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Democracy Dies in the Red: How $100 Million in Losses and Trump-Era Fear Broke the Washington Post

Story on Page 8

The Great Energy Pivot: Can Venezuela Replace Russia in India's Oil Basket?

US President Donald Trump's plan to sell Venezuelan oil to India is neat, but may be operationally messy, analysts say.

Story on Page 2

Redrawing the Map: Why the Dream of 'Greater Balochistan' is Pakistan's Ultimate Nightmare

Story on Page 7

Lost in the Noise: Understanding the Real Struggles of India's Youth

Story on Page 3

The Obesity Epidemic
3 in 4 Indian Homes Now in the Danger Zone

Story on Page 3

Targeting the 'Worst':
Inside the New WOW.DHS.GOV Deportation Portal

Story on Page 4

Can India switch from Russian to Venezuelan oil, as Trump wants?

(News Agency) New Delhi, India – When US President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India on Monday this week, he declared that New Delhi would pivot away from Russian energy as part of the agreement.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Trump said, had promised to stop buying Russian oil, and instead buy crude from the United States and from Venezuela, whose president, Nicolas Maduro, was abducted by US special forces in early January. Since then, the US has effectively taken control of Venezuela's mammoth oil industry.In return, Trump dialled down trade tariffs on Indian goods from an overall 50 percent to just 18 percent. Half of that 50 percent tariff was levied last year as punishment for India buying Russian oil, which the White House maintains is financing Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

But since Monday, India has not publicly confirmed that it has committed to either ceasing its purchase of Russian oil or embracing Venezuelan crude, analysts note. Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesperson, told reporters on Tuesday that Russia had received no indication of this from India, either.

And switching from Russian to Venezuelan oil will be far from straightforward. A cocktail of other factors – shocks to the energy market, costs, geography, and the characteristics of different kinds of oil – will complicate New Delhi's decisions about its sourcing of oil, they say.

So, can India really dump Russian oil? And can Venezuelan crude replace it?As a result, other countries including India began buying large quantities of cheap Russian oil. India, which before the war sourced only 2.5 percent of its oil from Russia, became the second-largest consumer of Russian oil after China. It currently sources around 30 percent of its oil from Russia.

Last year, Trump doubled trade tariffs on Indian goods from 25 percent to 50 percent as punishment for this. Later in the year, Trump also imposed sanctions on Russia's two biggest oil companies – and threatened secondary sanctions against countries and entities that trade with these firms.

Since the abduction of Maduro by US forces in early January, Trump has effectively taken over the Venezuelan oil sector, controlling sales cash flows.Venezuela also has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at 303 billion barrels, more than five times larger than those of the US, the world's largest oil producer.

But while getting India to buy Venezuelan oil makes sense from the US's perspective, analysts say this could be operationally messy.

How much oil does India import from Russia?

India currently imports nearly 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian crude, according to analytics company Kpler. Under Trump's mounting pressure, that is lower than the average 1.21 million bpd in December 2025 and more than 2

million bpd in mid-2025.

One barrel is equivalent to 159 litres (42 gallons) of crude oil. Once refined, a barrel typically produces about 73 litres (19 gallons) of petrol for a car. Oil is also refined to produce a wide variety of products, from jet fuel to household items including plastics and even lotions.

Has India stopped Russian oil purchases?

India has reduced the amount of oil it buys from Russia over the past year, but it has not stopped buying it altogether.

Under increasing pressure from Trump, last August, Indian officials called out the "hypocrisy" of the US and EU pressuring New Delhi to back off from Russian crude.

"In fact, India began importing from Russia because traditional supplies were diverted to Europe after the outbreak of the conflict," Randhir Jaiswal, India's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said then. He added that India's decision to import Russian oil was "meant to ensure predictable and affordable energy costs to the Indian consumer".Despite this, Indian refiners, currently the second-largest group of buyers of Russian oil after China, are reportedly winding up their purchases after clearing current scheduled orders.

Major refiners like Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL), and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEL) halted purchasing from Russia following the US sanctions against Russian oil producers last year.

Other players like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation, and Reliance Industries will soon stop their purchases.

What happens if India suddenly stops buying Russian oil?

Even if India wanted to stop importing Russian oil altogether, analysts argue it would be extremely costly to do so.

In September last year, India's oil and petroleum minister, Hardeep Singh Puri, told reporters that it would also sharply push up energy prices and fuel inflation. "The world will face serious consequences if the supplies are disrupted. The world can't afford to keep Russia off the oil market," Puri said.

Analysts tend to agree. "A complete cessation of Indian purchases of Russian oil would be a major disruption. An immediate halt would spike global prices and threaten India's economic growth," said George Voloshin, an independent energy analyst based in Paris.

Russian oil would likely be diverted more heavily towards China and into "shadow" fleets of tankers that deliver sanctioned oil secretly by flying false flags and switching off location equipment, Voloshin told Al Jazeera. "Mainstream tanker demand would shift toward the Atlantic Basin, most likely increasing global freight rates as a result," he noted.

Sumit Pokharna, vice president at Kotak Securities, noted that Indian refineries have reported robust margins in the last two years, majorly benefitting from the discounted Russian crude.

"If they move to higher-costing, like the US or Venezuela, then raw material cost would increase, and that would squeeze their margins," he told Al Jazeera. "If it goes beyond control, they may have to pass the excess onto consumers."

Can India stop buying Russian oil altogether?

It may not be able to. One of India's two private refiners, Nayara Energy, is majority-Russian-owned and under heavy Western sanctions. The Russian energy firm Rosneft holds a 49.13 percent stake in the company, which operates a 400,000-barrel-per-day refinery in India's Gujarat, PM Modi's home state.

Nayara is the second-largest importer of Russian crude, buying about 471,000 barrels per day in January this year, accounting for nearly 40 percent of Russian supplies to India.

Its plant has relied solely on Russian crude since European Union sanctions were imposed on the company last July. ayara is not planning to load Russian oil in April as it shuts its refinery for more than a month for maintenance from April 10, according to Reuters.

Pokharna said the future of Nayara hangs in the balance, with the US unlikely to grant India an overt exemption for the Russia-backed company to import crude.

Can India switch to Venezuelan oil?

India has been a major consumer of Venezuelan oil in the past. At its peak, in 2019, India imported $7.2bn of oil, accounting for just under 7 percent of total imports. That stopped after the US slapped sanctions on Venezuelan oil, but some officials of the government-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation are still stationed in the Latin American country. Now, major Indian refiners have said they are open to receiving Venezuelan oil again, but only if it is a viable option.

For one thing, Venezuela is roughly twice as far from India as Russia and five times further than the Middle East, meaning much higher freight costs.

Venezuelan oil is more expensive as well. "Russian Urals [a medium-heavy crude blend] has been trading at a wide-ranging discount of about $10-20 per barrel to Brent, while Venezuelan Merey currently offers a smaller discount of around $5-8 per barrel," Voloshin told Al Jazeera.

"Importing from Venezuela and forgoing the Russian discount would be a costly affair for India," said Pokharna. "From transportation cost to forgoing discounts, it could cost India $6-8 more per barrel – and that is a huge increase in the importing bill."

Overall, a complete pivot away from Russia could raise India's import bill by $9bn to $11bn – an amount roughly equal to India's federal health budget – per year, according to Kpler.

"Venezuelan crude must be discounted by at least $10 to $12 per barrel to be competitive," argued Voloshin. "This deeper discount is necessary to offset the much higher freight costs, increased insurance premiums for the longer Atlantic voyage, and the somewhat higher operational expenses required to process Venezuela's extra-heavy high-sulfur crude."

Without deeper discounts, the longer journey and complex handling make Venezuelan oil more expensive on a delivered basis, he added.

Another major issue is that many Indian refiners simply do not have the facilities to process very heavy Venezuelan oil.

Venezuelan crude is a heavy, sour oil, thick and viscous like molasses, with a high sulphur content requiring complex, specialised refineries to process it into fuel. Only a small number of Indian refineries are equipped to handle it.

"[Venezuelan oil's heaviness] makes it an option only for complex refineries, leaving out older and smaller refineries," Pokharna told Al Jazeera. "The shift is operationally difficult and would require blending with more expensive light crudes."

Then there is the question of availability. Today, Venezuela produces barely a million barrels per day when pushed to its limit. Even if all production was sent to India, it would not match the total Russian oil import.

Where else could India buy oil?

India's Minister Puri has said that New Delhi is looking to diversify sourcing options from nearly 40 countries. As India has reduced Russian imports, it has increased them from Middle Eastern nations and other countries in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Now, while Russia accounts for nearly 27 percent share in India's oil imports, OPEC nations, led by Iraq and Saudi Arabia, contribute 53 percent.

Ghaziabad Suicides: Beyond K-Pop Blame, The Warning Signs We Keep Missing

(News Agency) The triple suicide of three sisters in Ghaziabad is shocking and extremely tragic. It highlights the disturbing reality that the youth in India have one of the highest rates of suicide in the world. It is double that of the global average, and among young Indian women, it is almost six times that of the global average.

The three sisters - aged 12, 14 and 16 - died after jumping from the ninth floor of their apartment in Ghaziabad early Wednesday morning. Their parents later found an eight-page note in a pocket diary, in which the girls expressed their deep admiration for Korean culture and accused their parents of trying to force them to give up what they described as their emotional refuge. Completed suicide and suicidal behaviours are a culmination of multiple factors coming together after months, and sometimes years, of emotional turmoil and distress. The common contributors are academic stress and exam failure, turbulent family atmosphere, unstable peer relationships, breakdown of romantic relationships, poverty and financial loss, sexual abuse, drug abuse and social contagion. For every completed suicide, there are at least 15 young people who attempt suicide, highlighting the scale of the crisis.Social media, online gaming, and imitation can be a powerful trigger in young people who are already emotionally disturbed. Such influences can increase risk-taking behaviours and impulsivity, leading to extreme steps taken by them. It is vital to understand the various causes and trajectories of self-harm and suicidal behaviours so that we can prevent them much before they become a crisis. It is also important to know the early signs of emotional distress and expressions of suicidal behaviours, which can take the form of suicidal thoughts and/or deliberate self-harm not amounting to death. Too often, a suicidal attempt is dismissed as attention-seeking behaviour, and the young person is admonished for a so-called "selfish" attitude. This only serves to push the young person away into isolation and despair. It is crucial to remember that each subsequent attempt is likely to be more serious, perhaps lethal. Focusing only on social media, internet gaming and content will limit our understanding of a phenomenon that is much more complex. ?Just as we see in this tragic incident, where the girls took to watching Korean drama and K-pop due to many apparent reasons such as an unusual family structure, harsh parenting, academic difficulties, not going to school, social isolation and abject loneliness. They found an emotional connection and solace in the virtual world, as there were no options in the real world.

Banning or restricting social media in young people can solve only part of the problem. They need to have alternative spaces and activities to fulfil their social and emotional needs, to have meaningful connections in the real world and a sense of purpose to achieve what they aspire to. They also need emotionally safe spaces to share and express themselves without fear of judgment or punishment.

Parents, teachers and other caring adults need to spend time with children and take an interest in their world in ways that matter to them. They should develop the capacity to listen with compassion, without jumping to conclusions or passing judgment.

We need to take collective responsibility to address this national crisis that threatens to disrupt the dreams of a generation that has the potential to change our world for the better. The state and its policies, parents, schools and educational institutions, legal systems and the police, all need to come together to enable emotional well-being and positive mental health for our children and youth.

Obesity hits 3 in 4 Indian families. Citizens expect Budget 2026 relief

The LocalCircles survey shows obesity now touches three in four Indian social circles, turning a personal health issue into a collective crisis. Affordable nutrition, shared lifestyle changes, and family-focused policies are urgently needed to curb an epidemic straining India's healthcare future.

(News Agency) A new survey by LocalCircles, titled "Obesity and Budget – 3 in 4 Indians Surveyed Have Someone Obese in Their Close Social Network," reveals how deeply obesity has entered Indian households. Nearly 75 per cent of respondents report at least one obese family member or close friend, showing the crisis is now social rather than individual. Rising food prices, sedentary lifestyles, and easy access to calorie-dense foods are reshaping daily habits across both urban and rural India.As obesity fuels diabetes, heart disease, and other non-communicable diseases, experts warn that India's healthcare system faces growing strain without affordable, family-level interventions. The survey highlights that ultra-processed foods are rapidly displacing traditional dietary patterns, worsening overall diet quality and contributing to a higher risk of multiple chronic diseases. It stresses that dietary reform must be treated as a public health priority. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019–21, 24% of Indian women and 23% of Indian men are overweight or obese. Of particular concern is the rise in childhood obesity: the prevalence of excess weight among children under five increased from 2.1% in 2015–16 to 3.4% in 2019–21.

OBESITY CRISIS SPREADS THROUGH SOCIAL CIRCLES

The LocalCircles survey highlights that obesity is clustering within families and friend groups, with shared meals and routines reinforcing unhealthy patterns.

About three in four Indians now witness obesity within their close social network, blurring urban-rural divides and normalising excess weight across generations.

With rapid economic growth and changing lifestyles, over 100 million people in India are estimated to be living with obesity. Obesity typically presents as either gynecoid (pear-shaped) fat distribution around the hips and thighs, or android (apple-shaped) fat accumulation in the abdominal region.

Central or visceral obesity, considered the most dangerous form, is strongly associated with metabolic disorders and chronic diseases, notes a blog titled "Obesity in India: A Growing Health Concern" published by Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

India's obesity rates rose sharply during the COVID-19 period due to lifestyle disruptions, reduced physical activity and limited access to healthy food choices. In this context, LocalCircles conducted a nationwide survey to understand how widespread obesity is within the close social networks of Indians and the associated health

The survey received over 50,000 responses from citizens across 319 districts in India. Of the respondents, 61% were men and 39% were women, with 47% from tier 1, 26% from tier 2 and 27% from tier 3, 4, 5 and rural districts.

76% Indians surveyed have one or more obese individuals in their close network i.e. family, friends, colleagues and neighbours; 42% have 4 or more individuals.

RISING COSTS PUSH FAMILIES TOWARD UNHEALTHY FOOD

High food inflation is pushing households toward cheaper, calorie-dense street food and processed snacks, while fruits, vegetables, and protein-rich diets become harder to sustain.

The survey links budget stress directly to rising BMI, particularly among lower- and middle-income families. Rise in obesity in India is caused by several variables, such as alterations in lifestyle, restricted availability of healthful food selections, and decreased physical activity. To tackle obesity, it is essential to encourage a nutritious diet by creating awareness about healthy food choices, regular physical exercise, reducing or stopping unhealthy, high-calorie meals, panic shopping, and food stockpiling of ultra-processed foods.

Given the lack of awareness or adoption of a healthy lifestyle among many people, the survey asked, "If you consider the obese individuals in your close network (family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, etc.,), what all can you attribute their obesity to?"

ome among the 17,309 respondents to the question indicated more than one reason with 64% attributing it to "sedentary lifestyle"; 64% attributing it to lack or "no exercise"; 68% attributing it to "fatty and/ or ultra processed food diet"; 27% attributing it to "underlying medical condition"; 4% to "alcohol consumption" and 23% attributing it to "other causes" not mentioned earlier.

In essence, 64% Indians surveyed who have one or more obese individuals in their close network attribute their obesity to sedentary lifestyle, no exercise and fatty and/or ultra processed diet.

HEALTH RISKS EXTEND BEYOND WEIGHT GAIN

Medical experts warn that obesity clusters significantly increase the risk of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and certain cancers.

ICMR-linked research suggests shared household habits magnify these risks, making family-based interventions more effective than individual efforts alone.

The WOW.DHS.GOV Portal: "Worst of the Worst" Analysis

(By Our Staff Reporter)

1. The "Worst of the Worst" List

The WOW.DHS.GOV portal serves as a searchable database containing roughly 25,000 individuals. It is designed as a transparency tool to show the public the specific "criminal illegal aliens" being removed from American communities.

Key Features of the Database:

Public Data: Includes names, mugshots, nationalities, arrest locations, and specific criminal convictions.

Searchability: Users can filter by U.S. state, nationality, and crime type.

Strategic Messaging: DHS leadership, including Secretary Kristi Noem, has framed the list as a "snapshot" of the "monsters" being taken off the streets to reassure the public of enforcement priorities.

The India Data Point: 89 Individuals

As of February 2026, reports indicate that 89 Indian nationals are featured on this list. An analysis of their case profiles reveals:

Financial Fraud Dominance: Roughly 25% (22 cases) involve financial crimes such as wire fraud, tax fraud, money laundering, and larceny.

Violent Crimes: 21 individuals have convictions for violent offenses, including assault and burglary.

Sexual Offenses: 17 individuals are listed for sexual crimes.

Homicide: Only one individual among the 89 was convicted of homicide (linked to a hit-and-run incident).

National Security: High-profile cases include Harpreet Singh, arrested in April 2025 for alleged links to the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and involvement in grenade attacks in India.

2. Other ICE & DHS Enforcement Lists

The "Worst of the Worst" is the newest and most public-facing list, but ICE and DHS maintain several other databases for enforcement and trade:

List Name Managed By Purpose

ICE Most Wanted ICE HSI / ERO High-profile fugitives involved in human trafficking, child exploitation, and gang violence.

SDN List Treasury (OFAC) Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons; often used by ICE for financial sanctions.

VOICE Database DHS (Past/Present) Historically used to track crimes committed by illegal aliens (Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement).

National Counterterrorism Center Database Multi-agency In 2025/2026, 85,000 new identities were added to track potential terrorist threats.

Blocked/Denied Persons Lists CBP / HSI Entities and individuals barred from trade or importing due to forced labor or security risks.

3. Background & Critical Investigation

While the administration describes these individuals as the "worst of the worst," investigative reports (such as those from UCLA and TRAC) provide a more nuanced "behind-the-scenes" look:

The "Conviction Gap": Despite the "Worst of the Worst" branding, overall detention data as of January 2026 shows that 74.2% of current ICE detainees have no criminal convictions.

Past Service: Many on the list have already served their criminal sentences in U.S. prisons. ICE picks them up upon release from state or federal custody to initiate deportation, meaning they were not "at large" when detained.

+1 Broad Labels: Critics argue that including financial fraud and traffic violations (DUI/Hit-and-Run) under the "Worst of the Worst" umbrella alongside murderers and terrorists is a communications tactic to justify mass enforcement.

4. Future Outlook: 2026 and Beyond

The trajectory of ICE enforcement indicates a move toward automated and hyper-transparent enforcement:

The "Digital Billboard" Strategy: Expect the "Worst of the Worst" list to expand significantly. DHS has signaled a "New Year's Resolution" for 2026 to increase these high-profile arrests.

Expansion of Search Criteria: Future updates to the portal may include "Neighborhood Alerts" or interactive maps showing where "criminal aliens" were recently arrested.

Increased Conflict: The public nature of these lists has already led to "counter-lists." In early 2026, activists leaked the "ICE List"—a database of over 4,000 ICE agents' names and photos—leading to heightened security concerns for federal officers.

Policy Shift: The administration is pushing for "Self-Deportation" incentives (e.g., the $3,000 stipend and free flight offered in late 2025) to clear the backlog of non-criminal cases while focusing physical enforcement resources on the WOW li

https://wjffradio.org/orange-county-legislature-unanimously-pass-resolution-against-chester-ice-facility/

While the database contains thousands of entries, the following individuals have been specifically identified in DHS and ICE reports due to the severity of their charges or the nature of their involvement in criminal activities.

High-Profile Indian Nationals on the "Worst of the Worst" Lists

Based on current 2026 DHS transparency portals and news releases, the following Indian nationals are cited as key examples:

Harpreet Singh (alias Happy Passian):

Context: Labeled as one of the most high-profile arrests, Singh is an alleged operative for Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Charges: Wanted in India for orchestrating more than a dozen grenade attacks on police and residential targets.

Status: Arrested in April 2025 through a joint FBI and ICE operation. He is currently a centerpiece of the "Worst of the Worst" recap for his ties to narco-terrorism and national security threats.

Balbir Singh: Conviction: Homicide (Murder).

Location: Arrested in Los Angeles, California. Details: Highlighted in a late 2025 report regarding high-threat arrests made during holiday surge operations.

Harneet Singh (25) & Harjinder Singh:

Conviction: Vehicular Homicide. Incident: Involved in a horrific crash on the Florida Turnpike after their 18-wheeler made an illegal U-turn, resulting in three deaths.

Harjinder (the driver) faces homicide charges, while Harneet (a passenger and illegal alien) was arrested by ICE in August 2025 for removal.

Charanjit Singh:

Convictions: Cruelty toward a child, drug possession, and flight to avoid prosecution. Location: Arrested in Minnesota in early February 2026 as part of a surge against "criminal illegal aliens" in sanctuary jurisdictions.

Shubham Singh: Conviction: Child Pornography.

Context: Listed among the "Worst of the Worst" detainees currently held or processed through specialized facilities (including mentions in reports regarding the expansion of high-security detention).

2. Analysis of the "Financial Fraud" Category

While the "Worst of the Worst" list often prioritizes violent offenders, reports from February 2026 indicate that approximately 25% of the 89 Indians on the list are categorized under Financial Fraud and Economic Crimes. Specific (though often aggregated) details include:

Umesh Chandra Puri: Cited in ICE's "Immigration Fraud" dossiers for fraudulent naturalization.

Telemarketing & Wire Fraud: A significant portion of the unnamed 89 individuals are linked to large-scale "call center" fraud operations targeting U.S. seniors, which ICE HSI (Homeland Security Investigations) has prioritized as a threat to the U.S. financial system.

3. Other ICE Enforcement Lists

Beyond the "Worst of the Worst" website, ICE maintains several distinct lists that often overlap:

ICE Most Wanted: Focuses on fugitives "at large." This list currently features individuals involved in human smuggling and large-scale document fraud.

The "Guantanamo Bay" Processing List: A highly controversial 2025/2026 initiative where DHS has begun naming "high-threat" criminal aliens slated for transfer or high-security detention.

Operation Predator List: Specifically targets "criminal alien" sex offenders and child predators (where individuals like Charanjit Singh and Shubham Singh are categorized).

4. Background and Future Outlook

The "Mass Transparency" Strategy: The WOW list is part of a 2026 DHS strategy to use "public shaming" and data transparency to justify mass deportation budgets. By focusing on the "89 Indians" or "criminal gangs," the agency aims to maintain public support for high-volume enforcement.

Future Trends: Investigative analysts expect the list to expand from its current 25,000 entries to over 100,000 by the end of 2026. There is also a move toward "Digital Billboards" in major cities displaying the names and mugshots of those on the WOW list to encourage community tips.

International Friction: The naming of Indian nationals for financial fraud has caused diplomatic tension, with the Indian government frequently requesting more granular data on whether these individuals have exhausted their legal appeals before being publicly labeled "the worst."

Indian National Indicted for Smuggling Illegal Aliens Across Canadian Border into United States

A federal grand jury in the Northern District of New York returned an indictment on Jan. 28, 2026, charging an Indian national for his role in a scheme to smuggle Indian nationals from Canada across the northern border into the United States.

(News Agency) According to court documents, Shivam Lnu, 22, directed smuggling operations from January 2025 through June 2025, coordinating the illegal transport of aliens across the U.S.-Canada border into Clinton County, New York. On Jan. 26, 2025, U.S. Border Patrol agents attempted to stop two vehicles traveling in tandem near the U.S-Canada border. Both vehicles accelerated to avoid agents, triggering a pursuit. One vehicle went off the road and became immobilized, while the other was later stopped in Mooers, New York.

The vehicles contained a total of 12 undocumented aliens. WhatsApp messages between one of the drivers and a number connected to Shivam allegedly revealed coordination of smuggling illegal aliens into the U.S. from Canada on numerous occasions in and prior to January 2025, including exchanging proof of life photographs and directions to safe houses in upstate New York.

Shivam is charged with one count of conspiracy to illegally bring aliens to the United States and four counts of illegally bringing aliens to the United States for the purpose of private financial gain. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for each count. If convicted of all four counts of illegally bringing aliens to the United States, Shivam faces a mandatory minimum sentence of five years and a maximum sentence of fifteen years. Shivam was initially charged by criminal complaint on June 13, 2025, with one count of conspiracy to transport aliens.

Assistant Attorney General A. Tysen Duva of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Acting U.S. Attorney John A. Sarcone III for the Northern District of New York and Erin Keegan, Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) made the announcement.

The investigation and charges are supported and prosecuted by Joint Task Force Alpha (JTFA), the Department's lead effort in combating high-impact human smuggling and trafficking committed by cartels and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). A highly successful partnership between the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), JTFA investigates and prosecutes human smuggling and trafficking and related immigration crimes that impact public safety and border security.

JTFA's mission is to target the leaders and organizers of Cartels and TCOs involved in human smuggling and trafficking throughout the Americas. The Attorney General has elevated and expanded JTFA to target the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking groups operating not only in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, but also in Canada, the Caribbean and the maritime border, and elsewhere. Led by the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and supported by the Money Laundering, Narcotics and Forfeiture Section, the Office of International Affairs, and the Office of Enforcement Operations, among others, JTFA has dedicated Assistant United States Attorney-detailees from the Southern District of California; District of Arizona; District of New Mexico; Western and Southern Districts of Texas; Southern District of Florida; Northern District of New York; and District of Vermont. JTFA also partners with other USAOs throughout the country and supports high-priority cases in any district.

All JTFA cases rely on substantial law enforcement resources from DHS, including ICE/ HSI and CBP/BP and OFO, as well as FBI and other law enforcement agencies. To date, JTFA's work has resulted in more than 435 domestic and international arrests of leaders, organizers, and significant facilitators of alien smuggling and/ or trafficking; more than 385 U.S. convictions; more than 330 significant jail sentences imposed, and forfeitures of substantial assets.

India AI Impact Summit 2026: 35,000+ Registrations so far; 100+ Countries, 500+ Startups to engage across 500 Sessions

The Summit, that has attracted unprecedented interest from the global community with over 35,000 registrations, received ahead of the event, will prioritise the translation of vision into execution, with a clear focus on outcomes that matter on the ground.

Governments, industry leaders, researchers, civil society organisations and international institutions are set to attend the event to actively participate in shaping the Summit's agenda. It is expected to witness participation from over 100 countries, including 15 to 20 Heads of Government, 50+ Ministers from various countries, and 40+ CEOs of leading global and Indian companies. Around 500 prominent figures from the global AI ecosystem, including innovators, researchers and Chief Technology Officers, are also expected to attend.

Highlighting the depth and diversity of engagement, the Summit will feature a startup showcase of 500+ AI startups and host around 500 sessions alongside the main programme, making it one of the most comprehensive AI-focused global convenings.

The scale of engagement leading up to the Summit has been equally significant. Over 1,300 proposals have been received for pre-Summit events, with more than 500 pre-Summit events conducted so far across sectors and regions in India as well as globally. The Summit framework also includes seven flagship events, collectively engaging 3,00,000+ participants, reflecting the wide national and international interest in the AI Impact Summit process.

The global AI summit process has evolved over time, beginning with an initial focus on AI risks at Bletchley Park, progressing to discussions on ethics and inclusion in Seoul, and subsequently moving towards the operationalisation of shared principles at Paris. The Summit reflects India's growing role in global AI discussions.

Further details regarding the AI Impact Summit 2026, including the programme, thematic focus areas and participation modalities, are available on the official Summit website - https://impact.indiaai.gov.in/. Interested stakeholders are encouraged to visit the website and register to be part of this global dialogue aimed at advancing the responsible and impactful use of Artificial Intelligence.

Media Accreditation for the Summit is LIVE. Only Accredited Media Representatives will be permitted to cover the Summit proceedings. Applications must be submitted online through the official portal at https://impact.indiaai.gov.in/media-accreditation. The media accreditation window closes on 8 February 2026.

Indian-Origin Climate Scientist Wins Prestigious Crafoord Prize In US

Often described as the "Nobel of Geosciences," the prize recognises Ramanathan's decades of research on super-pollutants and atmospheric brown clouds, which have reshaped understanding of global warming.

(News Agency) Houston: Indian-origin climate scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan has been awarded the 2026 Crafoord Prize in Geosciences by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Often described as the “Nobel of Geosciences,” the prize recognises Ramanathan's decades of research on super-pollutants and atmospheric brown clouds, which have reshaped understanding of global warming. Ramanathan, 82, made a landmark discovery in 1975 while working at NASA: chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), widely used in aerosols and refrigeration, trap heat in the atmosphere up to 10,000 times more effectively than carbon dioxide. "Until 1975, we thought global warming was mainly from CO2. I was shocked at the capacity of technology and human beings to change the environment," Ramanathan told the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Born in Madurai and raised in Chennai, Ramanathan began his career as an engineer in a refrigerator factory in Secunderabad, where he first handled CFCs. He later earned degrees from Annamalai University and the Indian Institute of Science. His Indian roots informed his work in the Indian Ocean Experiment (INDOEX), which identified atmospheric brown clouds over South Asia. The study linked air pollution to a weakened Indian Monsoon and accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers. Now, a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego, he has also advised global leaders and the Vatican on climate ethics. The Crafoord Prize carries a cash award of 8 million Swedish kronor (approximately $900,000) and a gold medal. The award will be presented during Crafoord Days in Stockholm and Lund in May 2026. Ramanathan's work underpins key international treaties, including the Montreal Protocol, which has prevented millions of tons of harmful emissions from entering the atmosphere.

US SEC fraud case against Gautam Adani can proceed after procedural matter resolved

(News Agency) NEW YORK, - The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission has arranged to serve Gautam Adani with a civil fraud lawsuit, allowing the regulator’s case against India’s second-richest person to proceed. In a Friday filing in the Brooklyn, New York federal court, the SEC and U.S.-based lawyers for Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani said the lawyers agreed to accept the SEC’s legal papers, eliminating the need for U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis to rule on how the defendants should be served.If the judge approves the resolution, the Adanis will have 90 days to respond to the SEC’s complaint, which could include requests for a dismissal. Robert Giuffra, a lawyer for Gautam Adani, declined to comment. Sean Hecker, a lawyer for Sagar Adani, also declined to comment. The SEC charged the Adanis in November 2024 with violating U.S. securities law by orchestrating a scheme to pay or promise to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes to Indian government officials to benefit Adani Green Energy (ADNA.NS), opens new tab, where both are executives and directors. Both defendants are in India, and the SEC had reported difficulty in serving them with legal papers.U.S. prosecutors filed a related criminal case in November 2024 against the Adanis and several other defendants. There have been no public developments in that case for more than a year. The SEC’s case had been stalled for most of that time. Gautam Adani, 63, founded and chairs the conglomerate Adani Group. He is worth about $59 billion according to Forbes magazine.

Indian-Origin Men Arrested in USA for Gold–Crypto Scam

(News Agency) Two Indian-origin men, Tejas Patel and Navya Bhatt, have been arrested in the United States on federal money laundering charges following an investigation into a multi-state scam operation. Federal authorities said the duo faces three counts of money laundering each for their alleged involvement in scams that cheated victims of hundreds of thousands of dollars in Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. According to investigators, the frauds included PayPal scams, fake Microsoft tech support schemes, and Bitcoin-related cons. Victims were persuaded to make payments in unusual forms such as gold bars, cryptocurrency, and large sums of cash. Court records reveal that a woman in Toledo was tricked into handing over more than $40,000 in cash after the accused allegedly posed as representatives of the Federal Trade Commission. Officials said the money laundering activities were linked to a larger organised network involved in moving and hiding proceeds from fraud.

Squires Cements Deshpande’s Role As Top PTAB Judge

(News Agency) U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Director John Squires has appointed Kalyan Deshpande as the chief judge of the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB). Deshpande’s appointment solidifies his position as a prominent figure within the PTAB, which plays a crucial role in adjudicating disputes related to patents and trademarks. With this new role, Deshpande is expected to lead the PTAB in handling a wide range of cases involving intellectual property rights. His expertise and experience in patent law make him a valuable asset to the PTAB. As the PTAB’s chief judge, Deshpande will oversee a team of administrative patent judges and ensure that patent disputes are resolved efficiently and effectively. This appointment highlights the importance of Deshpande’s contributions to the field of patent law and underscores the PTAB’s commitment to upholding the integrity of the patent system. Overall, Deshpande’s role as the chief judge of the PTAB is expected to have a significant impact on the resolution of patent disputes and the development of patent law in the United States.

A 'Greater Balochistan'?

Why This New Threat Has Pakistan Losing Its Sleep

(News Agency) In the early hours of January 31, Baloch freedom fighters belonging to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched their biggest, most audacious and spectacular offensive against the Pakistani state. Operation Herof-2 was the second such complex and coordinated attack after Herof-1 in August 2024. In both scale and scope, Herof-2 was bigger and bolder, with insurgents launching over 40 simultaneous attacks in over 12 districts covering the length and breadth of the restive province. According to some estimates, anywhere from 500 to 1,200 guerrillas were involved in the attacks, which targeted big cities and urban centres, including the capital city Quetta and the most secure Quetta Cantonment. Despite the brave face that Pakistan Army and its subordinates in the installed civilian regime are putting up, and the claims of victory being made by the predominantly Punjabi media of Pakistan - which acts as a mouthpiece of the quasi-military-hybrid regime - there is egg on the faces of the self-appointed field marshal and the rest of the security establishment, which was taken by complete surprise.

Shock Treatment

The total collapse of the writ of the state, even if it was for a few hours, has sent shockwaves through the province and the Pakistani state. The fact that the insurgents were able to infiltrate highly secure areas, including the capital city and the cantonment situated there, and were able to attack government offices, security bases and encampments in different cities, has exposed the hollowness of the claims being made by the dubious chief minister and other security officials. Despite official denials, the fact that the situation in Balochistan was fraught and fragile was not a secret. Government officials, ministers, top politicians and even tribal chieftains were unable to travel on highways, even with security. Trains were routinely targeted, and militants used to set up checkpoints on highways, and then melt away before the state could respond.

The morale of the local security forces had plummeted. Police officials and civil servants were terrified and unable or unwilling to step out of the safety of their offices. Politically, the alienation of the people from the Pakistani state was at an all-time high. Repressive policies of the security forces, which operated with complete impunity and were given a license to kill, kidnap, forcibly disappear people, invade homes, clamp down upon media and any kind of dissent, only added to the disaffection among the Baloch. But despite the complete disregard for human, civil, legal and constitutional rights of the people, and total absence of any kind of political outreach, the military-dominated hybrid regime in Islamabad and its local appendage in Quetta were unable to control the situation. Since hybrid military regimes can never accept failure, they must look for scapegoats.

It is always easier to blame problems on an external player than admit your own blunders and staggeringly stupid policies. India is, of course, an obvious bogey whenever something goes wrong in Pakistan. The military in Pakistan thinks that labelling the Baloch freedom fighters as 'Fitna tul Hindustan' (subversion by India) can help it get over the problem.

Blaming The Wrong People

Without providing a shred of evidence, the Pakistani authorities and their media mouthpieces (even the private media in Pakistan is nothing if not the Pakistani versions of Pravda and Peoples Daily, only it is controlled by the army and not by any political party) have been quick to allege that India funds the insurgency. By way of evidence, they point to the film Dhurandhar as an admission of India accepting its role in Balochistan. What is more, they use a statement of BLA that it shares a common enemy with India as further evidence. What none of these alleged journalists and analysts (mostly retired Pakistan military personnel) bother to ask themselves is why, if it is so easy for India to indoctrinate people in Balochistan by paying them money, the same tactic hasn't been used in other restive areas like Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Sindh and Punjab.

The more the situation in Balochistan deteriorates, the more the Punjabi establishment and their collaborators add new names to the list of usual suspects active in Balochistan. If the delusional Pakistanis are to be believed, Balochistan is the playground not just for India's RAW, but also Israel's Mossad, America's CIA, the UAE intelligence, and, of course, the Afghan or Taliban intelligence service. With US-Iran tensions on the boil, there were many Pakistanis who linked Operation Herof-2 with the larger American game plan to Balkanize Iran. Assisting the Americans in this were, of course, in their view, the Israelis and Indians. The UAE has also been projected as a troublemaker because the Pakistanis think the Emirates want to undermine the dysfunctional Gwadar port, which they think will seriously dent the UAE's ports. Among the grand conspiracy theories that the Pakistanis have conjured up is that countries like India, the US, the UAE and Israel have a common interest in sabotaging the almost defunct China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and are, therefore, working in tandem. Pakistani 'grand strategists' are also convinced that the Americans have been actively sponsoring Azeri, Kurd, Arab and Baloch groups in Iran to split the country. They have convinced themselves that the Americans will bomb Iran and create a chaotic situation in which these groups will be able to separate, leaving behind a rump Persian state.

A Larger Movement?

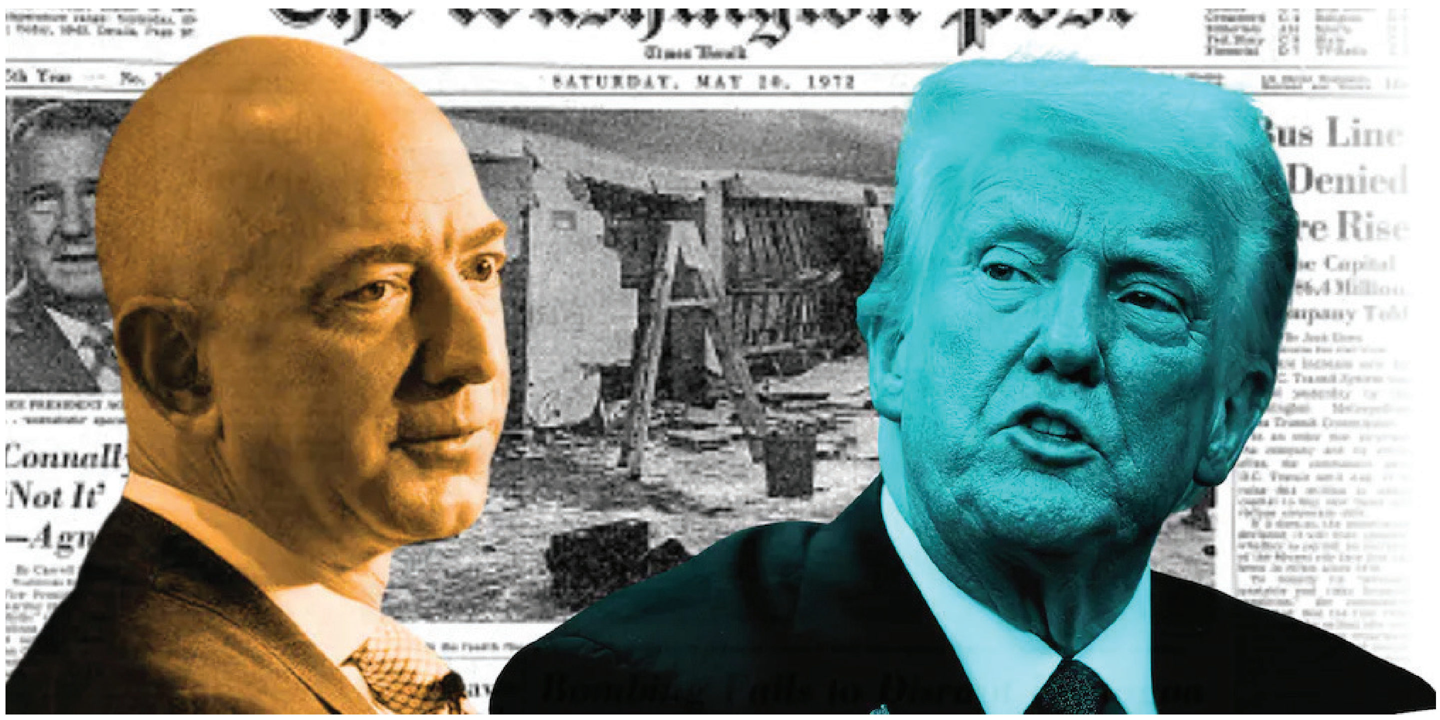
The southeastern Sistan-Balochistan province of Iran has been disturbed for many years now. The Iranians have managed to keep a lid on the province using brute force. But the predominantly Sunni Baloch province of Sistan-Baluchistan has close links with the Pakistani-controlled Balochistan. While the nature of the struggle in Pakistan-controlled Balochistan and Iranian Sistan-Baluchistan is quite different, both movements gain from each other. Add to this the notoriety of this entire belt as a hub of human, guns and narcotics smuggling, a lot of which takes place with the connivance and complicity of the security forces. Another explosive element in this already deadly mix is the reported American backing for Sunni extremist groups like Jaish-al-Adal, which is based in Pakistan but is carrying out attacks in Iran.

The Iranian security forces have occasionally carried out cross-border raids into Pakistani territory in pursuit of these terrorists. For their part, the Pakistanis believe that Iranian territory has been used by Pakistani Baloch insurgent groups to mount attacks inside Pakistan-held Balochistan. Both countries exchanged missile attacks almost two years ago and targeted what they called terrorist bases and camps in each other's territory. In this deadly cocktail has been mixed the Mossad, which is accused of having established a big network in Sistan-Baluchistan. There is growing trepidation in Pakistan establishment circles that there could be a new great game underway in the region to create a Greater Balochistan comprising Sistan-Baluchistan and Balochistan. This is not just a mineral-rich area, but geographically, a very pivotal area. A Greater Balochistan will alter the geopolitics of the region, straddling not only the entire Gulf region but also providing a base to access Central Asia and keep a watch over troublesome areas in Iran, Afghanistan and a rump Pakistan. In fact, the geographical relevance that Pakistan keeps talking about comes from its control over Balochistan.

By Sushant Sareen

The Washington Post 'Bloodbath': $100 Million Losses And Trump 2.0 Shadow

The Washington Post - which made history by exposing President Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal - has announced "substantial" cuts to its estimated 1,000-strong journalism roster.



A 'bad day', 'perplexing', 'absolute bloodbath', 'bizarre decision', 'setback for journalism'... the reactions to the Jeff Bezos-owned The Washington Post's brutal decision to lay off a third of newsroom staff worldwide, around 300 people, have ranged from disbelief to disillusionment.

Former Executive Editor Marty Baron delivered one of the more searing assessments: "... the darkest days of one of the world's greatest news organisations", he said, questioning the fate of "ground-level, fact-based reporting" at a time when it was most needed.Among those sacked was Lizzie Johnson, who was in Kyiv covering Russia's war on Ukraine when she was told her position was eliminated. Claire Parker, who ran the Cairo Bureau, and Aaron Wiener, the bureau chief in Berlin, were told their entire teams were to be sacked.

Delhi bureau chief Pranshu Verma and senior international affairs columnist Ishaan Tharoor, the son of Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, were among those who were let go.

International Editor Peter Finn asked to be laid off too rather than face his gutted team.

A shocked labour union representing many Post journalists had this to say: "... a newsroom cannot be hollowed out without consequences for its credibility, its reach and its future..."

Why has the Post, one of the world's most influential, recognised, and respected news organisations, taken this extreme step? In a note to his newsroom Matt Murray, the Executive Editor, said, "We have grappled with financial challenges for some time. They have affected us in multiple rounds of cost cuts and buyouts, along with (other) periodic constraints..."

What happened at WaPo?

French publication Le Monde joined in the weeping; "a day of mourning and anger in the legendary American daily", it said, as it and other media organisations referred uneasily to reports that said the Post lost US$70 million in 2023 and US$100 million in 2024.

The latter figure was worsened by the loss of an estimated 250,000 digital subscribers after the decision to not endorse any candidate in the year's presidential election, despite the editorial board having decided to support Kamala Harris, a move that broke decades of tradition.

And across 2025 paid average daily circulation was less than 100,000 - a 60 per cent drop from just five years ago, according to data from the Alliance for Audited Media cited by Reuters.

The paper has lost an eye-watering 500,000 subscribers since 2020.

Digital numbers fell from a peak of 22.5 million daily active users in January 2021 to less than three million by mid-2023, a frightening 90 per cent drop.

Privately-funded news outlets anywhere in the world have struggled for years to maintain a sustainable business model after the internet upended the economics of journalism.

And so, the Post - which made history by exposing President Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal - was to see "substantial" cuts to its estimated 1,000-strong journalism roster.

In his note, Murray also said the changes "reflect the radically changing economy for the news media" and "will help secure our future... and provide us stability moving forward".

But the layoffs weren't really a surprise. They never are.

Wednesday morning

Weeks before that Wednesday morning briefing fearful whispers and rumours made the rounds, underscored by certain staff being told not to bother coming in to work that day.

The "strategic reset" was announced at a two-hour call beginning 9 am ET. By Wednesday afternoon a volley of pink slips had been fired to Post staff worldwide.

What about Bezos?

The Amazon boss was sent three letters between January 25 and 31.

Each asked him to protect different parts of the paper, from its foreign news operations to local teams. "We care deeply about the DC area, and we know you do, too..." one letter said.

He remained silent.

One Post staffer told British publication The Guardian "... Bezos is ultimately making the call... he has enough money to do what he chooses..." At the time of publishing this article, Bezos still hadn't commented. The detachment, contrasting with Murray's pragmatic "painful but necessary" position and Chief Executive Officer Will Lewis' "will help secure our future" message, represent a well-worked, if unimaginative, framework within which corporate restructuring takes place. But it doesn't silence voices that have looked beyond the financial and at the political.

And Trump?

Fingers have also been pointed at US President Donald Trump and his bludgeoning of media publications and journalists he views as critical of him and his policies, though there is no suggestion of a direct order from the Trump administration to lay off Post staff.

Glenn Kessler, a fact-checker for nearly three decades at the Post, offered a rather blunt analysis: "Bezos is not attempting to save The Washington Post. He's trying to endure Trump."

The Trump-Bezos relationship is not what it was, a reality emphasised by Bezos, whom Trump once mocked as 'Jeff Bozo' and said was using the Post to attack him, having stayed silent about the FBI's unannounced raid on Post reporter Hannah Natanson's home in January.

The paper itself was not silent; the raid was denounced as "highly unusual and aggressive" and press freedom groups called it "a tremendous intrusion" by the Trump administration.

The thaw has been building since 2024, with Bezos congratulating Trump on his second term and attending the inauguration and the President declaring the Amazon chief a "good guy".

Do the Post layoffs figure somewhere in this thaw? Or are the cuts purely about ensuring one of the world's most famous news organisations survives an increasingly challenging digital era?

By Chandrashekar Srinivasan

Trump officials propose testing a citizenship question amid a push to alter the census

(News Agency) Participants in this year's field test of the 2030 census may be asked about their U.S. citizenship status, the Trump administration revealed Thursday. The proposal, which is part of a regulatory filing for the test, comes months after President Trump — in the middle of a redistricting push for new voting maps that could help Republicans keep control of the U.S. House of Representatives — put out a call on social media for a "new" census that would, for the first time in U.S. history, exclude millions of people living in the country without legal status.

Participants in this year's field test of the 2030 census may be asked about their U.S. citizenship status, the Trump administration revealed Thursday.

The proposal, which is part of a regulatory filing for the test, comes months after President Trump — in the middle of a redistricting push for new voting maps that could help Republicans keep control of the U.S. House of Representatives — put out a call on social media for a "new" census that would, for the first time in U.S. history, exclude millions of people living in the country without legal status. **Sponsor Message** In Congress, a growing number of Republican lawmakers are backing similar controversial proposals to leave out some or all non-U.S. citizens from a set of census numbers used to determine each state's share of congressional seats and Electoral College votes.

According to the 14th Amendment, those census apportionment counts must include the "whole number of persons in each state." And in federal court, multiple GOP-led states have filed lawsuits seeking to force the bureau to subtract from those counts residents without legal status and those with nonimmigrant visas, such as international college students and diplomats living in the United States. Missouri's case goes further by calling for their exclusion from all census counts, including those for distributing federal dollars for public services in local communities.

Results from the 2026 test are not expected to be used to redistribute political representation. Instead, the test is designed to inform preparations for the next once-a-decade head count in 2030, which include a report on the planned question topics that is due to Congress in 2027.The planned questionnaire for the test comes from an annual U.S. Census Bureau survey that is much longer than recent forms for the national tally. It's not clear why the bureau is using the American Community Survey to test methods for the census. Spokespeople for the bureau and its parent agency, the Commerce Department, did not immediately respond to NPR's requests for comment.

In addition to citizenship status, the form asks about people's sources of income, whether their home has a bathtub or shower, and whether the home is connected to a public sewer, among other questions.

By Hansi Lo Wang

The Path of Order: Securing the Republic and Restoring the Rule of Law

The fundamental duty of any sovereign nation is the protection of its borders and the consistent application of its laws. As we move through 2026, the United States finds itself at a critical juncture. The current administration has received a clear mandate to restore order, yet the implementation of this mandate—specifically through U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations—has met with a spectrum of reactions ranging from staunch support to intense public

scrutiny.

To ensure the long-term stability of our nation and the safety of its citizens, the administration must pursue a strategy that balances unflinching law enforcement with a common-sense policy framework that can command broad American consensus.

I. The Pillars of a Non-Porous Border

A nation without a secure border is not a nation; it is a territory. The "One Big Beautiful Bill" (OBBBA) passed in 2025 provided the financial teeth—nearly $170 billion—to finally achieve what has been promised for decades.

Completion of the Border Wall: Physical barriers remain the most effective deterrent against mass illegal crossings. The current allocation for finishing the southern wall is not merely a political promise but a structural necessity for national security.

Technological Supremacy: Utilizing the $6.2 billion allotted for border technology, the administration must deploy advanced vetting systems, drones, and seismic sensors to ensure that "non-porous" is a reality, not a slogan.

Ending "Catch and Release": By expanding detention capacity and utilizing expedited removal processes, the administration has correctly signaled that the border is no longer a revolving door.

II. Standing with Law Enforcement: FBI and ICE

The men and women of the FBI, ICE, and CBP are the thin blue line protecting the American taxpayer and the legal resident. The recent backlash against interior operations ignores a vital truth: law enforcement does not make the laws; they execute them.

Our Principle: Any assault—physical, verbal, or legal—on federal agents performing their duties is an assault on the rule of law itself.

To support these agencies effectively, the administration should:

Protect Federal Immunity: Counter-efforts to strip ICE agents of their legal protections must be resisted to prevent "litigation paralysis" where agents fear personal ruin for performing their jobs.

Prioritize High-Threat Targets: Focus remains paramount. The "Worst of the Worst" initiative, which prioritizes the deportation of violent gang members, narco-terrorists, and those with serious criminal records, justifies the necessity of ICE to the broader public.

Enhance Training and Standards: While the surge in hiring is necessary, maintaining rigorous training standards (moving back toward the traditional 22-week academy) will reduce operational errors and enhance the legitimacy of the force.

III. Common-Sense Deportation and System Integrity

The rule of law is undermined when the system is abused. For too long, "temporary" protections became permanent loopholes.

Removal of Criminal Aliens: There should be zero tolerance for illegal aliens who commit additional crimes on American soil. The deportation of over 675,000 individuals in 2025, with a focus on those with criminal indicators, is a step toward restoring public safety.

Closing Legal Loopholes: Reforming the "categorical parole" programs and ensuring Temporary Protected Status (TPS) remains truly temporary prevents the long-term erosion of our immigration statutes.

Upholding System Integrity: When 90% of those in ICE detention are deported directly, it sends a clear message: the law is being enforced as written.

IV. Building a Consensus for the Future

For a policy to endure, it must eventually move beyond executive orders and into the realm of legislative consensus. The "Dignity Act" and similar bipartisan efforts suggest a middle path that the administration could shape.

Conclusion

The Trump administration has a historic opportunity to fix a broken system. By securing the border, protecting our law enforcement heroes, and removing those who threaten our safety, we restore the "Rule of Law." However, the final victory will be a system so robust and fair that it no longer requires a "crisis" to manage. The path forward is clear: Secure the border, enforce the law, and respect the officers who stand on the front lines.

By South Asian Insider Team

Orange County Unites Against Federal Detention Center Proposal

1. The Resolution: Bipartisan Opposition

The resolution, sponsored by Democratic Legislator Genesis Ramos, sends a formal signal to the federal government that Orange County refuses to host a detention center in Chester or anywhere else within its borders.

Key Arguments for the Resolution:

Lack of Transparency: Lawmakers accused DHS of failing to communicate with local officials and residents.

Infrastructure Strain: Concerns were raised about Chester's ability to provide water, sewer, and emergency services to a massive facility.

Humanitarian Concerns: Legislator Ramos cited a record 32 deaths in ICE detention in 2025, calling the proposal "immoral and inhumane."

Economic Impact: The facility would remove the property from local tax rolls, resulting in an estimated loss of over $520,000 annually in school and property taxes.

2. The Dissenting Voice: Richard Vargas

While the legislative vote was unanimous, the public comment period—which lasted over two hours—featured one notable "dissenting" perspective. Richard Vargas, a retired deputy sheriff and veteran, did not support the Chester location but argued against the general anti-ICE sentiment of the room.

The Speech of Richard Vargas (Excerpt):

"Not one person has gotten up tonight and spoken about all the American citizens who have been raped and sexually abused, hundreds, by illegal aliens. And what have we done here? Nothing! Unless you fought for this country, unless you served this country like I have—you have nothing to say. I oppose this facility in Chester because it doesn't belong in a warehouse, but it should be located elsewhere on federal land, like the United States Military Academy at West Point."

Vargas's comments were met with significant heckling from the crowd, reflecting the deep polarization of the community.

3. Background: The Land and the "Icahn Connection"

The facility is proposed for a 400,000-square-foot former Pep Boys distribution center located at 29 Elizabeth Drive, Chester.

The Purchase: DHS recently moved to acquire the 35.9-acre site. While a final sale price has not been publicly disclosed, the property has a full market value of $25 million.

The Owner: Corporate records and reports from the Albany Times-Union link the property to IEP Chester LLC, an affiliate of Icahn Enterprises LLC.

The Rumor Mill: Reports have circulated that Carl Icahn, a billionaire investor and former advisor to the Trump administration, is facilitating the deal. Local activists have seized on this "insider" connection to claim that the site was selected for political and financial convenience rather than operational suitability.

4. Future Outlook: Will the Resolution Stop DHS?

Despite the unanimous local opposition, the legal path to stopping the facility is uphill due to the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Investigative Conclusion: While the Orange County resolution is a powerful symbolic victory for activists, it serves more as a "declaration of war" than a legal barrier. The future of the Chester facility likely rests in the federal courts or on whether the high-profile backlash forces DHS to reconsider the site's viability.

By South Asian Insider Team

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The United States Should Apply the Arab Spring's Lessons to Its Iran Response

The uprisings showed that foreign military intervention rarely produced democratic breakthroughs.

With popular protests in Iran receding rather than escalating, the United States faces a narrower but still consequential set of policy options. The experience of the Arab Spring underscores that external military intervention amid domestic upheaval rarely produces democratic breakthroughs and more often entrenches disorder. In Syria, Libya, and Yemen, foreign military involvement during moments of popular mobilization destroyed already fragile state institutions, militarized political competition, and generated prolonged civil wars whose regional spillovers continue to destabilize the Middle East. These cases suggest that even when regimes face legitimacy crises, intervention does not translate social protest into political reform. Instead, it collapses the political arena into armed conflict.

Equally important, threatening military action against a regime confronting internal unrest tends to harden authoritarian behavior rather than moderate it. When rulers interpret external pressure as an existential threat, they are more likely to frame domestic opposition as an extension of foreign hostility and to treat politics as a zero-sum struggle for survival. The Arab Spring offers ample evidence that such dynamics intensify repression, close off space for reformist actors within incumbent regimes, and marginalize nonviolent opposition. In Iran's case, U.S. military threats risk reinforcing the security establishment's dominance and legitimizing harsher internal controls, even as popular mobilization loses momentum.

But the United States still has a viable strategy, one that would prioritize calibrated incentives and sanctions aimed at shaping regime behavior without triggering collapse or militarization. Targeted sanctions can remain a tool for constraining the most coercive elements of the regime, but they should be paired with credible pathways for economic relief and diplomatic engagement tied to measurable reforms. This approach acknowledges political realities: Regimes under pressure are unlikely to concede reforms unless they can frame them as stabilizing rather than capitulatory. Conditional incentives—economic access, sanctions relief, or regional de-escalation arrangements—can strengthen pragmatic actors within the regime while avoiding the destructive consequences associated with external coercion.

Ultimately, U.S. policy toward Iran should be guided less by the pursuit of rapid political transformation and more by the management of risk in an already volatile region. The Arab Spring demonstrated that destabilizing regimes through force or maximalist pressure often produces outcomes worse than the status quo, both for societies in transition and for regional security. Working—however imperfectly—with existing power structures to encourage gradual reform may be frustrating and slow, but it remains the most reliable option for advancing U.S. interests while avoiding another cycle of collapse, repression, and regional spillover.

Washington can pursue four nonviolent, concrete measures that combine pressure with inducements. Such measures would be aligned with the preferences of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Turkey, and Egypt—key Middle Eastern middle powers that oppose military confrontation with Iran out of concern for regional destabilization.

First, the United States can reframe sanctions as conditional and reversible instruments rather than permanent punishment. This would involve clearly articulating specific steps—on nuclear transparency, regional de-escalation, or domestic governance issues—that would trigger partial sanctions relief, particularly in sectors affecting civilian welfare. Such clarity would undercut claims of regime hardliners that concessions yield no benefits and threaten regime survival.

Second, Washington can actively support and work through regional de-escalation frameworks in which middle powers already play a mediating role. Encouraging and quietly backing Saudi-Iranian and Gulf-Iranian dialogue, as well as Turkish and Egyptian openings toward Iran, allows the United States to influence Iranian behavior indirectly while lowering the temperature of regional rivalries. These states possess economic, diplomatic, and security channels with Tehran that Washington lacks, and they have strong incentives to prevent a slide toward war that would threaten energy markets, maritime security, and internal stability.

Third, the United States can expand humanitarian exemptions, educational exchanges, and other people-to-people channels while protecting them from being subjected to sanctions. Such measures can mitigate the societal costs of isolation and prevent the regime from monopolizing narratives of siege and resistance. Importantly, these steps signal that U.S. policy distinguishes between the Iranian state and Iranian society, reducing the regime's ability to justify repression as a response to foreign hostility.

Finally, Washington should coordinate closely with middle powers to establish a shared red line against military escalation while maintaining unified diplomatic pressure for incremental change. A visible convergence between U.S. and regional positions—opposing war, favoring de-escalation, and advocating gradual reform—would deprive Tehran of opportunities to exploit divisions and would reinforce the message that stability and reform are not mutually exclusive.

In an already volatile Middle East, nonviolent, regionally coordinated policies offer the best chance of influencing Iran's trajectory without falling into the trap of military intervention and domestic disorder that several cases of the Arab Spring demonstrated.

By Amr Hamzawy and Sarah Yerkes

The Trump-Modi Trade Deal Won't Magically Restore U.S.-India Trust

Washington and New Delhi should be proud of their putative deal. But international politics isn't the domain of unicorns and leprechauns, and collateral damage can't simply be wished away.

On Monday, after six months of rancor and wrangling, the United States and India at last announced an initial agreement on a trade deal. The agreement came just one week after India and the European Union sealed a formal free trade agreement that had been under negotiation for well over a decade.

The contrast is important in two respects.

First, the EU's deal is a genuine trade agreement, while Washington's, in keeping with the pattern of negotiations under President Donald Trump, is a trade "deal"—with all the flexibility and potential for reversal that the latter implies. Bluntly put, the United States hasn't done true bilateral or plurilateral agreements since what feels like the Jurassic period, so we should temper our enthusiasm by recognizing that one of these things is not like the other.

Second, the American deal is still thin on details, many of which will need to be further negotiated. According to Trump, the deal includes a cut from 50 percent to 18 percent tariff rate on Indian exports, an agreement from India to purchase $500 billion in U.S. goods and services over time, and what the White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt has now characterized as an explicit promise from India to stop purchasing Russian oil.

My advice? Everyone needs to take a deep breath.

The situation between Washington and New Delhi was utterly unsustainable, which is why a deal was inevitable. (In fact, I was surprised it didn't happen sooner.) If you care deeply about U.S.-India relations and are invested in them, then having the floor fall out—as it did—is bad news. This is the opposite, and we should celebrate it.

Since his arrival in January, U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor has managed to reset the tone. Prior American ambassadors, such as Robert Blackwill and David Mulford, have fostered momentum by identifying just a few key priorities early in their tenures and then pushing both systems hard to move the ball downfield. Gor seems to have recognized that a U.S. tariff rate for India that was the highest in the world (alongside Brazil's) was both unsustainable and an insuperable obstacle to progress in any other area. Smartly, he focused on removing it.

The resulting headline is that the deal cuts tariffs on India's exports to 18 percent. That's better than the 50 percent—a 25 percent base tariff coupled to an additional 25 percent penalty tied to India's Russian oil purchases—but the tariff rate never should have been that high in the first place, and everyone had better hope it stays here.

Trump loves tariffs, full stop. He has used or threatened them for much more than just trade disputes, and they are now the one-size-fits-all solution to any and every issue that seizes his attention: because he seeks a crackdown on fentanyl flows, because he doesn't like a given country's foreign policy choices, because he doesn't like how a U.S. company has been treated, because he'd like to roll back other countries' domestic regulatory regimes, because he thinks countries should buy American only, because he wants them to ditch supply chain relationships with third countries, because he doesn't want anyone to do deals with the very countries that he himself is doing deals with, and even when others dare to object to his interest in annexing a piece of territory.

In short, tariff "deals" have foundered because he changes his mind or layers on new issues. Don't believe me? Go talk to some South Koreans. Then ask a few Canadians. Both countries thought they had made deals, only to discover that the terms of such deals are subject to fresh threats and perpetual renegotiation.

But 18 percent is a smooth landing for India, because if American tariffs are going to be a fact of life, then relative advantage over competitors is what matters. India now has a lower tariff rate than ASEAN countries—most of them are stuck at 19 percent, with Vietnam at 20 percent and with additional penalties for transshipment of Chinese goods—and it's competitively good for Indian exporters. (It is perversely entertaining that 18 percent is now considered an awesomely "low" tariff rate, but this is nonetheless a boon to India.)

That said, while relative tariff rates matter, tariffs aren't the only factor in determining trade and investment decisions. It is questionable whether a 1 percent or 2 percent tariff differential conveys such overwhelming competitive advantage that it overcomes other factors working in favor of Southeast Asian competitors that are better integrated into regional supply chains and have stronger fundamentals in their favor as foreign direct investment, export, and manufacturing hubs. The straight line many are drawing from small differentials in tariff rates to the totality of what makes an exporter attractive elides much about Vietnam's comparative advantage and especially what made China so attractive. There is more to the China ecosystem, for example, than just cost.

We also shouldn't sleep on China. Beijing has no realistic chance of reducing tariff rates to prior levels, but it doesn't need to. It just needs to get close enough to the ASEAN and India tariff rates to shape the medium-term calculations of manufacturers and complicate all the "China plus X" talk of the past decade. And that outcome hardly seems inconceivable since we are heading for at least two—and maybe more, per Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent—U.S.-China leaders meetings this year. Plus, Trump clearly craves a deal with Beijing.

Analysts would be wise to ignore some of the numbers in the deal, or at least treat them as aspirational. How is India going to buy $500 billion of anything from the United States anytime soon? U.S. goods exports to India in 2024 were $41.5 billion. U.S. services exports to India in 2024 were $41.8 billion. So a 500 percent increase—from $83 billion to $500 billion—seems like, well, kind of a stretch. But U.S.-India trade has undershot its potential forever, so ambition is good.

I also have a hard time believing the government of India will make any Russian oil-related commitment explicit. After all, India has deep historical and sentimental ties to Russia that it will not simply ditch under American pressure. Maintaining the symbolic hedge that it can purchase Russian oil if it so chooses speaks both to Indian foreign policy autonomy and to its ability to resist American coercion, both of which are important factors in India's domestic politics. Initial signs suggest that New Delhi had already been incrementally reducing its imports of Russian crude, even in the absence of a deal with Washington. But publicly rebuking Russia—as Bessent and others in the administration repeatedly have—was always a nonstarter for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who can ill afford to humiliate one of India's most important defense partners. And Trump's frequent suggestions that Venezuelan oil is the answer to the world's crude import needs strains credulity when that country's industry needs to be modernized, to the tune of tens or hundreds of billions of dollars in capital expenditure. Most importantly, those who care about U.S.-India relations—have worked hard on them and have spent years struggling for them against domestic political pressure—should be happier than they were a few months ago.

By Evan A. Feigenbaum

India-EU FTA: A Strategic Accomplishment

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has the potential to be a strategic accomplishment that strengthens both sides in an increasingly uncertain world. Realising that promise, however, will depend on whether New Delhi and Brussels can overcome their respective political, regulatory and implementation challenges.

By Captain Sarabjeet S Parmar (retd)

The signing of the long-running India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in late January 2026 marked a milestone in New Delhi's external economic strategy, especially given the fast-changing global geopolitical environment. For India, it is more than tariff cuts and export numbers, as the deal is both an economic opportunity to accelerate structural transformation and a strategic lever to rebalance India's partnership with the EU amid an uncertain global order. Apart from the emergent benefits, for the deal to fructify in totality, there is a need for a series of political, economic and regulatory challenges that New Delhi must manage carefully to translate the commitments into durable gains. The deal opens the EU market to Indian goods and services on an unprecedented scale. The agreed package looks at eliminating or substantially reducing tariffs on the great majority of traded goods and provides improved access for services and investment. This is a level of market openness that India has long sought from a major advanced economy partner. The Indian government's factsheet available online describes the FTA as a modern, rules-based partnership intended to boost exports, investment, and supply-chain integration as India approaches its 2047 development horizon. From India's perspective, there are several immediate macroeconomic benefits: greater two-way trade, higher services exports (IT, professional services, finance), and a likely uplift in foreign direct investment (FDI) into manufacturing and green industries. The EU's demand for high-value Indian services and manufactured intermediate goods can help accelerate job creation in labour-intensive sectors, which has been a long-standing policy priority for New Delhi. The European Commission projects significant increases in EU exports to India as well. This means that Indian exporters will face tougher competition but also gain from deeper integration into European supply chains.

There are four strategic impacts that merit attention. Firstly, the FTA reduces India's exposure to single-market risks by anchoring trade and investment ties with the EU market, which is the world's largest integrated market. This diversification can be considered as politically useful as ongoing global geopolitical tensions continue to impact the global trade corridor.

Secondly, the FTA's clauses on standards, services, and investment are designed to facilitate technology transfers, renewable energy cooperation, and clean-manufacturing linkages. This will be advantageous for India as it looks at transitioning to low-carbon infrastructure. EU capital, climate finance instruments and regulatory convergence can accelerate adoption of higher environmental and technical standards within India.

Thirdly, a deeper India-EU economic partnership strengthens India's diplomatic hand, especially in a multilateral world towards shaping rules for emerging technologies, and as a balancer amid US-China strategic competition.

Fourthly, on the domestic front, the FTA can strengthen New Delhi's approach to an outward-looking growth strategy that leverages Make in India manufacturing and services to generate employment.

There are several challenges that New Delhi needs to surmount so that the FTA translates into meaningful economic transformation. The first relates to regulatory frameworks.

Indian industry will need to upgrade compliance capacity rapidly to meet EU labelling and environmental standards. Analysts have flagged measures such as CBAM-style rules and sustainability due-diligence as potential friction points. These would need to be addressed.

Second is agriculture, which is politically sensitive in both the polities. New Delhi will need to manage domestic producers' political resistance when increased European competition could threaten livelihoods.

Third is rules of origin, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) capacity and implementation complexity. Practical gains from any FTA depend on rules of origin, customs facilitation and the capacity of MSMEs to use the agreement. Many Indian exporters currently operate at thin margins and will need targeted support, specifically finance, testing labs, trade facilitation and digital certification, to capitalise on preferential access. The factsheet recognises this implementation challenge and points to cooperation measures, which need to be operationalised.

Fourth is ratification. The EU's internal ratification process can be politically contingent, while New Delhi would need to secure domestic consensus for the provisions it has offered. The deal's full benefits are also dependent on parallel agreements or side-letters on investment protection, geographical indications, and digital trade. These elements may require additional negotiation, hence longer timelines for full activation of the FTA.

For India, the FTA is a strategic inflection point, an enabling framework to expand market access, modernise domestic industry, and deepen geopolitical ties with Europe. The real test starts now. These include conversion of tariff schedules and commitments into employment, upgrading industrial capacity, and resilient integrations into global value chains. The speed at which New Delhi addresses the regulatory, political and capacity constraints will enable fructification of a long-awaited FTA with Europe that will benefit both markets.

Odisha Man Shocks Internet by Lifting King Cobra with His Mouth: A Daring Display of Wildlife Interaction

(News Agency) A video featuring an unusual and daring feat from Odisha has sparked significant attention online.

The footage shows a man lifting a King Cobra with his mouth, a display that has left many viewers astonished.

This unexpected act has become a talking point across various social media platforms, prompting widespread reactions.

The man's interaction with the serpent showcases a level of familiarity that raises questions about safety and risk. King Cobras are known for their venomous nature, and such close encounters can be extremely dangerous.

Despite the inherent risks, the man appears unperturbed as he engages with the snake.In the video, the individual demonstrates a unique technique that has generated both admiration and concern from viewers. While some applaud the skill and bravery displayed in the footage, others have voiced their apprehensions regarding the potential consequences of such actions. Social media comments have ranged from astonishment to warnings about the dangers involved.

The phenomenon of showcasing extraordinary animal encounters is not new on social media.

However, this particular instance has garnered a heightened level of intrigue due to the nature of the animal involved.

King Cobras are among the longest venomous snakes in the world, and incidents like this invite discussions regarding wildlife interactions and conservation.

As the video continues to circulate, it reflects the fine line between entertainment and risk-taking in the realm of animal interactions.

The event highlights a broader conversation about the responsibilities that come with handling wildlife and the implications of such displays in the context of animal welfare.

Trump and Modi Forge Major Deal: Strengthening U.S.-India Ties for Economic Growth

(News Agency) President Trump has officially announced a significant deal following a high-stakes phone call with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This telephone conversation served as a precursor to the agreement, indicating the importance of dialogue in international negotiations. Both leaders engaged in discussions that may have set the groundwork for the following arrangements.The nature of the deal remains undisclosed, but its announcement reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen ties between the United States and India. Both nations have been exploring various avenues for collaboration on economic and strategic fronts. The call highlights the bilateral relationships that are pivotal to fostering mutual interests.

In recent years, the relationship between the U.S. and India has evolved, with both countries looking to enhance cooperation. This deal could represent a further commitment to that goal and may have implications for future diplomatic engagements. Observers anticipate that the agreement will play a significant role in shaping the economic landscape of both nations.The discussions led by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi underscore a trend of increasing engagement between key global players.

As both leaders look to navigate complex international challenges, such initiatives are crucial to ensuring that the interests of their respective nations are addressed. The decision to make a public announcement following their private conversation indicates a readiness to acknowledge progress made in collaboration.As details of the deal unfold, analysts will be closely monitoring its impact on both domestic and international fronts. The agreement has the potential to influence various sectors, including trade and technology.

Unlocking Aerospace Potential: The Kaveri Engine and India's Journey Toward Self-Reliance in Aviation

(News Agency) The Kaveri engine represents a significant advancement in India's aerospace capabilities, being a low-bypass, twin-spool turbofan. Developed by the Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE), which operates under the aegis of the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), the engine has been tailored for applications in modern aircraft.

Designed with an emphasis on performance and efficiency, the Kaveri engine aims to enhance the operational capabilities of various military platforms.

Its twin-spool configuration facilitates improved thrust and better fuel efficiency, both critical factors for modern aviation demands.

As India seeks to bolster its defense production capabilities, the Kaveri engine stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to self-reliance in high-technology sectors.

The development of indigenous engines is crucial for reducing dependence on foreign technology and fostering domestic innovation.The Kaveri engine's design incorporates advanced engineering techniques, aiming to meet the rigorous performance standards required in military aviation.

It is intended to support India's ambitious aspirations for a robust aerospace sector while also contributing to global aviation technology discourse.

In summary, the Kaveri engine underscores India's growing expertise in aerospace engineering.

As the project continues to evolve, it is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of both military and civilian aviation in the country.

India Holds Firm Against International Court Order On Indus Waters Treaty

India's message since Pahalgam has been consistent: treaties cannot function in isolation from ground realities.

(News Agency) Even as a Court of Arbitration in The Hague presses ahead with fresh hearings and document orders under the Indus Waters Treaty framework, India has made it clear that it does not recognise the legitimacy of these proceedings and will not participate.

The latest flashpoint is an order issued last week by the Court of Arbitration (CoA) constituted under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), directing that operational "pondage logbooks" from Indian hydroelectric plants be produced as part of what it calls the "Second Phase on the Merits".

The Court has fixed hearings for February 2-3 at the Peace Palace in The Hague and noted that India has not filed any counter-memorial or indicated participation. For New Delhi, however, this entire exercise is moot. Government sources told NDTV that the "so-called illegally constituted" CoA continues to "hold parallel proceedings (in addition to the neutral expert). Since we do not recognise the legitimacy of the CoA, we do not respond to any of its communications."

Additionally, as IWT is in abeyance, India is not bound to respond. This is a tactic by Pakistan to get us involved to show that we remain engaged."

Treaty in Abeyance, Strategy in Motion

The background to this unprecedented standoff lies in New Delhi's decision on April 23, 2025, a day after 26 civilians were killed in Pahalgam by Pakistan-linked terrorists. India formally placed the Indus Waters Treaty "in abeyance" and, for the first time since 1960, explicitly linked water cooperation to Pakistan's continued use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. The move came alongside Operation Sindoor and marked a decisive shift in India's Pakistan policy – cooperation cannot continue amid hostility. Islamabad's reaction has been frantic. In the nine months since, Pakistan has summoned envoys, rushed delegations to world capitals, written to the United Nations, initiated over ten legal actions and held multiple international conferences – all centred on one narrative that India has targeted its most sensitive vulnerability.

Nearly 80-90 per cent of Pakistan's agriculture depends on the Indus River system. Its water storage capacity barely covers a month of flow. Its major reservoirs – Tarbela and Mangla – are reportedly near dead storage. What was once a technical treaty arrangement has now become a strategic pressure point. Despite India's position, the Hague-based court is proceeding as if the treaty framework remains fully operational. In an order dated January 24, 2026, the court laid out a detailed hearing schedule for February 2-3, specifying that Pakistan alone will present arguments in person at the Peace Palace if India does not attend.

Why Foreign Investors Are Growing Worried About Their 'Minerals' Bets In Pakistan

(News Agency) Pakistan's geoeconomic ambitions find themselves in an anticipated predicament amid the resurgence of violence in the restive province of Balochistan. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) on January 31 launched the second phase of its 'Operation Herof', targeting over ten districts across the province. While conflicting casualty reports have emerged, local reports state the involvement of suicide bombers, including female fighters in the operation. In retaliation, the Pakistani security forces launched a counter-militancy operation and reported the killing of over 150 BLA-linked militants in the aftermath of the violence. During the operation, the authorities reportedly suspended mobile services in several districts, including the provincial capital of Quetta, and Mastung, Kalat, Khuzdar, Nushki, Dalbandin, and Kharan. Military measures have often accompanied communication blackouts as part of the state's response to security challenges in Balochistan. However, the Pakistani state framed the insurgency as externally driven, designating BLA militants as 'Fitna-al-Hindustan' to allege Indian involvement. Within hours of the incident, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in a statement said, "These were not normal terrorists. India is behind these attacks. I can tell you for sure that India planned these attacks along with these terrorists." The Pakistani authorities have previously also accused Afghanistan and Iran's role in the Baloch militancy theater. While Baloch militants are known to operate out of southern Afghanistan and southeastern Iran, Pakistan's accusations of state involvement continue to lack credibility or independently verifiable evidence.

The Nushki Gateway

During the operation, the BLA held control over Nushki, therefore highlighting the district as a critical flashpoint between the militants and Pakistani security forces. Strategic control over the territory of Nushki enables militants to sever the land link between the provincial capital, Quetta, and the western part of the province. More significantly, Nushki serves as the entry point to Chagai district, known to be the heart of Pakistan's mineral capital. Home to the Reko Diq gold and copper mines as well as the Saindak copper-gold project, Nushki holds considerable significance for Pakistan's currently expanding geoeconomic calculus.

By maintaining a presence in the region, BLA has gestured with intention and capacity to disrupt the logistics of upcoming mining projects, which they have historically portrayed as 'colonial extraction' by the federal government.

Elon Musk Merges SpaceX and xAI Ventures: Pioneering Innovations in Aerospace Technology

(Stafff reporter) Musk's space exploration company and his AI start-up are merging. This significant move signals a new chapter in Musk's endeavors in both space technology and artificial intelligence. The merger is expected to enhance the capabilities of both entities, allowing for innovative solutions in both fields.The merging of these two powerful ventures highlights Musk's vision of integrating advanced technology with space exploration. By combining resources and expertise, the merger may lead to groundbreaking developments that could redefine how artificial intelligence is utilized in space missions.

Musk's space exploration company has made a name for itself with ambitious projects aimed at making space travel more accessible. Meanwhile, his AI start-up has been at the forefront of cutting-edge advancements in artificial intelligence. The collaboration between these two sectors has the potential to create synergies that could result in significant advancements in aerospace technologies.The implications of this merger extend beyond mere operational efficiency. It could pave the way for new applications of AI in various aspects of space exploration, including enhanced navigation systems and autonomous spacecraft operations. By leveraging AI technology, Musk's ventures may improve safety and effectiveness in space missions.As the worlds of artificial intelligence and space exploration converge, industry experts are closely watching the outcomes of this merger. The integration of Musk's ventures could set a precedent for future collaborations in technology, inspiring other companies to innovate at the intersection of these two dynamic fields.

Russian Cargo Ship Captain Convicted: A Wake-Up Call for Maritime Safety and Negligence Reform

(Stafff reporter) A Russian cargo ship captain has been convicted of gross negligence manslaughter following a tragic incident in the North Sea. The collision involved his vessel and a U.S. oil tanker, which resulted in the death of one crew member aboard the tanker.

The case has drawn significant attention due to the implications for maritime safety and international shipping regulations.The court proceedings revealed that the captain's actions were deemed responsible for the accident.

Investigators scrutinized navigation practices and reported that the ship was not adequately monitored at the time of the incident. The verdict reflects the serious nature of the charges and the responsibilities placed upon those in command of commercial vessels.

Following the collision, both ships sustained considerable damage, prompting a major response from emergency services. The accident raised questions regarding maritime oversight and the enforcement of safety protocols in busy shipping lanes. The ramifications of this event are likely to be felt across the industry as stakeholders assess current navigational standards.

The guilty verdict is expected to lead to discussions on better training and operational compliance among crew members worldwide. Maritime authorities may increase scrutiny of vessels operating in high-traffic areas to prevent future incidents.

This case serves as a poignant reminder of the potential consequences of negligence in maritime operations.As the shipping community processes the implications of this ruling, attention will also focus on the broader impact on international maritime law.

The tragic loss of life and the circumstances surrounding this collision highlight the need for ongoing dialogue about safety measures at sea. Stakeholders will likely push for reforms aimed at reducing the risk of similar accidents in the future.

Donald Trump's Vision for Independence Arch: A New Icon Overlooking the Potomac River

(Stafff reporter) Former President Donald Trump has expressed a strong interest in developing a significant architectural project along the scenic banks of the Potomac River.

The proposed structure, tentatively named the Independence Arch, would rise to a height of 250 feet. This ambitious initiative reflects Trump's ongoing engagement with public works and its implications for American heritage.

The Independence Arch, if realized, would stand as a monumental tribute to the values and principles that the nation represents.

Proponents of the project believe that such a structure could serve as an iconic symbol, drawing visitors and fostering a sense of national pride. The location by the Potomac River offers a picturesque backdrop, further enhancing the arch's potential prominence.

Discussions surrounding the design and funding of the Independence Arch are still in the preliminary stages.

Trump's enthusiasm for the project appears to stem from a desire to make a lasting impact on the capital's landscape. As conversations unfold, various stakeholders may need to weigh the cultural significance and logistical challenges associated with such an endeavor.The proposed monument has the capacity to generate significant public interest and tourism, potentially benefiting the local economy.

By attracting visitors to the site, the Independence Arch could also contribute to broader discussions about public monuments and their roles in contemporary society.

The feasibility of the project will hinge on multiple factors, including funding, regulatory approvals, and community support.

As the idea of the Independence Arch takes shape, it remains to be seen how it will fit into the broader narrative of urban development in the capital.

The project's goals, as articulated by Trump, highlight the intersection of architecture, history, and national identity. As more details emerge, the conversation around the Independence Arch will likely continue to evolve, sparking discussions about the future of monuments in America.

Gov. Kathy Hochul taps former NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams as running mate

(Stafff reporter) NEW YORK (WABC) -- Governor Kathy Hochul announced that former New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, a mom from Queens and a lifelong New Yorker, will join her on the ballot this year as her lieutenant governor. The governor is expected to be officially selected by state Democratic Party delegates to be their gubernatorial candidate next week. Hochul released a statement saying, "I'm grateful to begin building the next chapter of New York's future with Adrienne Adams, our next Lieutenant Governor. Raised by two union workers, Adrienne knows what it means to work hard and stand up for those who need it most. That's why as New York City Council speaker, she led the charge to protect families, make housing more affordable, invest in our children, and stand up to anyone who seeks to harm our City. As Donald Trump attacks this state relentlessly and Bruce Blakeman bends the knee before him, I need a fighter in my corner who'll stand strong for New York families. Adrienne Adams is that fighter. "Adrienne and I are no strangers to rolling up our sleeves and getting results for working New Yorkers. Together, we're going to continue investing in public safety, bringing costs down, and making this state a place where all families can thrive." In turn, Adams released her own statement of acceptance saying, "I am honored to stand side by side with Governor Kathy Hochul in her fight for a safe, affordable, and resilient New York. As NYC Council Speaker, I spent every day working to find common ground on affordable housing, child care, and lowering costs for New Yorkers struggling to get by. We made progress, but there's more work to do - and with Governor Kathy Hochul's leadership, we're going to get it done together. "There's too much on the line for us to let Donald Trump raise costs, rip away child care, and wage war on New York families - and Governor Hochul and I are ready for this fight. Let's get to work." Adams will be Hochul's third lieutenant governor in five years. Brian Benjamin resigned following a federal indictment and she is currently being primaried by her current lieutenant governor Antonio Delgado.

Pizza Hut is closing hundreds of locations

(Stafff reporter) NEW YORK -- Pizza Hut is closing hundreds of locations across the United States while its parent company continues a strategic review of the embattled brand. Yum! Brands, which also owns Taco Bell and KFC, revealed in Wednesday's earnings call that 250 "underperforming" Pizza Huts are closing in the first half of this year, which amounts to roughly 3% of its US footprint.

A specific list of locations wasn't released.

The company announced in November it had launched a "formal review of strategic options" for Pizza Hut, including a possible sale. No further additional information was released Wednesday other than that Yum! expects the review to be completed this year. Pizza Hut has consistently struggled in a tough pizza landscape, especially against its chief rival, Domino's Pizza. For Pizza Hut, it was another dismal quarter, with another decline in same-store sales for its US locations, dropping 3%. The chain's attempt to focus on value, namely a new $5 pizza, hasn't resonated. Meanwhile, Taco Bell continued to be a standout. Same-store sales soared 7% for the quarter as its consistent release of new menu items lured in a variety of people, including high-income consumers, younger eaters and families. KFC also continued its slow turnaround in the US, with same-store sales inching 1% higher. The chicken chain has brought on Taco Bell executives to focus menu innovation as it looks to regain ground it has lost to Raising Cane's and Chick-fil-A. Shares of Yum! (YUM) have jumped 6% so far this year.

US-Russia nuclear deal expires today. What does it mean for the world?

The only remaining nuclear treaty between the US and Russia expires today. It effectively spells a death knell for nearly three decades of nuclear control cooperation. What was the treaty? Will it lead to a new nuclear arms race? We delve into these questions in this article and explain it in 900 words.

(Stafff reporter) The last nuclear arms control agreement between the US and Russia is set to expire on Thursday. So does the restraint on deployment of nuclear warheads, raising fears of an unbridled nuclear arms race between the two superpowers. What has triggered concerns is that both US President Donald Trump and Russian President Putin have been reluctant to extend the treaty amid tensions over the Ukraine war. It effectively spells a death knell for nearly three decades of arms control cooperation between the US and Russia that helped bring an end to the Cold War.

Now, why does this matter? The US and Russia possess 87% of the world's nuclear weapons. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as 'New START', which was renewed in 2010, not only placed limits on the nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia, but also included compliance and verification mechanisms.

WHAT IS THE US-RUSSIA NUCLEAR TREATY? Under it, both sides had to share information on the movement of strategic nuclear forces. On-site inspections of missiles at short notice were also part of the deal.The 'New START', signed by former US President Barack Obama and Russia's Dimitri Medvedev in 2010, crucially gave Moscow a roughly equal footing with the US as a nuclear superpower. The treaty, which was extended for five more years in 2021 by Joe Biden, capped nuclear warheads for both sides at 1,550.Its expiry has now raised the terrifying prospect of a world without nuclear limits. To put it simply, the US and Russia are now free to produce as many nuclear missiles as they want. Its expiry has now raised the terrifying prospect of a world without nuclear limits. To put it simply, the US and Russia are now free to produce as many nuclear missiles as they want.

WHAT HAVE TRUMP AND PUTIN SAID?

And both leaders have shown no desire to renew the deal. Trump has sounded less concerned, telling the NYT last month, "If it expires, it expires". In fact, the US President has been a vocal critic of international limits and last year ordered the military to resume testing of nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, Russia has declared it was no longer bound by limits on nuclear warheads, after an offer to Trump to extend the treaty by a year went unheeded. However, Putin, in a call with China's Xi Jinping on Wednesday, said Russia would "act in a measured manner and responsibly", AP reported.

Russia's Medvedev, who signed the treaty with Obama in 2010, warned of the danger of allowing the deal to lapse. "This immediately means a catastrophe and a nuclear war will begin... it should still alarm everyone," Medvedev told reporters in Moscow.

A key stumbling block has been a demand by the US to include China in any future arms control treaty. The US has been wary of China ramping up its nuclear arsenal. It also raises concern for India, which shares border disputes with China even though there has been a thaw in ties.

However, China's nuclear warheads, believed to be around 600, is 12% less than the size of the US arsenal.

Meanwhile, Russia has sought the inclusion of France and the UK - Europe's nuclear powers - in any future deal.

HOW HAS THE WORLD REACTED?

The development has rattled the United Nations, which has urged the US and Russia to quickly renew the deal. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in a statement, said the risk of a nuclear weapon being used was the highest in decades. "For the first time in more than half a century, we face a world without any binding limits on nuclear arsenals of two superpowers," he said.

The Pope also stressed that both sides should do "everything possible" to avert a fresh nuclear arms race. Now, you have understood the gravity of the matter. But the expiry of the US-Russia deal does not concern these nations only. It has implications for the world.

WILL IT START A NEW NUCLEAR ARMS RACE?

The immediate fallout could threaten the 1970 nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT), which is up for review later this year. In fact, the expiry of the US-Russia deal weakens the very foundation on which the NPT rests. Under the NPT, countries without nuclear weapons have pledged not to acquire them. In return, the nuclear countries promised to reduce and eventually do away with their arsenals. Now, if the US and Russia again start ramping up their nuclear weapons, non-nuclear countries can well accuse them of breaking their side of the deal. It will only spur a global nuclear arms race.In reality, both the US and Russia have already started modernising their nuclear forces. In fact, a new arms race is already underway.

Last year, Russia tested a nuclear-powered intercontinental super torpedo called Poseidon and Burevestnik, a nuclear-armed and powered cruise missile. Against this backdrop, Trump has intensified plans to build a "Golden Dome" to protect North America from long-range weapons.

In fact, he has pointed out that this threat from Russia is behind his Greenland takeover ambition. The 2025 Netflix thriller 'A House of Dynamite' depicts a crisis in the US where an unidentified ballistic missile is launched towards it. While the thriller was based on a hypothetical situation, no one knows what the future may hold amid a volatile global order and conflicts playing out across the world. In the future, the US and Russia may well sign a new nuclear weapons deal. But for the moment, the expiry of the treaty signals a more volatile and tense period.

US Navy F-35C Shoots Down Iranian Drone in Arabian Sea

(Stafff reporter) ARABIAN SEA — A US Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone on Tuesday after it aggressively approached the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72).

The engagement marks a significant escalation in regional tensions, occurring just hours before a separate confrontation involving Iranian fast-attack craft and a US-flagged merchant vessel.Details of the Engagement

US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that an F-35C Lightning II stealth fighter, launched from the Abraham Lincoln, intercepted and destroyed an Iranian Shahed-139 drone.

According to CENTCOM spokesman Capt. Tim Hawkins, the drone "unnecessarily maneuvered" toward the carrier strike group while it was operating in international waters, approximately 500 miles (800 km) from Iran's southern coast. Despite multiple de-escalatory measures taken by US forces, the drone continued its approach with "unclear intent," prompting the shootdown in self-defense.

No Injuries: No American personnel were harmed. No Damage: No US equipment or vessels sustained damage during the encounter.

Escalation in the Strait of Hormuz

The drone shootdown was not the only flashpoint on Tuesday. Only hours later, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces harassed the M/V Stena Imperative, a US-flagged and US-crewed merchant tanker.Reports indicate that two IRGC fast boats and an Iranian Mohajer drone approached the tanker at high speeds, threatening to board and seize the vessel.

How Rupert Murdoch created a media empire — and 'broke' his own family

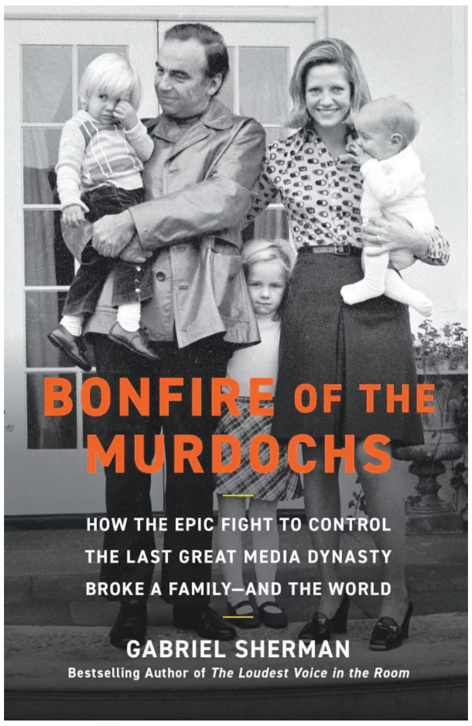
(Stafff reporter) Rupert Murdoch was just 21 years old in 1952 when he inherited his first newspaper. The News, an afternoon tabloid published in South Australia, had a modest circulation, but Murdoch, who turns 95 in March, used it as a springboard to create a vast conservative media empire that includes Fox News, the New York Post and The Wall Street Journal.

Murdoch has long seen his holdings as a family business, which he hoped to leave behind to his children. In recent years, however, a political rift within the family has pitted Murdoch's four eldest children — Lachlan, James, Elisabeth and Prudence — against each other, and inspired the HBO drama series Succession.

"Rupert Murdoch said that his dream was to build a family business. And what he built was a business that destroyed his family," journalist Gabriel Sherman says. Sherman has covered the Murdoch family for nearly two decades. In his new book, Bonfire of the Murdochs: How the Epic Fight to Control the Last Great Media Dynasty Broke a Family — and the World, he chronicles the protracted public battle for control the family business and how their news organizations have changed politics.In the book, Sherman details how Murdoch's son James in particular has become increasingly critical of company's conservative bent. But in September, after years of legal wrangling, James, Elisabeth and Prudence each reportedly agreed to accept $1.1 billion to relinquish their stake in the company — leaving Lachlan as heir to their father's throne. "I think [Rupert Murdoch] sees handing the empire to Lachlan as a triumph," Sherman says. "He has actually done what he set out to do was to pass the company to one of his children — at the cost of destroying the nuclear family in which they all grew up."Interview highlights

On the Murdoch children being taught about business at a young age

Going back to the beginning, he expected and wanted his children to be apprenticed in the business from the time that they were essentially old enough to read. There's an amazing anecdote in the books about how Rupert Murdoch, who traveled the globe buying media companies, expanding his empire, when he did come through New York, where he was raising his children, his second wife, Anna, would wake the children up at dawn, make them put on a blazer and a tie, and come to the breakfast table, where they would get a precious few moments with Rupert and discuss the news of the day or the latest deal machinations that he was doing. It was



basically a finishing school in the art of building a media business — and these were children 8, 9, 10, 12 years old, and Rupert never felt closer to his children than when he was discussing the business.The philosophy was that a newspaper is to be "made to pay." Sensationalism, news and scoops and gossip — all of it was a seductive package that Sir Keith expected and wanted Rupert to learn. And Rupert's media properties from the London Sun, to the New York Post, to even Fox News today, they all evince that same DNA of news as entertainment, news as profit. And that was the philosophy that Sir Keith had. One of his first major acquisitions in the United States was in San Antonio, Texas, of all places. There were two struggling newspapers in San Antonio that were put up for sale and Rupert thought that this could be kind of a laboratory for him to try out his sensationalist form of British tabloid journalism in America — and that's what he did. ... He used San Antonio as a way to show that he could increase his readership. He boosted the circulation of these papers through just sensational and outrageous stories that had headlines like, "headless corpse found in gutter." The only news value was to shock the readership, and if you look at Fox News and things he's done [subsequently], it's a through line that has gone throughout his entire career.He saw Watergate as evidence of what an out of control "liberal press" could do to a society. He told people that Watergate was kind of a run-of-the-mill political dirty trick. It was clumsy. Yes, it was unseemly, but it was in no way something that Nixon should have been forced out of office for. … Rupert has a philosophy that basically everyone's corrupt, everyone does it. So the fact that Nixon got caught doing it is bad but the Democrats were no better.

CHEAP EUROPEAN CITY BREAKS

The 10 most affordable destinations for 2024

(Stafff reporter) We love a quick city break (particularly if it's cheap too) you can log off on Friday, be in a new city by the evening, and spend the weekend experiencing a new culture, visiting historical sites, trying new food, and be back at your desk on Monday morning with no jet lag.

If you're on the hunt for a cheap city break in Europe, try these suggestions. The Post Office's city costs barometer - a tool that has determined the 10 best places to make your money go further - has compared the average cost of a two-night three star hotel room for two, the cost of a museum trip, art gallery visit, a heritage tourist attraction a cup of coffee, a glass of wine and the average cost of a meal for two, to work out the best value for money.

We don't need telling twice, here are the top 10 cheapest places to book for your upcoming European city break.

10. Warsaw, Poland

Total costs: £319.42

Currency: Polish zoty

Flight time from London: 2 hours 25 minutes

Kicking things off is Poland's capital city Warsaw which sits on the Vistula River and is packed with things to do for a short weekend break. The city is steeped in history and a walk through the cobbled streets of the Old Town (which was heavily destroyed in WWII) is a must do, as well as paying a visit to the various palaces and museums. Summer is often very busy for this city, so try a visit in spring or autumn to get the most out of it.

9. Prague, Czech Republic

Total costs: £318.43

Currency: Czech Koruna

Flight time from London: 1 hour 55 minutes

If you're into architecture, you need to head to Prague and explore the incredible churches, palaces and gardens that fill the city. And if that's not really your vibe Prague is still well worth a visit - it has some of the best beer, a beautiful river to stroll by on a summer's day and delicious cakes to samples in the city's many cafés.

8. Bratislava, Slovakia

Total costs: £315.57

Currency: Euros

Flight time from London: 2 hours 15 minutes

Tourist hotspots such as Prague and Budapest are rivalled by Slovakian capital Bratislava. History, culture and architecture combine in the old town, as well as the city's impressive castle and palaces. There's a buzzing nightlife and a range of huge clubs, with alcohol in the city being famously cheap. For nature, Bratislava hosts part of the Danube River, with nearby lowlands housing vineyards.

7. Budapest, Hungary

Total costs: £310.87

Currency: Hungarian Forint

Flight time from London: 2 hours 30 minutes

Most people will know a trip to Budapest isn't complete without a trip to the famous baths, but there's also so much more to this city. You'll need to do some sightseeing and take in the Buda Castle and the Fisherman's Bastion, as well as paying a visit to Hospital in the Rock. And then you need to take a trip to the Insta-famous bars and clubs that have popped up in buildings set up for demolition.

6. Riga, Latvia

Total costs: £297.20

Currency: Euros

Flight time from London: 2 hours 35 minutes

Looking for an alternative summer city break that won't break the bank and has both a beach and a city to explore? Then head to Riga, which is situated on the Black Sea. As well as plenty of museums and historical sites to explore, close to the city is the resort town of Jurmala which is full of beautiful beaches to spend a day on.

5. Athens, Greece

Total costs: £289.40

Currency: Euros

Flight time from London: 3 hours 40 minutes

When we think of Greece, it's often it's many idyllic islands and coastal resorts that come to mind, but it's capital city Athens is currently having a moment. As well as the obvious attractions such as the Parthenon and the Acropolis, there's also much to explore in Athens such as the open air cinemas, the beaches, farmers markets and a selection of cool boutique stores.

4. Krakow, Poland

Total costs: £278.87

Currency: Polish z?oty

Flight time from London: 2 hours 20 minutes

Krakow often appears on the list of affordable city breaks, and for good reason. The affordable city is packed with culture and historical sites to absorb. as well as a fun nightlife in the Kazimieriz neighbourhood, which is filled with galleries, street art and plenty of cocktail bars.

3. Lille, France

Total costs: £278.28

Currency: Euros

Train time from London: 1 hour 22 minutes

Bookmark this city break for December, as that's when Lille hosts its famous Christmas market. As the city is just a train ride away, it makes it an ideal location for a quick city break. As well as the Christmas market, there's plenty of shopping and sight seeing to do too.

2. Lisbon, Portugal

Total costs: £263.75

Currency: Euros

Flight time from London: 2 hours 45 minutes

If everyone on your TikTok FYP going to Lisbon isn't a sign to check out this Portuguese city, then it being one of the cheapest city breaks in Europe surely must be. There's a reason everyone is jetting off to Lisbon - the historical sites, the vintage shopping and of course the pastel de natas. Lisbon has a thriving food scene, with some incredible restaurants and fun bars and clubs for night outs. And if none of that sells it to you, how does taking a trip across the river while watching the sunset sound?

1. Vilnius, Lithuania

Total costs: £236.51

Currency: Euros

Flight time from London: 2 hours 40 minutes

And the title for the cheapest European city break goes to Lithuania's capital city Vilnius. It's a small city so you'll be able to see most of it in a weekend. If you're obsessed with history and architecture you'll be wanting to visit the city's old town which is a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most well preserved medieval cities in Europe. The old town is also great for boutique shopping and you'll also find some nice cocktail bars there too.

Musk's SpaceX and xAI merge to make world's most valuable private company

(Stafff reporter) Elon Musk's SpaceX is taking over his artificial intelligence (AI) start-up, as the billionaire continues to unify some of his many business interests.

SpaceX confirmed the deal to acquire xAI, a smaller firm known for its Grok chatbot, posting a memo from Musk about the merger on its website.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed. However, a source familiar said it valued xAI at $125bn (£91bn) and SpaceX at $1tn, making it the most valuable private company ever.

In his memo, Musk said the combination would form an "innovation engine" putting AI, rockets, space-based internet, and media under one roof. xAI began as a segment of X, formerly known as Twitter, after Musk acquired the social media platform in 2022, using its access to real-time text and information as AI training data.

By spring of 2025, it was independently incorporated and valued more highly by investors than X.

Its main product is Grok, which has come under scrutiny several times over its AI image generation feature.

In recent weeks, the European Commission and UK watchdog Ofcom both launched investigations into X over concerns Grok was used to create sexualised images.

xAI said in January it had imposed restrictions on Grok users that limit image editing.

Emma Wall, chief investment strategist at Hargreaves Lansdown, said Musk was the market leader in the "two incredibly frontier technologies" of AI and space exploration.

She said because the new merger is entirely private, it hasn't been tested by the market in the same way as Tesla, which is publicly listed.

"But what you're seeing priced in at these valuations is a kind of multi-decade vision for the company to put... energy and energy generation into space, data centres into space," she told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

However, Wall said any potential benefits would not be seen on earth for "10, 20, 30 years".

'Super company'

The huge merger comes after Musk's electric car company, Tesla, announced a $2bn investment in xAI last month.

Musk told Tesla investors that he envisioned xAI functioning as an "orchestra conductor" for Tesla factories employing autonomous robots. He also said it would stop manufacturing two car models in favour of producing robots - one of the most significant pivots the company has made. "It's those type of technologies that he'll be looking to leverage with this new kind of super company," Wall told the Today programme.Tesla moved forward with the xAI investment despite objections from some shareholders, who had questioned the decision to divert resources to another Musk firm. In a vote last year, abstentions and votes against the idea outnumbered those who approved.

SpaceX is also reported to be working on plans to list its shares for public trading.

Emily Zheng, a senior analyst at Pitchbook, said the deal for xAI has all the markings of a company preparing for a public listing.

"The sheer cost of compute, infrastructure, and energy is why we are seeing many of venture's most valuable startups like SpaceX prepare to go public this year," Zheng said.

"Consolidating these companies ahead of an IPO allows SpaceX to present a differentiated, capital-efficient growth narrative to public investors."

IPO stands for Initial Public Offering, and this is when a private company first sells its stock to the public on a stock exchange.

Nvidia's Bright Future: How AI and Gaming Demand Could Lead to Record-Breaking Fiscal 2027 Revenues

(Stafff reporter) Nvidia has a high chance of surpassing fiscal 2027 revenue estimates. This prediction stems from continuing increases in demand for Nvidia's products, particularly in sectors such as artificial intelligence and gaming. Analysts have noted that the growth trajectory for Nvidia has been robust, positioning the company well against its competitors. Market trends indicate that more businesses are looking to leverage GPUs for enhanced computing capabilities. Nvidia's advancements in technology are aligning closely with these trends, making its offerings more attractive to a wider audience. As companies increasingly adopt AI and machine learning technologies, the relevance of Nvidia's products becomes even more pronounced. In addition to artificial intelligence, Nvidia's gaming segment remains strong. With the consistent popularity of gaming, its graphics processing units continue to see significant demand. This dual strength in both gaming and AI applications suggests a solid foundation for Nvidia's future revenue growth. As fiscal 2027 approaches, investors are keeping a close eye on Nvidia's financial performance. The company's ability to innovate and evolve in response to market demands will be crucial in meeting and potentially exceeding revenue expectations. Analysts are optimistic about Nvidia's growth prospects, which could influence investor sentiment positively.Overall, the outlook for Nvidia appears promising, given the current trends in technology and consumer demand. If these patterns continue, Nvidia may not only meet but also exceed the anticipated fiscal 2027 revenue figures, reinforcing its position as a leader in the technology sector.

The Bitcoin Breakdown: Key Levels and "Whale" Support

(Stafff reporter) On Monday, February 2, 2026, the cryptocurrency market entered a period of intense volatility and structural reassessment.

The current downturn—now described by several analysts as a technical bear market—has seen Bitcoin (BTC) lose roughly 40% of its value since its October 2025 peak of $126,000.

The Bitcoin Breakdown: Key Levels and "Whale" Support Bitcoin is currently hovering at $76,827.62, struggling to maintain its footing after a "flash" slide toward $74,000 over the weekend.

This marks the fourth consecutive month of decline, the longest losing streak since the 2018 crash.

Critical Support: Analysts, including Samer Hasn from XS.com, have identified $72,000 as the primary line of defense. Hasn notes that "whales" (large-scale holders) are currently increasing their positions, serving as the "last line of defense."

If this level fails, the next major downside target is projected at $66,000. Institutional Outflows:

The decline is fueled by a consistent exodus from Bitcoin ETFs.

This reflects a shift in institutional sentiment following the nomination of Kevin Warsh as Federal Reserve Chair, which markets have interpreted as a "hawkish" signal less supportive of high-risk assets.

A Silent Epidemic: 25% of Americans Have Fatty Liver Disease

You don't have to drink too much alcohol to acquire the most common chronic liver disorder in the U.S.

(Stafff reporter) In fact, you don't have to drink any alcohol at all to develop nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). Experts estimate about 25 percent of all adults have the disease, which occurs when abnormal amounts of fat build up in the liver.

(For more about alcoholic fatty liver disease, which is caused by heavy alcohol use, visit here, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases [NIDDK].)

What concerns gastroenterologist Ashwani Sethi, M.D., is that most people don't even know they have NAFLD.

"Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease is often missed during routine medical screenings," says Dr. Sethi, who holds board certifications in gastroenterology and internal medicine and practices with Lee Physician Group.

"It's known as a silent liver disease because it can happen without causing symptoms (asymptomatic)," he says. "It's often found in patients during a routine screening for asymptomatic elevated liver enzymes or on abdominal imaging."

NAFLD is a rapidly growing cause of cirrhosis of the liver, especially when combined with alcohol. Dr. Sethi recommends Hepatitis A and B vaccinations in these people with NAFLD if they have not had them.

"For all these reasons, it's important to be aware of NAFLD so you can get screened for it by your healthcare provider," he advises.

What are the health risks of NAFLD?

People with NAFLD may develop liver complications or other health problems, Dr. Sethi notes. He adds that people with NAFLD also have a higher risk for certain health problems, including cardiovascular disease—the most common cause of death in people who have the disease.

"NAFLD is more common in people with certain diseases and conditions, especially people who are overweight or obese and who have type 2 diabetes or prediabetes," he says.

About 75 percent of people who are overweight and more than 90 percent of people with severe obesity may have NAFLD, reports the NIDDK.

What are the symptoms?

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease often has no symptoms, which makes it a sneaky, but lethal disease. If symptoms become obvious, they may include fatigue, weight loss, and discomfort in the upper right side of your abdomen. For a complete list of symptoms, visit the American Liver Foundation.

Can I prevent NAFLD?

Dr. Sethi calls NAFLD a "lifestyle-driven disease," meaning the best way to help reduce your risk of developing NAFLD or to treat it involves modifying your lifestyle—starting with weight loss.

"Weight loss is probably the most recommended approach for reducing fat, inflammation, and fibrosis—or scarring—in the liver," Dr. Sethi notes. "Losing at least 3 percent to 5 percent of your body weight can reduce fat in the liver. To reduce liver inflammation and fibrosis, you may need to lose 7 percent to 10 percent of your body weight, some studies suggest."

(Need help losing weight? Try a Lee Health board-certified obesity management doctor.)

Dr. Sethi adds you can also reduce your risk or prevent NAFLD by staying physically active, eating a healthy diet, limiting meal portions and alcohol intake, and keeping a healthy weight.

Nutritionally, an eating plan like the Mediterranean Diet—which is rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains—is excellent for reducing liver fat and inflammation, Dr. Sethi says.

(A Mediterranean style of eating benefits the heart, too. Learn more from Lee Health's cardiac care partner, Cleveland Clinic.) **Lee Community Healthcare Gastroenterology Services**

For uninsured and economically distressed residents in our community, Lee Community Healthcare clinics provide care. We provide access to specialty care at reduced rates as well as help with barriers to care.

Deadly "high risk" Nipah virus sparks global concern: 11 important symptoms to know about

(Stafff reporter) If you've seen headlines about Nipah virus (NiV) cases rising in India, you're not alone in wondering what it's all about – and whether it's something to be concerned about here in the UK. After all, following on from the Covid pandemic and a recent surge in Adenovirus cases, we're all more alert than ever when it comes to viruses.

The Nipah infection is rare, but it can be serious – and the World Health Organization considers it a "high risk" pathogen. Recent clusters in India's Kerala state have put it back in the spotlight, but what actually is the Nipah virus and is it something we need to worry about in the UK? We asked a doctor to explain what exactly it is, how it spreads, the symptoms to watch for and treatment options.

What is the Nipah (NiV) virus?

Nipah is a zoonotic virus, meaning it can spread from animals (notably bats and pigs) to humans.

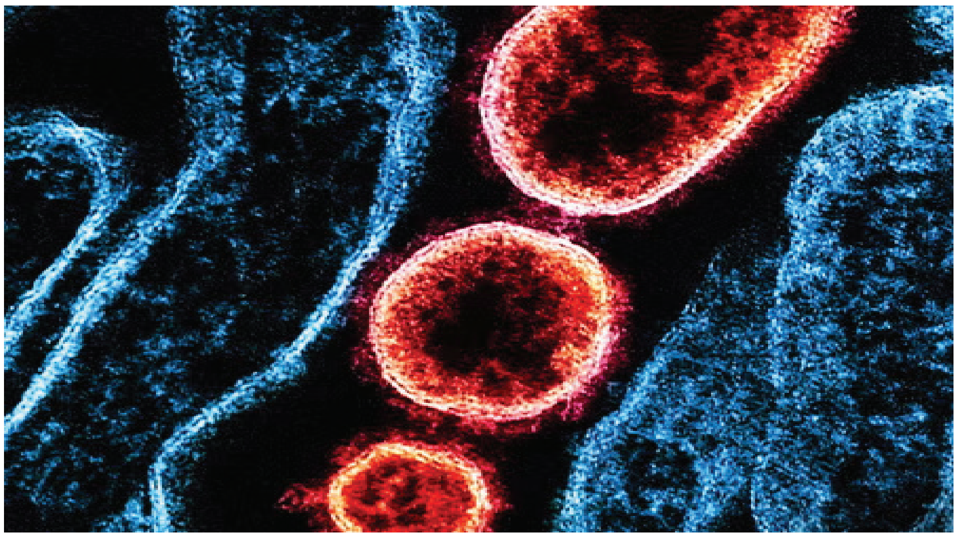
"It was first identified in Malaysia in 1999 after outbreaks in pig farmers and has since been responsible for occasional, localised outbreaks in parts of South and Southeast Asia, particularly in India and Bangladesh," explains Dr Suzanne Wylie, GP and medical adviser for IQdoctor. "These outbreaks are generally linked to close contact with infected animals, especially fruit bats (Pteropus species), or through person-to-person spread in healthcare or household settings."

The result can see illnesses range from mild or even symptom-free to severe respiratory disease and encephalitis (brain inflammation).

How common is Nipah?

"Nipah virus infections are very uncommon globally and have occurred only sporadically in specific regions over the past two decades. Even in areas where outbreaks have happened previously, the number of cases has tended to be small and contained quickly with appropriate public health measures," says Dr Wylie.

Earlier this month, almost 100 people were quarantined after five cases were confirmed in West Bengal, according to a report by The Independent.



Data from the World Health Organization states that Kerala has reported multiple outbreaks since 2018, and in 2025 there were four confirmed cases (two deaths) reported across two districts, including a district reporting its first known cases.

Globally, Nipah has caused only a limited number of known outbreaks, mainly in parts of South Asia, but it's closely watched because it can be severe and can spread person-to-person in certain circumstances. "Nipah virus infection can be very serious: past outbreaks have been associated with high mortality rates (40–75 %), though the exact risk varies by outbreak and healthcare setting," Dr Wylie continues. "Some survivors may experience long-term neurological effects after acute illness. "That said, these severe outcomes are seen in a small number of people overall, and aggressive public health control can limit spread rapidly."

A taste sensation": This crispy chilli oil will easily upgrade your every meal, and only costs £2.40

(Stafff reporter) Drizzled over fried eggs. Spooned on to instant noodles. Trickled around the rim of a spicy margarita. Crispy chilli oil – and Lao Gan Ma specifically – is quickly becoming the only way to upgrade any meal, and is about to be your new obsession (if it's not already). The sauce was created by Tao Huabi in 1980s Southwestern China, and it translates in English to 'Old Godmother'. The name is apt, considering a portrait of the short-haired woman behind the brand stares out at you from the glass jar, silently judging, as you dollop yet another spoonful of her recipe on to your plate. For the uninitiated, Lao Gan Ma is a chilli oil so rich it's almost black, crunchy with soybeans and tingly on your tongue. It's both comforting and punchy, a knockout flavour that's fiery yet sweet, all underpinned by the indulgence of the oil, which soothes your taste buds against the cut of heat. It's truly a sensation, stupendously addictive and can be added to basically anything. A versatile queen.

According to DELLI, an online food and drink marketplace, chilli oil sales have risen nearly 400% year-on-year, while 1.3m jars of Lao Gan Ma are produced daily. Meanwhile, Mintel, a global research firm, predicts umami flavours will be a prominent trend throughout 2026, with 'swicy' – yes, that's sweet and spicy – tastes becoming a new cupboard staple. Think: hot honey, or cocktails made with chilli.

Pink Lady cocktail

(Stafff reporter) Ingredients

90 ml
London dry gin
50 ml
fresh lemon juice
30 ml
cane sugar syrup
5 ml
grenadine
1
medium egg white
Ice
Cocktail cherries with stems, to garnishDirections

Step 1Put the gin, lemon juice, sugar syrup, grenadine and egg white into a cocktail shaker and 'dry shake' well (without ice). When frothy add a handful of ice and shake again until chilled.

Step 2Strain into two glasses and garnish each with a cocktail cherry.

How second-hand shopping became fashion's biggest flex — 5 tips to sustainably boost your wardrobe this year

(Stafff reporter) This year, I challenged myself to buy all my clothes second-hand. My New Year's resolution was influenced by the accelerating pace of fashion: new drops, new hypes, new seasons. The idea is so popular that it goes by many names, like the 'No New Clothes challenge' or 'No Buy January'. But two weeks in, I found that shopping second-hand isn't the challenge it used to be.

"The appetite for vintage and second-hand fashion has moved from the alternative to the mainstream," says Steve Dool, Senior Director, Brand & Creative at Depop. "It's increasingly becoming a first choice, not a fallback." On the red carpet, celebrities now opt for vintage instead of the latest collections. Kylie Jenner donned a glittery dress from Versace's 1996 Couture collection to the 2026 Critics' Choice Awards earlier this month. Steve is also seeing a rise in stylists who pull second-hand for shoots, as well as searches for vintage occasion-wear on Depop. 'Vintage dress,' for example, has risen 36% since last year, and 'Vintage bag' is up 41%.Physical vintage shopping is more attractive than ever, thanks to the boom in curated vintage stores like BROTHER LDN and CRABI in London, Nhogirl in Amsterdam and Neuzwei in Berlin. Unlike traditional consignment or thrift stores, these spaces have the slick, Instagrammable vibe of a showroom with an edited selection of designer goods, a strong social media presence and an owner with covetable taste. "Vintage shops have had a bit of an image problem over the last decade, [with] lots of bulk buying, and bales of graphic tees still smelling faintly of someone else's life," says Gabriela Crewe of CRABI. "I want to do the hard work for people. If I wouldn't want it in my own wardrobe, it doesn't make the cut [for the store]." I remember the days when second-hand was seen as a fashion faux pas. Gossip Girl's Jenny Humphrey covertly shopped pre-owned to afford the same designer labels as her peers, only to be shamed for wearing last season. But a few weeks ago, I proudly responded, "Thanks! They're second-hand," to someone complimenting my Pradas. Gabriela agrees. "The idea that wearing second-hand is embarrassing feels very outdated. If anything, it's become a badge of honour. There's nothing more satisfying than someone asking where your outfit is from, and you getting to casually say, 'It's vintage.'" Natasha Demetriou of BROTHER LDN also sees this shift: "The hype of having a new thing from the latest collection is very dated. Now it's all about finding scarce, unique products from past collections." Natasha's speciality is 'archival vintage', a term that recently entered the popular lexicon to differentiate musty hand-me-downs from second-hand status symbols. Kylie Jenner's Versace dress is a good example, as is the Tom Ford-era Yves Saint Laurent blouse in Natasha's shop. Both are designer pieces with historical significance, imbued with a certain IYKYK energy. It "takes a special resilience and eye," to know which vintage pieces are archive-worthy, says Natasha. Think of your everyday online shopping session, from the moment you get inspired by the influencer on your FYP to your order being delivered to your doorstep. The process only takes a few clicks. It's designed to give you a quick dopamine-boost and keep you on hype, but it makes it hard to build a wardrobe that really feels like you. So, it becomes a flex to show you have a distinct taste, that you can treasure-hunt and build a wardrobe you really care about.

Claudia Winkleman has nailed the faux fur coat look – 9 easy ways to replicate her stylish Traitors outfit

(Staff reporter) In case you missed it and you haven't yet checked out our guide to the biggest winter coat trends this season, faux fur coats *need* to be on your radar. It's basically the only silver lining to January weather, the fact that it's cold enough to wear your faux fur coat! There was no shortage of textured outerwear on the autumn/winter 2025 runways at the likes of Gucci, Elie Saab, Stella McCartney, Fendi, Altuzarra, Chloé, Gabriela Hearst and more, all showcasing fabulously fluffy creations.

While a faux fur coat is obviously associated with partywear – it can't be denied that they are the perfect finishing touch when slipped over the top of a sequin skirt or an off-the-shoulder mini – they also look great with jeans. Not to mention, this is also the easiest way to wear the trend. Just look to Claudia Winkleman (AKA our ultimate style inspo ATM, thanks to all her stunning 'fits on the latest season of The Traitors), who donned a seriously shaggy oversized faux fur coat in episode nine, first aired on Friday [16 January] night.With so many variations in faux fur coat designs and jeans silhouettes to choose from, we've rounded up a whole load of outfit inspiration to make channelling Claudia's style and recreating her ensemble with the perfect combo for you that much easier.Shaggy faux fur coat and flared jeans A shaggy faux fur coat is undoubtedly associated with '70s fashion thanks to the glam rock movement of the era. While Claudia styled hers with slim-fitting black trousers, we vote you lean into the hippie vibe with the decade's other sartorial signature: flared jeans. A pair of aviator frames and some platform boots complete the look.

Oversized longline faux fur coat and cigarette jeansLongline coats that practically touch the floor are a big 2025 winter coat trend, and there are plenty of floor-sweeping faux fur designs to tick off two trends in one. To pull off the style successfully, make sure to balance the volume of your coat with slim-fitting jeans like a cigarette silhouette.

Teddy faux fur coat and barrel leg jeansA teddy style of faux fur has a particular plushness that benefits from some shaping in the jeans you wear underneath. Wide-legs are too shapeless, while skinnies provide too severe a contrast.

Instead, opt for barrel leg jeans that sit somewhere in between, offering the best of both worlds with some volume in the balloon-like silhouette that then tapers at the ankle.

Collarless faux fur coat and wide-leg jeansThe absence of a collar immediately makes a faux fur coat feel more fitted, no matter how long it is or the style of fur – shaggy versus smooth versus teddy. This means you can wear your widest wide-leg jeans and not feel or look unbalanced.

Washington Post announces sweeping layoffs as it scales back news coverage

(Stafff reporter) The Washington Post has announced it is laying off one-third of its work force, sharply scaling back the paper's coverage of sports and foreign news.

The cuts, announced on Wednesday, will impact employees across departments with roles in the newsroom's sports, local and foreign sections hit particularly hard.

It marks the latest upheaval for the leading US newspaper, which is owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.

Executive editor Matt Murray said the cuts would bring "stability". But the announcement was met with condemnation from the paper's employees and some former leaders, one of whom described it as among the "darkest days in the history of" the storied newspaper.

"Today's news is painful. These are difficult actions," Murray wrote in a note to staff on Wednesday. "If we are to thrive, not just endure, we must reinvent our journalism and our business model with renewed ambition."

In his explanation of the cuts, Murray said that the paper's online traffic had plummeted in the last three years amid the artificial intelligence boom, and that it was "too rooted in a different era". "Even as we produce much excellent work, we too often write from one perspective, for one slice of the audience," he said. Ahead of the announcement, foreign correspondents and local reporters had pleaded with Bezos to preserve their jobs. "Continuing to eliminate workers only stands to weaken the newspaper, drive away readers and undercut The Post's mission," the Washington Post Guild said in a statement on Wednesday. Laid off journalists took to social media, with many voicing anger about the decision to scale back coverage of foreign news. The paper's former Cairo bureau chief said she was laid off alongside the "entire roster" of Middle East correspondents and editors. A correspondent based in Ukraine lamented losing her job "in the middle of a warzone". Another reporter said most of the paper's metro section, which is focused on news in the Washington DC region, had also been laid off.

Marty Baron, who served as The Post's editor until 2021, called it "among the darkest days in the history of one of the world's greatest news organizations".

He said Bezos, who bought the newspaper for $250mn in 2013, had spoken "forcefully and eloquently of a free press" during his tenure as the paper's editor, which encompassed President Donald Trump's first term in the White House. But, Baron added: "I wish I detected the same spirit today. There is no sign of it." spokesperson for The Post said in a statement that the steps were "designed to strengthen our footing and sharpen our focus".

The layoffs mark the latest in a series of staff cuts and buyouts across The Post's departments in recent years, amid backlash to some of the paper's editorial decisions.

The newspaper swiftly lost tens of thousands of subscribers after it announced, shortly before the 2024 US presidential election, that it would not endorse a presidential candidate - a decision made by billionaire owner Bezos.

The move broke with decades of tradition, with the paper having endorsed a candidate in most presidential elections since the 1970s - all of whom had been Democrats.

Bezos' move last year to focus the paper's opinion section on "personal liberties and free markets" prompted the editor of that section to resign.

The Post's financial woes and falling subscriber base stand in contrast to The New York Times, which reported on Wednesday that it added about 450,000 digital-only subscribers in the last quarter of 2025.

Oracle may slash up to 30,000 jobs to fund AI data-center expansion as US banks retreat

(Stafff reporter) Oracle is considering cutting 20,000 to 30,000 jobs and selling some of its activities as US banks pull back from financing the company's AI data-center expansion, according to investment bank TD Cowen.

The job cuts would free up $8 billion to $10 billion in cash flow, TD Cowen said in a research report seen by CIO. Oracle is also weighing a sale of its health-care software unit, Cerner, which it acquired for $28.3 billion in 2022.

The measures come as multiple US banks have pulled back from Oracle-linked data-center project lending. "Both equity and debt investors have raised questions regarding Oracle's ability to finance this buildout," the report said.

The financing challenge stems from the scale of Oracle's infrastructure commitments, amounting to $156 billion in required capital expenditure, TD Cowen estimated.

Oracle did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Borrowing costs are up

The banking retreat has driven up Oracle's borrowing costs sharply. Lenders have roughly doubled the interest rate premiums they charge Oracle for data-center project financing since September, TD Cowen said, pushing borrowing costs to levels typically reserved for non-investment grade companies.

The higher costs have stalled deals. "Multiple Oracle data-center leases that were under negotiation with private operators struggled to secure financing, in turn preventing Oracle from securing the data-center capacity via a lease," the report said. Without financing, private data-center operators can't build the facilities Oracle needs, creating a bottleneck in the company's infrastructure rollout.

Oracle has already tapped debt markets heavily, raising approximately $58 billion in just two months: $38 billion for facilities in Texas and Wisconsin, and $20 billion for New Mexico. But that represents only a fraction of what the company ultimately needs, and US banks are increasingly reluctant to provide more.

Asian banks have stepped in where US lenders are retreating, remaining willing to lend at premium rates as they seek exposure to AI infrastructure growth. That provides Oracle an alternative path for international expansion but doesn't solve the company's US capacity challenges.

TD Cowen added that the US financing constraints raise fundamental questions about whether Oracle can grow revenue if it cannot secure the data-center capacity its customers are expecting.

Scrambling for solutions

Faced with these constraints, Oracle is pursuing multiple strategies to reduce its capital needs. The company has begun requiring 40% upfront deposits from new customers, TD Cowen said, effectively asking clients to help fund the infrastructure buildout. It's also exploring "bring your own chip" (BYOC) arrangements where customers would supply their own hardware, shifting capital requirements off Oracle's books.TD Cowen said some combination of BYOC and workforce reductions represent the most likely path forward, since BYOC would directly address the capital expenditure challenge while job cuts would improve cash flow. But both options carry risks. BYOC could require renegotiating existing contracts that assume Oracle provides the hardware, while major layoffs could affect the company's ability to execute its infrastructure plans.

The potential workforce reduction would be Oracle's largest in recent years. The company cut an estimated 10,000 jobs in late 2025 as part of a $1.6 billion restructuring plan. Oracle has also repeatedly reduced headcount at Cerner since acquiring the healthcare technology company, including layoffs in 2023 following problems with a Veterans Affairs contract.

Shanaya Kapoor opens up on mixed reception to her debut film: You can't let hope die

(Stafff reporter) Shanaya Kapoor has spoken candidly about navigating the mixed response to her debut film Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan, choosing to focus on the emotional significance of seeing herself on the big screen rather than being weighed down by verdicts.

In an exclusive chat with India Today, the actor said the release of her first film marked a deeply personal milestone. “For me, it was a big moment to see myself on the big screen for the first time. I was really soaking that in and focusing on the fact that it had finally happened. I was sitting in the theatre, watching myself on the big screen, and it was crazy what was going on,” she shared.Describing a debut as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, Shanaya added that she wanted to hold on to that feeling. “I didn’t want to let go of that moment because it’s a very special moment, especially for an actor with their first film. It’s like your journey has started, it’s like your baby.”While she acknowledged that box-office numbers and audience turnout matter to her, Shanaya said she consciously chose not to let the outcome affect her emotionally. “I want the audience’s love, their acceptance. I want the theatres to be full. I don’t want empty spaces in theatres for my films; that is the dream,” she said.When that didn’t entirely materialise with her debut, Shanaya explained that she stayed grounded by keeping her focus on the larger picture. “When it didn’t happen, especially because it was my first film, and it took time for the movie to come out, I was still focusing on that moment. I was just blown away,” she said, adding that the appreciation she received from viewers helped her move forward. “The people who did watch the film – that love really gave me a lot of motivation.”At the time of the film’s release, Shanaya was already immersed in her next project. “I was shooting for Tu Yaa Main at the time, so I didn’t take it too much to heart. I wanted to focus on this and give it everything I had,” she said. Asked whether the experience has changed the way she approaches scripts and career decisions, Shanaya was clear that it has not. “No, I don’t think it has altered the way I choose films,” she said. “When I read AKG, I felt connected to it instantly. It was an instinct, a feeling my heart had with the script. When I hear a narration or read a script, I ask myself, am I feeling connected? Is this my real gut instinct? I always want to go with that. I don’t want that to change.” Summing up her outlook going forward, the actor emphasised resilience and hope. “You have to keep hoping, you can’t let that hope die,” she said. “I want to keep taking risks, having fun, and exploring. I always want to try new things and take that risk.”

Shanaya Kapoor will next be seen in Tu Yaa Main, co-starring Adarsh Gourav. The film is slated for release on February 13.

Why Manoj Bajpayee's Ghooskhor Pandat has landed in controversy

(Staff reporter) Ghooskhor Pandat, an upcoming Netflix thriller, starring Manoj Bajpayee, is embroiled in a controversy. The show was announced, and its teaser unveiled at an event in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Bajpayee plays Ajay Dikshit, a corrupt and morally compromised police officer in the film, who goes by the nickname Pandat. Set over the course of a single night, the story begins when Dikshit comes across a severely injured girl thrown out of a moving car, an encounter that pulls him into a larger conspiracy.The film is directed by Ritesh Shah and co-written by Shah and Neeraj Pandey. It also features Nushrat Bharuccha and Saqib Saleem in important roles.What sparked the controversy around Ghooskhor Pandat?

The trouble started soon after the teaser of Ghooskhor Pandat was unveiled at the 'Next on Netflix' event. A Mumbai-based lawyer, Ashutosh Dubey, sent a legal notice to Netflix and the makers of the film, objecting to the title.So, what is the main issue? The use of the word Pandat (priest, religious scholar) in combination with ghooskhor (a term commonly used to refer to those who accept bribes). The notice claims this pairing is defamatory and amounts to an attack on the dignity of the 'pandit community'.Why is the use of the word ‘Pandat’ being questioned? According to Dubey's legal notice, the term Pandit (from which Pandat is derived) has deep roots in Indian civilisation and is traditionally linked to scholarship, spiritual authority, ethics and social respect. According to the notice, the title Ghooskhor Pandat is “per se offensive” and objectionable because it pairs a word commonly linked to bribery and corruption with Pandit, which Dubey describes as a historically respected cultural, religious and intellectual identity. The notice argues that using the term in this way unfairly attaches 'criminality and moral depravity" to an identifiable community. The notice also emphasised that corruption is an individual moral failing and should not be projected as a community trait.

What does the legal notice demand?

The notice demands the immediate withdrawal of the title Ghooskhor Pandat, calling it defamatory, unconstitutional and socially incendiary.

Alia Bhatt, Sharvari's Alpha to have a theatrical release: Source

(Stafff reporter) Putting an end to speculation around its release strategy, Alpha, starring Alia Bhatt, will hit theatres in April. Contrary to reports suggesting a direct-to-digital release, the spy thriller will arrive in cinemas, industry sources have clarified, with the makers currently wrapping up the final leg of the shoot.

Sources close to the film clarified that Alpha is very much a theatrical film and that its shoot is progressing as planned, with work nearing completion. The confirmation comes amid heightened buzz around the film, which marks a first for YRF's popular spy universe.

Directed as a high-octane action entertainer, Alpha is the first female-led spy thriller from the YRF stable. Alongside Alia

Aashiqon Ki Colony, the latest song from O'Romeo, features Shahid Kapoor and Disha Patani in a high-energy dance number. Composed by Vishal Bhardwaj with lyrics by Gulzar, the track combines seduction, rhythm and sharp choreography.

Bhatt, the film features Bobby Deol and Sharvari Wagh in key roles.

Originally slated for an August release, Alpha was earlier eyeing a Christmas 2025 window before the makers decided to push the release date. The delay, Yash Raj Films said, was prompted by the need to give the film's visual effects adequate time. "The VFX of Alpha needs more time to present the film in its visually best shape to audiences," the production house said in a statement, underlining its commitment to delivering a big-screen spectacle. Rumours of Alpha heading straight to OTT gained traction in recent weeks, particularly as anticipation around the film continued to grow. However, those associated with the project stressed that the film was always designed for a cinema-first experience and will release theatrically as planned.

Speaking about the film at the Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah last year, Alia Bhatt highlighted the significance of Alpha within the spy universe.

Dhurandhar The Revenge: Ranveer Singh's 1st look poster promises a blood riot

(Stafff reporter) Ranveer Singh introduced fans to the upcoming sequel of his hit action-thriller on Tuesday, sharing the first poster and confirming the title as Dhurandhar: The Revenge. The grand news arrived a few hours before the film's teaser release. The sequel, directed by Aditya Dhar, is slated for a theatrical debut on March 19 and aims to continue the franchise's intense narrative.

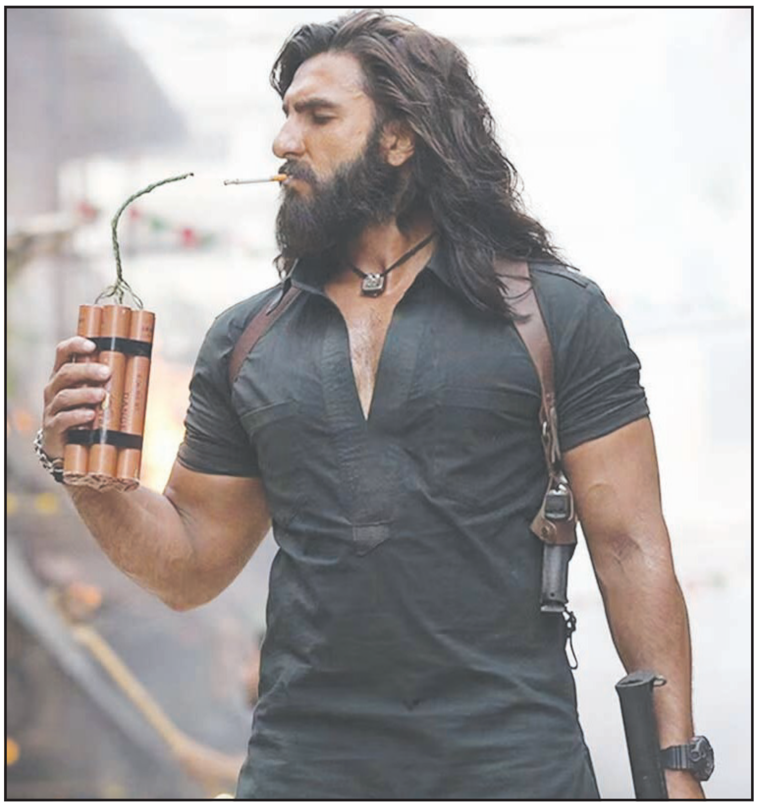
The newly shared poster captures Ranveer Singh in a dramatically different look from the previous film. Standing front and center in a black trench coat with his hair loose and a vivid red background, Singh's appearance signals a more intense and fierce storyline.

The visual hints at higher stakes and a darker tone for the second installment. The film's teaser will release today at 12:12 pm. Accompanying the poster, Singh wrote, "Ab Bigadne Ka Waqt Aa Gaya Hai." The statement was included in the caption of his social media post, adding to the anticipation for the film's teaser, which is confirmed to be released at 12:12 pm on Tuesday, February 3.

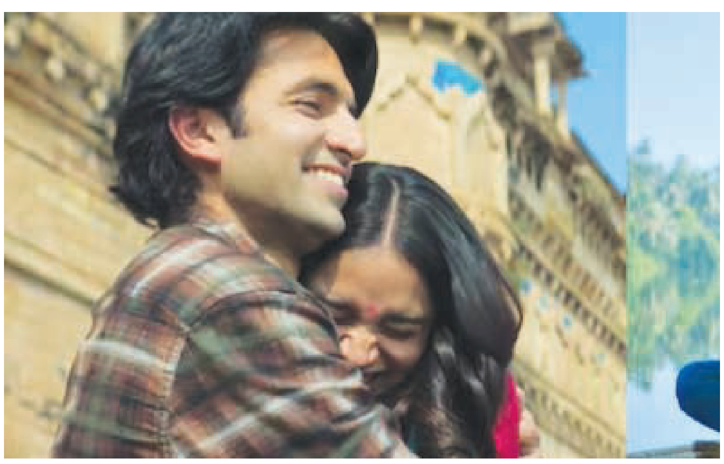
Following the success of the first film, audiences have shown strong interest in the sequel. According to available information, Dhurandhar: The Revenge has received an A (Adults Only) certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) for its teaser, which runs for 1 minute and 48 seconds. The teaser is expected to maintain the franchise's reputation for gritty, action-packed storytelling.

Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar 2 is also set for a major box office clash with Yash's much-anticipated Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups. Adding to the competition, Adivi Sesh and Mrunal Thakur's Dacoit is slated to release on the same day as well.

The team behind the film has maintained secrecy regarding the plot, but hints point to a significant evolution in Ranveer Singh's character. The sequel is expected to explore new adversaries and expand on the themes that made the original a commercial success. Unlike its first part, the sequel will release in six language.



The Kerala Story 2 song Saathi Re: Soulful track talks of love turned into betrayal



(Stafff reporter) The first song from The Kerala Story 2 – Goes Beyond, titled Saathi Re, has released. With the song, listeners get an early sense of the film's direction.

The song foregrounds the emotional trajectories of key female leads. It highlights their personal investment in love, acts of sacrifice, and the eventual shift into betrayal.

aathi Re follows three central women—Ulka Gupta, Aishwarya Ojha, and Aditi Bhatia. Each character steps into a new relationship, leaving behind her past, with significant consequences.

Opposite them, three male roles emerge: Sumit Gahlawat with Ulka Gupta, Arjan Aujla alongside Aishwarya Ojha, and Yuktam Khosla paired with Aditi Bhatia. These partnerships set the stage for the film's central conflict.

Music, lyrics, and tone

Vishal Mishra sings Saathi Re, with lyricist Manoj Muntashir and composer Mannan Shaah shaping the track.

The song establishes a sombre mood, emphasising each character's challenges as they encounter love and loss. Both the score and the lyrics hint at core themes intended to connect with the audience.