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Vol. 24 Issue 14 Friday 4 July to 10 July 2025 \$1 www.thesouthasianinsider.com

## President Trump is ready to sign his "Big, Beautiful Bill"

US House Passes Sprawling Domestic Policy Bill

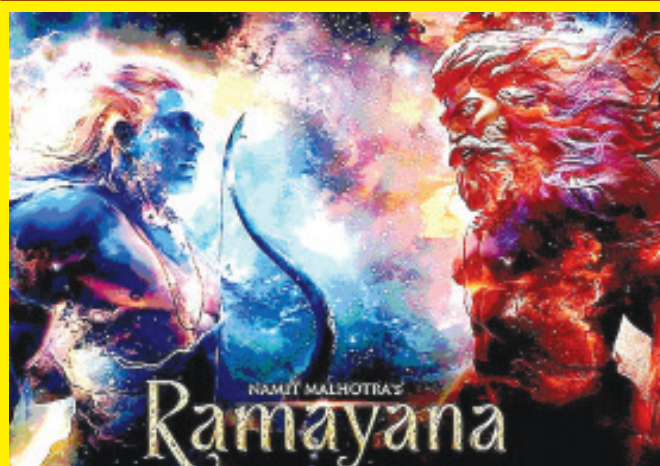


## More than 300 charged in \$14.6 Billion Healthcare Fraud



## Ranbir Kapoor-Yash's Ramayana feels like a moment for Indian cinema

Nitesh Tiwari's 'Ramayana' is a cinematic moment shaped by faith, scale, and storytelling ambition. With Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi, Yash, and Sunny Deol leading a power-packed cast, the film dares to honour the epic as more than mythology. The first glimpse feels less like a teaser and more like the beginning of something historic.



## To Understand Musk-Trump Splitsville, You Must Look At Mamdani

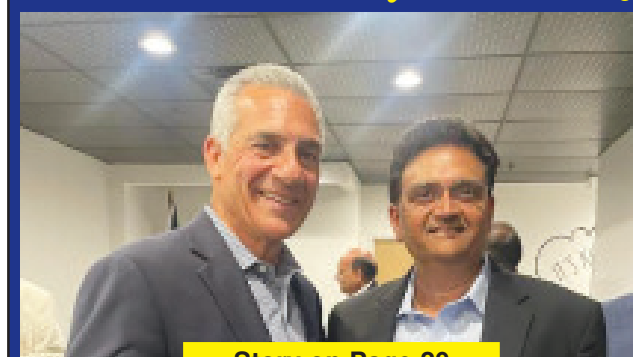
Story on Page 9



## Who is Soham Parekh, Indian techie who worked at 5 US startups at same time?



## Sridhar Chillara Appointed Chairman of South Asian American Coalition for Jack 2025





# Pharmacist Mujjahid Huq charged with health care fraud

(By our staff reporter)-Mujjahid Huq, a licensed pharmacist who owned pharmacies in Buffalo, Brooklyn and Queens, has been charged with "three counts of health care fraud, two counts of unlawful monetary transactions, and conspiracy to make false statements in health care matters in connection with a \$2.1 million pharmacy fraud scheme. Also an unnamed defendant based in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates who owned a medical billing company allegedly orchestrated a scheme to prey upon vulnerable individuals in need of addiction treatment by conspiring with treatment center owners to fraudulently bill

## Maruf Hossain, receives \$22.75 million verdict after suing MTA:

Maruf, a Bangladesh-born Bicycle delivery driver who had lost all five digits on his left foot in a fall from a chipped Bronx subway platform, has been awarded \$4.5 million per toe, a jury said Monday. He was seriously injured in June 2017 when he tripped on a chipped Parkchester platform, sending him to the tracks below as a train pulled into the station. All of the toes on the Bangladesh-born worker's left foot were severed, and the train hit him with such force that it dislocated his hip, fractured his pelvis and left him with head trauma and spinal fractures, his suit said. Hossain told the court he will need constant medical care for the rest of his life, plus help at home with chores.



Arizona Medicaid approximately \$650 million for substance abuse treatment services.

Boris Manaev, of Lynbrook has been charged with "health care fraud and unlawful monetary transactions" in connection with an \$8.2 million "scheme," the release said. Manaev owned BB Medical Equipment Inc, a supplier with a "small storefront" in Fresh Meadows, Queens, and no national presence, according to a federal complaint filed in federal court in Brooklyn.

These are some of the findings of The US Justice Department "2025 National

Health Care Fraud Takedown", which resulted in criminal charges against 324 defendants, including 96 doctors, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and other licensed medical professionals, in 50 federal districts and 12 State Attorneys General's Offices across the United States, for their alleged participation in various health care fraud schemes involving over \$14.6 billion in intended loss. The Takedown involved federal and state law enforcement agencies across the country and represents an unprecedented effort to combat health care fraud schemes that exploit patients and taxpayers.

## Narcotics Control Board of India busts a global drug cartel leading to arrests in USA and Australia

(By our staff reporter) New Delhi: Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah says, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi-led Government is determined to saw off every drug cartel and protect our youth, no matter where they operate from Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah congratulates NCB and all agencies on busting a global drug cartel

The probe set a stellar example of multi-agency coordination, resulting in 8 arrests and seizures of 5 consignments while triggering crackdowns in the US and Australia against the ring that operates across 4 continents and 10+ nations

Drug Syndicate used Telegram, crypto-currency payments and anonymous drop shippers Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah has congratulated NCB and all agencies on busting a global drug cartel. Shri Amit

Shah said that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi-led Government is determined to saw off every drug cartel and protect our youth, no matter where they operate from.

In a post on X platform, Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah said that "Congratulations to NCB and all agencies on busting a global drug cartel. The probe set a stellar example of multi-agency coordination, resulting in 8 arrests and seizures of 5 consignments while triggering crackdowns in the US and Australia against the ring that operates across 4 continents and 10+ nations. Our agencies are constantly monitoring the sophisticated modes like crypto payments and anonymous drop shippers used by these gangs. PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji-led govt is determined to saw off every drug cartel and protect our youth, no matter where they operate from."

OPERATION- MED MAX

In one of the most far-reaching crackdowns against the illegal pharmaceutical drug trade, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), HQ Operations Unit, has successfully dismantled a transnational drug trafficking syndicate that used encrypted digital platforms, drop shipping models, and cryptocurrency to smuggle controlled medicines across four continents. What began with a routine vehicle interception near Bengali Market in New Delhi unravelled into a sophisticated criminal web operating across India, USA, Australia, and Europe — showcasing the global reach of illicit pharma networks and NCB's capability to lead coordinated international enforcement actions. This operation uncovered a global network spanning 04 continents and more than 10 countries.

The Investigation Trail: From Delhi to Alabama On 25th May 2025, acting on

secret intelligence, the NCB HQ Ops team intercepted a car near Mandi House in Delhi. From the possession of its two occupants—both B. Pharma graduates from a reputed private university in Noida—3.7 kilograms of Tramadol tablets were seized.

The arrested individuals confessed to operating a vendor profile on a major Indian B2B platform, from where they sold pharmaceutical pills to clients across USA, Europe, and Australia. Leads from the interrogation led to a stockist in Roorkee, followed by the arrest of a key associate in Mayur Vihar, Delhi, who revealed connections with a contact in Udupi (Karnataka) responsible for organizing bulk orders for shipments to the USA.

From Udupi, NCB uncovered data on 50 international consignments, including:

- 29 packages from USA to USA
- 18 from Australia to Australia

- 1 each to Estonia, Spain and Switzerland

The above information was shared with global counterparts and Interpol, leading to the identification and arrest of a bulk re-shipper and money launderer in Alabama, USA by the US DEA, along with a massive haul of controlled medicines.

A Network Built for Secrecy

The syndicate operated on encrypted communication platforms like Telegram, relied on cryptocurrency payments, PayPal, Western Union and used anonymous international drop shippers to evade detection. Further digital forensics led to arrests of two more Indian nationals from New Delhi and Jaipur, who handled logistics and supply-side operations.

The operators never shipped in their home countries and coordinated through Other Drop-shippers in network to avoid legal consequences.





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US National (Mortal Remains)	\$60
US National (Ashes)	\$40

## NORI

Stage I	\$62
Stage II	\$22





(By Our Staff Reporter ) The Nassau County Executive Hon. Bruce Blakeman, Indian American Forum ( IAF ), India Association of Long Island ( IALI ), and India Day Parade ( IDP USA ) jointly celebrated Indian American Night, under the leadership of Dr. Bobby Kumar Kalotee, chairman of Human Rights Commissions ,on June 22nd, 2025. It is part of Nassau County Department of Parks and Recreation's ongoing International Nights series hosted at Harry Chapin Lakeside Theatre, Eisenhower Park.

The program started with American National Anthem sung by Hanika Reddy Parvathala, followed by Indian National Anthem by Jyoti Gupta and group. Legislator Hon. Rose Walker welcomed everyone and thanked all the supporters. Dr Bobby Kumar Kalotee, Chairperson of Nassau County Human Rights Commission, introduced and Congratulated all Honorees for their contributions to the community.

## Tirlok Malik Lights Up New York with Laughter and Joy

(By our staff reporter) New York: International Yoga Day 2025 was marked with uplifting energy, deep spiritual resonance, and a dash of humor as Emmy-nominated filmmaker and wellness advocate Tirlok Malik brought smiles to faces worldwide with his signature "Happy Life Yoga" session at Central Park, New York. The event was "UPLIFTNY2025," an inspiring celebration of International Yoga Day hosted by philanthropist Meera Gandhi and her foundation, "The Giving Back Foundation".

Held on June 21, the event blended yoga, mindfulness, laughter, and storytelling — all elements that have come to define Malik's unique approach to wellness. With



the backdrop of Central Park's summer bloom, participants from various walks of life gathered in person and online, connecting across continents through yoga and joy.

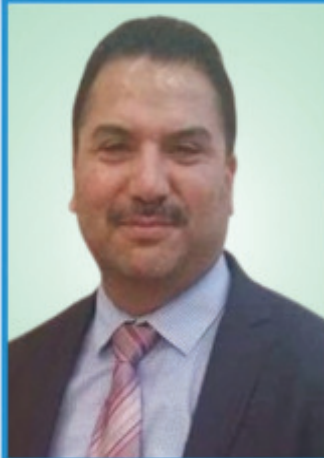
On June 22, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) hosted its Annual Global Virtual Celebration, continuing its tradition of organizing large-scale online gatherings since the pandemic. Now in its fourth consecutive year of going digital, the GOPIO event has evolved into a truly global affair, connecting Indian-origin professionals, leaders, and changemakers across time zones.

Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan, Consul General of India in New York, served as the Chief

Guest for this virtual event, which GOPIO — North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia — and professions ranging from scientists and authors to entrepreneurs and even a Nobel Peace Prize nominee.



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# Planning Meeting Held for “Shahidon Ko Shradhanjali”



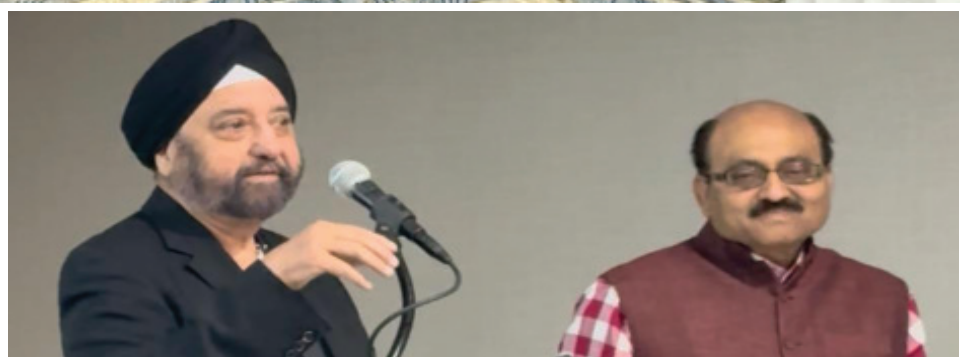
**Naveen Shah addressing the meeting**

(By our staff reporter) New York: American Punjabi Society (APS) recently participated and pledged Support to “Shahidon Ko Shradhanjali” an event whose Meeting was held recently at Long Island Hilton in Melville.

“Shahidon Ko Shradhanjali” is an



upcoming patriotic musical tribute event, and is being organized by Naveen Shah, CEO of Navika Group and Blue Sky Hospitality Solutions, in honor of India’s 79th Independence Day. The event is scheduled for Saturday, August 16, 2025, and promises to be a meaningful and memorable evening celebrating the bravery and sacrifices of India’s martyrs.



**Gary S. Sikka addressing the Meeting**

## Defense Minister of India & US Secretary of Defense talk over phone

(By our staff reporter)- Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of Defense Mr Pete Hegseth held a telephonic conversation on July 01, 2025. The two leaders discussed a wide canvas of issues ranging from long-term cooperation in the defence sector, including training and military exchanges, to expanding the industry collaboration. They agreed to further build upon the

### Discuss ways to further augment defence ties with focus on expanding industry collaboration

momentum of this critical & mutually beneficial partnership across all its pillars such as interoperability, integration of defence industrial supply chains, logistics sharing, increased joint military exercises and cooperation with other like-minded partners. Raksha Mantri

appreciated the unwavering support extended by US to India for its fight against terrorism. He complimented the US Secretary of Defense for his dynamic leadership which has propelled defence cooperation between US and India to new levels. Mr Pete Hegseth invited Shri

Rajnath Singh to US for an in-person meeting to take the bilateral defence partnership forward.

In a post on X, Shri Rajnath Singh stated that the discussions were held to review the ongoing and new initiatives to further deepen India-US defence partnership & strengthen cooperation in capacity building. He looked forward to meeting the US Secretary of Defense at an early date.



# Supreme Court collegium interviews over 50 judge candidates for High Courts

(News Agency)-The Supreme Court collegium has conducted interviews of more than 50 candidates in the last two days for appointment as judges in various High Courts across the country. The shortlisted candidates had already been recommended by the respective High Court collegiums facing an acute shortage of judges. These appointments are expected to fill vacant posts in High Courts such as Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Patna, Punjab and Haryana, and Rajasthan, among others. As part of the process, Chief Justice of India Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, along with Justices Surya Kant and Vikram Nath — currently the three seniormost judges of the Supreme Court — held one-on-



one interactions with these candidates at the top court premises on Tuesday and Wednesday. The candidates included lawyers and judicial officers whose names had been forwarded for elevation. During the interactions, the collegium examined the candidates' understanding of constitutional principles, legal

doctrines, judicial procedure, and overall judicial temperament. The exercise is in line with new guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in April this year, which aim to make the High Court appointment process more inclusive and transparent. The guidelines stipulate that after a High Court collegium recommends a name, inputs

must be sought from the state government, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and Supreme Court judges who previously served in that High Court.

Following these consultations and background checks, the Supreme Court Collegium personally interviews the candidates before making a final recommendation.

The appointment process for High Court judges begins at the High Court collegium level itself. Names are shortlisted after consultations with senior judges and members of the Bar. The collegium also holds personal interactions with potential appointees. For judicial officers under consideration, a committee of High Court judges who are not part of the collegium

prepares a detailed report.

The list of recommended names is then sent to the Chief Minister's office, which seeks inputs through intelligence agencies. The complete file is forwarded to the state Governor, who then sends it to the Union Ministry of Law and Justice.

After receiving the Intelligence Bureau's background report, the file reaches the Supreme Court Collegium for final deliberation. Additional consultations are held with Supreme Court judges who have previously served in the concerned High Court. Following the interviews, the collegium selects the most suitable candidates and forwards the final list to the central government for appointment.

## Interim trade deal with US likely in 48 hours, India firm on agriculture red line



(News Agency)-An interim trade deal between India and the US is likely to be signed within the next 48 hours - days before the July 9 deadline on the pause on Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs is set to expire. Sources said the negotiations

were in the final stages, with India digging in its heels on its stance of not opening the agriculture and dairy sectors completely to the US. On the other hand, India has sought greater access to labour-intensive industries.

## Have to cross that bridge: Jaishankar on US plan to tax top Russian oil buyers

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said India had already shared its concerns over energy security with the US Senator who has championed a bill proposing 500% tariffs on countries trading with Russia. Jaishankar, who is on a four-day visit to the US, said India, a major buyer of Russian oil, was aware of the potential implications of the bill. Addressing a press conference in Washington, Jaishankar underscored that developments in the US Congress of interest to India or those that could impact it were always closely tracked.

The minister, who attended the Quad Summit, said the Indian Embassy and officials were in touch with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who sponsored the bill. While introducing the bill, Graham specifically mentioned India and China, claiming the countries buy 70% of Putin's oil. "I think our concerns and our interests in energy security have been made conversant to him. So,

we will then have to cross that bridge when we come to it, if we come to it," Jaishankar said.

Complicating matters for India is the fact that US President Donald Trump has backed the new sanctions bill, which proposes a hefty 500% tariff on imports from countries continuing to trade with Russia, including India and China.

The bill is being seen as part of the Trump administration's efforts to get Russia to negotiate on the Ukraine war.

HOW WILL IT AFFECT INDIA?

So, if the bill is passed, how will it impact India? If the legislation is indeed passed, Indian imports to the US could face a humongous 500% tariff. However, India is close to signing a trade deal with the US, racing against time to avoid a 26% reciprocal tariff announced by Trump in April.

The trade deal is likely to bring down US tariffs on India considerably.

## High Court flags gaps in premature release framework of prisons, suggests reforms

(News Agency)-While setting aside the Sentence Review Board's (SRB) recommendation, which rejected the premature release of Santosh Singh, the convict in the rape and murder case of Priyadarshini Mattoo, the Delhi High Court has also laid down guidelines to be followed in such cases.

The court has stressed that it is essential for the process of decision-making to be informed by a comprehensive and individualised assessment of each convict's record.

Pointing out that there was little indication that the authorities undertook any nuanced or individualised assessment of the



petitioner's present psychological stability and emotional rehabilitation, etc., the court observed that the apparent lack of depth in these foundational reports undermines the deliberative exercise that the

SRB was expected to undertake.

Gaps & Limitations in Current Framework

The High Court also flagged the gaps and limitations in the current framework governing the

process of premature release and decision-making by the SRB, noting that the current framework does not require or contemplate a formal psychological evaluation conducted by a qualified mental health professional.

According to the High Court, this shortcoming is significant, as, in the absence of such clinical input, it may become difficult for the SRB to make an informed assessment of whether a particular convict has genuinely lost the propensity to commit crime — a factor that lies at the heart of the policy rationale for premature release.

The court also pointed out that, apart from specific contexts—i.e., where infirmity, illness, or mental health concerns are already known — there exists no explicit provision requiring a psychological appraisal of all eligible convicts, which, as per the court, is a "critical omission in the present framework."

Evaluating Psychological Trajectory Important: HC

Noting the same, the High Court observed, "Unfortunately, in none of the cases under consideration in the petition, has the Jail Superintendent furnished any detailed comments on the prisoner's mental or emotional development."





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## India's infrastructure revolution is powering its rise in manufacturing

India is strategically repositioning itself on the global economic landscape, expanding significantly into international export markets. This ambitious shift is driven by robust infrastructure overhaul, well-conceived policy reforms, and a clear long-term vision for 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

Flagship initiatives like 'Make in India' and 'Ease of Doing Business' reforms cultivate a supportive environment for manufacturers, fostering efficiency, scalability, and resilience. The Goods and Services Tax (GST), for instance, dismantled inter-state trade barriers, simplified compliance, and integrated the national economy, leading to reduced logistics costs and enhanced competitiveness.

The catalytic role of Production Linked Incentive

The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is a crucial catalyst for India's economic resurgence. Launched in 2020 and expanded to 14 key manufacturing sectors, it aims to transform India into a globally competitive manufacturing hub by rewarding incremental production, exports, and investment.

As of March 2025, incentives worth Rs 21,534 crore have been disbursed for 12 sectors. The scheme has attracted investments exceeding Rs 1.61 lakh crore, stimulated production valued at Rs 16.5 lakh crore, and facilitated exports amounting to Rs 5.31 lakh crore (approximately \$61.76 billion).

These figures highlight the scheme's effectiveness in boosting domestic manufacturing and attracting \$24.14 billion in FY2024-25, significantly driven by the PLI scheme. The government's continued commitment is evident in the scaled-up PLI budget for FY 2025-26. Modernising infrastructure: Connectivity, efficiency

India's manufacturing aspirations are gaining solid ground through significant infrastructure modernisation, reducing costs, and enhancing reliability for global supply chains.

Manufacturing in the rail sector

Indian Railways, often regarded as the nation's vital artery, forms a foundational element of this infrastructure narrative. It facilitates the annual transport of over 6.5 billion passengers and 1.5 billion tonnes of freight across India's vast geographical expanse. This historic institution is currently undergoing an extensive modernisation programme, incorporating advanced technologies, upgrading its physical infrastructure, and improving service delivery to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding economy.

Under the ambitious National Rail Plan, India has allocated an estimated \$109 billion for capital expenditure between

2026 and 2031. The investment in the railway sector from 2014 to 2024 has already surpassed the total cumulative outlay of the preceding six decades, with a record \$30 billion earmarked for the fiscal year 2025-26 alone. This significant financial commitment is translating into substantial industrial opportunities, with projections indicating a 25% increase in demand for rolling stock by 2031.

India's growing proficiency in designing and manufacturing world-class rail technology is increasingly evident. The success of the Vande Bharat Express, India's first indigenously developed semi-high-speed train, now with over 100 operational services, highlights the nation's engineering prowess and its potential for exports. These trains are not merely 'Made in India'; they are engineered for global application like featuring energy-efficient regenerative braking systems. Indian Railways recently secured a significant Rs 2,000 crore order from Guinea for 140 diesel locomotives, demonstrating the country's aspiration to become a major participant in the global rolling stock market.

India is rapidly establishing itself as a global provider of both urban and mainline rail solutions, driven by a procurement policy that aligns with the 'Make in India' initiative. International players like Alstom are leveraging India's skilled engineering talent and cost-effective manufacturing capabilities to produce and export rolling stock for prestigious international projects, including the Sydney Metro and Queensland Rail, solidifying India's position as a crucial hub within the global rail supply chain.

Landmark projects like the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) are fundamentally reducing transit times and logistics costs, with the Eastern DFC fully operational and the Western DFC expected to be fully operational by October 2025. The DFC has slashed freight train travel times by up to 50% and increased traffic from 247 to 352 average trains per day by February 2025.

Maritime manufacturing prowess

India's maritime sector is undergoing strategic transformation to unlock its potential as a global trade enabler. With a vision to become one of the top five shipbuilding nations by 2047, India is targeting an additional 4 million Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT) in shipbuilding capacity, underpinned by dedicated policy support and capital investment.

The government has launched a Rs 25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund, with 49% government participation, to provide long-term financing for shipbuilding, port modernisation, and inland water transport.

**By Nikhil Gandhi and Karan Sethi**

## Turkey's looking more like Pakistan every day. Blasphemy-obsessed, imprisoned by hatred

The inferno lies below, a landscape made up of bombs, fire, and rubble. Their wings elevating them above the carnage, two angels—one bearing the name of the Prophet of Islam and the other of the Israelites—wish each other peace. The cartoon, published in the Turkish satirical magazine LeMan, is open to readings. Is it that those condemned to live in war can only discover their shared humanity after being liberated from life? Alternately, is it that the angels have abandoned their followers on earth, learning that piety cannot tame the savagery of the faithful? Earlier this week, police in Istanbul fired rubber bullets and tear gas into a mob seeking to attack a bar where staff of the magazine had retreated after the supposedly blasphemous cartoon went to print. The country's interior minister Ali Yerlikaya has promised legal action against the cartoonist, graphic designer, and editors of LeMan, vowing that "these shameless individuals will be held accountable before the law".

Though no one was killed in the violence, it is becoming clear that Turkey, once the progressive cultural powerhouse of the Middle East, is starting to look a little more like Pakistan each week. The country's septuagenarian ruler, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is even working to dismantle the constitution, which mandates that "sacred religious feelings shall absolutely not be involved in state affairs and politics as required by the principle of secularism". Extreme religious violence isn't unknown in Turkey. Thirty-seven people were burned to death in 1993 after mobs attacked a cultural festival of the Alevi sect, attended among others by the Turkish translator of Salman Rushdie's book, The Satanic Verses. The proscription of books, arrests of opposition leaders, and the repression of ethnic minorities have been an ugly feature of

Turkey's republic. However, its social and cultural life remains highly sophisticated and liberal, and not just by the standards of the grim Middle East despotisms. Erdogan's true legacy, the violence in Istanbul suggests, might be demolishing the foundations on which Turkey's pluralism has rested.

### Decline of the republic

Kemal Atatürk's epoch-defining construction of republican Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire aimed to create a new civilisation that could negotiate the industrial world. The religious orders that wielded enormous influence in the imperial era were closed down in 1925. Far-reaching reforms were introduced on how men and women ought to dress, including the rejection of the traditional Fez cap and encouraging women to give up the Peçe (headscarf) and Çarsaf (a loose-fitting outer garment). In 1928, the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic script, a tool to demolish the power of the clerical class.

The same year, Islam was removed as the state religion.

For Atatürk, it seemed that the reconstruction of Islam itself was necessary. So he established the Presidency of Religious Affairs to oversee religious affairs. The clergy were transformed into state employees, responsible for delivering sermons dictated by the authorities. Imams were ordered to allow musical instruments into mosques, and failing that, were provided with gramophones and records. Even the wearing of shoes inside mosques was encouraged. This state-enforced religion, scholar Nevzet Çelik noted in a thoughtful essay, brought about enormous transformation—but it also stifled the organic evolution of civic life and marked secularism with the taint of authoritarianism.

**By Praveen Swami**



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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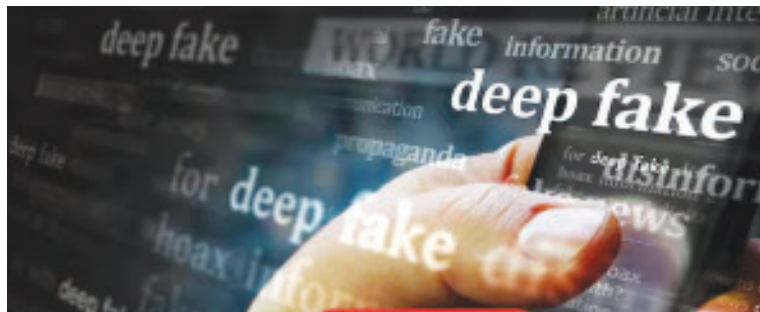


# Deepfakes are everywhere. But it's the harm, not the tech, that needs fixing

By Nikhil Narendran

What do Elon Musk, Taylor Swift, Sachin Tendulkar, and Asaduddin Owaisi have in common? They have all been targeted by deep fake videos. Likelihood with celebrities across has been exploited for deep fakes promoting crypto schemes, financial scams, and fake nudes. If you are reasonably active on social media, you might have already spotted AI-generated influencers that confuse you as to whether you are interacting with a real person or an AI bot. This phenomenon is so prevalent that we have started losing touch with what's real.

Seeing is not believing  
Generative AI (GenAI) has made it easy for anyone with an internet connection to create content that looks and sounds indistinguishably real. It is leading us to question our age-old wisdom that "seeing is believing." Gen-AI is altering our relationship with our visual and auditory senses. In the last century, we



considered the camera the arbiter of truth and relied on this medium to tell us the truth. However, we often forget that the same camera was also used in the last century to capture genuine moments of life, as well as for cinema and propaganda. Iconic images of Soviets capturing Berlin and the Toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue were all carefully staged images. Most social media content is also carefully planned, involving make-believe image building.

So, seeing was not believing even before the Deep Fakes. Spoofing of Senses

In fact, all our senses have been manipulated, and we have

accepted this truth. We are constantly encouraged to laugh during Sitcoms using canned laughter, and most music, including vocals, has been heavily processed.

Synthetic fabrics such as Nylon, Rayon, and PU leather have long hijacked our sense of touch. 99% of the vanilla we consume is not from orchid pods but from synthetic vanilla made from petrochemicals. Synthetic meat, Dalda, ground oil, etc., are other synthetic oils that have taken over our sense of taste.

The fresh bread smell that you get from bakeries is not just from the freshly baked bread but also from maltol, diacetyl and yeast esters released by their ventilation

systems.

So, the visual sense is not the only one being taken over by synthetic items. It is the latest one to be altered by technology. How do we regulate Deep Fakes? Whenever a new technology comes up, whether it was automobiles, the internet, or electricity, human civilisations have always grappled with this question. Deep fakes using Gen AI are no different.

Should we then ban deep fakes altogether? Do we need to regulate tech or harms? A knife can be used in the kitchen, so it can also be used to harm a person. We do not regulate knives in the Kitchen, but have outlawed using them to harm.

We have seen how our camera has been used in the past, both for good and bad. It has been used for spreading knowledge and information at the same time, for hatred and falsehood. With deep fakes, only the mode of origination has changed. Instead

of a camera being used to commit harm, now an algorithm has been used to commit the same harm.

Therefore, just like we didn't ban the camera for all it's good, we need not ban the Gen AI video or audio generation capabilities. We just need to continue regulating the harmful uses of this technology.

Are we concerned about an AI-generated adorable cat video? If his family consents, do we have any issues with a virtual replica of an erstwhile Bollywood actor acting in a new film?

AI-generated videos need not be regulated altogether. We just need to regulate its bad uses, i.e., the generation of Gen AI content that harms a person or their rights.

For instance, a deep fake that represents a celebrity in a scam or a pornographic video needs to be regulated, as should a fake video in which a politician makes a communally sensitive speech. Do we need new laws for this?

## To Understand Musk-Trump Splitsville, You Must Look At Mamdani

By Madhavan Narayanan

To understand the peculiar three-way conflict involving Trump, Musk, and Mamdani, you have to understand what makes America prosperous and yet the Average Joe or Jane unhappy.

What is going on between Donald Trump and Elon Musk? Is this a principled shadow war about how to cut government expenditure, or a negotiating position between the world's wealthiest man and its most powerful one in a crony capitalist plot gone wrong?

To understand this, you may be well advised to look at a third individual who is bitterly opposed to Trump in a major ideological controversy: Zohran Mamdani, who has just been elected by the Democrats as a frontrunner to be the mayor of New York, the financial capital of the United States. All three have been in the news this month, and their contrasting views and positions give us an idea of what is right with America - and what is wrong. Keeping It Open

First up, we cannot be sure if Musk and Trump will patch up after their fallout. The co-founder and CEO of electric car maker Tesla and the President of the United States are officially in a conflict over how to cut government expenditure, but with some caveats that suggest they want to keep the options open (Read: Backroom negotiations to arrive at a truce).



After Trump's ambitious "One Big, Beautiful Bill" cleared the Senate, Musk tweeted about the betrayal of Americans and mulled over prospects. "So tempting to escalate this. So, so tempting. But I will refrain for now," Musk wrote on X. He had tweeted earlier: "If the insane spending bill passes, the America Party will be formed the next day."

Trump left little to imagination as he ranted against electric cars and suggested that if anything at all needs to be done to slash government expenditure - after a disenchanted Musk left the axe-wielding Department of Government Efficiency, a.k.a. DOGE - it would be to cut back on governments subsidies and/or demand

support for electric cars and space missions. That is right down the business street of Musk, whose SpaceX and Tesla are the planet's technology darlings. "No more Rocket launches, Satellites, or Electric Car Production, and our Country would save a FORTUNE., [sic]" Trump said on TruthSocial, his favourite ranting site.

Where Is This Going?

We can't be too sure of where this will end because both Musk and Trump are business people who like to cut a midway deal. But Musk's talk of launching a new political party is something that shows that, push comes to shove, he may just up the ante on the President.

The fact is that at 122% of the GDP, the US has one of the highest levels of government debt in the developed world, surpassed only by Japan and Italy, unless one counts the tiny island nation of Singapore. Trump's 940-page bill seeks to restrict healthcare and food support programmes for the poor and the disabled, and is controversial enough. But alongside, there is a broad consensus on phasing out tax breaks for clean energy, which translates in plain English as "less demand for Musk's cars".

"We might have to put DOGE on Elon. You know what DOGE is? DOGE is the monster that might have to go back and eat Elon," Trump said. "I don't think he should be playing that game with me."

**Enter Mamdani**

Where does all this leave the average American? To understand this, look no further than New York, where Zohran Mamdani has emerged as an unlikely frontrunner to become the city mayor. Mamdani is an immigrant Muslim of Asian origin, born to Delhi-bred filmmaker Mira Nair. He is also an avowed socialist in a capitalist haven. Trump has been carping about Mamdani as a "communist lunatic", while in Mamdani's words, Trump has been creating divides to divert attention from issues like the high cost of living for "working people".



# Ahead Of Air India Crash Report, A Recap Of The Dreamliner's Sketchy Past

By Sindhu Bhattacharya

Air India flight AI171, which crashed seconds after takeoff from Ahmedabad airport on June 12 killing all but one on board, was a Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Till that fateful day, not a single Dreamliner had been involved in a crash. The Dreamliner fleet has been airborne since 2011 and nearly every third widebody aircraft flying across the world today is a Boeing 787. The Ahmedabad crash is being seen as a rare occurrence, but what caused the crash?

Theories abound, but only two broad themes matter - was it equipment failure, or was it human error? Aviation experts have already ruled out environmental factors such as a storm, lightning, etc, since it was a clear day. Terrorism as a cause has also not been established till now, though it will be conclusively ruled out only after the investigation into the crash has been completed. According to reports, the preliminary probe report of the crash is expected to be released next week. So as of now, the only two plausible possibilities are: either the aircraft systems malfunctioned, or there was a cockpit error.

## All Eyes On Boeing

Boeing & Co, the manufacturer of the Dreamliners, has found itself in the spotlight after this crash. It has anyway been under intense global scrutiny for alleged malpractices in quality checks while making aircraft, including the 787s, for some time now. Last year, Sam Salehpour, a veteran quality engineer with Boeing for the 777s and also other aircraft, including the 787s (Dreamliners), who later turned into a whistleblower, gave a written testimony to the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs.

In his testimony, Salehpour alleged that Boeing prioritises "speed of production over safety and quality and incentivizes management to overlook significant defects in Boeing's airplanes". He said, "Despite what Boeing officials state publicly, there is no safety culture at Boeing and employees like me who speak up about defects with its production activities and lack of quality control are ignored, marginalized, threatened, sidelined, and worse." Some of Salehpour's allegations are quite damning, particularly on the 787s. Boeing has denied all of these allegations.

Salehpour went on to say that while working on the 787s in late 2020, he observed that Boeing had begun taking shortcuts to reduce bottlenecks in production and speed up the delivery of 787s, allowing defective parts and



defective installations in the Dreamliner fleet. Specifically, he alleged that improper fastening of fuselage sections posed risks to the aircraft's longevity and could lead to a mid-flight breakup of the aircraft after many thousand trips. While the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

has taken note of Salehpour's allegations and started an investigation into Boeing's practices, the regulator has not come out with its findings till now. Perhaps the crash at Ahmedabad will spur the FAA to hasten the probe.

Not just Salehpour's allegations, Boeing has been in FAA crosshairs earlier too for the Dreamliner fleet. In 2013, two 787s operated by Japan Airlines caught fire, which was later attributed to overheating of the aircraft's lithium-ion batteries. At that time, the FAA had quickly grounded the whole of the Dreamliner fleet and had also banned fresh deliveries of these aircraft from Boeing. The manufacturer then fixed the problem by offering an improved battery insulation, among other solutions, before the Dreamliners were allowed to fly again.

So, in the aftermath of the deadly Ahmedabad crash, the FAA needs to not just close the existing probe and release its report, but perhaps Boeing should also be subjected to enhanced scrutiny.

## What About Engine Maker?

But in all the focus on Boeing and its alleged malpractices, are we missing the woods for the trees? If the AI 171 crash involved a twin-engine failure, as is being widely believed now, shouldn't the engine manufacturer - GE Aerospace in this case - also have the spotlight turned on to itself? The aircraft that crashed was at least 12 years old, and it is unlikely that Boeing had anything significant to do with it in this period of time - while GE and the Air India maintenance teams would have had to do regular checks. So, along with questioning Boeing, perhaps tough posers should also be made to the

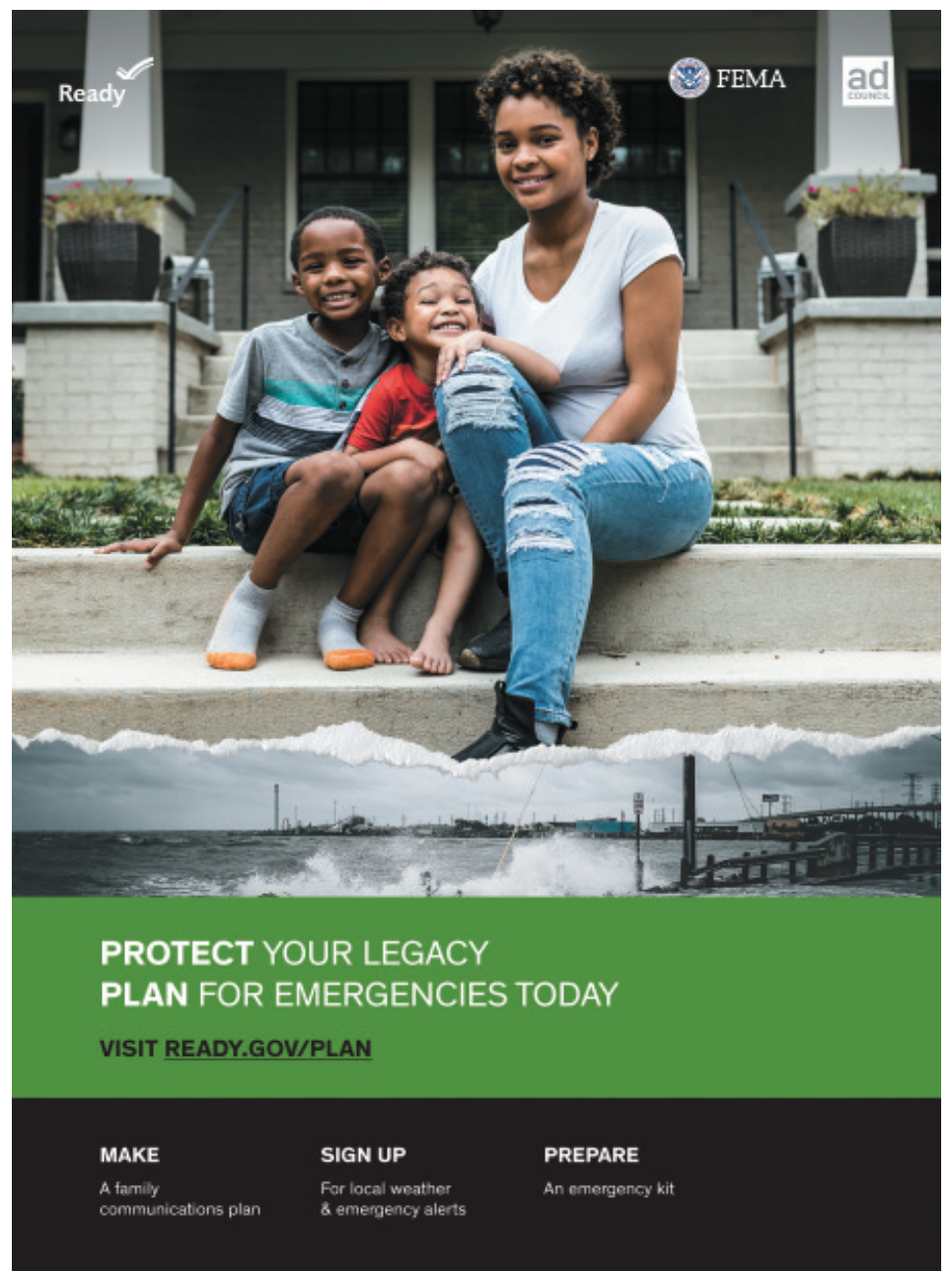
maintenance practices at Air India and the role of GE Aerospace. Of course, if the investigation report points to a design flaw with aircraft, any software glitch in electronics, or so on, then Boeing would be culpable - simply because an aircraft engine does not work in isolation, it works in coordination with the rest of hardware and software.

## DGCA's Hesitation

Across the globe, more than 1,100

Dreamliner aircraft are currently in operation with different airlines. Air India has 33 in its fleet, but the largest number of Dreamliners is currently being operated by a couple of American carriers. Their predominance in American airlines' fleets is perhaps one of the reasons the FAA has refrained from grounding the Dreamliner fleet after the Air India crash.

A Reuters report quotes US officials and FAA officials as saying that they had not seen any data that would require a grounding of all Dreamliners - as yet. But nothing explains the Indian safety regulator DGCA's reluctance to ground the Dreamliner fleet till investigators get some idea about what caused the crash. The AI 171 crash is being probed by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), with experts from several countries joining in. Whatever the findings of the AAIB investigation, one thing is clear: the families and loved ones of the crash victims need answers, and these can only come when culpability is clearly fixed - without undue delay.



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# 8 years of GST: How Modi's landmark tax reform reshaped India

July 2025 marks eight years of GST - India's biggest tax reform - streamlining compliance, improving transparency, and creating a unified market. The 'One Nation, One Tax' model continues to evolve and deliver.

By Sanju Verma

July 2025 marks the eighth anniversary of 'One Nation, One Tax', which made India a unified, common market, with a single, destination-based, multi-stage tax on the supply of goods and services, right from manufacturing to consumption. Credits of input taxes paid at each stage are available in the subsequent stage of value addition. This makes the GST, or Goods and Services Tax, essentially a tax only on value added at each stage. GST collection in May this year was Rs 2.01 lakh crore. In April, it was Rs 2.37 lakh crore. The average monthly GST revenue has been Rs 1.84 lakh crore in FY25. It was Rs 1.68 lakh crore in FY24 and Rs 1.51 lakh crore in FY23. GST thus showcases the combining of grand vision with seamless execution. GST was first implemented in France in 1954, with the standard rate largely being 20 per cent. It came into being in New Zealand in 1986 at 10 per cent, before moving



to 15 per cent. GST was initiated in Singapore at three per cent in 1994 and then went up to seven per cent.

The indirect tax rate in Indonesia is largely between 10 and 35 per cent, while in Brazil, though the average tax rate for food products is seven per cent, the average value-added tax for most other items is 17–20 per cent, with an additional cess on inter-state supplies at 4–25 per cent. This shows that there is no single GST rate, and allegations that India's GST is inefficient because it's multi-tier are uncalled for.

The Indian variation of GST is unique because of the sheer array of numbers involving a country of

over 1.4 billion people. When GST was introduced in July 2017, the idea was to have a revenue-neutral rate of 15.5 per cent, 2–3 years hence. But this rate is merely 11.4 per cent today.

Today, fewer than 28 items attract a tax rate of 28 per cent, and these are largely sin goods like tobacco, aerated drinks, high-end sedans, etc. GST is largely pro-poor and pro-middle class. GST for all religious tours has been fixed at five per cent. GST for air travel in economy class is five per cent, and 12 per cent for business class. For movie tickets costing up to Rs 100, it was brought down from 18 to 12 per cent, and for those priced above Rs 100, it went from 28 to

18 per cent. GST on sanitary pads is down from 13.5 per cent earlier to zero now.

Interestingly, of the 160-odd countries that have adopted GST, only 49 follow one tax slab module, 28 countries have two slab tax modules, and all others have modified the GST structure to align it to country-specific needs, which essentially means there is no "one size fits all" approach.

An e-Way Bill is now mandatory for interstate transport of goods, required to be generated for interstate movement beyond 10 kilometres. It is a paperless technology solution and a critical anti-evasion tool to check tax leakages. Along with GST, the e-Way bill, with RFID tags for motor vehicles, has been a gigantic step in the right direction in improving tax compliance. Over 12.26 crore e-Way bills were generated in May, the second-highest figure after the all-time high figures of 12.45 crore in March. The Narendra Modi government reduced GST on under-construction houses from

12 per cent to five per cent, and in the "affordable housing" segment, it was reduced from eight per cent to a mere one per cent, once again endorsing a pro-people approach. India's fuel economy, post-GST, is more competitive, having eliminated the need for truckers to wait endlessly to pay octroi and entry taxes at inter-state check posts. Among other concessions, services rendered to all Jan Dhan accounts are now completely tax-exempt, showcasing that the Modi government's clarion call of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' is not a mere platitude. To curb corruption, tax leakages and fraud using fake invoices, the Centre brought in e-Invoicing in 2020, for those with turnovers of more than Rs 500 crore. That limit now extends to those with Rs 5 crore turnovers. From about 495 forms that needed to be filed in the pre-GST era, that number in the post-GST era has come down to just a handful of 12-odd forms.

## Punjab's New Land Pooling Policy: Why Being Opposed?



By Jag Mohan Thakern

In a meeting chaired by the chief minister Bhagwant Mann, the Punjab cabinet on June 02 gave its nod to the new land pooling policy, which

Initially being launched in 27 cities and towns of the state.

After the meeting, in a press conference, renewable energy minister Aman Arora divulged that the new policy involves landowners, promoters, and companies as stakeholders in the development process and its aim is to curb illegal colonies by the land mafias in the state which are growing in an unplanned and haphazard way.

What the New Policy is?

If we see the claim under the new policy, the farmer, inter alia, will receive a 1,000-square-yard residential plot and a 200-square-yard commercial plot for every one acre of land contributed. About other benefits, Money Control reports that if nine acres are pooled, the landowner will receive three acres (33 per cent) back. They can either develop group housing projects like high-rise buildings or sell the land to builders. For those contributing 50 acres,



they will get 30 acres (60 per cent) back, meant for plotted development.

In the case of land pooling for industrial and institutional sectors, 1,600 sq yards of industrial or institutional land will be given in lieu of one acre of land. The land pooling scheme for commercial sectors allows for a 800 sq yard of plot to be given for one acre of land, but in case of the land pooling policy for integrated industrial parks, a 1,000 sq yard industrial plot, 300 sq yard residential plot and 100 sq yard commercial plot will be given for one acre of land. Government claims that one of the most emphasized features of the policy is its voluntary nature and no land will be

taken without the farmer's written consent in the form of a No Objection Certificate (NOC). Policy states that until the farmers receive possession of the developed plots as per their eligibility, the government will pay them an interim compensation of Rs 30,000 per acre annually for up to three years. But here arises the questions- if the new land pooling policy is so lucrative and beneficial for the farmers, then why it is being criticized by the farmer unions and opposition parties? Why they are warning to start agitation against it?

What opposition parties say?

Stating the policy a "Ponzi scheme", Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar, on June

30, alleged that the land of farmers is being seized by enticing them with false promises of four times the profit.

"This scheme has been designed with the intention to loot Punjab. Government officials are falsely claiming that farmers will not lose their land. Once a notification is issued, a farmer cannot even sell his land. If an owner cannot sell his land, isn't this a violation of his rights?" Jakhar asked. Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, president Punjab State Congress, @RajaBrar\_INC On June 3 tweeted, "I wonder what is the need of acquiring 24000 acres of prime agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. It will simply destroy Punjab's economy that is based on agriculture. Let me warn you, when you try to undermine the foundation of the economy, that is agriculture, the entire edifice will collapse and come crashing down." Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal, on July 01, announced a series of protests to start from Ludhiana on July 15 to safeguard the interests of farmers whose 40,000 acres of land are set to be forcefully acquired for peanuts by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government under a 1995 State land acquisition act aimed at looting farmers and fillings its own coffers.



# Pakistan suffers violence of its own making. West's refusal to learn is even more tragic

The suicide bombing in North Waziristan, claimed by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur faction of TTP, is the latest manifestation of a fatal logic that has long guided Pakistan's suicidal statecraft and self-delusion.

By Vinay Kaura

In the arid valleys of North Waziristan, where the dust hangs heavy and silence is often broken by the thud of helicopter blades or the distant crackle of gunfire, a convoy of Pakistani soldiers met their tragic end. Sixteen men, extinguished in a single assault by a suicide bomber's calculated violence.

Claimed by the suicide bomber wing of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur faction of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the attack, at first glance, is but another episode in the grim ledger of the subcontinent's senseless bloodletting; yet to treat it as such is to miss the deeper, tragic direction of Pakistan's politics. This is the latest manifestation of a fatal logic that has long guided Pakistan's suicidal statecraft and self-delusion.

This incident – one of the deadliest single-day attacks on Pakistani security forces in recent months in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – is emblematic of the persistent instability that has gripped North Waziristan, a region long regarded as a stronghold for militant groups such as the TTP.

Despite repeated counterinsurgency operations and government pledges to restore peace, the area remains a flashpoint for insurgent violence. The latest assault reflects not only the resilience and adaptability of these militant networks but also the enduring challenges faced by Pakistan's security apparatus since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan.

## **Pakistan: a study in contradiction**

The cycle of militant violence in North Waziristan is the reverberation of a deeper, historical dissonance – snowballing because of strategic miscalculations and unresolved grievances – that continues to shape, and perhaps distort, Pakistan's trajectory.

Pakistan has always been a study in contradiction – a nation forged in the fires of British India's Partition, steeped in trauma and displacement, yet perpetually seeking coherence through the manipulation of identity and enmity. It is a militarised polity defined less by what it is than by what it is not – not India, not secular, not reconciled. In this desperate search for national cohesion, the architects of the state turned to the expedient tools of religious fundamentalism and proxy warfare. The attack in North Waziristan is thus the harvest of seeds sown over decades: a policy of nurturing militant groups as instruments of strategic depth, first against the Soviets in Afghanistan, then against India in Kashmir.

Once tactically useful, these groups now turn upon their erstwhile patron in



Rawalpindi with the cold logic of history's recurring ironies.

Folly in governance is not merely an error; it is the deliberate pursuit of policies contrary to self-interest, even when their consequences are manifest and mounting. The Pakistani military's double game – proclaiming itself a victim of terror while abetting its architects – has produced a landscape where the boundaries between state and non-state, between friend and foe, have been blurred to the point of absurdity.

The North Waziristan suicide bombing is thus not a rupture, but a fulfilment. The Pakistani state's own monsters, having tasted blood, now feast upon their creators without any shame or restraint. If Pakistan's duplicity is the proximate cause of its turmoil, the West's strategic myopia is its indispensable enabler. The American embrace of the Pakistani military during the Cold War and again during the War on Terror was animated not by trust, but by expedience – a willingness to overlook Islamabad's flirtations with jihadist ideology so long as those ideologies bled in directions favourable to Washington.

Western diplomacy often operates on the dangerous assumption that alliances of convenience can be sustained without moral or strategic cost. It is this blindness – this transactional hubris – that allowed the Pakistani military to thrive in duplicity, to wear the mask of an ally while undermining the very goals it pretended to pursue.

## **Confront the monsters within**

The March 2025 attack by the Baloch Liberation Army on Jaffar Express, killing

scores of innocent passengers, also offers a grim counterpoint to the North Waziristan carnage – a reminder that Pakistan's crisis is not merely religious or ideological. It is also ethnic, economic, and political. Long marginalised and brutalised, the Baloch have found in violence the only language Rawalpindi seems to understand. The grievances are not obscure: decades of resource extraction without benefit, political exclusion from the corridors of power, and the suffocating embrace of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which transforms Balochistan into a logistical backyard for Beijing while its people remain dispossessed. And yet, the state responds not with reform, but repression; not with dialogue, but with drone strikes and disinformation. The narrative of external enemies – India, the West, Zionists – is cultivated like a national crop, while the internal rot deepens.

Amid this maelstrom, the promotion of anti-India hatred remains the Pakistani elite's most dependable tool of social control. As exemplified by the Pahalgam attack, proxy terror against India is not merely a matter of policy – it is the glue that binds a fractured polity, the narcotic that numbs the masses to their own dispossession. A nation that defines itself by perpetual grievance can never know peace, only escalation.

What emerges from this picture is not simply chaos, but folly – of a state that, in seeking security through duplicity, has rendered itself insecure; of a society manipulated into perpetual mobilisation against imagined enemies, while the real

threats fester within.

Instead of confronting the internal rot, Islamabad went to ridiculous lengths to accuse New Delhi of orchestrating the attack through a proxy outfit – a claim India swiftly and contemptuously rejected. Pakistan's persistent attempts to externalise blame on every internal security failure only serve to expose its duplicity in combating terrorism. And as demonstrated by India's refusal to sign the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) joint statement after Pakistan and China blocked strong language on terrorism, the world remains complicit through its silence and convenience. India, ever the target, is vindicated in its warnings.

Pakistan's tragedy is not that it suffers violence, but that it suffers violence of its own making. And more tragically, the West – having seen this play before – refuses to learn anything. The ghosts of past alliances, broken promises, and abandoned morals now haunt the corridors of global power, yet the lessons remain unread. Pakistan's present agony is the fruit of choices made in defiance of prudence and morality. For the West, especially the United States, the refusal to confront this duplicity will haunt them still – as surely as the ghosts of Kabul now haunt Washington.

India, for its part, must remain vigilant. It faces not merely a hostile neighbour, but a neighbour at war with itself – a far more unpredictable, unreasonable, and dangerous adversary. The reckoning, when it comes, will not be confined to the mountains of Waziristan or the treacherous passes of the Hindu Kush.



# Vendetta Republic: Minorities, women, justice under siege in Yunus's Bangladesh

By Subir Bhaumik

The brazen rape and public humiliation of a married Hindu woman in Bangladesh's Cumilla region on Thursday night has once again brought into sharp focus how insecure minorities are in the nation. The victim, a mother of two, whose husband works abroad, had gone to visit her parents when a neighbour broke into the house and raped her at knifepoint.

As others joined the rapist, a man called Mohammed Fazar Ali, they filmed the act and threatened to kill the woman and circulate the video on social media if she raised an alarm or complained to the police. But neighbours, both Hindus and Muslims, alerted by her cries for help, chased the rapist and his accomplices away. The police have already arrested five, including Fazar Ali. But by then, however, a 50-second video of the woman, naked and desperately fighting the rapist, had made it to social media. Hopes of justice are slim as the victim is under pressure to withdraw the case - the accused is a top local leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. This incident came within a few days of a brutal attack on a Hindu barber, Pares Chandra Shil, in the northern district of



Lalmonirhat, by a mob led by a local Imam who alleged he had made blasphemous remarks about Prophet Muhammad. The local police, instead of protecting the victim, helped the Imam by booking 69-year-old Shil for hurting religious sentiments, who insists he made no remarks against the Prophet.

And in the same week, authorities demolished a Durga temple in Dhaka's Khilkhet, on the grounds that it had been constructed on land belonging to the Bangladesh Railways. Indian protests against the demolition of the temple

sparked strong reactions from the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government. Minorities insecure

These incidents do point to a growing sense of acute insecurity amongst religious minorities. After the brutal assassination of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Committee leader Bhabesh Chandra Roy in April, India had pointed to the "systematic persecution" of minorities and appealed for a course correction. But Chinmoy Krishna Das, the ISKCON monk who first organised protests by Hindus in Bangladesh, remains in jail, unable to secure bail in the sedition case

he's been implicated in. Calls for his release have fallen on deaf ears. Attacks on Buddhists and Hindus in Chittagong Hill Tracts have also multiplied since the interim government took charge last year. But the Yunus administration is in persistent denial, with the chief advisor claiming that those Hindus attacked were victims of popular resentment because they were closely identified with the ousted Awami League. That is a blatant falsehood because neither the Cumilla woman nor Pares Shil was affiliated with any party. Gendered violence

Yunus presides over the most lawless period of contemporary Bangladesh. In the week that saw the brutal rape of the Hindu woman in Cumilla, two other cases of rape were reported from elsewhere in the country. Two men were sent to jail in Mymensingh for raping a 13-year-old girl. Local religious influentials tried to hush up the case by arbitration, but the police moved in after the girl's father filed a case alleging rape. The same week, the director of a local madrasa, Shakhawat Ullah, was arrested for the attempted rape of a 12-year-old girl in the female dormitory of the institution.

## US' 'Covert' Operations In Pak, And Why They Should Surprise No One

By Jayanta Bhattacharya

June has been a month of allegations, revelations, overtures, and assumptions. Coincidentally, these followed India's conditional halt in strikes on terror hideouts and launchpads in Pakistan. Four days of intense strikes continued till May 10 before New Delhi agreed to cease Operation Sindoor on Islamabad's appeal.

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister, Ishaq Dar, later confirmed that his country requested a ceasefire following attacks on Nur Khan and other key air bases during the operations.

The strike on Nur Khan airbase in Chaklala, near the garrison town of Rawalpindi - the city housing Pakistan's military headquarters - was a blow too big for Pakistan to cope with. About a month after India's conditional ceasefire, a senior journalist in Pakistan revealed how Americans run the Nur Khan air base. 'Not Authorised To Know'

In a podcast, author Imtiaz Gul had claimed that even the Pakistan army was not allowed to interfere in operations at the base. He revealed how once, when a Pakistan Air Force officer repeatedly sought to know what cargo American aircraft carried at the base, he was told at gunpoint that he was not authorised to know these details. It obviously created a flutter since the disclosure embarrassed both Islamabad

and Rawalpindi.

Even as the controversy was on, an old interview of a senior army officer on a private channel further reddened the faces of Pakistan's powers that be. The interview was hosted by Hamid Mir, a veteran journalist credited to have also conducted the last official interview of Osama bin Laden.

Incidentally, Mir has had a difficult relationship with the political and military leaders in Pakistan due to his outspoken and often critical views towards the administration.

In the old clip that went viral towards the end of June, Lt Gen (Retd) Shahid Azeez is heard saying that Pakistani troops were not even allowed to enter the Jacobabad and Pasni bases. He alleged these were under US control during its post-9/11 war on terror. He further claimed that the then-President, Pervez Musharraf, had told army commanders that he had already promised the US access to Pakistani bases. The decision was taken despite the protests of top army officers.

Pak Is A Resourceful Ally

Pakistan is no stranger to such clandestine operations. The army has always been in control of such covert exercises, with or without the nod of political administrators - except when an army chief, like Musharraf, assumed power.

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# Zohran Mamdani, cutlery shaming, and America's Finger-Lickin' hypocrisy

Indians love to eat with their hands and the West can never digest this fact. This age-old debate flared up when Zohran Mamdani was found eating with his bare hands and was told to go back to the "Third World" by a US politician. Slightly hypocritical for a country whose second-largest restaurant chain's slogan is "Finger Lickin' Good".

By Abhishek Asthana

One of the most underrated, yet integral parts of our school life was the lunch box. Given we had to wear the same uniform, a lunch box was one of the few status signals a child could have. While there were many shapes and sizes, I was always envious of that child who had a built-in slot for a spoon in his tiffin box. A plastic spoon resting diagonally on top, waiting to be picked. But it never was. That child would routinely bring various vegetables with parathas or pooris, which, after sticking together till the lunch break, had to be peeled off each other. If you excavated further, you would find a slice of mango pickle buried beneath, smearing the last poori with its own oil.

The spoon was rarely used. It was ornamental. Like that crockery set, in a middle class household, exhibited in a glass



cabinet in the drawing room. Indians love to eat with their hands. The West can never digest this fact (and also our street food). The day they have an elaborate meal with their entire family on the same table with more than three items prepared, they celebrate it as Thanksgiving. For us, it's a usual Tuesday. The age-old debate gained currency when the Democratic nominee for New York City mayor, Zohran Mamdani, armed with Bollywood songs and socialism, was found eating with his bare hands. And,

was subsequently told to be civilised or go back to the "Third World" by a Congressman. It's slightly hypocritical for a country whose second-largest restaurant chain's slogan is "Finger Lickin' Good". Why aren't they licking their spoons? Tough question. Once, Dr S Radhakrishnan, our former President, was having lunch with Winston Churchill. Just before lunch, our man excused himself to wash his hands, and came back to dig into his plate with his bare fingers. Churchill was not amused. He actually asked Dr Radhakrishnan

to use cutlery as it was more hygienic.

The man, whose birthday we celebrate as Teachers' Day, shot back: "Since nobody can use my hand to eat, my hand is more hygienic than any spoon or fork you use."

ChatGPT would summarise the above reply in just two words - "Fork you". There is no scientific reasoning that validates one theory over the other. It's just convenient racism - an inability to accept people can be different, especially when they are taking your jobs. Moreover, Western diet has a lot of meat, often medium rare, which requires a knife to be cut into edible bits. The only reason you need a knife to have Indian food is when you are NOT planning to pay the restaurant bill.

Seriously speaking, a fact that various British governor generals didn't realise is that Indian food

is not served like food. It's served like ingredients. The food is then mixed and prepared on your plate. Be it a Rajasthani thali or a South Indian meal, there are at least seven to eight items to mix the rice, dal or sambar, rasam, vegetables, appalam, pickle and many more. All of it is mixed together, with your fingers, like an expert chaatwala, using the various spices from different bowls in different proportions, to create that perfect morsel, which is then sent to your mouth for further flavour processing. Moreover, the curry or rasam sticks to your fingers due to forces of adhesion, thanks to class 10 science, and hence it's easier to transport the flavour to your mouth. This is what an Indian thali is. You can't do all that with a knife and a fork. My entire childhood was spent believing that the knife was only there to spread butter over my toast.

## The Cost of 'Boasting': Trump And India's Post-Op Sindoor Dilemmas

By Syed Akbaruddin

Diplomacy usually progresses through carefully chosen words and strategic pauses. Decisions are made away from cameras, the language is calibrated, and every phrase is weighed before being made public. United States President Donald Trump shattered that quiet when he claimed that he had averted a war between India and Pakistan in May by threatening trade penalties. Subtlety gave way to showmanship. The applause line may suit a rally, but it forces New Delhi and Islamabad to recalibrate their strategic calculations.

From Pahalgam To A Pause

To recapitulate, the immediate backdrop was grim. On April 22, a terror attack near Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir reignited tensions. Between May 7 to 10, India and Pakistan carried out air strikes, and both armies were on



high alert. A ceasefire followed on May 10, after four days of conflict. Trump promptly credited himself, claiming that his promise of American market access brought the nuclear neighbours back from the brink. This is a claim he has repeated on numerous occasions, whether true or not. This episode is also cited in a filing by the US government with the Court of International Trade to argue that presidential tariff powers advance national security. In this telling, trade rather than diplomacy was

the key to de-escalation. Sometimes, it is not the conflict that changes everything. It is the story told about how it ended. This is one such case. Strategic Autonomy in Question For India, the claim cuts deep. Since independence, India has pursued strategic autonomy by engaging major powers while reserving final decisions for itself. Trump's assertions, whether correct or not, imply that India's military choices can be reshaped by economic threats, a

suggestion that strikes at the heart of Indian foreign policy.

Worse, it crosses a red line. India has always rejected third-party mediation on Kashmir. By describing India and Pakistan as equal parties in a bilateral dispute, Trump blurred the crucial difference between a democracy responding to cross-border terrorism and a military-led neighbour country accused of enabling it.

Accepting Trump's narrative also risks encouraging future economic coercion and weakening India's hand in any balanced partnership.

New Delhi's official position is unambiguous. Indian leaders say the ceasefire resulted from direct military channels with Islamabad, no outside mediation and no economic inducement. The Congress and other opposition parties have criticised the Modi government for diplomatic surrender. In the

media, critics have argued that silence implies complicity, and this has dented India's global stature.

This controversy adds to the challenges of achieving the ambitious goals of boosting bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, clinching an "early harvest" by autumn 2025, and working on a first-phase pact that tackles tariff irritants, set by Modi and Trump at their meeting on February 13 this year.

Hedging Through Diversification India's partnership with the United States is multi-faceted. Still, any perception that this partnership compromises strategic autonomy is disconcerting. New Delhi is, therefore, hedging. It is accelerating trade talks with the European Union, enhancing defence cooperation with France, and re-examining long-standing ties with Russia. Even ties with Beijing are increasing.



# Did Mark Zuckerberg gatecrash Oval Office meeting? White House explains incident

(News Agency)-Meta head honcho Mark Zuckerberg reportedly wandered into an Oval Office meeting on the Air Force's new F-47 fighter jets this March, but was asked to step out by White House staffers concerned about his lack of security clearance, NBC News reported, citing two people familiar with the discussion.

Dubbed 'MAGA Mark' by some, Zuckerberg allegedly lingered briefly before being told to wait outside. However, a senior White House official pushed back on that claim, saying reports about the incident 'mischaracterised' what exactly happened. He said that the tech billionaire simply "popped in to say hello at the President's request".

"He was not asked to leave. He came in, greeted the President, and then stepped out to wait for his scheduled meeting with POTUS, which was set to happen after the session with the pilots,"



New York Post quoted the Trump official as saying.

It is not clear exactly when the alleged incident happened. Meta has not clarified the incident for now.

Mark Zuckerberg's relationship with politics has been anything but straightforward. Once a vocal supporter

of pro-immigration measures and Democratic Party leaders, the Meta chief shifted gears to back the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement during Donald Trump's re-election bid last year. In January, Zuckerberg was even spotted at Trump's inauguration ceremony, joining other billionaires like

Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk — the latter once a trusted Trump ally before their recent public rift.

Mark Zuckerberg, who has made several trips to the White House in the recent past, has also steered Meta in ways that conservatives view positively, from shutting down its fact-checking operations to appointing UFC President and Trump confidant Dana White to the company's board. Once known for banning Trump from Facebook and Instagram after the January 6 Capitol riots, Zuckerberg has since worked to rebuild ties with the President and his conservative base. In a move that surprised many, Meta donated USD 1 million to Trump's 2025 inaugural fund, the first such donation from the tech giant, signalling a clear political overture. Zuckerberg has also praised Trump publicly, notably calling his reaction to an assassination attempt "one of the most badass things I have ever seen".

## Communist lunatic: Why Trump is targeting NYC mayoral nominee Zohran Mamdani



(News Agency)-US President Donald Trump has a new political punching bag — and he's not holding back. In a fiery barrage of social media posts and campaign appearances this week, Trump launched an extraordinary attack on Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic nominee for New York City mayor, vowing to arrest or deport him if he wins the election in November.

"As President of the United States, I'm not going to let this Communist Lunatic destroy New York," Trump wrote on Wednesday on Truth Social. "Rest assured, I hold all the levers, and have all the cards. I'll save New York City, and make it 'Hot' and 'Great' again, just like I did with the Good Ol' USA!"

The 33-year-old Mamdani, a democratic socialist, stunned the political world by defeating former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in the Democratic primary.

His rise has made him the GOP's newest national target.

During a visit to a migrant detention centre in Florida, Trump said, "If Mamdani blocks ICE agents from making arrests in the city — well, then we'll have to arrest him. Look, we don't need a communist in this country. But if we have one, I'm going to be watching over him very carefully on behalf of the nation," Trump added.

Trump further fanned the flames by amplifying a baseless conspiracy theory that Mamdani is in the US illegally, despite the fact that he became a naturalized citizen years ago.

"A lot of people are saying he's here illegally. We're going to look at everything," Trump said.

Mamdani, who was born in Uganda to Indian parents and moved to New York at age seven, would be the city's first Muslim and Indian-American mayor if elected.

## Fed chair Powell should resign 'immediately' as housing chief seeks probe: Trump



(News Agency)-US President Donald Trump once again escalated his attacks on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, declaring that Powell should "resign immediately" and is "too late" to fix the damage he's caused.

Trump's remarks came after a statement by Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) director Bill Pulte, who called on Congress to investigate Powell for allegedly misleading lawmakers. Trump nominated Powell to lead the Fed during his first administration. Joe Biden, who succeeded Trump as president, nominated him for a second term. His tenure as Fed chair is set to end in May 2026. "Too late. He should resign immediately!!!" Trump posted on Truth Social while sharing a Bloomberg report that quoted Pulte accusing Powell of

making "deceptive" statements to the Senate about the Fed's costly headquarters renovations.

In a separate post on X, Pulte accused the Fed Chair of political bias and said Powell's conduct was sufficient grounds for removal. "I am asking Congress to investigate Chairman Jerome Powell, his political bias, and his deceptive Senate testimony, which is enough to be removed 'for cause,'" wrote Pulte, who also criticised Powell's handling of interest rates amid rising housing costs.

Pulte, a housing regulator with considerable influence over mortgage finance giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, has emerged as a vocal critic of the Fed. He has urged Powell to cut interest rates, citing their impact on working-class families trying to afford homes.



# Not looking to hurt them: Trump to meet Iranian officials if necessary

**President Donald Trump said Iran is ready to talk and that he's open to meeting its leaders. His comments came as the US imposed new sanctions on Iranian oil exports. Meanwhile, Iran denied cutting IAEA ties, though future inspections need top security approval.**

(News Agency)- US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that Iran appears ready to talk to the United States and that he would be open to meeting Iranian officials "if necessary." Speaking to reporters at Joint Base Andrews before heading to a rally in Iowa, Trump stated, "Iran does want to speak, and I think they'd like to speak to me, and it's time that they do."

He added, "We're not looking to hurt them. We're looking to let them be a country again."

Trump's remarks came on the same day the US announced fresh sanctions against Iran's oil industry. These are the first sanctions on Iran's energy sector since a US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Iran took effect last month.

The new sanctions target individuals and companies allegedly involved in smuggling Iranian oil. One of the named individuals is Salim Ahmed Said, an Iraqi



businessman. His company, based in the United Arab Emirates, is accused by the US of disguising Iranian oil as Iraqi oil to bypass international restrictions.

**IRAN INSISTS IT HAS NOT CUT IAEA TIES**

While tensions over Iran's nuclear program have grown in recent days, especially after the Iranian parliament passed a new law restricting international

inspections. Despite this, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi denied that Iran had ended cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), calling such reports "fake news." "Iran remains committed to the NPT and its Safeguards Agreement," Araghchi said. "In accordance with the new legislation by Majlis, sparked by the unlawful attacks against our nuclear

facilities by Israel and the US, our cooperation with the IAEA will be channelled through Iran's Supreme National Security Council for obvious safety and security reasons."

According to the new law, future inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities now require approval from the Supreme National Security Council.

The IAEA said it is "awaiting further official information from Iran" to understand the impact of the new rules.

**US WARNS IRAN TO COOPERATE WITH NUCLEAR INSPECTIONS**

The United States strongly criticised Iran's decision to limit IAEA access. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said during a regular briefing, "We'll use the word 'unacceptable,' that Iran chose to suspend cooperation with the IAEA at a time when it has a window of opportunity to reverse course and choose a path of peace and prosperity."

## US teacher denied plea to live near teen she sexually abused over 50 times



(News Agency)-A former Illinois special education teacher and soccer coach, Christina Formella, appeared in a DuPage County courtroom this week, smiling and holding hands with her husband, as she requested permission to move closer to the teenage former student she is accused of abusing repeatedly. The court denied her request to reduce the buffer zone that currently prevents her from living near the alleged victim. Formella, 30, is facing 52 criminal charges, including aggravated sexual abuse and assault. Prosecutors allege that she engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a student, beginning when he was 15 and she was 28. The reported abuse

allegedly took place more than 50 times, mostly on school premises and sometimes in her marital home.

Formella's defense argued that the current 5,000-foot buffer zone was impractical because the teenager spends time near her neighborhood and even works in the area. She has been living with her parents since her bond conditions were modified in June and is required to wear an ankle monitor, which she appeared to conceal with loose clothing in court. Authorities say the teacher initiated the relationship while the boy was on her soccer team. After he sustained an injury, Formella allegedly began tutoring him privately.

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# Zohran Mamdani marked Asian and African American on college application: Report

Democratic socialist and New York City mayoral frontrunner Zohran Mamdani identified himself as both "Asian" and "Black or African American" on his Columbia University application in 2009, according to a report by The New York Times.

The 33-year-old applied to the Ivy League university as a high school senior but was not accepted. The information came to light through internal data obtained from a hack of Columbia's admissions system. Mamdani, who was born in Uganda to Indian parents and raised in the US's Queens, defended the decision, saying he was trying to reflect his mixed background due to limited options in the form. His mother is the award-winning Indian-American filmmaker Mira Nair.

"Most college applications don't have a box for Indian-Ugandans, so I checked multiple boxes trying to capture the fullness of my background," the Queens lawmaker told the NYT. He also emphasised that the form allowed students to provide more specific information, and that he wrote in

**New York City's Democratic mayoral frontrunner Zohran Mamdani listed himself as "Asian" and "Black" on a 2009 Columbia application, citing limited options to reflect his Indian-African heritage, according to a report by The New York Times.**



"Ugandan" to better represent his heritage. Mamdani said he does not consider himself Black or African American, but "an American who was born in Africa". The NYT report further said that he does not appear to have ever publicly described himself as Black outside the college applications. At the time of his application, the Democratic mayoral candidate's father,

Mahmood Mamdani, was a professor at Columbia University, a position he still holds. Despite the connection, the 33-year-old said he had no strong desire to attend a school where his father worked, and ultimately enrolled at Bowdoin College in Maine, where he majored in Africana studies. The data from the Columbia hack, shared with the Times by an anonymous

intermediary, revealed that Mamdani's racial identification could have potentially given him an edge under Columbia's race-conscious admissions policy, which was still in place in 2009. Though Mamdani has embraced his South Asian and Muslim identity during his campaign, releasing videos in Urdu and Bengali and wearing traditional kurtas, he has also drawn on his African roots, referencing his Ugandan birthplace and his father's civil rights activism. In a recent appearance at the National Action Network, he noted that his middle name, "Kwame", was given in honour of Ghana's first Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah. Following his 2020 election to the State Assembly, Mamdani also supported legislation to include Middle Eastern and North African categories in state demographic data collection. The leaked Columbia data does not include a copy of his full application but contains race, test scores, citizenship status, and admission outcomes. Columbia has not confirmed the data's accuracy, though the NYT verified a sample of records, and Mamdani did not dispute the information.

## University of California bans student boycotts of Israel-linked firms amid probe

**The University of California reiterated its ban on student government boycotts of companies linked to any country, including Israel, amid federal antisemitism probes and rising campus tensions.**

( News Agency) - The president of the University of California this week reiterated that student governments are prohibited from financial boycotts of companies associated with any particular country, including Israel, as the Trump administration continues its probe of alleged antisemitism on college campuses.

Michael Drake did not mention Israel by name, but he did single out student governments in a letter he sent to chancellors of the university system. He said that while freedom of speech and inquiry are core commitments of the university, its policies also require that financial decisions be grounded in sound business practices, such as competitive bidding.

"This principle also applies to student governments," he wrote. "Actions by University entities to implement boycotts of companies based on their association with a particular country would not align with these sound business practices."

UC spokesperson Rachel Zaentz said in a statement that the letter is in keeping with the university's opposition to



financial boycotts of companies associated with a particular country.

"While our community members have the right to express their viewpoints, financial boycotts are inconsistent with UC's commitment to sound business practices, academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas," she said.

College campuses exploded with pro-Palestinian protests in the wake of the war

in Gaza, including a particularly brutal clash involving police at the University of California, Los Angeles last year. At the start of his term this year, President Donald Trump launched antisemitism probes at several universities, including the University of California, Berkeley.

The US Department of Health and Human Services and National Science Foundation are requiring research

grantees to certify they will not engage in boycotts of Israel or promote diversity, inclusion and equity or risk federal funding. The California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said Drake's letter is yet another example of the university system's attempts to silence student and faculty support of Palestinian human rights.

"It sends a chilling message that financial interests and political pressure outweigh free expression and moral responsibility to take a stand against a foreign nation committing a genocide," said Oussama Mokeddem, the group's government affairs director. The UC Student Association, which represents students across the campuses, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But its president, Aditi Hariharan, told the Los Angeles Times that she disagreed with the ban. "Students already have little influence on how the university works, and student government is one of the few places where they can really get involved and have their voices heard," she said in an interview before the letter was released.



# How the Justice Department carried out a \$14.6B healthcare fraud takedown

(By our staff reporter) The Department of Justice's unveiling this week of sweeping charges against more than 300 defendants who allegedly defrauded Medicare and other taxpayer-funded programs came as part of the department's annual "takedown" event.

The healthcare fraud takedowns have been a practice at the DOJ for more than a decade, but officials touted this one as the largest on record. It stood out not only for its size but also because it focused on transnational criminals and broached artificial intelligence.

"This takedown represents the largest healthcare fraud takedown in American history," DOJ Criminal Division head Matthew Galeotti said. "But it's not the end. It's the beginning of a new era of aggressive prosecution and data-driven prevention."

This year's operation led to 324 defendants being charged for submitting billions of dollars in allegedly fraudulent healthcare claims, including for medical care that patients never ended up receiving or that they received unnecessarily. A DOJ official told reporters after the announcement that the work was "strategically coordinated" so that the takedown involved "all new indictments, complaints, [and] informations."

Charges were brought across 50 federal districts and, according to the official, all were brought or unsealed during a three-week period leading up to the takedown announcement.

Galeotti said the intended false claims totaled \$14.6 billion. The actual losses reached \$2.9 billion, he said.

Another DOJ official told Fox News Digital the purpose of the annual takedowns is "to raise public awareness and deter wrongdoers from engaging in this crime." The official noted that Operation Brace Yourself, a 2019 takedown, led to an estimated reduction of \$1.9 billion being charged to Medicare for certain types of orthotic braces.

"Every fraudulent claim, every fake billing, every kickback scheme represents money taken directly from the pockets of American taxpayers, who fund these essential programs through their hard work and sacrifice," Galeotti said.

International scam

The charges announced this week spanned the globe, and DOJ officials said that in addition to four arrested in Estonia and another seven arrested at airports or the U.S.-Mexico border, the department was working to extradite others overseas who are accused of crimes.

Those defendants were part of an alleged scheme coined "Operation Gold Rush," which resulted in at least 20 members of a



transnational criminal organization, including defendants based in Russia, being charged as part of a Medicare and money laundering operation that centered on catheters. The group behind the scheme allegedly used foreign ownership entities to buy dozens of medical supply companies and then used stolen identities and confidential health data to create and file \$10.6 billion in claims with Medicare.

"We are seeing a disturbing trend of transnational criminal organizations engaging in increasingly sophisticated and complex criminal schemes that defraud the American healthcare system," Galeotti said.

Two owners of Pakistani marketing organizations were among those charged in an alleged \$703 million scheme in which they used artificial intelligence to create fake recordings of Medicare recipients consenting to receive medical supplies.

"We are concerned about the criminals' advancement in technology here, obviously," Galeotti said.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services administrator who oversees the Medicare program, was pressed by a reporter about why fraudsters were so easily able to penetrate the Medicare payment system.

Oz said CMS is working to meet the moment. The agency has "already launched a model. It is designed to use artificial intelligence and other more cutting-edge tools to address the fraud that exists in healthcare," Oz said.

Behind the scenes

Investigating and prosecuting fraudsters is work that relies heavily on data. The DOJ's healthcare fraud unit has since 2018 had its own in-house team that analyzes data, one of the DOJ officials told Fox News Digital.

The team's techniques include identifying "aberrant billing levels" and other

allografts," and unnecessarily applied them to elderly Medicare recipients, including hospice patients in their final days. The defendants allegedly reaped millions of dollars from the practice.

"Patients and their families trusted these providers with their lives. Instead of receiving care, they became victims of elaborate criminal schemes," Galeotti said.

DOJ officials said they plan to use a "fusion center" as part of their healthcare fraud crackdown. The center will combine data across agencies and is designed to create a more efficient analysis process.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is also involved in healthcare fraud work. A DEA official said during the takedown announcement that the agency's investigations included doctors, pharmacists and pharmacy owners.

Fifty-eight cases involved the illegal distribution of an estimated 15 million pills of opioids and other controlled substances, he said. "These pills ended up on our streets in the hands of dealers and in the path of addiction," the DEA official said.

Overall, dozens of medical care professionals, including 25 doctors, were charged in the takedown.



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# House passes sprawling domestic policy bill, sending it to Trump's desk



(By our staff reporter) The Republican-controlled House passed a multitrillion-dollar package of tax cuts and spending Thursday, sending it to President Donald Trump's desk after a tense 24 hours of negotiations and arm-twisting.

The mostly party-line vote of 218-214, which came one day ahead of Trump's July 4 deadline, caps an arduous process that lasted more than four months, rife with ideological clashes and acrimony between the House and the Senate, where Republicans had little margin for error given their narrow majorities.

In the end, the GOP largely unified to pack the bulk of Trump's domestic agenda into a single measure, with just Reps. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania voting against it. A bloc of Republican holdouts had initially opposed a procedural vote Wednesday to advance the bill, leading to an hourslong overnight standoff. But Trump and Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., managed to sway all but one of them, teeing up final passage in the House.

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Trump is expected to sign the bill into law on Independence Day, marking the party's biggest legislative accomplishment since it took full control of Washington in January.

Trump applauded Republicans after the bill passed Thursday, writing on Truth Social that the successful effort signaled a united Republican Party.

"The Republicans in the House of Representatives have just passed the 'ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL ACT.' Our Party is

UNITED like never before and, our Country is 'HOT.' We are going to have a Signing Celebration at the White House," he wrote. "All Congressmen/women and Senators are invited."

Trump continued the praise Thursday evening at an event in Des Moines, Iowa, organized to celebrate Independence Day. "There could be no better birthday present for America than the phenomenal victory we achieved just hours ago when Congress passed the One Big Beautiful Bill to make America great again," he said, lauding the legislation as "a declaration of independence from a national decline."

The 887-page package, dubbed the "one big, beautiful bill," extends the tax cuts Trump enacted in 2017 while temporarily slashing taxes on tips and overtime pay. It approves hundreds of billions of dollars in new spending on the military and on carrying out Trump's mass deportation plans. And it partly pays for all that with steep cuts to Medicaid, food aid benefits and clean energy funding. That includes an estimated \$930 billion in spending reductions under Medicaid, violating Trump's promise not to cut the program. Republicans often turned to Trump throughout the process to help close the deal on key votes. He regularly held meetings with and made phone calls to key lawmakers while issuing the occasional threat on Truth Social to holdouts who stood in the bill's way. Vice President JD Vance was also a regular presence in Senate and House meetings about the bill.

"If President Trump and Vice President

Vance had not engaged at the time they did, it wouldn't have passed," said conservative Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., who attended White House meetings in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room on Wednesday and ultimately voted for the bill.

Speaking to reporters in the wee hours of the morning, Johnson said Trump had been making phone calls to recalcitrant holdouts as late as 1 a.m. Thursday to help break an impasse on the floor.

"He doesn't really sleep a lot," said Johnson, who also dangled the prospect of future bills to address concerns and demands from a variety of members.

In his 1 a.m. call with holdouts, Trump and other White House officials promised to aggressively implement key provisions in the bill — from clean energy tax credit phaseouts to new Medicaid restrictions, a source familiar with the call said.

One by one, the GOP critics folded and accepted demands they insisted they wouldn't. Conservatives swallowed a bill that adds trillions to the debt. Politically vulnerable Republicans endorsed steep cuts to Medicaid and health care spending that the CBO projects will cost 11.8 million people their insurance. Republicans whose districts and states benefit from clean energy incentives ended up voting to strip them away.

"They're just afraid of Trump and the backlash that would ensue if he called them out," Massie, who opposed the bill, told NBC News the day before the final vote. "I'm not concerned."

Trump told reporters Thursday that it was

"easy" to get skeptical Republicans on board during his conversations and said he didn't offer any lawmakers specific commitments or promises.

"I did not have much of a problem with any of them," he said. "No deals. What I did is we talked about how good the bill is."

GOP holdouts fold after threats to vote no Rep. David Valadao, R-Calif., led a June 24 letter from 16 Republicans vowing to oppose the Senate bill because of its Medicaid cuts, which were more aggressive than those in an earlier bill. They warned that the bill would impose "penalties" for states with larger programs, "cuts to emergency Medicaid funding" and "additional burdens on hospitals already stretched thin."

"Protecting Medicaid is essential for the vulnerable constituents we were elected to represent. Therefore, we cannot support a final bill that threatens access to coverage or jeopardizes the stability of our hospitals and providers," they wrote.

The following week, all 16 of them voted for the bill anyway. Valadao's office didn't reply to requests for comment.

Trump and his allies sought to strike fear in GOP lawmakers by vowing to support a primary challenger to Massie in his next election. Massie, who objected to the large deficit increase in the bill, said Trump's real goal was to keep other Republicans in line by sending a message that defying him comes with political pain.

"They're whipping this horse, because I'm out of the barn, to keep the other horses in the barn," he said.

Fitzpatrick, who represents a swing district, said the steeper Medicaid cuts, "in addition to several other Senate provisions," moved him from supporting an earlier version of the bill to opposing the final one. "I believe in, and will always fight for, policies that are thoughtful, compassionate, and good for our community," he said in a statement. "It is this standard that will always guide my legislative decisions." Later, on the 1 a.m. call with Trump, Massie remarked that it would be nice if Trump stopped attacking him, the source said, then flipped from no to yes on the key procedural vote. Trump said Thursday that he was "disappointed" that Fitzpatrick voted against the bill but stopped short of backing a primary challenge against him.

Democrats slam the bill as 'disgusting' The House took up the bill after the Senate voted 51-50 to pass it on Tuesday, with Vance breaking the tie. The only Republicans who voted against it were Rand Paul of Kentucky, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Susan Collins of Maine.



# Sridhar Chillara Appointed Chairman of South Asian American Coalition for Jack 2025

(By our staff reporter) Sridhar Chillara Appointed Chairman of South Asian American Coalition for Jack 2025 Edison, New Jersey – In a major community gathering held in Edison, NJ, New Jersey gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli officially announced the appointment of Sridhar Chillara as Chairman of the South Asian American Coalition for Jack 2025. The event was attended by several respected community leaders from across the state, marking a significant step toward building deep community engagement and grassroots mobilization ahead of the November election. As part of his strategic vision, Mr. Chillara will lead the formation of multiple sub-coalitions representing key South Asian communities, including:

- Indian American Coalition
- Pakistani American Coalition
- Bangladeshi American Coalition
- Nepali American Coalition
- Sri Lankan American Coalition

Within the Indian American Coalition, language-based cultural wings will ensure meaningful outreach and voter activation:



- Indian Telugu Coalition
- Indian Gujarati Coalition
- Indian Tamil Coalition
- Indian Punjabi Coalition
- Indian Hindi Speakers Coalition
- Additional Indian language coalitions as needed

To further strengthen voter engagement, Mr. Chillara will establish a leadership team, advisory council, and several functional committees focused on:

- Social media & digital outreach
- Temple & festival-based campaign events
- Community

association partnerships • Youth and women's engagement • Voter registration and conversion drives • Targeted fundraising initiatives

As part of the campaign strategy, massive grassroots efforts will be rolled out across New Jersey to flip votes, convert independents and disillusioned Democrats, and encourage newly naturalized citizens to register as Republican voters. "This is not just an appointment — it's a movement," said



Sridhar Chillara. "With over 1 million South Asians living in New Jersey, our voice and our vote have the power to shape the state's future. We are ready to deliver a decisive victory for Jack Ciattarelli." Community members and volunteers interested in joining this historic mission are encouraged to follow and engage via: ?? facebook.com/SouthAsians4Jack ?? facebook.com/IndianAmericansForJack

## Why Ranbir Kapoor-Yash's Ramayana feels like a moment for Indian cinema

**Nitesh Tiwari's 'Ramayana' is a cinematic moment shaped by faith, scale, and storytelling ambition. With Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi, Yash, and Sunny Deol leading a power-packed cast, the film dares to honour the epic as more than mythology. The first glimpse feels less like a teaser and more like the beginning of something historic.**

(By our staff reporter) 'Ramayana' can never be just a film. It's history and the ultimate truth for some, and a story of indelible devotion for others. That is precisely why Hindi cinema struggled to transform the epic into a true cinematic saga - not just a film, but an immersive experience of the magnitude this story deserves. And it isn't easy. A story for all ages that demands more than just money - it calls for total surrender. Years of unwavering commitment, assembling the finest talent and bringing together people who not only understand the epic but are ready to embody its power and magic on screen. So, when Nitesh Tiwari announced that he was ready to take on the challenge and build a 'Ramayana' universe in two parts, it marked the beginning of a shared dream - his and the audience's. On Thursday, as Tiwari unveiled the first glimpse of 'Ramayana', audiences finally witnessed the grandeur of that vision. Watching 'Ramayana' come alive on the big screen felt emotional, magical and significant too. This is a story that never ages. 'Ramayana' belongs to

everyone, and has everything a full-fledged commercial entertainer needs: scale, soul and timeless resonance. It carries within its values, devotion, bonding, feminism, power, history, defiance, and a wealth of emotions that resonate with every heart. And while it's too soon to know if Tiwari's 'Ramayana' will successfully capture all this on screen, one thing is already clear - the casting is pitch perfect. Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram might be the most inspired casting choice in years. Arguably the finest actor of his generation, Kapoor has consistently proven his craft - regardless of box office outcomes. His maturity, sincerity and effortless ability to become the character make him a thrilling fit for the role. Tiwari's choice of Sai Pallavi as Sita seems equally profound. The goddess is revered for her simplicity, quiet strength and inner beauty - qualities that Pallavi exudes. The actor is known across the Indian film industry for her no-glam image and expressive presence, especially in Malayalam cinema. She brings a rare authenticity to the role.

And yet the boldest move was perhaps casting Yash as Ravana. The 'KGF' fame is not just a striking presence, he commands the screen. He's a brave actor, never afraid to experiment, and his declaration of his craft is evident in every frame. He is not just watched on the big screen - he is experienced. Then comes Ravi Dubey as Lakshman, a television star with an undeniable presence and proven talent. Tiwari's faith in Dubey - choosing sincerity and emotional depth over stardom - reflects his commitment to storytelling over spectacle. The casting of 'Ramayana' looks as vibrant and powerful as the epic itself: a Bollywood powerhouse, a Malayalam gem, a Kannada superstar and a TV icon - all anchored by one of the most electrifying choices of all: Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman. Deol's thunderous energy, towering screen presence, and innate heroism make him the embodiment of Hanuman's fierce devotion and strength. His casting doesn't seem just right, but almost destined. Deol is to 'Ramayana' what Lord Hanuman is to the epic: a

relentless warrior who wins hearts. The ensemble cast makes 'Ramayana' a promise of more than just a big-screen spectacle - a promise of an emotion, a memory, a generational experience. The film doesn't seem to be trying to modernise the epic, nor is it trying to reimagine it to suit trends. It's almost like Tiwari has bowed down to its source, honoured its scale, its essence, and the immense emotional capital it holds in most Indian households. 'Ramayana' is attempting to recreate a world, revive a belief, and retouch the moral compass that the epic so powerfully embodies. In a time when mythology often drives a battleground of opinions, Tiwari's attempt at making this film looks more like reverence than revision. This is probably a one-of-its-kind effort to bring generations of audiences together, and offer them an opportunity to reconnect with their shared cultural space - realise a shared dream. It may just also become the defining cinematic mythology of our times. The epic deserves no less. Neither does the audience.



# Who is Soham Parekh, Indian techie who worked at 4-5 US startups at same time?



(By our staff reporter) An Indian engineer is at the centre of a controversy in Silicon Valley, after several US-based startup founders publicly accused him of moonlighting at multiple companies without disclosure.

Soham Parekh, who is believed to be based in India, is alleged to have simultaneously worked at up to four or five startups—many of them backed by Y Combinator—raising questions about hiring practices in remote-first tech culture.

The controversy began when Suhail Doshi, founder of Playground AI and former CEO of analytics firm Mixpanel, posted a public warning on X (formerly Twitter). “PSA: there’s a guy named Soham Parekh (in India) who works at 3–4 startups at the same time. He’s been preying on YC companies and more. Beware,” Doshi wrote. Doshi said Parekh had briefly joined Playground AI last year but was fired within a week after his dual employment came to light. Doshi also shared what he claimed was Parekh’s CV, which listed companies like Dynamo AI, Union AI, Synthesia, and Alan AI among his past employers. He alleged that most of the resume was likely “90% fake.”

Other founders came forward with similar experiences. Flo Crivello, founder of Lindy, said his team had hired Parekh just a week earlier. “Fired this morning,” he wrote. “He did so incredibly well in interviews,



must have a lot of training.” Nicolai Ouporov, CEO of Fleet AI, confirmed Parekh had worked with them as well, adding that he had “been doing this for years.” Matthew Parkhurst, CEO of Antimetal, also weighed in. He described Parekh as “really smart and likeable,” but said they let him go after discovering his multi-company commitments. “Hiring Soham is a new rite of passage tbh. Any great company should go through it,” Parkhurst joked.

Michelle Lim, Head of Product at Warp, added that Parekh had been hired for a work trial, which was immediately

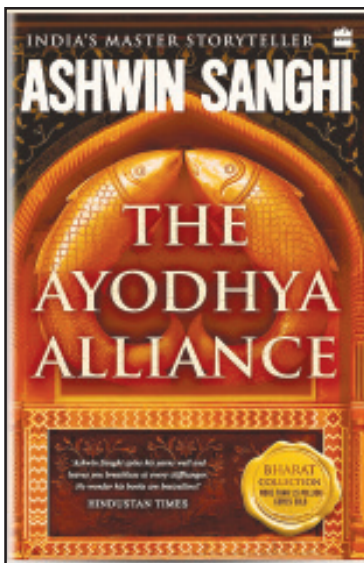
cancelled once the accusations surfaced. So far, Parekh has not made a public statement, but according to Doshi, he reached out privately. In a message shared by Doshi, Parekh appeared to express regret: “Asking this as genuine advice... Have I completely sabotaged my career? What can I do to improve my situation? I am also happy to come clean.” According to his CV, Parekh holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Mumbai and a master’s from Georgia Institute of Technology. However, the authenticity of these claims is now under scrutiny. As the thread gained traction, it

also sparked wider conversations online—about remote hiring, lax background checks, and the ethics of moonlighting in the tech industry. While some questioned how a single engineer could take on so many roles, others remarked on his apparent skill at interviews.

One social media user who claimed to have worked with Parekh said, “When he works, yes. I saw him taking on a task and finishing in an hour when it’d take at least three for other engineers.” For a handful of Silicon Valley startups, hiring Soham Parekh was a lesson learned the hard way.



# The Ayodhya Alliance: Thrilling Fusion Of Ancient Secrets And Modern Warfare



By : Prosenjit Nath

Ashwin Sanghi returns with *The Ayodhya Alliance*, a bold, globe-trotting thriller that fuses mythology, science, and geopolitics into an electrifying narrative. With his signature blend of fact and fiction, Sanghi delves deep into the rich tapestry of Indian epics, ancient civilisations, and contemporary power struggles, delivering a novel that is as intellectually engaging as it is relentlessly suspenseful.

At the heart of the story lies a long-buried enigma — a mysterious scientific force once whispered by Ravana to Lakshman on the blood-soaked battlefield of Lanka. This isn't just any ancient secret, but a revelation with the potential to alter the trajectory of human history. For thousands of years, this secret remained hidden, protected by guardians bound by a sacred oath. Now, in the 21st century, as India's borders simmer with tension and a crucial defence technology begins to falter, the past resurfaces with explosive urgency. Enter Aditya Pillai, a high-stakes industrialist with a deep investment in India's defence projects, and Somi Kim, a brilliant South Korean technocrat. The pairing is unusual but compelling. Their mission begins as a modern technological crisis but soon morphs into an Indiana Jones-esque quest that spans continents and millennia. Together, they uncover a trail that stretches from Ayodhya to Kailasa, from the Pandyan Empire to Rome, Damascus, Thailand, and Korea. The sheer breadth of the historical canvas is staggering. Sanghi's greatest strength lies in his ability to craft plausible

connections between mythology and science, between the spiritual and the strategic. In *The Ayodhya Alliance*, he masterfully blurs the lines between historical fact and speculative fiction. As the protagonists follow cryptic clues and decode ancient texts, readers are treated to a whirlwind tour of lost knowledge, suppressed technologies, and forgotten alliances. But it's not just the treasure hunt that keeps the pages turning. The novel also probes deeper questions: What happens when science is indistinguishable from magic? Who controls the narrative of history? And what is the cost of ultimate power?

The pacing is brisk, with Sanghi deftly alternating between historical flashbacks and high-octane contemporary scenes. The transitions are smooth, ensuring that the reader is never disoriented despite the temporal leaps. He builds suspense

incrementally, never overwhelming the reader with exposition, yet feeding just enough information to keep the mystery alive.

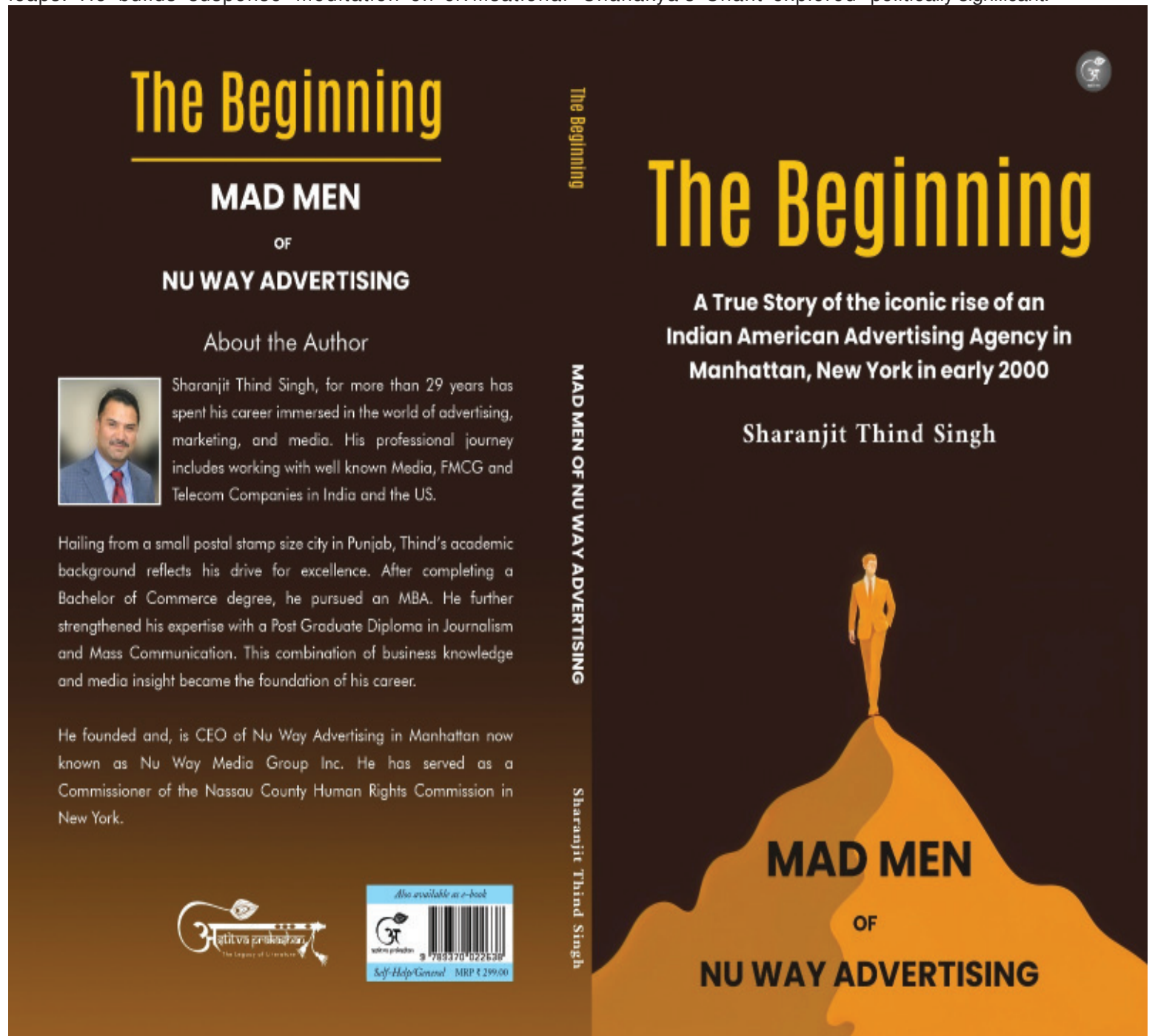
Characters are well-drawn and multidimensional. Aditya Pillai is more than a corporate magnate; he is a man caught between his duty to his nation and his moral compass. Somi Kim brings an international flavour to the narrative and functions as both a cultural counterbalance and an intellectual equal. Their dynamic evolves gradually, underscoring themes of trust, collaboration, and shared heritage. Supporting characters — some descendants of ancient orders, others shadowy figures from intelligence agencies — add texture and complexity to the story. Thematically, *The Ayodhya Alliance* operates on multiple levels. It is, on the surface, an action-packed thriller. But at its core, it is a meditation on civilisational

continuity, the erosion of knowledge, and the consequences of playing god with lost technologies. The myth of Ravana's whispered secret is not just a plot device; it is a symbol of how power, once divorced from ethics, can become a global threat. Sanghi's prose is crisp and cinematic, well-suited for the screen adaptation this book practically demands. There are moments where the exposition — especially the historical segments — verges on dense, but for readers familiar with Sanghi's work, this is part of the intellectual pleasure. His research is meticulous, and he continues his tradition of endnotes and references for the curious reader who wants to dive deeper into the history beneath the fiction.

Where *The Krishna Key* and *Chanakya's Chant* explored

theology and political philosophy, *The Ayodhya Alliance* ventures further into the speculative realm, almost bordering on science fiction. Yet, it remains grounded in the Indian ethos, reminding readers that ancient India was not only spiritual but scientific in its orientation — a land where technology and mysticism coexisted.

In an era where India's role in the global order is rapidly evolving, *The Ayodhya Alliance* resonates as more than just a thriller. It is a story about civilisational agency, about reclaiming lost narratives, and about rising powers reasserting their intellectual and spiritual legacy on the world stage. At a time when popular fiction is saturated with Western myths and tropes, Sanghi's effort to root an international thriller in Indic history is both refreshing and politically significant.





# 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting took place in Washington D.C.

(News Agency)-The Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Ministers of Australia, India, and Japan met in Washington, D.C. on July 1, 2025, for the 10th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting. They welcomed recent and upcoming activities conducted by their four countries and in cooperation with partners to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific. Ministers announced key initiatives to strengthen maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and support humanitarian assistance and emergency response across the region.

2. Today, Quad Foreign Ministers are proud to announce the launch of the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative, an ambitious expansion of our partnership to strengthen economic security and collective resilience by collaborating on securing and diversifying critical mineral supply chains. This new flagship initiative, alongside the high-impact programs and outcomes the Quad is realizing, will enable our four countries to bring economic opportunity and prosperity to our people and the region.

Maritime and Transnational Security

3. The Quad is expanding maritime law enforcement cooperation with the region, which will support efforts to

curtail illicit maritime activity, including piracy, drug trafficking, infringements on border security, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

- This month, we launched the first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, which strengthens our interoperability and knowledge-sharing to best address unlawful maritime activities across the region. Quad partners have embarked as observers on a U.S. Coast Guard Cutter that has departed Palau and will disembark in Guam this week.

- Later this month, the Quad will hold the second maritime legal dialogue to advance efforts to uphold maritime order.
- We continue to implement the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), including the increased provision of space-based collection and sharing of radio frequency data, analytical training, and capacity building. We intend to geographically expand IPMDA across the Indian Ocean region and continue to explore developing an IPMDA common operating picture.

- We intend to conduct the first Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) workshop in 2025, which aims to assess the capability gaps in the region and enhance the maritime capabilities in consultation with regional

partners.

Economic Prosperity and Security

4. The Quad is committed to ensuring a free and open region and promoting the prosperity of our citizens and all people in the Indo-Pacific region. We aim to strengthen energy security across the Indo-Pacific and promote resilient supply chains and quality infrastructure projects that are transparent and secure.

- The Quad Critical Minerals Initiative will strengthen cooperation on priorities such as securing and diversifying reliable supply chains, and electronic waste (e-waste) critical minerals recovery and reprocessing. The Initiative will expand the Quad's cooperation on supply chain resilience measures for critical minerals, and we look forward to coordinating with private sector partners to facilitate increased investments.

- We will formally launch the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership by hosting a transportation and logistics conference with Indo-Pacific partners in Mumbai in October 2025. The conference will increase knowledge, facilitate dialogue, and exchange experiences on advanced ports and logistics practices; and mobilize government and private sector

investments in quality port infrastructure development. This will complement the work Quad partners have done to boost infrastructure expertise across the Indo-Pacific region through the Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program.

- We continue to advance the Quad Partnership on Cable Connectivity and Resilience. This year, the United States and India will host an undersea cables forum with participation from Quad partners to identify opportunities for digital infrastructure collaboration. This forum will encourage regulatory harmonization which supports more efficient access by Quad partner companies to identify opportunities for digital infrastructure collaboration. Australia's Cable Connectivity and Resilience Centre is supporting partner governments to strengthen their undersea cable policies and regulations. Critical and Emerging Technology

5. The Quad recognizes the transformative power of critical and emerging technologies and will continue to advance secure and trusted information and communications technology infrastructure while expanding our work on artificial intelligence, semiconductors, technical standards, biotechnology, and cybersecurity.

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# Mushrooms are having a moment



(By our staff reporter) They're popping up in papads, jams and cakes; as health boosts in bread and coffee; and in urban gardens "People are realising that mushrooms are a real superfood," says Anuradha Srivastava, a food technologist at

the Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Directorate of Mushroom Research (ICAR-DMR) in Himachal Pradesh. "They contain no sugar, so they're ideal for diabetics. They're good for those with high blood pressure or cholesterol and they contain many of the trace nutrients that

our bodies need." At the government-run ICAR-DMR, innovations have led to a versatile mushroom powder that is being used to make a multigrain mushroom bread, biscuits and papads. Their mushroom pickles are also now widely available across the country and on e-

commerce platforms. The R&D team is now working on a mushroom spread, murabba, and a mushroom bhujia. Brands like Urban Platter have a range of mushroom powders to choose from. Wholesalers like The Mushroom Co have branched out into the quirky as well. "We make a coffee mix infused with cordyceps mushroom extract, known to be a mild aphrodisiac and widely used for its medicinal and strengthening effects," says founder Rohhaan Gawde. As

chefs return to local, season produce, mushrooms are becoming a favourite ingredient because of their ability to absorb other flavours," says Sarah Edwards, a recipe developer who runs Copper & Cloves in Bengaluru. "They're also easy to cook, with a subtle nutty flavour that complements sauces, savoury dishes and certain desserts." Their fleshy texture and high-protein content make them a go-to meat substitute.

# The good kind of shots

*Ever done shots that are good for health? Try out these nutrient-packed drinks that can be made at home*

(By our staff reporter) Can a shot a day keep the doctor away? It can help, if you're taking the right kinds of shots - wellness boosts packed with antioxidants, minerals, vitamins and nutrients. The most popular are ginger shots, but you can also shoot turmeric, cinnamon or apple cider vinegar. Some have anti-inflammatory properties, others help strengthen your bones. And they can all be made at home. Here's how.

## GINGER SHOTS

Take a 1-inch piece of fresh ginger root, grind and strain it to extract about 1 tsp of concentrated juice. Add lemon or orange juice, turmeric, pepper and honey to taste.

"Ginger contains gingerol, a substance that aids in digestion, and can help treat many forms of nausea, especially morning sickness in pregnant women," says Bhakti Samant, chief

dietician at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai.

## CINNAMON SHOTS

Soak a cinnamon stick in water, add a bit of honey, and sip (ideally, don't down this in one go; it's absorbed better in small quantities). "Cinnamon influences the manner in which sugar is metabolised, helping to cut fat accumulation," says Samant. This shot can help

ease menstrual cramps, adds Seema Singh, chief clinical nutritionist at Fortis Hospital, Delhi.

## TURMERIC SHOTS

The curcumin in turmeric is a very strong anti-oxidant. "This makes

turmeric shots a great anti-inflammatory. It helps ease joint pains, and boosts immunity," says Singh.

Mix 1 tsp haldi in a cup of coconut water; add

ginger, honey and lemon to taste. A pinch of freshly ground black pepper will

help the body absorb the curcumin better.

**CHIA SHOTS** "Chia is rich in Omega 3 fatty acids. They are a source of antioxidants, which are believed to have cardiac, anti-ageing and anti-carcinogenic characteristics," says Samant.

Soak 1 tsp chia seeds in water for at least 10 minutes. Down like a shot; it's so filling, you can have it in place of a snack.

## APPLE CIDER VINEGAR SHOTS)

Popularly known as ACV, apple cider vinegar is an alkaline, probiotic-rich ingredient known to reduce muscle pain, headaches, and boost digestion. For an ACV shot, mix 1 tsp of apple cider vinegar in 100ml of water and add ice cubes. Restrict to one shot a day.





# Move over, kale: Mushrooms are the new grocery aisle celebrities



(By our staff reporter) Move over, kale. There's a new celebrity in the produce aisle: mushrooms. People are scooping up mushrooms so quickly that producers are scrambling to keep pace with burgeoning demand. "We haven't run out as yet, but we're definitely trying hard to keep up," said Gale Ferranto, who helps run her family's third-generation business, Bella Mushroom Farms, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Chester County, about a two-hour drive southwest from New York City, is the epicenter of mushroom production in the United States. "We call it the Mushroom Mecca," said Ferranto. The area accounts for more than 60% of all domestic mushroom production coming from more

than 50 local family-owned farms. Ferranto's farm produces five million pounds of mushrooms annually, packaged under its Buona Foods brand and other private labels for grocery store chains like Stop & Shop and Giant Food. "It's not going to be easy, but we are upping our game to grow more mushroom crops a year from now," she said. Monthly US mushroom production has surged to an all-time high, according to industry trade group American Mushroom Institute. Store prices for mushrooms have also ticked up. The average selling price for a pound of fresh mushrooms increased to \$4.19 in December 2019, up from \$4.03 from a year ago, according to market research firm IRI. "The push by

consumers to eat healthier by pivoting to plant-based foods is a big part of mushroom's popularity," said Lori Harrison, spokeswoman for the American Mushroom Institute. Plant-based diets are in vogue, fueling demand for meat alternative items like the Impossible Burger and innovations such as cauliflower rice and cauliflower bread. "Growing recognition of the health and nutritional value of mushrooms along with their year-long availability and culinary versatility have contributed to increased customer demand," Walmart (WMT), the nation's largest grocer, said in a statement to CNN Business. Mushrooms are packed with vitamins and minerals. "They are fat-free, low calorie, low sodium, gluten free," said Harrison. "They

are versatile, you can eat them cooked or raw, and they fit any healthy eating plan you have for breakfast, lunch or dinner." Although button mushrooms remain the most commonly consumed variety, Harrison said demand is picking up for specialty varieties, such as shiitake, crimini and oyster mushrooms. Albertsons said shoppers seem to be doing just that. "What we're seeing with mushrooms is customers buying more mushroom varieties, beyond the traditional white and brown mushrooms," said Christine Wilcox, spokeswoman for the supermarket chain. Then there are some unconventional products with mushrooms as an ingredient: There's mushroom tea, mushroom jerky and

"shroom" crackers. Meanwhile, the mushroom "blended" burger continues to pop up on menus nationwide. Growing mushrooms on site Some grocery stores are keeping up with demand by growing mushrooms on site. Entrepreneurs Adam DeMartino and Andrew Carter are cofounders of Smallhold, a startup in Brooklyn, New York that's developed portable indoor mushrooms farming units for stores, restaurants and hotels. The average unit is six feet tall, four feet wide and three feet deep but the setup can be configured in different ways. Each unit can produce 40 to 60 pounds of mushrooms a week. "We've built the company around the growing demand for mushrooms," said DeMartino. The automated units are designed to grow organic specialty mushrooms like pink and blue oyster mushrooms and shiitake mushrooms in a highly-controlled and monitored environment. "Part of the appeal of these units is that mushrooms are delicate in nature. When you cram them into boxes for shipping, it affects their quality," said DeMartino.

# Cutting salt likely to prevent future heart disease, even if you're not at risk now

(By our staff reporter) Heart disease is the number one killer of people worldwide. What's the leading cause of heart disease? High blood pressure, which is often triggered by high sodium (salt) intake in the food we eat. Hypertension is also the leading cause of stroke, heart failure and kidney disease. Yet even if we never salted another dish again in our lives, we would likely still be eating too much sodium every day. That's because it's added to manufactured foods for flavor, texture and color as well as a preservative. A new meta-analysis of 133 clinically randomized trials on lowering salt intake, published Monday in the British journal BMJ, found strong evidence about what would happen if the salt in the foods we eat was cut back. Not only did cutting dietary sodium reduce blood pressure in those with existing hypertension, it also reduced blood pressure in people who were not yet at risk. The greater the reduction in salt



intake, the greater the fall in blood pressure, the research found. That's huge in the world of prevention, said cardiologist Dr. Iclima Fergus from New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, who was not involved in the research. "The importance of this study is that it shows that the reduction in sodium results in blood pressure reduction widely across multiple

populations, not just in populations who were initially deemed as salt sensitive, such as African Americans," Fergus said. That's especially significant considering the revised guidelines from the American Heart Association, Fergus said. Hypertension used to be diagnosed when the top number (systolic) was 140 and the bottom number (diastolic)

was 90. Now you're considered hypertensive if your blood pressure is 130/80. "At 130/90 you already begin to see changes in the vasculature (blood vessels) of the kidneys and some hardening of the arteries," Fergus said. "So having blood pressure in the lower range is beneficial." An even bigger benefit for at-risk

populations In addition to the finding that reducing salt in food brings down blood pressure across populations, the research discovered an even larger fall in blood pressure for those highest at risk, such as the elderly, those with existing high blood pressure and African Americans. In the United Kingdom, blacks are three to four times more likely to have high blood pressure and twice as likely to die from stroke, according to World Action on Salt, a UK advocacy group concerned with salt's effects on health. The American Heart Association says that in the US, more than 40% of African American men and women have high blood pressure. African Americans are also more likely to develop hypertension early in life, where prevention can make an impact. The new meta-analysis was done by international researchers from the Queen Mary University of London, the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, and Action on Salt.



# Does an Indian diet need fibre supplements?

**An array of research-backed benefits of a high-fibre diet has also led wellness companies to add another product to their shelves – fibre supplements. But do Indians need these supplements?**

(By our staff reporter)

Dietary fibre – you need it for a healthy gut, maintaining weight, controlling blood sugar levels, keeping the heart healthy, and keeping constipation woes at bay. Found in legumes, whole grains, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, fibre is an essential part of a balanced diet.

It is basically a type of carbohydrate that our digestive system cannot break down. It keeps us full for longer as it slows the movement of food in the digestive tract and also slows down the quick absorption of sugar and hence reduces blood sugar spikes. Another important thing that fibre does is bulk up the stool and help it pass through the intestines more easily, reducing constipation. An array of research-backed benefits of a high-fibre diet has also led wellness companies to add another product to their shelves – fibre supplements. Available in the forms of powder, husks, and tablets, these supplements claim to boost the daily fibre consumption that might be compromised owing to several reasons like traditional diets and the craze for processed foods. According to ICMR's Dietary Guidelines, almost 40 per cent of a day's food should be vegetables (30 per cent)

and fruits (10 per cent). However, in eastern regions like West Bengal and Odisha, low-fibre foods such as rice and seafood dominate the traditional diet. It's no surprise that this region leads the market for Isabgol (psyllium husk), a type of dietary fibre commonly used to relieve constipation, according to an IMARC report – much like its dominance in the Gelusil market.

"In arid regions like Rajasthan, the limited variety of fresh produce can reduce fibre intake from fruits and vegetables. Diets in these areas may rely more on grains and legumes, which can affect fibre content depending on how they are prepared. In contrast, tropical regions like Kerala have a rich variety of fruits, vegetables, and legumes, leading to higher fibre intake. However, the predominant use of rice may lower fibre intake from grains," says Dr Rohini Patil, MBBS, nutritionist and founder of Nutracy Lifestyle, Pune.

She adds, however, that it can all be sorted with a mindful approach to meal planning. In May 2023, a study supported by the Protein Foods and Nutrition Development Association of India (PFNDAI) revealed that 69 per cent of Indians consume less



fibre than their recommended daily allowance. "Low fibre intake can lead to elevated cholesterol levels, digestive issues, and a higher risk of chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease. To support overall health, it's crucial to incorporate more fibre-rich foods into the diet, such as fresh fruits, legumes, and whole grains," says Parmeet Kaur, Head Dietician, Marengo Asia Hospitals, Gurugram. But, does an Indian diet need fibre supplements?

With a variety of local foods available across the country, diet and nutrition experts say that an Indian diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and

legumes usually provides enough fibre. But it can go wrong if one doesn't follow the concept of a balanced diet or heavily relies on processed foods.

"A trend towards processed foods due to modern lifestyle changes has decreased the consumption of natural fibre," says Parmeet Kaur.

Lovneet Batra, a Delhi-based nutritionist, believes that Indian diets across all regions are rich in fibre as they contain whole grains and vegetables, but it is the urban Indian diets that require fibre supplements. "They (urban Indian diets) often lack vegetables, fruits, and whole grains," says Batra.

## Eyeing that doughnut? What our food cravings indicate



**Finding the underlying reasons for cravings is essential to strike a healthy relationship with food**

(By our staff reporter) A n intense and unavoidable desire for a specific food is something we all can relate to. There are days when we just want to have a plate full of French fries or doughnuts or a large tub of ice-cream. This despite being fully aware that we are giving in to our cravings and nothing else.

Cravings can be a complex interplay of nutrient deficiencies, environmental factors, emotional needs and specific triggers, but not always limited to these factors. We all have a unique relationship with food, and different reasons can trigger our cravings. Sometimes it's around specific tastes,

such as sweet or savoury, and at other times it's from emotions, environmental changes and stress. Cravings vary among women, men and children due to differences in hormonal fluctuations, psychological factors and lifestyle habits. "Every craving indicates a body response, and addressing it involves understanding what the body might be lacking or what emotional needs might be unmet," says Miten Kakaiya, fitness coach and founder of Miten Says Fitness, an online fitness coaching platform. By understanding what your cravings are indicating, you can address the underlying health issues and

improve your overall wellbeing. Cravings can be common but their intensity and frequency different due to individual relationships with food. "Women crave more for sweets and carbs, men for savoury and protein-rich foods, and children for sweet and salty foods," explains Kakaiya. Cravings such as for chocolates, salty chips, sugary drinks or even red meat are mostly associated with nutritional deficiencies of some minerals or vitamins. Then, food often becomes a comfort factor, connected to feelings of happiness, sadness and anxiety. "Chocolates are high in magnesium, and craving for it could indicate a deficiency in this mineral. The desire for salty food items, such as chips and wafers, might indicate a possible sodium or chloride deficiency. The need for these electrolytes can increase after sweating heavily or dehydration," observes Kakaiya. Sometimes when you crave for just a fruit juice or even a piece of cake, it could be for the sugar in it. Sugar cravings

have been linked to the need for quick energy or deficiency in chromium, tryptophan or serotonin. At times, the weather triggers cravings, such as for warm soups or fritters in winter or for a refreshing drink in summer.

It's important to address food cravings and find healthier alternatives; once you start understanding the root cause, it gets easy to find solutions. The key is to start by journaling your cravings and taking out time to understand what could have triggered it. Following a balanced and nutritional diet, by including more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, lentils, nuts and seeds, staying hydrated by drinking at least 8-10 glasses of water daily, eating at regular intervals and not skipping meals, and limiting exposure to unhealthy food could be some possible answers to cravings. Avoiding stocking up on tempting snacks can control impulsive eating while being mindful of portion sizes can help resist the temptation to indulge in unhealthy foods.



# Palace hopping in God's own country



*A visit to the palaces in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, gives an insight into the myriad opulence of the bygone eras*



(By our staff reporter) Ancient forts and palaces are often considered to be portholes for travelling back in time. Standing strong since centuries, they take us on a visual expedition through the many journeys that have shaped history. During a recent trip to Kerala, we decided to explore the lesser-known palaces of the Kingdom of Travancore. These palaces do not seem massive at first sight. However, they have several sections that spread out across acres of grounds. We get to see a cluster of smaller single or double-storeyed structures with gabled and tiled roofs. The architectural brilliance of the place, is reflected through intricate carvings and functionality of layout. Several

centuries old, each palace tells the story of the kingdom and its relations with other kingdoms within and outside India. Kuthiramalika (150+ years old) Literally meaning the horse palace, it derives its name from the 122 smiling horse heads - visible from the palace's main entrance - carved into the beams that support the roof. Built in the 1840s by the then Maharaja of Travancore, Swathi Thirunal Balarama Varma, the palace is situated near the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Given that you have adhered to the dress code of the temple, you can club your visit to both the places. Also called Puthen Malika, the palace's architecture boasts

of the use of rosewood, teakwood, marble and granite. While visiting the interiors, you're not allowed to wear footwear. So, it is hard to miss the glossy smoothness of some sections of the floor. The reason behind it is the use of a mixture made of egg whites, charcoal, and limestone, which keeps the floor cool even on hot days. The well-trained guides here take you on a systematic journey explaining to you the many sections of the palace. It is truly a travel back in time as we see the thrones, the ivory cradles, the palanquins, the arms and other artefacts, once used by the royals. Also known as Nedumangad Valiya Koyikkal Palace, it was the royal

headquarters of the Perakam dynasty. It was built in the 16th century for Queen Umayamma of the Venad Royal Family. Currently, the Kerala State Department of Archaeology is the custodian of the palace and maintains the Folklore and Numismatic museums inside the property. The former has a huge collection of ancient artefacts that played a vital role in the day-to-day activities of common people as well as the royals. One can see the rare chandravalayam, the small percussion instrument played while reciting the ballad of Lord Rama, here. The latter has an exhaustive collection of coins and is a must-visit for those who collect them. The coins on display here reflect the ancient kingdom's trade relations with the Roman and Venetian dynasties, among others. Apart from guides, there are kiosks that tell you all about palace's history. Unlike our previous visits, the trip to Kilimanoor Palace, famous for being the birthplace of Raja Ravi Varma (RRV), was filled with surprises. To begin with, we couldn't spot a single tourist, and it was eerily quiet, except for the distant sounds of someone practising Carnatic vocals. The palace was devoid of any signs or guardsmen, too. Past the imposing gate, called padippura,

we found the source of the Carnatic music - a guru and shishya with a harmonium placed at the centre. The room turned out to be the former studio of RRV. Now, it was filled with his paintings and a lamp was lit in his honour, below a massive picture of him at the farthest end. The guru introduced himself as Rama Varma Thamburan, the sixth descendant of RRV, and apologised that he won't be able to let us in for "it was private property". However, as soon as he got to know that we had come from out of state, he showed us the palace grounds and explained the architecture. It resembled most of Kerala's residential homes from that era, adhering to the 'nalukettu', meaning beyond the imposing arch or the main gate, there were clusters of small and medium-sized houses, two ponds, wells, and sacred groves (kaavu). We were denied entry to the sacred forest, but we could witness the exterior architecture - there was a blue French-inspired building, commissioned by RRV, which clearly stood out - the ancient wooden carvings, and paintings. We also got to see one of the two ponds, which in a surreal manner seemed to reflect the stillness of time.



# The thick red line: Why India shouldn't agree with US on agri

**The India-US trade deal is reportedly stuck because of DC's tough demands on the agriculture and dairy sectors. India shouldn't give in to Donald Trump's demands because agriculture is hugely subsidised in the US, with farmers there getting over \$61,000 against India's \$282. If concessions are to be made, it should be by the US, and not India. Here's why.**

By our staff reporter)

July 9, Donald Trump's tariff deadline, is fast approaching. He's expecting a "very big deal". Indian officials camping in Washington, DC, have extended their stay, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar rushing to the US capital to meet his counterpart, Marco Rubio. Amid all this diplomatic hustle and heat, New Delhi's goal is clear — secure a favourable interim deal for India before Trump's threatened high tariffs, up to 26%, on Indian exports, kick in. But there's an impasse in the talks. India has a "big red line", on which it will find difficult to negotiate. Team Trump is reportedly seeking concessions from India in the agriculture and dairy sectors. There are big reasons why India shouldn't agree to the US demands on agri and dairy.

New Delhi has dug in its heels, and is determined to safeguard India's domestic agricultural sector, and the dairy domain. Millions of Indians, about 40% of the population, are employed in the sector, even though it's not as heavily subsidised as farming in the US, whose government is driving a hard bargain to ensure American agricultural products don't face steep import tariffs in India.

Though the US tries to project it as an attempt at creating a level playing field, the situation is heavily tilted in its favour. A mere quid pro quo tariff regime will not address the mismatch created by the US by providing massive subsidies to its farmers vis-a-vis farmers in India.

While farmers in the US get over \$61,000 in subsidies annually, their counterparts in India get just \$282 a year.

As India rightly called the agriculture and dairy sectors a "big red line", it, in all likelihood and fairness, shouldn't give in to Trump's demands because doing so could jeopardise the livelihoods of nearly half the country's workforce dependent on agriculture, say the data and experts.

It could expose the Indian market to heavily subsidised US farm dumping, undermine food security standards, some tied to religious and cultural practices, fear experts and reportedly the Indian government and a think tank.

"As far as the import of genetically modified (GM) soybean, maize and dairy products from the US is concerned, the government does not seem to be ready for it at all," agricultural expert Om Prakash tells India Today Digital.

Then there are risks of cross-pollination from GM crops that could harm India's native seed varieties. There's also the matter of dietary sensitivities and consumer trust, especially in dairy, where feeding cattle animal remains clashes with Indian



cultural and religious values.

"India is protective of its farmers, which is why they have relatively high tariffs compared to anywhere in the world," agricultural trade expert Sharon Bomer Lauritsen told Politico.

"They're going to protect their farmers," added the former negotiator of the US Trade Representative.

**AGRICULTURE'S ROLE IN EMPLOYMENT: INDIA-US CONTRAST**

First, let's look at the numbers. They will highlight how agriculture produces, employment, and their demand and supply vastly differ between India and the US, and why trade negotiations must acknowledge these realities with fairness.

As of 2020, around 196.64 million people were employed in agriculture in India, compared to just 2.11 million in the US. Agriculture accounts for 41% of total employment in India, while in the US, it is merely 1%. At 14.6%, agriculture is one of the biggest components of India's GDP, while it contributes 0.92% to the American economy.

When it comes to average farm size, the difference is stark.

The average farm holding in the US is about 180 hectares, while in India, it is just 1.08 hectares.

Farmers in the US also receive significantly more government support, with an average of \$61,286 per farmer (2016), compared to \$282 per farmer in India (2018–19), according to World Trade Organisation (WTO) data, accessed from Kisan Tak, India Today Digital's sister portal on agriculture, farmer welfare and

environment.

Agricultural expert Om Prakash says that India has been constrained by the WTO's discriminatory policies since the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) came into effect on January 1, 1995. He argues, "India's farm subsidy is significantly lower, even more so when adjusted per farmer, yet the WTO continues to pressure India to reduce it even further".

KisanTak's Prakash ties them directly to the WTO's flawed subsidy accounting method.

The WTO's subsidy accounting method is flawed because it doesn't look at how many farmers India has. It just counts the total money given to them. On the other hand, the US, with fewer farmers, gives more money, and each farmer gets a much bigger sum. But in India, where millions of farmers get little help, it looks like India is giving more than it should, even when it's not.

**WHAT IF INDIA LOWERS TARIFFS ON US FARM AND DAIRY GOODS?**

To ring-fence its farmers and the agriculture sector, India is forced to charge much higher import tariffs on agricultural products compared to the US. On average, India puts a 39% tax on farm goods coming from other countries. But for the items that are imported the most, the tax goes up to 65%. This shows how strongly India protects its farmers by making imported farm goods more expensive. In contrast, the US keeps its agricultural import taxes lower, with a simple average of just 5% and a trade-

weighted rate of 4%, according to data from the WTO.

The New Delhi-based think-tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has warned that reducing import tariffs on subsidised US agricultural products, particularly grains, could harm Indian farmers and destabilise food prices in India. Lowering tariffs could allow cheap, subsidised US grains to flood the Indian market, especially when global prices are low.

This would potentially undercut local farmers and disrupt the domestic food supply in India.

While staples like frozen shrimp, basmati rice, and spices still lead India's export basket, there's been a notable surge in shipments of processed cereals and other value-added food products. On the import side, India continues to source premium items from the US, with almonds, pistachios, and walnuts making up a significant share.

**NITI AAYOG BACKED GM IMPORTS, CONGRESS PROTESTED**

A March NITI Aayog discussion paper titled Promoting India-US Agricultural Trade Under the New US Trade Regime highlighted stark productivity gaps between the two countries.

It noted that "India's average soybean yield has stagnated around "one tonne per hectare", whereas in the US, it is "3.4 tonnes per hectare". Similarly, "maize yields in India are just 3.5 tonnes per hectare," compared to "11.1 tonnes per hectare in the US".



# How poor is 'poor' in India?

Millions of Indians have exited extreme poverty, yet many still live one crisis away from hunger, debt, or despair. In this deep dive, we examine why poverty is retreating in numbers, but not in reality.

By Koustav Das

Can data really define poverty in India? The numbers certainly suggest progress. Fewer people live below the international poverty line. More people have access to food, jobs, electricity, and housing. Government dashboards show consistent improvement across key areas.

But behind the graphs and charts, millions still live just one setback away from hunger. Their names may no longer show up in poverty counts, but their reality hasn't changed much. They are not poor on paper, but they aren't secure either.

For a large part of India, the line between survival and collapse is still painfully thin. **MILLIONS EXIT POVERTY, YET REMAIN VULNERABLE**

The World Bank's latest global poverty update, released in June 2025, confirms the headline: extreme poverty in India has dropped sharply. The share of people living on less than \$3 a day, adjusted for local prices (what economists call "purchasing power parity" or PPP), fell from 27% in 2011 to just 5.3% in 2022. If we use the older \$2.15-a-day cutoff, the rate is even lower: just 2.3%.

That means nearly 269 million people exited extreme poverty in just over a decade. On the surface, this sounds like a remarkable transformation. But what does it really mean to live above \$3 a day in India?

To understand that, we need to look at how this poverty line is calculated. The World Bank doesn't use market exchange rates, which vary with inflation and currency swings. Instead, it uses PPP rates, which try to reflect how much a dollar can buy in each country.

Based on the IMF's latest figures, India's PPP exchange rate in 2025 is about Rs 20.66 for every "international dollar."

That means \$3 a day works out to around Rs 62 per person.

**IS RS 62 A DAY ENOUGH?**

But that number raises questions. Can Rs 62 a day cover rent, food, transport, medicines, and other basic needs in India?

Dr. Vidya Mahambare, Professor of Economics at Great Lakes Institute of Management and an expert in development economics, doesn't think so. "The Rs 62-per-day threshold appears extremely inadequate when compared to current living costs," she said. "One way to consider a minimum threshold for basic living is to compare it with the minimum wage—the lowest legally approved earnings level."

Currently, the central government provides a non-statutory floor wage of Rs 178 per



day, below which no state can set its minimum. By contrast, the World Bank's international poverty line for lower-middle-income countries—\$4.20 per day—comes to roughly Rs 87 in PPP terms. "By this measure, around 23.9% of India's population remains below the poverty line," she noted.

Mahambare also stressed the need to revise India's outdated poverty line. "The lower the threshold, the lower the poverty headcount ratio," she said. "But such a number is not useful for policymaking and doesn't reflect the ground-level reality of people's hardships."

On the use of international poverty lines, she said PPP-based measures are helpful for global comparisons since they account for differences in prices and are more stable than market exchange rates. But for domestic policy, she said, "the poor in India consume a different basket of goods than the global average. A domestic cost-of-living benchmark more accurately reflects local realities and is better suited for national programs."

**FROM POVERTY LINE TO DIGNITY LINE**  
Even the Rs 87-per-day benchmark might understate the true burden. Dr. Swapnil Sahoo, Assistant Professor at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon, believes it is time India stopped relying only on income-based definitions of poverty. "Yes, extreme poverty is down to 5.75%. But that doesn't tell us the whole story," he said. "More than 83% of Indians still live on less than Rs 171 a day."

The Rs 171-a-day figure is based on the World Bank's \$8.40 poverty line in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, which is used to assess poverty in upper

middle-income countries. At India's current PPP exchange rate of Rs 20.66 per international dollar, this translates to around Rs 171 per person per day.

For him, the Rs 65-a-day cutoff for poverty is setting the bar too low. "That is not a dignified life," he said. "We need a dignity line, not just a poverty line." The Rs 65 figure was recently cited by SBI Research as the poverty threshold for urban India in 2023–24.

According to Sahoo, a more honest measure of poverty would start around Rs 250 to Rs 300 a day. This would reflect a life that allows for food, health care, education, some savings, and a sense of security, not just survival.

**INDIA'S POVERTY PUZZLE**

To be fair, many government schemes have helped families escape extreme deprivation. Food subsidies, rural roads, cash transfers, and better access to electricity have improved lives in measurable ways. Incomes in agriculture and construction have also grown in some regions. But part of the reason poverty seems lower today also comes down to how it is measured.

India's official household consumption surveys now use a method called the Modified Mixed Recall Period (MMRP). This change helps capture more spending, especially on regular items like food and fuel. As a result, people appear to be consuming more, and poverty estimates fall.

That is where experts urge caution. India hasn't officially updated its poverty line since 2011-2012. Committees were set up, but their recommendations were never implemented. In the absence of a fresh

national benchmark, India is now relying on global definitions.

Earlier official thresholds, Rs 33 a day for urban areas and Rs 27 for rural (set by the Tendulkar Committee), are outdated and politically sensitive. As a result, they have quietly disappeared from policymaking.

To fill that gap, India has turned to broader indicators like the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). Developed globally and adapted by NITI Aayog, it tracks things like access to school, electricity, clean water, cooking fuel, and sanitation, offering a fuller picture of deprivation.

According to the latest MPI data, India's rate of multidimensional poverty has fallen from 29% in 2013 to 11.3% in 2022. Over 200 million people have moved out of deprivation during this period.

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh have shown the biggest improvements. Access to basic services has grown, though these same states still carry some of the highest overall poverty burdens.

IndiaToday.in reached out to NITI Aayog to seek views on the implications of the MMRP methodology and the relevance of an official poverty line in the multidimensional era. A response was awaited at the time of publishing.

**INEQUALITY BLURS THE PICTURE**

Even as extreme poverty drops, inequality hasn't gone away. The Gini index, a number between 0 and 100 that measures income inequality, has improved slightly, from 28.8% in 2011 to 25.5% in 2022. A score of 0 means perfect equality and 100 means one person has everything.



# Who Wants Peace, Anyway?

## On War And The People Who Fuel It

By Nishtha Gautam

O brave new world, / That has such people in't!"

One of Shakespeare's most debated heroines, Miranda, exclaimed in *The Tempest*. "Such people" then and now are the kind of people who launch just wars. Aldous Huxley, who borrowed the title of his most famous work, *Brave New World*, from Shakespeare, explained in his first novel how these are instigated. "The surest way to work up a crusade in favour of some good cause is to promise people they will have a chance of maltreating someone. To be able to destroy with good conscience, to be able to behave badly and call your bad behaviour 'righteous indignation' - this is the height of psychological luxury, the most delicious of moral treats."

There's No Safe Distance Anymore

The first half of 2025 has seen an unchallenged rise of such crusades. With the dogs of war reaching its soil and skies, India no longer has the privilege of pontificating about peace from a relatively safe distance. Unlike the two world wars of the previous century, which primarily involved Europe and the US, the third one appears to be earmarked for the Global South. And it's already in motion. Twice in the past two months did the world come close to a nuclear conflict.

More than 60 armed conflicts are currently raging across the globe. Scan the map, and it becomes painfully clear: countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Asia are heavily - and disproportionately - represented. This isn't just a cartographic coincidence. It's a product of a global security architecture that never truly served these regions in the first place.

Violence Is The Top Global Risk Now

It's no longer controversial to say that the world is entering a new era of instability. But what remains under-discussed - perhaps deliberately so - is that the Global South bears the brunt of this unravelling order. The 2025 Global Risks Report from the World Economic Forum tells us what those on the ground already know: "perceptions have darkened when it comes to conflict", with state-based armed violence now ranked as the most pressing global risk. Not long ago, such a threat wasn't even in the top two-year outlook. Now it defines the present. Violence, according to the report, is expected to remain "very high relative to the recent historical norm", with an annual rise of up to 20%.

The figures speak for themselves.



However, statistics alone cannot convey the profound social, economic, and psychological costs of a world in perpetual crisis. For more than three months, India's focus has been fixed on how to contain Pakistan's unconventional covert operations and its full-blown conventional aggression. A significant bump in Pakistan's defence budget will compel India to follow suit. With an annual spend of \$75 billion, India is already one of the world's leading military spenders. The Global Firepower Index ranks it in fourth place after the US, China, and Russia.

Seeing War For What It Is

For decades, conventional security doctrines have hinged on procurement: weapons systems, alliances, and defence budgets. But for much of the Global South, these are symptoms of the problem, not its cure. It may not be 'sexy' in an era dominated by drone strikes, cyberwarfare and diplomatic brinkmanship, but peace remains the only proven path to prosperity. In recent years, the war economy has been unmasked for what it truly is: not a generator of strength, but a destroyer of long-term viability. Bombed-out infrastructure, displaced populations, and disrupted trade routes do not foster investment. They repel it.

No Shortage Of Hypocrisy

The disruption caused by war to supply chains, energy security, market dynamics, and the psyche of the consumer is all but clear to us, thanks to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and Iran's threat to choke the Strait of Hormuz. Talking of Iran, with one of the largest oil reserves in the world, it is an economy on a ventilator. Even the

United Nations, often criticised for its bureaucratic caution, has been clear. Marking the International Day of United

Nations Peacekeepers in 2022, the organisation warned that "armed conflict and post-conflict situations have a substantial impact on economic life and present a hostile environment to business and investments." Its 'Business for Peace' initiative might more accurately be rephrased as 'Peace for Business'.

This isn't just a semantic trick. But it is bound to fail. The war industry cannibalises all others, and there's no shortage of hypocrisy in today's global security discourse. Powerful states lament instability while fuelling it through arms sales and proxy wars.

There is a paradox, too. The time to turn away from reactive militarisation and toward proactive peacebuilding is right after a war. But that's also the time peace becomes an orphan because a crusade in favour of some good cause is to be launched soon, and we must be prepared.



# Court rejects Jacqueline Fernandez's plea to quash Rs 200-crore ED case

(By our staff reporter) Delhi High Court on Thursday dismissed the actor Jacqueline Fernandez's petition challenging the Enforcement Directorate's complaint under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Fernandes had sought the quashing of the ED's case against her related to the Rs 200 crore money laundering case involving alleged conman Sukesh Chandrasekhar. Justice Anish Dayal dismissed her plea, which also sought to quash the second supplementary chargesheet of the Enforcement Directorate in the case and proceedings are pending in a Delhi trial court, as reported by the news agency PTI. The ED counsel opposed the petition on the ground of maintainability, saying a special court had taken cognisance of the

the ED's complaint and the second supplementary chargesheet under Sections 3 and 4 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. In

her appeal, Jacqueline claimed that Sukesh trapped her.

prosecution complaint (chargesheet) and prima facie found a case. The cognisance order was not challenged, the counsel added. In the plea, Jacqueline challenged

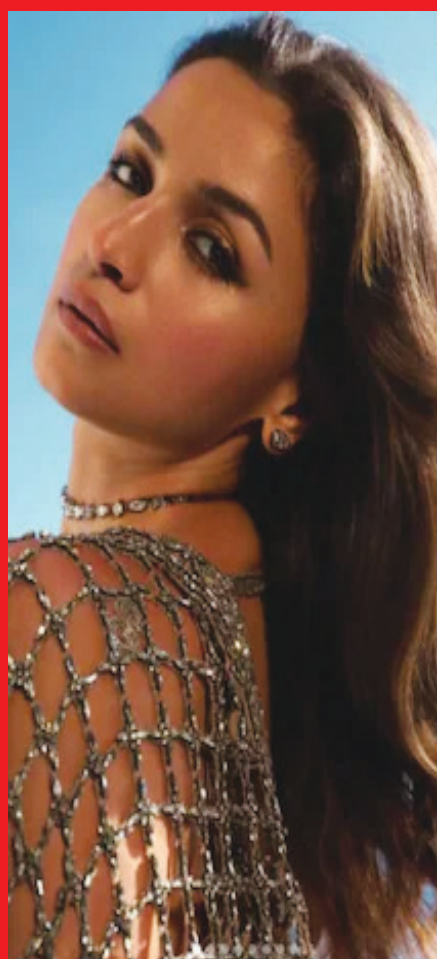


## Ramayana 1st glimpse: Alia Bhatt, KJo and Sargun Mehta share their excitement

As the first glimpse of 'Ramayana' was released on Thursday, several celebrities shared their excitement for the film. Filmmaker Karan Johar and actors Alia Bhatt and Sargun Mehta were among the popular personalities who shared that they can't wait for its Diwali 2026 release.

Filmmaker Karan Johar shared the first glimpse on his Instagram story and wrote, "This is what a mega blockbuster looks and sounds like! unreal! Congratulations to the entire team, it is looking phenomenal and cannot wait for the world to witness this magic. (sic)" Alia Bhatt cheered for her actor-husband Ranbir Kapoor's film and wrote, "Some things don't need words. This feels like the start of something unforgettable. Diwali 2026 — we're waiting (sic)." Sargun Mehta expressed that her heart swells with love and gratitude as she looks at the teaser and names on the poster of the film.

"2026 ki diwali ka intezaar meri zindagi ka sabse lamba intezaar hoga. (The wait for 2026's Diwali will be the longest wait of my life) My heart is so so full. Every time I see the teaser and read the names on the poster, my heart swells with love and gratitude. Shukar shukar shukar



(Gratitude Gratitude Gratitude) Jai Shri Ram, Om Namah Shivaay (sic)," the Punjabi actor wrote on Instagram. Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, the film has been produced by Namit Malhotra and co-produced by Yash. The film is backed by Prime Focus Studios and Monster Mind Creations, in collaboration with DNEG - the eight-time Oscar-winning VFX powerhouse.





## Ayushmann Khurrana, Sara Ali Khan, Wamiqa Gabbi in Pati Patni Aur Woh 2: Reports

By our staff reporter) Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has reportedly replaced Kartik Aaryan in 'Pati Patni Aur Woh 2'. The reports further claimed that Sara Ali Khan and Wamiqa Gabbi are also likely to star alongside Khurrana in the film's sequel. A report by Peeping Moon said that the makers aim to inject "fresh romantic pairings with proven comic timing" into the film and find the dynamic between Ayushmann,

Wamiqa, and Sara perfect to take on roles originally portrayed by actors Kartik Aaryan, Bhumi Pednekar, and Ananya Panday. It also said that the new instalment promises an original story, told largely from a woman's perspective, while maintaining the essence of the original. Another report by Pinkvilla had earlier stated that Sara and Ayushmann were confirmed to join the cast of 'Pati Patni Aur Woh 2'. Sara and Ayushmann are a

fresh combo in the comic space, and the actor (Sara) fits the character's brief. She heard the script, and it was an instant yes from her side for the film," the publication cited a source as saying. The source added, "It's a typical comedy from the era gone by – a multi-star cast, where the lead is stuck in a situation leading to comedy. Apart from Sara, the film has the presence of two more female actors alongside a formidable ensemble.

The casting for this yet untitled comic caper is presently underway."Mudassar Aziz, known for 'Happy Bhaag Jayegi' and the original 'Pati Patni Aur Woh', is likely to direct the sequel as well. The production is set to commence in August, with plans for a concise two-month shooting schedule. The film, produced by Bhushan Kumar's T-Series and Juno Chopra's B.R. Studios, is likely to release in theatres in the first quarter of 2026.

## Ibrahim Ali Khan, Rasha Thadani begin workshops for upcoming romantic drama: Report

(By our staff reporter) After making his acting debut with Nadaaniyan, Ibrahim Ali Khan is now gearing up for a new romantic drama alongside Rasha Thadani, daughter of actor Raveena Tandon. The fresh on-screen pair has already begun preparations for the project, though the film's title remains under wraps. According to a Mid-Day report, both Ibrahim and Rasha have started reading sessions and workshops to prepare for the film, which is said to be a love story with a coming-of-age angle.

A source close to the development told the publication, "Ibrahim and Rasha have been doing reading sessions and workshops. The makers were clear that they didn't want only a glamorous pair but two actors who could tap into the



awkward, exhilarating energy of first love. Rasha and Ibrahim clicked from

the first meeting."

The film marks an important shift for

Ibrahim, whose debut rom-com 'Nadaaniyan' opposite Khushi Kapoor faced sharp criticism for its writing and performances. Speaking about his evolving career graph, the source added, "While he debuted with a rom-com, Ibrahim will be seen in intense roles in 'Sarazmeen' and 'Diler', which features him as a marathoner. After those two outings, this film with a coming-of-age arc will focus on the softer and more relatable side of him." Rasha Thadani, who recently made her debut in 'Azaad' alongside Ajay Devgn, Aaman Devgn, and Diana Penty, is also said to be fully invested in the project.

The pairing of two newcomers from film families has generated buzz, though there has been no official announcement or denial from the actors or the production team yet.