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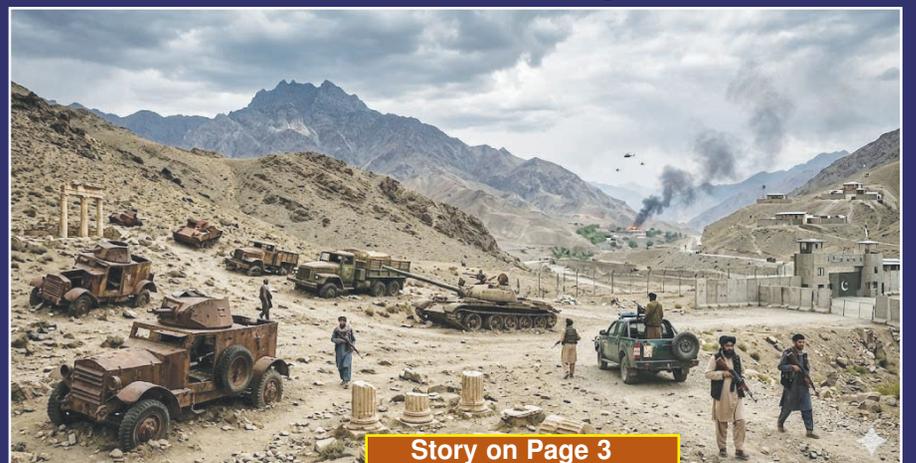
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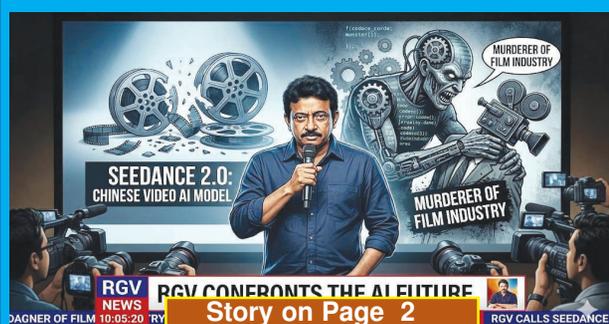
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RGV calls Seedance 2.0, Chinese video AI model, murderer of film industry

Ram Gopal Varma aka RGV has labelled Seedance 2.0, a video AI model from China, "murderer of the film industry". His comments come even as tens of clips created using Seedance have gone viral due to their movie-like realism.

(Our Staff Reporter) : In June 2025 when ByteDance released Seedance, it shook the film industry across the globe. Writers, directors and studios suddenly found themselves staring at tools capable of creating high-quality cinematic videos in seconds at a minimal cost. Cut to 2026, and ByteDance has introduced Seedance 2.0, a more advanced and a far more powerful AI model. The result? Chaos, curiosity, and a fair bit of panic around the existence of traditional filmmaking. So much so that Indian filmmaker Ram Gopal Verma is now calling it "the murderer of film industry." In other words, RGV is saying that AI is not coming for the film industry, and all the jobs it provides, but it is already here. Seedance 2.0, a Chinese video AI model, is so

good that it is already over for Bollywood and Hollywood.

In a post on X, RGV penned a long note on how AI is shaking up the film industry, framing it as not just a technological shift but as an existential threat to the way cinema has functioned for decades. "Real democracy is taking the tools out of the hands of the elite and putting them in the hands of the people. Seedance just did that to cinema," he wrote on Wednesday. In his note RGV drew comparison between clips created by Seedance 2.0 at a cost of a few dollars with those crafted by blockbuster filmmakers like S S Rajamouli using huge budgets. He said the lower cost meant the days of gatekeeping within the film industry were over. "Seedance 2.0 just kicked that gate down

and set it on fire. This can take (from users) descriptive prompts and create cinematic, multi-shot, sound-designed, devastatingly impactful scenes that look like they cost hundreds of crores and took months or years to make," he wrote. "Suddenly, a creative guy in Gorakhpur or Coimbatore or Satara or wherever, doing a mundane job to feed his family, who can't even afford to come to Mumbai, can just write a scene and the likes of Seedance make it for him—and that is true democracy in motion."

While RGV finds Seedance 2.0 an exciting development, he also questions what it means for the film industry at large. He calls AI tools a potential threat to filmmaking's collaborative ecosystem, actors, cinematographers, editors,

production designers, VFX teams, musicians, light technicians and spot boys, all of whom could face extinction if AI evolves to generate full-length, theatrical-quality films independently.

"No more star issues. No more producers panicking over budgets. No more 'we'll fix it in post.' No more 300 people standing around waiting for one shot, Just one person, he wrote. "The dinosaurs had their 100-year reign. Now the asteroid has arrived." In recent days a number of clips created with Seedance 2.0 have gone viral. For example: While RGV is hailing Seedance 2.0, not everyone is similarly receptive. In fact, Hollywood has reacted to the AI model bitterly and angrily. Major studios including The Walt Disney Company, Netflix, and

Warner Bros have reportedly sent legal notices to ByteDance, which likely has caused an indefinite delay in the global rollout of Seedance 2.0. The AI tool, which is still in controlled access, was expected to launch publicly on February 24. As clips created with Seedance 2.0 went viral in the last few weeks, Motion Picture Association has sent cease-and-desist letters to ByteDance, allegedly branding its AI tool a "systemic infringement machine". Hollywood Studios have also accused ByteDance of training the model on what they described as a "pirate library" of copyrighted films and characters. As a result, ByteDance has reportedly paused the wider release to introduce stricter content filters and legal safeguards.

The Beginning

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About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh



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Warner Bros Discovery signs \$110 billion deal with Paramount Skydance

(Our Staff Reporter) : Warner Bros Discovery has agreed to be acquired by Paramount Skydance in a \$110 billion deal signed on Friday morning, according to an audio clip of a global townhall by the company, which was reviewed by Reuters.

"Netflix had the legal right to match the PSKY offer. As you all know, they ultimately decided not to do that. That then resulted in a signed agreement with PSKY as of this morning. So that's where everything stands," Bruce Campbell, Warner Bros' chief revenue and strategy officer, said in the townhall.

Paramount and Warner Bros did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The deal - which includes some \$29 billion in debt - is among Hollywood's biggest media shake-ups and will create one of the largest film studios in the world, allowing Paramount to tap Warner's trove of intellectual property, including franchises such as "Fantastic Beasts" and "The Matrix".

It will also allow Paramount to bolster its streaming efforts, with a potential combination of HBO Max and Paramount+, enabling it to gain market share and tussle with market leader Netflix.

The agreement caps a bidding war after Netflix declined to match Paramount's latest \$31-per-share offer, which was deemed superior by Warner Bros to the streaming pioneer's \$27.75-per-share agreement for its assets.

Paramount was in pursuit of Warner Bros since late last year when it launched

a hostile campaign to wrestle the company from the streaming giant by consistently raising its offer.

The company, led by billionaire Larry Ellison's son David Ellison, enticed Warner's board back to the bargaining table by raising the possibility of an improved cash offer. In its revised bid, Paramount raised the termination fee it would pay should the deal fail to gain

Afghanistan: The graveyard of empires, and now Pakistan's nightmare

(Our Staff Reporter) : Pakistan bombed Kabul and Kandahar on Friday (February 27), hours after Afghan forces attacked Pakistani border positions. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif declared open war: "Our patience has reached its limit. Now it is an open war between us and you."

Tension had been brewing since February 21 when Pakistan launched airstrikes on Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost provinces, claiming to target seven militant camps linked to the TTP and Islamic State Khorasan. UN monitors reported 13 civilians killed, including women and children. Afghanistan retaliated, launching large-scale offensive operations against Pakistani military positions along the Durand Line. Pakistan believes Afghanistan's Taliban appear unwilling to seriously crack down on the TTP, partly due to prior affinities between the two

regulatory approval to \$7 billion from \$5.8 billion.

Activist investor Ancora Holdings, which owns a small stake in Warner Bros, had also stepped up pressure on the HBO owner to engage more with Paramount. Still, the merger is likely to draw antitrust scrutiny in Washington, foreign countries and US states, including California, despite the

Ellisons' ties to President Donald Trump. Lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle have raised concerns that any deal to acquire Warner Bros could result in fewer choices and higher prices for consumers. Cinema operators are also concerned that combining large Hollywood studios could cost jobs and reduce the number of movies released in theaters.

groups but also out of fear that TTP militants might defect to their rival, Islamic State Khorasan Province.

Kabul argues sovereignty is non-negotiable, and Afghanistan will not be dictated to.

Graveyard In The Mountains

To understand why Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with a large army, is struggling to bend Afghanistan to its will through airstrikes, we have to understand what Afghanistan is. Let us start with how Akbar, the mighty conqueror of the subcontinent, understood the limitations of geography.

A few kilometres from Islamabad is the city of Attock. It is built around the fort of Atak-Banaras, built by Akbar.

Atak-Banaras, Akbar believed, was the western frontier of his empire. The etymology is instructive: Atak (barrier, blockade) is where the Indus River becomes a formidable obstacle for

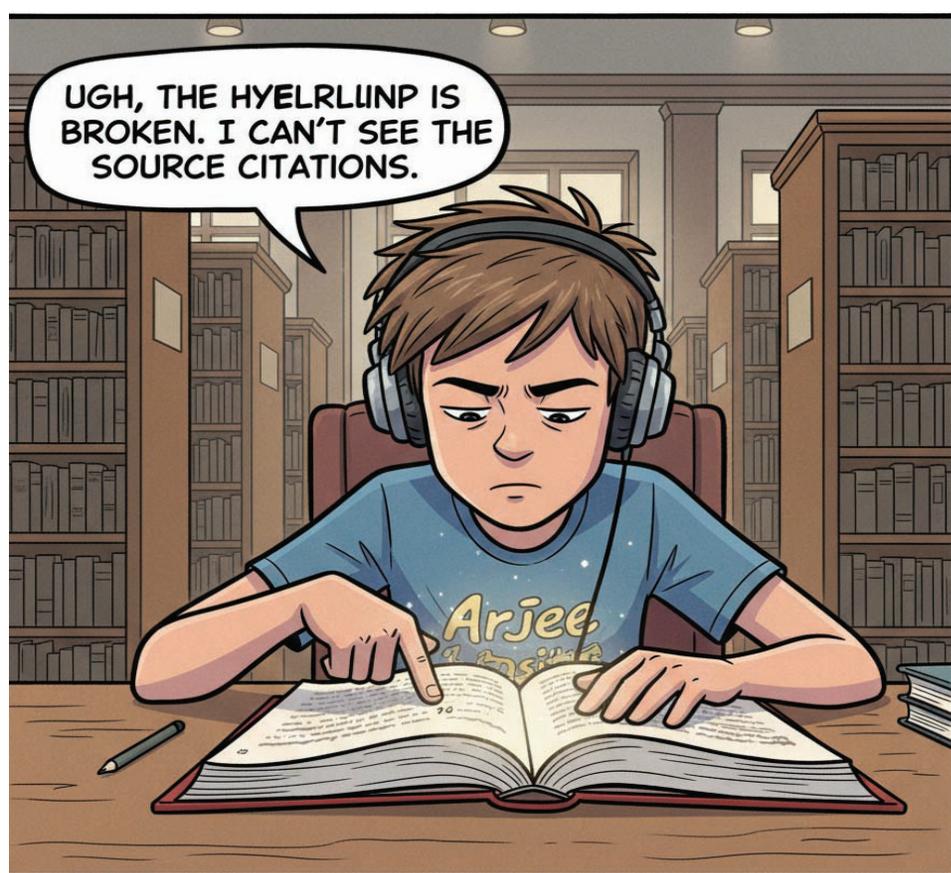
travellers and invading armies from the northwest. Most of the early Indian invaders were Afghans. They crossed the passes, looted India and disappeared into the mountains. When Akbar tried to tame them, his Rajput commanders of Amber (now Jaipur) hesitated. There was a traditional belief among orthodox groups that crossing Atak was forbidden or would result in a loss of caste, effectively making the river a religious stopping point or limit. But there was more to it than religion.

Geography As Destiny

North of Attock is the land of headaches. It is called Afghanistan, a country that was never meant to be easily governed or conquered.

The Hindu Kush mountains, which split the country into isolated valleys, have always been Afghanistan's greatest military asset. Every invader learnt that the real war is always in the passes, the villages, the ridgelines.

The Brain Rot Chronicles-Featuring Arjee



Report exposes billions in uncovered fraud, waste as watchdog coalition offers support to Trump's crackdown

(Our Staff Reporter) : As the Trump administration appoints Vice President JD Vance to lead a nationwide "War on Fraud," a coalition of conservative state financial officers says it has already uncovered and stopped billions in taxpayer waste and is pledging to partner with the White House to root out corruption nationwide. In a Thursday letter to the White House, the State Financial Officers Foundation (SFOF) praised President Donald Trump's focus on what he called fraud scandals that have "resulted in tens of billions of dollars being stolen from American taxpayers," writing that such corruption "shreds the fabric of a nation" SFOF CEO OJ Oleka told Vance that the group's 40 conservative state treasurers, auditors and comptrollers across 28 states stand



ready to support the administration's anti-fraud mission, noting they collectively oversee more than \$3 trillion in state funds. The letter accompanied SFOF's inaugural 2025 Oversight Report, which claims that affiliated state financial officers safeguarded more than \$28 billion of waste, fraud, and abuse in 2025 alone.

The report highlights some of the most egregious examples within that \$28 billion, including in Florida, where Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia found just under \$2 billion in excessive spending, and in Kentucky, where Auditor Allison Ball found more than \$836 million in improper Medicaid payments. Medicaid fraud has been of particular interest to the Trump administration given the massive fraud scandal that has unfolded in Minnesota and Vance said on Wednesday the administration has "decided to temporarily halt certain amounts of Medicaid funding that are going to the state of Minnesota in order to ensure that the state of Minnesota takes its obligations seriously to be good stewards of the American people's tax money."

Democrats confronted for staying seated at SOTU during Trump's call to put Americans first

(Our Staff Reporter) : President Donald Trump's question during the State of the Union address highlighted divisions in the chamber, with many Democratic lawmakers remaining seated when asked if they prioritize American citizens over illegal immigrants. "Jesse Watters Primetime" producer Johnny Belisario traveled to Capitol Hill to track down the lawmakers who stayed silent and ask what they thought of the president's speech. "The president asked Democrats to stand up if they prioritize American citizens over illegal aliens. Did you stand?" Belisario asked. "I didn't stand," admitted Maryland Rep. Steny Hoyer. He dismissed the moment as a "gotcha question." When pressed as to whether Trump had "got" him, Hoyer disagreed with the characterization. Other Democrats echoed the sentiment, with Connecticut Sen.

Richard Blumenthal labeling the moment a cheap "gimmick." Arizona's Sen. Mark Kelly defended his silence, claiming lawmakers aren't there to "perform."

When asked about his priorities, Green said his duty is to "the American Constitution, which protects you, aliens and people in this country." Green argued he was engaging in "good trouble" during the outburst and blamed his colleagues for escalating the situation. "It was my colleagues that reached over to rip things out of my hand and said things to me. So, I did not create a disturbance, they did," said Green. Texas GOP Rep. Troy Nehls, who ripped Green's sign, had a different view of the protest. "I said, 'Al, you've got to be better than this. What the hell are you bringing this sign on here? I mean, Al. You got kicked out of here last year. Now you're [going to] try to do a two-fer,'" Nehls said, accusing Green of



staging a spectacle to "get his mug on television."

The House GOP is moving to censure Green for the disturbance. They also censured him in March 2025 over a similar protest during a Trump speech. While the House GOP moves

to censure Green again, some in his own party disagreed with the protests. Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman also called for decorum, stating, "I just don't think we should ever do that. We should respect the office, regardless who's in that office."

Delhi liquor policy case: Arvind Kejriwal sheds tears as court shreds CBI

(Our Staff Reporter) : The face of the party that ruled Delhi for a decade was tearful on Friday after a court gave him a clean chit in the liquor policy case. Kejriwal katar imandar (Kejriwal is staunchly honest) – former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal said, with co-accused and his ex-deputy Manish Sisodia consoling him. The AAP chief struggled to find words and his voice cracked as overwhelming emotions took over the 57-year-old. Hours later, Kejriwal showed his fierce side as he accused PM Narendra Modi and Home

Minister Amit Shah of conspiring to end the AAP.

Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others were cleared of all charges in the liquor policy case. Special judge Jitendra Singh went all out in slamming the CBI as he said the entire case was based on conjecture and surmise, lacking any admissible evidence. He said that probe agency portrayed a rational picture, but evaluation showed facts were arranged to back a predetermined conclusion. The court even went on to state that the CBI's theory was "eco-

nomic illiterate". It heavily came down on the investigating officer for showing complete disregard for facts and ordered departmental action against him.

Today's court ruling, while has stirred jubilant celebrations among AAP supporters, it appears to be have also set the tone for the political flashpoint between them and the ruling BJP to deepen.

GET DEEPER – KNOW THE LIQUOR POLICY CASE

In 2021, the then Kejriwal-headed

AAP government introduced a Delhi excise policy aimed at reforming liquor sales in the capital by privatising the trade, increasing state revenue, and bettering consumer experience. Then, Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia was tasked in overseeing the excise department. In July 2022, the Delhi Chief Secretary flagged irregularities in the policy in a report. It alleged that AAP government officials accepted bribes and waived off or slashed licence fees to favour certain private firms and stakeholders.

Kristen Stewart's rambling ICE comments about LA trigger fierce 'word salad' backlash

(News Agency) Kristen Stewart's latest comments on the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Los Angeles drew intense scrutiny online, as critics questioned the actress' scattered thoughts about feeling like the city is being dismantled.

"I can't stand the idea that – the dismantling of the culture that did have a hand in, like, making me who I am, which is so meaningless in the face of people's lives being, like, completely unearthed, uprooted, destroyed," Stewart said while being interviewed by Architectural Digest.

"This is, like, not who we are," she added. "So, like, where I'm from, I don't identify with that right now. And so, like, I – I definitely am dying every day

thinking, 'So do we make movies about this? Do we throw all of our money at it? Do we stop buying burgers in the daytime? What do we do about this?' Like, I can't fathom that it's happening until it



doesn't happen. It's like Los Angeles doesn't exist without all of us."

Architectural Digest shared the video of Stewart's response to Instagram, with critics branding the

actress' comments "word salad."

"There's still time to delete this and post something relevant to architecture instead," one user commented. "Elite-level word salad right there," another added.

"Nobody cares what actresses think," one user said.

However, others praised Architectural Digest for sharing Stewart's thoughts.

"All the soulless people in the comments, my god help us. I commend you @archdigest for contributing to the conversation," one comment read. "How are people struggling so much to understand what she's saying? To me this is a very clear and passionate response to the question," another user wrote. "And I commend her for taking that moment to speak on it, and think her reasoning is

spot on."

"LA loves her hard," one user said. "Y'all negative Nancy's can stay pressed."

Stewart has been eyeing an exit from the U.S.

The "Twilight" star revealed in an interview with The Times that she's cultivating her directorial career around being able to create films in Europe because she "can't work freely" in America. Her directorial debut, "The Chronology of Water," was shot in Latvia as "it would have been impossible to do in the States." The bi-coastal actress — who spends time in Los Angeles and New York — admitted that she's "probably not" going to live in the states for much longer. "I can't work freely there," Stewart said. "But I don't want to give up completely. I'd like to make movies in Europe and then shove them down the throat of the American people."



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Shivratri Editors' Meet celebrates Spirituality, Interfaith, and Collective Purpose

(By Parveen Chopra) Edison, New Jersey: Celebrating the significance of Maha Shivratri with a dialogue among media and eminent personalities from various walks of life, A Lotus In The Mud presented an Editors' Meet luncheon here. Abhishek Mishra hosted the uplifting program at the elegant Akbar banquet hall. It was curated and moderated by Parveen Chopra, the founding editor of ALotusInTheMud.com. The event brought together prominent voices from the Indian American community reflecting on the importance of interfaith harmony, creating an atmosphere of unity and shared purpose.



Chopra said that A

Lotus in the Mud is pleased to associate with Abhishek Mishra's endeavors to promote belief in

God, and that all religions advise doing good deeds. Mishra related his personal spiritual journey,

including a manifestation of Lord Shiva's living, is different from organized religion.

a miraculous dharma, the righteous way of

Exploring India's Hidden Linguistic Treasures: The Importance of Lesser-Known Languages



(News Agency) India is often defined by its linguistic giants—Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and the Dravidian powerhouses. Yet, beneath this canopy of "major" languages lies a dense, vibrant undergrowth of hundreds of secondary and indigenous tongues. To overlook them is to miss the true pulse of the subcontinent. From the high-altitude whispers of Ladakhi to the coastal rhythms of Konkani and Tulu, these languages are not just "dialects"—they are entire worldviews. The Scale of the Soundscape While the Constitution recognizes 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule, the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) has identified nearly 780 living languages. More Than Words: Languages as Cultural Archives A language is a library of the

environment it grew up in. For example: The Toda language of the Nilgiris contains hyper-specific terms for buffaloes and local flora that exist nowhere else. Santhali, spoken by millions but often sidelined in urban discourse, uses an indigenous script called Ol Chiki, which reflects the community's deep connection to nature. When a language like Great Andamanese fades, we don't just lose a grammar; we lose ancient knowledge of medicinal plants, weather patterns, and oral histories that were never written down. The Digital Renaissance and the "Youth Gap" The greatest threat to these languages is "linguistic prestige"—the idea that English or Hindi are the only paths to success. However, a counter-movement is brewing.

Canada approved 25,000 asylum claims without security checks or in-person meetings

(Our Staff Reporter) Canada has approved nearly 25,000 asylum claims without security checks or conducting in-person interviews with applicants between 2019 and 2023, according to a report by the Toronto-based CD Howe Institute.

The report, authored by former Canadian senior immigration official, James Yousif, noted that the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) approved at least 24,599 asylum claims without meeting the applicants once, abandoning checks and procedures meant to detect fraud, criminality and security risks of applicants. According to the report, the IRB streamlined vital security

checks and replaced in-person hearings with automated file-assessments to fast track applicants from 24 "high-risk countries" — including Pakistan, Sudan and Russia — due to a severe backlog of pending asylum applications as well as a historic high in illegal border crossings and refugee claims. The report said it made Canada's asylum system one of the world's most permissive but significantly more vulnerable to abuse and fraud. Reacting to the report, Canadian immigration consultant, Kanwar Singh Sierah, said on X, "It's not just 25,000 people... Canada's asylum system has been hijacked by criminals and

terror-linked elements as the easiest pathway to settle abroad for years." "These are only the cases caught being not interviewed and rubber-stamped... Now imagine the scale of approvals driven by politics, lobbying, and community pressure," Kanwar Singh Sierah added in his post. **APPLICANTS FROM MANY COUNTRIES GIVEN ASYLUM STATUS WITHOUT HEARINGS, MEETINGS**

According to a report by Canadian daily, National Post, Canada has had an asylum system in one form or another. According to the Government of Canada, its "asylum system helps people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of

persecution". In order to claim asylum, applicants must be able to prove that returning to their home country would entail credible risk of persecution in the form of torture, cruel/unusual punishment and death. The process involves a review by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) or Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). This is followed by a review by the IRB's Refugee Protection Division, which determines if the applicant is in need of protection. However, from 2017 onwards, the CD Howe Institute report states that the IRB started bypassing all these systems after a surge in asylum claims from that year, under a process called File Review.

Kidnapping FIR to midnight remand: How 24-hour Delhi-Himachal police clash unfolded



(Our Staff Reporter) A tense 24-hour confrontation between the Delhi Police and the Himachal Pradesh Police over the custody of three Youth Congress activists over the shirtless protest at AI Summit ended on Thursday morning, after the visiting team was finally allowed to proceed to the national capital. Shimla Police opposed the arrests, claiming the arrests were illegal, and the episode involved repeated stops, the registration of a kidnapping case against Delhi Police personnel, detention of officers and vehicles and a midnight court hearing for transit remand. Here is how the cops-versus-cops showdown unfolded in Himachal Pradesh as the Police Officials under the Congress government opposed the arrests of the Youth Congress activists.

Delhi Police in Shimla: Three accused in the shirtless protest at AI Summit - Saurabh, Arbaaz, and Siddharth -- fled

Delhi and checked into a resort in the Shimla district. Delhi Police Special Cell teams arrived in Himachal Pradesh to track the suspects.

Arrests from Resort: On early Wednesday morning, a Delhi Police team of 15-20 personnel in plain clothes raided the resort in Rohru and detained them and took them away in their vehicle. It is alleged that they seized the resort's CCTV DVR without providing a seizure memo or receipt.

Kidnapping Case Filed: Resort management filed a complaint with Shimla Police, claiming unidentified men "kidnapped" their guests.

Shimla Police registered an FIR for kidnapping. Delhi Police Convoy Stopped: Himachal Police intercept the Delhi Police convoy on NH-5 at the Shoghi border near Shimla and Solan. Around 20 Delhi personnel are detained for questioning.

hours to produce the suspects in court. Their vehicles were stopped

Transit Remand Granted: As the day progressed, the matter was moved to the court of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate. The three accused underwent medical examinations at a hospital in Shimla late Wednesday night. At 1:30 am on Thursday, the court granted transit remand to the Delhi Police, allowing them 18 hours to transport the accused to the national capital.

UP woman beheads 3-year-old stepdaughter, cops hint at witchcraft

(Our Staff Reporter) A woman in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur allegedly killed her 3-year-old stepdaughter by beheading her with a stroke of a sharp axe. Although the motives behind the murder are unclear yet, the local police suspect that the murder occurred due to sorcery or witchcraft, as they found pictures of gods in the murder room and set up to practise witchcraft.

The incident took place on Tuesday night between 11 pm and 12 am. Speaking to India Today, Triveni Maurya, the victim's father, said that he spotted his wife going out of their home after 11 pm. This triggered suspicion in his mind as he never saw his wife leaving home after dark. He soon chased his wife and raised an alarm among the villagers, who also came out of their homes and helped Triveni to catch her wife. After a brief period of time, Triveni came back to his

home and was taken aback to see that his three-year-old daughter had been brutally murdered. The child suffered a blow from an axe, and as a result, her head was severed from her body. Following the discovery of the dead body,



the villagers informed the police. Upon learning about the incident, they soon rushed to the spot. The police took the accused into custody. Talking about the incident, a senior police officer, Ratneshwar Singh, told India Today, "The accused has been taken into custody, and the murder weapon has been seized.

Threat to Muslim Ummah: Israel's Hexagon plan with India spooks Pakistan

(Our Staff Reporter) : Following Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's pitch for a "hexagon of alliances"—aimed at fighting "radical axes" in the Middle East (Western Asia), a rattled Islamabad has rushed to condemn it, calling it an "anti-Muslim Ummah bloc".

The proposed "hexagon of alliances" grouping, which has named India among the key members, was on Tuesday described by a resolution by the Pakistani Parliament's Senate (the Upper House) as a threat to regional and international peace and stability, reported multiple Pakistani news outlets. The resolution described the pitch as a "vile proclivity of the leadership of the Israeli occupying power towards diminishing the unity and integrity of the Muslim Ummah on political and ideological grounds". A leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)—which is an integral part of the PM Shehbaz Sharif-led ruling coalition—"deplored the continued provocative steps and statements by the Israeli leadership that threatened regional and international peace and stability, including the latest statement about

forming alliances against Muslim nations," reported Pakistani English daily, The Express Tribune. Days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day state visit to Israel, Netanyahu said that the security alliance would take on radical Shia and Sunni adversaries in the region. He said that the bloc would include Israel, India, Greece and Cyprus, along with other unnamed Arab, African and Asian nations. Netanyahu's announcement came amid rising tensions between Israel and Iran and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia joining hands for a Nato-like pact, with Turkey looking to join it.

PAKISTAN'S SENATE PASSES RESOLUTION CONDEMNING ISRAEL-INDIA HEXAGON ALLIANCE

The resolution was introduced by PPP leader Palwasha Mohammad Zai Khan, in the Senate, Pakistan's upper house of Parliament, and was passed unanimously. The resolution expressed strong disapproval at what it described as continued provocative actions and statements by the Israeli leadership, including comments about creating

"alliances" against Muslim countries, reported the Pakistani newspaper, Dawn.

In its resolution, the Senate condemned any attempts by Israel to undermine what it described as the "sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of brotherly Islamic countries".

It also rejected Israel's recognition of Somaliland, as a sovereign independent state. The breakaway region of Somalia on the Red Sea, was recognised by Israel in December 2025. Pakistan had joined ranks with the Organisation of Islamic Nations and 20 other nations in rejecting the Israeli move then, calling it "full and blatant disregard for international law." Pakistan's Senate also condemned what it called Israel's continued violations of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza. It alleged that Jerusalem was blatantly disregarding international law, the UN Charter, relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The resolution reaffirmed Islamabad's "unwavering" support for the Palestinian people's "inalienable" right to self-

determination and for the establishment of an "independent, viable, and contiguous" State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The House also demanded full Israeli withdrawal from "the occupied territories."

WHAT IS ISRAEL'S PROPOSED HEXAGON OF ALLIANCES? Israeli PM Netanyahu proposed the "hexagon" of alliances as a new security framework to counter what he calls "radical axes" in West Asia. The announcement came days ahead of Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit to Israel after nine years. Speaking on Sunday (February 22), Netanyahu said the bloc would bring together countries that "see eye-to-eye on the reality, challenges and goals" posed by extremist forces. "This includes India, Arab nations, African nations, Mediterranean nations (Greece and Cyprus), and nations in Asia that I won't detail at the moment. I will present this in an organised manner," Netanyahu added. The framework is designed to deepen cooperation in security, defence and intelligence-sharing.

PM Modi Awarded Knesset Speaker's Medal, Calls It a Symbol of India-Israel Friendship

(Our Staff Reporter) Prime Minister Narendra Modi was presented with the prestigious Speaker of the Knesset Medal, one of the highest distinctions granted by Israel's Parliament. The recognition highlights his role in strengthening ties between India and Israel and advancing cooperation across multiple strategic sectors. The honour was conferred by the Knesset in acknowledgement of Modi's leadership and sustained engagement with Israeli counterparts. Officials cited his contribution in elevating bilateral relations into a broad strategic partnership covering defence, security, technology, innovation, and expanding people to people connections.

Accepting the award, Modi described it as recognition of the enduring bond between the two democracies rather than a personal accolade. In a message shared publicly, he said



he was deeply honoured and accepted the medal with humility and gratitude.

He emphasized that the distinction reflects the shared values guiding both nations and the strength of their long standing partnership. Modi's diplomatic outreach in West Asia has also

included balanced engagement with Palestine. In 2018, he received the Grand Collar of the State of Palestine, the highest civilian award presented by the Palestinian leadership to foreign dignitaries, acknowledging India's support for Palestinian aspirations alongside its close ties with Israel. Earlier in the

day, Modi addressed the Knesset, speaking about regional peace and stability. He referenced the Gaza Peace Initiative led by the Trump administration, stating that it offers the promise of a just and durable solution, including progress on the Palestinian issue. He noted that dialogue re-

mains essential and reiterated India's support for efforts that promote peace and stability across the region.

Referring to shifting dynamics in West Asia, Modi spoke about the Abraham Accords and the hope they initially generated, while acknowledging that current conditions have become more complex. He reaffirmed India's support for Israel during challenging times and underlined the importance of continued cooperation between the two nations. The visit also featured a ceremonial reception at Ben Gurion Airport, where Modi was welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Sara Netanyahu. The ceremony underscored the warmth of bilateral relations and the continued expansion of collaboration between New Delhi and Jerusalem.

Living in La La Land: India rebukes Pak over Kashmir propaganda claims



(Our Staff Reporter) India delivered a sharp rebuttal to Pakistan and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the UN Human Rights Council, accusing Islamabad of peddling propaganda detached from ground realities in Jammu and Kashmir and quipping that Pakistan must be living in "La La Land" if it doubts development in the Union Territory. Speaking during the high-level segment of the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, India's First Secretary Anupama Singh exercised New Delhi's right of reply after Pakistan and the OIC raised the Kashmir issue. "India is compelled to exercise its right of reply. We categorically reject these allegations," Singh said, accusing the OIC of "parroting Pakistan's propaganda" and allowing itself to be reduced to "an echo chamber for that country's political compulsions." "She said Pakistan's narrative 'reeks of envy' and asserted that the only unresolved issue was Pakistan's occupation of Indian territory.

"We call upon Pakistan to vacate the areas under its forcible occupation," she said. Underscoring New Delhi's development push in the region, Singh cited electoral participation and infrastructure projects as evidence of normalisation. "The record voter turnout in general and assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir testifies that its people have rejected the ideology of terrorism and violence propagated by Pakistan," she said. She then delivered the sharpest barb of the exchange: "If the Chenab Rail Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge inaugurated in Jammu and Kashmir last year, is considered fake, then Pakistan must be living in 'La La Land.'" Singh added that Pakistan's disbelief might stem from the scale of development spending in the region. "Or perhaps it finds it unbelievable that the developmental budget of Jammu and Kashmir is more than double the recent bailout package it sought from the IMF," she said.

Bahut shandaar: Netanyahu's Indian attire at dinner meet gets PM praise

(Our Staff Reporter) Ahead of the private dinner, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was seen wearing a traditional Indian jacket as he warmly greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The gesture was widely viewed as symbolic of the strong strategic partnership between India and Israel, reflecting not only deepening diplomatic and defence ties but also the evident personal rapport shared by the two leaders.

The optics underscored the growing cooperation across sectors and reaffirmed the close bond that has characterised bilateral relations in recent years. In a social media post on X, the Israeli Prime Minister wrote in Hindi, "Before our joint dinner, I surprised my friend Prime Minister Modi by wearing traditional Indian attire." The message was seen as a warm acknowledgement of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's choice of traditional Indian clothing, further highlighting the strong personal chemistry and deepening strategic ties between

the two leaders.

In an attempt to strengthen bilateral defence and trade ties against



the backdrop of ongoing tensions in the Middle East, including the worsening relationship between the United States and Iran, Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Israel on Wednesday. His first day was marked by a speech in the Knesset and later a grand dinner with his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Exploring India's Hidden Linguistic Treasures: The Importance of Lesser-Known Languages



(Our Staff Reporter) India is often defined by its linguistic giants—Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and the Dravidian powerhouses.

Will pee in your mouth: Railway cop slaps snack seller after tea order delayed

(Our Staff Reporter) A snack vendor at the Mathura Junction railway station was allegedly slapped by a Government Railway Police (GRP) constable after a delay in serving tea. The policeman also hurled abuses at the man almost constantly during an intense argument at the latter's stall. A security camera captured the entire incident, which took place on Wednesday (February 25). In the video, which has now gone viral, there even comes a point where the GRP constable is seemingly heard yelling, "Muuh mein muut dunga tere! (I'll piss in your mouth)." The incident took place on a platform of the railway station when the vendor was opening his stall for the day. While he was cleaning his kiosk, a GRP person-

nel arrived at the stall and ordered a tea, before leaving for a few minutes. Upon returning, the policeman found that the tea hadn't been served yet. This supposedly sent him into a spiral of rage. The CCTV footage of the incident shows that the snack seller repeatedly reasoned that he was unable to prepare the tea as he was busy cleaning the kiosk. As the verbal altercation escalated between the duo, a few others gathered at the scene. The argument then purportedly pivoted to the snack seller's use of a floor wiper for the maintenance of his kiosk. The GRP constable, along with some others at the spot, apparently accused him of sweeping water off his stall's floor and onto the platform – an action they said created a slipping hazard.

UP woman beheads 3-year-old stepdaughter, cops hint at witchcraft

(Our Staff Reporter) A woman in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur allegedly killed her 3-year-old stepdaughter by beheading her with a stroke of a sharp axe. Although the motives behind the murder are unclear yet, the local police suspect that the murder occurred due to sorcery or witchcraft, as they found pictures of gods in the murder room and set up to practise witchcraft. The incident took place on Tuesday night between 11 pm and 12 am. Speaking to India Today, Triveni Maurya, the victim's father, said that he spotted his wife going out of their home after 11 pm. This triggered suspicion in his mind as he never saw his wife

leaving home after dark. He soon chased his wife and raised an alarm among the villagers, who also came out of their homes and helped Triveni to catch her wife. After a brief period of time, Triveni came back to his home and was taken aback to see that his three-year-old daughter had been brutally murdered. The child suffered a blow from an axe, and as a result, her head was severed from her body. Following the discovery of the dead body, the villagers informed the police. Upon learning about the incident, they soon rushed to the spot. The police took the accused into custody.

Yet, beneath this canopy of "major" languages lies a dense, vibrant undergrowth of hundreds of secondary and indigenous tongues. To overlook them is to miss the true pulse of the sub-continent. From the high-altitude whispers of Ladakhi to the coastal rhythms of Konkani and Tulu, these languages are not just "dialects"—they are entire worldviews. The Scale of the Soundscape While the Constitution recognizes 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule, the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) has identified nearly 780 living languages. More Than Words: Languages as Cultural Archives

A language is a library of the environment it grew up in. For example: The Toda language of the Nilgiris contains hyper-specific terms for buffaloes and local flora that exist nowhere else. Santhali, spoken by millions but often sidelined in urban discourse, uses an indigenous script called Ol Chiki, which reflects the community's deep connection to nature. When a language like Great Andamanese fades, we don't just lose a grammar; we lose ancient knowledge of medicinal plants, weather patterns, and oral histories that were never written down. The Digital Renaissance and the "Youth Gap"

The greatest threat to these languages is "linguistic prestige"—the idea that English or Hindi are the only paths to success. However, a counter-movement is brewing. Social Media: Young creators are using Instagram and YouTube to create skits and music in Bhojpuri, Haryanvi, and Garhwali, turning "village tongues" into symbols of cool, regional pride. Tech Inclusion: Efforts to create localized keyboards and AI translation tools for languages like Gondi are bridging the digital divide, allowing speakers to navigate the modern world without abandoning their mother tongue.



#Dadication

Punch the monkey's story isn't unusual, then why does it feel so personal?

It is easy to dismiss it at first. It's just a monkey. Just another animal video. Just another fleeting moment of internet cuteness. But Punch's story has proven to be much more than that. The world has formed an unexpected emotional connection with Punch, the baby monkey at Japan's Ichikawa Zoo, who was abandoned by its mother and later found comfort in a stuffed orangutan placed beside it.

The internet collectively softened while watching Punch wrap the plush toy's arms around itself for reassurance, felt a pang when other monkeys rejected it, and melted when it clung to the caretaker for safety. Each moment struck a nerve, turning quiet observation into shared emotion.

What makes this reaction interesting is that abandonment is not unusual in the animal kingdom. It happens often and instinctively. Yet Punch's story feels deeply personal to many. People aren't just watching an animal; they're resonating with a feeling. And that reaction has far less to do with wildlife behaviour and far more to do with human psychology, our instinct to connect with vulnerability, seek comfort, and recognise our own fears reflected in another being. The instant connection

Dr Anitha Chandra, consultant psychiatrist at Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru, tells India Today that people are feeling a deep sense of connection with Punch because humans are naturally wired to empathise with babies, especially those that appear small, helpless, and similar to human infants.

This response, she explains, reflects how human psychology is shaped by emotional bonding, parental instinct, and the tendency to humanise animals.

To this, Dr Munia Bhattacharya, senior consultant, clinical psychologist at Marengo Asia Hospital, Gurugram, adds that what really stayed with people was seeing vulnerability so clearly.

"When humans see a young being that looks lost or confused, it hits something emotional very quickly. Most people don't sit and analyse why they feel moved. They just feel it. In a quiet way, Punch reminded people of moments when they themselves felt left out, unsupported, or emotionally alone. That's why the reaction became so strong."

Baby animals often spark stronger emotions because they send out the same cues as human infants: small size, big eyes, soft features, and a sense of helplessness. These signals instantly trigger our protective instincts, even before logic kicks in.



We don't stop to think about the species; we simply respond to vulnerability, because that's how the human brain is wired.

Having a safety net

In the many videos circulating online, what left people in awe was the way Punch dragged the plush toy everywhere, wrapping its arms around it for comfort and even clinging to the caretaker the moment it saw him.

It instantly conveyed a simple truth: even if the world feels against you, having that one safety net can help you sail through. "Safety nets are very important in moments of rejection because they give comfort, reduce fear, and help a person or even an animal feel secure during emotional pain, and Punch's comfort toy resonates strongly with human experiences because many people also hold on to objects, memories, or loved ones for emotional support when they feel lonely or hurt," says Dr Chandra.

This shows that the need for reassurance, attachment, and a sense of safety is universal, and that even something as simple as a soft toy can come to symbolise hope, stability, and healing in difficult moments. But the thing with us humans is that we often need something to fixate on, be it Labubu, bag charms, or the latest internet trend that offers a brief sense of comfort and distraction. While Punch's story struck a deep emotional chord, it was the plush toy he clung to that unexpectedly became

the next object of collective obsession. The orangutan soft toy, seen as Punch's source of comfort, quickly captured the public imagination, turning from a background detail into a symbol of emotional safety.

In fact, the orangutan plush from IKEA seems to have shot up in popularity, earning a "top seller" badge on the brand's India website. Doesn't this say a lot about how we process emotions today? We don't just empathise with the story; we latch on to a tangible object connected to it. Owning the same toy becomes a way to feel closer to the emotion, to participate in the moment, and perhaps even to recreate that sense of comfort in our own lives. Fear of rejection Punch seeking love and attachment moves people not just because it is emotional, but because, as experts point out, it mirrors a deeply familiar human experience. The image of a baby monkey looking for comfort reflects feelings many associate with moments of emotional vulnerability, times when support felt uncertain or absent. That response is immediate and instinctive. There is no story to decode or dialogue to follow, just a clear need for connection. That simplicity makes the moment easy to relate to and difficult to look away from.

What does it tell about us humans?

Empathy plays a big role here, and it is what pulls people closer. Dr

Bhattacharya mentions that Punch's vulnerability doesn't push people away; it draws them in.

"The story quietly reminds us that humans connect most deeply when someone's fragility is visible. Strength can be admired, but vulnerability is what creates emotional closeness."

While rooting for Punch, many have found a way to restore emotional balance in an increasingly uncertain world.

Caring for a small, vulnerable baby monkey offers a simple, hopeful focus, one where kindness and protection still feel meaningful. In the middle of stress, conflict, and unpredictability, supporting Punch gives people a sense of connection and emotional purpose, reminding them that compassion matters even when much of life feels out of their control. In the end, Punch's story is less about a baby monkey and more about what it stirs within us. It reveals how deeply humans are drawn to vulnerability, how instinctively we reach for moments of care and reassurance when the world feels unstable.

And, in choosing to care for Punch, people aren't just following an internet moment; they're responding to a shared emotional need to protect, to connect, and to believe that kindness still holds power.

Sometimes, it takes a small, silent story to remind us of the comfort we all seek and the compassion we are capable of offering.

James R. Downing, MD, to step down as president and CEO of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in late 2026

Downing will transition to a faculty role in the St. Jude Department of Pediatric Global Medicine to continue institution's global mission

After leading an unprecedented growth of [St. Jude Children's Research Hospital](#) over the past 12 years, [James R. Downing](#), MD, will step down as president and CEO in late 2026 as part of a planned leadership transition. He will move into a faculty role in the [Department of Global Pediatric Medicine](#), which he helped establish in 2018 to advance the mission of St. Jude around the world.

"When I joined St. Jude 40 years ago, I came for the opportunity to do great science, but I stayed because of the mission and culture," Downing said. "I've watched St. Jude transform the care of pediatric cancer around the world, and I'm grateful to have played a small part as its CEO. It has been the honor of a lifetime to wake up every day and know that I have a purpose, to be a part of this workforce, and to change the outlook for children everywhere."

Downing will remain in the role of president and CEO while the St. Jude Board of Governors conducts a global search for the institution's next leader. The Board expects to announce the incoming CEO this summer and complete the leadership handoff by the end of 2026.

Judy Habib, chair of the [St. Jude Board of Governors](#), credits Downing with making St. Jude a leader in the global movement to treat and cure children around the world.

"What he has accomplished globally in his time as CEO would have made our founder Danny Thomas proud. He has certainly made us proud and grateful for all he's done for St. Jude and the children around the world," Habib said. "He has nurtured the spirit of collaboration within St. Jude and among peer institutions, governments, global agencies, and advocacy groups. His legacy of bringing people together, leading with a bold vision, and being a relentless advocate of fundamental science will carry St. Jude forward for the next CEO and beyond."

[Ike Anand](#), president and CEO of [ALSAC](#), the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude, said he has appreciated Downing's partnership in fulfilling the two organizations' shared mission.

"Dr. Downing is a true partner, mentor, and friend, and I have long admired his unwavering commitment to scientific excellence and his deep compassion for the children and families we serve," Anand said. "His vision has guided St. Jude through historic expansion, advancing efforts to transform the lives of children globally who are suffering from cancer and other catastrophic diseases. As he prepares for his next chapter, we celebrate his profound legacy and the continuing impact of his work for children and families everywhere."

A scientist and leader

Downing is considered a pioneer in the understanding of the genetic basis of childhood leukemia and in the field of genome sequencing. He joined St. Jude in 1986 as an assistant member in the [Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine](#), eventually becoming department chair. After being appointed scientific director in 2004, he spearheaded the [Pediatric Cancer Genome Project](#), which ultimately laid the foundation for a new period of research and treatment of childhood cancer and other catastrophic pediatric diseases. He was named president and CEO in 2014 and has led the institution in the largest strategic expansion in its history. Downing has focused on advancing the fundamental, clinical and translational research, increasing the institution's global impact, and strengthening its culture.

To meet the changing needs of patient families and the growing St. Jude workforce, he has also overseen a major expansion of the main campus of St. Jude in Memphis, Tennessee. Major milestones include construction of [The Domino's Village](#), Inspiration4 Advanced Research Center, St. Jude Data Center, and two clinical towers opening next year. A second research center is also under construction.

Downing's contributions have been honored by the global medical and scientific community. He is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a fellow of the American Association for Cancer Research Academy and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has received the Society of Memorial Sloan Kettering Prize, the E. Donnell Thomas Lecture and Prize from the American Society of Hematology and the Pediatric Oncology Award from the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

"St. Jude has become uniquely positioned to solve some of the world's most challenging problems around childhood cancer and other pediatric diseases. I often ask, 'If not St. Jude, then who?' and if the answer is no one, then we're going to do it," Downing said. "Nothing worth doing can be achieved in a single lifetime, nor can it be achieved alone. I'm merely a caretaker of St. Jude, and I look forward to helping the next leader fulfill our founder's dream that no child should die in the dawn of life."

A lasting legacy

"There are so many strides and triumphs that transpired under James Downing's leadership," said Marlo Thomas, national outreach director for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. "As an exemplary mentor, he inspires excellence in his colleagues, building a culture in which

every person can do their best work. But what I will always value about Dr. Downing is that this brilliant scientist has the passion and heart for helping sick kids driving everything he does."

Downing's accomplishments as CEO have been numerous, including the completion of two strategic plans that called for investments of nearly \$20 billion and more than 2,300 new positions. The strategic plans laid the groundwork for the following landmark initiatives that continue to shape the hospital and its impact:

Fundamental science

- 100% Established the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

- 100% Launched St. Jude Cloud, the largest repository of pediatric cancer genomic data and associated analysis tools in the world

- 100% Established the St. Jude Research Collaboratives

- 100% Opened new academic departments in imaging sciences, host-microbe interactions, cellular and molecular biology, and computational biology

- 100% Launched the Office of Data Science to lead the organization strategy in data science for biologic discoveries

- 100% Launched the Centers of Excellence in Data-Driven Discovery, Structural Cell Biology, Pediatric Immunology, Innate Immunity and Inflammation, Leukemia, and Neuro-Oncology Sciences

- 100% Opened the Inspiration4 Advanced Research Center and began construction on a second research tower Childhood Cancer and other catastrophic diseases of childhood

- 100% Redesignated as an NCI Comprehensive Cancer Center

- 100% Established the Cancer Predisposition Clinic and Program

- 100% Created the Pediatric Cancer Dependencies Accelerator

- 100% Established the HPV Cancer Prevention Program

- 100% Launched the Pediatric Translational Neuroscience Initiative

- 100% Announced a cure for X-linked SCID, or bubble boy disease

- 100% Increased the number of patients admitted to St. Jude annually

- 100% Designated as a Magnet Hospital with Distinction

- 100% Established the Patient and Family Experience Office and opened Family Commons

- 100% Opened The Domino's Village, a new patient housing facility

- 100% Completed construction on two clinical towers

Global impact

- 100% Established St. Jude Global

- 100% Formed the St. Jude Global Alliance



- 100% Initiated the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer with the World Health Organization and became the first WHO collaborating center for childhood cancer
- 100% Launched the Global Platform for Access to Childhood Cancer Medicines

- 100% Established the *Together by St. Jude*™ website as a global resource for families

- 100% Launched master's program in Global Child Health in the St. Jude Graduate School

Workplace and culture

- 100% Expanded the St. Jude workforce by more than 40%

- 100% Launched the Living Our Values program and strengthened the St. Jude culture

- 100% Established an employee on-site clinic

- 100% Transitioned to Epic, a new electronic health record system, and the operations platform Workday

- 100% Opened the St. Jude Childcare Center for employees

- 100% Launched the St. Jude Leadership Academy

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is leading the way the world understands, treats and cures childhood cancer, sickle cell disease, and other life-threatening disorders. It is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center devoted solely to children. Treatments developed at St. Jude have helped push the overall childhood cancer survival rate from 20% to 80% since the hospital opened more than 60 years ago. St. Jude shares the breakthroughs it makes to help doctors and researchers at local hospitals and cancer centers around the world improve the quality of treatment and care for even more children.

A Ghost in the Machine

In the dim, high-stakes theater of international intrigue, Nomma Zarubina was a player who forgot the most important rule of the game: never get too close to the man holding the leash.

Originally busted in November 2024, the 35-year-old Russian national—known in the shadows by her FSB codename "Alyssa"—found herself caught in a web of her own spinning.

The Profile: A Ghost in the Machine

Zarubina wasn't your typical trench-coat spy. A prolific networker and decolonization expert, she spent years infiltrating the glittering circles of Manhattan think tanks, military analysts, and anti-Kremlin activists. Behind the selfies with opposition leaders and the academic jargon, the FBI alleges she was a "talent spotter" for the FSB (Russia's Federal Security Service). Her mission? To identify vulnerable Americans for potential recruitment, supervised by handlers thousands of miles away in the Siberian city of Tomsk.

The First Strike: November 2024

The FBI finally moved in late 2024. Zarubina was charged with making false statements about her dealings with Kremlin spooks. During multiple interrogations, she allegedly fibbed about her relationship with Elena Branson, a dual citizen who fled to Moscow after being accused of running a Russian propaganda hub in New York.

Zarubina walked out of the Southern District of New York courthouse on a \$25,000 bond, restricted to the city and ordered to steer clear of Russian officials. For a moment, it seemed she might wait out her trial in the relative comfort of Brooklyn.

The Twist: The G-Man and the Midnight Texts

But "Alyssa" had a habit she couldn't break: late-night digital whispers. While out on bail, Zarubina began a relentless campaign of harassment against "Case Agent 1"—the very FBI agent who had been investigating her. What started as desperate pleas soon spiraled into a surreal, flirty, and eventually abusive barrage of midnight messages.

The Content: Dozens of texts and photographs flooded the agent's phone. In one string sent at 4:00 AM, she reportedly wrote, "Catch me baby. So many spies," and "I need you. Wake up. You are SO smart."

The Evidence: Some messages included photos of her in a cowboy hat, glass of red wine in hand, taunting the man tasked with her downfall.

The Climax: By December 2025, the court's patience had evaporated. Prosecutors described her behavior as "stalking" and "taunting" a federal officer.

The Fall: Behind Bars

In an emergency hearing, a judge wasn't interested in her defense's claims of "stress and alcohol." He revoked her bail, and Zarubina—the woman who tried to charm her way out of a federal indictment—was marched back to a jail cell.

On February 19, 2026, the final act played out: Nomma Zarubina pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI and naturalization fraud (linked to her involvement in a prostitution ring). She now faces up to five years in federal prison, her sentencing set for June.

Next Step: I can analyze the specific court documents from the Southern District of New York if you'd like more granular details on her handlers or the "Alyssa" recruitment protocols. Shall I look into those for you? The digital trail of "Alyssa" leads deep into the bureaucracy of the Southern District of New York (SDNY), where federal prosecutors have meticulously dismantled her double life. Based on the latest court filings and investigative reports, here is the granular breakdown of the "Alyssa" recruitment protocols and her Siberian handlers.

The Siberian Puppet Masters

Zarubina didn't report to the glittering towers of Moscow. Instead, her strings were pulled from Tomsk, Siberia.

The Handlers: The FBI identified her

'China was playing chess while the rest of us were playing checkers': Bombshell study finds \$200 billion of secret loans to U.S. businesses over 25 years

China's state lenders have funneled \$200 billion into U.S. businesses for a quarter of a century, but many of the loans have been kept secret because the money was first routed through shell companies in the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Delaware and elsewhere that helped obscure their origins, according to AidData, a research lab at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. More alarming, much of the lending was to help Chinese companies buy stakes in U.S. businesses, many tied to critical technology and national security, including a robotics maker, a semiconductor company and a biotech firm. The report found a far more widespread and sophisticated lending network than previously thought — a web of financial obligations extending beyond developing countries to rich ones, including the U.K., Germany, Australia, the Netherlands and other U.S. allies. "China was playing chess while the rest of us were playing checkers," said former White House investment adviser William Henagan, who worries the hidden lending has given China a chokehold on technologies. "Wars will be won or lost based on whether you can control products critical to running an economy."

China money gets a closer look

While the U.S. still welcomes most foreign investment — and President Donald Trump has courted it — money from China has drawn particular scrutiny as the world's two biggest economies with opposing ideologies battle for global supremacy. Deals financed by China's state-owned banks, the ones studied in the AidData report, are especially problematic. The lenders are controlled by China's central government and the Communist Party's Central Financial Commission, and they are directed to advance China's

primary contacts as high-level officers within the FSB's Tomsk Directorate. These handlers directed her to embed herself within the "Free Russia Foundation" and other anti-Kremlin circles in the U.S.

The Mission: She wasn't stealing nuclear codes; she was a "Spotter and Assessor." Her protocols involved identifying "disgruntled" or "ideologically flexible" Americans—specifically those with access to military contractors or think tanks—and feeding their psychological profiles back to Siberia for future recruitment.

The "Alyssa" Recruitment Protocols

Court documents detail a sophisticated three-step process Zarubina used to infiltrate U.S. circles: The "Activist" Cover: Zarubina built a persona as a fierce critic of Vladimir Putin. By positioning herself as an ally to the Russian opposition, she gained immediate trust from American analysts and policymakers who viewed her as a "heroic defector." The Social Honey-Trap: She utilized high-end social networking, frequently hosting "salons" or late-night gatherings where alcohol flowed freely. The FBI noted her pattern of using "flirtatious proximity" to lower the guard of her targets—a tactic that would eventually be her undoing when she

applied it to her own FBI case agent.

The Digital Feedback Loop: Zarubina maintained an encrypted link to her Tomsk handlers. After a successful evening of networking, she would transmit "Contact Reports" detailing the personalities, vulnerabilities, and potential leverage points of the people she met.

The Final Betrayal: Naturalization Fraud

Beyond the spying, the most granular detail in the recent sentencing memos involves her entry into the U.S. The government proved that her entire American life was built on a lie:

The Prostitution Ring: To secure her legal status, Zarubina hid her involvement in a high-end prostitution ring.

The Marriage Scheme: Investigators found her U.S. citizenship was obtained through a fraudulent marriage, a classic "sleeper agent" tactic to ensure she couldn't be easily deported while her spotting operations were underway.

The Sentencing Countdown

Having pleaded guilty on February 19, 2026, Zarubina is currently being held without bail. Her sentencing, scheduled for June 2026, is expected to draw a maximum five-year sentence, though federal prosecutors are pushing for a "national security enhancement" that could influence her post-prison deportation status.

strategic goals.

In total, the AidData report found China lent more than \$2 trillion from 2000 through 2023 around the world, double the highest previous estimates and a surprise to even longtime analysts of China's rise. And much of the lending to wealthy countries was focused on critical minerals and high-tech assets — rare earths and semiconductors needed for fighter jets, submarines, radar systems, precision-guided missiles and telecom networks.

"The U.S., under both (former President Joe) Biden and Trump, have been beating this drum for more than a decade that Beijing is a predatory lender," said Brad Parks, executive director of AidData. "The irony is very rich."

Shell games

Until now, a full accounting of China's state lending has never been published because much of the financing is buried beneath layers of secrecy, masked by Western-sounding shell companies and mislabeled by international databases as ordinary private financing. "There is a complete lack of transparency that speaks to the lengths to which China goes, whether through shell companies or confidentiality agreements or redactions, to make it extremely difficult to come up with this full picture," said Scott Nathan, the former head of the U.S. International Development Finance Corp., an agency set up in the first Trump term to invest in foreign projects deemed in the U.S. national interest. Since the report's last documented loan in 2023, U.S. scrutiny has gotten better. Screening mechanisms, such as the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., got beefed up in 2020 to protect sensitive sectors in the economy.

The Hypocrisy Of Pakistan And Turkey's Frustration With India-Israel Ties

Even before the conclusion of PM Modi's visit, editorials and op-eds appeared in Pakistani and Turkish media, indulging in fear-mongering about India and Israel's deepening ties.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprising trip to Israel seems to have rattled both Pakistan and Turkey. Even before its conclusion, editorials and op-eds appeared in the media, voicing apprehension at the visit and indulging in fear-mongering about how India and Israel, "representing Hindutva and Zionism" - characterised as "two evils" - were joining forces against Muslims. According to those reports, this was seen as the sole purpose of Modi's visit and the underlying premise on which the Indo-Israeli partnership is based. Accusations range from outright demonisation to the hilariously absurd.

But why is Islamabad so rattled with Modi's Israel visit? After all, India and Israel are known to share a close defence partnership for decades. There is nothing new with that. Sure, the recent visit yielded 16 agreements, but nothing spectacularly new in defence was announced. Moreover, there is no military alliance between the two countries; in fact, India does not have any such arrangement with any country, not even with its close friend and strategic partner Russia.

Hypocrisy 101

On the other hand, just very recently, Pakistan was chest-thumping over its announcement of setting up an "Islamic NATO". It also concluded a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia last year, soon after India's Operation Sindoor. The triumphalism was hard to miss, especially given that India had invested a great deal in the India-Saudi partnership while the once-tight relations between the Saudis and Pakistanis had waned. The rejuvenation of its old ties with the Saudis was thus like a Godsend to Pakistan, promising resources for its struggling economy and, potentially, more cutting-edge hardware for its military. Specifically, the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed between the two envisaged the two countries treating any aggression against either as an attack on both, thus laying the ground for joint deterrence and military cooperation. This would seem to be a hedge for Pakistan against any future military action by India.

This apparent strategic victory was complemented soon by the announcement that another close pal of Pakistan, Turkey, was joining the alliance. A NATO member, Turkey, with its largest standing army in the bloc, is a

formidable military power. Its participation in this trilateral was enough to give the world nightmares.

Important Questions For Pakistan

Now, who this "Islamic NATO" was aimed at was anyone's guess. The announcement came soon after Israel launched unprecedented airstrikes on Qatar to take on Hamas - which, apparently, was shielding the outfit. For Pakistan, its greatest strategic threat remains India. For Turkey, too, Israel, once a friend, has come to represent its greatest security challenge over the past few years; its relations with India, too, have been nosediving over the past few years.

So, why would Pakistan, or even Turkey for that matter, now take umbrage even if an India-Israel military alliance, along the lines of the strategic "hexagon" that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outlined, comes to fruition?

True, the Islamic NATO plan has been shelved - at least for now - given the deep divisions between the KSA and Turkey. But Pakistan's close strategic partnership with the country continues.

Pak's Sweet Spot - For Once

In fact, diplomatically, Pakistan has been in rather a sweet spot since the end of Operation Sindoor. Throughout the operation, it got unwavering support from its "brothers" Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as from its "iron friend" China. After the operation, the administration of US President Donald Trump embraced Pakistan in a way US administrators have not done in the past two decades. This has opened doors for more monetary bailouts for Pakistan's cash-strapped economy from organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Pakistan is seemingly in a prominent position on the Trump-convened Board of Peace, and is expected to bag a considerable piece of the Gaza reconstruction pie. Countries like Azerbaijan and Indonesia have placed defence orders with it. Most recently, the presidents of regional powerhouses Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan paid official visits to Islamabad. All of this points to the country's diplomatic comfort, far from the 'isolation' Pakistan is used to moaning about.

Crying 'Ummah', Cutting Deals

So, why is Pakistan so anguished by India's partnership with Israel? Could it be that despite the diplomatic niceties,

the strongly worded agreements, Pakistan realises that while India and Israel are true partners, its own partnerships are anchored in a more servile, client-state paradigm? For instance, despite the clause of treating any aggression against either as an aggression against both in the Saudi-Pakistan pact, the ensuing conflict between Pakistan and the Taliban did not see any Saudi participation.

Similarly, in spite of the rhetoric around an Islamic NATO, the concern for the Muslim ummah remains mere lip service, a useful ideological prop for relationships that are actually transactional in nature. Just consider: if aligning itself with Israel is to sleep with the Devil, then many Muslim countries are guilty of the same, including Pakistan's "brother" Azerbaijan, which has emerged as one of Israel's largest arms buyers over the past many years. Both Pakistan and Turkey are mum on Azerbaijan's blossoming relations with Israel in the wake of the Gaza conflict and open hostility to the Palestinians.

While the Turkish press laments the recruitment of Indian labour by Israel (as it will replace Palestinian labour) it has never highlighted that since October 2023, when the Gaza war broke out, Turkey has not once considered stopping the transit of Azeri gas to Israel, in solidarity with the Palestinians whose cause it keeps championing. Why? Because doing so would have been to deprive itself of lucrative transit fees.

Fear Is The Best Campaign

Perhaps fear-mongering is essential for Pakistan to keep the focus away from its own shortcomings against its own citizens and fellow Muslim countries. All the conflicts that the country is currently embroiled in - internally with the Baloch, or in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and externally with the Afghan Taliban - are all with fellow Muslims and have claimed the lives of hundreds of women and children. Something Pakistan blames India (falsely) for.

Perhaps also, demonising India serves to hide a greater concern: shedding Palestinian blood. For, in spite of its alignment with Israel, India also shares close ties with a range of actors in West Asia, including with the Palestinians. Since the Gaza war broke out, India has regularly sent humanitarian aid to Gaza and has continued to steadfastly adhere to a two-state solution - a Palestinian state existing in peace alongside an Israeli state. A case in point: the very day that Modi was addressing the Knesset, India announced a range of fully funded scholarships for Palestinian students.

It is Pakistan that is guilty of having Palestinian blood on its hands in what has come to be known as the infamous Black September events of 1970, when it deployed troops in Jordan to help its King Hussein quell the challenge to its rule mounted by Palestinian refugees. Perhaps these concerns are once again haunting Pakistan as President Trump demands that Pakistan deploy its troops in Gaza now.



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If Trump wants to smash Mexican cartels, he's got history and law on his side



With Puerto Vallarta and the state of Jalisco under siege from the cartels, American policymakers need to know that President Donald Trump would be on strong legal ground if he chooses to hit the cartels in Mexico or anywhere in the world.

Over the last four decades, the drug cartels have transported tens of thousands of military-age men over our borders, many of them carrying weapons of mass destruction like fentanyl or carfentanil. This isn't "migration." It's an invasion, and, under the Constitution, the president not only has the authority, but the duty to act.

Though the drug cartels are non-state actors, they effectively control roughly one-third of Mexican territory, exerting quasi-sovereignty by extracting "taxes," controlling the movement of people, and intimidating and extorting government into doing their will.

Trump has done what no president in decades could do: he secured the southern border and stopped the massive influx of illegal aliens and dangerous drugs. But is America required to stand back and wait for criminals to cross our borders in order to defend itself? Of course not. There is ample precedent for presidents using the military to take on non-state actors abroad who threatened the lives and livelihoods of Americans — even without congressional authorization.

Shortly after taking office in 1801, President Thomas Jefferson famously sent the Marines "to the shores of Tripoli" to punish pirates who for years had harassed American merchant ships and demanded tribute payments. Congress was not in session, but Jefferson neither waited for authorization nor called them into session. Despite having a relatively small navy for the time, the new president sent a squadron to the Mediterranean with orders to sink the pirates if necessary. In August 1801, the squadron sank a ship off the coast of Malta without congressional authorization. In February 1802, Congress passed an authorization of force — not a declaration of war.

On March 9, 1916, the outlaw Pancho Villa's raiders killed three American citizens and then crossed the border to attack Columbus, New Mexico, killing 10 American soldiers, robbing American businesses and killing eight more civilians. Maj. Frank Tompkins's men pursued the raiders 15 miles across the Mexican border, killing 100 of them and capturing 30. Villa's men had previously executed a train car full of American engineers who were on their way to work in Mexico's mines. The Mexican government continually proved unable to bring Villa and his men to justice.

President Woodrow Wilson called an emergency cabinet meeting on March 10. Wilson decided to send the Army into

Northern Mexico, citing an 1882 treaty that allowed "hot pursuit" over the border. Wilson sent 4,800 soldiers into Mexico under General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing on a "punitive expedition" to track down Villa and his men. Congress showed their approval with a concurrent resolution two days after the fact. The Mexican government protested and even fought back against the Army, but ultimately backed down in the face of American strength.

Drug cartels have killed far more Americans than either the Barbary Pirates or Pancho Villa ever did. As the DEA has said repeatedly, nearly all of the drugs killing Americans today were trafficked over our southern border.

Some liberals and libertarians would likely object that attacking the cartels in Mexico or outside our borders would violate the War Powers Act, which Congress passed over President Nixon's veto in 1973. But even if a court upheld the War Powers Act on its merits — which has still never happened — the law merely requires that the president notify Congress of an attack within 48 hours and limits an attack to 90 days without congressional authorization. Since the WPA's passage, presidents of both parties have conducted military operations all over the world without congressional authorization — from Haiti to Libya to Bosnia. Declarations

of war have been extremely rare in our history: the last was in 1942. The Founders intentionally gave the president broad and fulsome powers to conduct military operations after the sclerotic Articles of Confederation proved unable to respond to Shay's Rebellion and the British refusal to remove troops from newly independent American territory. Presidents must be able to act quickly and decisively to protect Americans from national security threats, and the Founders gave them the tools to do just that.

After President Trump took office last January, the military began Operation Southern Spear, which has involved direct attacks on drug smuggling boats from Venezuela. Like Jefferson's squadron against the Barbary Pirates or Wilson's "punitive expedition" against Pancho Villa, the Trump administration isn't waiting until the criminals cross our border — nor should they.

The cartels have been enriching themselves for decades by getting Americans addicted to deadly drugs, bringing tens of thousands of military-age men into our country and costing hundreds of thousands of American lives. Whether the cartels stand on American soil or on foreign soil, the president stands on solid legal ground in bringing them to justice.

Chad R. Mizelle

Supreme Court blocks Trump tariffs— but hands him a smarter path forward



President Donald Trump has lost his tariff case in the Supreme Court. However, with careful and prudent use of the tariff powers he does have, he can turn this into a win for his policies and for America.

The Supreme Court has just ruled in *Learning Services v. Trump* that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) does not authorize the president to impose tariffs. While the act unquestionably gives him the power to regulate imports in the event of unusual and extraordinary emergencies, the dispute was whether tariffs – a kind of tax – are legally and constitutionally "regulation."

While there were reasonable arguments on both sides, six of the nine justices ruled they are not, and that the IEEPA does not empower the president to impose tariffs. What are the likely economic consequences of this ruling, and what should it imply for future Trump trade policy?

First, note that as economic policy, tariffs are a bad idea. International trade raises incomes and promotes economic growth in every country that trades. Trade is mutually beneficial, win-win for all trading parties. It is a popular myth that trade destroyed American manufacturing. American manufacturing

has steadily increased since 1970, more than doubling, as shown by data collected by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

On the other hand, roughly 90% of the costs of the "liberation day" tariffs have been borne by American businesses and consumers, as shown in analysis by economists at the New York Federal Reserve. The American economy has had solid growth and low unemployment under Trump, but this is owing to his excellent energy and deregulation policies, which have reduced regulatory burdens. Tariff costs are another burden on the economy. Removing this drag should further encourage economic growth and employment.

It is also a popular myth that a trade deficit is a loss for a country. The trade deficit, or current account, is balanced the capital and financial accounts, that is, foreigners investing in America.

There are two reasons why foreign investment flows into America. One is that America's security and dynamism make it an attractive place to invest, a good thing. The other is the Federal government's growing appetite for borrowing to cover its burgeoning deficits, a bad thing. Tariffs and trade restrictions make America's economy

less dynamic and do nothing to curb the government's fiscal irresponsibility. There is no good economic argument for tariffs.

However, for foreign policy and national security purposes, tariffs can have an important role. Numerous other laws authorize the president to impose such tariffs. For example, the Trade Act of 1974, Section 122 (under which Trump has now imposed 10% tariffs) authorizes tariffs in the event of severe balance-of-payments deficits. The Trade Expansion Act of 1962, Section 232, authorizes tariffs on goods for national security purposes.

Numerous other laws authorize the president to impose tariffs. However, all of these include various reasonable conditions and limits.

For example, if the president imposes a national security tariff, Section 232 gives the administration 270 days to develop a study justifying the tariff. Trump still holds broad power to impose tariffs, but now it is more constrained and requires transparent reasons for any particular exercise of this power.

While this constrains Trump somewhat, he can turn this into a win for his presidency. Tariff power can be useful as a foreign policy tool, and by

using a more nuanced and targeted approach to tariff policy, he can accomplish a lot of good for the American economy.

For example, the European Union is attempting to impose its ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) standards on American firms doing business in Europe, via the EU's Corporate Due Diligence and Sustainability Mandates. EU mandates would apply to all of a firm's activities everywhere, not just those in Europe.

Similarly, the EU has attempted to impose its Digital Services Act on American media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Meta. This would require firms to monitor and censor free speech, despite America's First Amendment protections. Targeted tariffs could be a very useful tool for punching back at this, protecting free commerce and defending American firms from such attacks. This would have the effect of strengthening America's economy and position in the world.

President Trump has lost a round in the Supreme Court and his ability to impose tariffs is constrained. But with judicious use of the powers he retains, he can turn this into an opportunity to make America stronger and his presidency a greater success.

Modi's visit to Israel is India's signalling to the world



Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached Israel on Wednesday for a two-day visit even as India has asked all its citizens to vacate Iran. The Middle East is scorching hot, and India is choosing this moment to deliver a shape-defining hit, albeit with a goldsmith's hammer. This is going to be a precise and delicate signalling of its strategic position.

The visit is crucial for Netanyahu and Israel. The Israeli PM is facing increasing pressure — at home over "authoritarian tendencies", and abroad over the Gaza crisis. At this moment, Israel stands as a near-pariah nation. In India, Modi's visit is being criticised by some for "compromising" the country's moral leadership and the balanced stand on the Israel-Palestine issue. Again, it is all about the timing. New Delhi hosted one of the biggest international delegations, including many countries with a stated anti-Israel stance, just days ago at the India AI Impact Summit. India isn't a pariah state but one that has a calibrated foreign policy, dealing at the same time with the US, China and Russia, along with Iran and Israel. So, when Modi meets

Netanyahu, it is a leader of a non-aligned nation meeting his counterpart of one of its biggest strategic and defence partners. This in no way stymies its two-state stand on Palestine. Our memories are woefully short, especially when we are in criticism mode. Remember, it was only Israel that unflinchingly stood by India during Operation Sindoor. Cutting-edge Israeli weapons added to India's military muscle as it engaged in a mini-war with Pakistan in May 2025. Israel is one of India's most reliable security and defence partners. In its Budget for 2026-27, India increased its defence allocation by 15.19%, taking it to an all-time high of Rs 7.85 lakh crore (\$87 billion). This as Pakistan, which signed a ceasefire with India after the May 2025 four-day war, is on an arms procurement overdrive.

An agreement on security cooperation is likely to be signed during Modi's trip, which could focus on the transfer of advanced weapon technologies. The famed Iron Dome and the Iron Beam, which is a high-energy laser weapon that shoots down drones at just a couple of dollars per shot, is being talked about in this regard in security

expert circles.

Israel isn't important just as a defence ally, it is one of the building blocks of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The IMEC is India's answer to China's Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI) as New Delhi positions itself as a China+1 alternative.

The IMEC will give India unhindered logistical access to European markets and integrate it better with global supply chains. It is, therefore, crucial to its plans of becoming the factory of the world.

Modi's visit to Israel also has tacit support for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India's closest Arab ally. Since 2020, when the UAE signed the Abraham Accords, it has deepened its cooperation with Israel. It has maintained deep ties despite the war in Gaza, which prevented Saudi Arabia, the Sunni regional powerhouse, from signing the Donald Trump-mediated accord. India, Israel, the US and the UAE have cooperated for investments and regional stability under the I2U2 Group, dubbed the West Asian Quad.

Israel's ties with the UAE have become more significant with Saudi Arabia signing a defence

pact with Pakistan, which allows the use of Pakistani nuclear weapons for Riyadh. Turkey, a Nato member with a big standing military, is seeking a tripartite defence deal with Saudi and Pakistan. Turkey provided drones and military technicians to Pakistan during the May 2025 war.

This context makes Netanyahu's plans for a Hexagon security alliance, which includes India, very interesting. India simply doesn't have much of a choice with China, Pakistan and Turkey in the other camp. A Hexagon alliance, therefore, makes more than sixth sense.

Even as alliances get forged in the Middle East, PM Modi's visit, most importantly, is a strategic signalling to the US, Israel's closest ally.

After two decades of elevated ties with New Delhi, DC has taken an Islamabad tilt under President Donald Trump. He is banking on Pakistan to send its soldiers to Gaza as part of the International Stabilisation Force. The Rawalpindi-Islamabad hybrid regime, fearful of the domestic backlash, has been dithering on committing its troops, but is equally fearful of offending Trump. This is Modi's subtle

messaging to Trump: India will do for your all-time and all-weather friend Israel what your fair-weather friend Pakistan can't and won't.

Political policies, like economic ones, need to be flexible and adjust to global realities. The US, a champion of free trade, has become a protectionist, while Communist China has become the biggest backer of a free economy because they suit their current interests. Being flexible and pragmatic in foreign and economic policies is the only way to grow. India, like any sovereign nation, has forged an independent foreign policy. Be it in energy trade or defence partnerships, it has always kept its best interests and strategic autonomy as its priorities. It has balanced Trump's tariffs with Russian trade. Such has been New Delhi's policy that neither Israel nor Iran — two sworn enemies — questioned its ties.

Modi's visit to Israel isn't just a show of support for a trusted ally who has stood by thick and thin; it is also a strategic signalling to the world of a nation that isn't shy of taking sides with its best interests in mind.

Yudhajit Shankar Das

Wanted, Desperately: A 'Fixer' For Rahul Gandhi

Optics are important in politics. And the optics have been damaging for the Congress in recent days as assembly polls near in five states, of which the party has high stakes in at least three: Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu.

There was barely time to bask in the satisfaction of having resolved its Shashi Tharoor problem in Kerala with a peace meeting between the disgruntled Thiruvanthapuram MP and Rahul Gandhi when the Congress found itself fire-fighting again, this time on all sides. In Assam, its former state chief, Bhupen Borah, quit to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He left despite Rahul Gandhi's personal intervention to persuade him otherwise, and as he quit, he fired a parting shot intended to hurt by raking up BJP allegations against his successor Gaurav Gogoi's "Pakistani links".

Firefighting Everywhere

In Tamil Nadu, the Congress's staunchest ally, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), served notice to dump the Congress unless it agreed to the following: one, take action against two leaders considered part of Rahul Gandhi's durbar, Praveen Chakravarty and Manik Tagore, for their sustained campaign to launch a separate Congress-led front with film actor Vijay's fledgling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK); two, come to the table without further ado for seat-sharing negotiations on the DMK's terms. The unkindest cut came from Kerala, where long-time Gandhi family loyalist, Mani Shankar Aiyar, took pot shots at two other Rahul durbaris, KC Venugopal and Pawan Khera, and predicted a third successive win for the Left Front. "I am a Rajivian, not a Rahulian," he declared in typical Mani style. Almost simultaneously, another family friend and INDIA bloc ally, Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference, also forecast a Left Front victory in the state.

Aiyar and Abdullah may not count for anything in Kerala, but when friends and allies use the Congress as target practice, it makes for embarrassing headlines in a state where the party fancies its chances at forming the next government. What Ahmed Patel Did For Sonia



Could the Congress have done damage control and saved itself from poor optics on the eve of crucial state elections? Perhaps. But for that, Rahul Gandhi would need to take a leaf out of his mother Sonia Gandhi's playbook and find himself an effective political aide, as she had in the late Ahmed Patel.

Whatever his faults and shortcomings were, Patel earned his stripes in his long innings as Sonia Gandhi's chief factotum, serving as troubleshooter, party handler, backroom strategist and communication channel with allies during the UPA years. He was the first port of call for anyone who wanted a word with Sonia Gandhi and readily worked the phone lines or held lengthy in-person meetings late into the night to crack the whip, hammer out compromises and strike deals. Sonia Gandhi stepped in after Patel had prepared the ground for her.

Although there were times when he was accused of making tactical errors and playing favourites, there is little doubt that he was largely instrumental in helping Sonia Gandhi to steer the UPA ship through two successive terms in power.

A Crucial Difference

Congress watchers see many similarities between Rahul Gandhi and his mother. Both are

uncomfortable with messy situations - inevitable in the rough and tumble of politics - instinctively shy away from taking hard decisions, and rarely engage with knotty organisational issues.

However, there is a crucial difference. Sonia Gandhi came into politics as an inexperienced "outsider". She had the wisdom and maturity to seek help from a trusted circle of advisors with a keen nose for politics. Ultimately, she came to rely on Patel's tact and diplomatic skills to tackle tricky party problems and ally troublefs for her.

On the other hand, although Rahul Gandhi was a greenhorn, too, when he took the political plunge; he came in as heir to the legacy of India's foremost political dynasty. Secure in a sense of entitlement, he has often displayed disdain for the Congress establishment and system. Sidelining the politicians, he has chosen to surround himself with civil society advocates, foreign-educated techie whiz kids and other apolitical activists, most of them without any experience in the Congress or acquaintance with its leaders and workers.

Consequently, crises are neither anticipated, nor forestalled, nor tackled effectively. Like his mother, he

is reluctant to intervene himself, but unlike her, he lacks an aide/aides of the calibre of Ahmed Patel to take care of problems that are bound to crop up in any political organisation.

Can A Party Survive Without Foresight?

For instance, no one stepped in to silence Chakravarty and Tagore, although their comments and flirtation with TVK leader Vijay were clearly annoying the DMK. It was only after the DMK threatened to go ahead without the Congress that the party acted. The two have since been lying low.

Similarly, by the time Rahul Gandhi spoke to Bohra in Assam, it was too late. The state's chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, an ex-Congressman himself, had already worked on Bohra to join the BJP and ensured that he exited with unsparing criticism for his former party. It is surprising that the Congress high command didn't see it coming. Certainly, it was slow to take cognisance and act.

Don't Escape The Chaos

Politics is quite different today. It is far more challenging and competitive. Sonia Gandhi was up against the Vajpayee-Advani BJP, which played by the old rules of politics. Rahul Gandhi faces the formidable

Modi juggernaut and relentless personal hostility from the top duo of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. Both believe in scorched earth tactics and use all means at their disposal to build the BJP into the country's foremost political force. Their "Congress mukt Bharat" is not an empty slogan. In their playbook, the Congress must be erased for the BJP to dominate. This is the political environment in which Rahul Gandhi has to function. The challenges require a much more hands-on approach, quick reflexes and a willingness to engage with the chaos of Indian politics. Many in the Congress wonder why Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hasn't been deployed as Rahul Gandhi's Ahmed Patel. She knows the heartbeat of the Congress, and as she showed during the winter session of Parliament, even sipping tea with Modi, she has the skillset required to deal with people and situations. She has intervened in the past on behalf of Rahul Gandhi - in Punjab, for instance, with Amarinder Singh, and in Rajasthan with Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot, to name a few tangles. Maybe Rahul Gandhi should consider involving her more often. At least she can try to help save what's left of the Congress.

Arati R Jerath

Tale Of Two Epsteins, Ghislaine Maxwell And 9/11

The Epstein Files Transparency Act, 2025, has a massive loophole deliberately introduced to conceal classified information. According to the Act, classified information related to "national defence or foreign policy" should be kept secret. Of the 6 million Epstein documents, US attorney general Pam Bondi has released 3.5 million pages.

Do the remaining documents contain top-secret classified information about American national defence and foreign policy? It's baffling that Congress introduced the condition in the first place.

Why would a serial paedophile predator and his girlfriend-cum-pimp be involved in classified US national defence or foreign policy matters?

JEFFREY EPSTEIN AND CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The couple was involved with top international leaders, including Bill Clinton and Ehud Barak, tycoons like Donald Trump (not president then), celebs, models, sportspersons, heads of global financial institutions, tech titans, spiritual leaders, political/social activists and scientists.

Still, why would Clinton and Barak discuss classified matters with Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, later convicted on five counts of sex trafficking and abuse of minors and sentenced to 20 years in June 2022.

There could be only one possible explanation – the couple were spies.

Epstein was connected to the CIA and Mossad/Aman (Israel's Military Intelligence Directorate).

Epstein operated during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George HW Bush, Clinton, George W Bush, Barack Obama and Trump (the first two years of his first term).

Epstein, untouchable for years, was indirectly involved in the CIA's Iran-Contra scandal (1981-86).

Barak, who savagely raped and beat up the late Virginia Giuffre – Epstein's primary accuser – till she bled, per her posthumous explosive memoir *Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Surviving Abuse and Fighting for Justice*, headed Aman in 1983-85.

Coincidentally, the person

who supervised the CIA's first arms delivery to the Contras after the US started using Israel for arming the Nicaraguan rebels was Barak.

Epstein also cooperated with Barak in providing surveillance technology to Côte d'Ivoire in 2014 and helped Israel sign a security cooperation agreement with Mongolia in 2017.

You May Like

"No.1 Trader Mr. Hemant Reveals His Winning Strategy for Free! TradeWise by Taboola Sponsored Links Clearly, Epstein had America's blessing to be part of the scandal and engage with Israel like a diplomat. William Burns, Obama's deputy secretary of state and Joe Biden's future CIA director, met Epstein thrice in Washington and at his Manhattan home in 2014.

It's highly suspicious that an Obama Cabinet official who supervised the State Department's operations met Epstein, who was arrested in 2008 for soliciting prostitution and sex trafficking with a minor and served 13 months.

Now, the DoJ's third release of Epstein files (January 30) has confirmed the allegations of his Israel link.

File No EFTA00090314 mentions an FBI agent asking a "Confidential Human Source (CHS)" about information regarding improper domestic or foreign influence over American elections.

The CHS mentioned Harvard's then-law professor and famous criminal attorney Alan Dershowitz, who had represented Epstein in 2008 and was part of the defence team of Trump during his first impeachment trial in 2020. Dershowitz allegedly had sex with Giuffre, at least, six times and watched the sexual abuse of other minors.

The source told the FBI that Dershowitz influenced many students from wealthy families – for example, Josh and Jared Kushner.

"CHS believed Dershowitz was co-opted by Mossad and subscribed to their mission. CHS continues to communicate occasionally for (sic) Dershowitz."

The source recalled Dershowitz telling Alex Acosta

(the US attorney for the Southern District of Florida at the time and later Trump's labour secretary in his first term) that Epstein belonged to both US and allied intelligence services. In 2008, Acosta cut a sweetheart deal, or a non-prosecution agreement (NPA), with Epstein and kept his victims in the dark.

"CHS shared phone calls between Dershowitz and Epstein during which he/she took notes. After these calls, Mossad would then call Dershowitz to debrief."

CHS said that "Epstein was trained as a spy under Barak" and became convinced that he was a co-opted Mossad agent.

JEFFREY & EDWARD

The Epstein files mention several important people. The documents triggered a media frenzy with reporters digging into them to establish the connection between Epstein and the prominent names.

However, the less famous names have not been under the media glare.

One such name repeatedly features, hundreds of times, in the Epstein files but has been overlooked – the late independent investigative journalist Edward Jay Epstein.

Ed Epstein, a political science professor at Harvard University, the University of California, Los Angeles and MIT, questioned set narratives and reported on US intelligence and counterintelligence. Critics termed him a conspiracist, but his admirers saw him as a brilliant reporter.

Ed's first book, *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth* (1966), questioned the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in assassinating JFK on November 22, 1963, and that Jack Ruby acted alone in killing Oswald.

However, the House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations suggested in 1976 – almost a decade after Ed's book – based on acoustic analysis, the possibility of a second shooter who fired the fourth shot at JFK.

Ed wrote two other books on the JFK assassination: *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald* (1978) and *The JFK*

Assassination Diary: My Search for Answers to the Mystery of the Century (2013).

In his book, *How America Lost Its Secrets: Edward Snowden, the Man and the Theft* (2017), he argued that Snowden was a possible Russian spy, not a whistleblower.

Ed also hobnobbed with world leaders, like Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, billionaires, spies and international criminals.

In this process, the famous Epstein met the other infamous Epstein in 1987.

The seduction was quick – Jeff immediately impressed Ed with his usual charm, guile, money, status and global reach.

Their friendship blossomed.

In November 2018, the Miami Herald had exposed how Epstein got away with a shocking lenient sentence in 2008 due to the NPA signed between his lawyers and Acosta. In 2019, Acosta had to resign from the Trump Cabinet following the explosive report.

However, Ed, another journalist who took favours from Epstein, supported him despite being aware of his global paedophilia racket and even after his mysterious death at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, NYC, on August 10, 2019. Several emails in the files show the closeness between the two Epsteins.

An email sent by a person (email address redacted) to Epstein on April 16, 2012, reads: "Ed Epstein will see you for tea tomorrow at 4:30." Another email with a similar redaction and sent on April 29, 2013, reads: "Can Ed Epstein have lunch w/JE [Jeffrey Epstein] on May 2nd at 12:30?" There are several other emails mentioning lunch or tea meetings between Epstein and the journalist with the names of the senders and receivers redacted.

An email reminder dated March 6, 2013, reads: "Michael Wolff party in honor of Ed Epstein book: *The Annals of Unsolved Crime*. 6-8:00, 38 East First Street."

The book examines the Warren Commission's 'unanswered questions' and some famous "unsolved" or

mysterious crimes of all time, like the anthrax attacks on the US in September 2001 and the murder of Jimmy Hoffa, the infamous union leader and criminal, by the Genovese crime family in July 1975.

Wolff, another controversial journalist and Epstein friend who has written four books on Trump and has made explosive claims alleging the president's involvement in his paedophilia ring, was close to Ed.

Another email sent by the journalist to Epstein on May 4, 2012, mentions an orgy. "Yes, here is a case of charging that someone acted improperly at an orgy."

One month after Epstein's death, Ed continued to support his late pal and dismissed his sexual crimes.

In an exclusive interview with *The Daily Beast* in September 2019, he admitted to being fascinated with Epstein despite calling him a "liar" and an unreliable witness.

"For one thing, the women around him were some of the most beautiful women I've ever seen in my life. These were not underage women."

Ed couldn't "conceive of why he [Epstein] would go out with an underage woman ... It wasn't like he was some sort of ugly gnome that couldn't get a girl".

Dismissing the Miami Herald investigation, Ed said, "I'm not sure he destroyed their [underage girls] lives. He paid them money, and they went on for six or seven years giving him massages. ... Getting a massage or getting a girl to masturbate you doesn't necessarily destroy your life."

Regarding the 2008 NPA, he said, "But if they [Acosta and other officials] gave him [Epstein] the deal, if he negotiated and got it, then that was the price that society agreed on, and that was the price that he paid."

GHISLAINE MAXWELL, ED EPSTEIN & 9/11

Bondi ensured a tight leash on deciding which files should be released by withholding, redacting and removing them. However, bits and pieces of alarming files were dumped on the DoJ website in the latest tranche.

Aninda Dey

Bill Gates Admits to Affairs with 2 Russian Women While Married to Melinda and Apologizes to Staff for Past Epstein

Bill Gates this week admitted to having two affairs with Russian women while married to Melinda French Gates and apologized to staff at his charity for his history with Jeffrey Epstein

"Bill spoke candidly, addressing several questions in detail, and took responsibility for his actions," a spokesperson for him tells PEOPLE "I did nothing illicit.

I saw nothing illicit," he said Bill Gates this week admitted to having two affairs with Russian women while married to Melinda French Gates and apologized to staff at his charity for his past ties to sex offender and disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein — while maintaining he was not part of anything "illicit."

"I did nothing illicit. I saw nothing illicit," the billionaire philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder said in a town hall for his Gates Foundation on Tuesday, Feb. 24, according to a recording reviewed by the The Wall Street Journal.

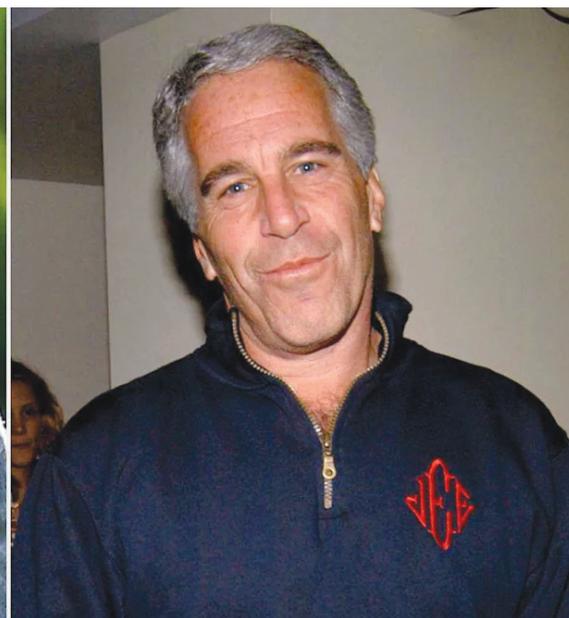
A spokesperson for Gates tells PEOPLE in a statement that



"this was a scheduled townhall with employees, which Bill does twice a year.

In the conversation, Bill answered questions submitted by foundation staff on a range of issues, including the release of the Epstein files, the foundation's work in AI, and the future of global health. "

"In the townhall, Bill spoke candidly, addressing several questions in detail, and took responsibility for his actions," the



spokesperson says.

Scrutiny has been renewed around Gates' past ties to Epstein — who died in federal custody in 2019 after being accused of human trafficking — because a trove of documents released by the U.S. Justice Department showed yearsold draft emails Epstein wrote himself in which he accused Gates, 70, of contracting a sexually transmitted infection from "Russian girls" and then asking for Epstein's help in order

to hide it from his then-wife.

A spokesperson for Gates had previously called those claims from Epstein "absolutely absurd and completely false."

However, Gates acknowledged on Tuesday, he'd had affairs with a "Russian bridge player who met me at bridge events, and one with a Russian nuclear physicist who I met through business activities."

Gates reiterated to staff that "he never spent any time with victims, the women around him,"

according to the Journal.

He also said it was a "huge mistake to spend time with Epstein" after first meeting the sex offender in 2011 — long after Epstein had pleaded guilty to soliciting a minor for prostitution. Gates has previously said he was seeking charitable donations.

Never miss a story — sign up for PEOPLE's free daily newsletter to stay up-to-date on the best of what PEOPLE has to offer, from celebrity news to compelling human interest stories. The billionaire said this week that he did not properly check Epstein's background but was aware of some "18-month thing" that limited his travel. "Knowing what I know now makes it, you know, a hundred times worse in terms of not only his crimes in the past, but now it's clear there was ongoing bad behavior," Gates said, according to the Journal. During the town hall, Gates also credited his ex — who recently spoke out herself and said Gates needed to "answer" for his history with Epstein — for being "skeptical" of Epstein.

Starting April, tourists in Barcelona will pay one of highest taxes in Europe

Tourists in Barcelona could be taxed as much as 15 euros (\$17.70) a night after the city raised its tourism fee to one of the highest in Europe on Wednesday as part of efforts to curb visitor numbers and help



finance affordable housing. Authorities in Catalonia have faced increasingly vocal protests from residents about excessive numbers of tourists they say are pushing up housing prices by driving a rise in short-term holiday lets. The regional parliament of Catalonia approved a law to double the tax for holiday rental guests to a maximum 12.5 euros per night, up from 6.25

euros, ahead of an already announced plan to ban all shortterm rental accommodation by 2028. Hotel guests will pay a maximum of between 10 and 15 euros per night from April, up from a current 5 euros to 7.5 euros, depending on the hotel category. A twonight stay for a couple at one of the four-star hotels that make up nearly half of all hotels in Barcelona could now cost an extra 45.60 euros, as the local authority can charge up to 11.4 euros per night

per person. Guests at five-star hotels could be charged up to 15 euros a night and cruise passengers will continue to pay around 6 euros. A quarter of the revenue raised will help address the city's housing crisis, according to the text of the law. Irene Verrazzo, a 33-year-old nurse from Italy, said Barcelona was already very expensive, and she doubted she'd return.

India-Israel free trade talks kick off in Delhi ahead of PM Modi's visit to Israel

India and Israel on Tuesday launched the first round of negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA), marking a significant step towards deepening their economic partnership ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the West Asian nation.

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal met an Israeli delegation visiting India for the negotiations and described the discussions as an important milestone in enhancing bilateral economic ties. In a post on X, Goyal said the negotiations in New Delhi were aimed at creating greater opportunities for businesses and people in both countries. "The FTA negotiations mark an important step towards enhancing India-Israel bilateral trade & economic cooperation, aimed at creating greater opportunities for businesses and people on both sides," he said. Trade and technical experts from both countries are holding detailed sessions covering a wide range of issues, including trade in goods and services, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, customs procedures and trade facilitation, and intellectual property rights, according to sources. Nir Barkat, the Minister of Economy and Industry of Israel, hailed the development, and said that "we are on the way to a breakthrough that

creates great new opportunities between our countries and will serve as a powerful growth engine for the economies of Israel and India." Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to arrive in Israel later today for a two-day visit, during which he will hold bilateral talks with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu on a wide range of issues. Defence and security cooperation are expected to feature high on the agenda, along with discussions on trade, agriculture, and collaboration in science and technology. In another significant development on the eve of the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu unveiled what he described as a "hexagon of alliances" and identified India as a core partner in the initiative, alongside Israel, Greece and Cyprus. The proposed grouping, according to Netanyahu, is aimed at countering what he termed "radical axes" in the Middle East (West Asia). India and Israel elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's earlier visit to the country in July 2017. Since then, the two nations have developed strong cooperation across multiple sectors, including science and technology, innovation, defence and security, trade and investment, agriculture, water management, and people-to-people exchanges.

Anthropic accuses DeepSeek and 2 other Chinese AI models of stealing its data, people on internet say it is fair

Anthropic has accused three Chinese AI firms, including DeepSeek, of distilling data from its Claude chatbot to train and improve their own AI models. Surprisingly, instead of finding support Anthropic found itself at a receiving end from people as they accused the AI firm of doing the same earlier.

This has been going on for some time, this tension and cold war between Chinese AI companies and their US counterparts. Anthropic, the US giant behind Claude AI, is at the forefront of it. On Tuesday, the company opened a new front in this war as it accused three leading Chinese AI companies, which are DeepSeek, MiniMax and Moonshot AI, of stealing data from Claude to train their AI models. In a blog post Anthropic said that the Chinese companies used thousands of accounts to carry out conversations with Claude lasting millions of tokens. The information gleaned from these conversations was then used to fine tune Chinese AI models. Essentially, Anthropic is saying that the Chinese AI models are cheating, doing something like a student might do during an exam when they peek into their friend's answer sheet and copy the answers. In the AI world this process is called distillation, or in other words training a smaller or new AI model on the output of a superior AI model. Companies like Anthropic and OpenAI do that internally.

In a statement released this week, Anthropic alleged that the Chinese companies created around 24,000 fraudulent accounts that together generated more than 16 million exchanges with Claude. The goal, according to Anthropic, was to extract high-quality outputs in areas like coding, reasoning and tool use, strengths the company says define its model. "We have identified industrial-scale

campaigns by three AI laboratories—DeepSeek, Moonshot, and MiniMax—to illicitly extract Claude's capabilities to improve their own models," accuses Anthropic. While Anthropic acknowledges that distillation can be a legitimate method, it argues that it is illegal when used to copy powerful AI without permission. "Models built through illicit distillation are unlikely to retain those safeguards, meaning that dangerous capabilities can proliferate with many protections stripped out entirely," Anthropic says.

Same same but different? While Anthropic is throwing some serious allegations at Chinese models, the internet's reaction has been anything but sympathetic. Social media quickly filled with memes suggesting that the entire AI industry relies on massive data scraping. Many users pointed to Anthropic's own legal troubles, referencing recent lawsuits where the company agreed to pay at least \$1.5 billion to settle a lawsuit filed by authors who accused the company of using pirated books to train its Claude AI chatbot. "I have a website about Traditional Chinese Medicine that I spent literally years building. When I asked questions to Claude about the topic, it parroted

almost word-for-word what I myself wrote. So please spare us the gaslighting about training AI on others' work," one user wrote on X. "This is pure evil. First, Anthropic used torrents to download books and data for training on top of the

accusations. Responding to a user who pointed out that his company also trains on vast datasets, Musk acknowledged that AI systems are indeed trained on large amounts of data. However, he argued that the difference is that Anthropic is being "smug" and "hypocritical" about it.

Attack on DeepSeek from the US government Anthropic's accusations also land at a time when the AI race between the US and China is intensifying, with the US government increasingly framing advanced AI as a matter of national security. Adding further heat to the US-China AI standoff, a recent report by Reuters claimed that DeepSeek trained its latest AI model using Nvidia's most advanced Blackwell chips despite US export restrictions. American officials reportedly believe the chips were clustered at a DeepSeek data centre in Inner Mongolia, raising questions over whether export controls were bypassed. Incidentally, both the attack from the US government and Anthropic on Chinese AI companies comes at a time when DeepSeek is set to release its next AI model. The company, which entered the public conversation with the launch of the sensational R1 AI model, is expected to release its next big AI model within a week. There are rumours that when the DeepSeek R2, the expected name of the AI model, comes out it will match or beat the best AI models from the US.



internet, without asking permission from anyone. Second, the Chinese companies paid for the API and did not get the information for free. Third, it seems like Anthropic is tracking people," another user claimed.

And when there is controversy involving a competitor, tech billionaire Elon Musk rarely misses the chance to weigh in. The xAI boss took direct aim at Anthropic, accusing the company of having trained on scraped data itself and of paying settlements related to such practices. "Anthropic is guilty of stealing training data at massive scale and has had to pay multi-billion dollar settlements for their theft. This is just a fact," Musk wrote. Of course, Musk's own company, xAI, is not entirely removed from similar

46 per cent of Indians say AI intimacy feels 'addictive like pornography': New survey

That finding comes from a Gleeden-IPSOS survey conducted among 1,500 respondents across Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities in India. The study examines how AI is reshaping dating, emotional connection and infidelity in modern Indian relationships.

The results suggest that AI is no longer just a digital assistant. It is becoming an intimate presence. Nearly half (46%) of respondents said their use of AI for emotional or sexual interaction felt addictive, similar to pornography. The survey shows that AI is being used across multiple layers of personal life. Around 63% said they have used AI to improve their seduction skills or enhance dating interactions, while 60% turned to it for sexual advice or counselling-style guidance. Another 64% reported using AI to navigate relationship challenges with their partner.

Beyond advice, engagement has become more direct: 54% said they had set up a virtual AI partner for sexual interaction, and 58% used AI for romantic or affectionate exchanges such as messages, kisses or companionship. Together, these findings indicate that AI is no longer operating in the background — it has become an active participant in emotional and sexual spaces. When AI intimacy meets real-world morality

The findings also point to a clear cultural tension.

While 49% of respondents admitted to choosing intimacy with AI over sex with their partner at least once, a majority (65%) still believe erotic AI interaction counts as cheating. Nearly 70% said they would be shocked to learn

their partner engaged in AI erotic exchanges, and roughly the same proportion said they would not feel comfortable sharing their AI chat history. The deepfake concern



Another notable finding: 49% of respondents reported creating deepfake images involving celebrities or known individuals.

Unlike AI intimacy, which often remains

private, deepfakes raise legal and ethical questions around consent, exploitation and digital boundaries. The trend highlights how quickly technological capability can move ahead of regulation and social norms.

Sybil Shiddell, Country Manager for Gleeden India, says, "We see an emotional change occurring as AI becomes not just a functional tool but also a place where people can seek validation, make fantasy, or find comfort. Many people are exploring this new world in secret, feeling guilty and curious at the same time, and yet many of these people feel their partner has been unfaithful for doing the same thing."

She adds, "It is not if AI will change our relationships, but in what way, how much will be affected, and how will these changes affect our emotional connections?"

Destroyed my life: Indian CEO sells firm, quits Sweden, blames xenophobia

What was meant to be a startup success story in Sweden has ended in an anguished exit for Indian entrepreneur Abhijith Nag Balasubramanyam. Ten months after founding a company, he has been forced to sell his business and return to India. What's behind the move? What challenges did he face? Read on to find out.

He built a startup from scratch in just six months to strengthen food security in Sweden. Created local jobs. But in less than 11 months, Abhijith Nag Balasubramanyam, an Indian entrepreneur, has been forced to sell his business and return to India due to a "hostile" and "xenophobic" immigration system. The development comes at a poignant moment -- amid rising anti-immigrant sentiment as Sweden tightens its citizenship policies. In a searing LinkedIn post, Abhijith said his exit was not by choice, but allegedly due to hurdles created by the Swedish migration agency, locally known as Migrationsverket. The agency basically oversees residence and work permits in Sweden. "I have sold the company as I am being forced to leave the country by the end of this month. This isn't an exit by choice. It is an eviction by an incompetent and increasingly hostile state apparatus," Abhijith wrote. Little did the entrepreneur anticipate this day when he founded Hydro Space Sweden AB in

May 2025. The microgreens company, which was started in the Swedish city of Skelleftea, was a searing success, receiving positive response from customers.

The focus of the venture was to strengthen local food security in northern Sweden. However, even as the business gained traction, his immigration case was unravelling. "In return, I was met with a lack of transparency and a total absence of human decency from Migrationsverket," Abhijith said.

In recent years, Sweden has pitched itself as an innovation hub open to global talent. However, Abhijith said his case underscored the wider climate of hostility towards international founders. "The reality of the Swedish 'startup-friendly' image is a facade," he said.

ORDEAL WITH SWEDISH MIGRATION

AGENCY

He also went on to describe in detail his ordeal while dealing with Migrationsverket.



Accusing the agency of "gross incompetence", the entrepreneur said the officials handling his case had "zero business acumen", failed to guide clearly on the documentation process, and changed the grounds of rejection at will. "My experience with the Swedish migration agency wasn't just a bureaucratic hurdle; it was a masterclass

in systemic dysfunction and unprofessionalism," he further wrote on LinkedIn.

Abhijith also spoke openly about the emotional toll the whole process had on him. He said the uncertainty had "destroyed" his mental health, prompting him to take a break and return to India. "I do not have the energy, or the desire, to spend my capital fighting a legal battle against a system that is fundamentally broken and seemingly xenophobic," Abhijith wrote. "Instead, I have decided to take a break and move back to my home country to work on my mental health," he further said before signing off. While the Swedish migration agency has not publicly responded to his claims, the incident comes at a time when the European nation has introduced new rules to cut immigration ahead of a parliamentary election in September. Earlier this month, Sweden brought in a new set of rules for citizenship applicants, mandating an eight-year stay, up from five, and a strict language and culture test.

Technology Executive Calls for Urgent Policy Reform as AI Reshapes Infrastructure, Markets, and National Competitiveness

CALIFORNIA, CA, UNITED STATES, February 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ — As artificial intelligence adoption accelerates across industries, a new policy-focused analysis argues that governments and institutions must urgently rethink energy infrastructure, workforce development, and regulatory accountability to avoid deepening inequality and geopolitical risk.

In a newly released thought leadership paper, technology executive and industry strategist Rachit Lohani outlines how AI is moving beyond software innovation and into foundational systems such as electricity grids, water usage, urban development, education models, and national security frameworks.

"Artificial intelligence is no longer just a technology story," Lohani said. "It is an infrastructure story, a labor story, and ultimately a governance story. If policymakers treat it as merely another productivity tool, they will miss the structural shifts already underway."

Infrastructure and Energy PressuresThe analysis highlights the growing strain AI workloads are placing on national power grids and cooling systems. Large-scale data centers require reliable, continuous electricity, prompting renewed debate around nuclear energy, renewable integration,



and grid modernization.

Countries including the United States, China, members of the European Union, and India are increasing investment in domestic AI capacity, often pairing public funding with private-sector capital from major technology firms such as Meta, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft. These investments, Lohani argues, will shape global competitiveness for decades.

"AI will reward nations that treat energy, compute, and data as strategic assets," he said. "Those that fail to invest in grid reliability and

sovereign AI capability risk long-term economic disadvantage."

The Rise of AI Cities

The paper also explores how AI infrastructure is reshaping geographic power. Cities hosting large data centers and research hubs are likely to experience shifts in real estate demand, tax base expansion, and workforce composition. At the same time, regions without comparable investment may face widening economic gaps. "This is not evenly distributed innovation," Lohani noted. "It will cluster. And clustering changes political influence."

Professions Under Transition

Rather than predicting mass job elimination, the analysis argues that AI will redefine professional value. Routine cognitive production—from drafting reports to writing code—will increasingly be automated. Human value will shift toward judgment, accountability, oversight, and ethical reasoning. "Expertise will not disappear," Lohani said. "But surface-level expertise will become abundant. The premium will move to trust and responsibility."

Education at a Crossroads

The report calls for significant reform in educational systems, arguing that memorization-based evaluation models are increasingly obsolete in an AI-augmented environment. Lohani suggests schools and universities must prioritize synthesis, interdisciplinary thinking, and ethical literacy.

"If education systems do not adapt, private AI-native alternatives will fill the gap," he said. "Public institutions must decide whether they want to lead or react." A Civilizational Reordering The central thesis of the paper frames AI not merely as an efficiency revolution, but as a structural reordering of economic and institutional power.

"AI is simultaneously an efficiency revolution and a power-concentration revolution," Lohani said.



Delhi's OG mall Ansal Plaza is now a ghost town

Not every generation might be able to relate to Ansal Plaza or its existence. But that doesn't change the fact that it was Delhi's OG mall. But today, its condition is as good as a

Nothing lasts forever, not even the places that once defined a city. In Delhi, that truth feels particularly stark when you walk into Ansal Plaza.

Inaugurated in 1999 in South Delhi, it was the capital's first mall, a novelty in a city that had not yet discovered weekend mall culture. Ask a Delhi Boomer or a Millennial, and they will speak of it with a fondness usually reserved for first loves. And those who grew up orbiting around DLF Promenade or Select Citywalk will never quite understand what it meant.

Ansal Plaza was where Delhi first rehearsed the idea of modern urban leisure. It housed the city's first Shoppers Stop. McDonald's was not just a fast-food joint; it was a dating destination. The amphitheatre hosted concerts and film promotions. Music World (faded post digital shift) sold cassettes and CDs to a generation that had not yet met streaming. Journalist Deebashree Mohanty remembers watching it rise, brick by brick. Her father, then a senior bureaucrat, had government housing in the adjacent Hudco Place complex. "When Ansals announced that a mall would be coming up within the same gated complex, it felt like the centre of the world had arrived at our doorstep," she recalls.

There was McDonald's, of course. Shoppers Stop. Shoe stores. An ethnic wear brand that everyone recognised. A pub catering to a budding party crowd. But the real draw was the central atrium, which doubled as a performance space. "I remember attending concerts there, and one particularly big event when

Palash and Euphoria performed," she says.

Ansal Plaza was more than just a shopping complex. For young adults growing up in that era, it was a concept, a hang-out spot, and a symbol of a new kind of urban life. Most importantly, it was the first place where people could simply go and "chill."

India Today recently reported on how Noida's once-thriving The Great India Place — better known as GIP — now stands largely abandoned, stripped of its former buzz. Once a weekend staple for NCR families, parts of it resemble a shell of what they used to be. It made me wonder: what has become of Delhi's first mall? So I went to find out.

Now, it resembles a ghost town

The approach to Ansal Plaza is poorly lit. The signage is absent. The parking lot, once chaotic, is almost empty. Inside too, the silence is palpable.

McDonald's and KFC are among the few outlets that seem to function steadily. A gaming arcade, Game Palacio, occupies space on the premises, but footfall is thin. Apart from that, the mall is largely populated by shop staff, security guards and delivery executives picking up orders.

The escalators are not functional. The toilets unclean. The lifts are unreliable. Some sections look half-renovated; others appear forgotten. There are paan stains everywhere, and taking the stairs truly feels daunting because the mall is so empty.

Upper floors house a government-owned bank office and a few private companies — more functional than commercial.

A man who described himself as the

'caretaker' of a pub in the mall, and asked not to be named, says business is barely sustainable. "We pay around Rs 3.5 lakh in rent. The footfall is so low that we cannot recover it. The lifts don't function properly. The escalators stop. When we approach management, nothing changes. We are just barely surviving," he says.

He pointed to another concern: a liquor shop within the premises. "We have requested a separate entry and exit for it. Not everyone who walks in comes with the best intentions. It makes the environment feel unsafe." That unease is not abstract. During my visit, there were people passing a comment or two and staring, which did feel a little uneasy (not something you expect inside a mall). The empty corridors, dim staircases and near-deserted floors lend the place a distinctly unsettling air. Retailers admit business is sparse. "There is no footfall," several say bluntly. A jewellery store employee explains their survival differently:

"We have an existing client base. We don't depend on walk-ins."

And then there are the spas, operational, but about which no one is willing to speak on record.

A second life

While Ansal Plaza has long-lost its sheen, it did get a second life in 2016 after having virtually gone into oblivion the first time.

They relaunched the mall with 16 new brands, with Decathlon being the anchor brand.

Did it work? Absolutely not! Within a year, things started taking an ugly turn. Decathlon, which anchored the relaunch, closed around 2023, and the rest, as you know, is history.

Why did it fail?

Some point to competition. As newer malls in Saket and Vasant Kunj offered multiplexes, sprawling food courts and better infrastructure, Ansal Plaza struggled to keep up, even post-relaunch. Others blame management neglect. Tim-



Love In Style: 7 Locations In South Africa That Make A Dreamy Backdrops For Indian Pre-Wedding Shoots



Not too long ago, many Indian couples engaged briefly with AI-generated pre-wedding images; a playful, short-lived trend that hinted at something deeper: pre-wedding photography in India is evolving. Couples today want more than staged portraits or digital illusions; they want experiences. They want settings that breathe, landscapes that hold emotion, and memories that feel lived-in rather than constructed.

This shift is also reflected in the way Indians are travelling. South Africa has long enjoyed strong interest from Indian travellers; even a decade ago, the destination saw a noteworthy 27% rise in arrivals driven by weddings and related travel, a momentum that continues to hold steady today.

It's easy to understand why. South Africa offers the kind of beauty that doesn't need embellishment: vineyards soaked in golden light, dramatic coastlines, serene lagoons, iconic mountains, and safari landscapes brushed in shades of amber. For Indian couples seeking pre-wedding moments that are cinematic yet authentic, South Africa offers landscapes that naturally complement their love story. From sun-kissed vineyards and dramatic coastlines to serene lagoons and majestic mountains, every location feels alive.

Whether couples want romance, adventure, or timeless elegance, the country's diverse scenery provides the ideal backdrop. Here are 7 of the most breathtaking spots that one must visit if you are looking to conduct stunning pre-wedding shoots:

Cape Town & Table Mountain

Cape Town is where drama meets elegance in the most astonishing way. Picture yourself standing atop Table

Mountain, the city unravelling beneath you, the Atlantic waves glinting under the sun, while the coloured houses of Bo-Kaap add playful splashes of pastels in the background. The soft sands of the Clifton Beaches invite barefoot, windswept shots that feel effortless and timeless. As the sun dips behind Signal Hill, everything is bathed in a rose-gold glow, turning ordinary moments into ethereal, cinematic frames. Every alleyway, cliffside, and waterfront feels like it was created for romance and telling stories, which makes Cape Town a versatile canvas for every style of pre-wedding photography.

Cape Winelands – Stellenbosch & Franschhoek

If romance had a colour, it would be the soft golden light that spills across the Winelands every evening. In Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, vineyards stretch out like gentle waves, each row of vines offering a perfect natural frame just waiting for a story to unfold. The elegant Cape Dutch manor houses; with their charming gables and old-world grace; bring a touch of European charm, but with a warmth that feels unmistakably South African. As you wander past shaded courtyards and quiet country lanes, it's easy to feel like the world has slowed down just for you. The Winelands don't just look beautiful; they make every moment feel intimate, calm, and effortlessly romantic.

The Garden Route – Wilderness & Plettenberg Bay

For couples who dream of soft, airy, nature-filled photographs, the Garden Route feels like it was crafted just for them. At sunrise, Knysna's lagoon glows like liquid gold, turning the water

into a perfect mirror for those slow, tender moments. Wilderness offers beaches wrapped in a gentle morning mist, where the sky and sea blend into one soft gradient. And Plettenberg Bay? It's where rugged cliffs meet serene turquoise water, creating hidden corners that feel like your own private world. Every stop along the route brings its own quiet poetry; gentle waves, rustling forests, wide-open skies; giving photographers endless ways to capture love in its most natural form.

Kruger National Park & Luxury Safari Lodges

There's something incredibly grounding about love in the middle of the African bush. In Kruger's luxury lodges, the world feels vast yet deeply connected; golden horizons stretching endlessly, ancient trees watching over the landscape, and the occasional silhouette of wildlife making the moment feel almost surreal. Sunrise here wraps everything in soft, dreamlike light, while sunsets are rich and warm, perfect for photographs that feel timeless. Whether it's an intimate moment on your private deck or a dramatic shot in the open savannah, Kruger adds a sense of adventure and soul that few places can match. It's romance with a heartbeat.

Durban & KwaZulu-Natal's Coastline

If your love story is vibrant, fun, and full of energy, Durban and the KwaZulu-Natal coastline are your playground. With palm-lined beaches, warm seas, and a cheerful, tropical buzz, the region is perfect for couples who want their photos to feel alive. Whether it's the glow of uMhlanga Beach, the unique beauty of Hole in the Wall at Thompsons Bay, or the striking lines of uShaka Pier, every spot adds a

splash of colour and joy. This is where sunlit laughter, playful waves, and breezy portraits come together to create a pre-wedding shoot that feels light-hearted, youthful, and full of warmth.

Drakensberg Mountains

If your heart leans toward dramatic landscapes and a little bit of magic, the Drakensberg will draw you in instantly. Its towering peaks, rolling green valleys, and misty, moody skies make you feel like you've stepped into a fantasy world. Waterfalls spill down cliff faces, clouds drift low enough to touch, and every turn reveals a view that feels bigger than life itself. But the real magic is how the mountains make intimate moments feel so profound; two people, together, framed by nature in its most powerful form. Morning, noon, or evening, the Drakensberg adds a rare, almost soulful depth to every shot.

Blyde River Canyon & the Panorama Route

The Panorama Route is where nature goes full cinematic. Think emerald valleys, sharp cliffs, and vast canyon views that make you stop and breathe a little deeper. Iconic spots like God's Window, Bourke's Luck Potholes, and the Three Rondavels offer dramatic, fashion-forward frames with sunlight dancing across the landscape. Every viewpoint feels like it was designed for storytelling: grand, sweeping, and filled with emotion. Here, couples become part of something bigger than the frame: a celebration of nature's power and beauty. The result? Photos that feel bold, adventurous, and truly unforgettable.

What was on menu at PM's AI Summit dinner with world leaders

As the India AI Impact Summit 2026 continues at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, the conversations extend beyond tech and policy to a gala dinner hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — an evening where India served world leaders a seasonal, soulful taste of its culinary heritage.

The mood in New Delhi is currently centred around artificial intelligence and a lot of tech talk. The capital is hosting the India AI Impact Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, where it is not just about algorithms and codes, but also about the buzz of the future taking shape.

On Wednesday, February 18, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted an intimate dinner for the visiting world leaders. The dinner menu wasn't just about indulgence. Every course felt like a quiet ode to India's culinary identity.

The specially curated menu included the aroma of humble grains, native spices and seasonal produce that have sustained communities for generations. A special focus was placed on GI-tagged ingredients — produce that is deeply tied to specific regions and local know-how. Millets and indigenous crops also found a place, drawing attention to ingredients that are not only nutritious but climate-smart.

The evening unfolded course by course, each dish carrying a name as evocative as its flavours. Here's a look at the menu exclusively accessed by India Today.



It began with Varniila 'Colourful and Vivid' - Crisp baby spinach paired with yoghurt sphere, tamarind-date sweetness, a rustic jowar crunch, and cilantro infused with flavours of Old Delhi.

The main course was a tribute to the culinary heritage of Uttarakhand. The entre was Sasya 'Harvest – Produce of the Field', a celebration of India's winter bounty. The centrepiece was the much-loved GI-tagged Munsyari Rajma Gilawat, known for its creamy texture. It was paired with pahadi rice, jhangora pulao,

alongside Kumaoni aloo aur subz ke gutke — the mountain-style potatoes tempered in mustard oil and local spices. A silky tomato-anari sauce tied the platter together. Next up were freshly baked breads. There was Taftaan, the soft, lightly leavened bread dotted with melon seeds, and Kashmiri Girda, a valley staple with its characteristic browned surface and tender crumb. What felt indulgent yet thoughtfully composed was Nisarga 'Nature's Creation', a refined spin on nostalgia. The Rasmalai Tres Leches

featured a moist chena sponge soaked in sweetened milk, layered with winterberry compote and finished with a pearl millet streusel.

The meal concluded, as many Indian meals do, with light yet refreshing beverages — Kashmiri kahwa, filter coffee, and Darjeeling tea. It also included Indian Rose and Mishri Gulkand Chocolate Leaf. The world leaders were not just treated to a lavish Indian spread, but were also given a glimpse into the country's diverse cultures and living traditions. The evening unfolded as a sensory experience, where food met festivity. Classical musical renditions filled the air, while graceful dance performances brought regional stories to life on stage. The highly anticipated India AI Impact Summit was inaugurated on Monday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, setting the tone for a week packed with big ideas and global collaboration. Bringing together hundreds of key dignitaries, innovators and policymakers from across the world, the summit has turned the capital into a buzzing hub of future-forward conversations.

March in Oakville: Festivals, Food and Family Adventures Take Centre Stage

OAKVILLE – March is shaping up to be one of the most vibrant months of the year in Oakville, with a packed calendar of festivals, cultural celebrations, live performances and family-friendly attractions. Visit Oakville is encouraging both residents and visitors to take full advantage of the season, highlighting a diverse lineup of experiences that blend community spirit, creativity and outdoor fun. Rebecca Edgar, Executive Director of Visit Oakville, says March reflects the town's unique energy. From maple syrup traditions and interactive art installations to culinary celebrations and cultural festivals, Oakville offers something for every age and interest. Whether planning a day trip, a weekend getaway or simply exploring close to home, visitors can expect memorable moments throughout the month.

Taste of Oakville and Maple Syrup Festival Sweeten the Season

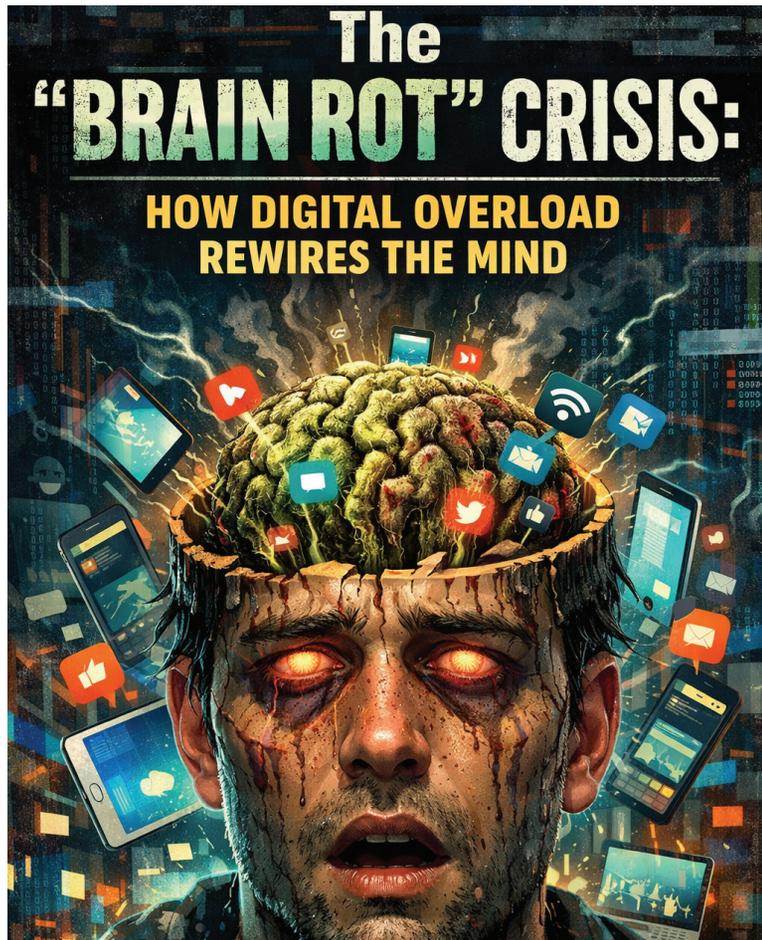
Food lovers can savour the final days of Taste of Oakville, running until March 15. More than 50 local restaurants are offering special prix fixe menus starting at \$20 for lunch and \$30 for dinner. Select venues also feature live music on Tuesday evenings,

while unique dining domes at The King's Arms and 7 Enoteca add a cozy seasonal touch to the experience.

Meanwhile, the beloved Maple Syrup Festival returns to Bronte Creek Provincial Park on March 1, 7, 8, 14 to 22, and 28 and 29. Families can learn how maple syrup is produced, explore the historic Spruce Lane Farmhouse, enjoy wagon rides and indulge in fresh pancakes topped with local syrup. The event runs throughout March Break and on weekends, making it a seasonal highlight for visitors of all ages. Cultural Celebrations and Immersive Downtown Experiences Oakville's cultural calendar also features meaningful community gatherings. The town's Eid Festival on March 14 and Eid Bazaar on March 19 offer opportunities to celebrate culture, connection and festive traditions. Later in the month, Downtown Oakville's Towne Square transforms into an interactive art space with Loop, an immersive light and sound installation running from March 14 to April 6. Visitors can pair the experience with lakeside strolls, boutique shopping and dining at downtown restaurants. History enthusiasts can visit the Oakville Museum from March 17 to 20 for spe-

cial March Break craft workshops and guided tours. Designed for children aged four to twelve and their families, the program offers hands-on activities such as terrarium building and woven art projects while providing insight into the town's heritage. St. Patrick's Day on March 17 adds to the excitement, with local venues including The Firehall, The King's Arms, The Queen's Head, Temple Bar, Harper's Landing and The Oakville Pump & Patio hosting festive celebrations. Outdoor Adventures and Family Fun Attractions As temperatures gradually warm, Oakville's parks, trails and gardens invite families outdoors. Lakeside walks, heritage trails and scenic green spaces provide the perfect setting for fresh air and activity. Trails also remain suitable for cross-country skiing or snowshoeing during lingering winter conditions. For indoor excitement, families can explore a range of attractions throughout town. iFly Oakville offers indoor skydiving thrills, while Aerosports Oakville delivers trampoline fun. Dave and Buster's hosts arcade games and special events, and the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts presents Curious George and the Golden Meatball on March 18.

The "Brain Rot" Crisis: How Digital Overload Rewires the Mind



The term "brain rot" has evolved from a niche internet slang into a clinical concern as studies increasingly explore how relentless screen time affects the human mind. Defined as the feeling of cognitive exhaustion after hours of consuming low-quality digital content, "brain rot" is now being scrutinized for its long-term impact on attention, memory, and mental health.

The Science of Distraction

According to Catherine Price, author of *How to Break Up With Your Phone*, the constant interruptions from notifications and the habit of "topic-switching" while scrolling fragment our attention. This makes it significantly harder to engage in deep, focused work. Research suggests that scrolling through short-form videos on platforms like TikTok or Instagram is linked to poorer cognition and increased anxiety.

Longitudinal data from a 2025 study of 7,000 children found that high screen use was associated with reduced cortical thickness—the brain's outer layer responsible for higher-level thinking and decision-making.

The Dopamine Loop and Sleep

Mitch Prinstein of the American Psychological Association notes that screen time often prompts a search for dopamine hits, which can lead to impulsivity and ADHD-like symptoms. Furthermore, screens often steal time from the recommended eight hours of sleep. In adolescents, chronic sleep deprivation reduces white matter, the substance that coats neurons and accelerates brain signals, which is critical for cognitive development. **AI Chatbots and Cognitive Shortcuts** A striking study by MIT researcher Nataliya

Kos'myna looked at how AI chatbots affect learning. Students using chatbots for essay prompts showed significantly less brain activity and struggled to quote from their own work immediately after finishing. Kos'myna warns that our brains naturally "do shortcuts," and by outsourcing tasks to AI, we may lose the skills we stop practicing. **Expert Tips for a Digital Detox**

To mitigate these effects, experts suggest several simple strategies:

Bedroom-Free Zones: Keep devices out of the bedroom to prioritize sleep hygiene.

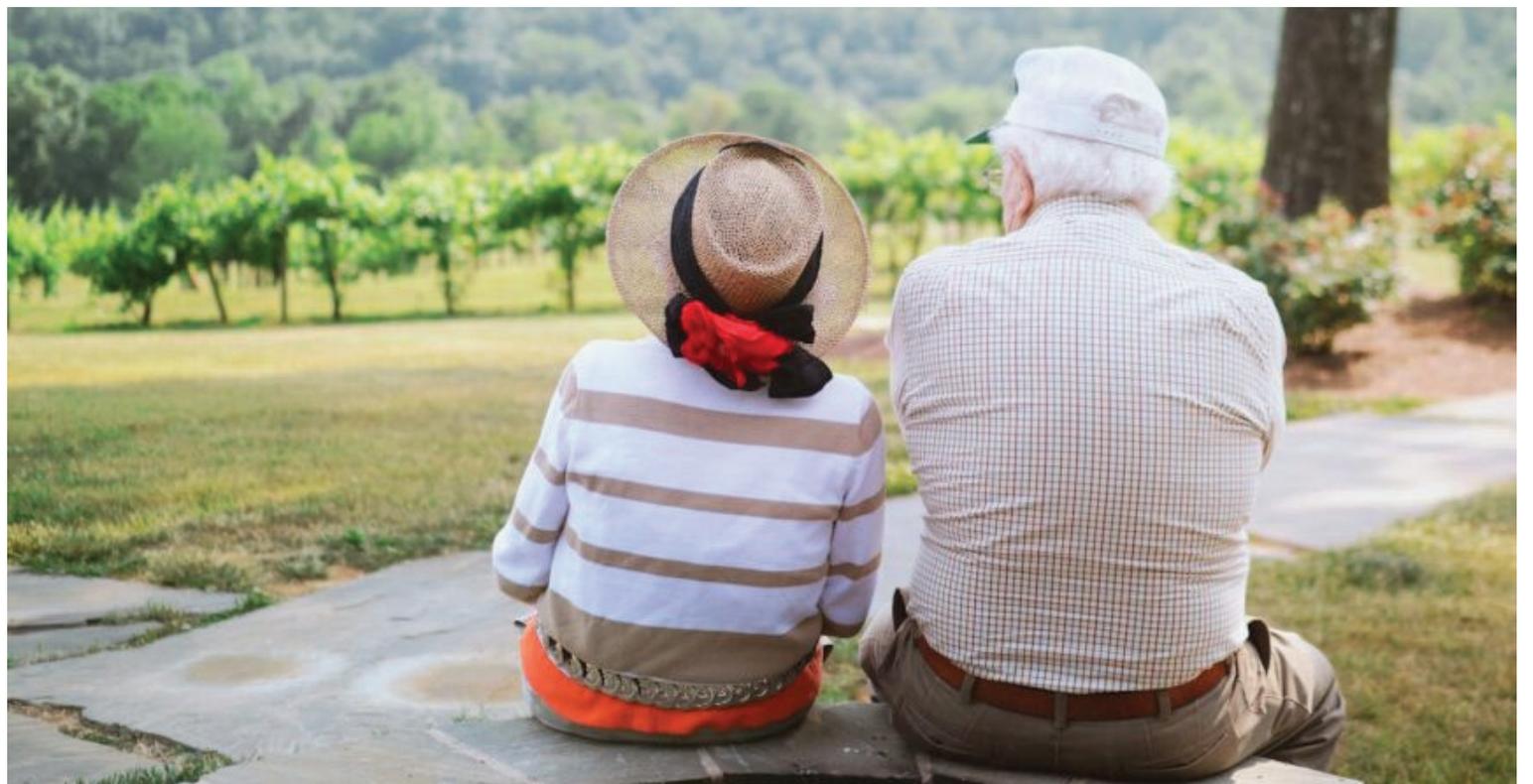
Conscious Usage: Be mindful when using AI; recognize that there is always a cognitive cost to outsourcing a task.

Embrace Friction: Avoid too much digital ease. A little struggle is necessary for the brain to maintain advanced abilities.

Boosting Senior Health: Simple Movements for Strength, Balance, and Flexibility

For seniors, simple movements performed consistently can lead to significant improvements in strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health. Engaging in regular physical activity plays a crucial role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for older adults. Such movements can include low-impact exercises that are easy to incorporate into daily routines. Research indicates that even minimal physical activity can provide substantial health benefits for seniors. These benefits extend beyond physical strength to encompass mental well-being and emotional stability as well. Consistency in practice is key, as repeated movements help solidify improvements and foster a sense of accomplishment.

Incorporating movements tailored to individual abilities is essential for safety and effectiveness. Seniors are advised to focus on exercises that promote stability and coordination, as these are



integral to preventing falls and injuries. Flexibility exercises can also aid in maintaining joint function and mobility as one ages. Structured programs and community classes are available to assist seniors in pursuing these movements.

These programs often emphasize the importance of social interaction, creating opportunities for seniors to connect and engage with peers while they exercise. This social component can enhance motivation and adherence to a

regular exercise regimen. Overall, the impact of regular, simple movements cannot be understated for senior populations. As awareness of these benefits grows, there is an increasing emphasis on developing

supportive environments that promote physical activity among older adults. Through consistent practice, seniors can achieve remarkable improvements in their well-being and enjoy a more active lifestyle.

Met Gala 2026: Theme Has Been Revealed But Do You Know The 8 Rules Stars Must Follow?

The world's most glamorous event also happens to be one of the strictest.



Met Gala 2026: Theme Has Been Revealed But Do You Know The 8 Rules Stars Must Follow?

The countdown to fashion's biggest night has officially begun. The Met Gala returns on May 4, 2026 — and this year's theme, "Fashion Is Art," promises dramatic looks, bold creativity and unforgettable red carpet moments. But while the world watches celebrities serve their most iconic outfits, very few people know what actually happens behind those famous museum doors — or the strict rules that keep the night running smoothly.



You Can't Just Show Up, Even If You're Famous

First things first: you cannot attend without an invite. The guest list is controlled by none other than Anna Wintour, the long-time mastermind behind the event. Even brands that spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on tables don't get full control over who sits there. Every guest must be personally approved. No exceptions.



Yes, Celebrities Actually Pay To Attend

Once you get invited, you still need to pay. And it's not cheap. Tickets reportedly range from \$50,000 to \$75,000 per person. But it's not just a party — the event is a fundraiser for the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute. Guests get an exclusive exhibition preview, cocktails, dinner and access to one of the most private celebrity gatherings in the world.



Seating Is Carefully Planned (And Slightly Strategic)

This isn't a sit-where-you-like dinner. Every seat is planned months in advance by organisers and event planners. The goal? Perfect chemistry at every table, and no awkward encounters. Yes, that includes making sure exes aren't seated face-to-face.



No Phones, No Social Media... In Theory

Those iconic celebrity bathroom selfies you've seen online? Technically forbidden. The event has a strict no-phone, no-social-media policy to keep the evening private and encourage real conversations. Of course, stars occasionally bend this rule, but officially, the Met Gala is meant to be camera-free inside.



Even The Menu Has Rules

And finally, the most unexpected rule of all. Certain foods are banned. Garlic, onions and chives are reportedly off the menu. The reason? Strong flavours... and even stronger breath. Because nothing should distract from couture — not even dinner.

Sleep Divorce: Why Couples Are Choosing To Sleep In Separate Beds For Better Health



seeing sleep as health care rather than symbolism.

From a medical standpoint, Dr. Sunil Kumar K, Lead Consultant – Interventional Pulmonology & Sleep Medicine at Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru, agrees. He says, “By sleeping apart, they can get deeper sleep, feel more refreshed, improve mood, and avoid arguments about bedtime routines, while still loving and caring for each other.”

The Hidden Toll Of Poor Sleep

Sleep deprivation doesn't just cause grogginess. Over time, it quietly erodes both physical and emotional well-being. “Physiologically, poor sleep contributes to fatigue, lowered immunity, metabolic strain and headaches. Psychologically, it weakens emotional regulation and stress tolerance,” notes Dr. Chhabra.

Dr. Sunil expands on the risks: “Poor sleep can increase the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, weight gain and heart problems, while emotionally it makes people irritable, anxious and less productive.”

The ripple effect often shows

up at home first. Small disagreements escalate faster. Patience runs thin. Couples sometimes mistake chronic exhaustion for relationship issues.

Can Sleeping Apart Improve Intimacy?

Counterintuitive as it sounds, experts say better sleep often leads to better connection. “When the decision is mutual, couples actually report improved intimacy,” says Dr. Chhabra. Rested partners communicate more thoughtfully and show more empathy.

Research echoes this. Dr. Sunil explains, “Better and uninterrupted sleep reduces daily tension and supports better communication, often strengthening emotional and physical closeness despite not sharing the same sleeping space.”

Holistic life coach Richa Agarwal frames it simply: “Sleep is the restart button for the nervous system – an exhausted brain cannot love unconditionally.” In other words, sometimes distance at night creates warmth during the day.

Fix The Disruptors First

Separate beds aren't always the first solution. Many sleep problems have practical fixes. Common disruptors include snoring, mismatched schedules, screen use, and untreated disorders like insomnia or sleep apnea. “Earplugs, white noise machines, shared bedtime routines, limiting screens, or seeking medical help for snoring can make a big difference,” says Dr. Sunil. Agarwal also suggests calming rituals and technology boundaries before bed to reset the body's natural rhythm.

The Emotional Balance

That said, communication is key. Sleeping separately without discussion can feel isolating. “Physical separation becomes a concern only when it turns into emotional disengagement,” warns Dr. Chhabra. “Reassurance, affection, and shared routines prevent feelings of rejection,” adds Dr. Sunil. Maintaining closeness – through conversations, cuddles, or time together – ensures the decision remains about health, not distance.

For decades, sharing a bed has been treated as a quiet symbol of intimacy. But as modern life grows busier and sleep becomes increasingly elusive, many couples are rethinking that tradition. Instead of sacrificing rest for togetherness, they're choosing something unexpected: separate beds – sometimes even separate rooms – to protect their health.

Known as sleep divorce, the trend isn't about emotional distance. It's about recognising sleep as a biological necessity. And according to doctors and mental health experts, prioritising

rest may actually strengthen relationships rather than strain them.

what Exactly Is Sleep Divorce?

In clinical practice, Dr. Shweta Chhabra, Consultant Psychiatrist at Apollo Clinic, Bellandur, Bengaluru, explains that many couples are choosing this arrangement not due to conflict but exhaustion. “Sleep divorce simply refers to partners choosing separate beds or rooms to protect sleep quality while remaining emotionally connected,” she says, adding that it reflects a shift toward

India's 10-minute house help craze is growing, but the math is not math-ing

Urban India has a new obsession, and unsurprisingly, it feeds its endless appetite for convenience. This time, it's apps that promise a house help at your doorstep within 10 minutes. For now, workers signing up are earning well, and customers are enjoying discounted rates. But how long can this last?

It was a Saturday, and Shivani Mathur was gearing up for the day when she received a voice note on WhatsApp from her house help: “Didi, aaj main nahi aaungi (I won't be coming today).” From experience, she knew a message like that could not be argued with. But this Saturday was different. She had guests coming over.

The 43-year-old, who lives in a high-rise society in Noida, quickly turned to her tower's residents' group chat and asked if anyone could send their house help to help her out. Soon after, a woman in a purple uniform rang her doorbell and took charge. She cleaned the house, washed the dishes, and even helped with kitchen prep. She kneaded the dough, chopped vegetables, cleaned coriander and mint leaves for the chutney. Everything was done in almost two hours, and under Rs

200. Since being introduced to the service, it has become her go-to option whenever her regular house help is on leave.

Mathur is not alone. Across urban India, households are increasingly turning to apps whenever their regular house help is on leave or when an extra pair of hands is needed. What was once managed through neighbourhood networks and phone calls is now resolved with a few taps on a screen.

Get a house help at your doorstep in 10 minutes

This is an expansion of the digital roster of essentials in modern Indian homes. After Ola and Uber for instant commuting, Zomato and Swiggy for instant food delivery, MakeMyTrip and Goibibo for instant travel bookings, Blinkit, BigBasket and Instamart for instant groceries, and

YesMadam and UrbanClap for instant salon services at home, there are now apps that let you call a house help to your doorstep within 10 minutes.

Snabbit, Pronto, Urban Clap's InstaHelp, and Broomies are among the top players in the instant domestic help space and are already popular in cities like Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Pune. Snabbit grew from 1 lakh orders a month in August to 3 lakh in October and is now close to completing 8.5 lakh orders in February. Urban Company's 'instant maid service', InstaHelp, launched in March 2025, reached a new milestone on February 22, crossing 50,000 daily bookings.

Need someone to do the dishes for the day? Want help clearing that huge pile of clothes from the bed and neatly arranging them in the wardrobe? Or

someone to clean up the house the morning after a long, chaotic party? Planning to treat your kids to gajar ka halwa but dreading the laborious task of grating carrots? These are the everyday problems the instant house help industry, India's next ambitious market in the making, is trying to solve.

The process is fairly simple: download the app, request an instant service (or schedule it in advance), select the number of hours required, and that's it. The cost? Even more unbelievable. For Rs 100, you can get an hour of service from a trained professional on Urban Company. On Snabbit, you can opt for a package of Rs 149 for three one-hour visits, which comes to about Rs 50 per hour of service.

Abysmal: Konkona on only 3 per cent films being directed by female filmmakers

Noting that only 3 per cent of the 2,500 films produced in India last year were directed by women, Konkona Sen Sharma has called the situation "abysmal". She said anything less than 50 per cent is



The conversation around gender parity in Indian cinema has resurfaced once again, this time with actor-director Konkona Sen Sharma strongly calling out the dismal representation of women behind the camera. Referring to the statistic that only 3 per cent of the 2,500 films produced in India last year were directed by women, Konkona described the situation as "abysmal" and said it is far from acceptable. In a recent chat with Variety India, Konkona, who is gearing up for the release of *Accused*, spoke about the need for better representation in filmmaking. She was joined by *Accused* co-star Pratibha Ranta and director Anubhuti Kashyap.

Konkona said, "It's a sad reality. The numbers are very, very small – 3 per cent is abysmal. It should be at least 50 per cent. Anything below that is not acceptable." She added, "Is it better than before? Probably. But that shouldn't be the benchmark. We must focus on where we need to go." Highlighting the systemic challenges, she further said, "Often, decisions are driven by economics rather than the goal of building a more

equitable society and that gets in the way. At the end of the day, it's about representation. We need more women stepping forward and choosing these careers."

Sharing her perspective, Anubhuti said, "I think we are on the right track. In my personal experience, I haven't seen instances where people weren't chosen because of their gender – at least not to my knowledge. It also has to do with how our country and system have functioned."

Anubhuti further said, "Patriarchy has been strong for a long time. Women have started entering these professions and spaces much later, and they didn't receive opportunities earlier." She added, "The numbers are just beginning to grow stronger, and I hope it happens very soon. But I don't think at present it's because someone is consciously choosing not to pick women."

Accused is written by Sima Agarwal and Yash Keshwani. The psychological thriller is backed by Karan Johar, Adar Poonawalla and Somen Mishra. The film is set to release on Netflix on February 27.

High Court halts *The Kerala Story 2*: Don't release rights until court decides

The Kerala High Court has directed the makers of *The Kerala Story 2* to halt the release of the film's rights until it decides on petitions challenging its censor board certification. The court observed that the concerns raised by petitioners are "probably genuine."

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday directed the makers of the controversial film not to release the rights to the film until the court delivers its decision on the petitions challenging its certification. Hearing the matter, the High Court observed that the apprehensions raised by the petitioners were "probably genuine" and asked the producers to hold back the release of the film's rights scheduled for tomorrow. "Do not release the rights for the movie tomorrow. Wait for the hearing to conclude and for the court to decide on the petitions," the bench said. The court also questioned the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) over the certification granted to the film. "You have not even given an 'A' certificate to the film. You've given U/A," the bench remarked. The court further noted that the makers were not keen on screening the film immediately and observed that there was a shortage of time to examine the matter in detail.

Makers cite other films with state name in the title

Appearing for the CBFC, counsel argued that several films have been made using the names of Indian states and cities,



citing examples such as *Go Goa Gone*, *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* and *Delhi Belly* to counter objections regarding the film's title.

Counsel for the producers contended that the movie narrates the story of women survivors and that the petition raises broader questions beyond the content of the film. "The main question is not about the movie, but whether this is a petition filed by an aggrieved party, a public interest petition, or something else," the counsel submitted.

"About the dignity of India, not Kerala"

They further argued that the relief sought, issuance of a writ to quash the certification granted to the film, is legally untenable. "Kerala is also a part of India. We cannot isolate Kerala from India. What is being sought is something unknown to the law," the counsel said, adding that references to the "dignity of Kerala" were constitutionally misplaced. "There is no question of 'dignity of Kerala'; it is the dignity of India," the court was told. After hearing initial submissions from both sides, the High Court recorded the undertaking given by counsel for the

makers that they would wait for the court's decision before proceeding with the release. The hearing was adjourned for the day, with arguments remaining inconclusive. The matter will continue tomorrow. **All about *The Kerala Story 2*** *The Kerala Story 2* found itself at the centre of a fresh controversy earlier this week, echoing the turbulence that surrounded its predecessor. Directed by Kamakhya Narayan Singh and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, the film claims that young Hindu women are lured into interfaith marriages, only to be assaulted, stripped of their rights, and forced to convert to Islam. The trailer sparked intense debate, also drawing political attention. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan publicly criticised the film, calling it "false propaganda" and "poisonous". The makers earlier revealed in an interview with *India Today* that the film was granted a U/A rating to the film -- a move challenged in a petition at the Kerala High Court.

The Kerala Story 2 features Ulka Gupta, Aditi Bhatia and Aishwarya Ojha in the lead roles. The film is scheduled for release on February 27.

A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms finale proves GoT universe struggles with endings

After Episode 5's powerful Trial of Seven, A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms looked ready to fix Westeros' long-standing finale problem. However, the Season 1 ending played it safe, and the GoT problem lingered.



ground. While it maintained what the season had built, it didn't take it any further. For viewers who have followed Game of Thrones from Ned Stark's execution to its much-debated final chapter, the rhythm looked familiar. The most powerful blows landed in the second-last episode, Episode 5. The finale then should have focused on aftermath. It instead focused on plain conversations and looming sadness. Episode 5 of A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms had all the markings of a turning point. Duncan was left with no other option but to say yes to the trial against the Targaryens, the dragon blood. A hedge knight was backed into a corner, choosing trial because the alternative was mutilation. It stood as a public test of whether honour has any currency in a world run by bloodlines. The episode had weight, both emotional and physical, and that weight was visible in every moment. The Trial of Seven (a battle between Ser Duncan's seven warriors and

royal blood) worked because it tightened everything the season had been exploring: class resentment, silent ambition, the fragile space Duncan occupies in elite circles. Even Egg's (a Targaryen prince who chooses to be a squire to Duncan) watchful silence during those moments added depth. For Egg (Dexter Sol Ansell), this was his first close look at how power actually operates. After an hour like that, escalation felt inevitable. Instead, the finale provides a settlement. The political order remains intact. Duncan survives and moves forward. Egg continues his journey, changed but not shaken in a way that alters the landscape. The questions about authority and legitimacy raised in Episode 5 are resolved more quickly than expected. The larger issue is emotional. The finale does not provide catharsis. It does not allow the audience to stay with the psychological impact of what Duncan endured. We do not see a deeper internal

struggle. Egg, too, absorbs the lesson quietly, but the episode does not explore how that lesson unsettles him. The storytelling remains subtle, almost cautious, at a point where a stronger emotional release could have lifted the season higher. Instead of leaving viewers energised or unsettled, it leaves them calm. It does not push the story into new territory, nor does it create urgent curiosity for Season 2. A few tensions raised earlier in the season fade without strong closure, making the ending feel complete on paper but not entirely fulfilling in spirit. The series is smaller in scope than its predecessor. It is not about thrones at war or cities burning. But structure still matters. When a penultimate episode peaks so clearly, the finale carries expectation, whether the story wants it or not. This was the opportunity to break from an old Westeros pattern. A final chapter that matched Episode 5 in impact would have changed how this franchise approaches endings.

For a brief moment, it seemed A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms might correct a long-standing problem in this universe: finales that arrive after the real damage has already been done. Episode 5, built around Ser Duncan's (Peter Claffey) Trial of Seven, had shifted the season into higher gear. The writing was tighter. The stakes were clearer. The characters' choices finally seemed consequential. It looked like this prequel might finally

escape the long shadow of uneven Westeros endings. And then came Episode 6.

Why is a finale episode relevant anyway? The idea is to leave a viewer on a high, to give a suitable end to the entire build-up, and to push the story to a point where the audience feels both satisfied and curious about what comes next. The final episode of A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms Season 1 only wrapped threads. It steadied the

Delhi to host first International Film Festival from March 25

The capital will host the first International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) from March 25 to 31, featuring over 125 Indian and international films.

Delhi will host its first international film festival from March 25 to March 31, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Tuesday. Titled the International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026, the event will screen more than 125 Indian and international films across multiple venues in the capital. The curtain raiser was unveiled on February 25, 2026, at the Delhi Secretariat in the presence of Cabinet Minister Kapil Mishra. The festival will be held at prominent locations in New Delhi, including Bharat Mandapam. IFFD is a government-led initiative organised by the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation. Apart from film screenings, the week-long



programme will include gala premieres, masterclasses, panel discussions, workshops and cultural performances. According to officials, the festival aligns with the Delhi Film Policy and aims to promote film tourism, talent development and industry collaboration. Special segments will focus on digital and emerging cinema. The CineXchange Film Market and Cineverse Expo will provide networking and business opportunities for professionals. Masterclasses and panel discussions by filmmakers and industry experts are also part of the schedule. The festival will also promote a single-window facilitation system to streamline shooting and production-related processes in the city.

Fearless Voice of the Community

The South Asian Insider

23 Glorious Years, Always a Step Ahead

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Venezuela's Maria Machado dedicates Nobel Prize to Trump
Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2022 and asked Donald Trump a dozen of winning the prize, praised the US President for supporting the Venezuelans working to establish democracy and end President Nicolas Maduro's dictatorship.
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Inside India's Scariest Scam, And How To Stop It
Digital scams are proliferating as India's elderly population embraces the internet. Scammers are highly effective, preying on the inherent vulnerabilities of seniors, such as respect for authority, fear of legal trouble, and loneliness.
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