorical flourish. Be that as it may, the fact is that Modi hasn't repeated these charges. He obviously realised it soon that casting aspersions on an army or air force action even to blame Indira Gandhi is never “smart politics.” Dragging the armed forces into politics never goes down well with the people. This is where Girish Mahajan went over the top. Making martyrs out of the militants killed in an army operation is going too far. And comparing our army operation with Ahmad Shah Abdali's attacks only makes it worse. So, why is the BJP not condemning his remarks or not even distancing itself from them? Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis even defended Mahajan, saying that his remarks should be seen in the context of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

A new frontier

Why has the BJP, which wears nationalism on its sleeves, chosen to condone his remarks then? Because it fits into the party's ambitious political agenda in Punjab, where it's largely seen as a Hindu party. Two states that were ravaged most by the Partition were Bengal and Punjab. It took the BJP eight decades to finally gain power in Bengal, despite the trauma and travails of a vast majority of the displaced people from Pakistan. Punjab, therefore, has to be the next political frontier for the BJP. Imagine a conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS patron Mohan Bhagwat today: Bhagwat: Naren bhai, we are so proud of you. You have almost delivered the Hindu rashtra to us. Modi: There lies my question,

Mohan ji... What's wrong if JP (Nadda) tells you that our BJP is competent today and can take care of itself?

Bhagwat: Nahin (no), Naren bhai, that's not the problem...just that you, as an individual, are becoming bigger than our goal—social and national reconstruction. As you know, no individual can be bigger than the larger goal.

Modi: That's my problem, Mohan ji. You had three goals that we put in our manifesto—Ayodhya Ram Mandir construction, Uniform Civil Code and abrogation of Article 370. We have implemented almost all of them. What more do you expect?

Mohan Bhagwat goes silent at this point.

After a brief pause, Modi resumes, “Ok, fine... I have also delivered what Syama Prasad Mookerjee would have wanted in Bengal. I will deliver you Punjab, too.”

Bhagwat looks at Modi intently for a while and then walks away. It's a hypothetical and imagined conversation, of course. The fact, however, is that Modi seems to be working in exactly that direction—Punjab as the next frontier. In February, when everybody was busy in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala elections, PM Modi was at Dera Sachkhand Ballan near Jalandhar on the occasion of Guru Ravidass Jayanti. Dalits constitute 32 per cent of Punjab's population, the highest proportion of the Scheduled Castes in any state. Six weeks later, in the middle of intensive campaigns in four states and one union territory, Union Home Minister Amit Shah was addressing a badlav (change) rally in what appeared to be the BJP's show of strength in Moga, Punjab. As I write this column, BJP national president Nitin Nabin is on a three-day tour to Punjab.

Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Manipur and Punjab go to polls in February-March next year. The stakes are high as the BJP is already the ruling party

in the first four states. Why then are top BJP leaders spending so much time in Punjab, where they are supposed to have a very little stake? The BJP remains a Hindu party in Punjab, where Hindus constitute 38.5 per cent and Sikhs 57.7 per cent of the population. That's why the Shiromani Akali Dal confined its erstwhile alliance partner to three out of 13 Lok Sabha seats and 23 out of 117 Assembly seats in elections. After its split with the SAD in 2020, the BJP secured 6.6 per cent votes in the 2022 Assembly election. It won over 18 per cent votes in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, coming second in three constituencies—Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Ludhiana. So, what's giving the BJP so much hope that leaders such as Modi and Shah took time away from major battlegrounds like Bengal and Assam to kickstart the party's campaign in Punjab? The fact is that despite all its expansive reach across regions, the BJP hasn't been able to have a chief minister in a non-Hindu majority state. There is just one exception, albeit technically: Manipur, where Hindus outnumber Christians by about 0.10 percentage point. Punjab has a much tougher demography from the BJP's point of view. Yet, the BJP remains confident. “We will not have any tie-up with anyone in Punjab. We will fight on three core issues: lack of governance, drug menace and conversion,” a top government functionary recently told a select group of journalists. Since its Jan Sangh days, the BJP has never been a very significant player in Punjab politics. In 1952, Syama Prasad Mookerjee offered the support of two Jan Sangh MLAs to the Akali Dal-led UDF government in Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). The Communists supported it from outside. Incidentally, the Jan Sangh and the Communists were also on the same side in their support for the Akali Dal governments in 1967 and 1969. Much has changed since then. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

emerged as a principal political force, with the SAD and the Congress struggling to reclaim their respective space. AAP dominated the recent civic polls, indicating that its political rivals haven't made much dent into its support base yet. Incidentally, the Congress had also swept the municipal polls in Punjab a year ahead of the 2022 Assembly election, which propelled the AAP to power. The Akal Takht recently pronounced CM Bhagwant Mann “anti-Guru” and “anti-Khalsa Panth,” queering the pitch for the AAP in the run up to the elections. It can only take solace in the fact that the Congress and the SAD seem to be still caught in their own internecine battles. But is it good enough for the BJP to dream big in Punjab, given that PM Modi's appeal was always limited in the state and the spectre of Delhi border agitations against three controversial farm laws still haunts the BJP?

Nobody knows the scale of such conversions. Just as few knew the facts about the “ghuspaithiyas” or infiltrators in Bengal. It can evoke insecurities about identities and cultures, if not necessarily jobs and livelihoods, in any social group anywhere. Punjab is no exception. The BJP won't mind at all if the SGPC and Hindu organisations feel the same way. To cut the story short, the BJP is doing in Punjab what it does in most difficult political terrains — clutching at the last straw. From wooing the minority Hindus to reaching out to the Dalits through Modi's visit to Dera Sachkhand Ballan and making an outreach to the Sikhs, through Girish Mahajan's “shaheed” militants' remarks, and by making a Jat Sikh, Kewal Singh Dhillon, its Punjab unit chief, the BJP is leaving no stone unturned. If the SAD chief, Sukhbir Badal, notices the potential and comes running for an alliance on the BJP's terms, well and good. If not, the BJP can always hope for the best in a four-cornered contest. Even a hung assembly wouldn't disappoint the ruling party at the Centre.

CRED, Kunal Shah, And The Questions That Won't Go Away

Any news about CRED, and the question is always the same: what exactly is the business model? So persistent is this query that Kunal Shah himself took a dig at it on social media, while announcing Meta's landmark investment in his company, and his own appointment as global CEO of WhatsApp. Type "CRED" into Google, and the search engine pre-emptively jumps straight to questions about how the fintech startup works and makes money. Reddit threads devoted to explaining it are too many to count.

What Is CRED's Business Model?

Founded by Shah in 2018, CRED was built to reward creditworthy Indians for responsible financial behaviour. What began as a credit card bill payment platform has since grown into a broader fintech ecosystem, spanning UPI transactions and lending services. Today, the company

processes over 40 per cent of all credit card bill payments in India. Its lending business has expanded significantly, with managed assets under management reaching Rs 24,000 crore. The platform counts around 1.7 crore monthly active users, all with strong credit profiles, and claims the highest average revenue per user among India's payments players.

The company's latest financial performance points to improving unit economics. In FY25, operating losses declined by 51 per cent to Rs 298 crore, while overall losses reduced by 11.5 per cent to Rs 1,457 crore. During the same period, consolidated operating revenue increased 16 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2,735 crore. And now, with Meta's investment, CRED's valuation stands at \$4.5 billion. This Series H round, says the company, is aimed at accelerating growth, building institutional capacity and



strengthening CRED's position across product categories, while it prepares for an IPO.

Why Did Meta Invest In CRED? The numbers offer an interesting backdrop. In India's crowded UPI market, CRED ranks eighth by transaction volume. WhatsApp Pay - which Shah will now oversee as global head, ranks ninth. Meta's \$900 million investment secures a roughly 20 per cent minority stake in CRED, consolidating its foothold in India's digital payments landscape.

Is Meta After The Data?

Shah has denied it. But alongside questions about CRED's business model, a persistent murmur surrounds its growing valuation -- the real asset, many argue, is its user data.

That may be the fuller answer to why Meta invested. A minority stake today, but what prevents Meta from increasing it, gradually, or not so gradually? With WhatsApp under Shah's stewardship, Meta will push to unlock the platform's full potential in India, not just retaining its 500

million-plus users, but aggressively expanding its UPI business. For that, access to CRED's high-quality user data is invaluable. As for data protection laws, the data, in theory, never needs to leave Indian shores. Why Is Kunal Shah Leaving His Own Company?

That remains the biggest question of all.

Shah succeeds Will Cathcart as global head of WhatsApp. The question many are asking: why would a founder walk out of his own company to take up a job? Comparisons to other Indians leading global tech giants make for compelling social media posts, but most of those executives climbed corporate ladders to reach the top. They did not step away from the startups they spent years building. That is what makes Kunal Shah's story singular and worth watching -- a founder who became an employee.

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Why Pakistan Is Becoming Harder To Isolate - Despite India's Push

Pakistan's willingness to sell itself to the highest bidder explains its curious positioning in the world. India's only option now is to get creative as it tries to isolate it globally.

(Our Staff Reporter) : On Sunday, the world woke up to the news that Iran and the US had finally agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding "on ending the war that Israel and US had waged on Iran". The announcement was made by Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif. The document has been titled the 'Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding'. On Thursday, it was once again Sharif who announced that the deal had been electronically signed by the presidents of the United States



and Iran, with his endorsement as mediator. He said the agreement takes immediate effect - Iran would reopen the Strait of Hormuz and the US would lift its naval blockade (though on Saturday, Iran closed the strait again after Israel attacked Hezbollah in Lebanon). Sharif also thanked the leaders of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt for their support in reaching this agreement, which has been welcomed by much of the world. Pakistan's efforts are being lauded in global capitals. Oil prices have dropped, markets have surged.

This must be the finest hour in Pakistan's diplomacy, far more significant when it brokered a breakthrough between the US and China in 1979. The Iran war had majorly and negatively affected countries around the world, and a breakthrough has caused a huge global sigh of relief. Even if, for some untoward reason, the peace deal set to be negotiated over the next two months fails, Pakistan will have put its imprint on mediating the end of this conflict and made its mark as a mediator, an important diplomatic achievement.

India has been one of the worst hit countries by the war and is understandably relieved by the detente. In France, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the MoU, without mentioning Pakistan. Coming within a year of the Pahalgam attacks and Operation Sindoor, Pakistan's elevated diplomatic position is not what India would have imagined or wished for. This clarifies a sad truth - it is impossible, at least in the current geopolitical scenario, to isolate Pakistan diplomatically.

Because, Pakistan has some inherent strengths and weaknesses, both of which it leverages.

A Large Muslim Population

First, the size. Pakistan is the fifth-most populous country, with a population of over 241.5 million and the world's first modern Muslim state. Used to a secular polity, we in India often undermine the role of religion in international affairs. It is futile to ignore the fact that Islam provides Pakistan the soft power that cements its place in the larger Muslim world. Moreover, it has the second-largest Muslim population, which gives it leverage - the kind most vividly demonstrated during the Afghan jihad, when it became the frontline Muslim state fighting the communists. Such a large population also gives it visibility in states like the Gulf countries, where large expatriate Pakistani communities live and work. An overall population of 241 million also creates a large consumer market that countries do not want to forfeit. Next is Pakistan's military. Pakistan has the world's seventh-largest standing army. The global fire power index ranks Pakistan as the 12th global military power. It has approximately 660,000 active-duty personnel, with 550,000 reserve forces and 500,000 paramilitary troops. It conducts military drills with many countries across the world. Its large military means it is also a lucrative defence market, which exporters like the US, Turkey and China and even European Union member states will not wish to lose. Over recent years, Pakistan has bolstered its defence-industrial complex,

partnering with powers like China and Turkey and exporting defence equipment. Its best-known export market is Azerbaijan, which has procured the JF-17 Thunder Fighter Jet, that Pakistan jointly co-developed with China. But there are other markets in the Middle East (Libya, Turkey), Africa (Zimbabwe, Sudan), Southeast Asia and Europe (Ukraine) where Pakistan has exported conventional small arms, drones, etc. According to reports, the country made defence exports worth \$10 billion in 2024-2025.

A Rogue Nuclear State

Pakistan is a declared nuclear weapons state. It has an arsenal of 170 warheads, including tactical ones, with delivery systems ranging from short, medium, to long range. Unlike India, it does not have a No First-Use nuclear policy. While Pakistan's nuclear capabilities are primarily aimed at India, it has simultaneously provided cover of a "nuclear umbrella" to states like Saudi Arabia, further elevating its status as the only nuclear Muslim state.

Playing the role of a rentier state has also increased Pakistan's utility quotient. It has provided military and policing services to a range of countries, primarily Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, as well as Jordan, helping these states to train their forces, participate in active combat during situations of conflict, and crush potential uprisings and revolts against the ruling elites. For instance, in the 1970s, Pakistan helped Jordan's King Hussein to crush a Palestinian uprising. In the current Iran war, too, even as it was playing the

role of mediator, Pakistan moved aircraft and troops to Saudi Arabia under a mutual defence pact it signed with the Kingdom last year.

The Benefit Of Geography

Pakistan also has a unique geographical location bounded by the Arabian Sea on the South, the Gulf of Oman on the Southwest, and sharing land borders with India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China. It thus becomes a good listening post to monitor China, Afghanistan, Iran. Pakistan offers the most direct supply route to Afghanistan and was used as a frontline state by the US in its wars in Afghanistan, where it overrode Pakistan's sovereignty at will. This unique location also means that Pakistan offers the shortest land transit route to the many landlocked countries of the Eurasian landmass to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and on to south and south east Asia, and to the Middle East and Africa. Which is why it is a major node in China's Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time the country is resource rich, sitting on a wealth of minerals and oil and gas reserves. This is why, irrespective of the internal unrest, countries like China and the US covet it, as seen in the September 2025 agreement on critical minerals between the US and Pakistan. Offsetting these advantages, however, is what analysts call a 'schizophrenic state'. For, even as Pakistan mediates abroad, its own house is on fire, with insurgencies and uprisings from Balochistan to tensions in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. Even as it invests in its defence-industrial complex, its cash strapped economy depends

almost entirely on IMF bailouts and grants from its patron states like Saudi Arabia. Again, this is possible in Pakistan because of its quasi-democracy.

Pakistan Is Beyond Principles

Pakistan can dispense with democracy at will, alternating between elected governments and military rule with almost no qualms, for the world cares little about the country except its utility to them as a rentier state. That is why an elected Prime Minister like Imran Khan could be easily toppled through an uprising with little international pushback and a non-elected government was installed in no time. In a country where the army calls the shots, it is perfectly normal for its Army Chief - Asim Munir in this case - to sideline the country's elected Prime Minister and seal crypto deals with the US. There are no pretences here. All of this is unthinkable for India. In sum, Pakistan's willingness to sell itself to the highest bidder partly explains its diplomatic positioning in the world. Shehbaz Sharif's fawning over President Trump as a "peacemaker", nominating him for the Nobel Prize, had even Pakistanis cringeing. But it did the trick. Soon after Operation Sindoor ended, President Trump elevated Pakistan, especially Munir, as a friend and partner. This was what extended to Pakistan the opportunity to mediate. And that immediately resonated with America's other partners and allies (except Israel). Pakistan will continue to use such tactics and extract as much mileage as possible from its current moment in the sun. India will thus have to get creative in managing Pakistan. India's grievances are real and pressing, but as of now, there are few takers for them. Apart from shoring up its own security, New Delhi will need to expend more effort in public relations and media engagement to put forth its own narrative firmly. The ignorance around the world on the Kashmir issue, for instance, is mind-boggling. Pakistan is a rogue neighbour that cannot be wished away. India's task is to rein it in not just in its own neighbourhood, but also on the global stage.



India's New Surveillance Challenge From Pakistan Lies 500 km Above Earth

A US-based firm recently shared a post on LinkedIn explaining how Pakistan's earth observation satellite, PRSC EO3, is an anomaly because of its orbit. The US-based company COMSPOC found that the electro-optical imagery satellite, which requires sunlight to capture images of the ground, was placed in a 38-degree inclined orbit around Earth. The orbit is unusual for an optical imagery satellite, with a sun-synchronous inclination of nearly 90 degrees.

COMSPOC says the satellite sacrifices global coverage, but it allows it to capture Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India, with frequent visits. Additionally, ThePrint, in its investigation, found that Pakistan's latest earth observation satellite network has grown since 2025, allowing it to capture changes in India and the Indian Ocean region through its orbital architecture. ThePrint's report states that these satellites are mapping India at least twice every two days.

I dug deeper into Pakistan's satellite network, tracking its position and revisit rates using open-source satellite monitoring platforms, and found that its Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites capture India, the Bay of Bengal, and the Arabian Sea multiple times, providing nearly real-time

intelligence on activities in India. While the counterargument to the observation from Pakistan could be that they share a border with India, therefore, it will naturally capture, however, each satellite, especially PRSC EO3, makes multiple visits over India, covering territory from south to north during the entire day.

During this investigation, I monitored five Pakistani satellites: PRSC EO1, PRSC EO2, PRSC EO3, PRSC HS-1, PRSS-1, and PakTes-1a. While PRSS-1 was a joint venture between Pakistan and China, the others were developed by Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO). These assets, launched in 2018 (PRSS-1 and PakTES-1A) and between 2025 and 2026, comprise a seven-satellite constellation. Additionally, although PRSS-2 is another Sino-Pakistani project, its real-time location remains unconfirmed for this investigation.

What Makes It Unusual?

ThePrint's report provides a useful starting point for understanding the orbital configuration of Pakistan's satellites. My investigation found that three of Pakistan's low Earth orbit (LEO) Earth-observation satellites—PRSC-HS1, PRSS-EO1 and PakTES-1A—orbit at inclinations between 97 and 98 degrees,

placing them in near-polar sun-synchronous orbits.

Sun-synchronous orbits are particularly useful for surveillance, reconnaissance and Earth observation missions because they allow satellites to pass over the same location at nearly the same local time during each revisit. For example, if a satellite images Delhi at 10 a.m. IST during one pass, it will capture the city at roughly the same time on subsequent passes. This ensures consistent lighting conditions, enabling analysts to compare imagery over time and detect changes more accurately. As a result, most optical Earth-observation satellites operate in sun-synchronous orbits.

What stands out, however, is the role of PRSC-EO3. Unlike the other satellites, EO3 operates in an inclined orbit of 38 degrees. Consequently, around an hour after the sun-synchronous satellites pass over India, EO3 crosses southern India and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). While sun-synchronous satellites image territory along a north-south ground track, EO3 maps the region along a west-east path, providing a different viewing geometry and expanding overall coverage of a landmass.

A similar pattern emerges with PRSC-EO2. The satellite has a Right Ascension of the Ascending

Node (RAAN) of 298 degrees, compared to 243 degrees for EO1. RAAN determines the orientation of a satellite's orbital plane in space. Consider the Earth as a clock, so 298 degrees means that EO2's orbit points roughly at 10 o'clock and EO1's orbit roughly at 8 o'clock. Similarly, EO3's orbit is at 1 o'clock. RAAN is crucial to understanding the orbital planes of satellites and their revisit rates. The 55-degree difference between the two satellites places them in distinct orbital planes, offering important clues about how Pakistan has distributed its satellites to improve revisit opportunities over India. This separation in orbital planes enables EO2 to observe areas from different geometries and at different times than EO1, PakTES-1A and PRSC-HS1. When those satellites cross India, EO2 typically follows roughly 90 minutes later, passing over parts of the country, particularly the north-east, during certain orbital cycles. This staggered arrangement increases the frequency with which specific regions can be observed.

The effect becomes more apparent when Earth's rotation is taken into account. A satellite in low Earth orbit completes one revolution in approximately 95

minutes. During that time, the Earth rotates eastward by nearly 24 degrees. As a result, when EO2 returns for its next orbit, the ground track beneath it has shifted westward. In one pass, the satellite may image north-eastern India; on the next, it can cover parts of central India before continuing over Pakistan. This orbital configuration allows successive passes to capture different parts of the subcontinent, improving overall coverage and observation opportunities. Therefore, the satellites capture changes in India multiple times during daylight alone, providing nearly real-time intelligence on activities in India.

Satellite orbits, accessed through open-source platforms, show how Pakistan's orbital architecture is designed to monitor changes in the Indian and Pakistani landmasses. Beyond Islamabad, one element is common in all the satellites - China.

China's Space Diplomacy

All Pakistani satellites have been launched by China at the Jiuquan, Xichang, Yangjiang and Taiyuan launch centres. While ideally launch centres are located near the sea, ocean or the Equator, for example, India's Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota, is located

along the Bay of Bengal. In the case of Pakistan, a launch centre in Karachi or Balochistan is difficult due to heavy air traffic over the region and security concerns due to the Baloch insurgency in the region.

Recently, a leaked Iranian military document showed that Tehran secretly acquired a Chinese satellite, TEE-01B, to target US military bases in the Middle East. The satellite surveilled Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base between March 13 and 15. On March 14, Donald Trump confirmed that the air base was hit and five US planes were damaged. China has actively provided the services of its satellites to Pakistan, especially during Operation Sindoor, when Chinese satellites reportedly provided real-time intelligence on Indian activities at air bases for Pakistan to target the sites.

Interestingly, ThePrint's report highlights how after Operation Sindoor in May 2025, Pakistan's LEO satellite network has grown exponentially, with four satellites launched in a year compared to three in the last seven years.

A report from CSIS, a US-based policy think tank, shows that in the race for the space economy, China holds dominance in the market in Global South countries, especially in Africa, a region where China runs multiple projects with different African countries. Meanwhile, the US targeted developed countries, and

China went after developing economies. The report identified five indicators to analyse China's participation in space programmes of different countries. The indicators are - Ground segments, satellite contracting, satellite launch, bilateral partnerships, and China-led multilateral agreements. In the CSIS index, Pakistan ranks number 1, scoring 79.5, followed by Egypt and Venezuela at number 2 and 3, respectively.

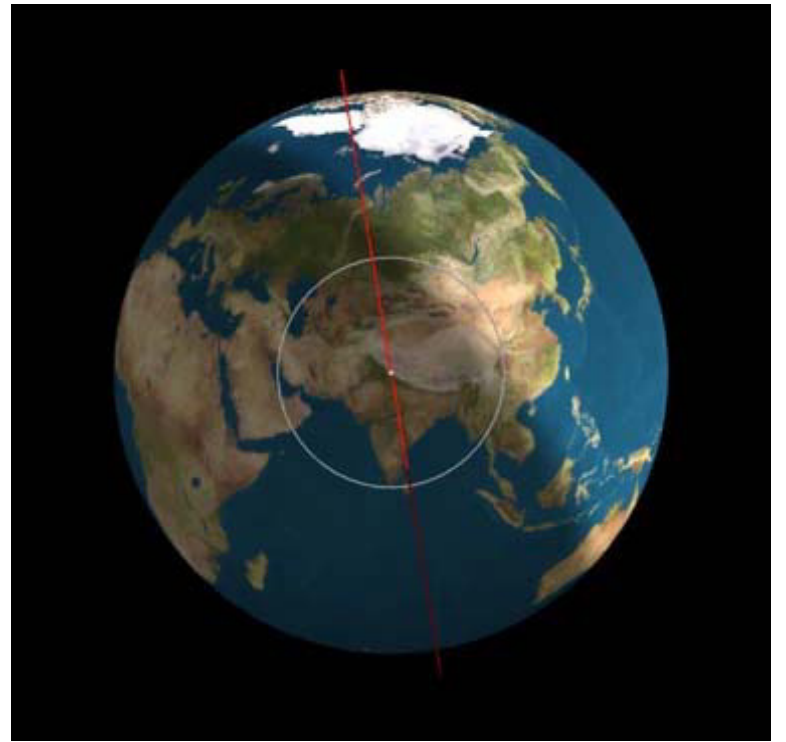
Although China has effectively outperformed the US in securing the space economy market within the Global South, its reputation faces scrutiny due to its support for private military organisations. For instance, China has reportedly provided the Wagner Group with satellite imagery of Ukraine to support their combat missions. Furthermore, the Wagner Group itself has faced allegations of committing human rights abuses in Mali. The US supply of arms to Israel in its genocide in Gaza and Lebanon serves as a counter to China's offering of services to the Wagner Group.

Space, The Ultimate High Ground

The phrase 'Ultimate high ground' was popularised by Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith, in which Obi-Wan Kenobi attempts to end his duel with Anakin Skywalker by taking the higher ground for advantage. The US is an established space

power, China is quickly catching up and has emerged as a counterforce to the US, and Russia is a declining power, but it is falling from a high peak. Meanwhile, India has emerged as a global space power and a force to reckon with because of its success in Mars, Moon, and the Sun missions, affordable launch capabilities, and the creation of its own navigation system (NavIC), even though it is facing several issues.

The dual-use nature of Earth observation satellites makes it difficult to distinguish between civilian and military applications. A satellite tasked with monitoring agriculture, disaster relief or urban development can also collect imagery of military bases, troop movements and critical infrastructure. In Pakistan's case, where the military remains deeply involved in national security decision-making, it is reasonable to assume that these capabilities contribute to military planning and contingency operations. Space-based Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), including imagery intelligence (IMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT) and geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), has transformed the intelligence cycle. Persistent overhead surveillance has reduced the monopoly that states once held over intelligence, while allowing both



states and private actors to monitor developments across vast geographic areas in near real time.

The result is a battlefield that is increasingly transparent to those with access to space-based assets. Pakistan's expanding Earth-observation constellation demonstrates how even middle powers can leverage space to strengthen their intelligence architecture. By distributing satellites across different orbital planes and inclinations, Islamabad has increased revisit opportunities over India and the Indian Ocean Region, improving its ability to monitor changes on the ground. While these capabilities do not provide continuous surveillance, they significantly shorten the

interval between observations and contribute to faster intelligence collection. Yet dependence on space creates new vulnerabilities. Satellites operate in a contested domain where the legal framework governing military activity remains underdeveloped. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty was negotiated in an era when space-based warfare was largely theoretical. Today, states possess a growing range of counterspace capabilities, including electronic warfare systems, cyber tools, direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons and co-orbital systems designed to interfere with or disable satellites. The Secure World Foundation's 2026 report on Global Counterspace Capabilities highlights how major powers are investing heavily in such technologies.

The report notes that while direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons remain a threat, increasing attention is being given to co-orbital systems capable of operating in proximity to enemy satellites. These developments underpin that space is no longer a sanctuary but an increasingly contested domain. GPS spoofing and jamming are common along the Indo-Pak border, but in the next conflict between the two neighbours, space-based capabilities will play a crucial role in target acquisition and surveillance for precision strikes, making the contest between reconnaissance and concealment a defining feature of any future India-Pakistan conflict.



Decoding Indus Waters Treaty (Part- 1): The Rivers That Shaped A Civilisation



Political borders are easily drawn on paper, but engineering a permanent split through a shared, continuous river network is a far more volatile challenge. Decades after the 1947 partition bisected the subcontinent's agricultural lifelines, the Indus Waters Treaty remains a landmark, controversial template of transboundary resource management. This exclusive six-part investigative series moves past historic rhetoric to dissect the secret diplomatic manoeuvres, structural vulnerabilities, and legal battles that shaped the 1960 accord. We trace how an intricate canal network became an ongoing geopolitical chessboard, evaluating whether a legacy pact can withstand the compounding strains of modern climate change and intense regional strategy.

Long before politics drew lines on maps, the Indus and its tributaries had drawn the contours of one of the world's oldest civilisations. The settlements of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the sophistication of their drainage systems, the deliberate placement of granaries and citadels—all of it was an early acknowledgement that a society can be only as durable as its relationship with water. By the time the British arrived in the nineteenth century, they inherited a hydraulic landscape thousands of years in the making. What they did with it would shape the politics of the

subcontinent long after they were gone. Between 1850 and 1940, the British built the largest contiguous canal irrigation network on earth across the Indus basin. The Upper Bari Doab Canal, the Lower Chenab Canal, the Triple Canals Project, the Sutlej Valley Project, each was an engineering response to a question that had been settled by geography millennia earlier. The basin's rivers, fed by snowmelt and monsoon, ran in a north-east to south-west direction. Their headworks were in the upper plains, around Madhopur and Ferozepur, while the canals they fed flowed south and west, irrigating the cotton fields of central Punjab and the wheat lands of Sindh. The unity of this system was hydrological. It was about to become political.

The Radcliffe Line and Its Wounds

When Cyril Radcliffe's boundary commission completed its work in August 1947, it inherited an impossible task. Five weeks to divide six provinces, two of which (Punjab and Bengal) were among the most intricately developed agricultural regions in the world. The line that emerged ran almost perpendicular to the flow of the Indus rivers. It placed the headworks of Madhopur and Ferozepur in India. The canals that drew from those headworks ran south into newly created Pakistan. A single irrigation network had been bisected overnight, with the upstream

country on one side and the downstream country on the other.

Within nine months, the consequences arrived. On 1 April 1948, the Standstill Agreement that had been governing post-partition water flows expired. India, citing technical and administrative reasons, halted water deliveries through the canals that fed Pakistani Punjab. Crops withered. Pakistani officials, then occupied with the larger crisis of partition and Kashmir, scrambled to negotiate. The Inter-Dominion Accord, signed in May 1948, restored flows in exchange for Pakistani payments and a commitment that India would eventually develop alternative arrangements for Pakistani water needs. It was a temporary settlement. Nobody believed it would last.

A single irrigation network had been bisected overnight, with the upstream country on one side and the downstream country on the other.

The Question Geography Forced Open

The April 1948 incident is often retold in Indian and Pakistani historiography as an Indian act of aggression. The reality was more complex. India had inherited the headworks and the engineering infrastructure to control flows. Pakistan had inherited the canals and the agricultural economies dependent on them. Neither

country had inherited a framework for managing rivers that flowed across a border that had not existed before August 1947. The question forced into the open was the question that geography had been asking since the first Harappan farmers diverted water onto their fields. Who owns a river that does not recognise borders?

The answers proposed in the years immediately following the partition reflected the political assumptions of both countries. India's position drew on the doctrine of upper-riparian sovereignty, the idea that the country in which a river rises has primary rights over its waters. Pakistan's position invoked the doctrine of prior appropriation, the idea that established uses of a river create rights that cannot be unilaterally extinguished by an upstream state. Both doctrines have respectable lineages in international water law. Both could plausibly support the positions their proponents took. The deeper problem was that the doctrines were incommensurable. There was no neutral authority capable of resolving them. The United Nations was newly established and absorbed in larger Cold War tensions. The International Court of Justice had no jurisdiction to compel adjudication. The bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan, already strained by the partition violence and the unresolved Kashmir question, could not produce a settlement on its own. For four years between 1948 and 1952, the matter remained unresolved, an open wound in an already complicated relationship.

Enter the World Bank

It was the World Bank that eventually made resolution possible, and it did so through the most unlikely of routes. In 1951, David Lilienthal, the former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority and a man with no particular brief on South Asia, visited the region to write for the American magazine Collier's. He

published an article suggesting that India and Pakistan should jointly develop the Indus basin, with technical assistance and financing from the World Bank. The proposal was unsolicited, written by a private citizen, and addressed to a problem that the bilateral parties had been unable to solve themselves. It caught the attention of Eugene Black, then president of the World Bank, who offered the bank's mediation. By March 1952, both India and Pakistan had accepted.

What followed was eight years of negotiation. World Bank engineers worked alongside Indian and Pakistani teams to identify technical solutions. The bank pressed both governments through patient diplomacy. There were moments when negotiations nearly collapsed, particularly in 1958 and 1959, when the financial costs of constructing replacement infrastructure for Pakistan appeared insurmountable. What kept the process moving was Eugene Black's persistence and the willingness of governments in both countries to entertain the idea that some problems are best solved through international mediation rather than bilateral confrontation.

On 19 September 1960, in Karachi, India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's Field Marshal Ayub Khan signed the Indus Waters Treaty. The World Bank was a third signatory through Vice President WAB Iliff. The treaty divided the six rivers of the Indus system. The three eastern rivers, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, would go to India. The three western rivers, Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, would go to Pakistan. The mathematics was simple. The mathematics was also a bargain whose long-term implications would take decades to become visible. India had agreed to a treaty under which it received roughly twenty per cent of the basin's flow. Pakistan received the other eighty per cent.

Planning a Japan vacation? Visa fee set to jump 5X. Here's what travellers need to know



Have you seen way too many people on your Insta feed already in Japan and you were planning to do the same? Well, you will be in for a bit of a surprise here. Starting July 1, your trip to Japan could become significantly more expensive because the government has announced a steep increase in its visa fees. In its first revision of visa fees since 1978, Japan has announced a steep increase in charges for foreign nationals applying to enter the country. A single-entry visa that currently costs 3,000 yen will now cost 15,000 yen, while a multiple-entry visa will jump from 6,000 yen to 30,000 yen, a BBC report suggested. In Indian currency, that translates to roughly Rs 8,750 and Rs 17,500 respectively. Japan has long been seen as one of those bucket-list destinations that had surprisingly become more accessible (falling yen is one of the reasons). It's a country where centuries-old temples coexist with robot cafes, where cherry blossoms draw millions every spring, and where a bowl of ramen can be as memorable as a visit to Mount Fuji. However, this move could be a bit of a bummer for those who had been planning their visit to the picturesque country in the

upcoming days.

The move represents a five-fold increase and is being widely viewed as Tokyo's attempt to bring its visa fees closer to those charged by other developed economies while accounting for decades of inflation and major shifts in exchange rates.

Why is Japan doing this now?

The most striking aspect of the announcement is not just the scale of the increase but how long it has been coming.

Japan's visa fees have remained unchanged for nearly half a century. During that period, the country has weathered economic booms, recessions, a global pandemic and dramatic

fluctuations in the value of the yen. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said the revision reflects inflation and exchange-rate changes that have accumulated since the last update in 1978. He also stressed that the government does not expect the increase to have an immediate impact on inbound tourism. Travel analysts point out that even after the increase, Japan's fees will be more closely aligned with what travellers already pay for visas to destinations across Europe and North America.

A country struggling with too much popularity

The timing is particularly interesting because Japan is

experiencing an unprecedented tourism boom. Last year, the country welcomed a record 42.7 million international visitors, driven by pent-up post-pandemic travel demand and a weak yen that made Japan relatively affordable for foreign tourists.

Cities like Kyoto, Tokyo and Osaka have been grappling with overtourism concerns. Local authorities have experimented with crowd-control measures, tourist taxes and restrictions in popular areas as visitor numbers continue to surge.

Against that backdrop, the visa fee hike appears less like a deterrent and more like an effort to ensure the country's immigration and tourism infrastructure can keep pace with demand.

It is not just tourist visas

The changes extend beyond holidaymakers. In May, Japan's Upper House also passed legislation allowing significant increases in fees related to residency applications and immigration procedures. The statutory upper limit for permanent residency applications could rise to 300,000 yen from the current 10,000 yen, while certain residency status changes and extensions may also become substantially more expensive in the coming years. For students, professionals and long-term residents, those changes could prove even more consequential than the tourist visa hike. If you are planning a visit to Japan anytime soon, consider checking the official Embassy of Japan in India.



In Japan: A shrine where people pray for concert tickets

Have you ever been approached by a friend who just wants your device to book concert tickets? Not because they need another ticket, but because every extra device means one more chance. Concerts have become far more significant than they once were. They're no longer just shows; they're experiences, memories, and often bucket-list moments. Today, concert tickets sell out within minutes - and sometimes even seconds. Remember when tickets for Diljit Dosanjh, Coldplay, and other artists' concerts sold out in a matter of minutes? The struggle is real, just ask any concertgoer. Even when you do everything right, the outcome isn't always guaranteed. You might join the queue early and still miss out on tickets, or log in from five different devices and fail to secure a spot. That's when fans either thank their lucky stars or blame their bad luck. In Japan, however, some fans are going a step further. They're visiting a particular shrine and praying for a little divine

intervention in their quest for concert tickets. Hidden among the gleaming office towers and luxury department stores of Tokyo's Nihonbashi district stands a tiny shrine where people come to pray for their favourite artist's concert. It's called Fukutoku Shrine.

At first glance, it looks like countless other Shinto shrines scattered across Japan. A bright red torii gate - a traditional entrance found at Japanese shrines - marks the entrance, incense drifts through the air, and visitors quietly offer prayers.

The lore behind Japan's concert shrine

Founded around the ninth century, Fukutoku Shrine was originally a place where worshippers prayed to Inari, the Shinto deity associated with prosperity and abundance. According to BBC, its fortunes took a major turn in 1590 when Tokugawa Ieyasu, the powerful samurai developed a fondness for the shrine and became its



patron.

Later, Fukutoku was granted permission to host lotteries, a privilege that helped fund improvements to the shrine while giving participants a chance to walk away with winnings. Unsurprisingly, the shrine soon built a reputation as a destination for those seeking a little extra luck.

Centuries later, that association with good fortune found an unexpected audience in music

fans. As J-pop, K-pop and global pop concerts grew into cultural phenomena, so did the competition for tickets. In Japan, getting a seat at a major concert often involves navigating a complex lottery system, where fans enter for the chance to buy tickets and winners are selected at random.

The process is designed to be fair, but that doesn't stop

Ahead of BTS's highly anticipated concert in Taiwan, many fans visited Taipei's Bangka Longshan Temple to pray to Yue Lao, the Taoist god of love and matchmaking, for help securing concert tickets, according to Reuters. Fans reportedly left purple-colored offerings, BTS merchandise, and even seating charts in the hope of securing tickets.

The belief is that Yue Lao uses



hopeful fans from looking for ways to tilt the odds ever so slightly in their favour.

If the shrine is believed to help people strike it lucky in traditional lotteries, some fans believe that it might also improve their chances in the modern-day lottery of concert tickets. Whether they're hoping to see a J-pop idol, a K-pop group, or an international superstar, many visitors stop by to offer a prayer, write down a wish, and seek a little divine assistance.

After all, when tickets sell out in seconds, even a one per cent boost in luck can feel worth chasing.

And it isn't just happening in Japan

a red thread of fate to bring destined people together. These days, however, fans are hoping that same thread might help connect them with their desired concert tickets, or even their preferred seats.

The practice, which gained popularity through social media, has become a ritual among K-pop fans navigating increasingly competitive ticket lotteries.

Demand is particularly high this time around, with BTS returning as a full group for performances in Taiwan for the first time since 2018. Whether it's love, career success, or concert tickets, people have always turned to luck- and sometimes a higher power - when something matters deeply to them.

A Doctor Explains Why Consuming Jeera Water On Empty Stomach May Reduce Fatty Liver Risk



About 16 to 32% of the Indian population is suffering from fatty liver disease, which makes the caseload of 120 million Indians remain affected. These alarming statistics, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research, indicate that fatty liver disease poses a major disease burden, which is making people pay attention to their dietary choices. One of the ways that fatty liver disease, at least grade 1 of the disease, can benefit from scientifically proven natural remedies that can reduce the amount of fat accumulation in the liver. Jeera water is one such remedy, as the research in *Advances of Integrative Medicine* suggests it contains compounds that reduce the risk of it. The research points to herbal treatments being able to improve liver enzymes and lipid profiles and slow down the progression of fatty liver disease.

Can Jeera Water Reduce The Risk Of Fatty Liver?

The simple natural remedy involves soaking carom seeds in water to extract their beneficial compounds. It has shown maximum health impact when it is consumed in the morning on an empty stomach. Jeera seeds contain bioactive compounds that make them a beneficial ingredient for reducing the risk of fatty liver disease. Dr. Sanjay Jain, Senior Consultant, Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Apollo Hospitals, Delhi, explains, 'Jeera water can boost bile release that helps break down fats better. It can even support smoother digestion and reduce heaviness. The exact mechanisms behind this are as follows:

1. Improves Digestion

Cumin seeds have been shown to boost digestive enzyme activity, which helps the body

break down fats, proteins, and carbohydrates in an effective manner. The stimulation of digestive enzymes boosts digestive enzymes and makes the gut function better. It can even reduce common gastric issues such as bloating and indigestion.

2. Supports Metabolism

Research published in the *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* suggests that jeera water can help regulate blood sugar levels. Jeera water can also reduce body weight and overall fat storage, as well as lower fasting insulin levels.

3. Rich In Antioxidants

Cumin seeds contain compounds that reduce oxidative stress, which can increase cellular ageing. It can improve core metabolic syndrome markers, which are directly tied to metabolic efficiency. Aids Fat Processing

The consumption of jeera water can fast-track fat processing by reducing fat deposition in the liver. The research published in the *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* journal suggests that 3 g of cumin seeds daily for 3 months is proven to reduce fat mass, improve the cholesterol profile, and reduce waist circumference as well.

Why Drinking It On An Empty Stomach Matters

Jeera water on an empty stomach can make the beneficial compounds absorb better in the body. But the quantity of it needs to be moderated, as jeera water can also lead to side effects when it is consumed in excess. Here is exactly how it can help with reducing the risk of a fatty liver: Better absorption of nutrients that can be readily extracted from the food you consume.

Kicks start metabolism early, which is necessary for better nutritional absorption. Supports the gut-liver connection, which is responsible for many bodily processes.

How To Prepare Jeera Water

Jeera water can be prepared by following these simple steps:

Soak 1 tsp cumin overnight or boil it in water, as the bioactive compounds need to be absorbed by the gut.

Drink warm in the morning to make sure that the temperature doesn't suddenly shock the system.

Avoid adding sugar, as it can change its effect on the body, as it will cause a blood sugar spike instead.

Possible Side Effects That You Should Know

Jeera water can pose side effects as well, as it is a natural remedy, and it can result in the following: Excess consumption risks, as it is a digestive aid whose dose

needs to be moderated.

Pregnant women/irritable bowel syndrome patients need to be careful of their jeera water consumption.

Not a replacement for medical treatment, as fatty liver affects people in grades; only grade 1 can benefit from jeera water consumption alongside medical treatment.

Tips To Reduce Fatty Liver Disease Risk

Fatty liver disease risk can be reduced by taking a holistic approach to make sure that the body is able to repair the damage that is caused by an impaired liver. Liver health needs a combination of healthy habits to function properly and filter out the substances that it doesn't need. Here is how you can do so:

Cut refined sugar and refined carb intake, as they can spike blood sugar levels and increase stress on the liver.

Exercise regularly to improve metabolism. Maintain a healthy weight, as the stress on the liver can be minimised. Limit alcohol intake as it increases stress on the liver and affects its functioning

Jeera water is a supportive habit, not a cure for fatty liver disease. But a doctor consultation is needed to make sure jeera-water intake is regulated and moderated.

How To Tell the Difference Between A Monsoon Viral Infection And Early Dengue

The monsoon in India offers relief from the scorching summer heat, but it also marks the annual arrival of a seasonal health hazard: a sudden wave of fever cases. People often wonder about their platelet counts and consider every sneeze or spike in body temperature as a sign of a serious disease, which makes them panic. The biggest challenge families face during this rainy season is determining whether a sudden fever is just a standard seasonal viral infection or the early warning signs of dengue. Because both conditions look nearly identical on day one, the first 48 hours are critical. Misreading the symptoms can lead to dangerous delays or, conversely, unnecessary hospital panic.

This is where the 48-Hour fever rule becomes your most vital tool for preventive care. There are medical insights and clinical trends to understand to figure out exactly how your body responds

to these distinct infections.

When a pathogen, be it a standard respiratory virus or the vector-borne dengue virus that enters your system, your immune system launches a generic, front-line defence. It releases pyrogens (fever-inducing substances) that reset your brain's internal thermostat to burn out the invader. Because this initial immune response is identical for multiple infections, diagnosing the exact cause through basic physical examination alone in the first two days is notoriously difficult.

According to a clinical review published in the *Journal of Clinical Virology*, early clinical symptoms of dengue frequently mimic non-specific viral syndromes during the initial 48 hours of fever onset, making early laboratory confirmation or close clinical tracking necessary for endemic regions.

However, as you cross that 48-hour threshold, the two conditions begin to take completely different

paths.

While a standard viral fever is self-limiting and manageable with simple rest, dengue requires close, methodical monitoring. Here is what you need to look out for as the fever progresses past the second day:

What Happens When You Cross the 48-Hour Mark?

If your fever stays consistently high past 48 hours and doesn't budge despite timely doses of paracetamol, it is time to skip the internet theories and get a direct blood test.

1. The Critical Testing Window Within the first 1 to 4 days of symptom onset, the Dengue NS1 Antigen test is highly sensitive and can confirm the presence of the virus before your body even produces antibodies. A simultaneous Complete Blood Count (CBC) is essential to establish your baseline haematocrit and platelet levels.

2. The Platelet Fallacy and the "Critical Phase"

Many people panic the moment a fever breaks, assuming they are out of the woods. In dengue, the period right after the fever subsides (usually between day 3 and day 5) is actually the critical phase. This is when plasma leakage can occur, causing the blood to thicken and platelet counts to drop sharply. A study highlighted in *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* notes that severe dengue complications, such as fluid accumulation and internal bleeding, characteristically manifest during the defervescence phase (the transition from a high fever to normal temperature).

While you wait for your lab reports, your home-care strategy should prioritise safety and systemic stabilisation:

1. Stick Strictly To Paracetamol For Fever Management

Use only paracetamol for fever control as advised by your physician. Avoid all anti-inflammatory painkillers like

ibuprofen, aspirin, or diclofenac, as they thin the blood and can trigger severe internal bleeding if the infection turns out to be dengue.

2. Prioritise Cellular Hydration

Do not just drink plain water. Combat cellular dehydration by consuming electrolyte-rich fluids such as Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS), fresh coconut water, and clear vegetable soups.

3. Track The Red Flags And Ensure Emergency Monitoring

Monitor for severe warning signs: continuous vomiting, bleeding from the gums or nose, severe abdominal pain, or sudden extreme lethargy. If any of these appear, seek immediate hospital admission. By tracking the exact duration of your symptoms and applying the 48-hour rule, you can safely navigate the monsoon season without letting panic override clinical facts. Stay safe, stay hydrated, and keep those mosquito repellents handy!

Getting A Headache Every Time You Cough? Here's What Doctor Say



You may expect coughing to cause temporary discomfort in the throat or chest. But what if every cough triggers a sudden headache? While it may seem unusual, headaches that occur during coughing, sneezing, laughing, or straining are a recognised medical condition known as cough headaches. In many cases, they are harmless and short-lived. However, experts warn that they can sometimes signal an underlying health issue that requires medical attention. According to Dr Manoj Sharma, Director, Internal Medicine, Fortis Hospital, Vasant Kunj, recurring headaches triggered by coughing should not be ignored, especially if they are severe or accompanied by other symptoms.

What Is A Cough Headache?

A cough headache is a type of headache that occurs immediately after coughing or activities that increase pressure inside the head, such as sneezing, laughing, bending over, or straining during bowel movements. "Cough headaches are of two types. Primary cough headaches are generally harmless. They are triggered by a sudden increase in pressure inside the head during coughing or straining and usually last from a few seconds to a few minutes," explains Dr Sharma. Although the pain can be intense, primary cough

headaches typically do not indicate a serious medical problem.

What Causes The Pain?

When a person coughs forcefully, pressure inside the chest and abdomen rises rapidly. This pressure can temporarily affect blood flow and fluid dynamics within the skull, leading to a sudden headache. Primary cough headaches are thought to occur because of this brief increase in pressure. The headache usually appears suddenly and may feel sharp, stabbing, or explosive in nature. Fortunately, these headaches often disappear within minutes and may not require extensive treatment.

When Could It Be

Something More Serious?

Not all cough headaches are harmless. Doctors distinguish between primary cough headaches and secondary cough headaches, which are caused by an underlying medical condition.

"Secondary cough headaches can be caused by an underlying condition affecting the brain or its surrounding structures, such as abnormalities in the flow of cerebrospinal fluid, structural changes, or, rarely, a brain tumour," says Dr Sharma. In these cases, coughing acts as a trigger that reveals an existing problem rather than being the actual cause of the headache.

Symptoms That Should Raise Concern

Secondary cough headaches tend to be more severe and may last longer than primary headaches. They can also occur alongside other symptoms that suggest a neurological problem. Warning signs include:

- Dizziness
- Difficulty walking or maintaining balance
- Vision changes or blurred vision
- Weakness in the arms or legs
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Persistent vomiting
- Confusion
- Fainting episodes

If any of these symptoms accompany a cough headache, medical evaluation should not be delayed.

When Should You See A Doctor?

While an occasional headache

triggered by coughing may not always indicate a serious problem, certain situations require prompt medical attention. Dr Sharma advises seeking medical care if the headache is:

Occurring for the first time

Severe or progressively worsening

Lasting longer than a few minutes

Associated with fever

Accompanied by confusion or fainting

Linked to vision problems

Associated with weakness, numbness, or other neurological symptoms. Early evaluation can help rule out potentially serious conditions and provide peace of mind.

How Is It Diagnosed?

To determine the cause of a cough headache, a doctor will first review your symptoms and medical history. If there are any concerning features, imaging tests may be recommended. "A physician may recommend imaging tests such as an MRI or CT scan to rule out serious causes," says Dr Sharma. These scans help identify structural abnormalities, problems with cerebrospinal fluid flow, or other conditions that may be contributing to the headaches.

What Treatment Options Are Available?

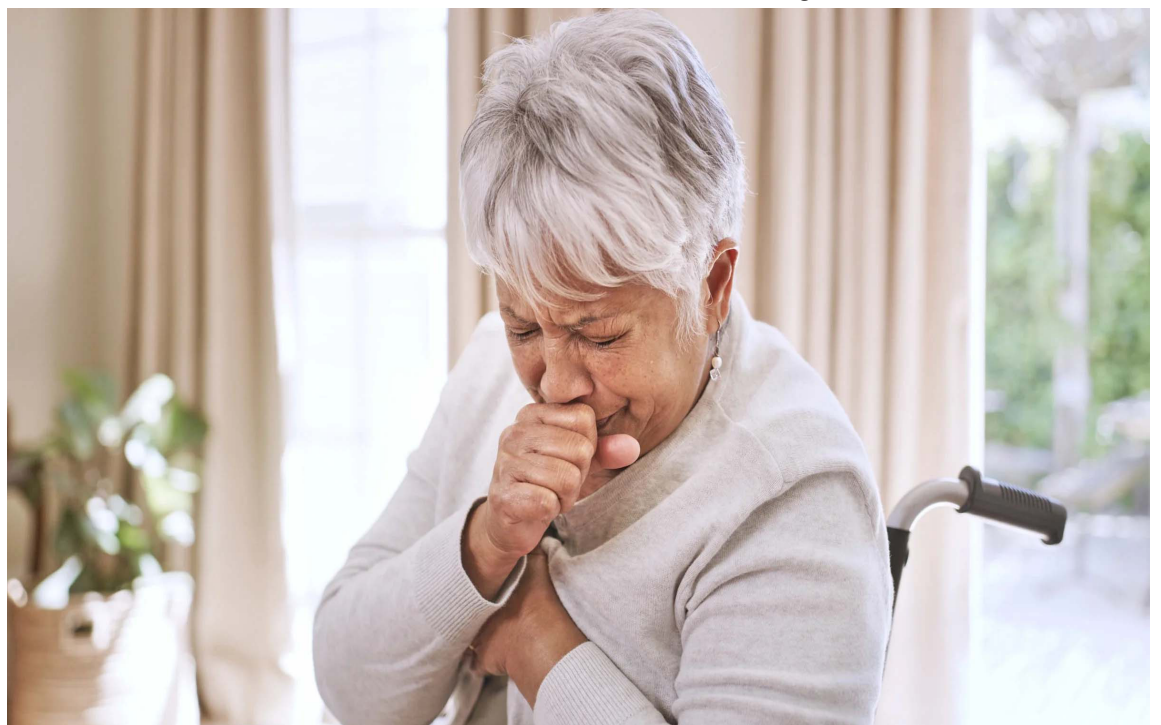
Treatment depends on whether the headache is classified as

primary or secondary. For primary cough headaches, medications may be prescribed to reduce the frequency and severity of symptoms. Some people also experience spontaneous improvement over time.

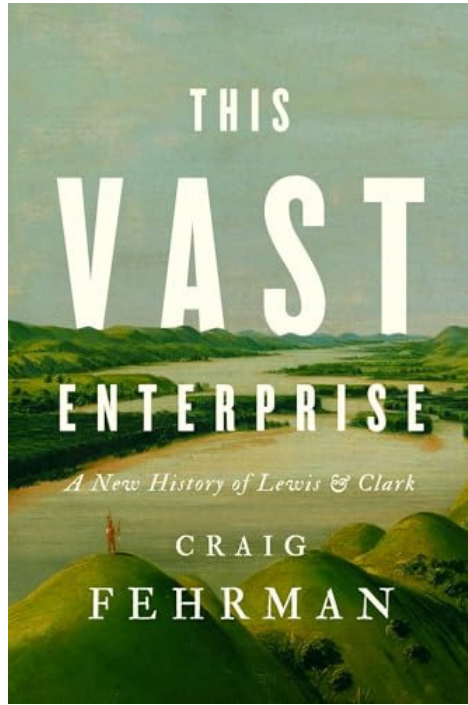
Secondary cough headaches require treatment of the underlying cause. Depending on the diagnosis, this may involve medications, specialised neurological care, or in some cases, surgical intervention. The key is identifying the reason behind the headache rather than simply treating the pain. Experiencing a headache every time you cough is not normal and should not be dismissed, especially if it is new, severe, or accompanied by other symptoms.

While many cough headaches are harmless and temporary, some can signal underlying conditions affecting the brain or nervous system. "If you're experiencing headaches every time you cough, don't self-medicate. Early evaluation can help identify the cause and ensure timely treatment, providing both reassurance and appropriate care," Dr Sharma advises.

Paying attention to these symptoms and seeking medical advice when needed can help rule out serious causes and ensure the right treatment at the right time.



This Vast Enterprise: A New History of Lewis & Clark



In the epic tradition of Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage*, *This Vast Enterprise* offers a bold new take on the Lewis and

Clark expedition, humanizing forgotten figures and shattering long-held myths about one of the most beloved episodes in American history.

Celebrated young historian Craig Fehrman, whose first book, *Author in Chief*, was hailed by Thomas Mallon in *The Wall Street Journal* as "one of the best books on the American presidency to appear in recent years," delivers a major new account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark returned from their long journey, in 1806, they brought an incredible tale starring themselves as courageous explorers, skilled scientists, and peaceful ambassadors. There was truth in those descriptions. But there was also distortion.

For the first time in a generation, *This Vast Enterprise* offers a fresh and more accurate account of their expedition—a gripping narrative that draws on new documents, stunning analysis, and Native

perspectives. Fehrman's central insight is that the success of Lewis and Clark depended on much more than just Lewis and Clark. We all know Sacajawea, and some of us know York, the Black man Clark enslaved. But *This Vast Enterprise* introduces us to John Ordway, a working-class soldier who fought grizzlies and towed the captains' bulky barge. It introduces us to Wolf Calf, a Blackfoot teenager who watched his friend die in a battle with Lewis and his men.

To capture this cast of characters, each chapter in *This Vast Enterprise* moves to a new point of view, describing that person's desires and contradictions with an unprecedented level of care. Fehrman balances the story's inherent adventure with the humanity of its protagonists. One chapter shows Thomas Jefferson operating in an age of bitter partisan unrest—his secret maneuvers to fund the expedition, uncovered here for the first time, are a case study in presidential

power. Another chapter reveals the strategy and strength of Black Buffalo, a Lakota leader, completely upending our understanding of early Lakota American diplomacy. In his chapters, Clark is not a bad speller but a student of the Enlightenment. (Fehrman found Clark's college notebook.) Lewis is someone whose psychological demons feel at once heartbreaking and modern.

And yet, in the end, the captains are men who needed help—from Sacajawea, from York, and from each other. Their expedition truly was a vast enterprise, a sprawling and federally funded military mission that came down to the heroic sacrifices of a few human beings. This book portrays those people, all of them, for the first time. It is more than just a work of history—it's a testament to the power of innovative research and emotional storytelling, and a thrilling reminder that even the most familiar moments in history can still surprise us.

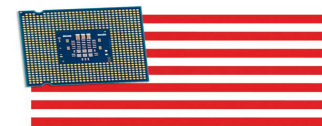
Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology

An epic account of the decades-long battle to control what has emerged as the world's most critical resource—microchip technology—with the United States and China increasingly in conflict. You may be surprised to learn that microchips are the new oil—the scarce resource on which the modern world depends. Today, military, economic, and geopolitical power are built on a foundation of computer chips. Virtually everything—from missiles to microwaves, smartphones to the stock market—runs on chips. Until recently, America designed and built the fastest chips and maintained its lead as the #1 superpower. Now, America's edge is slipping, undermined by competitors in Taiwan, Korea, Europe, and, above all, China. Today, as *Chip War* reveals, China, which spends more money each year importing chips than it spends importing oil, is pouring billions into a chip-building initiative to catch up to the US. At stake is America's military

superiority and economic prosperity. Economic historian Chris Miller explains how the semiconductor came to play a critical role in modern life and how the U.S. became dominant in chip design and manufacturing and applied this technology to military systems. America's victory in the Cold War and its global military dominance stems from its ability to harness computing power more effectively than any other power. But here, too, China is catching up, with its chip-building ambitions and military modernization going hand in hand. America has let key components of the chip-building process slip out of its grasp, contributing not only to a worldwide chip shortage but also a new Cold War with a superpower adversary that is desperate to bridge the gap. Illuminating, timely, and fascinating, *Chip War* shows that, to make sense of the current state of politics, economics, and technology, we must first understand the vital role played by chips.

"Remarkable . . . An eye-popping work, a unique combination of economic and technological—and strategic—analysis."
—PAUL KENNEDY, bestselling author of *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*

CHIP WAR



THE FIGHT FOR THE WORLD'S
MOST CRITICAL TECHNOLOGY

CHRIS MILLER

Enshittification

Why Everything
Suddenly Got
Worse and What
to Do About It



Cory Doctorow

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

Enshittification: It's not just you the internet sucks now. It's been enshittified. That was no accident, and it's not gonna fix itself. Here's how we'll disenshittify it so we can have a new, good internet. We are all living through the Enshittocene the Great Enshittening a time in which the services that matter to us, that we rely on, are being turned into giant piles of shit. It's frustrating. Demoralizing. Even terrifying.

The once-glorious internet has degenerated into "platforms" that rose to dominance because they delivered convenient and delightful services efficiently and reliably. But once we were locked in to those services, the tech bosses turned on us, relying on our dependency to keep us using the

services even as they got worse and worse. The platform bosses did the same to the companies that had flocked to their services to sell stuff to us. Once we were all locked in businesses and users the tech companies stripped out all utility, save the bare minimum needed to stave off total collapse.

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

Rama Duwaji, New York's First Lady, Just Made Bootleg Knicks Merch Look Couture

At Thursday's Knicks parade, Rama Duwaji arrived in a look that perfectly captured the city's chaotic, creative and unmistakably stylish energy. Instead of opting for polished tailoring or predictable parade dressing, the 28-year-old stepped out in a custom-made dress crafted entirely from bootleg NBA Finals merchandise tees, instantly turning a streetwear staple into one of the week's most talked-about fashion moments.

Designed by downtown designer Miss Claire Sullivan, the asymmetrical one-shoulder dress transformed ordinary Knicks T-shirts into wearable art. White, orange and blue tees were tucked, twisted, stitched and layered together to create a sculptural silhouette, which Duwaji wore over a black midi skirt. Quite in synch with her



style, the accessories were also supercool: layered gold necklaces, playful orange puff-ball earrings and black Nike Air Rift sneakers completed the look with the kind of nonchalant styling that New York fashion

does best. "Knicks in five LFG NYC," the designer captioned her post.

The inspiration behind the dress came directly from the city's intense Knicks fever. "My entire family is from New York,

but have all since moved away, and everyone was texting me about wanting Knicks shirts," Sullivan told Vogue. "I wasn't able to go to any of the street vendors myself, so my friends helped me source. When I saw

how many colors there were, I was inspired to get one in every color and turn them into a dress." Sullivan even wore the tutu version herself while celebrating the Knicks' Game 5 victory over the San Antonio Spurs earlier in the week, proving the look was designed not just as fashion commentary, but as a genuine expression of fan culture.

For Duwaji, the appearance marked one of her most high-profile fashion outings since her husband, Zohran Mamdani, was inaugurated in January. The Houston-born illustrator and animator became New York City's first Gen Z and first Muslim first lady earlier this year. Since then, she has largely maintained a low public profile while continuing her work in illustration and ceramics.

Janhvi And Khushi Kapoor Just Delivered The Ultimate Wedding Guest Style Inspiration

As the Kapoor family gathered to celebrate Anshula Kapoor's pre-wedding festivities, sisters Janhvi Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor turned heads with two distinctly different yet equally stunning ethnic looks. While Janhvi embraced timeless elegance in a traditional saree, Khushi opted for contemporary sparkle in a heavily embellished lehenga, proving once again that there's more than one way to make a style statement at a wedding. Janhvi Kapoor chose understated sophistication in a rose-pink saree featuring delicate gold borders and subtle woven detailing. The soft drape beautifully highlighted the fabric's richness without relying on excessive embellishments.

She paired the saree with a matching striped blouse featuring a deep neckline and short sleeves, adding a modern touch to the otherwise traditional ensemble. Keeping her accessories minimal, Janhvi wore a statement choker necklace, earrings, and stacked bangles



that complemented the warm tones of her outfit.

Her soft-glam makeup,

featuring rosy cheeks, glossy lips, and softly defined eyes,

perfectly matched the look's

romantic vibe. With her hair left open in gentle waves, Janhvi's ensemble struck the perfect

balance between festive and elegant.

Khushi Kapoor Shines In A Sequined Ensemble

Standing beside her sister, Khushi Kapoor embraced high-octane glamour in a baby pink-toned embellished ensemble. The outfit featured intricate sequins and beadwork throughout, creating a dazzling effect under the lights.

The heavily embroidered top, designed with a sweetheart neckline and delicate straps, added a contemporary edge to the traditional silhouette. She paired it with a sheer, embellished dupatta draped gracefully over one shoulder.

Khushi elevated the look with a striking emerald-and-diamond choker necklace, which added a vibrant pop of colour against the neutral palette. Her sleek updo allowed the jewellery and intricate detailing of the outfit to take centre stage.

For makeup, she opted for radiant skin, softly smoked eyes, and nude lips, keeping the overall aesthetic polished and sophisticated.

Maa Behen Review: Madhuri Dixit And Triptii Dimri Smash The Patriarchy In Netflix's Quirky Dramey

Madhuri Dixit-Triptii Dimri film takes on misogyny with style and swagger

What happens when women refuse to play by society's rules? Maa Behen attempts to answer that with humour, chaos, and a murder twist. But does it land successfully? Let's find out!

Maa Behen, directed by Suresh Triveni, brings together Madhuri Dixit, Triptii Dimri, and debutant Dharna Durga in a dark comedy that attempts to blend satire with family drama. The film also stars Ravi Kishan, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Arunoday Singh, and Shardul Bharadwaj in key roles.

Set around a dysfunctional mother-daughter trio, the film follows Rekha (Madhuri Dixit), a woman who has spent her life not caring about society's expectations. From her choice of clothes to her unapologetic attitude, Rekha is constantly judged by her surroundings. As one line in the film sharply underlines, "Dayaan ki umar nahi badhti, (A witch never ages.)" pointing to how society continues to scrutinise women regardless of age. Rekha lost her husband at 25 and has lived on her own terms ever since. Her two daughters - Jaya (Triptii Dimri) and Sushma (Dharna Durga) - share a strained relationship with her, shaped by resentment, misunderstanding, and their own personal struggles. Jaya is stuck in a suffocating, patriarchal household, burdened by domestic expectations, while Sushma projects confidence online but wrestles with emotional confusion. The story kicks into motion when Rekha calls her daughters one night, claiming her neighbour, Gupta ji, played by Ravi Kishan, was "killed" in her house. What follows is a chaotic spiral of panic, cover-ups, and questionable decisions. The discovery of a dead body, combined with wedding chaos at Gupta ji's house (his daughter is getting married), sets the stage for a dark comedy that tries to balance humour with emotional tension.

While the film uses this murder setup as a narrative hook, its core lies in the



relationships between the three women. Their interactions - sharp, messy, and often uncomfortable - show the generational conflicts and the emotional baggage they carry.

The film also makes repeated commentary on how women are labelled, judged, and defined. Terms like "man-eater," "witch," and "firoti" (extorter) are casually thrown at Rekha, revealing the deep-rooted misogyny she faces.

Madhuri Dixit leads the film with a confident and charismatic performance. She brings both grace and defiance to Rekha, especially in moments where the character calls out regressive thinking. In one scene, when questioned about her choice of clothing, she responds, "Yeh kya behuda baat hai, hamari blouse se iska kya matlab? (What nonsense is this? What does my blouse have to do with any of this?)" - a line that effectively sums up the film's stance on moral policing.

Triptii Dimri delivers a convincing performance as a woman trapped within the rigid structures of a traditional household, where even basic agency is denied. Her character's frustration feels real, particularly in scenes that reflect everyday sexism.

Dharna Durga, making her debut, adds fresh energy, holding her own alongside more established actors.

Ravi Kishan, as the neighbour, stands out in parts, balancing humour and unease. The supporting cast contributes to the film's chaotic tone, though

the screenplay often gets crowded with too many subplots.

That is where Maa Behen begins to falter. Despite a strong premise, the film struggles with coherence. The narrative moves from one situation to another without fully developing its conflicts. The satire, though

Main Vaapas Aaunga Review: Titan Naseeruddin Shah Delivers A Masterclass In Imtiaz Ali's Heartbreaking Film

Exactly a week ago, Naseeruddin Shah disappeared into the skin of JRD Tata, the Tata Group visionary, in Made In India: The Titan Story by Robbie Grewal. In Imtiaz Ali's Main Vaapas Aaunga, the veteran actor breathes life into a dying man named Ishar Grewal, whose life was marred by the horrors of the 1947 Partition.

Naseeruddin Shah is an actor par excellence and can easily be taken for granted because you feel he has done it all. He turns 76 in a few days and has been acting for 51 years. And yet, when you watch Main Vaapas Aaunga, you will still be gobsmacked.

In his follow-up to Amar Singh Chamkila, also set in Punjab, Imtiaz Ali makes a splendid return to the big screen with his most realised film to date -- one that dares you to look for old-school love in an era dominated by situationships. Diljit Dosanjh reunites with the filmmaker as Nirvair, a lost London-based youth who flies to India to see his ailing grandfather Ishar one last time.

The bedridden old man, suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia, longs for his first love even 78 years later and unintentionally knocks some

loud, lacks the sharpness needed to leave a lasting impact. The tonal shifts - from domestic drama to dark comedy - feel inconsistent at times.

On paper, the film has all the elements of a sharp feminist satire. In execution, however, it feels a bit stretched and uneven at times. The

sense (as happened in Tamasha) into Nirvair. Commitment-phobic and uncertain about his career -- a daytime engineer who moonlights as a comic -- Nirvair is played spot on by Diljit Dosanjh, the real global Indian. He struggles to understand why his grandfather refuses to die. "Martians' walked the earth during World War II and they still live among us," says Dadaji, and Nirvair tries to make sense of his gibberish in an attempt to let the old man die in peace.

Main Vaapas Aaunga flits between present-day Delhi and Sargodha in what was then undivided Punjab, days before Partition. Back then, Ishar was Keenu, played capably by Vedang Raina -- a name that nods to Sargodha's status as the citrus capital of Pakistan. Young and carefree, Ishar falls for Afsana Shaikh (Jiya), essayed by a formidable Sharvari. At the time, the Radcliffe Line had yet to tear the land apart; Punjab was one, home to Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Afsana reciprocates Ishar's love. The young couple, who meets chhup-chhupke in a Musalman's house garden, believe religion will not be a

humour works, and the emotional beats land, but the storytelling lacks tightness.

Still, the film deserves credit for addressing themes like patriarchy, social judgement, and women's autonomy without becoming overtly preachy. At its best, Maa Behen is messy, chaotic, and intermittently engaging - much like the lives of its central characters.

Ultimately, while the film may not be flawless, Maa Behen finds its voice in the way it takes on patriarchy - calling it out as "behuda baat" and refusing to play by its rules. It may stumble along the way, but its defiant, unapologetic stance ensures it leaves an impact as a bold, women-led story that isn't afraid to push back. Last but not least, the Madhuri Dixit film also packs in a cameo that might just catch you off guard.

problem. They are unaware of the fire about to spread.

The best part of the film is not what will happen -- the title and trailer make that clear -- but the how. Bringing a love story to a time when audiences have become accustomed to celebrating hatred and othering is itself an act of rebellion, even a political gesture. Imtiaz Ali, along with Naseeruddin Shah and Diljit Dosanjh, breaks your heart to mend it again.

The surprise package in this Partition drama is Sharvari, who nails the brief as the coy yet resolute Afsana. Vedang Raina is vibrant as Keenu, a man who becomes an empty shell long before he reaches the deathbed.

There is a lot of talk about "ye meri jagah hai" and the idea of communal harmony and freedom to choose where to live. But what happens when you are uprooted from the only place you have ever known as home? What do you say to those who never lifted a finger against anyone, regardless of religion, when their loved ones are hacked to death and raped? How does a Sikh youth react when he sees his own community plunder and kill the 'other'?

House Of The Dragon Season 3 Episode 1 Review: A Dragon-Sized Mess

House Of The Dragon spent most of its second season promising a war. Armies marched, dragons gathered, alliances shifted, and tensions escalated, only for the finale to leave viewers staring at their screens and asking the same question: "That's it?"

Two years later, Season 3 arrives carrying the weight of those expectations. The good news? Things finally happen. The bad news? Bigger does not always mean better.

The Season 3 premiere wastes no time throwing audiences back into Westeros. Alliances are tested, strategies are drawn up, dragons take flight, and familiar faces continue to wrestle with the consequences of decisions made long ago.

On paper, it has everything one could want from a House Of The Dragon episode. In execution, however, it feels oddly fragmented. The episode jumps between multiple storylines with such relentless urgency that very few scenes are allowed to breathe. Just when an emotional moment begins to settle, the narrative rushes elsewhere.

Just when a character interaction threatens to reveal something meaningful, the show cuts away to another corner of the realm. The result is an hour that is undeniably busy but surprisingly hollow.



To be fair, House Of The Dragon remains one of television's most visually accomplished productions. The scale is staggering, the dragons continue to inspire awe, and several action sequences are mounted with the kind of ambition that most fantasy dramas can only dream of.

There are moments when the series reminds you why it became the natural successor to Game of Thrones in the first place. Yet spectacle alone cannot compensate for the absence of emotional investment.

What is particularly frustrating is that the episode repeatedly brushes against compelling ideas without fully

exploring them. Characters make decisions that feel driven more by narrative convenience than by emotional logic.

Certain developments arrive so abruptly that they leave viewers wondering whether they missed a scene somewhere in between.

There is an unmistakable sense of the writers trying to move pieces across the board as quickly as possible, often at the expense of coherence.

The performances do a lot of heavy lifting. Emma D'Arcy continues to bring gravitas and quiet intensity to Rhaenyra, while Olivia Cooke remains one of the show's most fascinating screen presences. Even when the material around her wobbles,

Cooke finds ways to make Alicent feel painfully human.

Ewan Mitchell's Aemond remains as unsettling as ever, and let's just say there is one particular moment involving him that will have social media in complete disbelief. Let's just leave it at: if you know, you know. What surprised me most is that despite all the destruction on display, the episode rarely feels devastating in the way it intends to. Things happen, people suffer, and lives change forever, but the emotional impact doesn't always land.

Perhaps that's because the writing is so focused on pushing the story forward that it forgets

to let viewers sit with the consequences.

Even the biggest sequences suffer from this problem. They're undeniably large in scale and visually accomplished, but they don't quite generate the sense of awe that earlier seasons managed so effortlessly. You admire the craftsmanship, but you don't necessarily feel swept away by it.

That isn't to say the premiere is bad. The Season 3 premiere is far from a disaster. It is handsome, ambitious, and intermittently thrilling. It contains enough intrigue to keep viewers invested and enough spectacle to dominate online conversations for weeks. But beneath all the fire and fury lies an episode that feels strangely disconnected from its own emotional core.

After the disappointing Season 2 finale, this should have been the episode that reminded everyone why House Of The Dragon became one of television's biggest shows. Instead, it feels like another chapter spent preparing for greatness rather than fully achieving it.

The dragons are still magnificent. The politics are still messy. The performances remain strong. But for all its noise and fury, the Season 3 premiere leaves behind an oddly muted impression.

Cocktail 2 Review: Shahid Kapoor, Kriti Sanon, Rashmika Mandanna's Film Reduces Relationships To A Joke

A Gen Z rom-com with a millennial soul and the heart of an overgrown child, Cocktail 2 is a hit-or-miss mix of tips about life, love and uncharted adventures in Sicily that do not fully dissolve into the breezy, pulpy potion that the film seeks to serve up.

The pearls of wisdom that it bandies about stick out rather awkwardly as another menage e trois led by a young man in an open relationship navigates the ebbs and tides of the heart and the desires of two women who are polar opposites.

Coming 14 years after Cocktail, which was about two equally dissimilar ladies making impulsive choices, right or wrong, and holding up a mirror to the wayward ways of an entitled, commitment-phobic philanderer, the follow-up scampers in a different direction and winds up (along with its three principal characters) in a place where confusion runs riot. The 2012 hit, scripted by Imtiaz Ali, did not sugarcoat the flaws of the man in the love triangle nor did it cast the two girls in victim-versus-vixen mould. That allowed ample room for unpredictable twists that held up well even when they seemed somewhat stretched.

Nothing of that sort comes to pass in

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filmgoers but do not let go of the emphasis on endless conversations.

For all its buoyancy, Cocktail 2 is somewhat undermined by a hard-to-digest premise - a woman enlists a one-time hostel roomie to seduce her live-in partner in order to test his loyalty. Inevitably, trouble ensues. The far-fetched plot device reduces relationships to a joke. The male protagonist acknowledges as much late in the film. Tum dono ne mera mazaak bana rakkha hain, he thunders angrily when matters go out of hand. But that is not to say that the film is totally devoid of bright spots.

The moments that click rest largely on the three leads (Shahid Kapoor, Kriti Sanon and Rashmika Mandanna) straining every sinew of theirs to make the illogical and implausible pass muster. It is a tough ask but the actors do not stop trying. Full marks to them. They, however, succeed only sporadically because the storyline not only strains credulity but also hinges on the audience's willingness to completely suspend disbelief and relate to a grown-up trio behaving like schoolkids playing practical pranks on each other.

Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata Review: Kangana Ranaut Ensures She Doesn't Become Bigger Than Film

She has had a choppy ride at the box-office of late. Her last four Hindi releases (Thalaivi, Dhaakad, Tejas and Emergency) underperformed big time.

Could Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata, a female-centric film set in a hospital under a terror attack, be the throw of the dice that could turn things around for Kangana Ranaut?

The actor spares no effort, leading the charge with admirable restraint in a survival thriller that does well to never get ahead of itself. It stays well within and thrives on the limits that it sets for itself.

On her part, Ranaut, whose banner Manikarnika Films is the lead producer, ensures that she does not become bigger than the film, which often tends to be the bane of Bollywood movies that are bankrolled by stars.

The ensemble cast of Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata isn't swamped out by Ranaut's presence. While she enhances the lustre of the film, the script stays focused on a group rather than only an individual.

The film celebrates the unsung nurses who stood up against two Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists, including Ajmal Kasab, when they attacked Mumbai's Cama Hospital on the night of November 26, 2008.

Recreating a lesser-known chapter of the 26/11 terror attacks, writer-director Manoj Tapadia creates a taut and tensile narrative tapestry that brings into sharp relief the dimensions of what can happen when a routine day at work turns into a nightmare.

Ranaut plays a fictionalized version of the real-life nurse who, on that fateful night, saved 20 pregnant women, including one hypertension-afflicted

patient who went into labour when the terrorists stormed the hospital.

he is the pivotal figure and the film never lets the audience lose sight of that fact. But to the credit of Tapadia's screenplay, the lead does not get to hog all the footage. The ensemble gets its due.

The opening sequence of the film features Ranaut's character, Geeta Gandhare, and a police inspector (Sayaji Shinde in a cameo) in a conversation that kicks off a brief prelude. The cop exhorts the nurse to shed her fears and appear for the identification parade to nail Kasab.

The next sequence plays out around Geeta's dining table. Her husband appeals to her not to stick her neck out and invite trouble for herself and her school-going daughter. The nurse is wracked by doubt. Though crucial, this dilemma of hers is by no means the film's principal conflict.

That erupts only in the second half after the film has introduced us to, and created significant moments around, the other key cast members, including Girija Oak, Smita Tambe and Rasika Agashe, all of whom play nurses and deliver performances that add significant depth and range to the storyline.

There have been many Mumbai thrillers (and a web series) that have brought different aspects of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks to the screen but

Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata does not feel like one film too many. And that is a bit of a marvel.

The film does not stray from its core.



It employs a largely unflashy tone to celebrate the courage of the nurses who went beyond the line of duty and did not let "protocol and procedures" stop them from risking life and limb.

The constraints that they work within is brought to the fore in an early scene in which the nurses stage a vehement protest against a disciplinary memo that has been handed out to one of them by the hospital superintendent who insists that protocol is sacrosanct. All rule and regulations are thrown to the winds when extraordinary events upend everything.

In portraying the actions of the nurses and other health workers at the hospital, the film hovers for a fair amount of time on the Punjabi-speaking terrorists, two young bloodthirsty men who rampage through the building inflict as much damage as they can.

Fear courses through the hospital but the nurses, hiding in different crannies of the multistoried health facility, stand their ground even as they do not stop

attending to patients in need of immediate critical care. It is a race against both time and fate.

While Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata is not completely free from the predictable platitudes that the genre demands, the film manages to keep the aberrations down to the bare minimum as the action unfolds and the nurses do all that they can to keep the patients safe.

Broadly, the film has three distinct phases and textures. Cinematographer Ayan Sil a lot to work with and he proves equal to the task.

he first half is devoted mostly to delineating the principal characters and their families, with Geeta and her home receiving the most attention. It highlights the bonhomie that prevails among the nurses. All the banter that the ladies indulge provides a contrast to what lies in store for them.

This part of the film ends with the two terrorists barging into the hospital. In the half that follows, the hospital's interiors are engulfed in darkness - the lights are switched off in all the wards - and the action takes place in dimly lit passages and corners, creating shadows and silhouettes that heighten the air of menace.

Brightness returns to the film in the final passages. Even as the nurses deservedly bask in the glow of their bravery, hospital politics continue to plague them and life goes back to workaday normal for them.

Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata has its share of spills but because it isn't what Bollywood films of this kind often turn into - shrill bombast and hyper-masculine fulmination - it does not veer too far off its chosen path.

Raakh Review: Ali Fazal-Sonali Bendre's Show Kills You With The Horrors Of Life

Prosit Roy's investigative thriller Raakh is deeply unsettling. Loosely based on the notorious 1978 Ranga Billa case, in which two teenagers were abducted and brutally murdered, the series keeps you questioning basic morality and suggests humanity was - and continues to be - a lost cause.

Acclaimed writer, producer and director Prosit Roy stays true to authentic storytelling, delivering a solid gut-punch for viewers. The director of Paatal Lok fame does not hold back in depicting the gritty, unapologetic criminal underworld of 1970s Delhi, and it leaves you scarred.

Unlike most procedural dramas that have several interlinked crime stories, Prosit Roy focuses on the Ranga Billa case, the monstrosity that shook the nation. Every death that is reported thereafter, is invariably linked to the two killers on the run. The eight-episode series follows two siblings, Suman (Divya Sharma), 16, and Sahil (Vivaan Sharma), 14, who leave home to reach the radio station. Unaware of the horrors that await them, they never make it on air; their parents, Roma (Sonali Bendre)

and Ashok (Aamir Bashir), wait for Suman's soulful vocals, but evening turns into night and the children do not return. A terrifying chain of events begins to unravel. What follows is a wild goose chase led by Sub Inspector Jayprakash (Ali Fazal), who struggles to prove his worth as a police officer while navigating a complicated relationship with father Ghanshyam *(Rakesh Bedi), a constable of thirty years, and an ambiguous connection with a journalist. A rewind to 2025 reminds us that the 2025 prison drama Warrant starring Zahaan Kapoor, was also inspired by the same tragic case. The original events date to August 26, 1978, when kidnappers hijacked a car in New Delhi carrying the two siblings - children of a senior naval officer - who were tortured to death and their bodies dumped in a forest ridge.

Director Prosit Roy deserves credit for incorporating key elements of the original case with acute precision in Raakh. The Ranga Billa case marked the first in-depth forensic investigation carried out by Delhi Police, and you see plenty of that throughout the series. The

trajectory of the suspects - from Bombay to Agra and back to the financial capital - is spaced out and never feels disjointed.

Ali Fazal as Sub Inspector Jayprakash shows great depth. Burdened by the unforgivable crime, he refuses to give up until he cracks the case. As he unearths the disturbing past of Rajjo (Ramandeep Yadav) and Babu (Akash Makhija), who portray the menacing abductors, you are left in shock at how far these 'daityas' (demons) will go. The emotional highs and lows Fazal portrays keep you transfixed; you can feel the pain coursing through him as the criminals keep slipping from his grasp like quicksand.

Sonali Bendre is a delight to watch. The intensity with which she plays a bereaved mother tugs at the heartstrings. In complete denial, she goes about her life as if nothing has happened until reality strikes and she is shattered. Her silence speaks louder than any dialogue. Her searing, empty gaze conveys how the toll of such rampage falls on the families of the

deceased. Aamir Bashir, as her husband and a senior army officer, has his moments too. His deafening cry when the bodies of his children are discovered, soiled in mud and unrecognisable, is a masterclass in unvarnished grief.

The eerie feeling of bygone Delhi gnaws at you; disaster seems poised to unfold around every corner. Rakesh Bedi, who has always been in his element, brings adds gravitas to Raakh. He plays retired constable Ghanshyam, famous for his mutton curry and habit of delivering home-cooked food to officials. His phrase - "sabse bana ke rakhna chahiye" (be good to everybody) - and his visits to his son Jayprakash add a textured maturity to the series and win over the audience with intense scenes that show him as both father and seasoned observer of human vileness. Prosit Roy interestingly divides each episode into chapters, naming them - for example, Raakh: Gumshuda for the children's disappearance in the first episode, followed by Raakh: Jaanwar when the gruesome killing details are revealed.



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