

The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

Published From New York Since March 2002

Britain's Revolving Door

Seven prime ministers in ten years, a wealth exodus, and a rising populist right - is the U.K. living out the future a 1997 book predicted for every Western democracy?



The Alleged Mastermind of a \$2 Billion U.S. Telemedicine Scam Is Living the Luxury Life in Russia

Brian Sutton, wanted by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn in a scheme that reached pharmacies across New York and New Jersey, has built a life of Mercedes fleets, Moscow mansions, and Kremlin-linked business partners - beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement.

Page 4

Migrant Surge Overwhelms Spain's Ceuta Enclave; At Least 34 Dead

Page 5

WIDENING WAR: How Trump's Iran Conflict Pulled In Six More Countries Across Two Theaters

Page 5

State of Nation



Also In This Issue

KHALISTANI SEPARATIST PANNUN PLEDGES \$1 MILLION TO INDIAN STUDENT PROTESTS
Page 08

Jagdish Sewhani, President of The American Indian Public Affairs Committee, Meets President Donald Trump at a High-Profile Manhattan Event
Page 13

One Crisis, 4 Wins: How China Might Just Have Hit A Geopolitical Jackpot
Page 17

Mamdani Unveils \$70 Million Plan for City-Owned Grocery Stores Offering 30% Discounts, Faces Backlash
Page 21

The Double Jeopardy: Why a Second Heart Attack Can Be Far More Deadly
Page 30

Batwara 1947 trailer: Sunny Deol, Shabana Azmi explore the human cost of Partition
Page 36

BRITAIN'S REVOLVING DOOR

SEVEN PRIME MINISTERS IN TEN YEARS. A WEALTH EXODUS. A POPULIST RIGHT ON THE RISE. IS THE U.K. LIVING OUT THE FUTURE A 1997 BOOK PREDICTED FOR EVERY WESTERN DEMOCRACY?

2016–2019	2019–2022	2022	2022–2024	2024–2026	2026– ?
Theresa May	Boris Johnson	Liz Truss	Rishi Sunak	Keir Starmer	Andy Burnham

49 DAYS
AVERAGE TENURE: ~20 MONTHS

A DECADE OF INSTABILITY

- Living standards stagnant since 2008 financial crisis
- Brexit division fractured politics and parties
- Pandemic, energy shock, NHS crisis, £2.9T+ debt
- Voters feel left behind by a detached elite

ENOUGH OF BROKEN PROMISES

REFORM UK

THE POPULIST RIGHT GAINING GROUND

TAKING BACK CONTROL

THE BOOK'S CENTRAL CLAIMS

- Capital & talent will become mobile, chasing better jurisdictions
- States face fiscal crisis as tax bases become "portable"
- Politicians & institutions lose power to mobile individuals
- The transition will be turbulent and divisive

16,500 MILLIONAIRES LEFT THE U.K. IN 2025

\$92 BILLION IN INVESTABLE ASSETS MOVED ABROAD

— HENLEY & PARTNERS

THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL
MASTERING THE TRANSITION TO THE INFORMATION AGE
JAMES DALE DAVIDSON AND LORD WILLIAM REES-MOGG
PUBLISHED 1997

“We don't see our lives getting better, and we don't see the lives of our children getting better — and each government since has seemed unable to change that.”
— Former U.K. Treasury Official

(Exclusive TSAI) — On July 20, Andy Burnham walked into 10 Downing Street as the seventh person to run Britain's government in a single decade, promising the country “a circuit-breaker” after a stretch of political turnover unmatched in the postwar era. His predecessor, Keir Starmer, had lasted barely two years after a landslide 2024 victory before resigning under the weight of local election drubbings, cabinet defections and a Labour Party revolt. Burnham inherits a nation that has now cycled through Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, Rishi Sunak, Starmer and himself since the 2016 Brexit referendum sent David Cameron out the door — an average tenure of barely twenty months per premier. For a country that once prided itself on the stability of Westminster's unwritten constitution, and that supplied the model for parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth, the churn has become a case study in ungovernability. It has also revived interest, especially among investors and technology executives, in a controversial 1997 book that argued exactly this kind of political instability was coming — and that the real winners of it would not be politicians at all.

A DECADE NOBODY DESIGNED

The mechanics of the turnover are almost comic in isolation. Liz Truss lasted 49

days in 2022, undone within weeks by a tax-cutting budget that spooked bond markets and forced the Bank of England to intervene. Boris Johnson, the longest-serving of the six, still managed barely three years before scandal forced him out. Rishi Sunak, Britain's first prime minister of Indian heritage, steadied the ship only long enough to lose the 2024 election in a landslide. None of it happened in a vacuum.

Analysts trace the instability to two compounding shocks: the 2008 financial crisis, which left British living standards stagnant for the better part of two decades, and the 2016 Brexit vote, which fractured both major parties along a new axis of nationalism versus openness that neither Labour nor the Conservatives have been able to reconcile with their older class-based coalitions. Layer on a pandemic, a European energy shock following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a National Health Service under chronic strain, and a national debt now well past £2.9 trillion, and the pattern looks less like six bad governments than one structural crisis in six acts.

Into that vacuum has stepped Reform UK, Nigel Farage's insurgent party, which posted sweeping gains in the May 2026 local elections at Labour's and the Conservatives' expense. Reform's appeal, like similar movements from

continental Europe to the United States, rests less on a governing program than on a narrative: that a detached political class has managed decline rather than reversed it, and that ordinary voters have paid the price in frozen wages and squeezed public services while the rules kept changing under them.

WHERE 'THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL' COMES IN

It is against this backdrop that a nearly thirty-year-old book has re-entered the conversation in boardrooms and on financial newsletters: *The Sovereign Individual*, by the American investment writer James Dale Davidson and the former London Times editor Lord William Rees-Mogg. Its argument, in brief, is that the information age would do to the nation-state what the printing press did to the medieval Church — break its monopoly, in this case not on scripture but on taxation and coercion. Wealth and talent, the authors predicted, would become mobile in ways governments could not control, forcing states to compete for citizens the way businesses compete for customers. Politicians would lose ground; a mobile, technically skilled elite would gain it. And the transition, they warned, would be turbulent, marked by a populist backlash from those left behind.

Britain in 2026 supplies real evidence for parts of that thesis — and real evidence against other parts of it. On one side of

the ledger: the abolition of the U.K.'s centuries-old “non-dom” tax regime last year, which let wealthy residents shield foreign income from British tax, triggered what industry trackers describe as the largest recorded outflow of millionaires anywhere in the world. Henley & Partners estimated roughly 16,500 high-net-worth individuals left the U.K. in 2025 alone, taking an estimated \$92 billion in investable assets to lower-tax jurisdictions such as the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland and Cyprus. The Adam Smith Institute has argued the departing millionaires represented tax revenue equivalent to losing more than half a million ordinary taxpayers.

On the other side: researchers at the Tax Justice Network and other economists have disputed the scale of the exodus, pointing to HM Revenue & Customs data they say shows departures roughly in line with, not far above, official forecasts, and noting that departing-millionaire headlines have a long history of being overstated by groups opposed to wealth taxation. Polling cited by the same researchers found a majority of Britain's own millionaires say they support a wealth tax. Whichever figure proves closer to the truth, the fight itself — a government trying to hold onto mobile capital while an anti-establishment right captures the voters that capital left behind — is close to the

exact tension the 1997 book described, playing out in real time in a single G7 economy.

The U.K. is home to one of the world's largest Indian, Pakistani and Punjabi diasporas, concentrated in cities like Leicester, Birmingham and parts of London, with deep commercial, family and philanthropic ties back to the subcontinent. Rishi Sunak's rise to 10 Downing Street in 2022 was celebrated across the diaspora as a landmark moment for British Asian representation, even as his government struggled with the same stagnation that has since claimed two more prime ministers. Many British Asian entrepreneurs — a demographic disproportionately represented among the U.K.'s small and mid-sized business owners — are among those weighing the practical calculus of Britain's tax and regulatory direction against opportunities

opening in the Gulf, in Singapore, and increasingly in India itself, where policy has moved to actively court returning capital and talent.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Burnham has staked his premiership on the promise of stability: a ten-year economic and political plan, an early focus on cost-of-living relief and homelessness, and warmer ties with the European Union than his predecessors were willing to pursue. Whether he succeeds will depend on whether Britain's structural problems — a shrunken tax base, an aging population, a services-heavy economy exposed to global capital flows, and a fractured electorate no longer loyal to either legacy party — are solvable within the framework of the nation-state at all, or whether Davidson and Rees-Mogg were right that the framework itself is what's failing. What is harder to

"We don't see our lives getting better, and we don't see the lives of our children getting better — and each government since has seemed unable to change that." — a former U.K. Treasury official, on the roots of the turnover"



dispute is the direction of travel. Whether in Britain's wealth exodus, in Silicon Valley's growing appetite for privatized governance, or in the way capital and talent now routinely relocate ahead of unfavorable

policy rather than lobby to change it, the balance of power between the individual with mobile resources and the politician who depends on a fixed, taxable population has shifted further than most Western

democracies are prepared to admit. Britain, having changed leaders seven times in a decade without changing its underlying trajectory, may simply be the country where that shift is currently hardest to ignore.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Start planning at
ThisIsPretirement.org



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



THE ALLEGED MASTERMIND OF A \$2 BILLION U.S. TELEMEDICINE SCAM IS LIVING THE LUXURY LIFE IN RUSSIA



Brian Sutton, wanted by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn in a scheme that reached pharmacies across New York and New Jersey, has built a life of Mercedes fleets, Moscow mansions, and Kremlin-linked business partners — beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement.

(TSI Exclusive with reporting from OCCRP and Important Stories)

A U.S. citizen accused of engineering one of the largest health care fraud schemes ever uncovered in America is living openly and lavishly in Russia, according to a joint investigation published this week by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and its Russian partner, Important Stories.

Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn have identified Brian Sutton, 34, as the leader of a criminal organization that billed private insurers nearly \$2 billion in fraudulent prescription claims between 2017 and 2022 — collecting more than \$758 million before the scheme collapsed. Sutton has been charged but never tried. The U.S. Attorney's Office describes him as “at large,” and prosecutors say he is believed to be residing in Russia, beyond the reach of American law enforcement.

A SCHEME THAT REACHED NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

The operation, prosecutors allege, worked by having call centers — initially based in Utah, later relocated to Russia — telephone insured patients and offer them prescription medications at little or no cost, without any real medical examination. Recruited doctors were told they were reviewing legitimate

telemedicine visits; in many cases, prosecutors say, no such visits ever took place. The conspirators are accused of acquiring dozens of pharmacies nationwide, expanding into New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, Michigan and Alabama — placing parts of the alleged scheme squarely within this publication's coverage area.

Seven co-defendants have pleaded guilty in the Brooklyn case; several were sentenced in May to terms as long as ten years, along with multimillion-dollar forfeiture and restitution orders. Sutton's alleged role traces back further: a 2020 California felony complaint had already accused his family of running “mutant pharmacies” — outlets so devoid of ordinary retail stock that employees reportedly did not know how to operate a cash register. Fifteen co-conspirators in that earlier, smaller case pleaded guilty to defrauding insurers of roughly \$40 million. Sutton has not been convicted in either matter, and this report treats the allegations against him as accusations, not established fact.

MERCEDES, MOSCOW MANSIONS, AND A RUSSIAN PASSPORT

Leaked Russian databases and land records reviewed by OCCRP and Important Stories show Sutton building an extensive footprint in Russia since 2019, the same year prosecutors say

the scheme's call centers moved there. His vehicle fleet reportedly includes 23 Mercedes-Benz cars, six BMWs, and three Rolls-Royces.

His family acquired a roughly 600-square-meter villa in Barvikha 21, an exclusive gated community west of Moscow built in the style of architect Frank Lloyd Wright — and located about five kilometers from Russian President Vladimir Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence. In 2025, Sutton reportedly purchased a second, adjoining villa, expanding his personal footprint there to more than 6,500 square meters.

Corporate records reviewed by reporters show Sutton founded a Moscow call center, Well Connect, in 2019, and separately built a 90 percent stake in a coal-trading firm whose listed partners included major Russian steel and mining companies later sanctioned by the United States. He also acquired a fitness and spa center outside Moscow in 2022. According to leaked tax data, he earned roughly \$1.6 million from Well Connect alone in 2020-2021. Sutton reportedly obtained a Russian passport in 2022, having already acquired Israeli citizenship, alongside his father, in 2017.

A STAKE IN A KREMLIN-LINKED FIGHT CLUB

Perhaps the most striking find: corporate records show that in June 2022, Sutton

acquired a 10 percent stake in United Russian Fighters, an MMA club co-founded by Bekkhan Agayev, a sitting member of Russia's State Duma from the ruling United Russia party. Agayev's family is described by reporters as close to Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov; Agayev himself has been under U.S. sanctions since 2022. The club has publicly promoted support for Russian military units fighting in Ukraine.

Ilya Shumanov, former head of the Russian chapter of Transparency International, told reporters that Sutton has effectively found a safe harbor. “The American justice system will be unable to reach Sutton in Russia,” he said, noting the absence of any extradition treaty between Washington and Moscow. Shumanov added that Sutton's wealth may not be secure even there: property rights are precarious in Russia, he said, and Sutton's assets could eventually be absorbed by “influential Russian friends.”

Sutton and members of his family did not respond to requests for comment from OCCRP and Important Stories. The U.S. Department of Justice, the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, and Russia's Interior Ministry likewise did not respond to reporters' inquiries.

Migrant Surge Overwhelms Spain's Ceuta Enclave; At Least 34 Dead

An estimated 50,000 to 60,000 migrants crossed from Morocco into Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta over a roughly 24-hour period beginning Thursday, in one of the largest single-episode border crossings in the enclave's history. Spain's Interior Ministry said around 50,000 people had crossed the border since Thursday morning, while Ceuta's regional president, Juan Jesus Vivas, put the figure at about 60,000, saying many crossed by swimming around a border barrier that extends into the sea.

The human toll has been severe. Vivas confirmed at least 34 migrant deaths to reporters Friday, without detailing how the victims died, a toll that had earlier been reported as 19 bodies recovered from the water. Ceuta's population is roughly 84,000, meaning the crossing amounted to more than half the territory's residents arriving in a matter of days. **Government response** Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez

traveled to Ceuta Friday to address the crisis, calling the mass crossing a violation of "Spain's territorial integrity" and pledging to "use all the instruments of the state... to guarantee the security of the people of Ceuta." Spain has moved to expel recent arrivals quickly, though this runs against a Spanish Supreme Court ruling limiting the return of migrants who arrive by sea.

Returns have nonetheless proceeded rapidly — the Interior Ministry says departures back to Morocco were running at roughly 150 people per minute Friday, with more than 37,500 people having returned to Morocco by 1 p.m. local time. **Political reaction** The surge has sharpened an already polarized



domestic debate. Opposition figures, including VOX leader Santiago Abascal, criticized Sánchez directly — Abascal called him a "traitor" who "behaves like an enemy of the Spanish people." Some opposition voices have linked the surge to the S á n c h e z government's earlier policy extending legal status to roughly half a

million undocumented immigrants already in Spain, though officials have not confirmed a direct causal link, and the precise trigger for this week's surge remains unclear. On the European stage, the European Commission president reportedly called the situation "unacceptable," and Italy's government

has floated the idea of "extraordinary measures" in response. **On the ground** Moroccan security forces used tear gas and water cannon Friday to disperse crowds still attempting to cross, arresting roughly 30 people, according to an AFP journalist on scene. Despite the deployment, hundreds continued arriving throughout the day, including people climbing steep hillsides overlooking the border crossing.

What's still unverified Several elements of this fast-moving story remain in flux: the exact death toll (reports range from 19 to 34), the precise trigger for Thursday's sudden surge, and the total number who ultimately remain in Ceuta versus those returned. Casualty figures and crossing totals are coming from local and ministry officials rather than independently verified counts, and are likely to be revised as the situation stabilizes.

WIDENING WAR: How Trump's Iran Conflict Pulled In Six More Countries Across Two Theaters

From Jordan to Kyiv, the Gulf war is no longer contained — and its newest front may run through Ukraine

The war President Trump launched against Iran in February has spread far beyond its original battlefield. What began as a US-Israel campaign against Tehran has, over five months, drawn in Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and — most unexpectedly — Ukraine, according to conflict-tracking records compiled from wire reporting. The pattern suggests a war that is no longer confined to the Gulf, but is instead networking itself across regions and even into an entirely separate conflict thousands of miles away.

How it started

The 2026 Iran war began on February 28, when the United States and Israel launched a wave of airstrikes on Iran, including the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other senior Iranian leaders. Iran responded with retaliatory strikes across the region, and in the months since, the conflict has escalated into a grinding campaign of nightly strikes, a naval blockade, and a closure of the Strait of Hormuz that has rattled global energy markets.

The Gulf and Jordan draw fire Iran's initial retaliatory drone and missile strikes crossed into Jordanian airspace, where projectiles were intercepted by

Jordanian and American air defenses. Qatar has since absorbed repeated Iranian missile strikes, with casualties including two Su-24 aircraft shot down and four soldiers killed in accidents tied to the fighting. Saudi Arabia has also come under sustained fire, with strikes killing two civilians and injuring twelve, while the U.S. reported two soldiers dead and 29 servicemembers wounded defending Saudi airspace; the strikes have also targeted Saudi oil refineries directly.

Egypt: the newest and most alarming front

Egypt became the latest country pulled directly into the war this week. A drone strike Wednesday caused a fire on two ships at the port of Damietta — the first time Egypt has been directly drawn into the conflict. No party has formally claimed responsibility, but the targeting appears far from random: Iranian state television had named Damietta as a retaliation target two days before the strike, explicitly citing a Ukrainian strike on an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea — pointing analysts at Windward toward an Iranian-directed operation rather than a Houthi one. The drone hit ENERGOS WINTER, a U.S.-managed LNG unit, with fire spreading to a second tanker

docked alongside it — a strike analysts describe as opening a third front in the war, separate from both the Gulf and the Red Sea.

The United Kingdom's defensive role



Britain has spent the war shooting down Iranian drones and missiles over allied countries including Qatar, Iraq, and Jordan. After a drone struck a British military base on Cyprus, London deployed additional military assets to the island and began relocating the destroyer HMS Dragon to the Eastern Mediterranean — extending the war's footprint into European territory for the first time.

Ukraine: the link that changes the story

The most consequential thread may be Ukraine's. Kyiv's involvement has consisted of diplomatic endorsements from Washington and Israel, along with technical and military expertise to help Gulf states and U.S. bases

produced direct blowback: Ukraine's strike on an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea is the reason Iranian state television cited for targeting Damietta days later — meaning a port in Egypt burned, at least in part, over a naval incident connected to Ukraine's Gulf drone deals.

The bigger picture

Trump entered his second term promising to be a "peacemaker." Instead, he is now struggling to end two widening wars — the one he started with Iran, and the one he inherited between Russia and Ukraine.

The Damietta strike suggests those two conflicts are no longer fully separable: a war that began over Iran's nuclear program and regional aggression is now entangled with the Russia-Ukraine war through arms sales, air-defense cooperation, and retaliatory targeting thousands of miles from either original battlefield. For editors tracking this story, the individual national angles — Egypt's port fire, Ukraine's drone diplomacy — are each newsworthy alone. But the sharper story is structural: a five-month-old regional war is beginning to network itself across theaters, pulling previously unconnected conflicts into contact with each other in ways that make containment increasingly difficult to imagine.

AMRITSAR JOINS VARANASI AS INDIA'S SECOND HUB-AND-SPOKE AIRPORT

(Our Staff Reporter) : NEW DELHI — Amritsar's Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport became the second airport in India to operate under the government's new Hub-and-Spoke international connectivity model, following an inauguration ceremony Tuesday by Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu. The city joins Varanasi, which launched the framework on June 25, as part of a national push to route international travelers from smaller cities through major hubs. Until now, passengers flying out of Amritsar had direct access to only seven international destinations. Under the new arrangement, they can complete check-in, security screening, immigration and customs at Amritsar itself, then connect through Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport to more than 20 global des-

tinations without repeating those formalities. Their baggage is checked straight through to the final stop.

"Travellers will be able to access more than 20 international destinations with a single check-in and a single baggage tag, making the entire journey far more seamless," Naidu said at the launch. Officials say roughly 1.5 lakh passengers currently travel from Amritsar to Delhi each year solely to catch international flights, with a similar number arriving from abroad via Delhi to reach Punjab.

Air India is operating the route under its "Easy Connect" service, with two daily flights — AI 1113 departing Amritsar at 9:10 a.m. and AI 1115 at 10 p.m. — both landing in Delhi in under 90 minutes.

The government has larger ambitions for the model: a

proposed 44-airport network built around four national hubs and 40 spoke cities, aimed at strengthening India's standing as a global aviation gateway and generating an estimated 0.4 million jobs by 2030. Officials point to Amritsar's deep diaspora ties across Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh as reasons the city stands to benefit disproportionately from the change. For the Punjabi diaspora in the United States and Canada, many of whom fly through Delhi to visit family, the shift could simplify what has long been a cumbersome two-leg journey requiring separate check-ins and repeated security screening. Whether that promise holds will depend on how smoothly the system performs once passenger volumes climb through the fall travel season.

INDIAN-AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR SAYS INDIA STILL LACKS ECOSYSTEM FOR DEEP-TECH BETS

(Our Staff Reporter) : A blunt assessment from Indian-American entrepreneur Sabeer Bhatia is circulating again amid renewed debate over the direction of India's startup economy. Rangaswami, a Silicon Valley-based investor and founder of the Indiaspora network, has argued for several years that India has built impressive scale in consumer technology but still lacks the deeper ecosystem needed for high-risk, capital-intensive innovation. His critique centers on more than funding. India, he has said, is missing not just capital but talent density, a customer base willing to pay for unproven hard-tech products, and the long investment horizons that semiconductor, biotech, space and defense startups require to reach commercialization. Unlike consumer internet firms, which can launch, acquire users and generate revenue quickly, deep-tech ventures often need years of lab work, regulatory clearance and patient capital before showing results.

Sabeer Bhatia has pointed to what he calls a quiet but significant trend: successful Indian startups relocating their base of operations to Silicon Valley to access the American market and its risk capital. By his estimate, more than 100 such companies made that move within a three-to-four-year span. The comments land at a moment when India's startup sector is publicly wrestling with similar questions. Nearly a decade after the Startup India initiative launched, the country has more than 200,000 recognized startups and has drawn over \$160 billion in venture funding. But industry observers note that just 5% of that funding went to deep-tech sectors as recently as



2023, a figure that climbed to about 21% by 2025 — progress, but still a fraction of what is needed to match the scale of consumer-facing investment. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has separately pushed founders to move beyond convenience-driven business models, such as 10-minute grocery delivery apps, prompting pushback from prominent entrepreneurs who argue government infrastructure and R&D support remain inadequate. For the Indian-American community, which has produced a disproportionate share of Silicon Valley's technical leadership, the debate carries an added edge: many in the diaspora built their careers on exactly the kind of long-horizon technical bets that critics say India's ecosystem still struggles to support at home.

SCI SUBSTANTIATES FORMER QUEENS TEACHER'S NON-CONSENSUAL CONDUCT WITH STUDENT

(Our Staff Reporter) : QUEENS — The New York City Special Commissioner of Investigation for the school district has substantiated findings that former John Adams High School teacher Lennard Persaud engaged in non-consensual sexual conduct and inappropriate communications with a former student between 2014 and 2016, while the student was 16 and 17 years old. SCI Commissioner Anastasia Coleman announced the findings July 21, stating that Persaud engaged in non-consensual sexual intercourse with the former student on numerous occasions during her junior and senior years at the Ozone Park school, and maintained sexually explicit text communications with her. "Lennard Persaud's conduct was egregious, dangerous, and predatory, and he has no place working in a school or anywhere around children," Coleman said. "Teachers are entrusted with the safety and well-being of their students, and anyone who exploits

that trust and their position of authority over adolescents must be held accountable." The investigation, which began in April 2023 after the former student came forward, included interviews with other former students who corroborated aspects of the relationship, describing witnessing the student in visible emotional distress during the relevant period. Investigators also reviewed sexually explicit text exchanges between Persaud and the student. Persaud declined to be interviewed by SCI, citing his tenured status. Persaud was arrested by the NYPD in June 2023 on charges including third-degree rape, third-degree criminal sexual act, endangering the welfare of a child and third-degree sexual abuse. He pleaded guilty in January 2024 to a single count of disorderly conduct, a violation, and received a conditional discharge. The Queens District Attorney's Office said no further public information on the case is available.

TEXAS AD CALLING INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY "BETTER" THAN JULY 4 IGNITES BACKLASH

(Our Staff Reporter) : A flyer promoting an Indian Independence Day celebration in Frisco, Texas, has triggered a social media firestorm after it declared the event "way better than America's Independence Day," drawing sharp criticism from American commentators and, notably, from within the Indian-American community itself. The flyer was shared in a private Facebook group serving residents of Prosper and Celina, two fast-growing towns north of Dallas that have seen a significant influx of Indian-American families in recent years. Once screenshots began circulating more broadly, the line about July 4 became the flashpoint of the controversy, feeding into an already tense local conversation about immigration and demographic change in North Texas. Reaction split sharply. Some commenters defended the celebration as an ordinary expression of cultural pride, no different from Irish-American or Italian-American heritage events. Others, including at least one Indian immigrant posting in the group, pushed back hard, saying the comparison was unnecessary and ungracious toward a country that had provided them opportunity. "I am grateful for what this country has given me," one commenter wrote, arguing it was wrong to rank India's holiday above America's. The episode is the latest example of how routine diaspora cultural programming can become entangled in broader anxieties over assimilation, particularly in fast-growing Texas suburbs where rapid demographic shifts have already produced friction in local politics and school board debates. Community organizers in the Frisco area have not issued a formal response, and it remains unclear who authored the original flyer. For a diaspora press that regularly covers celebratory Independence Day events from Times Square to Edison, the incident is a reminder that even well-meaning promotional language can be read very differently by different audiences — and that cultural pride, expressed carelessly, can just as easily read as a slight to the country that diaspora communities call home.

INDIA LAUNCHES 'SHANTI' CAMPAIGN IN BID FOR NON-PERMANENT UNSC SEAT

(Our Staff Reporter) : UNITED NATIONS — India formally launched its campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2028-29 term, with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar unveiling a six-point agenda titled "SHANTI" — Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity — before an audience of international diplomats at UN Headquarters. Speaking at the July 13 launch, Jaishankar described the state of global affairs as a "profound paradox." "Never before has the world possessed such immense capabilities to advance human welfare at this scale," he said. "At the same time, we are witnessing levels of conflict, violence and instability that threaten even those who may be very far away." He argued India's candidacy rests on a proven international record combined with a forward-looking vision for reforming what he called a deeply fractured global order.

The SHANTI framework centers on six priori-

ties: amplifying the Global South's voice on peace and security, democratizing the multilateral system, modernizing UN peacekeeping with better technology and mandates, promoting a human-centered approach to artificial intelligence governance, protecting a free and rules-based maritime order, and strengthening cooperation against terrorism financing while advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. India, which has nearly 300,000 personnel deployed across roughly 50 peacekeeping missions worldwide, is seeking what would be its ninth stint on the Council, following an unopposed 2021-22 term secured under Jaishankar's tenure as foreign minister — a role he has held since May 2019, longer than any predecessor in recent decades. This time, India faces competition: Tajikistan has declared its candidacy for the same Asia-Pacific seat, backed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation since 2023. The bid runs in parallel with India's



long-standing push for a reformed Security Council that would grant it permanent membership alongside the current five veto-holding powers — a campaign New Delhi has pursued for decades with limited progress, even as officials argue growing global instability has strengthened the moral case for expanding the Council's permanent ranks.

DUTCHESS COUNTY'S LISA KAUL WINS DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY FOR NY STATE SENATE

(Our Staff Reporter) : POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y. — Lisa Kaul, a Dutchess County legislator and Rhodes Scholar who grew up in Bihar, India, won the Democratic primary for New York State Senate District 39 on June 23, securing 62% of the vote and setting up a general election matchup against Republican incumbent Sen. Robert Rolison in November. Kaul defeated primary rivals Evan Menist, who took 30.4% of the vote, and Working Families Party candidate Gay Lee, who won 7.5%, according to Ballotpedia. She launched her state Senate campaign in December 2025 after two terms representing the Town of Poughkeepsie on the Dutchess County Legislature, where she chairs the Environment Committee and serves as vice chair of the Family and Human Services Committee.

Born in Bihar to a father who served as a career Army officer and a mother who worked as a schoolteacher, Kaul earned a Rhodes Scholarship in 1990, which led her to a PhD at Oxford University before she moved to the United States in 2004. She became a U.S. citizen in 2008 and was first elected to county office in 2022, defeating a longtime Republican incumbent with 58% of the vote. "This feels like the fulfillment of a lifelong aspiration for me," Kaul said following her primary win. "I was born in Bihar. I grew up all over India as my father was in army. I always imagined a life of service where I would make a difference." She said seeing other Asian-American women run for office convinced her she could do the same.

Kaul's campaign has focused on affordability, housing costs, health care and childcare across the district, which spans Dutchess, Orange and Putnam counties. She has drawn endorsements from congressional lawmakers, including Rep. Pat Ryan, along with nursing associations and children's rights groups. Her win adds to a growing list of Indian-American candidates seeking statewide and legislative office across New York this cycle, part of a broader surge in South Asian political engagement across the state's suburban districts.

CALIFORNIA'S DIWALI HOLIDAY LAW STRUCK DOWN OVER RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE



(Our Staff Reporter) : SACRAMENTO — Less than a year after California became the third U.S. state to formally recognize Diwali as an official holiday, a state judge has struck down key parts of the law, ruling that its language gave the Hindu festival unconstitutional preferential treatment based on religious significance. Superior Court Judge Stephen Acquistio ruled on a petition brought by the San Francisco Taxpayers Association, finding that Assembly Bill 268 — signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom in October 2025 — "violates several provisions of the federal and state constitutions by giving Diwali special treatment expressly based on its religious importance without any significant secular considerations." The law had authorized public schools, community colleges and state employees to observe Diwali with paid leave or school closures. The judge clarified that his ruling addresses only the specific wording and legislative history of AB 268, not the broader question of whether Diwali could be recognized through constitutionally sound legislation in the future. The Hindu American Foundation, which had championed the law, called the decision a setback but emphasized that the ruling

focused on the statute's description of Diwali's religious significance rather than its practical accommodation purpose — allowing students and employees to observe the festival without being forced to choose between faith and work or school obligations. "HAF is monitoring this lawsuit and will continue supporting Hindu Americans in California as we work to protect the ability of our community to celebrate the holidays that matter," the organization said. HinduPACT, another advocacy group, criticized the ruling as undermining recognition of Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist traditions. It remains unclear whether the ruling voids the law entirely or only specific provisions, and a final judgment has not yet been issued. Any appeal is likely to hinge on the distinction between permissible religious accommodation and impermissible government endorsement of religion — a line courts have historically allowed public institutions to walk carefully, so long as they neither promote a faith nor coerce participation in it. For California's sizable Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities, the ruling casts uncertainty over what had been celebrated as a milestone recognition just months ago.

KHALISTANI SEPARATIST PANNUN PLEDGES \$1 MILLION TO INDIAN STUDENT PROTESTS

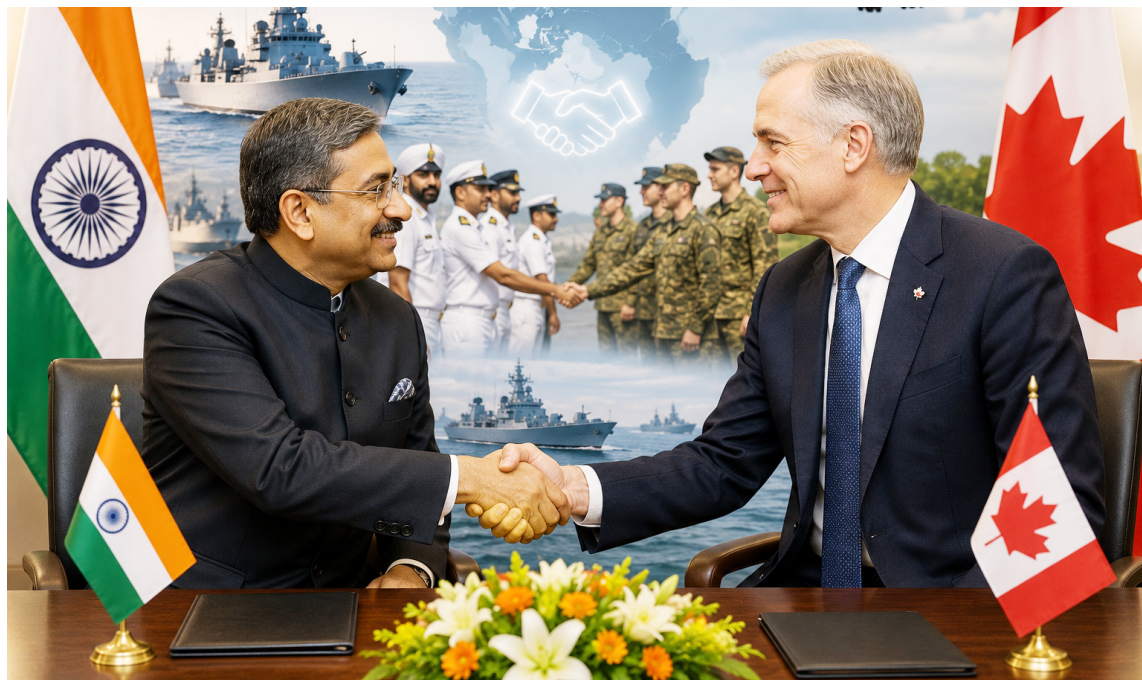
(Our Staff Reporter) : U.S.-based Khalistani separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun has announced financial backing for ongoing student-led protests in New Delhi, escalating a movement over examination reforms into a fresh flashpoint involving overseas separatist politics. In a video statement, Pannun, the designated leader of the banned outfit Sikhs for Justice, claimed to have held a virtual meeting with leaders of the protest movement, known as the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), and pledged \$1 million in support. He said the funding came with conditions: that protesters refuse to negotiate with the Modi government, continue their agitation until August 15, and boycott India's Independence Day celebrations. He also renewed longstanding calls for what he termed the "dissolution, disintegration and Balkanization" of India, and threatened to disrupt Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address at the Red Fort. Pannun additionally an-



nounced plans for a so-called "Khalistan Referendum" event in Indianapolis on August 16. There has been no independent confirmation that CJP leaders held the

meeting Pannun described or accepted any funds from his organization; his claims remain unverified. India's National Investigation Agency has previously pursued Pannun, who is designated a terrorist by the Indian government, over an alleged September 2025 conspiracy to disrupt Modi's Red Fort flag-hoisting ceremony, in which he reportedly offered a cash reward to anyone who could prevent the prime minister from unfurling the national flag. Pannun has continued to operate from the U.S., U.K. and Canada despite repeated Indian efforts to curtail his activities. For the Indian diaspora and law enforcement agencies across North America, Pannun's periodic video statements have become a recurring irritant in bilateral relations, particularly around symbolic dates like India's Independence Day, even as their practical impact — and the authenticity of his claimed contacts inside India — remains difficult to independently verify.

INDIA, CANADA DISCUSS EXPANDING MARITIME AND DEFENSE COOPERATION



(Our Staff Reporter) OTTAWA — India and Canada have agreed to deepen defense ties, with talks this week between India's High Commissioner to Canada, Dinesh K. Patnaik, and Canadian Defence Minister David McGuinty focused on strengthening maritime cooperation, defense capacity-building and joint training. The meeting, confirmed by the Indian High Commission on Tuesday, follows a broader thaw in India-Canada relations that has been building over recent months. It comes on the heels of a separate conversation last week between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Canadian counterpart, Anita Anand, held on the sidelines of a diplomatic gathering in Manila. "India-Canada cooperation has been steadily growing," Jaishankar said following that exchange, adding that the discussion focused on advancing goals set jointly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

The maritime focus builds on a framework agreed during Carney's earlier visit to India, when the two countries welcomed a new Maritime Se-

curity Partnership covering defense material cooperation, supply chain resilience, and joint training and exercises. Trade ties have advanced in parallel: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal visited Canada in late May to launch the India-Canada Trade and Investment Forum alongside Canadian International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu, part of a broader effort to rebuild economic and diplomatic engagement between the two countries. The renewed cooperation marks a notable shift after several years of strained relations following diplomatic disputes over Khalistani separatist activity on Canadian soil. Both governments have signaled interest in moving past those tensions toward practical collaboration on defense, trade and the Indo-Pacific security architecture more broadly. For Canada's large Indian diaspora, particularly in British Columbia and Ontario, warming ties between Ottawa and New Delhi carry both economic and personal significance, offering the prospect of eased travel, expanded trade opportunities and a diplomatic relationship less defined by the friction of recent years.

FBI ADDS PUNJAB NATIVE AMRITPAL SINGH TO WANTED LIST OVER TRANSNATIONAL DRUG RING

(Our Staff Reporter) The FBI has issued a wanted poster for Amritpal Singh, a 30-year-old Indian national from Punjab, alleging his involvement in a transnational drug trafficking network that smuggled hundreds of kilograms of cocaine and methamphetamine weekly across the United States, Canada and

group allegedly transported and distributed hundreds of kilograms of cocaine and methamphetamine each



Mexico. According to the FBI, Singh is connected to the Ravinder Dhanda Organized Crime Group, based in Vancouver, Canada, and allegedly participated in a conspiracy to distribute and possess controlled substances with intent to distribute, as well as conspiracy to export controlled substances. A federal arrest warrant was issued against Singh on June 23 by the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California in Los Angeles. Federal prosecutors say Singh was one of 11 defendants named in an eight-count indictment returned that day, alongside Ravinder Singh Dhanda — also known by the aliases "Randy," "Rolex" and "John Wick" — Jaskarn Baghri, Gurtej Singh Smagh, and several others based across British Columbia and the United States. According to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California, the

week from the U.S. into Canada. The case is being investigated as part of a broader crackdown on North America-based organized crime networks that gained momentum following the killing of Punjab Police Inspector Gurpreet Singh in Nangal, which prompted Indian investigators to examine possible links between overseas gangsters and criminal activity inside Punjab. Authorities have not disclosed Singh's current whereabouts and are asking the public for information leading to his arrest. The case is separate from, though occasionally confused with, other individuals sharing the common Punjabi name Amritpal Singh who have surfaced in unrelated cross-border narcotics investigations in recent years — a reminder of how frequently overlapping names complicate reporting on transnational crime networks tied to Punjab.

PIRELLI'S FIRST INDIA-SHOT CALENDAR CENTERS WOMEN ACROSS ARTS AND CULTURE



(Our Staff Reporter) The 2027 edition of the famed Pirelli Calendar will be the first in the publication's six-decade history shot entirely in India, featuring an all-Indian cast of women spanning music, film, poetry and fashion, and marking a significant departure from the calendar's historically risqué reputation. The project, shot across Rajasthan, Jaipur and New Delhi, was originally conceived as a collaboration between celebrated Indian photographer Raghu Rai and Norwegian photographer Sølve

Sundsbø. Raghu Rai died in April before the concept was fully developed; his daughter, photographer Avani Rai, stepped in to complete his portion of the project alongside serving as one of its featured subjects. The calendar's nine central figures include sitar player and composer Anoushka Shankar, poet Rupri Kaur, models Padma Lakshmi, Bhavitha Mandava and Lakshmi Menon, and actors Freida Pinto, Aditi Rao Hydari and Avantika Vandanapu. Alongside these recognizable names, the

project also spotlights ordinary Indians photographed on the street, reflecting what Avani Rai described as a belief that "India's story belongs as much to its ordinary citizens as its cultural icons." Mandava, a 26-year-old model who this year became the first Indian woman to open Chanel's Métiers d'Art runway show, said she initially had reservations given the Pirelli Calendar's decades-long association with nudity and eroticism. "I'll be honest I wasn't very enthusiastic about the past eroticism of the Pirelli calendar and those associations," she told The Guardian. "But I'm so glad, they have actively made an effort for me to feel like I belong." For Anoushka Shankar, the significance went beyond fashion. "When I found out the focus was India and Indian women, I just thought getting to be a part of that would be really special," she said, reflecting on growing up in London amid what she described as ignorance about Indian identity. First published in 1964 with just 20,000 copies printed annually and distributed largely to corporate clients, the trade calendar has evolved considerably from its early emphasis on nudity toward more artistic, culturally driven themes in recent years.

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL NAMES PALLAVI GOGOI TO LEAD KNIGHT-BAGEHOT FELLOWSHIP

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL

APPOINTS

PALLAVI GOGOI

AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

KNIGHT-BAGEHOT FELLOWSHIP

IN ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS JOURNALISM

- Veteran journalist with 25+ years of experience**
NPR • CNN • AP • USA Today
BusinessWeek • WSJ
- Experienced educator**
Taught economic narrative courses at Columbia and Princeton University
- Leads prestigious fellowship**
Combining journalism excellence with business insight through Columbia Journalism School and Columbia Business School

INDIAN-AMERICAN LEADER
Delhi University alumna

PERSONAL CONNECTION
Deeply connected to Columbia, both personally and professionally

A STRONG VOICE FOR ECONOMIC JOURNALISM
At a pivotal time for global and U.S. economic understanding

“I believe that economics undergirds every decision in life, which is why I am a torchbearer for journalism that sheds light on this topic.”
— PALLAVI GOGOI

(Our Staff Reporter) NEW YORK — Columbia Journalism School has appointed veteran business journalist Pallavi Gogoi as executive director of the Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism, effective August 17, placing an Indian-American newsroom leader at the helm of one of the country's most respected mid-career journalism programs. Gogoi succeeds Robert Smith, a host of NPR's "Planet Money" who has directed the fellowship since 2021. She currently serves as NPR's chief business editor,

a role she has held for nearly a decade, and brings more than 25 years of experience across CNN, the Associated Press, USA Today, BusinessWeek and Dow Jones/The Wall Street Journal. She has also taught economic narrative courses at both Columbia and Princeton University. Founded in 1975 and named for the Knight brothers of the Knight Foundation and 19th-century economist Walter Bagehot, the fellowship pairs advanced journalism coursework at Columbia with core MBA classes at Columbia Business School, along with

weekly private seminars featuring leaders from media and finance. "Pallavi's experience as both a newsroom leader and an educator gives her a keen understanding of what working journalists need from a program like Knight-Bagehot," said Jelani Cobb, dean of Columbia Journalism School. Gogoi, a Delhi University alumna, described the appointment as deeply personal as well as professional. "I met my husband when he was a student at Columbia University, so I have always associated the campus with warm and sappy memories of young love," she wrote on LinkedIn. She also credited Stephen B. Shepard, the former editor-in-chief of BusinessWeek and Knight-Bagehot's first director, as a formative influence on her journalism career. "I believe that economics undergirds every decision in life, which is why I am a torchbearer for journalism that sheds light on this topic," Gogoi said. Her appointment adds another prominent name to the growing roster of Indian-American leaders shaping American journalism education, at a moment when economic literacy in the newsroom has taken on renewed importance amid tariff wars, immigration policy shifts and a volatile job market.

QUEENS MOURNS ARMY SGT. ANGEL RAMPERSAD, KILLED IN JORDAN BASE ATTACK



(Our Staff Reporter) OZONE PARK, Queens — Hundreds of neighbors, family members and elected officials gathered this week to mourn Army Sgt. Angel Sarah Rampersad, a 28-year-old Ozone Park native killed July 17 during an enemy attack on Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan, one of the opening casualties of the recent conflict with Iran.

The Army confirmed Rampersad, along with two fellow soldiers, was killed in action during the strike. A public candlelight vigil organized by the Ozone Park Residents Block Association drew hundreds to her family's block on 96th Street on Monday, with neighbors lining porches holding American flags as her mother, Carol Acevedo, thanked the community through tears.

"I would just like to thank everyone for their love and support and their kindness that has shown for me and my family," Acevedo said. Rampersad, known to loved ones as Sarah, moved to the U.S. from Trinidad with her mother and sister at age 2. She attended P.S. 108 and Forest Hills High School, where she played drums, sang and competed as a track athlete, before earning a criminal justice degree at John Jay College.

She enlisted in the Army in 2019, serving three years in Hawaii and three in Germany before reenlisting for what became her final deployment. "We will remember Angel for how she lived, not how she died," said Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr., recalling her as a drummer, singer and star athlete. Mayor Zohran Mamdani issued a statement calling her "an Ozone Park native who was killed at a military base in Jordan while serving our country," adding that "her courage and sacrifice will be remembered not just in Queens, but across all five boroughs." Her aunt, Judy Rackal, described a quiet strength that defined Rampersad even as a child: "All through her life, in the face of every crisis that her family encountered, she would be the calming element all the time." A public funeral was held Friday. For a neighborhood that has watched its share of soldiers deploy over the years, Rampersad's death has landed with the particular weight reserved for those who never come home — a war fought far away, felt intensely close.

USHA VANCE LAUNCHES PRIZE WEBSITE AS SUMMER READING CHALLENGE TRIPLES PARTICIPATION



(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — Second Lady Usha Vance has unveiled a new online rewards portal for her Summer Reading Challenge, allowing children who complete the program to claim prizes from corporate partners including Crayola, Walmart, Dairy Queen, Wendy's and NASA. Now in its second year, the challenge asks students from kindergarten through eighth grade to read 12 books of their choosing over the summer, keep a reading log, and submit a written reflection by September 4. "Reading is its own reward, but I'm excited to announce that kids who participate in my Summer Reading Challenge will also receive fun prizes this summer," Vance said in announcing the prize site. "Congratulations to everyone

who has already completed the Challenge — enjoy picking out something special on the new prize website!" Prizes available through the portal include tickets to the Crayola Experience in Florida or Pennsylvania, gift cards from Walmart and Dairy Queen, a free Wendy's Frosty coupon, and Scouting America patches, along with a personalized certificate, a letter from the second lady, and entry into a raffle for a White House visit. This year's edition also includes an America 250-themed bookmark created with the National Endowment for the Arts and expanded accessibility features for children with learning and developmental differences. Vance, who launched the initiative in 2025 to combat summer reading declines, cited federal data showing the share of children who read for fun nearly every day has dropped sharply in recent years, alongside falling reading proficiency scores among fourth and eighth graders. Last year's pilot program drew more than 20,000 reading log submissions from all 50 states; the Office of the Vice President says this year's participation is already running at triple that pace.

he initiative has become one of the more substantive public platforms Vance, the first Indian-American second lady, has built during her time in Washington, with partnerships now extending to schools, libraries and community organizations nationwide — including, community leaders note, growing interest from South Asian cultural and educational groups looking to encourage summer literacy among diaspora children.

SALMAN RUSHDIE RECOUNTS 2022 STABBING AT FEDERAL TERRORISM TRIAL IN BUFFALO

(Our Staff Reporter) BUFFALO, N.Y. — Author Salman Rushdie testified for roughly an hour in federal court here last week, describing in graphic detail the 2022 knife attack that left him blind in one eye, as the man convicted of stabbing him stands trial on separate federal terrorism charges.

Rushdie, 79, recounted being struck what he initially believed was a punch under his chin before realizing he had been stabbed. "I was on the stage, lying down, with an enormous pool of blood all around me," he told jurors. "It was an enormous and expansive lake of blood."

At one point during testimony, Rushdie removed his glasses to show the courtroom his now-sightless right eye. The defendant, Hadi Matar, 28, a U.S. citizen of Lebanese descent, was previously convicted in New York state court of attempted murder for the attack, which occurred as Rushdie prepared to speak at the Chautauqua Institution in western New York, and is currently serving a 25-year sentence for that conviction. He now faces separate federal charges alleging the attack constituted an act of transnational terrorism, carried out in service of a 1989 fatwa issued by Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini calling for Rushdie's death over his novel "The Satanic Verses." If convicted federally, Matar could face life in prison. Federal prosecutors allege Matar supported Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., citing materials found at his home.

US PLACES INDIA IN LOWER TARIFF BRACKET UNDER NEW FORCED-LABOR TRADE ACTION

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — India has secured placement in the lower tier of new U.S. tariffs targeting countries over inadequate enforcement against forced-labor imports, a diplomatic win New Delhi says came after months of sustained engagement with American trade officials. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative announced final measures on July 23 under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, imposing tariffs of either 10% or 12.5% on goods from 60 economies investigated for failing to adequately prevent the import of forced-labor products. India, initially expected to face the higher 12.5% rate, was instead placed in the 10% bracket alongside 16 other economies, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Indonesia, Mexico and Bangladesh. India's Commerce Ministry credited the outcome to written submissions, in-person consultations and participation in public hearings throughout the USTR investigation, as well as amendments India made to its Foreign Trade Policy in July explicitly prohibiting imports of forced-labor goods. "As a result of these sustained efforts, India has been placed in the lower tier of additional tariffs under the final measures, providing a relative advantage to Indian exports in key sectors," the ministry said in a statement.

Officials estimate roughly 45% of India's exports to the U.S. — including generic pharmaceuticals, smartphones and goods already covered under separate Section 232 tariffs on steel, aluminum and auto parts — will remain exempt from the additional duty, sparing an estimated \$87.3 billion in shipments. The remaining 55% of Indian exports will face the new 10% duty beginning July 24, replacing a temporary 10% rate that had been in effect since February. New Delhi reiterated its commitment to concluding the long-pending India-U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement, with both sides having already agreed on a framework for its first phase. A separate USTR Section 301 investigation affecting India remains pending.

MODI TAPS NANDAN NILEKANI TO LEAD PANEL RESTORING TRUST IN INDIA'S EXAMS

(Our Staff Reporter) NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi has named Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani to head a high-powered task force charged with overhauling India's embattled examination system, following weeks of student protests over a paper leak scandal that forced the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Modi announced the six-member panel in a video message posted to Instagram, saying the government aims to make India's exam system "trusted, transparent and tech-savvy." Nilekani, who previously built the Aadhaar biometric identity system as founding chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India, will be joined on the task force by former ISRO chief S. Somanath, former Intelligence Bureau director Tapan Deka, IIT Madras director V. Kamakoti, former education secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena.

The panel was formed in the wake of a leak involving the NEET-UG 2026 medical entrance exam, which triggered widespread protests among students and became a flashpoint for broader anger at the National Testing Agency, the body responsible for administering India's major competitive exams. The task force is expected to recommend technology-driven and structural reforms aimed at making the system leak-proof, alongside legislation strengthening penalties for exam fraud that the government is expected to introduce this parliamentary session.

Nilekani's appointment continues a pattern spanning nearly two decades in which successive governments, regardless of party, have turned to the technocrat to lead major public-sector modernization efforts. Analysts note his professional reputation is widely respected among students and educators alike, though



expectations remain tempered. "What matters the most is the implementation part, accountability, transparency, and a leak-proof examination system," said one student advocate quoted in coverage of the announcement, cautioning that India has a mixed record translating ambitious technology initiatives into reliable nationwide execution. For the millions of Indian and diaspora families whose children sit for NEET, JEE and other national exams each year, the panel's recommendations — and whether they are actually implemented — will be closely watched in the months ahead.

NYC UNVEILS 30% GROCERY DISCOUNT PLAN FOR NEW MUNICIPAL STORES

(Our Staff Reporter) NEW YORK — Mayor Zohran Mamdani announced Monday that a core basket of everyday groceries — including all fresh produce, meat and seafood — will be sold at a fixed 30% discount at five new city-owned grocery stores planned across each of the five boroughs, part of his administration's signature affordability push. The discount will apply to roughly 20 additional categories of pantry staples, dairy and refrigerated goods, with prices locked in rather than fluctuating week to week as at private grocers, according to the mayor's office.

City officials estimate the combined savings could cut the average New Yorker's grocery bill by about \$90 a month, or roughly \$1,000 a year. The stores will not sell cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets or prepared hot foods — categories officials say generate significant revenue for existing bodegas — in an effort to avoid



directly competing with neighborhood grocers. "Since 2019, food prices have soared at grocery stores around the country by roughly 30%," Mamdani said at a Monday news conference in Brooklyn.

The city has allocated \$70 mil-

lion in capital funding for the initiative and released a request for proposals seeking private operators to manage day-to-day operations, even as the city retains ownership of the stores themselves.

The first location is planned for

The Peninsula, a mixed-use redevelopment on the former Spofford Juvenile Detention Facility site in Hunts Point, the Bronx, expected to open by the end of 2027. A second store is slated for La Marqueta in East Harlem, with a target opening of 2029; all five stores are expected to be operational by the end of Mamdani's first term. Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice Julie Su and NYCEDC Interim President Jeanny Pak joined the mayor at the announcement, describing the program as a first-of-its-kind public initiative aimed at neighborhoods where, city data shows, more than 40% of families struggle to afford food — a figure that reaches 77% in Hunts Point specifically. For the city's dense South Asian retail and grocery sector, particularly in Queens and the Bronx, the plan's long-term impact on small immigrant-owned grocers remains an open question city officials have yet to fully address.

SENATE BILL WOULD FREEZE H-1B VISAS FOR THREE YEARS, RAISE SALARY FLOOR TO \$200,000

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — A sweeping Republican-led proposal that would halt new H-1B visa issuance for three years and impose a \$200,000 minimum salary requirement is sending fresh waves of anxiety through Indian tech workers, who make up the large majority of H-1B recipients nationwide. Sen. Tim Sheehy of Montana introduced the End H-1B Visa Abuse Act of 2026 on July 23, describing it as an effort to restore the visa program "to its original purpose of filling specialized jobs that cannot be filled by American workers." The bill would suspend all new H-1B issuance for three years, then restart the program under a sharply reduced annual cap of 25,000 visas — down from the current 65,000 — while replacing the current lottery system with a wage-

based selection process favoring the highest-paid roles. Under the proposal, H-1B validity would be capped at three years, down from the current maximum of six or more. Employers would be required to certify that no qualified American worker is available and confirm they have not recently laid off staff before sponsoring a foreign worker. The bill would also end the "dual intent" provision allowing H-1B holders to pursue permanent residency while employed in the U.S., bar visa holders from bringing dependents, prohibit concurrent employment, and ban staffing agencies from sponsoring H-1B workers for third-party placements. It would additionally codify into law the administration's previously proposed \$100,000 filing fee per H-1B petition, a measure a federal court had

struck down. The bill mirrors an earlier House version introduced by Arizona Rep. Eli Crane in April, which drew seven Republican co-sponsors but has not advanced. More than 80% of H-1B recipients are Indian or Chinese nationals, according to federal data, making the community acutely exposed to any tightening of the program. The legislation remains in its early stages and faces a difficult path through a divided Congress, requiring approval from both chambers and the president's signature before taking effect. But combined with ongoing visa stamping delays at U.S. consulates in India, the proposal is already reshaping how Indian professionals and their employers plan travel, career moves and long-term settlement in the United States.

The Beginning

MAD MEN
OF
NU WAY ADVERTISING

About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh

MAD MEN
OF
NU WAY ADVERTISING



KRISHNAMOORTHY: INDIA "NOT DOING ENOUGH" TO MEET CHINA CHALLENGE, URGES DEEPER U.S. TIES

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Illinois Democrat who has represented the state's 8th Congressional District since 2017, says India needs to do more to confront China's rise, and that Washington should be doing more to bring New Delhi into closer partnership on the technologies that will define the coming decade. "I think India, like the United States, needs to step up to the challenge. It's not doing enough. It can do more," Krishnamoorthi said in an interview with IANS this week. He called the strategic competition with Beijing "the defining challenge of our time" and said neither country is currently rising to meet it. Krishnamoorthi, who was born in New Delhi and raised in the U.S., pointed to fusion energy, solar power, quantum computing and artificial intelligence as areas where deeper India-U.S. collaboration could pay off. He argued that

closer cooperation on emerging technology, not just traditional defense ties, will determine which country sets the terms of global competition with China in the years ahead. He also tied the China question directly to immigration policy, criticizing the treatment of H-1B visa holders — a workforce dominated by Indian professionals — and calling for faster processing of employment-based green cards. "For the million

people who've been waiting patiently



in queue to get their green card, we should do everything we can to expedite

this process, especially for those people who've been here for decades," he said, adding that any reforms should be pursued on a bipartisan basis.

The comments follow remarks Krishnamoorthi made in December warning that U.S.-India relations had entered a "cold and frigid" phase amid tariff disputes, and that treating India differently than China on trade was strategically self-defeating. He has separately described rising anti-Indian rhetoric in American politics as "deeply disturbing," citing an elected official's public call for his own deportation. For a diaspora accustomed to watching Krishnamoorthi as one of the most visible Indian-American voices in Congress, his message this week doubled as both a warning and an appeal: that the U.S.-India relationship, however imperfect, remains too important to the China question to be left to drift.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FAST-TRACKS ASYLUM CASES, DROPS INTERVIEW REQUIREMENT

(Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security has issued an interim final rule allowing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to refer certain asylum applications directly to immigration judges without first conducting an interview, a major procedural shift the administration says will help clear a backlog of more than 1.4 million pending cases. The rule, which took effect immediately without a prior public comment period, applies to "affirmative" asylum applications — those filed by people not already in removal proceedings, which USCIS normally reviews itself. Under the previous system, USCIS interviewed applicants and either approved their claims or referred unsuccessful cases to immigration court.

The new rule allows officers to skip the interview step entirely for a large share of pending cases. Officials estimate the change could affect up to 444,724 of the 1.43 million pending affirmative asylum cases — roughly 31% of the total. DHS argues the previous interview requirement had no statutory basis and that the system has been exploited by applicants seeking to delay removal or obtain work authorization while their cases wound through the process.

Immigration advocates warn the change strips away a critical opportunity for applicants to present evidence of persecution before facing deportation proceedings, raising due-process concerns that are likely to trigger

enforcement and speed deportations. Immigration courts, which already face a backlog exceeding 4 million cases nationally, are expected to



absorb a larger share of asylum adjudication as a result. For South Asian immigrant communities, many of whom have relatives navigating the asylum system or advising others through it, the rule adds another layer of uncertainty to an already strained and unpredictable process — one where the margin between a full hearing and a fast-tracked referral to court may now come down to little more than the flip of an administrative switch.

The move follows a series of Supreme Court rulings this year affirming DHS's authority to limit asylum processing and end Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of migrants, and fits within a broader administration effort to tighten immigration

INDIAN-ORIGIN MAIL CARRIER DIES DELIVERING ROUTE IN TRIPLE-DIGIT TEXAS HEAT

(Our Staff Reporter) LITTLE ELM, Texas — Umeshkumar Thakkar, a 58-year-old U.S. Postal Service letter carrier, died Monday, July 20, while delivering mail in this Dallas suburb as temperatures reached 102 degrees. His death has renewed scrutiny of working conditions for postal employees during increasingly severe summer heat waves. Thakkar, a resident of nearby Aubrey, had worked as a part-time rural carrier since 2022. Surveillance footage showed his postal vehicle parked with hazard lights flashing near Thornhill Lane and Graystone Drive around 12:20 p.m. Neighbors later saw emergency vehicles arrive at the scene; a 911 call was placed around 2 p.m., and firefighters performed CPR before he was pronounced dead. His family and coworkers held a funeral service Thursday. The cause of death has not been officially determined, and USPS has not confirmed whether heat played a role, though federal workplace safety officials with OSHA have opened an investigation. Thakkar's vehicle appeared to be one of the aging Grumman Long Life Vehicles that lack air conditioning; postal workers have reported temperatures inside such vehicles exceeding 120 degrees during summer months. His death marks the third fatality among Dallas-Fort Worth postal carriers working in extreme heat in just over three years. Eugene Gates Jr., a 66-year-old letter carrier with nearly four decades of USPS service, died in June 2023 after collapsing in similar conditions; OSHA later fined the Postal Service more than \$15,000 for failing to protect him. Jacob Taylor, a 28-year USPS veteran, died in June 2025 under comparable circumstances. "The Postal Service is deeply saddened by the tragic loss of a postal family member," USPS said in a statement following Thakkar's death. Kimetra Lewis, president of the local branch of the National Association of Letter Carriers, has urged neighbors to check on carriers during their routes.

Jagdish Sewhani, President of The American Indian Public Affairs Committee, Meets President Donald Trump at a High-Profile Manhattan Event



(By our staff reporter) NEW YORK – Jagdish Sewhani, the President of The American Indian Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), recently had a notable meeting with President Donald Trump at a high-profile gathering held in the heart of Manhattan. This interaction underscores the

continuous efforts to foster strong ties and foster dialogue between the American Indian community and key political figures. After the meeting, Jagdish Sewhani told this reporter that he wanted to discuss a wide array of topics, including bilateral trade, cultural exchange, and issues of mutual concern between India and the United States. President Trump, who has a history of engaging with various community leaders, expressed his warm regard for the Indian diaspora and acknowledged their significant contributions to the social and economic fabric of America.

Jagdish Sewhani, a respected figure in both public affairs and community leadership, articulated the vision of AIPAC to enhance cooperation and understanding between the two nations. He emphasized the importance of sustained engagement and collaborative efforts to address global challenges and build a prosperous future based on shared values. This meeting is part of AIPAC's ongoing commitment to represent the interests of the American Indian community and to ensure their voice is heard at the highest

levels of government. By facilitating interactions like this, the organization aims to promote a more inclusive and productive dialogue, ultimately leading to policies and initiatives that benefit all. The American Indian Public Affairs Committee remains dedicated to its mission of advocating for the vibrant and dynamic Indian-American community. It will continue to pursue opportunities for constructive engagement and to champion causes that strengthen the historic partnership between India and the United States.



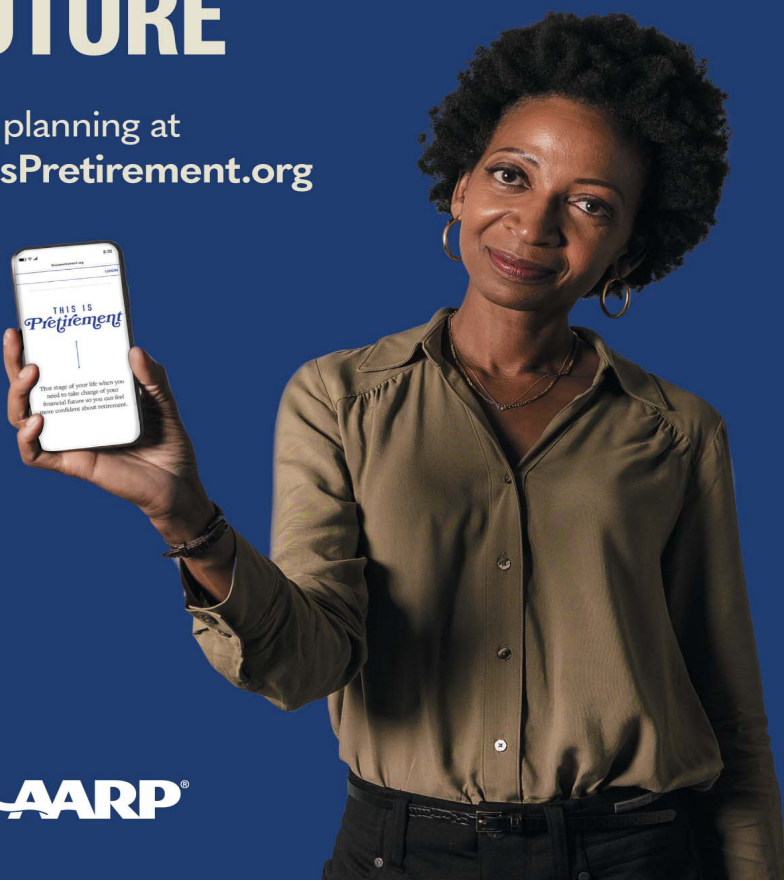
#Dadication



fatherhood.gov

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

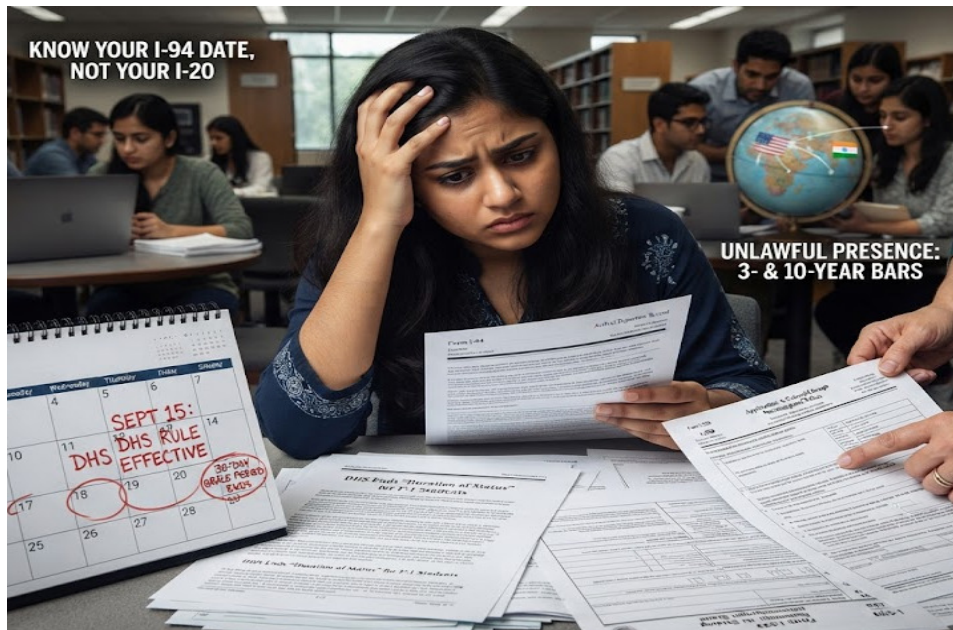
Start planning at ThisIsPretirement.org





The Four-Year Clock

Washington has turned the student visa from a program into a deadline. Indian families should understand exactly what changes on September 15.



For four decades, an F-1 student's stay in America was measured by a sentence rather than a date. "Duration of status" meant lawful presence lasted as long as the program did — because education does not run on schedule. A dissertation stalls. A committee member leaves. A failed experiment costs a year. The system bent, because the reality bent.

On September 15, it stops bending. A Department of Homeland Security final rule published July 17 ends duration of status for F students, J exchange visitors, and I representatives of foreign media. In its place is a fixed date on the Form I-94. F-1 students will be admitted for the length of the program, including post-completion practical training, up to a maximum of four years — plus a grace period cut from sixty days to thirty. Need longer? File an extension of stay with USCIS: fee, biometrics, federal adjudication, and the real possibility of denial by an officer who has never met your dissertation committee.

Indians are the largest cohort of international students in the United States. Read that paragraph again as a parent.

The rule's harm is not in its headline; it is in its plumbing. Once the I-94 date passes without a timely filing, unlawful presence begins to accrue — and unlawful presence, upon departure, triggers three- and ten-year bars on reentry. A student who miscounts thirty days does not receive a warning letter. They receive a decade. There are safeguards, and they are genuine but narrow. A timely-filed extension lets an F-1 student continue a full course of study while it is pending. The 180-day automatic extension for timely STEM OPT

filings survives. Certain employment authorization continues for up to 240 days during a pending extension. Students already in valid status when the rule takes effect may generally finish out their current I-20 period, and a six-month reprieve applies to some OPT filings. None of this restores the old system. All of it depends on filing early and filing correctly.

The quieter cruelty is the restriction on academic mobility. Undergraduates must generally complete a first academic year at the school that issued the original I-20 before transferring or changing objectives. Graduate students generally may not change educational objectives during a program at all, nor transfer, absent extenuating circumstances. Delay caused by academic probation or repeated failure to complete will not support extra time. A young engineer who discovers midway that her field has moved — and in this decade, fields move — is now instructed to finish the degree that no longer exists. Set this beside the other half of the story. Illinois Tech opens a UGC-approved Mumbai campus this fall, the first standalone American university campus in India. IIT Bombay is seeding a New York sub-campus with SUNY Old Westbury for 2027. The corridor is being rebuilt in both directions at precisely the moment Washington makes the American end harder to walk.

The practical guidance is unglamorous and urgent. Know your I-94 date, not your I-20 date. File early. Do not travel abroad with an extension pending. And do not assume September is far away.

TSAI Editorial Board

The Cockroach That Made a Colossus Blink

A satirical party that did not exist in May extracted a cabinet resignation in a week. India's actual opposition should be asking why it could not.

For twelve years, Narendra Modi has not retreated. He has absorbed farmer protests, outlasted currency shocks, governed through a coalition-forced third term, and only months ago delivered his party a run of state election victories in territory it had never held. The machine does not reverse.

Last weekend it reversed.

On Saturday, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, taking accountability for a chain of examination scandals that began with a leaked university entrance paper in May. On Sunday, Modi announced - on Instagram, the platform the protesters had made their own - that Nandan Nilekani, the Infosys co-founder who built Aadhaar, would lead a high-powered task force on examination reform. By Monday the encampment at Jantar Mantar was empty. The group that forced this did not exist in May. The Cockroach Janta Party began as a joke on social media - the name is the argument, a species that survives what kills everything else. It has no ideology anyone can summarise, no funding structure, no seat, no candidate. Its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, addressed a Delhi rally on July 20.

That same day, police used batons and tear gas to stop thousands of students marching on Parliament. The images travelled the world within hours. That evening, according to reports, Pradhan met Home Minister Amit Shah and offered to go.

Note the sequence. The government did not move at the leak. It did not move at weeks of demands for accountability, or at the families who say the fraud destroyed their children. It moved when the pictures moved. For readers following this from Edison or

Richmond Hill, the temptation is to file the episode under Indian domestic politics. Resist it. Two things here belong to us.

The first is a lesson about opposition. The Congress has spent a decade failing to land a blow that unaffiliated twenty-year-olds landed in six weeks. The lesson is not that satire beats organisation. It is that the BJP's dominance has been a dominance over parties - over actors who can be negotiated with, absorbed, split, or beaten at a ballot box.

A movement with nothing to trade is a different category of problem. Every established Indian party should be reading last weekend with alarm, including the ones celebrating it. The second is a warning about what follows. A task force is a concession and a container at the same time. Nilekani is a serious appointment; he is also a mechanism for converting a street into a committee, on the government's calendar rather than the students'.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police say they have identified 2,873 people with criminal records at the protest sites and are investigating violence at Jantar Mantar. Whatever that inquiry finds, its political function is legible: to retroactively recast a student movement as an infiltrated one. The CJP has suspended its demonstrations, not dissolved them. Its remaining demands, including compensation for the families of students lost to the scandal, have been promised rather than delivered. The measure of last weekend will not be the resignation. It will be whether anyone is still counting in November.

TSAI Editorial Board

INSIDER

ISSN No. 1554 06X

By TSAI Editorial Board

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

Editor in Chief

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Tel: 646 875 8495

Managing Editor:

Amaninder Singh Thind

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com

Special Correspondent (New York)

Raaj Raahi

Mailing Address:

NuWay Media Group Inc.

223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4

Manhattan, New York 10018

For General and Advertising Inquiries:

thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.

Disclaimer The South Asian Insider is a weekly newspaper published every week by The South Asian Insider. It's available in community & religious centers, ethnic grocery stores and also available by mail, email & online to subscribers. The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by the various writers, authors and forum participants in The South Asian Insider do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Editor. All advertisers advertising in The South Asian Insider assume responsibility for accuracy of their advertisements. The South Asian Insider and/or people associated with it are not responsible for any claims made by the advertisers and don't endorse any product or services advertised in The South Asian Insider. We strongly urge consulting your lawyer before buying/contracting/hiring through the ads published in the newspaper. We are in the business of selling space and claims made by the advertisers are not authenticated or confirmed by an independent source. (AI edited/generated image, used for reference purposes only)

Nine Hundred Ninety-Eight Dollars a Day

DHS says it has now issued \$84 billion in civil fines against people who did not leave. Look closely at who is receiving the letters.

BY SUNNY THIND, EDITOR-PUBLISHER

There is a figure in a Department of Homeland Security announcement from July 23 that deserves far more attention than it has received: eighty-four billion dollars. That is the total in civil fines the agency says it has issued against people who failed to depart after an order of removal. More than 100,000 letters have gone out. The rate is \$998 per day.

Do the arithmetic the letters do. A person who received a removal order in 2012 and remained — with the government's knowledge, often with the government's written permission, because there was nowhere to send them or because they were pursuing relief — is now looking at a demand in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The New York Times reported the case of a 68-year-old man whose

U.S.-citizen wife has cancer, and who had DHS permission to remain after a 2012 order. His letter said he owed \$579,838.

That is the design working, not a defect in it.

The letters draw no distinction between someone evading removal and someone pursuing an alternate form of relief, holding a valid work permit, or possessing explicit permission to be here. They arrive accompanied by a flier explaining how to self-deport. One recipient was given fifteen days to contest. She appealed. She then received a second letter threatening her credit and referral for collection litigation, and stating that the debt would be weighed against her in any future immigration proceeding.

Read that last clause slowly. The fine you incur by staying becomes evidence

against the case you are staying to make. Attorneys interviewed by the Times report that many such appeals have simply been denied.

This is enforcement by insolvency. It requires no detention bed, no flight, no immigration judge, no courtroom. It requires a mailing list. And it falls hardest on precisely the population least equipped to resist it: people settled enough to have a fixed address, a work permit, and a credit score — which is to say, people the system can find.

Our own readership should not assume distance from this. South Asian families across Queens and Nassau County occupy every point on this spectrum: the asylum applicant whose hearing is years out, the man with an old order and a pending motion to reopen, the household where one member's status is settled and

another's is not. The letters do not check first whether you are the sympathetic case.

Federal lawsuits are now underway challenging the policy on due process and constitutional grounds. They deserve to succeed. A penalty that accrues while a person is exercising a legal right to seek relief is not a sanction for lawbreaking. It is a toll on the courthouse door.

Two practical notes for readers. Do not ignore such a letter — the window to contest can be as short as fifteen days. And do not answer one without counsel, because whatever you write becomes part of your immigration record.

A fine of \$998 a day is not a deterrent. Deterrents are aimed at future conduct. This is aimed at people who are already here, already known, and already waiting.

TSAI Editorial Board

The Chill Before the Rule

On September 18, public benefits return to the green-card calculation. The greater danger is what frightened families do before then.

UNDERSTANDING THE 2022 PUBLIC CHARGE RULE RESCISSION: A GUIDE FOR IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

WHAT CHANGED ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

1. PREVIOUS RULE (2022)

- SSS, TANF, State Cash Assistance **COUNTS**
- Long-term Institutionalization **COUNTS**
- SNAP, Medicaid (most), CHIP, WIC, Housing **EXCLUDED**

NARROW & PREDICTABLE TEST

NEW RULE (Effective Sept 18)

- Total Circumstances Review
- Factors: Age, Health, Family, Assets, Education, Skills, Sponsor
- Non-Cash Benefits **MAY BE CONSIDERED, BUT NOT AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFYING**

OFFICER DISCRETION RETURNS TO STATUTORY TEST

PROTECTIONS & KEY DATES

- Past Use Protected: Benefits received **BEFORE** Sept 18 are evaluated under the old standard.
- Applications Filed **BEFORE** Sept 18 fall under the old rule.
- Humanitarian Categories (e.g., Asylees, U/T Visas) remain **EXEMPT**.
- Consular Processing **ABROAD** follows separate State Department standards.

THE REAL DANGER: PREVENTABLE DISENROLLMENT.

Don't pull children off benefits due to fear or rumors. Past use is protected.

COMMUNITY ACTION & GUIDANCE

ADVISORS & INSTITUTIONS: Community clinics, Gurdwaras, Temples, Practitioners **MUST SHARE ACCURATE INFORMATION.**

COMMUNITY CLINIC GURDWARA LANGAR TEMPLE TRUST

THREE CRITICAL MESSAGES TO REPEAT:

- Your children's benefits are your children's.
- Past use is protected.
- Do not disenroll anyone on the strength of a rumor.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE:

- IF FILE IS READY:** Submit Form I-485 **BEFORE** Sept 18 to keep narrower standard.
- IF FILING AFTER:** Thoroughly document assets, employment, education, and sponsor affidavit.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS. FIGHT FEAR WITH FACTS. SEEK TRUSTED LEGAL HELP.

BY SUNNY THIND, EDITOR-PUBLISHER

On July 20, the Department of Homeland Security published a final rule rescinding the 2022 public charge regulation. It takes effect September 18. From that date, officers deciding whether a green-card applicant is "likely at any time to become a public charge" recover the discretion the 2022 rule took away.

What this means requires precision, because imprecision here does measurable damage.

Under the 2022 rule, the test was narrow and predictable. Only cash assistance for income maintenance - SSI, TANF, state general assistance - and long-term institutionalization at government

expense counted against an applicant. SNAP, most Medicaid, CHIP, WIC, and housing assistance were expressly excluded.

The new rule does not resurrect the 2019 regulation with its benefit lists and twelve-month thresholds. It replaces the framework with nothing at all. Officers return to the bare statutory test under INA §212(a)(4): a totality-of-the-circumstances review weighing age, health, family status, assets, resources, financial status, education, skills, and the Affidavit of Support. Non-cash benefits are no longer barred from consideration. Neither are they automatically disqualifying. Everything becomes a judgment call by an individual adjudicator,

which is another way of saying the outcome now depends on who opens your file.

Now the parts too few people are repeating loudly enough. Benefits received before September 18 are protected - DHS has said prior use of Medicaid, SNAP, CHIP, or housing assistance will be evaluated under the old standard. Applications for admission made before that date, and adjustment applications postmarked or electronically filed before it, fall under the current rule. Major humanitarian categories remain statutorily exempt. And consular processing abroad is governed by separate State Department standards, historically narrower, which may matter

for some families weighing where to file. Here is the history that should worry us most. When the 2019 rule was announced, the measurable harm was not in denials. It was in disenrollment. Families pulled U.S.-citizen children off CHIP and out of food assistance - benefits belonging to those children - in households where public charge did not apply to anyone at all. Emergency rooms absorbed conditions a clinic visit would have caught. The rule did most of its work before it did any of its work. That will happen again unless our institutions move first. Gurdwara langar committees, temple trusts, community clinics in Jackson Heights and Edison, and every practitioner serving this readership should be repeating three sentences now: your children's benefits are your children's. Past use is protected. Do not disenroll anyone on the strength of a rumour. The practical guidance is simple. If you are eligible to adjust status and your file is ready, submit before September 18 - you keep the narrower standard and the current Form I-485, which will be rejected after that date. If you cannot, document assets, employment, education, and your sponsor's affidavit thoroughly, because those statutory factors now carry the weight the old lists used to carry. The rule is a policy choice, and reasonable people will argue it on the merits. The panic is not a policy choice. It is preventable - and preventing it is a job for community institutions before it is a job for lawyers.

TSAI Editorial Board



Trump's Iran challenge: Is the US President heading into a Carter trap?

The longer President Trump stays embroiled in Iran, the more deleterious the consequences to his Presidency and his legacy.

The Iran-US war enters its sixth month on August 1. A shaky June 17 ceasefire and MoU have endured despite a 13-day US bombing campaign against Iran that ended on July 24. Both sides have raised the stakes and expanded the conflict. US ally Ukraine struck Iranian vessels in the Caspian Sea on Sunday. Iranian proxies, the Houthis, attacked Saudi Arabia's oil facilities and shut the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the Red Sea. President Trump is now embroiled in what scholar Robert Pape calls the "escalation trap" — a self-reinforcing cycle in which efforts to control or win a conflict lead to a worse, wider, and harder-to-control situation. On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman declared that "Tehran has never permitted and will never allow the United States to determine the timing of any military conflict." Esmail Baghaei said that "national security alone dictates the country's defensive and diplomatic actions." This is among the most chilling statements by Iranian officials so far, signalling that Tehran believes it holds escalation dominance and that Trump has lost control. Hence, I would argue that

Trump now faces a far bigger challenge: the Carter trap.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States, faced multiple foreign policy challenges. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 caused a global energy shortage. Carter embargoed Iranian oil, oil prices doubled to \$39.50 a barrel, and Americans wasted hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel as car engines idled in gasoline queues. The result was 'stagflation', high interest rates, and soaring inflation. The coup de grace came with the hostage crisis, during which Iranian held 52 Americans captive at the US Embassy in Tehran. An ambitious US rescue attempt ended in disaster. Two aircraft crashed on the ground, eight US servicemen were killed, and US special forces were forced to abandon the mission. The hostages remained in Iranian custody for 444 days. Carter lost the 1980 election in a landslide to Ronald Reagan. In 2026, Trump faces the Iranian challenge as Carter did in 1979, and isn't doing a great job of it — Reuters/Ipsos polls on Sunday showed that just one in three Americans support the war on Iran.

Most respondents say President Trump has failed to explain his goals. His only trump card — the US economy is surprisingly resilient despite global oil shocks. Yet, the low approval ratings and the unending Iran war, could affect Republicans in the November 3 midterm elections. All 435 seats in the US House of Representatives, and one-third of the 100 US Senate seats, are up for vote. (They are called 'midterms' because they take place halfway through a president's term. An Indian equivalent would be elections to all 543 Lok Sabha seats and 83 Rajya Sabha seats). The partisan composition of congress literally determine what the President can do in the last two years of his term. If the Democrats get four seats in the midterms, they will control the House of Representatives. If Trump is unable to end the Iran conflict on his terms before the midterms, he could be staring at a hostile House when the new Congress convenes on January 3, 2027. The Iranians know this. In 1981, they administered a coup de grace to the Carter Presidency. They released the hostages on January 20, 1981, minutes after Ronald Reagan was

sworn in as president.

Trump has called Reagan his favourite President and Carter his least favourite. He has often mentioned Biden and Carter in the same breath, saying Carter died a happy man knowing Biden had presided over the worst administration in American history. Trump did toss 'Trump 2028' caps at the White House correspondent's dinner, but given the US Constitution's two-term limit on the US President, this could have been a farewell joke. The Iranian conundrum effectively challenges Trump's legacy as president. There is, however, a flip side to the Carter trap — the Carter requiem. Carter was the longest-lived former US President. He passed away in 2025 at 100. In the 44 years out of office, he contributed far more in his post-presidency years than in the White House. He established the Carter Centre for human rights and won the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize, something Trump has long coveted. For Trump, now 80, the oldest person to be inaugurated as president, these are sobering thoughts.

By Sandeep Unnithan

One Crisis, 4 Wins: How China Might Just Have Hit A Geopolitical Jackpot

There is now a near-unanimous consensus that the Iran war has benefited China immensely. Against the sniggering commentaries of the initial days of the war, when it was believed that China would be hit hard, the more recent reports on how it has impacted China are far more sobering, if not outright envious. But China can hardly be blamed for accruing benefits from the shortsighted, ill-thought-out war. There are four broad areas in which China is reportedly benefiting.

A Distracted America

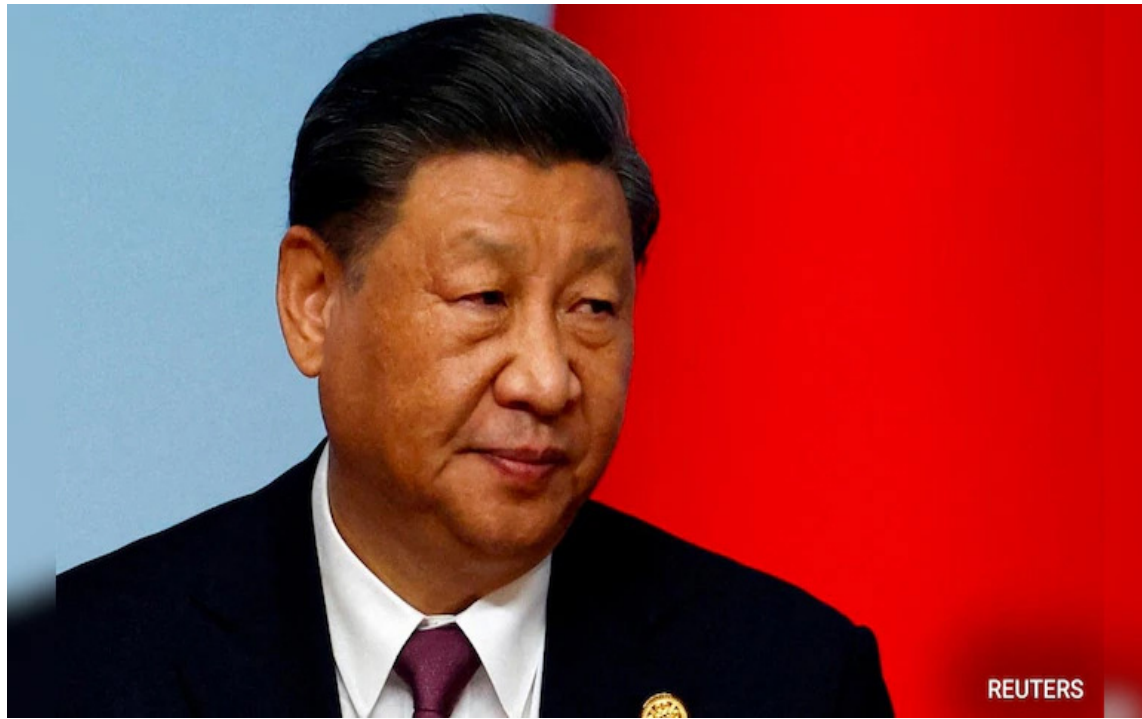
The first is military. The ongoing Iran war is being perceived as a gamechanger in the Indo-Pacific security architecture as the US continues to pivot to the Middle East, pulling out missile systems, long-range missiles, and interceptors from places like South Korea and Pacific Islands and transferring them to the Middle East to replenish depleting stockpiles there. This leaves China with greater military clout in the region and also helps it mount a narrative - especially around Taiwan - about the unreliability of the US as an ally. The war also helps China study American war manoeuvres, strike patterns, weapons systems, operational capabilities, etc., which are useful for any potential future conflict over Taiwan or in the Indo-Pacific.

It's The Oil, Silly

Secondly, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz early into the war and the destruction of energy facilities have caused disruptions in energy supply chains on a scale hitherto unwitnessed. About 25% of crude oil and a fifth of LNG have disappeared from global energy markets. This has benefited China in two ways.

One, the energy shortfall has accelerated the push for renewables. Countries such as Pakistan and Vietnam have increased the deployment of renewable energy and the use of electric vehicles. China is the largest manufacturer of electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind turbines, and is leading global clean energy chains, with exports soaring to \$21.9 billion just by March 2026.

On the other hand, China has judiciously engaged in building



massive strategic energy reserves. Over the years, it has sourced sanctioned Iranian oil at massively discounted prices, especially after the 2021 agreement with Iran for an estimated \$400 billion, which has been a lifeline for Iran, more so after the war began and a blockade was imposed on the country's ports. According to data from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), China holds an estimated 1.2 to 1.4 billion barrels of total crude oil in combined commercial and strategic stockpiles. With decreasing demand and sustained pipeline LNG supplies, Chinese firms have been reselling LNG to countries facing severe shortfalls because of the war, like Vietnam, South Korea and the Philippines.

Both these things increase China's strategic leverage regionally and globally.

The Age Of The Yuan

A third reason, and one tied to the above, is the process of de-dollarisation and the promotion of the Chinese yuan. This process has been underway for a while now and is projected to only accelerate. Just like the sanctions on Russia accelerated the use of the yuan in Sino-Russian trade, so did the sanctions on Iran facilitate the use of the Chinese currency in settling cross-border trade.

Sanctions aside, other countries, too, have tried to hedge their exposure. For instance, in 2023, China and Saudi Arabia signed a local currency swap agreement

worth \$7 billion as part of efforts to boost trade using their currencies and reduce reliance on the dollar. In 2024, Saudi Arabia signed on to the mBridge project, launched in 2021 between the central banks of China, Hong Kong, Thailand, and the UAE, to develop a new system for cross-border payments using central bank digital currencies. India, too, paid in yuan for Russian oil shipments earlier and for Iranian crude this year under a US sanctions waiver. Given how tied the Iranian economy is to China's, and in order to deliberately undermine the US dollar, Iran also announced that it would collect shipping "tolls" for passage through the Strait of Hormuz in yuan. China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) has reportedly seen daily transactions increase by over 50%, from \$85 billion to \$130 billion during the war.

Pulling Its Diplomatic Weight

Fourthly, the Iran war has seen China's diplomatic clout increase. In any case, much of the Global South, at least Africa and the Middle East, sees China as a natural leader and the only alternative to the US. The Iran war has helped project and promote that image. The war began on February 28, 2026. Soon after, China's Special Envoy to the Middle East, Zhai Jun, began engaging in shuttle diplomacy in the region to facilitate mediation and advance de-escalation efforts. This was just what Li Hui, the Chinese government's special representative for Eurasian affairs,

had done during the Russia-Ukraine war. While nothing changed on the ground in the latter case, it did project and promote China's image as a peace-loving and peace-seeking country. China has also opposed a UNSC resolution to open the Strait of Hormuz. Earlier, too, China had facilitated a "truce", though short-lived, between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

There are other ways as well in which China has been benefiting from the Iran war. The bombing of the Chabahar port tower or the strikes in Iran's northern region bordering the Caspian Sea - and on cargo vessels in there - have caused a setback to the International North-South Transport Corridor, which was, at least in part, meant to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its expanding influence in Central Asia, Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Attacks on Chabahar and renewed sanctions on the port also complicate India's connectivity ambitions. But all this allows China to continue with its trade routes untouched. In fact, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the BRI's flagship project in Pakistan, has actively benefited as countries like Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan reroute their trade routes away from Iran to the CPEC to reach the Arabian Sea.

China also controls the global supply chain of rare earth elements, critical to the production of hi-tech and next-generation weapon systems. The

US is estimated to have imported almost 70% of its rare earth metals from China between 2021 and 2024. China imposed export restrictions on these elements, given its trade war with the US. But with the rapid depletion of America's stockpiles in the war, the demand for these metals has increased, which plays directly into China's hands, offering it greater leverage over the US in trade negotiations.

Who Can Blame Luck?

Yet, can China be blamed for making use of opportunities that have presented themselves to it? In fact, sanctions on Iran, even preceding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), offered China strategic avenues. It began importing large quantities of heavily discounted Iranian oil, even assigning one particular bank, the Bank of Kunlun, to process payments without the threat of Western sanctions. Where countries like India retreated, China opened up the large Iranian market to its products and engaged in building strategic infrastructure in the country. Iran became a major node in China's BRI and a useful tool to keep the US engaged in the region, distracted from the Indo-Pacific and Taiwan. Yet, given its energy dependence on the Gulf states, China adroitly balanced relations with the GCC, too, as well as with Israel, where it has also engaged in strategic infrastructure development. It opposes the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran but is alleged to have supplied dual-use technology to it.

When the first Trump administration withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, reimposing sanctions on Iran, China was the one to benefit from the pre-deal opportunities. Now, the Iran war is only compounding those opportunities. In fact, every US move against Iran has translated into an enabling factor for China. Meanwhile, those like Taiwan and South Korea will be warily wondering - as they had in Trump's last administration - how much they can depend on the US as a defense shield.

So, why grudge China the advantages it has been handed almost on a platter?

By Aditi Bhaduri

'A Breaking Point': An Open Letter To Nandan Nilekani On How To Fix India's Exams

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor offers a radical blueprint to the man leading the Centre's exam reforms task force.

My dear Nandan,

I am one of those who is delighted that you have been asked to lead a committee to propose reforms in our nation's examination system. Though I am conscious that another such committee was named after a series of paper leaks in 2024, led by Prof K. Radhakrishnan, and made 101 recommendations, most of which have not been implemented, I would like to believe that whatever you come up with is more likely to retain the government's attention. Since there is no indication that your committee plans to consult Parliament or its members, as representatives of the people, for their views, I am offering you a few ideas here as a well-meaning citizen.

You know that this is a moment of profound angst and unprecedented disillusionment among India's youth. Across the country, millions of young men and women, who have spent the prime of their lives buried under mountains of test preparation, sacrificing sleep, health, and family resources, only to be betrayed by the failings of the system, took to the streets. Their anger was not merely a reaction to isolated paper leaks or administrative blunders; it was the inevitable breaking point of a system that has become structurally obsolete, morally exhausted, and intellectually deadening.

Go Beyond Stoppap Solutions

India's youth do not lack ambition, intellect, or resilience. What they lack is an educational ecosystem that matches their promise. We have created a high-stakes, hyper-competitive bottleneck where a candidate's entire youth is judged by a single, high-stress, high-volume multiple-choice exam administered over a few gruelling hours. When that fragile mechanism breaks down, due to administrative malfeasance, corruption, or institutional rot, it shatters the faith of an entire generation in the promise of Indian meritocracy. If we are to transform this crisis into an opportunity, we cannot settle for incremental fixes or temporary committee reports. We need a fundamental reimagining of how we assess talent, foster higher education, and prepare our youth for the twenty-first century.

The core vulnerability of our current national testing regime (whether for university admissions or professional qualification) is its centralised, single-day, high-stakes design. When three million students must sit for a test simultaneously on a single Sunday, the logistics create massive vectors for paper leaks, server crashes, and administrative failure. Moreover, it is pedagogically cruel:



a sudden illness, panic attack, or family emergency on exam day (or even a bad traffic jam on the way!) can set a student back by an entire year. India must, therefore, transition to a continuous, modular, and computer-adaptive testing framework modelled on the GRE and SAT. By establishing state-of-the-art, secure testing centres across every district, where standardised exams can be administered multiple times throughout the year, we can allow students to submit their highest score for admission applications. This immediately de-escalates youth anxiety, dismantles the toxic pressure-cooker environment, and removes the single-point-of-failure vulnerability that makes paper-leaking cartels so lucrative. Paired with dynamically generated question banks powered by secure cryptographic technology, we could ensure that no two candidates at the same centre would receive the exact same question set, rendering physical paper leaks structurally impossible.

The 'Thinking' Student

Furthermore, our modern national entrance tests largely evaluate high-speed pattern recognition and rote recall, rather than critical thinking, problem-solving, or deep conceptual comprehension. This narrow focus has spawned a predatory, unregulated multi-crore-rupee coaching industry that acts as a shadow education system, favouring affluent urban students who can afford expensive test-prep factories while penalising talented rural youth or students from poorer families. I have long been urging our teachers not to teach students "what to think", but rather "how to think". But that preaching falls on deaf ears if the exam system only rewards those who have "mugged up" preparation material and learned how to regurgitate it in the exam hall. We must not only reform the exam papers and procedures, as I have suggested above, but broaden our evaluation criteria by adopting a holistic admissions matrix. Higher education institutions should weigh entrance exam

scores alongside secondary school performance, creative and analytical writing assessments, and maybe even verified extra-curricular activities and community contributions. Entrance exams themselves must be redesigned to test core analytical reasoning and domain-specific problem-solving, rather than requiring students to solve hundreds of complex problems under extreme time-pressure.

Testing reform will achieve little, however, if the destination, our universities, remains stagnant. Higher education institutions across India are bogged down by rigid, outdated syllabi imposed by over-centralised regulatory bureaucracies, leaving graduates ill-equipped for a rapidly evolving global economy. We must grant genuine financial and administrative autonomy to top-tier state and central universities, enabling them to design interdisciplinary curricula, introduce cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, climate science, and advanced biotechnology, and form direct industry partnerships. Every undergraduate programme must integrate mandatory internships in the "real world", laboratory research, or community-based field projects, ensuring that a degree signifies practical capability rather than mere attendance.

The Post-Exam Reckoning

A significant driver of students' frustration is the lack of employment opportunities once they finish their studies, with India facing the world's highest graduate-unemployment numbers at 40%. One place the government can start is to deal with the desperate bottleneck for public sector employment, where tens of thousands of university graduates apply for a handful of clerical positions. This reflects a structural mismatch: our higher education system grants degrees that fail to convey market-relevant skills, driving youth toward public sector exams as their sole sanctuary for economic security. To address this structural imbalance, we

should first urgently fill all existing public sector vacancies with those who have cleared previous examinations but languished on pending lists. Second, we should streamline public recruitment by replacing dozens of fragmented, overlapping recruitment tests with a unified, biannual National Public Service Aptitude Assessment, also on the model I have previously outlined. Meanwhile, civil service roles should be redefined to explicitly require technical abilities and functional skills, rather than relying on hyper-competitive elimination exams that test trivial general knowledge.

Listen To The Young

Finally, the crisis of faith among our youth stems from a complete lack of administrative accountability when systems fail. Heads must roll for the repeated failures of the last few years, especially 2024 and 2026. It is not enough to hold one Minister morally responsible. Others down the chain must also pay the penalty for maladministration, or worse, malfeasance. And to ensure this doesn't happen again, the system must be fixed. When exams are cancelled or compromised, state agencies routinely issue vague statements while leaving students in financial and emotional limbo. We must enact strict legislation establishing a statutory National Testing Standards Act, creating a clear legal "duty of care" that is owed by testing agencies to candidates. This framework should mandate financial compensation for students affected by administrative cancellations, enforce strict timelines for grievance redressal, and assign severe criminal liability for institutional negligence or corrupt practices. Complemented by an independent Ombudsman for Educational Examinations, completely detached from the Ministry and testing agencies, we can audit security protocols, investigate candidate complaints, and publish annual transparency reports that restore public faith. The young people who protested at Jantar Mantar and across our nation were not asking for unearned privileges or lowered standards. They were asking for fairness, transparency, and a system that respects their dignity and hard work. By replacing high-stress, leak-prone testing rituals with a modern, modular, and holistic educational framework, India can restore trust in its public institutions and unleash the true potential of its young demographic. The choice before us is clear: we can continue to patch up a collapsing, century-old apparatus, or we can build a resilient, world-class education system worthy of India's future. You can help our government make that choice. All the best, Nandan!

By Shashi Tharoor

Gen Z Can Topple A Minister. Why Can't They Enter Parliament?

India's Gen Z can vote at 18, graduate soon afterwards, and even hold bureaucratic positions after 21. What they still can't do is contest elections before they turn 25.

Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation carries an irony that Delhi's political durbars should not miss. A politician whose ascent began in student politics has been forced out of the Education Ministry by students who had no party office, no famous surname, or invitation to the national high table.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) converted an insult into an identity and an examination scandal into a larger argument about fairness. The ruling NDA government first treated the agitation as a policing problem. It then negotiated, conceded the protesters' principal demands, and accepted Pradhan's resignation. Pralhad Joshi, another senior Cabinet hand, has been given additional charge of Education. The resignation matters. But India must understand the larger message: young people should not have to besiege Parliament to be heard inside it. Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy put the argument in memorable political shorthand: India's youth should not merely march from Jantar Mantar towards Parliament; they should be enabled to move from sadak se Sansad, that is, from the street into the legislature itself.

Not Yet A Generational Transfer

The immediate official response has been administrative continuity: one veteran replaces another, at least temporarily. Yet the crisis was not merely about who occupied Shastri Bhawan. It was about the distance between those designing India's education system and those living through its examinations, coaching factories, paper leaks, delayed recruitment, and precarious passage from degree to employment.

The next full-time Education Minister should, therefore, be chosen with more imagination. So should the next minister responsible for information technology. These ministries govern the terrain on which Gen Z lives: education, artificial intelligence, data, online speech, platform work, skills, and employment.

In fact, many in the Congress and the INDIA alliance are now suggesting that a future Opposition-led government should entrust the education portfolio to a Gen Z leader.

Young Country, Old House

India possesses the world's largest Gen Z cohort. More than 500 million Indians, roughly 35% of the population, are between 10 and 29. Yet, only four members elected to the present Lok Sabha were identified as Gen Z. That is less than one per cent of a House whose average age is 56 and which is among the oldest Lok Sabhas India has elected. The mismatch is not cosmetic. Representation influences what receives



urgency.

India permits a citizen to vote at 18 but requires that person to wait until 25 to contest for the Lok Sabha or an Assembly, and until 30 for the Rajya Sabha or a Legislative Council. The argument is older than the Republic. In the Constituent Assembly, Shibban Lal Saxena had warned against excluding exceptional young Indians, while BR Ambedkar defended higher age requirements, particularly for the Upper House.

The founders made their judgment in the conditions of 1949. But does respect for their wisdom does not require every threshold to remain frozen for eternity? The world, after all, has evolved.

Singapore permits citizens aged 21 to contest parliamentary elections. Since its Prime Minister must command a parliamentary majority, a 21-year-old is theoretically eligible for the office. Singapore has not had a 21-year-old prime minister, but the relevant point is simple: its law does not declare political adulthood to end at the voting booth.

The Indian contradiction is difficult to defend indefinitely. A citizen can vote at 18, graduate soon afterwards, sit for the civil services at 21 and, in exceptional cases, acquire substantial administrative responsibility before becoming legally eligible to contest an Assembly or Lok Sabha election. The Republic is willing to trust a 21-year-old with the machinery of the state, but not yet with the possibility of securing a popular mandate.

Can Parliament Act?

Reddy has repeatedly proposed lowering the minimum age for contesting assembly elections from 25 to 21 and has spoken of an Assembly resolution urging a constitutional amendment. Telangana cannot make this change alone: Articles 84 and 173 prescribe the qualifications, so Parliament must act. But a state government can create the political pressure that makes Parliament act.

Reddy has announced that a special session of the Telangana Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council will be convened in the first week of August to adopt a resolution seeking 21 as the minimum age for contesting the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, and 25 for the Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils. The resolution is to be forwarded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union government.

The proposal retains a distinction between the directly elected Houses and the Upper Houses, while lowering both thresholds. It is more considered than a blanket demand to abolish every age qualification.

The argument draws deliberately on Rajiv Gandhi's decision to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 through the 61st Constitutional Amendment. The amendment's statement of objects argued that politically conscious young people should be allowed to become part of the political process.

Another Congress-era precedent comes to mind. Under PV Narasimha Rao, the eligibility age for offices in urban and rural local bodies, including mayoral and Zilla Parishad leadership positions, was lowered from 25 to 21. This helped create space for very young representatives in local government, including the election of a 21-year-old mayor in Thiruvananthapuram. Younger candidates later. The unfinished step lies in Parliament and the assemblies. But parties need not wait for a constitutional amendment. They can commit a meaningful share of tickets in every state to candidates below 35. They can open district and state organisations to credible internal elections, and place young legislators in portfolios with real authority rather than confining them to youth affairs, sports, and ceremonial responsibilities.

Open The Gates, Not Merely The Gallery Lowering the candidacy age to 21 would be a start, not a cure.

Indian politics is expensive, dynastic, and organisationally closed. Without changes in campaign finance, internal party democracy, and candidate selection, lowering the threshold may simply allow younger members of established political families to enter four years earlier. A youthful surname is not a youth revolution. Nor should the CJP be romanticised. A successful protest is not automatically a programme for governance. Virality is not organisation, and irreverence is not ideology. Young politics can be intolerant, impulsive, and vulnerable to manipulation, just as old politics can be cynical and complacent.

The answer is not to hand the Republic to one generation. It is to stop excluding that generation from meaningful power. Political parties should publish the age profile of their candidates, set measurable youth targets for tickets, and finance first-generation entrants who do not possess family wealth or an inherited constituency. Legislative fellowships should lead somewhere more consequential than research assistance. Parliament should debate lowering the age to 21 for the Lok Sabha and assemblies, while retaining a higher threshold for Upper Houses if it wishes to preserve their revisory character. The CJP achieved what established politics had failed to do. A minister's resignation is evidence that young citizens possess political power even when the system denies them anything approaching proportional representation. But thought protests can remove a minister, redesigning an institution needs politics. The real tribute to those who came to Jantar Mantar would not be another speech celebrating their courage. It would be to open the doors through which power is entered. India trusted 18-year-olds with the vote in 1989. In 2026, it should begin trusting 21-year-olds with the possibility of office.

By Rasheed Kidwai

India's own chutnified Arab Spring 'Lite'

Why the irreverent, intelligent Gen-Z movement might be a cornerstone in India's socio-political landscape -- the single largest event uplifting the masses' ability to tell chalk from cheese.

Over the past month, India watched something it had almost forgotten was possible: a largely leaderless, entirely online-native youth movement force a sitting Cabinet minister to resign under a government that has, for twelve years, treated dissent as a rounding error.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) went from a five-day-old Instagram page to 26+ million followers -- more than the ruling BJP's own handle -- within weeks of launch. It ballooned into street protests across Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Patna and Aizawl, dragged ministers into rounds of negotiations, survived a tear-gas-and-baton crackdown that injured over 150+ students at Parliament Street, and still ended with education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation -- the first time in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure that a high-profile minister has fallen to public pressure.

That is not a footnote. That is arguably the most consequential socio-political event India has produced in over fifteen years -- not because it toppled a government, but because it reset the terms on which an entire society is allowed to argue with its elders and its rulers.

RIPS THROUGH FOSSILISED VIRTUE-SIGNALING UNCLE MAFIA

The Economist called India a "republic of uncles" and the label resonates for a reason. The Uncle Mafia isn't one man -- it's a layered ecosystem. It's the WhatsApp uncle forwarding right-wing propaganda before breakfast. It's the university administrator who, after the Uttar Pradesh Governor's stray comment during a convocation visit, banned non-vegetarian food in all 18 hostel messes of Lucknow's King George's Medical University -- including student-run cooperative kitchens, no explanation needed beyond deference. And it's the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, who was recorded calling unemployed young critics "parasites of society" and comparing them to "cockroaches" in open court. His clarification came only after the internet had already run away with the insult and further added salt to the injury as he claimed "I only called the non-graduates as cockroaches, otherwise the youth respects me a lot".

This is the backdrop against which India's youth live: 40 per cent of graduates aged 15-25 are unemployed, graduate joblessness has been stuck between 35 and 40 per cent since 1983, and only 7 per cent of graduates land a permanent salaried job within a year of finishing college. Add paper leaks that wiped out a national medical entrance exam for 2.2



million aspirants, more than 20 suicides linked to exam failures, and hours lost daily to traffic and tuition, and you have a generation running on empty while being lectured about gratitude.

What they built in response wasn't a manifesto or a violent takeover -- it was a meme with teeth. Protesters wore cardboard cockroach masks, scrawled resignation demands on diapers, staged satirical street theatre, and turned videos of police lathi-charges into darkly funny "subway surfer" escape reels that racked up organic views by the day. Even the Delhi Police, mid-crackdown, found themselves the subject of banter rather than blind fear -- protesters cracked jokes with the same constables tear-gassing them, refusing to let the state's brutality curdle into either despair or violence.

The Uncles learned, in real time, that the republic isn't sustained by forwarded wisdom -- it's renewed by the "phone and reel-struck" kids they'd written off. Proof of the lesson landing: Modi himself abandoned his usual multi-camera, mitron-laden addresses for a three-minute, midnight, vertical selfie video, dropping his old "mitron" for "friends" -- and then had to release a second video accounting for the Gen Z coaching him on his camera angle and distance.

REFUSING THE WITH-MODI-OR-AGAINST-MODI TRAP

The state's playbook for dissent has worked for over a decade: paint protesters as foreign-funded, separatist, or politically hijacked, then let the base's nationalist-religious cocktail do the delegitimising. It happened to the farmers who camped at Delhi's borders for over a year against the

2020 farm laws -- officials and BJP leaders branded them "Khalistanis," "anti-national," even "Maoist," and the government only capitulated after the protest's geographic footprint had been successfully contained to Punjab, Haryana and western UP, limiting the electoral fallout to a handful of states ahead of the 2022 polls.

This time, the government reached for the same script -- dismissing the CJP as politically "manufactured" and warning that such groups could "hollow out the country" -- but the Gen Z cohort simply refused to bite. They stayed relentlessly on-message: paper leaks, minister's resignation, compensation for suicide victims, withdrawal of FIRs -- nothing about toppling Modi, nothing about left versus right. That discipline is what let a movement expand faster than any counter-narrative machine could chase it; the CJP's Instagram following outpaced the BJP's own within days, and the movement never needed to lean on the opposition Congress or the INDIA bloc for oxygen, resources, or legitimacy.

Opposition leaders watched from the sidelines, cautious not to be seen "learning from" or co-opting a youth energy that was visibly more creative, more online-fluent, and frankly funnier than anything their own war rooms could produce. That is a movement that stayed about the issue -- and, in doing so, modeled something India hasn't seen in a decade: citizens across the ideological aisle starting to agree that a rigged entrance exam is a rigged entrance exam, full stop.

WHAT LASTS BEYOND THE RESIGNATION

There are footnotes worth savoring: most protesters pointedly avoided leaning on "Dhurandhar," the pro-state cinematic universe film, as protest iconography, choosing entirely original memes instead. Rural, tribal and urban youth mixed at protest sites with an easy "bro-code" camaraderie rarely seen across India's usual caste, class and regional fault lines. Volunteers organised logistics with the precision of a startup -- protein bars, cardio breaks, power banks, and AI tools cranking out placards on demand.

In the aftermath, Modi has fired Pradhan and appointed Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani to head a six-member task force -- including a former Isro chief and a former Intelligence Bureau director -- to rebuild India's exam architecture.

Whether that fixes anything is genuinely uncertain. What's not uncertain is that the satirical, evidence-driven, hyper-local lens Gen Z built to evaluate power will outlast this news cycle -- and it is now the innovator's dilemma sitting squarely in the ruling party's lap.

Modi's BJP already came within a whisker of losing its majority in 2024, falling to 240 seats from 303 and needing coalition partners to govern for the first time in a decade. If the base-first, delivery-optional playbook continues while youth misery goes unaddressed, the next electoral reckoning could be sharper than that near-miss. For the opposition, the lesson cuts the other way: this generation (600 million youth voters under 30 by 2029) doesn't need saviors from any political aisle -- it will only reward those who bring something better than just showing up.

By Pratik Sharma

Mamdani Unveils \$70 Million Plan for City-Owned Grocery Stores Offering 30% Discounts, Faces Backlash

(Our Staff Reporter) NEW YORK : New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has laid out a \$70 million plan to open five city-owned grocery stores, one in each borough, promising a 30 percent discount on staples including eggs, milk, bread, cheese, seafood, chicken, fruit and vegetables. Under the plan, the city will provide the real estate and waive rent and property taxes for the stores, allowing the savings to be passed on to shoppers regardless of income. City projections suggest the discounts could cut the average New Yorker's monthly grocery bill by about \$90, or roughly \$1,000 a year.

The first store, budgeted at roughly \$30 million of the \$70 million total, is planned for La Marqueta, an existing public market space in East Harlem, with an opening targeted for the end of 2027; sites for stores in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island have not yet been finalized. Prices on a "core basket" of goods would be locked in for a full month at a time under the plan, which Mamdani framed as protection against "weekly fluctuations" and "sticker shock at the checkout line." Private operators selected by the city would handle day-to-day operations, and the stores would not sell cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets or hot food.

The proposal, a marquee pledge



from Mamdani's 2025 campaign, has drawn sharp pushback from independent grocers and bodega owners who argue that city-subsidized competitors could undercut businesses already operating on thin margins; a Fox News Digital analysis found roughly 45 existing grocery stores within a 35-minute walk of the East Harlem site alone. City Council Speaker Julie Menin has signaled she has not yet decided whether to back the plan, saying she will assess its impact on "consum-

ers and local small businesses, including bodegas." New York Governor Kathy Hochul has separately criticized the concept, saying she favors "free enterprise," as critics note the plan arrives amid a roughly \$5.4 billion citywide budget gap. NEW YORK : New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has laid out a \$70 million plan to open five city-owned grocery stores, one in each borough, promising a 30 percent discount on staples including eggs, milk, bread, cheese, seafood,

chicken, fruit and vegetables. Under the plan, the city will provide the real estate and waive rent and property taxes for the stores, allowing the savings to be passed on to shoppers regardless of income. City projections suggest the discounts could cut the average New Yorker's monthly grocery bill by about \$90, or roughly \$1,000 a year.

The first store, budgeted at roughly \$30 million of the \$70 million total, is planned for La Marqueta, an existing public

market space in East Harlem, with an opening targeted for the end of 2027; sites for stores in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island have not yet been finalized. Prices on a "core basket" of goods would be locked in for a full month at a time under the plan, which Mamdani framed as protection against "weekly fluctuations" and "sticker shock at the checkout line." Private operators selected by the city would handle day-to-day operations, and the stores would not sell cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets or hot food.

The proposal, a marquee pledge from Mamdani's 2025 campaign, has drawn sharp pushback from independent grocers and bodega owners who argue that city-subsidized competitors could undercut businesses already operating on thin margins; a Fox News Digital analysis found roughly 45 existing grocery stores within a 35-minute walk of the East Harlem site alone. City Council Speaker Julie Menin has signaled she has not yet decided whether to back the plan, saying she will assess its impact on "consumers and local small businesses, including bodegas." New York Governor Kathy Hochul has separately criticized the concept, saying she favors "free enterprise," as critics note the plan arrives amid a roughly \$5.4 billion citywide budget gap.

NATO Top Commander Warns 'The Math Is Not in Favor of the West,' Urges Cheaper Mass-Produced Defenses

(Our Staff Reporter) BRUSSELS : NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation, French Adm. Pierre Vandier, has warned that the Western alliance must fundamentally overhaul its weapons and industrial base to withstand the scale of drone and missile attacks now being seen in Ukraine and the Middle East. "Today, the math is not in favor of the West," Vandier told Fox News Digital in an interview following the NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, held in early July, where allies committed to acquiring 900 Patriot missiles and investing more than \$40 billion in counter-drone capabilities over five years.

Vandier argued that simply buy-

ing more of the alliance's existing high-end weapons will not close the gap. "There is no way to produce 50,000 Patriots a year," he said. "We don't have the supply chain, and it's not worth doing that given the cost of the weapon." Instead, he called for a layered defense architecture combining cheap, mass-producible "attritable" weapons capable of countering waves of low-cost drones, alongside a smaller stock of "exquisite," high-end interceptors reserved for sophisticated threats such as ballistic missiles.

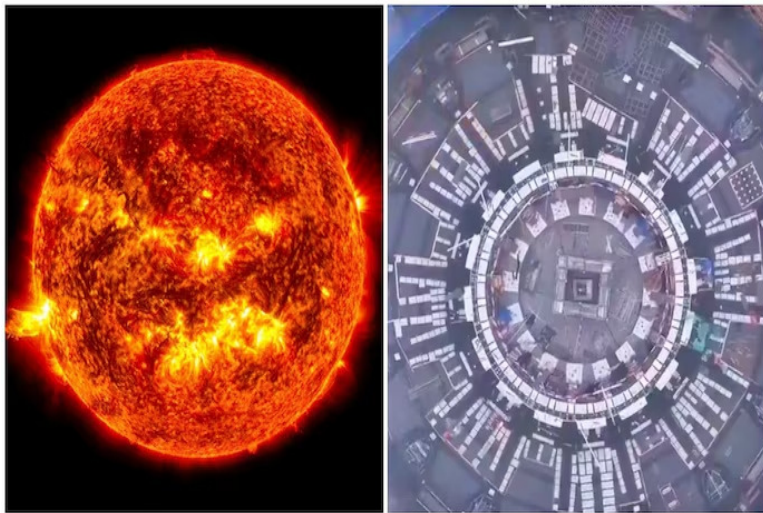
"You need to have attritable, low-cost, mass-produced weapons to just kill the low-cost weapons that are coming by big waves,"

Vandier said, "and then you need still the exquisite, complex weapons to kill the most complex weapons, as ballistic missiles." Russia's sustained nightly missile and drone barages against Ukraine, combined with the recent U.S.-Iran conflict's strain on high-end interceptor stockpiles including Patriot and THAAD systems, has intensified pressure on NATO planners. Trump announced at the Ankara summit that Washington would license Ukraine to manufacture its own Patriot interceptors, though Vandier's broader warning about the alliance's industrial base remained unchanged by that announcement.



World to Get an Artificial Sun?

China Completes Testing of World's Largest Fusion Magnet



(Our Staff Reporter) HEFEI, CHINA China has completed the development and full-performance testing of what researchers say

sun" and generate electricity from nuclear fusion by around 2030. The toroidal-field magnet, developed by the Institute of Plasma Physics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is a D-shaped structure measuring 21 meters long and 12 meters wide and weighing 582 tonnes - by the institute's account, the largest fusion reactor magnet ever built, with 1.3 times the volume and three times the stored energy of comparable magnets developed for the international ITER project. Researchers also completed testing of a companion high-temperature superconducting central solenoid coil, and said the two

systems together validate the core magnetic-confinement technology needed to hold plasma superheated beyond 100 million degrees Celsius - hotter than the sun's core - without letting it touch reactor walls. The magnets are part of China's Comprehensive Research Facility for Fusion Technology, which feeds into the Burning Plasma Experimental Superconducting Tokamak, expected to be completed by the end of 2027. The breakthrough builds on other recent gains, including a world-record sustained plasma run of 1,066 seconds at 100 million degrees Celsius earlier this year on

China's Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak, popularly known as its existing "artificial sun." Chinese engineers said they had also cut the cost of high-temperature superconducting tape from 400 yuan to 100 yuan per meter, a reduction they called critical to the long-term economic viability of fusion power. Scientists caution that full reactor assembly, extended testing, and demonstrating that a reactor can generate more energy than it consumes remain significant hurdles before commercial fusion power becomes a reality.

7.1-Magnitude Earthquake Rocks Southern Japan, Kills Several, Traps Dozens in Kumamoto Mall

(Our Staff Reporter) KUMAMOTO, JAPAN A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.1 struck Japan's southern Kumamoto prefecture on Tuesday afternoon, triggering a tsunami advisory, collapsing buildings and causing an explosion at a shopping mall where several people are feared dead and dozens more remain trapped. The Japan Meteorological Agency said the quake, centered near the city of Uki at a depth of about 10 kilometers, registered the highest possible reading of seven on Japan's Shindo intensity scale; the U.S. Geological Survey measured it separately at 6.8. Roughly 20 to 30 workers could not be reached after an explosion partially collapsed the AEON Mall in Kashima City, according to public broadcaster NHK, which cited police sources. At least one hospital reported more than 50 injuries, with another reporting around 40 wounded, including 10 in serious condition. Aerial footage showed a derailed cargo train, collapsed

towers at an industrial facility, cracked roads and a damaged wall at the historic Kumamoto Castle, built in 1607. Authorities said roughly 300,000 residents were instructed to seek shelter at evacuation centers, and more than 46,000 households lost power. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi urged residents to "remain vigilant for the possibility of another earthquake of similar magnitude" and said the government was working to assess the full scope of the damage. Japan's nuclear regulator informed the International Atomic Energy Agency that the nearby Sendai nuclear plant was undamaged, and Kyushu Electric Power said it found no abnormalities at either the Sendai or Genkai nuclear stations. Chipmaker TSMC, which operates a major plant in Kumamoto, said all personnel at the site had been confirmed safe. Japan sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and experiences nearly 20 percent of the world's earthquakes of magnitude 6.0 or higher.

Kamala Harris Endorses Troy Jackson in Maine's Pivotal US Senate Race

PORTLAND, MAINE : Former Vice President Kamala Harris on Monday endorsed Troy Jackson, the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate in Maine, just two days after state party delegates named him as a last-minute replacement candidate in a race widely seen as pivotal to control of the chamber. Jackson, a fifth-generation logger and former president of the Maine Senate, secured the nomination Saturday at a hastily called convention in Bangor after Graham Platner, who had won the June primary, withdrew amid sexual assault accusations that he has denied. In a fundraising email, Harris drew a direct comparison to her own compressed 2024 presidential run, which began after President Biden ended his re-

election bid. "Troy will have just 101 days between his nomination for Senate and when voters in Maine will cast their ballots," Harris wrote, urging Democrats to rally behind him. It was not immediately clear whether Jackson's campaign had sought the endorsement or whether it was offered unprompted; representatives for the campaign and the Maine Democratic Party did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Jackson will face longtime Republican Senator Susan Collins in November, in a contest Democrats view as one of several must-win races if the party is to retake control of the Senate; strategists say the party also needs to flip three other Republican-held seats while holding all of its current ones.

Lured to Thailand With Cheap Tour Package, Three Indian Men Tortured for Rs 69-Lakh Ransom

(Our Staff Reporter) PATTAYA, THAILAND : Thai police rescued three Indian tourists on Monday after they were abducted, bound and tortured for a week by a transnational ransom gang comprising four Pakistani nationals and one Indian national, in a case that has shaken the Indian expatriate community in the resort city of Pattaya. The victims, aged 23, 24 and 26, had each paid roughly 70,000 baht for a seven-day package tour to Thailand and arrived at Suvarnabhumi Airport on July 21 before being taken by taxi and motorcycle to a townhouse in the Nong Prue area. Once inside, the men said they were bound hand and foot with tape over their mouths, and were

repeatedly hung face-down over the edge of a mattress while their captors beat their ankles with sticks. Using a phone routed through Dubai to mask their location, the gang forced the victims to call relatives in India and demand a combined ransom of roughly 7 million rupees - about Rs 69 lakh, or 2.4 to 2.5 million Thai baht. The victims told police they were denied food and access to a

toilet throughout the ordeal. The rescue followed a tip from relatives who contacted the Indian Embassy and Chonburi immigration police on July 21 after seeing

video calls showing the men restrained and assaulted. A joint team led by Pattaya police, Chonburi immigration officers and volunteers from the Indian Community of Pattaya surrounded the two-story townhouse on Monday afternoon; the suspects fled on motorcycles moments before officers entered the property. Investigators say five people took part in the operation and are pursuing all of them. Authorities said the case underscores a growing pattern of criminal networks luring foreign tourists, particularly Indians, with deeply discounted tour packages before holding them for ransom after arrival.



Johnson & Johnson Offers \$5.5 Billion to Settle Tens of Thousands of Talcum Powder Cancer Lawsuits

NEW YORK : Johnson & Johnson said Monday it has reached a proposed \$5.5 billion settlement to resolve nearly all of the roughly 69,000 to 76,000 remaining U.S. lawsuits alleging that its talc-based baby powder and related products caused ovarian cancer, capping more than a decade of litigation that survived three failed bankruptcy maneuvers by the company. The agreement covers cases consolidated in federal court in New Jersey as well as related claims in state courts, accounting for roughly 99.75 percent of the outstanding U.S. talc claims, the company said. J&J plans to pay up to \$3 billion in 2027, with the remainder distributed after 2028. The deal is conditioned on acceptance by law firms representing at least 95 percent of the remaining claim-

ants. Erik Haas, the company's vice president of litigation, maintained that the underlying claims "lack scientific merit" but said the settlement allows the company to "put this matter behind it."

Plaintiffs' lead counsel Chris Seeger as "three failed bankruptcies" that left tens of thousands of women waiting for

compensation.

J&J stopped selling talc-based baby powder in North America in 2020, switching to a cornstarch-based formula, and discontinued talc products globally in 2023. The company has separately paid roughly \$2.5 billion to resolve a batch of Missouri claims in 2021 and \$700 million in 2024 to settle a 43-state attorneys general investigation into its marketing practices. It also faces an active lawsuit in the United Kingdom, filed on behalf of roughly 3,000 claimants, estimated to be worth more than £1 billion. The World Health Organization classified talc as "probably carcinogenic to humans" in 2024, though J&J continues to dispute any causal link between its products and cancer.



H-1B Alert for Indians: US Labor Department Bars Four Companies From Hiring Foreign Workers

WASHINGTON : The U.S. Department of Labor has formally designated four employers as "willful violators" of H-1B visa rules, barring GowraTech LLC, Renotek Group LLC, Seeloz Inc. and Sherwood at Mount Dora Inc. (doing business as Sherwood Academy) from filing new H-1B petitions for staggered two-year periods running as late as May 2028. The action, part of the department's Project Firewall initiative launched in late 2025, is likely to draw close attention from the Indian professional community, which accounts for the large majority of H-1B visa holders nationwide.

Labor Department Inspector General Anthony P. D'Esposito said the investigations went well beyond routine paperwork violations. "This isn't just paperwork fraud - it's the exploitation of vulnerable workers, forced labor, the displacement of American workers, and abusive human trafficking," he said. "As the Inspector General, my top priorities are exposing fraud, protecting American workers, and putting criminals in cuffs." Federal officials said more than 175 active investigations into H-1B fraud were underway as of July, producing more than \$15 million in assessed back wages tied to wage-kickback schemes and other abuses.

Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer said some employers had "paid foreign workers below-market wages, bypassed qualified Americans, or even forced U.S. employees to train their own replacements." Employees at the four barred companies are being urged to consider self-sponsored pathways or transfers to cap-exempt employers, since a revoked petition could place a worker's immigration status in jeopardy. The enforcement action coincides with a new wage-weighted H-1B lottery system for the FY 2027 season, designed to prioritize higher-paid, higher-skilled applicants over what USCIS officials describe as abuse of the prior random-selection process to import cheaper labor.

India "Hugely Angry" Over Nirav Modi Delay, Says UK Minister Who Signed His Extradition Order

LONDON : Priti Patel, the former British home secretary who personally signed off on Nirav Modi's extradition order to India in April 2021, has said she is "appalled and horrified" that the fugitive diamond merchant remains in the United Kingdom more than five years later. Speaking on an episode of The Daily Telegraph's podcast series "The Diamond King," set for release this week, Patel said the Indian government had been "hugely angry" over London's continued failure to hand over Modi, and that the delay had materially complicated bilateral cooperation, particularly on the return of failed asylum seekers and visa overstayers. Modi, 55, is wanted in India to stand

trial on fraud and money-laundering charges connected to an estimated \$2 billion loan scam at Punjab National Bank, one of the largest banking frauds in the country's history. He remains lodged at Pentonville Prison in London. Although the extradition order was approved and signed by Patel in 2021 after British courts found a prima facie case against him, the process has been repeatedly delayed through a string of High Court appeals on human rights grounds and a parallel, confidential asylum claim.

"If our system were judicious and doing the right thing, rather than tying itself up in process and excuses, he should not be in this country," Patel

said, according to excerpts of the interview. Now the Conservative Party's shadow foreign secretary, she said New Delhi had used the unresolved case as leverage in unrelated negotiations. "I had a hell of a challenge getting them to sign off on receiving failed asylum seekers," she said, adding she believed India's reluctance was tied directly to its frustration over Modi. British courts rejected a fresh attempt by Modi to reopen his case in March, and he is reported to have since lost a last-ditch appeal before the European Court of Human Rights, bringing his return to India closer than at any point since his 2019 arrest.

Trump Announces Tariffs of Up to 200% on Generic Drugs; India's \$30-Billion Pharma Trade in the Crosshairs

WASHINGTON / NEW DELHI President Trump has announced a phased tariff schedule on imported generic drugs that will eventually reach 200 percent, a move that threatens to reshape one of India's most important export industries. Under the plan, announced on Truth Social, generic drugs will face zero tariffs for two years starting August 1, 2026, before a 100 percent levy takes effect in August 2028, rising to 200 percent a year later. Trump described the runway as a "last chance" for companies to relocate manufacturing to the United States before facing what he called a deliberate "penalty."

India supplies roughly 47 percent

of all generic prescriptions dispensed in the United States, making it by far the country's largest source of affordable generic medicine, and the U.S. market accounts for about a third of India's total pharmaceutical exports. Major Indian drugmakers - including Sun Pharma, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Cipla, Lupin, Zydus Lifesciences and Aurobindo Pharma - already operate manufacturing or repackaging plants in the United States, which experts say gives the industry a window to adapt before the punitive rates arrive.

Trade analysts described the two-year exemption as both a warning and an opening. Arpit Chaturvedi of

Teneo called it "a critical negotiating window" for New Delhi to seek relief through ongoing U.S.-India trade talks, potentially by offering corporate investment commitments in America. The move follows Trump's earlier 100 percent tariff on branded and patented pharmaceuticals, announced in September 2025, which largely spared generics. More than a dozen major branded drugmakers, including Eli Lilly, Pfizer and Novo Nordisk, have separately struck three-year tariff exemptions with the White House in exchange for aligning U.S. drug prices with those charged in other wealthy countries under Trump's "most favored nation" pricing policy.

Knife-Wielding Man Stabs Three Women in Paris, Invokes Allah in Rampage Near Porte de Clichy

PARIS : A 31-year-old man armed with two kitchen knives stabbed three women, including one who was pregnant, in a rampage near Porte de Clichy in Paris on Monday morning, before being tackled and pinned to the ground by bystanders and detained by an off-duty police officer. French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez confirmed the attack, which left two of the women in critical condition and a third with minor injuries. The victims, aged 19, 24 and 36, were struck in the abdomen and lower back.

Witnesses and video footage verified by Reuters showed the attacker, dressed in a cream-colored tracksuit, wielding a large knife in each hand as he lunged at a young woman near the Two Domes brewery.

Bystanders, including a man who struck the attacker with his suitcase and a waiter who pinned him with a chair, subdued him until police arrived. According to multiple witnesses and a police source cited by Le Parisien, the man repeatedly declared during his arrest that he had been ordered by Allah to kill women.



short of formally classifying the attack as terrorism, with Nunez describing the suspect's statements as "incoherent" and saying a source close to the investigation indicated he may suffer from psychiatric problems. The case has been assigned to the Paris judicial police's first district on charges of attempted aggravated homicide, and the national anti-terrorism prosecutor's office has been notified but has not taken up the matter. The attack came roughly 40 hours after a deadly, Islamist-linked vehicle-ramming and machete attack at a Pride festival in Berlin that left one person dead and more than a dozen injured, intensifying scrutiny across Europe of a string of recent knife and vehicle attacks.

Oman Pitches Malacca-Style Plan to End Iran's Sole Grip on Strait of Hormuz

MUSCAT / TEHRAN : Oman has presented Iran with a Gulf-backed proposal for a joint regional mechanism to manage the Strait of Hormuz, under which Tehran would collect voluntary fees from shipping but would no longer exercise sole control of the strategic waterway, a Gulf source told Reuters this week. The plan is modeled on the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia, where Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore ask vessels to make voluntary contributions to fund navigation, environmental protection and search-and-rescue operations - a system that generates roughly \$70 million a year, according to a Georgetown University-Qatar analyst tracking the talks.

The proposal comes days after the United States abruptly suspended its latest campaign of air strikes on Iran, raising hopes of a diplomatic breakthrough that could reopen the strait to normal shipping. The waterway carried roughly a fifth of the world's energy supplies before the recent conflict shut it down. President Trump said Monday the U.S. was having "good talks" with Iran and that a deal was possible, but warned strikes would resume if negotiations collapsed.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi discussed the Hormuz proposal separately with his Omani and Saudi counterparts this week, with Tehran's foreign ministry saying he "emphasised the need to strengthen cooperation and advance joint diplomatic efforts to establish stability in the region." Tehran has separately argued that its interim arrangement with Washington already allows it to manage shipping through the strait, and has objected to U.S. efforts to support an alternate route that runs closer to Oman. Analysts caution the ultimate sticking point may be political: Tehran had floated a far higher fee of roughly \$1 million per ship, well above what the voluntary Malacca-style model would likely generate.

Netanyahu Objected to US Sale of F-35s to Turkey; Trump Pushes Ahead Regardless

WASHINGTON / ANKARA : Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directly lobbied President Donald Trump against selling F-35 stealth fighter jets to Turkey, warning that the transfer would "destroy the power balance in the Middle East" and undermine Israel's air superiority in the region. Trump, speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, flatly rejected the objection. "Nobody tells me what we should be selling," the president said, describing Turkey as a "tremendous ally" and praising Ankara's role in Syria. Turkey was removed from the multinational F-35 program

in 2019 during Trump's first term after it purchased Russia's S-400 air defense system, a move that triggered sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. Trump signaled at the NATO summit in Ankara this month that he was prepared to overturn that ban, though the State Department has since told Congress that Turkey does not yet qualify for the sale, citing the unresolved S-400 issue.

In a CNN interview, Netanyahu called Turkey "a regime infected by the Muslim Brotherhood" that "hates the United States," and

said President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is "not exactly a model ally." He cited Ankara's support for Hamas and its territorial disputes with Cyprus and Greece as further reasons Washington should withhold the jets. Trump, while acknowledging friction between Ankara and Tel Aviv, brushed aside the criticism and said Turkey possesses "a lot of great equipment" and a "very powerful military." Netanyahu has downplayed any rift with Trump, insisting the two leaders remain "eye to eye" on the region's major issues despite the disagreement over Ankara.

20 Killed as Pakistani Forces Crush Long March Protests in PoK's Rawalakot

RAWALAKOT / ISLAMABAD : At least 20 people were killed and dozens more critically injured after Pakistani security forces opened fire with live ammunition on protesters taking part in a "Long March" organized by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, according to the group and multiple regional reports. The crackdown, which unfolded Monday evening in Rawalakot, followed the failure of talks between JAAC and Pakistani authorities and coincided with the start of multi-phase PoK legislative assembly elections that the committee has urged residents to boycott. The march began in the Mirpur Division on Sunday, with caravans converg-

ing on a sit-in at Rawalakot before setting out for Muzaffarabad. JAAC said it had confirmed the identities of 19 of the dead, with a twentieth victim, killed by a bullet to the head, still unidentified. The United Kashmir People's National Party said Pakistani forces used live ammunition, heavy shelling and tear gas against what it described as peaceful demonstrators, and called on the United Nations and international human rights bodies to intervene immediately. Snipers were reportedly deployed at multiple points around the city, and long-range tear gas shells were used to disperse crowds even as protesters vowed to continue. India's Ministry of External Affairs said the violence was "a

natural consequence" of Pakistan's "oppressive approach" and "systemic plundering" of the region, and separately dismissed Islamabad's attempts to link the unrest to Indian instigation as "fabricated claims." Pakistani officials, including Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, have in the past framed unrest in PoK as evidence of an external hand at work, though Islamabad has not produced public evidence for such claims regarding the current protests. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has expanded a federal negotiating committee in an effort to defuse the crisis, even as the crackdown continues under a communications blackout across parts of the territory.

Why Does Balochistan Want Independence From Pakistan? A Look At The Long-Running Conflict



For decades, Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan has been at the centre of a conflict between Baloch nationalist groups and the federal government in Islamabad. What began as opposition to the region's incorporation into Pakistan in 1948 has evolved into a complex struggle shaped by historical grievances, economic disparities, human rights concerns and demands for greater political autonomy.

The 1948 Accession & Historical Grievances

The roots of the Baloch nationalist movement date back to the partition of British India in 1947. Before Pakistan's creation, the region's largest princely state, the Khanate of Kalat, declared independence. However, in March 1948, the Khan of Kalat signed an instrument of accession to Pakistan after negotiations and military pressure from Islamabad.

Baloch nationalist groups maintain that the accession was not voluntary and regard it as an annexation of their territory. This dispute over Balochistan's political status remains a central issue in the independence movement and has fuelled several insurgencies over the past seven decades.

Resource-Rich But Underdeveloped

Although Balochistan accounts for nearly 44 per cent of Pakistan's land area, it remains the country's least developed province by many socio-

economic indicators. Nationalist leaders argue that the province's vast natural resources have largely benefited other parts of Pakistan while local communities continue to face poverty, unemployment and inadequate infrastructure. One of the most frequently cited examples is the Sui gas field, discovered in 1952. The gas has supplied homes and industries across Pakistan for decades, but many areas of Balochistan still lack reliable access to gas, electricity and basic public services.

Concerns Over CPEC & Gwadar

The development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the strategic Gwadar Port has further intensified tensions. The Pakistani government views CPEC as a transformative economic initiative that will boost connectivity, investment and employment. However, many Baloch groups argue that local communities have not benefited proportionately from the project. Critics claim that large-scale infrastructure development has led to concerns over land rights, resource control and demographic changes, while employment opportunities have largely gone to workers from outside the province.

Allegations of Human Rights Violations

Human rights concerns have become another major flashpoint in the conflict. International organisations, including Amnesty International, have repeatedly

raised concerns over alleged enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and restrictions on freedom of expression in Balochistan. Families of missing persons and civil society groups have accused security agencies of abducting activists, students, journalists and political workers suspected of supporting nationalist causes. Pakistani authorities have denied many of the allegations and argue that security operations are necessary to combat militancy and maintain law and order.

The issue has gained renewed attention through campaigns led by rights activists and organisations advocating greater accountability and justice for missing persons.

Rise of Armed Insurgency

Alongside peaceful political movements, several armed separatist organisations have carried out attacks against security forces, government installations and economic infrastructure. Among the most prominent groups is the Baloch Liberation Army, which has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile attacks in recent years.

The insurgency has evolved significantly, with militant groups increasingly targeting strategic infrastructure, transportation networks and projects linked to foreign investment. Pakistan considers these organisations terrorist groups and has conducted extensive military

operations against them.

A Clash of Narratives

For the Pakistani state, Balochistan is strategically vital due to its geography, mineral wealth and access to the Arabian Sea. Islamabad argues that development projects and security measures are aimed at improving the province's future and protecting national interests. For many Baloch nationalists, however, the movement is about preserving political rights, control over natural resources and a distinct ethnic and cultural identity. They contend that decades of economic marginalisation and political repression have left them with little faith in the federal system.

Why The Issue Persists

The Balochistan conflict remains unresolved because it combines several overlapping issues: disputed historical narratives, economic grievances, demands for greater autonomy, allegations of human rights abuses and ongoing armed resistance. While successive Pakistani governments have announced development packages and reconciliation efforts, mistrust between nationalist groups and the state continues to run deep, ensuring that the question of Balochistan's future remains one of South Asia's most enduring and complex political disputes.

By : Saurabh Verma

Tech Platforms That Farm Rage With AI Fakes Cannot Claim Neutrality



In the space of a few days, a senior minister appeared to say something inflammatory he never said. A prime minister appeared to make comments he never made. A protest leader appeared to call off a movement he never called off. All three videos were fake. All three were generated by AI, and all three spread on social media before anyone could stop them. That is the real story of the recent Gen Z-led protests: not just what people were angry about, but how easily that anger could be weaponised and set loose at scale.

AI misinformation is a live governance problem, and India needs a serious national conversation on regulating such synthetic content. Not to restrict innovation, but to ensure AI does not supercharge misinformation and hate speech capable of disturbing public order in a country as socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse as India. Traditional misinformation required real effort to scale. AI collapses that cost, as anyone can now produce a realistic fake video, voice clip or image in minutes, publish it instantly, and watch algorithms push it to hundreds of millions before any fact-checker or law-enforcement agency notices. It is this combination of cheap creation, instant publication and algorithmic virality that makes generative AI different in kind, not degree. By the time authorities identify one fake, several variants may already be circulating across languages and regions, which is why this can no longer be treated as a content-moderation problem alone.

Once harmful AI content reaches millions, it becomes a law-and-order challenge, and sometimes it is already too late. India's law-enforcement machinery is structurally outmatched here: cybercrime units are stretched thin across a twenty-plus-language

information space, forensic verification takes hours a viral clip will not wait for, and jurisdictional friction (platforms headquartered abroad, complaints filed in one state about content viewed nationwide) slows things further.

Police can register an FIR and courts can eventually establish the facts, but none of that stops the first few hours of unchecked spread, when the real damage is done. The goal must be to intervene before content goes viral, putting the burden on platforms that control amplification, not on police left cleaning up afterwards.

Accountability Must Sit with Big Tech Platforms

There are three points in the life cycle of AI content where responsibility could apply: creation, publication and viral amplification. Creation itself should not be heavily restricted. Generative AI has enormous legitimate value in education, creativity and business, and society should not stifle it because it can be misused.

Real accountability should begin at publication. Platforms already deploy sophisticated systems to catch child sexual abuse material and terrorist content, and can build comparable safeguards for high-risk synthetic content: deepfakes that impersonate public figures, fabricate riot footage or incite communal hatred.

Most important, though, is virality. Even after harmful content slips past initial moderation, platforms have rich signals once it starts spreading: engagement spikes, abnormal sharing, coordinated behaviour and user reports. AI systems are themselves capable of flagging synthetic media after the fact. If they can detect it post-virality, it is unacceptable that they lack the capability to catch much of it during its spread.

The trouble is that commercial incentives

cut the other way. Emotionally charged, divisive content drives more engagement, a dynamic often called 'rage farming'. Platforms cannot claim to be neutral hosts while running algorithms that decide what millions see. Once a platform makes that editorial choice at scale, responsibility must extend across the content's entire life cycle, not end at hosting.

AI-generated misinformation does not manufacture division out of nothing. It exploits existing fault lines, lending fabricated narratives more credibility and speed, which is precisely why this has become a public-order issue, not merely a technology one.

Equal Safeguards for India

Big Tech and AI platforms do not apply uniform safeguards everywhere. During US elections, these companies invested heavily in election-integrity operations, fact-checker partnerships and rapid-response detection. Similar patterns have emerged across Europe as regulatory pressure has grown. In India, platforms have mostly taken the position of neutral intermediaries, responding only after content has already spread. If companies can deploy stronger safeguards in the US and Europe, why should Indian users, in a country of far greater scale and linguistic complexity, receive weaker protection? Part of the answer is cost. Multilingual moderation is expensive, and platforms have been reluctant to fund it uniformly. A more uncomfortable possibility is structural. Many of the same companies that build AI tools capable of generating synthetic media also own the platforms that distribute it, complicating accountability when both functions sit within one ecosystem.

This should not be acceptable to India. With over 900 million internet users, India has the leverage and the legitimate

national interest to demand the rigour it sees deployed elsewhere. Recommendation algorithms are built to maximise engagement. Virality is the objective, not a side effect, which may be commercially defensible in general. But once AI-generated content touches communal harmony, law and order, elections or national security, commercial incentives cannot override the safety of Indian citizens. Big Tech does not get to treat India as a lower-safeguard market simply because enforcement here has historically been slower to bite.

What India's New IT Rules Attempt

India began addressing this through the Information Technology (Amendment) Rules, 2026, marking a shift from reactive moderation to preventive compliance. AI-generated audio, video or images indistinguishable from real people or events now attract a higher standard of due diligence, and platforms must deploy automated detection to prevent uploads of unlawful synthetic content, such as impersonation of public figures, fabricated riot footage and fraudulent records.

The framework also emphasises transparency through watermarking, audio disclosures and provenance markers such as digital fingerprints or tools like SynthID, and it tightens takedown timelines, since every additional hour multiplies reach.

Critically, compliance is no longer voluntary, and intermediaries that repeatedly fail these obligations risk losing safe-harbour protection under Section 79 of the IT Act, exposing them to direct legal liability.

But labelling and provenance metadata mean little if platforms do not treat them as an operational priority. Detection must run at publication and, more importantly, at the point content begins to go viral, not days later, after a government notice.

In a country as vast and interconnected as India, unchecked AI-generated misinformation, deployed by extreme elements on every side of the political divide, can become a force multiplier for violence that no police force can contain after the fact. That burden has to sit primarily with Big Tech and AI companies, not an overstretched enforcement apparatus playing catch-up. These are the same companies that build the systems capable of generating synthetic media and the platforms that decide, algorithmically, how far it travels. They cannot profit from both ends of that chain while disclaiming responsibility for either.

By Vinay Sarawagi

In An AI-Anchored World Order, Tech Capital Alone Can't Price Our Future

Last year, multinational company Nvidia's market value became \$5 trillion, which is bigger than the annual production size of most major global economies at this point. At about the same time, the world's biggest tech companies announced investment plans that may total more than a trillion dollars over the next few years, much of which will be focused on building infrastructure for AI, data centres, and advanced computing systems. AI-led investments are guiding a new trend in the world stock market trends and across major economies - while sucking out capital from emerging market economies and other sectors.

This is proof of a new revolution in technology-led capital investment that has caused the emergence of what is an AI-anchored world order. There are issues with this trend, of course. Commitment to AI-led investment is growing, but there is limited evidence of widespread productivity gains in/across these firms - which we explained earlier in terms of the formation of a tech-fueled mania or bubble. Goldman Sachs estimates that cumulative capital expenditure by the world's largest hyperscalers could exceed \$1.1 trillion over the coming years, while Morgan Stanley projects nearly \$2.9 trillion in global data-centre spending through 2028. Broader AI-related investment is expected to surpass \$1.6 trillion over the same period, extending far beyond software into semiconductors, cloud infrastructure, electricity networks, and specialised computing systems.

While all major companies are blindly betting on big investments in AI, (stock) markets have been signaling other companies to follow trend and governments - some of which hardly understand AI at all, are rethinking their industrial policies and growth-strategies around it. This is troubling-and a trend too well seen in economic history before where the history of economic change through investment pledges made are rarely as apparent as the financial optimism often seen around it.

There is of course a few countries benefiting from this pivot to an AI-led world order. Nations with their stack of industries promoting AI benefit while others lose out. US and China with their foundational AI models; South Korea, Taiwan with their chip-manufacturing industrial strength, and, Israel and Japan with their skilled capital beneficial for AI-investments are obvious gainers. For others, like Europe, India, Brazil, Philippines, South Africa etc. see muted benefits. The potential for commercial returns from AI is not yet clear in these



countries or in other EMEs which are seeing a greater amount of foreign capital move out as well.

In AI-companies too, the productivity gain verdict isn't fully out. OpenAI's own forecasts reportedly predict that it will suffer cumulative losses of more than \$140 billion from 2024 to 2029. The price of advancing the technological frontier is continuing to increase rapidly throughout the industry.

According to industry estimates, the incremental improvements in language models will be increasingly expensive in terms of computing power, energy usage and capital expenditure. The economics of AI is starting to look more like massive infrastructure initiatives than software. Meanwhile, there is less dramatic evidence from the workplace than the market valuations may indicate. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research showed that more than 90 per cent of the firms surveyed said that AI has had little or no impact on their workplaces. Business leaders are still hopeful for future productivity gains, but they are still ahead of what is being seen.

This disconnect between expectation and economic reality is not new. There have been many occasions when significant technological changes have happened in a similar way. The railways were drawing in huge speculative capital before they had had any impact on national markets.

Electricity produced unprecedented investment prior to the productivity impact that it had in industries. The dot-com era saw a lot of excitement about new technologies that have since changed the world, but not always in the time investors had envisioned.

The uniqueness of the present moment is the extent of the financial concentration around a small number of companies and technologies. Nvidia now makes up over 7 per cent of the S&P 500. Capital is also going to the semiconductor manufacturers, cloud

infrastructure providers, energy suppliers, and data centre operators. The entire ecosystem has turned into a global investment magnet. Some observers have started to doubt that parts of this ecosystem are becoming more self-referential. The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) and various market analysts have noted the appearance of financing models where investment funds flow within the AI industry itself. Chipmakers invest in start-ups, start-ups buy chips, valuations go up, and more money comes in. These can produce a strong impression of strong demand where it is not actually there. The worry is not so much about fraud, but about the risk that the financial momentum starts to feed back in.

The consequences aren't limited to the stock market alone.

The impact of artificial intelligence on labour markets is becoming more nuanced. The widespread notion of mass technological unemployment has not yet come true. What is coming in the future is a widening gap between those whose jobs can be assisted by AI and those whose jobs can be automated by AI. New data from PwC's AI Jobs Barometer suggests a growing polarisation of the labour market. There are jobs that are growing faster in wages and demand that are using AI to complement specialized skills. There are jobs that are growing in wages and demand that are using AI to complement specialized skills. Routine cognitive tasks are under increasing pressure. Some segments have already experienced significant decreases in translation, localisation and basic content production. Customer-support operations are becoming more and more automated, with companies reporting substantial savings on the number of routine interactions they are having with human representatives.

There's another limitation that's hardly talked about.

Physical infrastructure is becoming a key component of the future of AI. This

year, global data centres will use approximately 565 terawatt-hours of electricity, and AI optimised servers are expected to be a growing portion of that consumption. Reliable power is one of the major constraints to expansion in several areas.

This has introduced a curious paradox. The most popular digital technology of our times is increasingly relying on very traditional issues, such as electricity generation, transmission systems, land acquisition, and industrial supply chains. In the advanced economies, energy planners are dealing with speculative demand forecasts from developers wanting future power capacity.

More than two-thirds of utility executives are facing requests for data-centre loads that may never come, according to a recent Capgemini survey. The impact of artificial intelligence is starting to influence investments in industries outside the tech space. In the interim, geopolitical rivalry is getting more serious. Chinese open-weight models are closing performance gaps with the top Western systems, and at much lower costs. As skills grow more common, the potential for fast commoditisation hangs over parts of the industry. The challenge now might be to monetise it in a sustainable way, rather than creating a strong model.

That process can speed up innovation, bring in investment and establish new industries. It can also create distortions when there is a disconnect between expectations and outcomes. The difficulty will be not so much about predicting what artificial intelligence can do, but about understanding the implications of acting as if its benefits are already here.

And so, as the AI booster effect continues to help economies sail through one crisis after another, perceived and projected expectations of such investments in terms of growth and its distributive prosperity are yet to be figured out. Developing nations, including India, will require a different orientation to its industrial policy going forward to absorb benefits in terms of external gains from AI-capital investments to some sectors (like advanced manufacturing and services) while thinking differently for the shared prosperity of its population through other sectors where maximum labour-force participate rates are embedded.

By Deepanshu Mohan, Ankur Singh

11 Years Later, Houthis Have Returned To Finish Unfinished Business With Pakistan

Pakistan has been here before, and the last time, it barely escaped.



Pakistan may soon find out that its mediation efforts in the Iran-US war have hidden costs attached to it and that its worst nightmare yet may be unfolding. As the Houthis finally join the war, Pakistan may face the spectre of having to step in militarily - a possibility it had tried to escape till now, successfully.

To put things in perspective, we need to go back in time to March-April 2015. Intense discussions were on in the Pakistani Parliament on whether to join the war in Yemen against the Ansarallah Houthi militias. The Saudis had put together an Arab coalition to wage war against the Houthis as they overran the capital Sanaa, threatening the internationally recognised government of President Abdur Hadi Mansour. In what was a rare occasion, the Saudis, feeling directly threatened by the Houthis, who were backed, armed, and funded by Iran, began bombing the rebels. However, they also demanded that their client state, Pakistan, join the war.

A Decades-Old Relationship

This, of course, was not unusual. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's long defence and economic ties are well-known. Their military cooperation, which began way back in the 1960s, has seen them operate in the same theatre of war earlier - in 1969, when in a joint air operation they had repelled a South Yemeni incursion into Saudi Arabia's southern border. In the 1970s and the 1980s, up to 15,000 Pakistani troops were stationed in the kingdom. During the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War, Pakistan sent troops to protect the Kingdom. It is widely believed that the two countries also have a nuclear understanding whereby Pakistan provides a nuclear cover for the Kingdom. Initially, Pakistan was ambivalent. But soon, the Nawaz Sharif government announced its decision to join the war, albeit with widespread opposition. While Nawaz Sharif was beholden to the Saudi royal family - when his second term as Prime Minister ended after a military coup in 1999, he went into exile in Saudi Arabia - many Pakistanis protested against the decision. The main opposition party then, of former cricketer Imran Khan, had already warned the government against joining the Saudi coalition, as did Pakistani editorials and civil society. For one, many Pakistanis had by then

become fed up with the Saudi role in the Wahhabisation of Pakistani society, which had led to a lot of sectarian bloodletting between the Shias and Sunnis. Secondly, Iran was a neighbour, and what was happening in Yemen was - as it is now - a proxy war between Tehran and the Saudis, and there was no appetite to alienate Iran. Finally, Pakistan itself was reeling from terror attacks and Baloch insurgency, and joining the Yemen war, it was felt, would strain the army. So, though the government had agreed otherwise, on April 10, 2015, Pakistan's Parliament passed a resolution for strict neutrality in the Yemen war, refusing an active combat role - as the Saudis had wanted - while calling for a diplomatic and peaceful resolution. However, the Pakistani Parliament did pledge to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with Saudi Arabia if its territorial integrity or holy sites were directly threatened.

A Rock And A Hard Place

This did little to assuage the Saudis or their Arab coalition. Grants were cut, jobs grew sparse, many Pakistani workers began to be repatriated back home, and the Saudis and Emiratis, who had also actively intervened in Yemen, began pivoting towards India. Clearly, refusal to join the war had cost Pakistan dear, but, on the other hand, it helped improve its relations with Iran.

Nevertheless, Pakistan stood its ground, pivoting towards China to fill in the gap created by the lack of Arab largesse. When discord broke out again between Qatar on one hand and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on the other, Pakistan, expectedly, desisted from taking sides, walking a diplomatic tightrope.

Matters got worse when Imran Khan assumed power. He turned towards Turkey, with which the Saudis and Emiratis had strained relations due to its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. But Khan, together with Turkish President Erdogan and the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammed, mulled floating a Muslim platform parallel to the Saudi-led Organization of Islamic Cooperation. At the last minute, however, under Saudi pressure, Khan had to pull out from the first summit meeting of the platform.

Running Out Of Options

This is why when last year Saudi Arabia

wanted a defence pact with Pakistan, following the attacks on Qatar by Israel, Pakistan, now again under the Sharifs, rushed to oblige. In fact, having inherited an economy in shambles, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's very first destinations upon assuming office were Riyadh and Abu Dhabi; the hope was to mend ties with them. The Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, signed last September, includes a clause that stipulates that if one party is attacked, then the other would come to its defence. When the current war broke out and Iran began attacking Arab states, Pakistan initially tried to maintain strategic ambiguity. But soon, when attacks intensified, such as the strike on Saudi Arabia's Al Jubail energy facilities, the Pakistani Foreign Office was compelled to promptly issue a stern condemnation and to reaffirm its support for the Kingdom, invoking the 2025 pact. It also moved some 13,000 military personnel and, reportedly, about 10-18 combat aircraft to the Kingdom.

Yet, luck favoured Pakistan, and it has not yet, at least as much as is publicly known, had to play any overt combat role in the war. Instead, Pakistan has continued its diplomatic balancing act by playing mediator between the US and Iran and helping the two reach a ceasefire agreement and a peace deal. This even allowed Iran to park some of its aircraft on Pakistani territory to shield them from US bombing. Not only that, but when the US announced a blockade of Iranian ports, Pakistan allowed Iran to transport goods through its territory.

Payback Time

All this may now come undone.

Pakistan's mediation helped it remain in Iran's good books but has cost it its relationship with Abu Dhabi, which wanted the war to be fought to the finish. The ceasefire has collapsed and the conflict is escalating by the day, with the US targeting Iran's civilian infrastructure and Iran targeting both US bases and civilian infrastructure in Arab countries. The Houthis, after lying low for much of the conflict, have now entered the war. They first attacked Saudi Arabia's Abha International Airport in the south. It was a "response" to the strikes on Sanaa Airport by the Saudi-backed Yemen government, which were meant to dissuade an Iranian

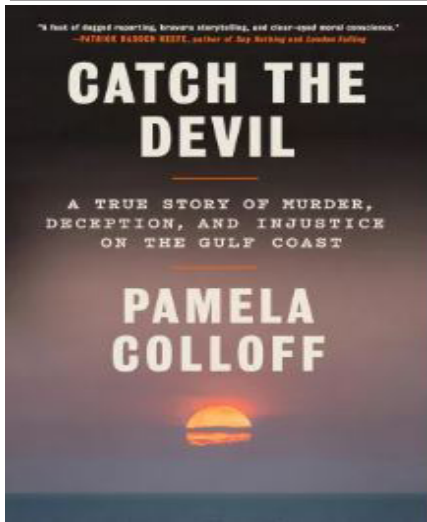
aircraft from landing there. The Houthis hold Saudi Arabia responsible for it. They have now closed the Bab Al Mandeb Strait to Saudi shipping and also struck a Saudi-flagged oil tanker named Encelia. Yesterday, the Saudi Press Agency confirmed that Encelia was "targeted while sailing in the Red Sea, resulting in a fire at the bow of the vessel". US President Donald Trump condemned it in a social media post, warning of further attacks on the Houthis and Iran. Oil prices rose sharply, touching \$100 per barrel for the first time since May. With Hormuz closed again, this marks a sharp escalation.

Back To Square One

Shehbaz Sharif condemned the Houthi tanker attack in the "strongest possible terms" in a phone call with his "dear brother", the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, saying that these actions are unacceptable, violate international law, threaten freedom of navigation, and undermine regional peace and security. In a post on X, Sharif wrote, "I reaffirmed Pakistan's complete solidarity with the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and conveyed that I, together with Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir and the entire Pakistani nation, stand firmly and resolutely with the Saudi leadership and the brotherly people of the Kingdom at this critical time."

This squarely puts Pakistan back in the very same mess it had wiggled out of - with a considerable cost - in 2015. With the closure of Hormuz, the Saudis had been rerouting their energy supplies via the East-West Petrol Pipeline to the Yanbu Port on the Red Sea. From there, tankers would cross through Bab el-Mandeb to reach Asian markets. The closure of this chokepoint not only poses a critical problem to the Saudi economy but also threatens to drive oil prices to unprecedented levels. If mediation does not bring about any resolution, Pakistan may be called upon to militarily intervene once again against the Houthis. This time, it will be obligated to do so, thanks not only to its defence deal with the Saudis but also to a floundering economy. This will then make it a party to the Iran war. Eleven years later, the Houthis have come to haunt Pakistan again.

By Aditi Bhaduri

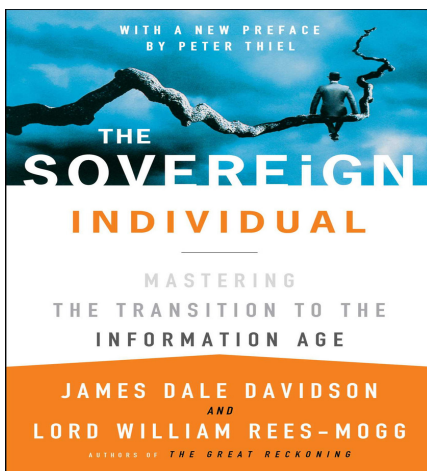
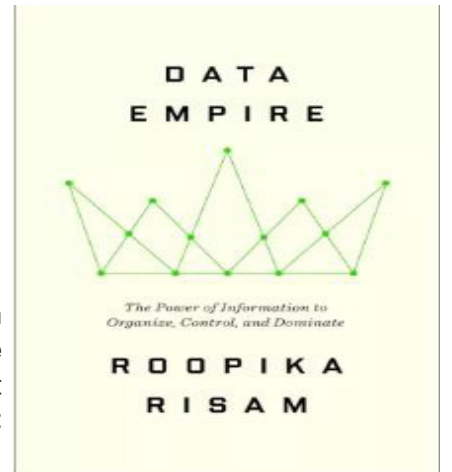


Catch the Devil: A True Story of Murder, Deception, and Injustice on the Gulf Coast, by Pamela Colloff (July 14)

This is the first book from Colloff, a veteran investigative journalist for ProPublica and The New York Times Magazine. She has won multiple National Magazine Awards for stories focused on miscarriages of justice – such as her 2019 piece about Paul Skalnik, a grifter, fabulist, sexual predator and snitch, whose fabrications can be linked to dozens of wrongful convictions in Florida, including some sending the innocent to death row. Here Colloff expands upon that investigation, which gets a lot more room to breathe in the transition from magazine article to full-length book. What emerges in this disturbing account is a portrait of one man's callous cruelty, and the law enforcers who had no problem tolerating a deal with the devil, provided it kept juicing the conviction rate.

Data Empire: The Power of Information to Organize, Control, and Dominate, by Roopika Risam (July 14)

And now, for another book centered on data – albeit from a rather different angle. This illuminating history from Risam, a Dartmouth professor, traces the practice of collecting information – and the power conferred by possessing it – from the bones that were humans' first archives, to the omnipresent systems that shape (or outright determine) life today. As Risam asks, "What has it meant – and what will it mean – when records that once served only to help us remember, come to rule?" A pressing question (see: those data centers), which you're probably better served trying to answer with the help of Risam than, say, Alexa or Claude.



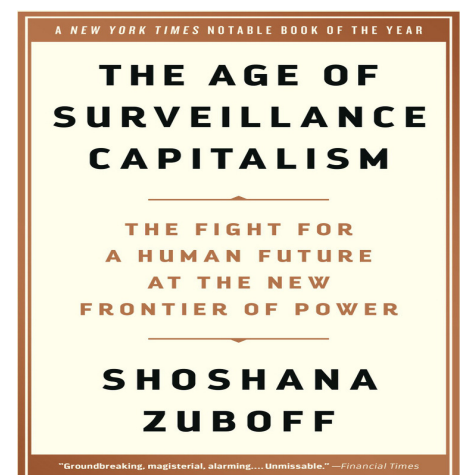
The Sovereign Individual "The shift from industrial to information economies will radically redistribute power from governments to individuals."

Written in the late 1990s by investor James Dale Davidson and former Times editor Lord William Rees-Mogg, The Sovereign Individual: Mastering the Transition to the Information Age reads less like a historical analysis and more like a blueprint for the 21st-century digital economy.

The authors argue that the Information Age is steadily dismantling the nation-state. In their view, governments historically maintained power because physical assets and populations were bound by geography. But as wealth digitizes and work detaches from location, the state's ability to tax and regulate dissolves.

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

"Surveillance capitalists know everything about us, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable to us." — Shoshana Zuboff If The Sovereign Individual celebrates digital liberation, Harvard professor Shoshana Zuboff's 2019 masterpiece, The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, exposes its darker consequence: subtle, systematic behavioral control. Zuboff argues that tech giants have engineered a brand-new economic order. Instead of merely harvesting data to improve services, companies claim raw human experience as free raw material to feed predictive algorithms. These "behavioral prediction products" are then traded in markets designed to influence what we buy, vote for, and believe.



The Double Jeopardy: Why a Second Heart Attack Can Be Far More Deadly

Surviving a heart attack is often described as a second lease on life. For thousands of cardiac patients each year, it serves as a wake-up call—a pivotal moment to rethink lifestyle choices, adhere to medication, and prioritize health. However, surviving that first event introduces a stark and sobering reality: the threat of a second heart attack is not only present, but the recurrent event is frequently far more dangerous than the first.

Understanding why a secondary myocardial infarction carries a significantly higher risk of mortality is crucial for patients, families, and caregivers alike. The danger stems from a combination of anatomical vulnerability, underlying disease progression, and subtle clinical warning signs.

A Compromised Foundation

The primary reason a second heart attack is so perilous comes down to structural heart damage. During a first heart attack, blood flow to a portion of the heart muscle is severely restricted or cut off, leading to tissue death and irreversible scarring. While the heart can adapt and continue functioning after this initial insult, its functional reserve is permanently diminished.

When a second heart attack strikes, it hits an already weakened organ. The heart muscle has less healthy tissue to rely on, making it exponentially harder to maintain pump function. This drastic drop in efficiency can rapidly lead to cardiogenic shock—a life-threatening state where the heart suddenly cannot pump enough blood to meet the body's vital needs.

Elevated Risk of Dangerous Complications

Beyond reduced pumping power, the scarred tissue from a previous heart attack creates an unstable electrical environment within the heart wall. Electrical signals that coordinate heartbeats can get delayed or short-circuited as they travel around scar tissue.

When a second ischemic event occurs, this electrical disruption is magnified, drastically increasing the risk of lethal arrhythmias such as ventricular fibrillation. Additionally, recurrent heart attacks are far more likely to trigger immediate heart failure, per-



sistent blood pressure drops, and structural complications like myocardial rupture.

The Silent Danger of Discontinued Care

Perhaps the most preventable factor contributing to secondary

heart attack mortality is the phenomenon of secondary prevention fatigue. Months or years after recovering from a first event, patients often feel completely healthy. This false sense of security can lead to dangerous gaps

in care:

Medication Non-Adherence: Stopping antiplatelet agents, statins, or blood pressure medications without medical guidance dramatically increases the risk of clot formation and arterial block-

ages. **Symptom Masking:** Because nerve pathways may have been altered during the initial event, symptoms of a second heart attack can present differently—sometimes as mild fatigue, indigestion, or breathlessness rather than classic chest pain—leading patients to delay seeking emergency care.

Taking Control: Protecting Your Heart

While the statistics surrounding secondary heart attacks are serious, recurrence is far from inevitable. Enrolling in a formal cardiac rehabilitation program, strictly maintaining prescribed medication regimens, managing cholesterol and blood pressure, and making sustained dietary and exercise modifications can cut the risk of a recurrent event dramatically. Surviving the first heart attack proves the heart is resilient—but taking proactive, daily steps to prevent a second is what truly saves lives.

Malaria vaccine with 'world-changing' potential developed, gives 80% protection

(SAI Bureau) Scientists at the University of Oxford have created a malaria vaccine that has the potential to change the world.

The team expect it to be rolled out next year after studies revealed up to 80 per cent protection against the devastating disease. Importantly, according to the researchers, their vaccine is affordable, and they already have a contract to produce more than 100 million doses annually.

Malaria No More, a charity, stated that because of recent advancements, malaria deaths among children may be eliminated "in our lifetimes."

Due to the malaria parasite's extraordinary complexity and elusiveness, which is spread by mosquitoes, it has taken more than a century to create viable vaccinations. It is challenging to develop immunity since it is a dynamic target that changes forms inside the body.

The World Health Organization gave the first vaccination, created by pharmaceutical behemoth GSK, the historic go-ahead to be deployed in Africa last year. However, the Oxford researchers claim their approach is more

effective and can be manufactured on a significantly wider scale. The Lancet Infectious Diseases has released the trial findings from 409 kids in Nanoro, Burkina Faso. It demonstrates how three initial doses, followed by a booster shot given a year later, can provide up to 80 per cent protection. In the coming weeks, the team will begin the process of getting

their vaccine licenced, but the ultimate decision will depend on the outcomes of a larger experiment including 4,800 kids that is due by the end of the year. The Serum Institute of India, the biggest vaccine producer in the world, has already committed to producing more than 100 million doses annually. The GSK vaccine that has been given official approval is similar to the Oxford vaccination. Both aim to stop the parasite in its tracks at the beginning of its lifecycle before it reaches the liver and gains a stronghold in the host. The vaccines are made from a combination of hepatitis B virus and malaria parasite proteins, but Oxford's

formulation contains a higher percentage of malaria proteins. This, according to the research team, helps the immune system concentrate on hepatitis rather than malaria. The GSK vaccine's effectiveness has helped Oxford feel more positive about releasing their own vaccine the following year, for example by determining how practical an African vaccination programme would be.





East Meets West: How **Miso**, **Kimchi**, and **Olive Oil**



✿ Are Finding a Home in Indian Kitchens ✿



For generations, the foundations of Indian cooking have stood resolute on a steady holy trinity: mustard oil or ghee, a reliance on regional spices, and traditional lacto-fermented achaars. Yet across home kitchens today, a quiet culinary revolution is underway. Jars of fermented Korean kimchi, tubs of Japanese miso paste, and bottles of extra virgin olive oil are taking up permanent residence alongside turmeric and cumin. Driven by global travel, health-conscious eating habits, and the popularity of Korean culture and international media, Indian home cooks are reimagining classic recipes by seamlessly blending these global staples into regional cuisine.

The Umami Upgrade: Miso and Kimchi Meet Indian Spices

At first glance, fermented Korean kimchi and Japanese miso paste might seem lightyears away from traditional Indian flavors. However, both cuisines share a deep-rooted appreciation for gut-healthy,

fermented foods—making the integration surprisingly natural. Kimchi as the New Achaar: The fiery, tangy crunch of kimchi shares a undeniable kinship with North Indian red chili pickles. Home cooks are no longer serving it strictly alongside bibimbap; it is making its way into parathas, layered into kathi rolls, and stirred into spicy khichdi to add a punch of gut-healthy acidity. Miso for Deep Umami: Traditional Indian cooking extracts deep flavors from slow-roasted onions and spices. A spoonful of miso paste boosts that savory complexity instantly. Adding white miso to dal, rich tomato gravies, or Paneer Butter Masala yields a silky texture and subtle savory depth without overpowering the dish's spice profile.

Reining in the Flame: Olive Oil's Modern Role

While olive oil was once viewed with skepticism by Indian chefs due to its low smoke point and distinct aroma, refined and extra light varieties have earned a

solid place in urban pantries. Modern, health-focused cooks routinely turn to extra virgin olive oil for quick stir-fries, salad dressings, and low-heat tempered seasonings (tadka).

A New Era of Culinary Hybridity

This shift is not about replacing traditional

Indian ingredients, but expanding the cook's toolkit. By pairing time-tested regional cooking techniques with international flavors, home chefs are creating a new dialect of everyday dining—one that is global in origin, yet unmistakably Indian at heart.



Beyond the

BASILICAS:

The Endless Allure of

Barcelona is more than iconic landmarks—it's a city of sunlit streets, vibrant culture, stunning architecture, and Mediterranean magic around every corner.



GOTHIC QUARTER
Step back in time.



BARCELONETA BEACH
Sun, Sea & Relaxation.



LOCAL FLAVORS
Taste the real Barcelona.



STREET ART & CULTURE
Creative spirit everywhere.



ICONIC VIEWS
From Park Güell to Montjuïc



BOUTIQUES & MARKETS
Unique finds at every turn



LIVE MUSIC & FESTIVALS
Feel the rhythm of the city



WALKABLE & WELCOMING
Explore more, stress less

Barcelona isn't just a destination, it's an experience that stays with you forever. 



Few cities in the world manage to balance the kinetic energy of a cosmopolitan metropolis with the laid-back rhythms of a Mediterranean coastal retreat. Barcelona, the sun-drenched capital of Catalonia, does so with an effortlessly chic sensibility. Framed by the Collserola hills and the shimmering sea, it is a city defined by daring architecture, deep-seated history, and a culinary scene that turns dining into an art form.

A Canvas Written in Stone and Light

To understand Barcelona is to understand Antoni Gaudí, the genius master of Catalan Modernisme whose organic, dreamlike architecture anchors the city's skyline. Nowhere is his vision more awe-inspiring than at the Basílica de la Sagrada Família. Standing before its towering, detailed spires, visitors are treated to a masterclass in light and geometry—inside, stained-glass windows bathe the nave in kaleidoscopic hues of forest green, warm amber, and ocean blue.

Further uptown, Park Güell offers a fairytale sanctuary with its famous serpent-like bench covered in colorful trencadís mosaic tile, granting panoramic views out across the urban grid to the sea. Meanwhile, along the leafy expanse of Passeig de Gràcia, Gaudí's residential masterpieces—Casa Batlló and Casa Milà (La Pedrera)—stand as fluid, undulating monuments to architectural rebellion.

From Gothic Alleyways to Golden Sands

Stepping away from Modernist grandiosity

brings you to the labyrinthine heart of the city: the Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter). Here, narrow stone alleys weave between Roman walls, quiet plazas, and medieval courtyard palaces. Neighboring El Born adds a trendy, bohemian flair with its artisan workshops, cocktail dens, and the world-renowned Picasso Museum.

After exploring the shadowed corridors of the old city, the open horizon beckons. Barceloneta and Playa Bogatell offer miles of golden coastline. Here, locals gather to play beach volleyball, cycle down the palm-lined boardwalks, or sip chilled vermouth at a beachfront chiringuito (beach bar).

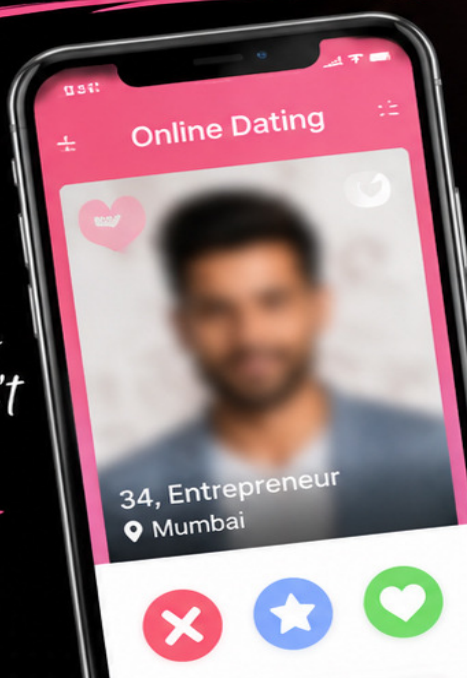
Savoring the Catalan Table

Food is the true lifeblood of Barcelona. At the legendary Mercat de La Boqueria along La Rambla, sensory overload is guaranteed—mounds of vibrant fruits, hanging legs of jamón Ibérico, and fresh seafood counter dining. For a more authentic slice of local life, seek out smaller markets like Santa Caterina. The Local Ritual: Don't miss El Tardeo—the late afternoon tradition of sipping dry Spanish vermouth alongside a bowl of olives, crisp potato chips, and tinned anchovies before sitting down for a late-night tapas feast. As evening sets, the city transforms. Whether you are catching sunset views atop Montjuïc or lingering over garlic prawns and sparkling Cava in a hidden square, Barcelona delivers an intoxicating mix of past and present. It's a city that doesn't just welcome visitors—it captures their imagination long after the journey home.

Swiping Left on Drama:

Suchitra Krishnamoorthi
Shares Her Wildest
Online Dating Tales

*Some Dates
You Just Can't
Make Up!*



“Online dating is a jungle out there, and I’ve seen it all!”

Navigating the modern dating ecosystem is no easy feat, even for Bollywood royalty. Actress and singer Suchitra Krishnamoorthi, best known for her iconic role opposite Shah Rukh Khan in *Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa*, recently offered a delightfully candid peek into her foray into online dating. From bizarre digital encounters to persistent proposals, her adventures on dating apps reveal that swiping left or right brings the same chaotic spectrum of experiences for celebrities as it does for everyone else.

A Daughter's Gentle Nudge
Suchitra's journey into online dating did not begin on her own whim, but rather through a loving push from her daughter, Kaveri Kapur. Fearing that her mother might feel isolated or lonely as she transitioned into new chapters of life, Kaveri took matters into her own hands by setting up a dating profile for Suchitra. "My daughter felt my life was too quiet and insisted I set up a profile and go on dates," Suchitra recalled, admitting she initially felt hesitant about jumping into the virtual matchmaking pool.

Unsolicited Pictures and Bizarre Matches

Once her profile went live, the full reality of modern app culture hit. Suchitra quickly discovered that online platforms come with an unpredictable variety of suitors. Reflecting on the stranger side of the virtual dating sphere, she shared how several men threw decorum out the window right from the start.

Unfiltered Introductions: "Weird men sent their sexy pictures," Suchitra revealed, referring to the unsolicited and boundary-crossing photos that often flood direct messages on dating platforms. **Boundary Struggles:** The experience highlighted the absurdities single women encounter when attempting to filter genuine suitors from digital oddities.

The Sweet Bumble Suitor Who Wanted Marriage

It was not all chaotic or uncomfortable, however. Among her digital interactions, Suchitra met a genuinely sweet man on Bumble whose earnestness took her by surprise.

Unlike suitors looking for casual arrangements, this particular match fell hard and fast. He was so smitten that he kept persistently asking Suchitra to marry him. While flattering, the grand

romantic gestures and rapid marriage proposals were not quite what the actress was looking for. **Friendships, Growth, and Moving On**

Though Suchitra eventually deleted her dating apps, she views the overall experiment with pride and good humor. Stepping out of her comfort zone allowed her to

meet diverse individuals. While romantic sparks did not fly, she managed to "friend-zone" several wholesome dates, turning brief digital connections into lasting, genuine friendships.

More than anything, the experience reinforced her clarity regarding relationships. Having been previously labeled the

"poster girl of divorce" following her separation from filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, Suchitra remains comfortable in her independence. Marriage is no longer on her checklist—she is content enjoying life on her own terms, proving that finding oneself is always the ultimate match.

Deep Wine & Dramatic Trains: Vaani Kapoor Rules the Runway in Dolly J Couture

With a structured butterfly blouse, oxblood fishtail skirt, and a trailing pallu, the actress stole the spotlight as the ultimate couture showstopper. Hyundai India Couture Week 2026, presented by the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), continued its celebration of Indian couture with another standout runway moment on Tuesday evening. Bringing Bollywood glamour to the catwalk, Vaani Kapoor turned showstopper for Dolly J's latest collection, 'BRAHM', a couture line inspired by one of the Himalayas' most revered and elusive flowers, the Brahma Kamal.

Dark Elegance: Zendaya Weaves Fashion Magic in 'Metamorphosis' Black Couture The style icon commands the red carpet at the 'Spider-Man: Brand New Day' premiere with a striking homage to the spider's web.

Runway-first fashion has long been part of Zendaya and her stylist Luxury Law's red carpet playbook. But for the Spider-Man: Brand New Day premiere, she raised the stakes even further. The 29-year-old actress stepped out in an Ashi Studio couture gown that had been fitted while it was still in making, weeks before its Paris Couture Week debut.

At the Los Angeles premiere of Spider-Man: Brand New Day, the actor stepped onto the blue carpet in a breathtaking black couture creation that blurred the lines between fashion, fantasy and cinematic storytelling.





The adventure just got real. The crew is no longer in the game—they're living it.

The beloved blockbuster franchise is back with an ambitious twist. The official trailer for Jumanji: Open World has dropped, reuniting fan-favorite stars Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Jack Black, Kevin Hart,

and Karen Gillan for a wild new adventure that flips the established premise on its head. Instead of the teenage players being sucked into a video game console, the mechanics of the game have

bled out into the real physical world. The trailer showcases high-octane chases, hilarious banter between Hart and Johnson, and expansive real-world set pieces as the avatar heroes navigate ur-

ban landscapes and untamed wilderness to prevent a total reality collapse. Jumanji: Open World promises a fresh, action-packed cinema experience for all ages.

Jared Leto Firmly Denies Claims Amid Explosive BBC Documentary



Oscar-winning actor and Thirty Seconds to Mars frontman Jared Leto is making headlines following the release of a high-profile BBC documentary, Jared Leto: Hollywood's Dark Secret. The investigative feature brings forward allegations of sexual misconduct from multiple women who claim to have encountered the performer during their teenage years.

In response to the broadcast, Leto and his legal representatives issued a strong statement maintaining his complete innocence, asserting, "I have never sexually assaulted anyone in my entire life." The documentary features accounts from several individuals alongside former tour crew members discussing past encounters. As the fallout from the release continues to reverberate across the entertainment industry, public debate around accountability and artist conduct has reignited.

Epic Sight: Nitesh Tiwari's 'Ramayana' Trailer Arrives in Style

The grand cinematic retelling of the Indian epic has finally taken its biggest step forward. Producer Namit Malhotra and director Nitesh Tiwari officially unveiled the much-anticipated trailer for Ramayana: Part 1, setting off a wave of euphoria across fan communities and moviegoers worldwide. Starring Ranbir Kapoor in the revered role of Lord Ram, alongside Sai Pallavi as Sita and rockstar Yash portraying Ravana, the film promises a monumental cinematic experience blending traditional mythology with cutting-edge global VFX. The visual teaser highlights sweeping landscapes, meticulously crafted action sequences, and a powerful background score that underlines the emotional and spiritual gravity of the tale. Teaming up with global distributors, the producers are framing Ramayana not merely as a domestic blockbuster, but as a landmark Indian project aimed at sweeping international box offices later this year.



Music Industry Strike Back: Labels Demand Ban on 'AI Slop' Songs



The global music landscape is witnessing a firm line drawn in the sand as major record labels and industry trade bodies join forces against the flood of machine-generated content. Industry leaders are officially petitioning global chart authorities to disqualify low-effort, fully automated "AI slop" tracks from official streaming charts and award considerations. Executives argue that artificially generated filler songs—often created by bots to farm royalty payouts through algorithmic playlists—undermine human artistry, crowd out working musicians, and deceive listeners. By establishing strict verification protocols, music associations hope to safeguard chart integrity and preserve authentic human talent in the digital streaming age.

Christopher Nolan's The Odyssey Reignites the Global Box Office

\$125 Million Opening Weekend Signals a New Era for Theatrical Cinema



By Raaj Raahi | Special Correspondent | South Asian Insider

New York: Hollywood has its biggest success story of the summer. Academy Award-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan has delivered yet another theatrical phenomenon with The Odyssey, which opened to an estimated \$125 million in North America and more than \$260 million worldwide over its debut weekend. The number is not just impressive, it is decisive. The Odyssey has reportedly recovered its estimated \$250 million production budget

within its opening frame alone, instantly turning it into one of the defining box-office moments of the year.

A WAKE-UP CALL FOR HOLLYWOOD

The timing could not be more pointed. Just a week earlier, Disney's Moana opened to roughly \$43 million despite carrying a comparable production budget of about \$250 million, reviving anxious questions about whether theatrical moviegoing was losing its pull. Nolan's latest epic has flipped that conversation almost overnight. Industry analysts are now pointing out that the problem was never audience fatigue. It was the absence of films ambitious enough to demand the big screen in the first place.

Speaking to BBC News, film industry analyst Stephen Follows put it plainly: "The box office is back, and Nolan is leading the charge." That line is now being repeated across Hollywood trade desks. **AN ALL-STAR CAST, A LANDMARK FORMAT** Matt Damon leads the film as

Odysseus, backed by a sprawling ensemble that includes Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Charlize Theron, and several other acclaimed names. The cast alone had generated significant buzz months ahead of release. The film also marks a genuine technical milestone: it is the first major feature shot entirely on IMAX film cameras, giving audiences another reason, beyond star power, to return to a theatre rather than wait for streaming.

SOLD-OUT SCREENS, RESTORED CONFIDENCE Premium large-format screens, IMAX in particular, reported sold-out showings across North America all weekend, underscoring that audiences still place real value on the premium theatrical experience when the film justifies it. For theatre owners, distributors, and filmmakers, The Odyssey is more than a blockbuster. It is a vote of confidence in the theatrical business model itself, at a

moment when that confidence was in short supply.

WHY IT MATTERS

Original Story Wins: Unlike franchise-driven releases, The Odyssey proves audiences still turn out for original, director-led storytelling.

Premium Cinema Experience: IMAX and other large-format screens generated exceptional demand, reaffirming the value of theatrical exhibition.

Hollywood Confidence Returns: The film's performance has renewed optimism among studios, exhibitors, and investors after a slow start to the summer. As Hollywood heads into the back half of the summer season, Nolan has once again proven that visionary filmmaking, original storytelling, and premium theatrical presentation are still powerful drivers of global box-office success. For the global film industry, studios, exhibitors, and independent filmmakers alike, The Odyssey may end up being the film that reminds everyone why cinemas still matter.

THE NUMBERS THAT CHANGED HOLLYWOOD'S SUMMER

FILM	OPENING WEEKEND	ESTIMATED BUDGET
The Odyssey	\$125 Million	\$250 Million
Moana	\$43 Million	\$250 Million

THE ODYSSEY AT A GLANCE	
Opening Weekend (North America)	\$125 Million
Worldwide Opening	\$264 Million+
Estimated Production Budget	\$250 Million
Director	Christopher Nolan
Lead Actor	Matt Damon
Format	First feature shot entirely on IMAX film cameras
Audience Response	Sold-out IMAX screenings across North America

Batwara 1947 trailer: Sunny Deol, Shabana Azmi explore the human cost of Partition

The trailer of Batwara 1947 introduces a family torn apart by Partition-era violence and displacement. It emphasises the human cost of 1947 through resilience, compassion and separation. The film stars Shabana Azmi, Sunny Deol and Preity Zinta.

The trailer of Batwara 1947, backed by Aamir Khan Productions, was unveiled on Tuesday, offering a glimpse into a story set against the backdrop of the 1947 Partition. Directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, the film stars Shabana Azmi, Sunny Deol and Preity Zinta in the lead roles.

Set during one of the most turbulent periods in the subcontinent's history, Batwara 1947 follows a family whose lives are torn apart by violence, displacement and the upheaval of Partition. The trailer focusses on the human cost of the tragedy while highlighting themes of compassion, resilience and hope amid widespread conflict. The trailer opens with Sunny Deol and Preity Zinta, who play a married couple, celebrating India's Independence. Their happiness is quickly overshadowed by the announcement of Partition, forcing them to leave their home and cross into the newly formed Pakistan. As violence erupts around them, Sunny's character



fights relentlessly to keep his family safe. Once across the border, the family is allotted a haveli that still houses Shabana Azmi's character, an elderly Hindu woman who refuses to abandon her home. As communal tensions escalate, Sunny takes it upon himself to protect her, standing firmly against religious hatred. In one

of the trailer's standout moments, he declares, "Mandir todna Islam nahi hai (Destroying a temple is not Islam)," before delivering another powerful line, "Har bachche ka pehla mazhab maa hota hai. Maa ko Hindu Musalman mein na batiye. Maa apne aap mein ek mazhab hai (Every child's first religion is their mother. Don't divide a mother into

Hindu or Muslim. A mother is a religion in herself)."The trailer also offers a glimpse of Karan Deol as Sunny's on-screen son, who warns their enemies that his father will stop at nothing to protect his family. The trailer of Batwara 1947 captures the turmoil and heartbreak of Partition, showing families being forced to leave their homes as

violence and fear spread across communities. It follows characters caught in rising communal tensions, where questions of identity, religion and even the right to one's home become matters of survival. Amid the conflict, the film puts forward a message of humanity. With its emotional and intense tone, the trailer highlights both the horrors of Partition and the hope of compassion in the face of hatred. Alongside the lead trio, the film also stars Karan Deol, Ali Fazal and Abhimanyu Singh. Batwara 1947 marks the reunion of director Rajkumar Santoshi and Sunny Deol nearly three decades after they last worked together. The film's music has been composed by AR Rahman, with lyrics by Javed Akhtar. Produced by Aamir Khan and Aparna Purohit under the banner of Aamir Khan Productions, Batwara 1947 is scheduled to release in cinemas worldwide on August 14, coinciding with Partition Day.

Web-Slinger Returns to His Roots: First Reviews Praise 'Spider-Man: Brand New Day'

Early reactions and reviews are officially in for Spider-Man: Brand New Day, and critics agree that Marvel's flagship hero has received a much-needed emotional reset. Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, the film steps away from high-concept multiversal chaos to deliver a more grounded, intimate, and character-driven chapter in Peter Parker's life.

Tom Holland delivers what many reviewers are calling his finest dramatic performance yet as a lonely, battle-tested Peter Parker trying to navigate adulthood and street-level heroism. Co-starring Zendaya, Sadie Sink, and Jon Bernthal, the film balances breathtaking combat choreography—including an incredible set-piece with the Hulk—with profound heart. Brand New Day reminds audiences exactly why the web-slinger remains comic book cinema's ultimate underdog.



Burning the Asphalt: Ryan Gosling Cast as Marvel's New Ghost Rider

In one of the most unexpected superhero casting shifts of the decade, Oscar nominee Ryan Gosling has officially joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Johnny Blaze, the supernatural anti-hero Ghost Rider. Gosling takes over the fiery chain from Nicolas Cage, who previously portrayed the character in the mid-2000s cult films.

Marvel Studios head Kevin Feige expressed immense excitement over Gosling's arrival, hinting that the new Ghost Rider project will lean into dark fantasy, street-level vigilante justice, and supernatural thrillers. For Gosling, who has long expressed his fondness for the flame-skulled character, stepping into the leather jacket and riding the Hell Cycle represents a thrilling, unpredictable turn in his career.

