

The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

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Bharat's Cleanliness Crusaders: Beyond the Viral Hashtag

Redefining Civic Sense: How India's 'Cleanfluencers' are Turning Digital Outrage into Ground-Level Revolution



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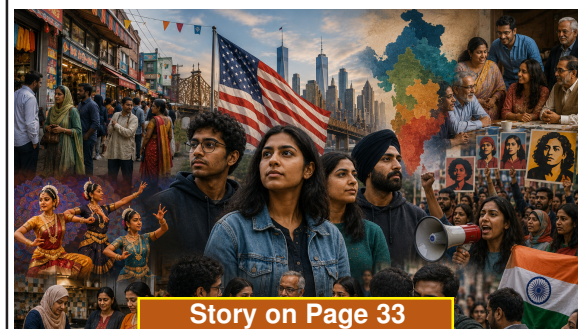
(TSAI Bureau) For decades, the Indian landscape has been a study in contradictions. While private homes are often kept meticulously clean, the public sphere—the "common ground"—frequently succumbs to neglect, litter, and systemic apathy. However, a new cultural phenomenon is sweeping across the country's digital and physical topographies. Known as "Cleanfluencers," a new breed of content creators is moving beyond the aesthetic "lifestyle" content of Instagram and YouTube to tackle one

of India's most persistent challenges: the waste crisis and a lack of civic ownership. This movement arrives at a critical juncture. India generates approximately 62 million tonnes of municipal solid waste annually, with only about 70% collected and a mere 25% treated. While government initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) have provided the infrastructure and the policy push, the missing link has always been the behavioral shift. Cleanfluencers are proving to be that missing link, transform-

ing the act of picking up trash from a "low-status" chore into a badge of digital and social honor.

The Great Divide: Digital Outrage vs. Physical Inertia The Indian internet is no stranger to outrage. A viral video of a luxury car passenger tossing a plastic bottle out of a window can garner millions of views and thousands of vitriolic comments. Yet, this "keyboard activism" rarely translates into a collective movement to clean the street where the bottle landed.

Who Is a South Asian American? The Fractures and Solidarities the Trump Era Is Forcing Into the Open



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State of Nation

The Unwinding of the American-Led World Order



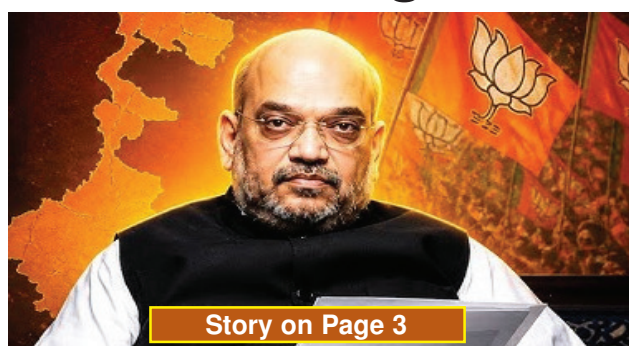
Is this a temporary disruption or a permanent realignment?

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The Rise of Cleanfluencers in India



(TSAI Bureau) Social scientists refer to this as the "Bystander Effect" amplified by digital platforms—everyone believes someone else (usually the government) should fix the problem. The Gap: While 85% of urban Indians express concern about littering in online surveys, less than 15% report having participated in a community clean-up drive in the last year. Cleanfluencers aim to close this 70% "action gap."

Cleanfluencers are disrupting this inertia by weaponizing the very tools that usually distract us: short-form video, trending audio, and "gamification." By filming themselves physically picking up garbage, sorting plastic, and restoring public spaces, they are providing a visual proof-of-concept that individual action is not only possible but aspirational.

The Pioneers: Changing the Visual Narrative

The movement isn't just about cleaning; it's about storytelling. Creators like Pradeep Sangwan (Healing Himalayas) and Anirudh Dutt (The Green Miles) have built massive followings by documenting the grueling reality of waste in India's most pristine locations—from the high-altitude trails of the Himalayas to the bustling streets of Delhi. These creators use a

"Before vs. After" format that provides instant gratification to the viewer. Watching a black, sludge-filled drain or a mountain of plastic wrappers transform into a clean, green space in 60 seconds triggers a psychological reward mechanism. It makes the impossible seem manageable. They aren't just influencers; they are "civic educators" who teach their audience about waste segregation, the circular economy, and the true cost of convenience.

Case Study: Plogging in India. Ripu Daman Bevli, known as the 'Plogman of India,' pioneered the concept of picking up litter while jogging. By branding it as a fitness activity, he removed the social stigma associated with handling waste, making it a "cool" and "healthy" lifestyle choice for the youth. The 'Dignity of Labor' Revolution Perhaps the most significant impact of cleanfluencers is the reclamation of the dignity of labor. In the Indian social context, waste management has historically been associated with specific marginalized communities. This deep-seated caste-based bias has contributed to a culture where "cleaning up" is viewed as someone else's job.

Cleanfluencers, often coming from privileged or

middle-class backgrounds, are using their platforms to break these taboos. When a creator with a million followers picks up a discarded cigarette butt or a mud-caked plastic bag, they are performing a radical act of social leveling. They are communicating that the environment is a shared responsibility, and no hands are "too clean" to protect it. This shift is crucial for fostering a genuine sense of civic ownership among the Gen Z and Millennial cohorts.

From Viral Content to Community Mobilization

The true measure of a cleanfluencer's success is not likes, but "boots on the ground." Many creators have transitioned from solo acts to organizing massive volunteer drives. They use Instagram Stories to drop "cleanup coordinates," inviting followers to meet at a specific beach, park, or street corner. The results are staggering. Events that once struggled to attract five volunteers now see hundreds of young people showing up with gloves and trash bags. This is the "Influencer Effect" at its best: turning followers into citizens. These events serve as "civic boot camps," where participants experience the visceral reality of India's waste problem, making them far

less likely to litter in the future.

The Role of Technology and Brand Partnerships

The rise of cleanfluencers has also caught the eye of corporate India. Under Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) mandates, brands are eager to partner with creators who have "authentic" environmental impact rather than those who just post "greenwashed" sponsored content. These partnerships provide the necessary funding for equipment, waste transport, and professional processing of the collected trash. Furthermore, technology is being integrated into the movement. Creators are using apps to map "black spots" (illegal dumping grounds) and tracking the "chain of custody" for the waste they collect, ensuring it reaches recycling centers rather than just another landfill. This transparency builds trust with their audience, proving that their efforts aren't just for the cameras.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite the momentum, the movement faces significant hurdles. The sheer scale of India's waste generation can lead to "compassion fatigue" among creators and their audiences. There is also the risk of "performative

cleaning," where spaces are cleaned for a video but neglected immediately after the cameras stop rolling. To sustain this rise, cleanfluencers must move toward systemic advocacy. Cleaning a beach is a noble act, but advocating for better municipal waste collection and stricter plastic bans is what creates long-term change. The next evolution of the cleanfluencer will be the "Policy-fluencer"—using their massive reach to hold local authorities accountable and demand better infrastructure.

Conclusion: A New Definition of Patriotism

In the past, patriotism in India was often defined by grand gestures or nationalistic rhetoric. Cleanfluencers are redefining it as a quiet, consistent commitment to one's immediate surroundings. They are teaching a generation that loving one's country is inseparable from keeping it clean. By bridging the gap between digital outrage and real-world action, these creators are doing more than just picking up garbage; they are scrubbing away decades of civic apathy. They are proving that while a viral video can start a conversation, it is the simple, humble act of bending down to pick up a piece of trash that actually changes the world. The rise of the cleanfluencer isn't just a digital trend—it is the beginning of a new civic consciousness for India.

500k+

Kgs of waste removed by creator-led drives in 2023

65%

Volunteer retention rate for monthly clean-up events

1:10

Ratio of digital views to physical volunteer minutes

Amit Shah And The 5 Architects Of BJP's Historic Bengal Win

(TSAI Bureau) New Delhi: Behind the BJP's historic victory in the West Bengal assembly election lies the astute strategy and vast experience of the party's 'Chanakya' - Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is also the architect of numerous historic triumphs. He had camped in Bengal for 14 days, coordinated party operations and issued directions. To translate strategy into action on the ground, he held continuous organisational meetings with party leaders late into the night to provide guidance, and spent his days at rallies and roadshows - at least 50 of them across Bengal.

During this period, Shah made significant announcements including implementation of the 7th Pay Commission for government employees if BJP came to power, and a pledge to deal strictly with "goons and infiltrators".

Following the first phase of voting, Shah pointed out the BJP had already secured over 110 seats in that phase, paving the way for more success in the second phase. This gave confidence to the public on the BJP's impending victory, particularly during the second phase, which was earlier seen as a difficult chal-



lenge for the party. Consequently, the BJP succeeded in breaching Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's fortress.

The strategic roles played by five central leaders alongside Shah added to the BJP's win in Bengal. From organisational matters to social media management, they worked seamlessly as a cohesive team. They are:

Dharmendra Pradhan

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan served as the chief strategist for the entire election campaign. He worked to make

coordination smooth between communities and across social stratas. His role primarily was to act as a bridge between the central leadership and the state unit, ensuring efficient management of resources and visits by the central leadership.

Bhupender Yadav

A master of organisational skills, Union Minister Bhupender Yadav focused on micro-management and played a big role in mobilising party workers down to the booth level. He navigated the complex legal intricacies of the electoral

process. His extensive experience in Bihar and other states proved invaluable within the challenging electoral landscape of Bengal.

Sunil Bansal

BJP national general secretary Sunil Bansal had previously steered the BJP to unprecedented heights in Uttar Pradesh. In Bengal, he built a formidable army of 'panna pramukhs' (booth-level coordinators) at the grassroots level. His primary focus was on building a strong and disciplined organisational struc-

ture for the BJP to counter the Trinamool's cadre-based system.

Biplab Deb

Former Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Deb has firsthand experience in fighting against and ultimately dislodging the Left in his state. In Bengal, he worked specifically in regions where the culture and language bore a close resemblance to those of Tripura. He played a pivotal role in galvanising local party workers and fostering an aggressive style of campaigning.

Amit Malviya

BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya spearheaded the battle of narratives on the digital front. His role was decisive in leveraging social media to inform in-depth and with care and sensitivity to the people key incidents ranging from Sandeshkhali to the RG Kar Medical College case. This created an anti-government sentiment against the ruling Trinamool. He launched a strong counter-challenge to the Trinamool's propaganda machinery through digital channels. Overall, it's the collective efforts of these leaders that enabled the BJP to achieve this level of success in the formidable stronghold of Bengal.

Howard Lutnick testifies he can't recall why his family lunched on Epstein's island

Howard Lutnick told a congressional panel he could not recall why his family had lunch with Jeffrey Epstein on the financier's private island in 2012. The testimony sharpened questions over his earlier account of cutting ties with Epstein years before.

(TSAI Bureau) US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told members of a congressional committee in private testimony on Wednesday that he couldn't recall why he and his family had lunch on Jeffrey Epstein's private island, members said.

Lutnick, the former chief executive of Cantor Fitzgerald, had lunch with the convicted sex offender for two hours on the island in 2012, contradicting a past public statement about cutting ties with Epstein years earlier. In a podcast last year, Lutnick said he vowed to "never be in a room" with Epstein after the financier invited Lutnick and his wife around 2005 to tour his townhome where Epstein made a sexually suggestive

comment about a massage table he had set up. Lutnick and Epstein were next-door neighbours on Manhattan's Upper East Side. "We asked him over and over again, 'Why did you go to the island?'" said Representative Suhas Subramanyam, a Virginia Democrat. "He says he doesn't remember, that it's inexplicable, and he simply didn't know how to answer the question."

Representative James Comer, the Kentucky Republican who chairs the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, said Lutnick was transparent in his voluntary testimony. Comer said Lutnick told the panel Epstein found out his family and friends were vacationing in the

Virgin Islands and invited them all to lunch. The only thing that I'd seen that Lutnick did wrong was [he] wasn't 100% truthful on the brief visit to the island with his family. He corrected that in his opening statement," Comer told reporters. "If we find that there were any misstatements by Lutnick, it's a felony to lie to Congress, and he'll be held accountable."

A massive batch of files released by the Justice Department in January included emails showing Lutnick had apparently visited Epstein's private island for lunch in 2012. The emails also showed Lutnick invited Epstein to a November 2015 fundraiser at his financial firm for Democratic presi-

dential candidate Hillary Clinton. Lutnick told lawmakers at a February 10 hearing that he and Epstein had only exchanged about 10 emails and met three times over 14 years. His family had lunch with Epstein on the island, Lutnick said, because they were on a boat nearby. "I did not have any relationship with him," Lutnick said of Epstein at the time. "I barely had anything to do with that person." Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to state prostitution charges, including soliciting an underage girl. He was sentenced to 13 months in jail and arrested again in 2019 on federal charges of sex trafficking of minors. His death that year in a Manhattan jail cell was ruled a suicide.

OPERATION SINDOOR

One Year Later

Did India's New Doctrine Make the Subcontinent Safer?

(TSAI Bureau) On the night of May 6-7, 2025, India launched what would become the most consequential military operation in South Asia since the 1971 war. Codenamed Operation Sindoor - a deliberate invocation of the vermilion worn by married Hindu women, a tribute to the wives widowed in the Pahalgam massacre - Indian Rafale jets armed with SCALP cruise missiles and HAMMER precision bombs crossed into Pakistani airspace in a 25-minute blitz targeting nine sites linked to the militant groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The operation responded to the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, Indian-administered Kashmir, in which gunmen selected their victims by religion before executing 26 civilians, most of them tourists, in cold blood. By the time Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations called his Indian counterpart on May 10, requesting an end to hostilities, the world had watched, in real time, the most extensive exchange of drones, missiles, and artillery between two nuclear-armed states in the history of warfare. Eighty-eight hours of conflict. Ceasefire. And a changed subcontinent.

For the millions of South Asian Americans - Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali - who watched from their apartments and living rooms across New York, New Jersey, and beyond, the days of Operation Sindoor were not a distant geopolitical event.

They were a crisis call. Phones lit up from Mumbai, Lahore, and Dhaka. Group chats exploded. Families refreshed news feeds through the night. The diaspora has always been the human bridge across the India-Pakistan divide; in May 2025, it felt that bridge might burn.

Now, a year on, the Indian government is marking the anniversary not with quiet reflection but with triumphant reaffirmation. On the first anniversary of the Pahalgam attack, the Indian Army posted on X that 'Operation Sindoor continues,' a signal that New Delhi views the new doctrine not as an episode concluded

but as a permanent posture adopted. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in multiple addresses following the ceasefire, laid out three pillars of this doctrine with unusual clarity: any future terror attack on Indian soil will be treated as an act of war; India will no longer be deterred by nuclear blackmail; and New Delhi will no longer distinguish between terrorist groups and the state that harbors them. These are not talking points. They are doctrinal declarations, and they deserve serious scrutiny from those of us whose families live under them.

WHAT INDIA ACHIEVED - AND WHAT IT CLAIMS

Let us first take the Indian government's case on its own terms, because it is a serious one. For three decades, Pakistan operated a strategy that analysts euphemistically call 'strategic depth through proxy warfare' and that its victims call state-sponsored terrorism. Groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed - both designated terrorist organizations by the United Nations - were allowed to recruit, train, and operate from Pakistani soil with varying degrees of ISI coordination. India's repeated responses - diplomatic protests, targeted sanctions, the 2016 'surgical strikes' at launch pads across the Line of Control, the 2019 Balakot airstrike - were calibrated to signal resolve without triggering full escalation. Pakistan's strategy was to absorb these signals, deny involvement, and wait out Indian public pressure under the protection of its nuclear umbrella.

Operation Sindoor was different in kind, not just in degree. For the first time since 1971, Indian strikes penetrated deep into Pakistan's Punjab province - not just across the Line of Control into Pakistan-administered Kashmir - hitting the headquarters of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Muridke and Jaish-e-Mohammed in Bahawalpur, facilities that had existed for decades in plain sight. The Indian Air Force deployed electronic warfare systems that successfully jammed Pakistan's Chinese-supplied air defense grid. The Navy simultaneously

A year after four days of missile strikes, drone battles, and nuclear brinkmanship reshaped South Asia, the question that haunts every South Asian American household is the one New Delhi refuses to answer.

locked down the North Arabian Sea, preventing any Pakistani maritime maneuver. Tri-service coordination - Army, Navy, Air Force acting in simultaneous, integrated fashion - was demonstrated publicly for the first time. Over 100 militants, including senior handlers and trainers, were reported killed. India's strategic objectives, as articulated by its military and civilian leadership, were three: degrade the specific infrastructure of cross-border terrorism, demonstrate that Pakistan's nuclear deterrent would not prevent punitive conventional action, and establish a new red line. By these measures, the Indian government considers Operation Sindoor a success. Defense Minister Rajnath Singh declared that India 'did not succumb to Pakistan's

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



"For the first time in history, two nuclear powers attacked one another with drones, air strikes, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. The question of whether this makes us safer is not academic - it is existential."

nuclear threats,' exposing what he called the 'nuclear bluff.' In the months since, India has reinforced its air defense with integrated S-400 squadrons, Barak-8 systems, and indigenous interceptors. Indigenous defense production has surged. Border surveillance has been tightened with AI-enabled monitoring. The doctrine of deterrence by punishment has replaced the old posture of strategic restraint.

THE QUESTION THE DOCTRINE CANNOT ANSWER

But deterrence is not the same thing as safety, and the difference matters enormously for the 1.7 billion people - including the families of our readers - who live in South Asia's nuclear shadow. One year later, there are questions that India's victory narrative cannot answer, and a responsible press must ask them.

The first is whether Operation Sindoor will deter future terrorism or simply transform it. Analysts at the Observer Research Foundation, one of India's most respected strategic think tanks, were blunt in their post-conflict assessment: 'If the objective of Operation Sindoor was deterrence against future terrorist attacks, it is simply impossible to ensure.' Deterrence, they noted, hinges on the adversary's cost-benefit calculations. Pakistan is not a 'normal state' - it does not perceive the consequences of force the way other states do. Its military has historically been willing to absorb extraordinary economic and reputational costs in pursuit of its Kashmir objectives. If the Pahalgam attack was planned precisely to force India into a response that would internationalize the Kashmir dispute - a goal Pakistan's diplomatic apparatus immediately set to work achieving after the ceasefire - then the attack achieved its strategic purpose even as Operation Sindoor destroyed the physical camps.

The second question is about nuclear risk. Both New Delhi and Washington have been careful about public statements, but the raw reality of what occurred in May 2025 must not be sanitized for political convenience. For the first time in history, two nuclear-armed states exchanged drone strikes, cruise missiles, ballistic

OPERATION SINDOOR
ONE YEAR LATER
DID INDIA'S NEW DOCTRINE MAKE THE SUBCONTINENT SAFER?

On 7 May 2024, India launched Operation Sindoor in response to the Pahalgam terror attack. It wasn't just a military operation—it marked the birth of a new doctrine. One year on, we ask: has it brought deterrence—or just a temporary calm?

WHAT CHANGED?

- PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE OPTION**
India asserted the right to strike terror infrastructure across borders.
- ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY**
Clear message: Terror will invite swift and decisive response.
- TRI-SERVICE INTEGRATION**
Army, Navy, Air Force operations in seamless synergy.
- INFORMATION DOMINANCE**
Counter-narrative and global outreach became integral to operations.

THE BIG QUESTION: SAFER NOW?

- STRONGER DETERRENCE**
Pakistan more cautious, big terror attacks reduced in frequency.
- BUT RISKS REMAIN**
Proxy networks intact, radicalization continues, and escalation risks persist.
- LASTING PEACE?**
Sustainable peace needs diplomacy, development and de-radicalization.

SECURITY IS NOT JUST ABSENCE OF WAR, BUT PRESENCE OF JUSTICE AND STABILITY.

ONE YEAR. NEW DOCTRINE. CONTINUING JOURNEY.

- HONORING OUR HEROES**
Salute to the brave who made the ultimate sacrifice.
- UNITED NATION**
India stands firm with its citizens and allies.
- BUILDING RESILIENCE**
Stronger Armed Forces, stronger Bharat.
- FORGING PEACE**
Peace through strength, not appeasement.

THE DOCTRINE IS NEW. THE RESOLVE IS PERMANENT. BHARAT FIRST. ALWAYS.

missiles, and air-to-air combat at scale. Pakistan fired four missiles toward New Delhi on the night of May 9-10 - all intercepted, but the act itself represents a threshold crossed that can never be uncrossed. U.S. President Donald Trump subsequently claimed that the conflict, had it not ended when it did, 'could have been a bad nuclear war.' His Vice President had initially told Fox News the United States would not 'get involved in the middle of a war that's fundamentally none of our business,' before an abrupt reversal after intelligence reports that remain classified to this day.

The Council on Foreign Relations, in its 2026 Preventive Priorities Survey, explicitly rated another India-Pakistan military confrontation as a significant risk for the current year. The drivers of conflict - cross-border terrorism, military modernization on both sides, fractured diplomatic channels, and domestic political pressure in both countries - remain intact. India's new doctrine, by raising the floor of its response to any future attack, has also compressed the decision-making window for both states. That compression is structurally dangerous. There is no real-time nuclear hotline between New Delhi and Islamabad. There are no formal crisis management mechanisms, no reciprocal inspections, no multilateral agreements on escalation thresholds. What exists is a pattern of reliance on ad hoc third-party intervention - American phone calls in the middle of the night - that Trump's administration has made significantly less reliable.

THE DIASPORA'S MORAL COMPLEXITY

For South Asian Americans, Operation Sindoor presented a moral landscape of extraordinary complexity. In homes across Queens and New Jersey, in WhatsApp groups that span Mumbai and Karachi, the same event generated radically different emotional responses depending on

family origin, religious identity, and political affiliation. Indian Americans, particularly of Hindu background, largely celebrated the operation as a long-overdue assertion of national dignity. Pakistani Americans, many with family in Lahore and Rawalpindi - cities that saw airports shut, schools closed, and stock markets panic - experienced it as a threat to the lives of their loved ones. Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan Americans watched with alarm at a regional order that felt newly unstable. Sikh Americans, whose community's relationship to the Indian state carries its own weight of historical complexity, navigated the operation's symbolism - Sindoor, a Hindu marker of marriage - with careful attention to what it implied.

There is also the question of civil liberties that the operation's aftermath raised and that received far too little attention in Western media. Professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, an academic at Ashoka University in India, was arrested in May 2025 for social media posts questioning the use of Muslim women officers for media optics during the conflict and raising concerns about mob lynching of Muslims in India during the hostilities. Over 1,200 academics and civil society members condemned the arrest as a crackdown on free speech. India's Supreme Court ultimately granted bail but - strikingly - ordered Mahmudabad not to comment further on the Pahalgam attack or Operation Sindoor. In a democracy that claims to wage war in defense of civilizational values, the criminalization of dissent about that war should trouble every South Asian American who holds both roots and democratic principles dear.

"Modi's new doctrine raises the floor of India's response to any future attack, but it also compresses the decision window in a region with no nuclear hotline, no crisis management

protocols, and a fractured U.S. mediator."

WHAT SHOULD WE ASK?

The Indian Army's anniversary post declared that Operation Sindoor 'continues.' It is a declaration of permanent vigilance, or perhaps of permanent war. From New York, the appropriate response to that declaration is not unconditional applause, nor reflexive condemnation, but the kind of rigorous, uncomfortable questioning that diaspora communities are uniquely positioned to provide - communities that contain, often within a single family, the full human stakes of both sides. Did Operation Sindoor establish credible deterrence, or did it establish a ladder of escalation that future actors - state, non-state, and fringe - now know how to climb? Has India's rejection of U.S. mediation, and its insistence that the ceasefire was entirely a bilateral achievement, made future crisis management more or less likely to succeed? Has the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty - addressed in the second article on this page - created a slow-burning crisis that will outlast any military deterrence effect? And in a region that is home to a quarter of the world's population, can the strategic indifference that India now extends toward Pakistan be maintained indefinitely without transforming into something far more catastrophic? These are questions that will not be answered in New Delhi's anniversary messaging, nor in Islamabad's defiant counter-narratives. They will be answered, slowly and at enormous cost, by the 1.7 billion people who live on the subcontinent - and who deserve a diaspora press that holds power accountable rather than simply celebrates power exercised.

The views expressed in Perspective pieces represent the editorial judgment and are intended to inform community discussion. We welcome responses from readers.

JPMorgan offered \$1 million to ex-staffer to settle assault claims before lawsuit

A lawsuit filed in a New York court alleges senior JPMorgan executive Lorna Hajdini subjected a former colleague to sexual assault, coercion, racial harassment and workplace intimidation.

(TSAI Bureau) JPMorgan Chase offered USD 1 million to settle sexual assault, harassment and discrimination allegations raised by former investment banker Chirayu Rana before he filed a lawsuit that has since triggered intense scrutiny across Wall Street, according to a report by The Wall Street Journal. The bank's attempt to resolve the matter privately failed after settlement negotiations broke down, with the former employee reportedly seeking a larger payout. The lawsuit, filed in New York State Supreme Court and later refiled after being briefly withdrawn for corrections, accuses senior JPMorgan executive Lorna Hajdini of sexual assault, coercion, racial harassment and workplace intimidation. Rana, who initially filed the case under the pseudonym "John Doe," alleges that Hajdini abused her senior position within the bank's leveraged finance division to pressure him into repeated sexual encounters and threaten his career prospects. According to The Wall Street Journal, JPMorgan made the settlement offer earlier this year in an effort to avoid litigation.

Two people familiar with the negotiations told the publication that the bank offered USD 1 million, but the sides failed to reach an agreement.

Confirming the settlement discussions, JPMorgan spokesperson Brian Marchiony said, "We did try to reach an agreement to avoid the time and expense of litigation and to support an employee who was being threatened with the very reputational harm now unfolding".

He added, "We continue to believe these allegations have no merit, and new information raised as a result of the public filing only reinforces that conclusion".

News agency Reuters separately reported that the bank reiterated it found no evidence supporting the allegations after an internal investigation involving multiple employees.

According to Reuters, JPMorgan said the complainant declined to participate in the probe.

Rana's lawyer, Daniel Kaiser, disputed the bank's position. "In my 30-plus year career as an employment litigator I have never had an employer defendant make such a substantial offer if they truly believed the allegations to be a 'complete fabrication,'" he said, according to Reuters.

The complaint alleges the misconduct began in 2024 after Rana joined JPMorgan's leveraged finance team as a senior vice president.

Court filings claim Hajdini made repeated



sexual advances, used racially charged language and tied Rana's promotion prospects to compliance with her demands.

THE HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS

Among the allegations detailed in the lawsuit are claims that Hajdini propositioned Rana inside the office, groped him during work events and threatened retaliation when he rejected her advances.

The suit further alleges that some encounters escalated into sexual assault and that Hajdini made racist remarks targeting his South Asian background.

The complaint also claims Hajdini drugged Rana with Rohypnol and erectile dysfunction medication before engaging in sexual activity with him.

Two anonymous witnesses cited in the revised filing allegedly corroborated portions of his account, including hearing him protest during one incident, according to reports by The Sun and The Daily Mail.

Rana further alleged that after he filed an internal complaint in May 2025 detailing "severe sexual abuse" and discrimination, he faced retaliation, including administrative leave, restricted system access and threatening anonymous calls. One alleged caller reportedly warned him to "stay away" and used racial slurs.

JPMorgan and Hajdini have strongly denied the allegations. Lawyers representing Hajdini said, "Lorna continues to categorically deny the allegations. She never dated this individual, never had a sexual or romantic encounter with him of any kind and never gave him any drugs. She maintains that his false claims are entirely fabricated and tarnishing her reputation".

The bank has maintained that its internal review of emails, devices, records and witness accounts uncovered no evidence supporting the claims. Hajdini remains employed at JPMorgan.

RANA FAKED FATHER'S DEATH



The case has become increasingly controversial following additional reports questioning aspects of Rana's account. The New York Post reported that Rana allegedly misled JPMorgan into believing his father had died in order to obtain extended paid leave while preparing the lawsuit.

The WSJ also cited organisational

records suggesting Rana did not directly report to Hajdini, potentially undermining claims that she controlled his compensation and promotion opportunities.

THE LAWSUIT THAT SENT SHOCKWAVES

The lawsuit has also drawn widespread media attention because of its graphic allegations and the prominence of the individuals involved. Hajdini, a longtime JPMorgan executive and Harvard Business School alumna, had spent nearly 15 years at the bank without prior public controversy before the case emerged. Despite the mounting public attention, the legal battle remains in its early stages. The lawsuit seeks damages for emotional distress, reputational harm, lost earnings and punitive compensation, while also calling for changes to workplace practices at the bank.

With both sides firmly disputing the claims and settlement talks having failed, the dispute now appears headed for a prolonged court fight.

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Indian Americans Dominate TIME 100 Most Influential 2026

Recognition Across Tech, Politics, Science, and Food—Boosting Community Pride Amid Heritage Month**

(Our Staff Reporter) In a powerful affirmation of the South Asian diaspora's rising global footprint, five Indian Americans have earned spots on *TIME* magazine's prestigious 2026 list of the 100 Most Influential People. Released on April 15, 2026—just days before the start of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month—the recognition spans technology titans, political trailblazers, scientific pioneers, and culinary ambassadors. For the vibrant South Asian community in New York and across the tri-state area, this milestone is more than a list of accolades; it is a moment of collective pride, reflection, and inspiration during a month dedicated to celebrating Asian contributions to



American life. This year's honorees—**Sundar Pichai**, **Neal Mohan**, **Zohran Mamdani**, **Dr. Kiran Musunuru**, and **Vikas Khanna**—embody the diverse pathways through which Indian Americans are shaping not just the United States but the world. Their achievements highlight a community that, while deeply rooted in cultural heritage, continues to redefine leadership in innovation, governance, health, and culture. As New Yorkers mark AAPI Heritage Month under the theme “Power in Unity: Strengthening Communities Together,” these stories resonate deeply in Queens' Little India, Jackson Heights' bustling streets, and community gatherings from Edison to Manhattan.

Tech Titans Steering the Future: Sundar Pichai and Neal Mohan



(Our Staff Reporter) At the forefront stands **Sundar Pichai**, CEO of Google and Alphabet, recognized in the Titans category for his pivotal role in democratizing artificial intelligence. Born in Madurai and raised in Chennai, Pichai's journey from a modest middle-class home—where his father worked as an electrical engineer—to leading one of the world's most powerful companies is the quintessential Indian-American success story. A graduate of IIT Kharagpur, Pichai has overseen Google's aggressive push into AI, merging Google Brain and DeepMind to launch Gemini and integrating AI tools across billions of users worldwide.

TIME praised Pichai for responding decisively to competitive pressures in AI, ensuring Google's breakthroughs reach the masses. As AI expert Andrew Ng noted in Pichai's profile, “Few leaders have brought artificial intelligence to more people than Sundar Pichai.” For South Asian tech professionals in New York's finance and startup hubs, Pichai's leadership validates the community's outsized contributions to Silicon Valley and beyond. Indian Americans, though a small percentage of the U.S. popu-

lation, hold a remarkable number of leadership roles at major tech firms, a testament to emphasis on education, resilience, and innovation passed down through immigrant families.

Complementing Pichai is **Neal Mohan**, CEO of YouTube (born in Lafayette, Indiana, to parents from Lucknow). Mohan has transformed YouTube into a dominant force in streaming, live sports, podcasts, and creator content—now the most popular video provider on U.S. television sets. Under his stewardship since 2023, the platform has expanded its cultural and economic influence, empowering creators while navigating global information ecosystems. *TIME* highlighted Mohan's unique blend of technical acumen and advertiser charm, skills honed through his Indian-American upbringing.

These tech leaders underscore a broader narrative: Indian Americans are not just participants in the digital economy but architects of its future. In New York, where many South Asian engineers and entrepreneurs call home, their success inspires younger generations pursuing STEM careers amid competitive visa landscapes and rapid technological change.

Political Leadership and Civic Impact: Zohran Mamdani



(Our Staff Reporter) In the Leaders category, **Zohran Mamdani**, New York City's dynamic mayor, brings local resonance. At 34, Mamdani made history as the city's first Muslim mayor and one of its youngest in generations. His inclusion celebrates a grassroots campaign rooted in progressive policies—rent freezes, free buses, expanded childcare, and universal programs addressing housing equity and labor rights.

Mamdani's first 100 days in office have been marked by visible action: filling potholes, rolling out daycare seats in underserved neighborhoods, and advancing a city-owned grocery store. His “direct” politics, as *TIME* describes it, infuses municipal governance with star power and excitement, drawing crowds and celebrity support. For New York's South Asian communities—particularly in diverse enclaves like Astoria and Jackson Heights—Mamdani's rise signals greater political representation and the power of immigrant voices in shaping urban policy.

His story also sparks important community conversations around identity, ideology, and coalition-building. As a vocal progressive, Mamdani navigates complex debates on representation while highlighting issues like affordable housing that affect many working-class South Asian families. During Heritage Month, his recognition amplifies calls for unity and civic engagement across AAPI groups.

Pride, Unity, and the Road Ahead



(Our Staff Reporter) The dominance of five Indian Americans on the 2026 TIME 100 list arrives at a poignant time. AAPI Heritage Month (May 1–31) celebrates the over 24 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who enrich the nation, even as communities confront challenges like hate incidents, immigration hurdles, and

political polarization. These honorees counter narratives of marginalization with stories of achievement and belonging. Community leaders in New York note the list's timing boosts morale. Events like the South Asian Cultural Festival in Queens or local AAPI rallies gain extra vibrancy when spotlighting role models.

Parents in Edison, NJ, or Flushing, Queens, see renewed motivation for their children; professionals reflect on path-

ways from immigrant struggle to global influence.

Yet, the recognition also invites reflection. While celebrating success, South Asian Americans continue advocating for equitable policies—from H-1B reforms to anti-hate measures—and building coalitions with other AAPI and minority groups. As Mayor Mamdani's tenure shows, representation brings both opportunity and responsibility. In conclusion, the 2026 TIME 100 list is a beacon for the South Asian American community. It affirms that heritage, hard work, and vision can propel individuals to influence the highest echelons of tech, politics, science, and culture. As New York's South Asians gather for Heritage Month parades, panel discussions, and festivals, these stories will undoubtedly be shared with pride—reminders that the community is not only thriving but helping define America's future. In unity, as the month's theme suggests, lies even greater power.

Scientific Breakthroughs Saving Lives: Dr. Kiran Musunuru

(Our Staff Reporter) In science and health, **Dr. Kiran Musunuru**, a cardiologist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, stands out as a Pioneer. Alongside collaborator Dr. Rebecca Ahrens-Nicklas, Musunuru was honored for pioneering personalized CRISPR gene-editing therapy. Their groundbreaking work treated a baby with a rare metabolic disease in record time—designing, testing, and administering a custom therapy within months. Of Telugu descent, with a cardiologist father who immigrated from India in 1976, Musunuru's research focuses on genetic approaches to heart and metabolic diseases. *TIME* lauded the duo for proving

that on-demand CRISPR therapies can be developed safely and rapidly, offering hope to patients without years to wait. Jennifer Doudna, CRISPR co-inventor, penned his profile, emphasizing the achievement's potential to transform medicine. For South Asian Americans, who often face higher risks of certain cardiovascular conditions, Musunuru's work carries profound personal and communal significance. It also reinforces the community's strong presence in U.S. medicine and research, from bench science to clinical care. In New York hospitals and universities, Indian-American doctors and researchers continue this legacy of excellence.

Culinary Diplomacy and Humanitarian Heart: Vikas Khanna

(Our Staff Reporter) **Vikas Khanna**, the Michelin-starred chef and humanitarian, brings warmth and cultural storytelling to the list. Born in Amritsar, Khanna credits his grandmother's kitchen for his philosophy. His New York restaurant Bungalow (opened 2024) and prior ventures like Junoon celebrate Indian flavors while fostering cross-cultural connections. *TIME* profile by Eric Ripert highlights how Khanna uses food to uplift others and bridge divides. Khanna's hu-

manitarian efforts—feeding millions and promoting Indian heritage globally—embody “influence through service.” His reaction to the honor was heartfelt: gratitude to his family and a sense of pride in representing Indian cuisine on the world stage. For New York's food scene, home to countless South Asian eateries, Khanna's recognition elevates the entire community's cultural contributions amid Heritage Month events featuring cuisine, dance, and arts.



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“We Belong” Summit in D.C.

Over 300 South Asian leaders gathered in Washington, D.C., on April 20, 2026, for Indian American Impact’s “We Belong” Summit and Gala. Amid rising hate incidents targeting South Asian and immigrant communities, participants confronted anti-immigrant rhetoric, advocated for voting rights and comprehensive immigration reform, and strategized ahead of key 2026 elections. Keynote speakers included U.S. Reps. Pramila Jayapal, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, and Virginia Lt. Gov. Ghazala Hashmi. The event emphasized unity, civic engagement, and building political power to affirm belonging in America.

NYC Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s Impact

As New York City’s first South Asian and Muslim mayor, Zohran Mamdani (elected 2025) continues to shape local politics with progressive policies on housing affordability, rent freezes, expanded childcare, and public transit. His April 29 comments urging King Charles III to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond to India during the monarch’s NYC visit sparked widespread debate. Supporters view it as bold cultural advocacy; critics question its relevance to city governance. Mamdani’s symbolic representation has energized South Asian New Yorkers, particularly in Queens, while igniting discussions on identity, ideology, diaspora influence, and balancing progressive values with community expectations.

Indian American Endorsements & 2026 Candidates

Organizations like Indian American Impact (IA Impact) and South Asians for America are actively endorsing and supporting a record number of South Asian candidates. IA Impact’s 2026 slate includes contenders for state legislatures, Congress, and local offices across states like Maryland, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Illinois (e.g., Amar Mukunda, Amish Shah, Arvind Venkat). In New York, grassroots efforts focus on candidates like Vichal Kumar and Somnath Ghimire. This surge reflects growing South Asian representation and mobilization for local and state races.

Carnegie Survey: Mixed Views on American Life

A February 2026 Carnegie Endowment survey reveals nuanced sentiments: while many Indian Americans thrive, nearly 40% (14% frequently, 26% occasionally) have considered leaving the U.S. amid political turbulence under Trump’s second term. Key concerns include 71% disapproval of Trump’s performance, frustrations with immigration policies, cost of living, personal safety, and a diminished sense of belonging. Politics topped reasons for unease (58%). The findings, timely for New York readers, underscore the need for stronger representation and inclusive policies even as the community celebrates

milestones.

India-US Trade Deal Developments

Negotiations for a comprehensive India-US trade agreement face delays as of May 2026. An early February framework reduced US tariffs on Indian goods from 50% to 18% in exchange for India curbing Russian oil imports, lowering duties on US products, and intending \$500 billion in American purchases. Fresh US Section 301 probes into excess industrial capacity, Supreme Court rulings on tariffs, and global energy shifts from the Iran conflict have slowed progress. Indian refiners partially reduced Russian oil but continue some purchases. For New York’s South Asian businesses and professionals, delays risk higher costs, disrupted remittances, and uncertainty in sectors like IT, pharma, and textiles that rely on bilateral flows.

NY Returns \$14M+ Antiquities to India

In a landmark cultural victory, New York authorities repatriated 657 stolen antiquities valued at nearly \$14 million to India on April 30, 2026. Many items link to disgraced dealer Subhash Kapoor and convicted trafficker Nancy Wiener, including a bronze Avalokiteshvara statue and sandstone Buddha figures. Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg highlighted the scale of trafficking networks targeting Indian heritage. The handover strengthens India-US cultural ties while prompting diaspora discussions on heritage protection, provenance, and museums’ roles in restitution.

H-1B/Visa Backlogs & Policy Pressures

South Asian professionals in New York’s tech and finance hubs continue facing severe H-1B stamping delays, with appointments pushed into late 2026 or 2027 due to enhanced vetting, high demand, and consular capacity issues. Family separation stories abound—engineers unable to visit aging parents or attend milestones. Potential reforms under the current administration add uncertainty, affecting retention and mental health in communities where Indian Americans dominate STEM roles.

May 2026 Visa Bulletin Updates

The latest bulletin shows minimal movement for India-heavy categories: EB-2 India remains at July 15, 2014; EB-3 at November 15, 2013. EB-5 unreserved for India holds at May 1, 2022. These stagnant dates underscore decades-long backlogs for skilled Indian applicants, intensifying pressure on families in the tri-state area.

Rising Hate & Safety Concerns

During AAPI Heritage Month, reports of anti-South Asian incidents persist despite some national decline. Visibility from figures like NYC Mayor Zohran Mamdani has

triggered spikes, per Stop AAPI Hate and FBI data. Communities respond with rallies, safety workshops, and coalitions emphasizing belonging amid political turbulence.

Youth & Student Success

Indian American students continue to dominate prestigious awards. Eleven secured 2026 Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans, with multiple pursuing advanced degrees in medicine, law, and engineering. Ananya Bhatia (Columbia) and Muskan Taori (University of Arkansas) earned 2026 Truman Scholarships for public service leadership. Echoes from the NYC Asian American Student Conference highlight youth activism and academic prowess.

Health & Wellness Initiatives

Tied to Heritage Month, community health drives spotlight oncologists like Dr. Shah and breakthroughs in cancer care. Local organizations host screenings, wellness workshops, and awareness events addressing cardiovascular and metabolic risks prevalent in South Asian populations.

Arts, Entertainment & Royal Flair

Desi influence dazzled at the Met Gala, with Karan Johar’s Ravi Varma-inspired ensemble and Jaipur Royals—Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh and Princess Gauravi Kumari—blending tradition with couture. Local performances, films, and crossovers sustain vibrant arts scenes.

Economic Power & Future Projections

The broader Asian Pacific diaspora commands nearly \$2 trillion in buying power. South Asians, projected to grow significantly toward 25 million by 2050, are shifting influence in U.S. politics, business, and innovation.

Advocacy & Unity

May Day overlaps fueled local protests for labor rights and immigrant protections, resonating with South Asian workers. Coalitions like South Asians for America (SAFA) and AAPI groups advance representation, education, and anti-hate efforts through summits and legislative advocacy.

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The Era of Free Markets Is Dead. Governments Killed It - and They're Not Sorry.

(By TSAI Editorial Board)

For a generation, the gospel of global economics was simple enough to fit on a bumper sticker: free trade lifts all boats. Lower barriers. Open markets. Let comparative advantage do its work. Governments were referees, not players. The invisible hand would sort it out.

That gospel is now so thoroughly abandoned that its former high priests are barely bothering to defend it. Welcome to the age of state capitalism — and this time, it's not just the authoritarians playing the game.

The United States, long the loudest evangelist of free markets, is now running the most economically interventionist administration since the New Deal. Tariffs stacked upon tariffs. Industrial subsidies that would have drawn howls of protest if any other country had attempted them. Strategic sectors ring-fenced from foreign competition. Critical supply chains pulled home regardless of cost. Washington has not merely changed its trade policy — it has repudiated the philosophical framework that underpinned it.

And the rest of the world is following suit, because what choice does it have?

Europe, long addicted to the comforting idea that it could compete on rules while others competed on resources, is now scrambling to build its own industrial policy arsenal. China has been playing this game for decades — subsidizing strategic industries, protecting domestic champions, weaponizing market access — and has grown enormously powerful doing so. The naïve assumption was that China would eventually converge toward Western economic norms as it grew richer. Instead, the West is converging toward something that looks a great deal more like China's model.

The consequences of this shift are still being absorbed, but some are already visible. Global supply chains — that extraordinary feat of international coordination that kept prices low and shelves stocked for

thirty years — are being deliberately fragmented. Not because fragmentation is efficient. Because efficiency, it turns out, is not the only variable governments care about. Resilience matters. Strategic leverage matters. The ability to deny a rival access to critical technology matters.

This is rational, up to a point. The pandemic exposed the genuine recklessness of sourcing everything from a single geography. The weaponization of rare earths and semiconductors has demonstrated that economic interdependence can be turned into a choke chain. Nations have legitimate reasons to think more carefully about what they produce and where.

But rationality in individual cases can produce collective irrationality at scale. Every country securing its own supply chains, protecting its own industries, and subsidizing its own champions is a world that is, in aggregate, poorer and more prone to conflict. The gains from trade that two centuries of economic theory documented so carefully do not simply vanish because politicians find them inconvenient. They vanish in practice — and ordinary people pay the price in higher costs and fewer choices.

The deeper question is whether this retreat from open markets is a correction or a collapse. Perhaps a more managed, strategic form of trade — less naive, more reciprocal — is genuinely more durable than the hyperglobalization that preceded it. Perhaps the free trade era always depended on a geopolitical stability that no longer exists.

Or perhaps we are in the early innings of a trade war that has no clear endgame, driven by competitive logic that no single government can unilaterally escape, heading somewhere that none of them would have chosen if asked to design the destination in advance.

The invisible hand didn't fail. We just stopped believing in it. The question now is what we build with our very visible, very busy, and very fallible ones.

The World America Built Is Over. Now What?

(By TSAI Editorial Board)

For eight decades, the architecture of global order rested on a single, unlikely foundation: the willingness of the United States to underwrite it. Not out of pure altruism — Washington extracted enormous strategic and economic advantages from the arrangement — but out of a genuine, if imperfect, belief that open markets, collective security, and international institutions served American interests alongside everyone else's.

That era is over. Not ending. Over.

What we are witnessing today is not a renegotiation of America's role in the world. It is a deliberate demolition of the order Washington spent the better part of a century constructing. NATO commitments treated as billing disputes. Trade alliances discarded as losing deals. International courts and climate agreements dismissed as encroachments on sovereignty. The message from Washington, delivered with consistency if not always clarity, is this: the rules-based international order was a bad deal for America, and America is done honoring it.

The tragedy is not simply that the order had flaws — it did, profound ones, too often serving the powerful at the expense of the weak. The tragedy is that nothing coherent is being built in its place.

History offers no reassuring precedents for this moment. When great powers abandon the systems they construct, the resulting vacuum is rarely filled by something better. It is filled by competition, by opportunism, by smaller powers making dangerous calculations in the absence of guardrails. We are already seeing this dynamic accelerate. Regional powers are rearming. Old rivalries are heating up. Countries that once sheltered beneath the American security umbrella are quietly asking themselves whether

that umbrella still opens.

Europe, for its part, has been slow to reckon with the new reality — preferring, for too long, to treat each rupture as an aberration rather than a pattern. That comfort is no longer available. The continent now faces the extraordinary task of building strategic autonomy in real time, without the institutional memory, the defense spending, or the political cohesion the moment demands. It is being asked to grow up very quickly, with very little margin for error.

China watches all of this with patient interest. Beijing has long argued that the American-led order was a vehicle for U.S. dominance dressed up in the language of universal values. That critique, whatever its bad faith, is now harder to dismiss when Washington itself seems to agree with it. A multipolar world — long Beijing's stated preference — is arriving faster than even Chinese strategists anticipated.

And yet here is the uncomfortable truth that neither side of this debate wants to sit with: the liberal international order, for all its hypocrisy, kept great power war off the table for the longest stretch in modern history. It is easy to catalogue its failures. It is harder — and more necessary — to ask what replaces the functions it served.

Someone must manage nuclear non-proliferation. Someone must coordinate pandemic response. Someone must keep sea lanes open and financial systems from cascading into collapse. These are not abstract goods. They are the plumbing of civilized international life, and plumbing, we are reminded, only gets noticed when it fails. The world America built is over. The question that will define the next fifty years is not whether to mourn it — but whether its successor will be built by negotiation or by catastrophe.

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VIJAY'S MOMENT: BEYOND A SUPER STAR'S VICTORY



Indian politics has always had a curious relationship with cinema. From mythological gods on screen to messianic leaders in real life, the transition from reel to real has often produced dramatic results—but rarely durable political success. The list is long: charisma has helped many actors enter politics, but only a handful have converted stardom into sustained political authority. Two names stand out. MG Ramachandran (MGR) built a welfare-driven political movement that reshaped Tamil Nadu. NT Rama Rao (NTR), perhaps the most striking example, stormed to power almost immediately after forming his party, riding a wave of Telugu pride and anti-establishment sentiment. But beyond them, the record is sobering. Chiranjeevi failed to translate mass appeal into power. Kamal Haasan remains electorally marginal. Pawan Kalyan has struggled to break through decisively. This context is critical when we examine the rise of Vijay. His emergence is not just another celebrity experiment in politics. It reflects something deeper—something structural. It reflects fatigue. Not just anti-incumbency, but a broader exhaustion with the dominant ideological framework that has defined Tamil Nadu for decades: Dravidian politics. Let's be clear. Vijay's phenomenon is not merely about a film star entering politics. Nor is it simply about a new party challenging the old. It is about the fatigue of Dravidian politics itself—a fatigue born out of repetition, stagnation, and a narrowing of political imagination. For decades, Tamil Nadu politics has been structured around Dravidian identity, anti-Hindi rhetoric, and a certain oppositional posture toward the rest of India. What began as a social justice movement evolved into a political orthodoxy. Over time, that orthodoxy has

hardened into habit. And habits, in politics, eventually create fatigue. Today, the Dravidian space is not collapsing—it is tiring out. Leadership lacks the charisma of the past. The ideological edge has dulled into predictable talking points. Governance, while functional, no longer inspires. This is where Vijay enters. But here lies the central question: Will Vijay transcend this fatigue—or be absorbed by it? History offers a warning. Look at Mamata Banerjee. She rose as a challenger to Left dominance in West Bengal, promising change. But once in power, she did not dismantle the old model; she replicated it. Political violence continued. Anti-industry sentiment persisted. The system changed faces, not character. This is the trap Vijay must avoid. Because the temptation will be strong. The easiest political path in Tamil Nadu is to inherit the Dravidian playbook—retain the rhetoric, adjust the tone, and position oneself as a “new version” of the same politics. It is safe. It is familiar. And in the short term, it works. But it is not transformative. If Vijay chooses that route, his rise will be significant—but not historic. To be historic, he must do something far more difficult: break the cycle, not continue it. That means moving beyond not just Dravidian politics—but also what can now be called secessionist fatigue. The constant invocation of linguistic and regional insecurities, the overuse of anti-Hindi narratives, and the framing of Tamil identity in opposition to the Indian identity—these have diminishing returns in a rapidly changing India. The new Tamil voter is not abandoning identity—but is increasingly seeking as-

piration alongside it. Jobs. Industry. Growth. Global integration. This is where Vijay has a real opportunity. He can redefine Tamil politics from resistance to relevance. And for that, his relationship with the central government will be crucial. In Indian politics, opposition does not have to mean obstruction. A useful model here is Naveen Patnaik. He maintained political independence, did not formally align with the ruling coalition at the Centre, yet worked pragmatically with it for the development of Odisha. That balance is key. Vijay does not need to be part of any national alliance. But he cannot afford to position himself in constant hostility either. Tamil Nadu's growth story is tied to national growth. Infrastructure, investment, manufacturing, global supply chains—these require coordination with New Delhi. Working constructively with Narendra Modi's government—without surrendering political autonomy—is not compromise. It is governance. At the same time, Vijay must decisively move away from the sharper edges of current Dravidian rhetoric—particularly the drift toward anti-Hindu, anti-Hindi, anti-North positioning and aggressive identity polarisation, which sections of the MK Stalin-led political ecosystem have been accused of normalising.

That path narrows politics. It does not expand it. Tamil Nadu does not need a louder version of the same ideological battles. It needs a new synthesis—one that preserves cultural pride but aligns it with economic ambition and national integration. This is certainly Vijay's moment. But moments are not destiny. Indian political history shows that stardom opens the door—but structure, ideology, and clarity decide who walks through it. NTR succeeded not because he was a star, but because he converted emotion into organization and identity into political momentum. Many others failed because they stopped at popularity. Vijay stands at that same crossroads. If he becomes another player within the Dravidian framework, his rise will be notable—but limited. If he breaks from it—if he channels Dravidian fatigue into a broader Tamil aspiration, sheds outdated antagonisms, works pragmatically with the Centre, and builds a forward-looking political narrative—then his entry could mark not just a change in leadership, but a shift in the grammar of Tamil politics itself. That is the real opportunity. And also, the real test.

By Shantanu Gupta

Fearless Voice of the Community

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The 'Silent' Bengal Voter Was Always Keeping Score. Mamata Just Didn't See It

By Ajit Kumar Jha

West Bengal has always been a place that refuses to be reduced - by any empire, by any ideology, by any single story that pretends to be whole. So when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sweeps the Bengal polls - when saffron seems to move through the state with the inevitability of weather - one is tempted, at first, to blame the strange mechanics of politics: alliances, strategies, the choreography of rallies.

But politics in India is never merely choreography. It is also climate.

A Mandate for Porivorton

In this monumental mandate for change, BJP has swept the Bengal polls leading in over 190 seats at the time of writing - a first, almost an astronomical rupture, because until now the party had not truly broken through West Bengal's long-held emotional geography. Even the narrative built by non-BJP politicians had been a kind of fatalism: that BJP was a creature of the Hindi heartland, trapped in its narrow "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" mold; destined, it was said, to remain a visitor rather than a resident.

Then came the wave. Not just an electoral rise, but a re-routing of belief - what you can call, without metaphor too excessive, a silent tsunami in the popular wave. The TMC - once the unshakable architect of the state - has reduced from 215 seats in 2021 to just 92. This is not merely loss; it is displacement, a kind of collective rearrangement.

Numbers, of course, are cold. But when the numbers gather into a pattern - when the swing is large enough to feel like a tectonic shift - they become the visible surface of something harder to measure: the mood of a people.

Why the Saffron Sweep?

And what, exactly, caused this saffron sweep?

The first and loudest answer is fierce anti-incumbency. For three consecutive terms, the TMC didn't only govern; it became the background texture of daily life - its successes remembered, its failures repeated, its promises worn into familiarity until familiarity itself began to feel like stagnation. In democracies, time can act like a solvent. What once felt like stability begins to feel like delay. What once felt like progress begins to feel like management of disappointment. Voters don't always switch because they suddenly fall in love with a new party - they switch because they can no longer live inside the old story.

Bengal is not an easy audience. So if the saffron wave has broken in here, the deepest explanation is this: people did not vote only for a party. They voted for a different emotional contract.



Then came the second force: the presence of massive central security forces during elections. Fear is a shadow that changes quickly into hope when people believe the threat can be controlled. The election wasn't just about who would speak; it was also about whether speaking would be safe. In a country where the political and the personal often overlap, that kind of security reframes the decision. People who had been hesitant began to step forward - not with certainty of perfect outcomes, but with confidence that their vote could actually matter.

What followed was visible in the great, almost communal act of turning up. Unprecedented Turnout

The silent euphoria among voters was measurable in the turnout itself. The first phase on 23rd April recorded an unprecedented 93.16% turnout. The second phase, in South East of Bengal across 142 constituencies, showed around 91% turnout. The average turnout across the entire state was over 92% - the highest turnout ever recorded, not only in the state but in the entire country. Democracy, for once, looked less like a ritual and more like an emergency response: a society moving together because it felt the moment demanded it.

And behind the turnout was a shift that cannot be reduced to strategy alone: women voters, who had backed TMC in 2021 in overwhelming numbers, switched sides in 2026 - largely on the issue of safety of women, after the historic protests of 2024 following the R G Kar medical college rape and murder of a young doctor. In political history, tragedies do not automatically translate into votes - but they can rewire the moral priorities of a

population. When a society feels that the state has failed to protect, it begins to vote not only for policy, but for dignity.

The BJP, meanwhile, campaigned in a language that sounded like a promise rather than a complaint: "Poriborton" - transformation - into "Sonar Bangla". The word "Sonar" is not merely branding; it is memory with a future tense. It says: Bengal can shine again. It says: we can step out of the long corridor of stalled expectations.

Prime Minister Modi campaigned against what he framed as "Maha Jungle Raj" - the aura of lawlessness, neglect, and economic stagnation associated with 15 years of TMC rule. But beyond accusation, the BJP message offered a specific kind of hope: a double-engine government that would accelerate industrial growth, create jobs, and open genuine opportunities-especially for the young, whose restlessness is often mistaken for impatience, when it is, in fact, a demand to be seen.

On the borderlands, another campaign found receptive ears: "ghushpaiti" - the issue of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh-pressed close to rural anxieties. In border regions, identity becomes policy and policy becomes survival. When people feel their livelihood, their local order, and their cultural boundaries are under strain, they do not separate the debate from the ground beneath their feet. Even the urban grievance, too, was made audible. The BJP highlighted what it called the pathetic infrastructure of Kolkata-the average speed of about 17.4 km per hour in public traffic, the narrow streets of the Kolkata presidency. Whether one agrees with the framing or not, the strategy was

clear: take the everyday frustration of getting from one place to another, then turn it into a referendum on whether the system has been functioning.

Here, the contrast between campaigns became a kind of moral staging.

TMC Campaigned on Despair, BJP on Hope

The TMC's campaign leaned toward negativity-despair as a motive force. BJP's campaign was pitched as hope-not naive, not sentimental, but pitched as a remedy: change is possible, and therefore change is necessary. And that difference matters more than we like to admit. Despair asks people to endure. Hope asks them to act.

BJP also appeared to benefit from the broader advantage of SIR exercise carried out by the CEC - a detail that, in a diverse democracy, can still influence how voters think about fairness, legality, and whose vote is being protected.

And so, layer upon layer, SIR, anti-incumbency, voter fatigue, and hope of porivorton combined into what the numbers-especially turnout-suggest was not an ordinary swing. It was a silent wave. A movement that didn't need constant noise, because its urgency was already inside the electorate.

After this historic victory, BJP's reach expands across North India-from Gujarat in the west to Assam in the east-and in Assam it has even won a hat-trick. This is the pattern of a party becoming not only national in ambition, but national in habit-learning new languages of power fast enough to survive local skepticism.

In West Bengal, skepticism has been historically intelligent. Bengal is not an easy audience. So if the saffron wave has broken here - if it has done so decisively enough to resemble a first-time conquest-then perhaps the deepest explanation is this: people did not vote only for a party. They voted for a different emotional contract with the future-one in which safety is promised, stagnation is denied, and transformation is made to sound not like a slogan, but like a timetable. In India, a wave is always more than a wave. It is a society changing its mind about what it can tolerate - and what it can no longer wait for. And Bengal, for the first time in this particular political story, has chosen - quietly, massively, and with the clarity that only a crowd at the ballot box can summon.

(The author is Editor, Research, NDTV)

Nuclear Neighbors and Broken Treaties: The Indus Waters Suspension and Water as a Weapon

India suspended one of the world's most durable water-sharing agreements as an act of strategic coercion. For 300 million people downstream - and for the stability of a nuclear-armed region - the consequences are only beginning.

(TSAI Bureau) The Indus Waters Treaty was not designed to survive a war. It was designed to prevent one. Signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, negotiated over nine years with World Bank mediation, and endorsed by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistani President Ayub Khan at a moment when the ink of Partition was barely dry and the wounds of 1947 still openly bled - the treaty was, above all else, an act of civilizational pragmatism. Two nations that had already fought one war, that would go on to fight two more, agreed that the six rivers of the Indus Basin would not become another battlefield. For sixty-five years, through three wars, the 1999 Kargil conflict, the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai massacre, and the 2019 Pulwama crisis, the treaty held. Water flowed. Wheat grew. The 300 million people who depended on those rivers for irrigation, drinking water, and hydropower - most of them with no say in any of the political decisions that governed their lives - were, in this one small but vital respect, protected.

On April 23, 2025 - one day after the Pahalgam attack that killed 26 tourists - India announced that the Indus Waters Treaty was being held 'in abeyance with immediate effect.' It was a 65-year-old compact, terminated in 24 hours by diplomatic declaration. Home Minister Amit Shah subsequently vowed that India would 'never' restore the treaty, stating Pakistan would be 'starved of water that it has been getting unjustifiably.' Pakistan's Foreign Ministry called it an act of war. The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled explicitly that the treaty remains legally binding regardless of India's declaration. India rejected the ruling, boycotted subsequent proceedings, and pressed forward.

The question this newspaper must ask is not whether India had the political motivation to suspend the treaty - the motivation is painfully clear - but what the human and strategic consequences of that decision will be, and whether a South Asian American community that spans both nations can afford to treat this as a matter of distant geopolitics.

WHAT THE TREATY WAS - AND WHAT ITS SUSPENSION MEANS

The Indus Waters Treaty divided six rivers between the two nations. The three eastern rivers - the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej - were allocated to India. The three western rivers - the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab - were allocated primarily to Pakistan, giving Islamabad roughly 80 percent of the total water carried by the Indus system, approximately 135 million acre-feet annually. The rationale was geographic: the



western rivers flow through Indian-administered Kashmir before entering Pakistan, meaning India sits upstream of Pakistan's agricultural heartland. The treaty was, at its core, a recognition that geography had handed India an extraordinary leverage point, and a mutual agreement not to weaponize it.

For Pakistan, the western rivers are not a geopolitical abstraction. They are the lifeblood of the Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. Pakistan is one of the most water-stressed countries in the world. Its agricultural sector - employing nearly 40 percent of its workforce and generating a fifth of its GDP - is almost entirely dependent on canal irrigation from the Indus system. The Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers support the food security of roughly 220 million people. The treaty did not merely govern how much water Pakistan received; it also mandated that India share real-time hydrological data - flood warnings, river flow measurements, glacier melt projections - that are essential for Pakistan's water management authorities to prevent catastrophic flooding and manage seasonal drought.

"India halted flood warning data-sharing that had been maintained for six decades. In a basin where 40 percent of river flow comes from Himalayan glaciers losing mass at double pre-2000 rates, the absence of upstream data is not a diplomatic inconvenience. It is a threat to civilian life." When India suspended the treaty in April 2025, it simultaneously halted this hydrological data-sharing. As the Pakistani think

tank Daily Parliament Times documented in a careful review published days before this edition went to press, the consequences were measurable almost immediately. Dam maintenance and flushing operations at Indian projects on the Chenab in May 2025 caused flow levels at downstream Pakistani gauging stations to fall by approximately 90 percent. India's position, under the treaty, would have been to time such operations and provide advance data; without the treaty in force, India was unconstrained. In a basin where, as Chatham House's Environment and Society Centre documented, 40 percent of river flow originates from Himalayan glaciers that are losing mass at double the rate recorded before 2000, and where glacial lake outburst floods represent an increasing and unpredictable risk, the absence of upstream data is not an administrative inconvenience. It is a threat to civilian life in every downstream flood plain.

THE LEGAL DIMENSION: INDIA'S ACTIONS HAVE NO TREATY BASIS

India has framed its suspension as a legitimate security response to Pakistan's alleged support of cross-border terrorism. The legal record does not support this framing, and the distinction matters. The Indus Waters Treaty contains no unilateral suspension clause. Article XII of the treaty requires the mutual agreement of both parties for any modification or termination. The treaty's own dispute resolution mechanism - a three-tier system comprising the Permanent Indus Commission, a Neutral Expert, and the Court of Arbitra-

tion - was designed precisely for moments of bilateral tension. India did not exhaust these mechanisms. It did not invoke them. It simply declared abeyance and acted. The World Bank President Ajay Banga stated clearly in May 2025 that there is 'no provision in the treaty to allow for its suspension' and that 'any changes require both India and Pakistan to agree.' The Permanent Court of Arbitration concurred, ruling that the treaty remains legally binding. India's response was to boycott the arbitration proceedings entirely - a posture that, whatever its strategic logic, leaves New Delhi in open defiance of international adjudication that it had itself helped construct over decades.

There is also the separate question of the ongoing arbitration at The Hague regarding the Ratle and Kishanganga hydropower projects, which Pakistan had brought under treaty provisions before the suspension. With India having withdrawn from those proceedings, Pakistan's legal remedies have been effectively foreclosed. India is simultaneously building new hydropower capacity on the western rivers - the Ratle project at 850 megawatts, Pakal Dul at 1,000 megawatts, Sawalkot at 800 megawatts - each of which adds to India's capacity to modulate, reduce, or time the flows that reach Pakistan. The infrastructure is being constructed in a geopolitical vacuum, without the treaty constraints that once governed it.

CLIMATE CHANGE: THE FACTOR BOTH SIDES ARE FAILING TO ADDRESS

Any honest accounting of the Indus Waters Treaty crisis must acknowledge the context that neither government is willing to address forthrightly: climate change has already made the 1960 treaty inadequate, and both countries know it. The treaty was designed for a mid-20th century climate - predictable monsoon patterns, glacial stability, and agricultural water demand roughly a fraction of what it is today. None of those conditions hold. India is one of the most water-stressed countries in the world by World Bank metrics, with extreme heat and increasingly erratic monsoon patterns making its own domestic water security increasingly precarious. India's position, as articulated by researchers like Maharaj Krishan Pandit of the National University of Singapore, is that the impacts of climate change provide an objective reason to renegotiate a 1960 treaty that many Indian analysts consider 'unfair and heavily skewed in favor of Pakistan.'

That argument is not entirely without merit. The treaty was brokered under conditions of post-Partition guilt and Cold War geopolitics in which India agreed to terms that would be difficult to negotiate today. The question of renegotiation - through legitimate, mutual, internationally supervised processes - is one that serious analysts on both sides have been raising for years. What India chose to do in April 2025 was the opposite of renegotiation: it was unilateral abrogation, under the cover of a security emergency, in a manner that foreclosed precisely the kind of deliberate, data-informed process that climate adaptation actually requires. The treaty's suspension has not given India more water. It has given India more leverage - leverage over a country whose population did not plan or execute the Pahalgam attack, and whose 220 million agricultural workers will bear the consequences of decisions made by men in military uniforms and government offices.

THE HUMAN DIMENSION: FARMERS, FLOODS, AND FOOD SECURITY

From the windows of Jackson Heights or Flushing or Parsippany, it is easy to discuss the Indus Waters Treaty as a strategic abstraction - a lever of coercion in a great-power game. It is harder, and more necessary, to understand it as what it actually is: a matter of whether wheat grows in the Punjab, whether children get drinking water in Sindh, whether Pakistani farmers who plant in February have any certainty about water availability in June. Aamer Hayat Bhandara, a farmer in Punjab province's Pakpattan district quoted by NPR in the months after the suspension, put it simply: 'Everyone is on the same page that water is the lifeline of Pakistan, and no one will allow anyone to stop it.' The Health implications are equally stark. A detailed analysis by scholars Neda Zawahri and Melissa McCracken, published by Think Global Health, documented that the suspension of hydrological data sharing directly disrupts Pakistan's ability to prepare for floods and droughts. Pakistan's ongoing water quality crisis - already severe, with significant portions of the population lacking access

to safe drinking water - will be worsened by the treaty's suspension. Disrupted river flow regimes exacerbate waterborne disease risk, damage downstream agriculture, and increase groundwater overpumping that threatens long-term aquifer sustainability. These are not diplomatic talking points. They are public health consequences for a civilian population of over 200 million people.

Pakistan's political leadership has responded with its own version of maximalism. Former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has warned on multiple occasions that Pakistan will 'secure all six rivers' by whatever means necessary if water is not shared fairly. Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir reportedly stated at a dinner in Tampa, Florida in August 2025 that Pakistan would destroy any future dam built by India with 'ten missiles' and that the Indus River is not India's 'family property.' These statements are reckless, and they represent exactly the kind of escalatory rhetoric that makes a manageable water dispute into a potential casus belli. But recklessness in response does not retroactively justify recklessness in the original act.

THE STAKES FOR SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS

There is a temptation within South Asian American communities - particularly those with strong Indian nationalist leanings - to view the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty as an overdue correction, a righteous assertion of national sovereignty against a country that sponsors terrorism. That view is understandable in the context of Pahalgam, in the context of three decades of cross-border violence, and in the context of an international community that too often holds India to standards it does not apply to Pakistan.

But it is a view that requires us to avert our eyes from the people downstream. It requires us to accept that collective punishment - and the deliberate manipulation of water on which 220 million people depend is precisely that - is a legitimate instrument of statecraft. It requires us to pretend that the 1960 treaty's collapse is without consequence for the South Asian farmers and families who are not in any chain of command, who did not give any order, and who will not be compensated for any crop failure that follows. For a diaspora community that has itself experienced collective punishment - that knows what it is to be held responsible for the actions of governments you never voted for, by people who see your ethnicity before they see your humanity - this should be an uncomfortable position to hold.

The Chatham House researchers who produced the most authoritative independent analysis of the treaty's suspension concluded with a measured warning: 'If the current state of suspension persists, cooperation will continue to erode. The absence of data sharing and joint planning will increase uncertainty, heighten disaster risks, and deepen political instability.' Penn State's Institute for Energy and the Environment added that unilateral infrastructure development and the collapse of formal legal frameworks could 'trans-

form water stress into broader security crises' that cascade into instability along the Ganga and Brahmaputra systems as well - rivers that irrigate eastern India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, and whose governance would suffer from the precedent India has now set.

WHAT WE MUST DEMAND

This paper has no illusions about the political context. India was attacked. Twenty-six civilians were murdered in a carefully planned act of religious violence. The state actors who enabled those murders have faced insufficient international accountability for decades. India's frustration, and its right to respond, are not in question. What is in question is whether the suspension of a water treaty - an instrument that was never designed to be a tool of security policy, that provides no tactical military advantage, that cannot be 'restored' on a timeline that matches any security negotiation, and whose costs fall entirely on civilian populations - is the right response. It is a question that the Indian government has not seriously engaged. It is a question that the Pakistani government has answered only with threats. And it is a question that the international community, including the United States government, has largely declined to press.

South Asian Americans must press it. We must press it because we have family on both sides of the Wagah border. We must press it because we understand, better than most, that rivers do

not stop at checkpoints and that aquifer depletion does not respect the Line of Control. We must press it because this diaspora - Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan - is among the very few communities in the world capable of holding the entire human cost of this crisis in a single moral frame. The Indus Waters Treaty survived three wars. Its suspension was not inevitable. It was a choice - made by political leaders under pressure, in the heat of a security crisis, with full knowledge of the international law they were setting aside and the civilian populations they were leveraging. That choice can be revisited, through the mutual negotiation the treaty itself always envisioned, through the kind of climate-informed renegotiation that water scientists on both sides have been urging for years, through the patient, unglamorous diplomacy that does not make for stirring anniversary posts but does make for a subcontinent where the wheat grows and the water flows. The subcontinent's rivers are older than its borders. They will outlast its current politics. Whether the people who live along them survive that politics - that is the question the treaty was built to answer, and the question its suspension has left dangerously open.

The views expressed in Perspective pieces represent the editorial judgment and are intended to inform community discussion. We welcome responses from readers.



At The Edge Of The Map, A Bet On Power: Why India Is Building In Great Nicobar

On a map of global trade, the southern tip of India's Andaman and Nicobar archipelago looks like a remote outpost, forested, fragile, and far from the mainland. But to planners in New Delhi, Great Nicobar Island is something else entirely: a hinge point between the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific, a vantage over the world's busiest sea lanes, and potentially, a lever of both economic and strategic power.

India's proposed Great Nicobar project, a deep-sea transshipment port, international airport, power plant and township, has triggered sharp debate. Critics warn of ecological damage, seismic risks and questionable commercial viability. Proponents argue it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reposition India in global trade and maritime strategy. The truth lies in understanding what the project is and what it is not.

A Location That Rewrites the Map

The case for Great Nicobar begins not with engineering, but geography.

Just north of the Indonesian archipelago, the island sits near the Six Degree Channel, a key maritime passage feeding into the Malacca Strait. This narrow corridor connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and, by extension, to East Asia's manufacturing heartlands.

The numbers underscore its importance: Roughly 40% of global trade passes through Malacca

Around \$5 trillion in goods flows annually

Nearly 80% of China's oil imports transit this route

For decades, India has observed this traffic from a distance. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands host the Andaman and Nicobar Command, the country's only integrated military command, but logistical limitations have constrained sustained operations.

The Great Nicobar project aims to change that. It would turn a remote island into a permanent, serviced node, a place where ships dock, aircraft refuel, and surveillance extends continuously over one of the world's most sensitive maritime chokepoints.

"Presence," in maritime strategy, is not symbolic. It is sustained, supplied and visible.

Beyond a Port: The Security Argument
uch of the public debate has framed Great Nicobar as a commercial port competing with mainland facilities like Vizhinjam International Seaport. But that comparison misses the project's primary logic.

Vizhinjam, located on India's southwest coast, is designed for efficiency, proximity to shipping lanes, strong hinterland connectivity, and rapid cargo movement inland. It is a commercial asset.

Great Nicobar is something different: a

forward operating platform. From this vantage, India can:

Monitor shipping traffic entering and exiting Malacca

Track naval movements in the eastern Indian Ocean

Respond rapidly to crises, from piracy to military escalation

Sustain long-duration maritime patrols

It cannot, as some rhetoric suggests, "block" the strait, as international law, like UNCLOS (The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), protects transit passage. But modern power rarely relies on outright control. It rests on awareness, deterrence and readiness.

The island's existing airstrip at INS Baaz already supports surveillance flights. Expanded infrastructure would extend that capability into a permanent operational presence. In strategic terms, the difference is stark:

Without development - intermittent reach

With development - continuous influence

The China Factor

No discussion of Great Nicobar can ignore China. Over the past two decades, Beijing has built a network of ports and facilities across the Indian Ocean, Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar and a military base in Djibouti. Analysts often describe this as a "string of pearls," designed to secure China's maritime lifelines.

India's response has been more restrained, focusing on partnerships and selective infrastructure. Great Nicobar represents a shift: a move to anchor its own presence near a critical chokepoint.

China itself has long worried about the "Malacca dilemma"; its dependence on a narrow passage vulnerable to disruption. While India cannot legally interdict this route, its ability to observe and operate near it introduces a layer of strategic uncertainty for any adversary. In peacetime, that translates into influence. In crisis, into leverage.

The Commercial Promise and Limits

If the strategic case is compelling, the economic one is more complex. Today, India depends heavily on foreign ports for transshipment, the process of transferring cargo between large and smaller vessels. Government data indicates that about 75% of India's transshipment cargo is handled abroad, primarily in Colombo, Singapore and Port Klang.

Direct losses are estimated at \$200-220 million annually, with larger indirect costs in logistics inefficiency. Great Nicobar aims to internalise a portion of this traffic. The planners envision:

Phase 1 capacity: 4 million TEUs by around 2028

Ultimate capacity: 16 million TEUs

For context, India's major ports together

handle roughly 13-14 million TEUs today.

The project's location offers advantages:

Natural deep draft (around 20 meters), accommodating large container ships

Proximity to Bay of Bengal markets

Minimal deviation for ships entering or exiting Malacca

Beyond container handling, revenue streams could include bunkering (fuel supply), ship repair, warehousing, and aviation services. Yet success is far from guaranteed.

Global transshipment is a competitive, low-margin business. Established hubs like Singapore and Colombo benefit from decades of network effects, shipping alliances, infrastructure, and operational efficiency. Capturing traffic requires more than location; it demands reliability, speed and cost discipline. In this sense, Great Nicobar is best seen as a long-term option rather than an immediate commercial windfall.

The Environmental Trade-Off & Risks

The most serious challenge to the project is ecological. Estimates suggest that over 130 square kilometres of forest land may be diverted. The island is home to unique biodiversity and indigenous communities, including the Shompen tribe. Environmental groups warn of habitat loss, coastal disruption and long-term ecological damage. The government's position emphasises mitigation:

Phased construction over decades

Compensatory afforestation

Protection of tribal reserves

Creation of wildlife sanctuaries

Courts have allowed the project to proceed, but with conditions. Compliance will be critical, not only for ecological reasons but for legal and reputational credibility.

Let us understand one thing clearly. The project is zonal, not island-wide. The development is concentrated mainly around Galathea Bay (south-east coast) and not across the full island. The entire Great Nicobar Island area is nearly 900 square km, but the project footprint is only around 130-160 square km. This means, around 80-85% of the island is NOT directly touched. It's a planned layout, not random clearing.

Also, large parts of the island remain protected under:

Tribal reserve areas

Wildlife sanctuaries

Restricted access zones

These are legally sensitive and not open for free development. Example: The Shompen tribal reserve is not supposed to be directly disturbed. This is a critical legal and ethical boundary.

Aside from these assurances, the broader question is philosophical: how should a developing country balance environmen-

tal preservation with strategic necessity? History offers precedents. Singapore, Dubai and China's coastal cities all transformed ecosystems to build global hubs. The outcomes were economically transformative, but not without cost.

Great Nicobar poses a similar choice. Beyond the environment, the project faces structural risks:

Geophysical: Earthquake and tsunami exposure

Logistical: High costs of building and maintaining infrastructure on a remote island

Commercial: Uncertain traffic volumes in a competitive market

Operational: Integrating port and airport functions without efficiency loss

These risks do not negate the project, but they demand careful design and phased execution, considering this is a project that will put India at a far more comfortable position, both strategically and economically, 30-40 years down the line.

Great Nicobar, being in a seismic zone and facing cyclone risk are real concern. But vulnerability is inherent to many strategic locations, from Pacific islands hosting U.S. bases to China's artificial islands in the South China Sea. Modern infrastructure is designed with redundancy and rapid recovery in mind.

The Long View: A Choice About India's Future

The infrastructure of this scale is rarely judged in years; it is measured in decades. Even if Great Nicobar underperforms commercially in its early years, its strategic value, as a forward base, a surveillance node, and a symbol of presence, may justify the investment.

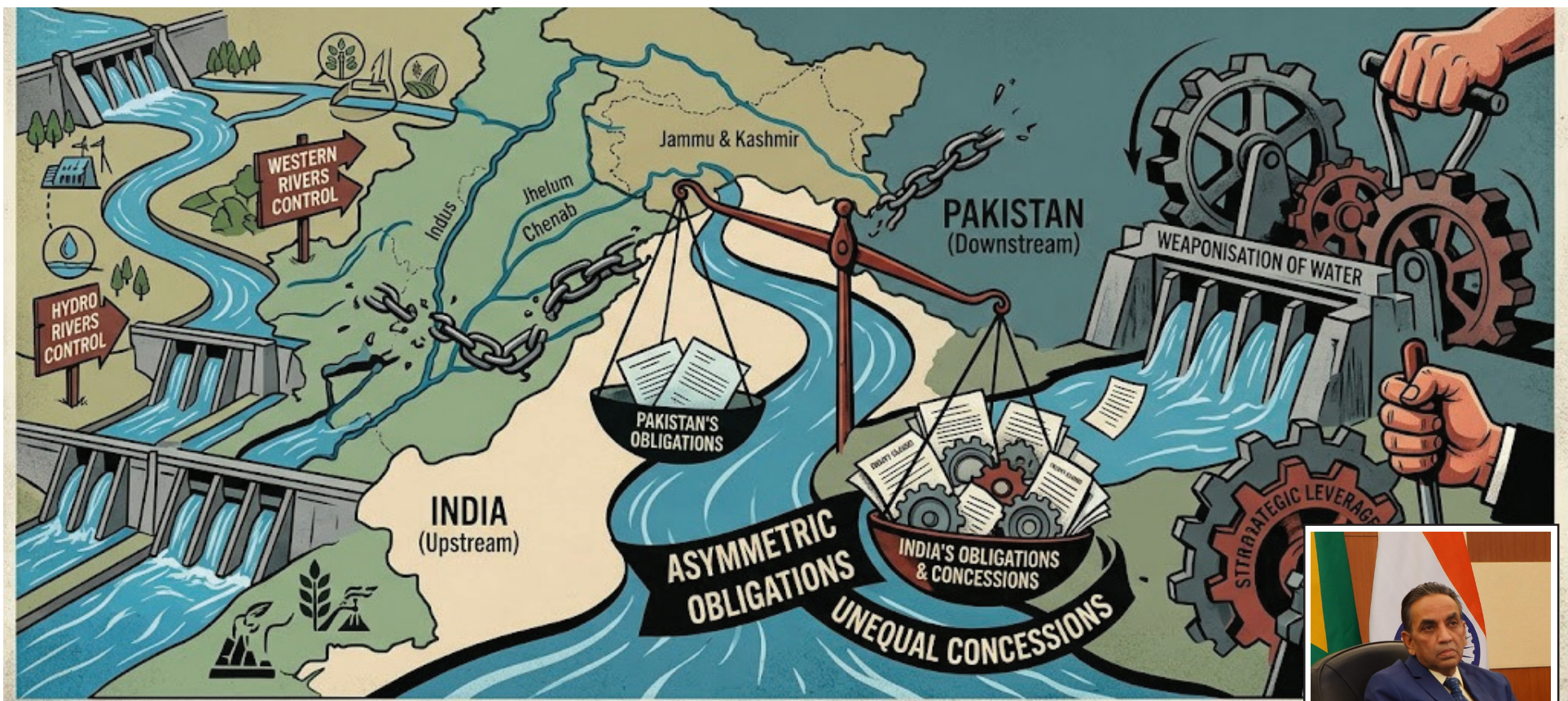
Conversely, poor execution could turn it into a costly miscalculation, amplifying environmental damage without delivering commensurate benefits. The outcome will depend less on the idea itself than on how it is implemented.

At its core, the Great Nicobar project is not just about a port. It is about whether India chooses to remain a peripheral player in global maritime networks or to position itself at their crossroads. For decades, the world's trade routes have passed by India's shores, enriching other hubs. Great Nicobar is an attempt that is ambitious, risky and contested, to change that equation. In the end, the debate is not simply about forests versus infrastructure, or existing ports versus Nicobar. It is about how a rising power defines its place in a world where geography still matters, and where the control of sea lanes continues to shape economic and strategic destiny. India has made its bet. Whether it pays off will determine not just the future of a remote island, but the country's role in the Indo-Pacific order for decades to come.

THE INDUS WATERS TREATY

Asymmetric Obligations, Unequal Concessions and Pakistan's Weaponisation

Part I: The Architecture of Inequity — How India's Goodwill Was Codified into Concession



(TSAI Bureau)

1. Background: The Partition of a River System

The Indus River System comprises six major rivers—the Indus, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej—flowing through the territories of both India and Pakistan. The system sustains drinking water, agriculture, and electricity generation across the Indus Basin, supporting hundreds of millions of people on both sides of the border.

When British India was partitioned in 1947, the Indus River System was also divided between the two successor states. The geographic reality was stark: India, as the upper riparian state, held the headwaters of most rivers, while Pakistan's agricultural heartland—the heavily irrigated Punjab plains—depended critically on continued water flows from the east. India, for its part, required access to the system for its own development objectives in Punjab and Rajasthan, while seeking stability and normalised relations with its new western neighbour. Despite its own pressing domestic needs, India concluded this highly concessionary water-sharing pact with Pakistan on 19 September 1960, an agreement facilitated by the World Bank.

2. Negotiations – India paid the price for rationality

2.1 Pakistan's Strategy of Delay and the 1954 World Bank Proposal

The trajectory of the negotiations was

shaped, from the outset, by the asymmetry between India's reasonable and constructive approach and Pakistan's maximalist, sometimes absurd, demands — an asymmetry that anchored outcomes far more favourably to Pakistan than equity would have warranted. The World Bank's first substantive proposal of 5 February 1954 illustrates this plainly: even at this initial stage, it required significant one-sided concessions from India:

- All planned Indian developments along the upper reaches of both the Indus and Chenab were to be abandoned, with those benefits accruing to Pakistan instead
- India was required to forgo diverting approximately 6 MAF from the Chenab River.
- No Chenab waters at Merala (now in Pakistan) would be available for Indian use.
- No water development would be permitted in Kutch from the river system.

Despite these considerable impositions, India accepted the proposal in good faith almost immediately, signalling its genuine desire for a speedy resolution. Pakistan, by contrast, delayed its formal acceptance for nearly five years until 22 December 1958. As a result of this goodwill gesture of India, the restrictions were imposed on her while Pakistan continued developing new uses on the Western rivers without equivalent constraints.

Pakistan absorbed the lesson that obstruction pays and cooperation costs—and has applied this lesson consistently ever since.

3. What India Lost: The Scale of Sacrifice

3.1 The Water Allocation

Under the Treaty's allocation formula, India received exclusive rights to the three Eastern rivers—the Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi—while Pakistan received rights to the waters of the three Western rivers—the Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum. India was permitted certain limited, non-consumptive uses of the Western rivers within its own territory, primarily for run-of-river hydropower generation, subject to extensive design and operational restrictions.

In volumetric terms, the Eastern rivers allocated to India carry approximately 33 million acre-feet (MAF) of annual flow, while the Western rivers allocated to Pakistan carry approximately 135 MAF—giving Pakistan roughly 80 percent of the system's water. India received 20 percent, in exchange for relinquishing all claim to the vastly larger Western system. The critical point is that India did not gain new water from the agreement. What India received was formal acknowledgment of flows it already accessed, in exchange for relinquishing all claim to the far larger Western system. India was permitted certain non-consumptive uses of the Western rivers within its territory—prima-

rily run-of-river hydropower generation.

3.2 The Financial

Concession: Paying to Give Away Water

Perhaps the most striking anomaly of the Treaty is the financial provision. India agreed to pay approximately £62 million (approximately \$2.5 billion in present value) as compensation to Pakistan to build water resources infrastructure in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This payment represents a unique precedent in which the upstream country, which was already surrendering the majority of the system's water, additionally paid the downstream country for the "privilege" of doing so. India essentially subsidised Pakistan's acceptance of a deal that heavily favoured Pakistan on the fundamental question of water allocation.

4. The Treaty's Structural Unfairness

4.1 Unilateral Asymmetric Restrictions on India

The Treaty imposes a series of specific design and operational restrictions on India's use of the Western rivers that have no corresponding obligations on Pakistan's side:

- India can develop only a limited Irrigated Cropped Area (ICA) in its territory.



By Dr. Pradeep Kumar Saxena, former Indian Commissioner for Indus Waters

India faces strict limits on the volume of water that can be held in any storage facility on the Western rivers.

India must comply with specific design criteria for any hydropower facilities on the Western rivers, including restrictions on pondage and storage capacity. These restrictions are one-directional: they constrain India's lawful development of resources within its own territory while imposing no equivalent transparency or restriction requirements on Pakistan. The result is a treaty that treats the upstream state—India—as the party requiring oversight and restraint, while the downstream state benefits from guaranteed flows.

1. Pakistan's Weaponisation of the Treaty

1.1 Systematic Obstruction of Indian Development

Since the Treaty's signing, Pakistan has consistently used its dispute resolution provisions as a strategic tool to delay and effectively obstruct development rather than genuine dispute resolution. Virtually every significant hydropower project India has proposed on the Western rivers—even those explicitly permitted under the Treaty's terms—has faced formal Pakistani objection, technical challenge, or referral to arbitration.

Projects including Baglihar, Kishenganga, PakalDul, and Tulbul have all been subjected to prolonged Pakistani challenges. In several cases, Pakistan has acknowledged the potential benefits of Indian projects for regulated water flow—including flood moderation—while simultaneously opposing them. This pattern reveals that Pakistani objections are not genuinely about Treaty compliance; they are about preventing Indian development in Jammu and Kashmir, regardless of the legal merits.

1.2 The 'Water War' Narrative and Its Deployment

Pakistan has simultaneously exploited India's consistent compliance with the Treaty to construct and disseminate an international narrative portraying India as a potential 'water aggressor'. Pakistani officials, academics, and diplomatic channels have repeatedly raised the spectre of India 'weaponising water' against Pakistan—citing the very Treaty that India has scrupulously honoured.

This narrative—posing the upper riparian as a threat—has proven remarkably effective with international audiences unfamiliar with the Treaty's history. Pakistan has used it to gener-

ate diplomatic pressure, attract multilateral sympathy, and constrain India's ability to assert its legitimate Treaty rights.

The singular irony of this strategy is that India has not committed a single violation of the Treaty—not during the 1965 war, not during the 1971 war, not during the 1999 Kargil conflict, and not at any other point in the sixty-five years of the Treaty's operation. India has maintained compliance even as Pakistan has used its territory to conduct state-sponsored terrorism against India.

2. The Consequences for India

2.1 Unrealised Development Potential

The Treaty's constraints have had measurable, lasting consequences for India's development in the Indus Basin. Vast areas of Rajasthan and parts of Punjab that could have been irrigated remain arid or dependent on alternative, more expensive water sources. The agricultural productivity foregone over six decades represents an incalculable economic loss.

2.2 Jammu and Kashmir's Suppressed Hydropower Potential

The impact on Jammu and Kashmir has been particularly acute. The Union Territory sits astride the Western rivers and possesses enormous, largely untapped hydropower potential. Development of that potential is constrained at every turn by the Treaty's design restrictions, Pakistan's systematic objections, and the perpetual risk of multi-tiered long drawn dispute resolution mechanism. Local populations have increasingly come to view the Treaty not as a framework for shared benefit but as an instrument of their own economic

marginalisation—an external imposition that prevents them from developing the natural resources flowing through their own territory.

2.3 Energy Security Implications

India's inability to optimally develop the hydropower potential of the Western rivers has direct implications for national energy security. The Treaty's restrictions mean that potential capacity—as a clean, renewable, and economically efficient energy source—has been sacrificed purely because of Pakistan's strategic obstruction of even the limited rights India possesses in this asymmetric agreement.

3. India's Case

The Treaty was intended to achieve the "most complete and satisfactory utilisation of the waters of the Indus system of rivers" in a "spirit of goodwill and friendship"—a context that no longer exists.

The treaties derive their legitimacy not merely from the force of law but from the good faith implementation of their terms by all signatories. Pakistan's documented and persistent use of state-sponsored terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy against India—culminating in atrocities including the 2001 Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and most recently the Pahalgam attack of April 2025—fundamentally challenges the premise upon which India's continued compliance with the IWT rests. Bilateral agreements cannot be selectively honoured: a state cannot simultaneously breach the foundational norms of inter-state conduct while demanding that its negotiating partner fulfil treaty obligations that disproportionately benefit the norm-breaker. The Treaty cannot be an island of In-

dian compliance within a sea of Pakistani bad faith. India's step represents an assertion long overdue—that international agreements are a two-way street.

4. Conclusion

The Indus Waters Treaty has long been celebrated as a triumph of international diplomacy. This paper has argued that such a characterization fundamentally misrepresents what actually occurred: a negotiation process in which Pakistani intransigence was rewarded with concessions, and Indian goodwill was systematically exploited to produce an agreement that was inequitable from its inception. Nevertheless, India surrendered 80 percent of the water, paid £62 million (approximately \$2.5 billion in present value) to facilitate that surrender, accepted one-sided operational restrictions on its own territory, and has maintained scrupulous compliance for sixty-five years—including through Pakistan inflicted multiple wars and sustained sponsoring of cross border terrorism. In return, India has received a Treaty agreed to in good faith that Pakistan uses as a tool of developmental obstruction, a 'water war' narrative it deploys internationally with no factual basis, and the permanent underdevelopment of vast tracts of Indian territory. India's step is to protect its legitimate interests in the Indus Basin. This is not aggression; it is the long-overdue correction of an asymmetric arrangement premised on a goodwill that was never reciprocated. To those who ask why hold the Treaty in abeyance now, it would be useful to remember that there is no wrong time for a right decision.



Is Washington's "Both Sides" Tilt on Kashmir a Betrayal of India - or a Realist Reset?

From Trump's ceasefire credit-grab to Asim Munir's White House lunch, the United States has re-hyphenated India and Pakistan in ways that alarm New Delhi and delight Islamabad. The South Asian American community deserves an honest accounting of what changed, why, and what it costs.

(TSAI Bureau) For nearly a quarter century, a quiet but significant shift governed Washington's approach to South Asia. Starting with the George W. Bush administration and sustained through Obama and Biden, U.S. policymakers practiced what diplomats called "de-hyphenation" - treating India and Pakistan as fundamentally distinct relationships, refusing to link American engagement with New Delhi to the state of tensions with Islamabad. The logic was sound: India was a billion-person democracy, a rising economic partner, a natural counterweight to China, a strategic ally in the making. Pakistan, vital in certain counterterrorism contexts, would be managed separately. India was no longer to be measured against Pakistan; it was a relationship in its own right. That policy framework died somewhere between May 10, 2025 - when Donald Trump took to social media to announce a 'FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE' between India and Pakistan before either government had confirmed it - and the day Pakistan's Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir sat down for a White House lunch that broke diplomatic protocol, since Munir is not Pakistan's head of state. For analysts who have spent decades watching U.S. South Asia policy, the reversal was both swift and stunning. For the South Asian American community - the one that straddles Jackson Heights and New Delhi, Coney Island Avenue and Karachi - it demands serious, clear-eyed analysis rather than either reflexive outrage or knowing resignation.

The Ceasefire Dispute That Broke the Relationship

The sequence of events matters. On May 10, 2025, as the four-day India-Pakistan conflict initiated by Operation Sindoor reached its most dangerous peak - with Pakistan having convened its National Command Authority, the body that controls nuclear decisions, and Indian jets having struck airbases deep inside Pakistani Punjab - American diplomacy moved decisively. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance worked phones across New Delhi and Islamabad. Rubio later said he had spent 48 hours engaged with both sides and announced that the two countries had agreed not only to a ceasefire but to hold talks on 'a broad set of issues at a neutral site.'

The problem, from India's perspective, was every word of Rubio's statement. New Delhi had not agreed to talks at a neutral site - a formulation that implies third-party mediation and implicitly elevates Kashmir as an internationalized dispute. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif immediately thanked Trump for his 'leadership and proactive role for peace in the region,' framing the ceasefire as an American-brokered achievement. Trump himself described it as such, repeatedly, including by suggesting he had offered trade incentives to stop the fighting - a claim India's Foreign Ministry flatly denied: 'The issue of trade did not come up in any of these discussions.'

India's own account was unambiguous: the ceasefire was worked out 'directly between the two countries,' full stop. Pakistan's DGMO called India's DGMO; India agreed to stop military action having achieved its objectives; there was nothing to mediate because India had never accepted a third-party role. The collision between these two narratives was not merely a PR dispute. It represented, as Japanese analyst Toru Ito observed in a careful assessment for the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, a return to the Cold War 'hyphenation' policy - treating India and Pakistan as a paired problem requiring U.S. management - that had been deliberately abandoned by every administration since George W. Bush. The Lowy Institute called it bluntly: Modi now faced a 're-hyphenation challenge.'

The Asim Munir Factor and the Pakistan Reset

Equally alarming to New Delhi was the trajectory of the Trump-Pakistan relationship in the months surrounding the conflict. Trump had hosted Asim Munir at the White House - an extraordinary gesture for a military chief who is not his country's head of government - after Pakistan delivered a counterterrorism win in Washington had been seeking: the capture of the perpetrator of the 2021 Abbey Gate bombing in Kabul that killed 13 American service members. Trump thanked Pakistan publicly at a joint address to Congress, a moment that, as the Fletcher Forum documented, 'contrasted sharply with his first-term tweets about Pakistani lies and deceit.' U.S. Central Command testified to Congress that Pakistan had been a 'phenomenal partner in the counterterrorism world.' Tariff rates for Pakistan were reduced while India was slapped with a cumulative 50 percent tariff - partly for buying Russian oil - making India one of the most heavily penalized American trade partners on earth.

The transactional logic of the Trump administration, as the Fletcher Forum's analysts observed, actually disadvantaged India's democratic structures. India's parliamentary oversight, judicial activism, right-to-information laws, and competitive bidding processes made the kind of swift, secretive deal-making that Trump prefers structurally impossible. Pakistan's military, which holds a stranglehold over political decisions without democratic accountability, could offer Trump personalized, rapid commitments on oil access, crypto partnerships, rare earth elements, and counterterrorism deliverables that India simply cannot replicate. In Trump's transactional framework, democratic guardrails are liabilities, not assets.

The result, as Foreign Policy's C. Raja Mohan observed, was that the Modi government found itself genuinely blindsided. 'Modi's advisors had a decent grasp of the coalition that propelled Trump back into the White House,' he wrote. 'Yet they were blindsided by the power and fervor of the MAGA movement, which turned on India and its diaspora with unexpected

force.' The same administration that featured Indian American figures like Vivek Ramaswamy and whose Vice President married a Hindu woman from Ohio was also the administration whose senior trade counsellor Peter Navarro labeled Russia's war in Ukraine 'Modi's war' because India kept buying Russian oil, and whose social media ecosystem amplified podcasts calling Indian immigrants 'gangsters with laptops.'

The Realist Case for Washington's Pivot

It would be intellectually dishonest to present this only as American betrayal of India, because there is a serious, coherent realist argument on the other side - one that the South Asian American community, which spans both Indian and Pakistani families, is uniquely positioned to weigh honestly.

The argument runs as follows. Pakistan, whatever its record on cross-border terrorism, controls territory through which critical Afghan supply routes pass, houses nuclear weapons that the United States cannot afford to see destabilized, and demonstrated in May 2025 that it could shoot down advanced Western-origin fighter jets using Chinese weapons systems - a development that shocked NATO defense planners. A United States that entirely abandoned Pakistan to isolation would be left with no diplomatic leverage at a moment when the risk of another India-Pakistan military confrontation - rated as significant by the Council on Foreign Relations for 2026 - requires credible American back-channel influence. Trump's phone calls and Rubio's diplomacy may have been self-aggrandizing in presentation; they were not without effect. A Pakistani source told CNN that Rubio was 'instrumental in striking the deal.' If the alternative to messy, credit-hungry American mediation was an uncontrolled escalation between two nuclear-armed states, the messiness is defensible.

There is also the longer-term structural question that India's own strategic establishment has been quietly wrestling with: does India actually want the United States to completely abandon its Pakistan relationship? A Washington with zero influence in Islamabad is a Washington that cannot pick up the phone during the next crisis. India's preference is not for U.S.-Pakistan severance but for U.S. dehyphenation - meaning Washington should not treat the relationship as linked, should not offer Kashmir mediation as a prize for Pakistani cooperation, and should hold Pakistan accountable for cross-border terrorism even while maintaining counterterrorism channels. That is a nuanced position that requires sustained diplomacy, not the transactional lurching of the current administration.

"The Indian American diaspora cannot be proxies for New Delhi, as some voices demand. But it can - and should - be a constituency that insists Washington hold its stated commitments to demo-

cratic partners."

What the Diaspora Should Demand

This brings us to the question that most directly concerns readers of this paper. The debate within South Asian American communities over how to respond to the U.S.-India tensions of 2025 has been fractious. Shashi Tharoor, the prominent Indian parliamentarian, publicly criticized Indian Americans for staying 'silent' on the 50 percent tariffs and the \$100,000 H-1B fee. Suhag Shukla of the Hindu American Foundation responded that 'Indian Americans do not exist to serve as proxies for the Government of India. We exist as Americans.' Both positions contain truth. Shukla is right that the diaspora's primary loyalty is to its American citizenship, its American community, and the values it came here to build. We are not lobbyists for New Delhi any more than Italian Americans are lobbyists for Rome. But Tharoor is also right that a diaspora community that built formidable political capital - that lobbied successfully for the Civil Nuclear Deal in 2008, that reversed Modi's visa ban in 2014 - and then fell silent as that capital was squandered by MAGA-era hostility, has allowed a vacuum to form. A community cannot trade on its political influence when convenient and then disclaim that influence when it becomes uncomfortable.

What the South Asian American community - Indian, Pakistani, and every shade between - should demand from Washington is not the partisanship of picking one country over another, but the consistency of principle. The principle is simple: state-sponsored terrorism is not equivalent to the military response it provokes. Kashmir is a bilateral matter that India and Pakistan must resolve without American pressure on India to accept third-party mediation as a condition of ceasefire. Democratic partners who follow rule-of-law processes deserve different treatment than states where a military chief can make trade commitments at a White House lunch without legislative scrutiny. Washington's 'both sides' tilt on Kashmir is not simply a betrayal of India and not simply a realist reset. It is an improvised, transactional, self-serving maneuver by an administration that wanted Nobel Peace Prize optics in May 2025 and a counterterrorism win in Kabul. The problem is not the outcome - a ceasefire that stopped a nuclear-capable conflict was a good outcome - but the price paid in strategic coherence, in the inflation of Pakistan's diplomatic standing, and in the signal sent to every democracy in Asia that its partnership with Washington is contingent on how well it serves Trump's moment-to-moment interests. That price will be paid slowly, quietly, and largely by people in this region who had no seat at the table when it was agreed.

The views expressed in Perspective pieces represent the editorial judgment and are intended to inform community discussion. We welcome responses from readers.

South Asia's Gen Z Revolutions: Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka - and Who's Next?

Three governments toppled in three years, swept away by leaderless uprisings organized on Discord and TikTok. A new political generation is rewriting the rules of South Asian democracy - and its diaspora cousins in New York are watching more closely than anyone realizes.

(TSAI Bureau) It began, as so many ruptures do, with something that seemed almost trivial. In Bangladesh in 2024, the government reinstated colonial-era job quotas reserving 30 percent of civil service positions for descendants of freedom fighters. Students protested. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called them 'grandchildren of Razakars' - collaborators with the Pakistani military - during the 1971 Liberation War. Within weeks, hundreds of thousands were in the streets. By August 5, 2024, Hasina - who had governed Bangladesh for fifteen of the previous sixteen years - had fled the country by helicopter. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights later estimated that 650 people died during the uprising. It was, as the Financial Times' John Reed wrote, a 'Monsoon Revolution' - and it was the first tremor of a tectonic shift.

What followed was extraordinary. In September 2025, Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli attempted to suppress mounting youth protests against corruption by banning 26 social media platforms - Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, X - in a single sweeping decree. The effect was the opposite of what he intended. Young Nepalis, cut off from their usual platforms, migrated to Discord, a gaming-oriented app the government had not thought to include in the ban, and continued organizing. Within three days of protests that left more than 70 people dead from security force violence, Oli had resigned. Nepal's parliament was dissolved. An interim prime minister - Sushila Karki, Nepal's first female chief justice and a figure known for fierce anti-corruption rulings - was chosen not by parliament but by an online Discord poll of more than 10,000 participants, many of them from the diaspora. By March 2026, Nepal had elected Balendra Shah, the 35-year-old rapper-turned-Kathmandu-mayor, as the country's youngest prime minister in history. These are not the outcomes of conventional South Asian politics. They are something new.

Three Countries, One Common Thread

The contexts were different. Sri Lanka's uprising in 2022 was driven by an acute economic catastrophe - fuel shortages, power cuts lasting twelve hours a day, a government that had defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time in the country's history. Protesters stormed the Presidential Palace, swam in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's pool, and broadcast it live on social media as Rajapaksa fled to the Maldives and then to Singapore. Bangladesh's revolution grew from a specific injustice - discriminatory quotas - that escalated into a general revolt against sixteen years of authoritarian consolidation. Nepal's protests were triggered by a social media ban that became, in the hands of a generation already furious about corruption and nepotism, the final straw.

But analysts across the political spectrum have identified a structural pattern beneath the different triggers. Paul Staniland, an associate professor of political science at

the University of Chicago who studies political violence in South Asia, called the pattern a 'new politics of instability' - a dramatic departure from a region where major political crises had historically resolved through military coups, controlled elections, or negotiated elite transitions rather than popular overthrow. The common thread, as Nepal's LSE South Asia blog documented, was 'the culmination of false promises by leaders, persistent corruption, recurring crises, and deepening inequality under unaccountable governance.' And the common instrument was a generation that had grown up with smartphones, that had seen the lifestyles of ruling-class children flaunted on TikTok and Instagram, and that had zero tolerance for the performative rituals of political systems that delivered nothing.

Nepal's uprising carried some of the most vivid details of this generational rupture. Protesters borrowed the skull-and-crossbones flag of the Straw Hat Pirates from the Japanese manga One Piece - a symbol, across multiple Asian protest movements, of rebellion against unjust authority. They deployed the '#nepobabies' hashtag to mock the lavish social media presence of ruling-class children whose parents ran a country where nearly 2,000 young Nepalis left every single day to seek work abroad. When Oli mocked the 'Gen Z origins' of the agitators - apparently assuming that youth was a disqualification rather than a credential - he accelerated his own removal. His banning of social media platforms, intended to silence dissent, instead demonstrated to every young Nepali watching that their government feared them enough to try.

The Diaspora's Unprecedented Role

For South Asian Americans, there is something both exhilarating and disquieting about this wave of revolutions. Exhilarating, because the demands being made - accountability, transparency, an end to dynastic corruption, governance that serves ordinary people rather than political families - are the same democratic values that drove many of our families to emigrate in the first place. Disquieting, because the revolutions have been harder to sustain than they were to ignite, and the outcomes are proving more complicated than the protests that produced them.

The diaspora's role in these movements was not peripheral. It was, in several cases, decisive. The Bangladeshi diaspora mobilized in Italy, Canada, France, Qatar, the UAE, the UK, and Malta, holding solidarity protests while streaming protests back home to Bangladeshis abroad. When Bangladeshi workers in the UAE organized demonstrations, three were sentenced to life imprisonment for 'rioting' and 54 others received sentences of ten to eleven years. Human Rights Watch condemned the arrests. The Nepali diaspora, spread across India, the Gulf states, and the West, joined the Discord servers where organizational decisions were made in real time. As Heinrich Böll Stiftung documented, the diasporic contribution was not merely sym-

bolic - the transnational distribution of organizing meant that no single government crackdown could fully suppress coordination. When Nepal's government blocked platforms domestically, servers hosted by Nepalis abroad kept the movement's digital infrastructure alive.

This is new. The South Asian diaspora has always been a source of remittances, of nostalgic cultural maintenance, of occasional political lobbying on behalf of ancestral homelands. It has not, historically, been an operational node in revolutionary politics. That has changed. And for South Asian Americans in New York, the implications are worth thinking through seriously. The activism of the Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan communities here was not merely moral solidarity. It was material participation in political processes that would determine the governments, economies, and security environments to which those communities remain connected - through family, through remittances, through the visas and immigration decisions of governments that these uprisings produced.

What the Revolutions Have - and Have Not - Achieved

One year after Bangladesh's revolution, the accounting is sobering. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, appointed to lead an interim government, has been slow to hold elections and has faced serious criticism for maintaining law and order while navigating the competing demands of the student movement, established opposition parties, and the Islamist coalition that performed strongly in the February 2026 elections. The National Citizen Party - the youth movement that grew directly from the July Revolution - entered those elections with enormous expectations and found itself competing within an electoral system that still rewarded organizational experience and governing track records. Bangladesh Nationalist Party, with decades of institutional infrastructure, outperformed the youth movement. Research fellow Imran Ahmed at the National University of Singapore observed that 'established political actors retained structural advantages within the electoral arena' even after the protest movement had transformed the political agenda.

Sri Lanka's story offers another cautionary note. After Rajapaksa's ouster, parliament elected Ranil Wickremesinghe, a veteran politician who had served as prime minister multiple times - precisely the kind of establishment figure the protesters had risen against. His mandate was economic stabilization, and he pursued it through IMF austerity that imposed genuine hardship on the same population that had stormed the Presidential Palace. In the 2024 elections, voters chose Anura Kumara Dissanayake, a reformist candidate from the left who has managed to build a workable relationship with India and pursue institutional change - a more hopeful trajectory than Sri Lanka's recent history would have predicted, but still

fragile.

Nepal's outcome, at least for now, is the most encouraging of the three. Balendra Shah's election as prime minister in March 2026 at 35 represents a genuine generational transfer of power, not merely a symbolic one. His Rastriya Swatantra Party, built on a platform of accountability and structural reform, swept elections that observers rated as free and fair. But as France 24 noted in its assessment of the Gen Z movements' track records, Shah 'doesn't do very many interviews' and 'doesn't inspire confidence in that way,' and the unemployment crisis that drives nearly 2,000 young Nepalis out of the country every single day remains unaddressed by any concrete policy announcement. The revolution succeeded. Governing is proving harder.

"The protests were leaderless by design - that was their strength. But governing requires exactly what the movements deliberately avoided: hierarchy, accountability, and the unglamorous work of institutional construction."

Who Might Be Next - and What the Diaspora Owes

The question of which South Asian country might be next in this wave is one analysts are asking with increasing seriousness. Pakistan, with its collapsing economy, its soaring inflation, its military chokehold on politics, and a Gen Z population that has watched Bangladesh and Nepal with unmistakable attention, is the country most frequently named. India - the region's largest democracy, whose own political system faces accelerating pressures around economic inequality, democratic backsliding, and a young population with aspirations that its formal political structures are not meeting - is discussed more quietly but persistently in academic circles. Neither is imminent; both have the demographic and economic conditions that preceded the revolutions already observed. For South Asian Americans, particularly the younger generation - the ones who are themselves South Asian Gen Z, who grew up watching the same TikToks and Discord servers as their cousins in Kathmandu and Dhaka - these revolutions are not merely news stories about ancestral homelands. They are a mirror. The same frustration with dynastic politics, with inequality papered over by social media performance, with governance that serves elites rather than the generation that must live with its consequences - these frustrations do not dissolve upon arrival at JFK or Newark Liberty Airport. They travel. They take root in new soil. They express themselves in Zohran Mamdani winning the New York City mayoral race against a former governor who embodied exactly the kind of established political dynast that young South Asians across the region have been toppling.

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Bengal 2026: The fall of the last bastion and the twilight of regional satraps

With Mamata Banerjee's defeat, the 2026 verdict signals a deeper shift in Indian politics: from coalition-era regional dominance to the rise of an increasingly centralised national political order.

(TSAI Bureau) The 2026 West Bengal Assembly election was not just another state verdict. It was a political inflection point. For the first time in 49 years, a national party breached the last ideological fortress of regionalism in eastern India. The BJP's victory in Bengal completes a pattern visible across India: the steady subsidence of regional satraps who once dictated terms to Delhi.

HOW BJP COUNTERED BENGALI ASMITA

For over a decade, the Trinamool Congress weaponised "Bengali Asmita" — Bengali pride — to paint the BJP as a party of "outsiders." The narrative worked in 2021. Jai Shri Ram was countered by Jai Bangla. But by 2026, it had lost its sting.

The BJP flipped the script. Amit Shah declared early that the BJP's CM would be "local and Bengali speaking," defanging the outsider tag. More symbolically, BJP candidates and leaders campaigned with fish in hand, eating at local homes, signalling that the party had no issue with Bengali non-vegetarian food habits. The message was clear: the BJP was not anti-Bengali culture; it was anti-TMC misgovernance.

This was coupled with a hard campaign on corruption — SSC teacher recruitment scam, syndicate raj, and law-and-order failures in Murshidabad. Regional pride could not override lived anger over jobs sold and homes torched. Mamata Banerjee's model of welfare + Asmita + minority consolidation finally cracked.

LARGER EROSION OF REGIONAL FORCES

Election after election, regional parties are being defeated, broken, or tamed. These were the same forces that, since the 1990s, held national parties hostage in Lok Sabha math. Coalition-era India ran on unequal agreements where Congress and BJP had little choice but to keep regional partners in dominant positions.

Both national parties tried to escape that shadow. Congress failed. The BJP, post-2014, has largely succeeded. The Bengal win is the symbolic completion of that project.

BJP PLAYBOOK: DEFEAT,



BREAK, OR TAME

The party has used 4 distinct methods against regional rivals:

Break and absorb: Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar's NCP were split. Party names and symbols went to factions aligned with BJP. The offshoots now survive under BJP's wings. The 2024 Maharashtra Assembly verdict confirmed it: the breakaway groups, with BJP, decimated the originals.

Counter the regional narrative: Against Mamata Banerjee and Naveen Patnaik, BJP didn't deny regional identity. It co-opted it and layered Hindutva + development over it. In Odisha, Amit Shah cornered Patnaik by questioning his heir apparent VK Pandian — a Tamil bureaucrat. "Will Odisha accept a Tamil leading the state?" Shah asked in rally after rally.

BJD's regional pride pitch was turned against it. In 2024, BJD lost after 24 years.

Re-engineer caste coalitions: Against Samajwadi Party and RJD, BJP built a counter to the Muslim-Yadav formula. Hindutva became the glue, combined with aggressive consolidation of non-Yadav OBCs, EBCs, and Dalits. The Samajwadi Party was defeated twice in UP Assembly polls, while the RJD has largely remained out of power in Bihar except during brief coalition interludes. Tame through power dependence: JDU and LJP sur-

vive today as BJP's dependents. BJP won more seats than JDU twice in Bihar and eventually installed its own CM, reducing Nitish Kumar to junior partner. LJP operates as a parasite on BJP's vote share. Same with TDP in Andhra — despite being the bigger partner, Chandrababu Naidu's stature is nowhere close to his Vajpayee-era clout. BJP keeps him in check, not in shine.

Even AAP, despite national party status, was defeated in Delhi in 2025. The pattern: regional parties lose when out of state or central power. They struggle to sustain cadre without patronage.

WHAT REGIONAL PARTIES RAN ON

Their politics traditionally survived on four pillars:

Regional sentiment — language, culture, and "outsider vs insider"

Strong ground connect — local cadre and mohalla-level networks

Caste and religious combinations — M-Y in UP/Bihar, minorities + Dalits in Bengal

Control of state governments — welfare, jobs, and contracts to keep the machinery running

BJP has attacked all four. Regional sentiment is blunted by "double engine + local face." Ground connect is matched by BJP's booth-centric, Panna Pramukh model. Caste combos are fragmented by broader Hindutva umbrella. And losing state power, as seen in Odisha,

Bengal, Maharashtra, leaves regional outfits exposed.

STRUCTURAL CRISIS FOR REGIONAL PARTIES

Three problems now haunt them:

Family-run structures: Most are one-family shows: SP, RJD, NCP, Shiv Sena, TMC, BJD, DMK, BRS. Succession fights and limited upward mobility for cadre create exits. BJP exploits this by offering "better opportunity" to second-rung leaders. Breakaways in Maharashtra, UP, and Bihar prove the point.

Fading regional sentiment: Aspirational voters, urbanisation, and pan-India digital media dilute linguistic chauvinism. Stronger Hindutva sentiment often trumps sub-nationalism. The Bengali voter angry over job scams chose BJP despite TMC's Asmita pitch.

Unsustainable cadre model: Regional parties need constant agitation, new programs, and access to power to keep cadre motivated. Out of power, funds dry up and workers drift. BJD's machinery collapsed within months of losing Odisha. TMC faces the same test now.

WHY BENGAL MATTERS MORE THAN OTHERS

Bengal was the last fort of "linguistic state Asmita." Tamil Nadu has Dravidian pride, but DMK still aligns with national parties. Maharashtra's regional pride was tied to Shiv Sena, now split. Karnataka's region-

alism is weak. Bengal's Asmita was cultural, intellectual, and political — from Left to TMC. Its fall forces a rethink. If Bengali Asmita cannot stop the BJP, what can? The message to the DMK, BRS, YSRCP, and the remnants of the TMC is stark: welfare plus identity politics is not enough when governance fatigue sets in and the BJP offers both a local face and national appeal.

END OF COALITION COMPULSION?

From 1989 to 2014, India's prime ministers were at the mercy of regional satraps. Deve Gowda, Gujral, Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh — all ran governments where state leaders could pull the plug. Modi's model of "total politics," combined with saturation welfare schemes, has significantly reduced that compulsion.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election left the BJP at 240 seats, short of a majority. Yet regional parties did not dictate terms. The TDP and JDU joined the NDA, but largely on the BJP's terms. There was no Common Minimum Programme and little scope for coalition-era bargaining. Bengal 2026 reinforces the message: the BJP no longer needs to bow to regional pride to win in eastern India.

WHAT NEXT FOR REGIONAL PARTIES

They face a binary choice: adapt or perish. Adaptation means moving beyond family-centric politics, building ideologies that transcend state borders, and delivering governance that can outperform the BJP's "double-engine" pitch. Perishing means gradual absorption, as seen with the LJP, the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, and the Ajit Pawar faction of the NCP. For now, the era of regional satraps as kingmakers appears over. Bengal was the final audit. The verdict suggests that India is moving from a federation dominated by strong state parties to a polity increasingly centred around national parties, with the BJP as the principal pole. The question for 2029 is no longer whether regional parties can stop a BJP landslide. It is whether they can survive at all as independent political forces. Whether they can bounce back is now the real question.

Mamata Donald Banerjee

There are similarities between Donald Trump of November 2020, and Mamata Banerjee of May 2026. Their self-delusion and choreography are identical.

(TSAI Bureau) There is something deeply comforting about the human capacity for self-delusion. It is one of the few natural resources that is genuinely renewable, requires no mining, and produces no waste except democracy. Donald Trump discovered this in November 2020. Mamata Banerjee has rediscovered it in May 2026. The choreography is identical.

Trump, you will recall, watched the numbers come in on the night of November 3, 2020. They were not coming in favourably. By the time Arizona fell and Pennsylvania wobbled, the arithmetic was doing what arithmetic insists on doing: reflecting the reality, regardless of who is watching. This is arithmetic's most infuriating quality.

Trump's response was to declare victory at 2 am, denounce the count, and spend the next 63 days building an elaborate cathedral of conspiracy in which he was the robbed sovereign and 77 million Americans were either fraudsters or fools. He held rallies. He filed lawsuits. He lost the lawsuits. He held more rallies. He pressured the Vice President. He called the Georgia Secretary of State and requested, with remarkable specificity, that 11,780 votes be found. None were found. Not one.

On January 6, 2021, he gave a speech urging the crowd to "fight like hell" against a stolen election and march to the Capitol, where Congress was preparing to certify the electoral college vote. The crowd obliged. They forced their way in, fighting Capitol Police, destroying property. Pipe bombs were found at the Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee headquarters. About 140 officers were injured. The Capitol, that grand old building that had survived the British in 1814, nearly did not survive its own citizens in 2021.

History is frequently funnier than historians like to admit. Now cross seven oceans and a few time zones.

West Bengal. May 4, 2026. The BJP swept the polls in its

first-ever victory in Bengal, winning 206 of the 294 assembly seats. The Trinamool Congress, which had lorded over Bengal since 2011, was reduced to rubble. Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister, Didi, the woman who had made herself synonymous with Bengal itself, lost her own seat. Banerjee refused to concede, alleging election chori. "I will not resign, I did not lose," she said, claiming over 100 seats were "forcibly taken" with the help of a "biased" Election Commission.

One hundred seats. Forcibly taken. By the Election Commission. Of India.

This is a remarkable claim. The Election Commission has historically been accused of many things: tardiness, favouritism, the odd scheduling that works conveniently for the BJP, but running a covert paramilitary operation to manually manipulate 100 constituencies will be a feat few expect.

Everyone knows why Bengal required such heavy central force deployment. If you were living in Europe, read up on the 2021 election aftermath. Mamata has always been ambitious. It appears she has now extended that ambition to her accusations as well.

he symmetry with Trump is not accidental. Both leaders had built their political identity around the idea that they were the authentic voice of the people. Rebels. Both had spent years as outsiders, scrapping against the establishment, accumulating a loyalty that was personal rather than institutional. Both, when the people spoke decisively against them, concluded that the people must have been confused. Or coerced. Or both. The people, in this reading, are always sovereign, right up until they vote the wrong way.

Trump declared he would "never concede" from behind a bulletproof shield, criticising the media and calling for Mike Pence to overturn the results. Mamata held a press conference and told journalists she had not lost. These are functionally the same statement. The bulletproof shield is op-

tional. The refusal to engage with reality is mandatory.

What followed in Bengal was predictable, unlike what happened in Washington in January 2021, which surprised at least some people who had not been paying attention. Post-election violence erupted across West Bengal with reports of killings, arson and clashes between party workers. At least four people were killed in unrest since the results were announced, with incidents of arson, vandalism and targeted attacks across multiple districts. Clashes and political confrontations surfaced across Kolkata, Howrah, Birbhum, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and other districts. A police officer was shot in Nyajat. TMC offices were torched in Jamuria. Bulldozers demolished structures in Kolkata's New Market. BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's closest aide was shot dead just outside the metropolis. The scale differs from January 6. The logic is the same.

When a leader tells their followers that the result was stolen, they are not making a factual claim. They are issuing an instruction. The instruction says: do not accept this. The instruction says: the streets are the real court. The instruction says: your anger is legitimate because my loss is impossible. In Washington, 120 of those charged for crimes on January 6 specifically cited Trump's remarks as the reason they went to the Capitol. They were not wrong to cite him. They had been told, repeatedly, in language both poetic and explicit, that fighting was required. They fought.

In Bengal, cadres who were already deserting found in Mamata's press conference a reason to pause. The quiet migration of the politically abandoned had already begun, many quietly eyeing a new patron in the BJP, when they heard the call to pick up whatever was at hand and prove their loyalty in the only currency that remained available to them.

This is the mechanism. This is how it works, every time, in



every language, on every continent where a leader refuses to lose.

There are differences, of course. Trump had Twitter, Fox News, and a MAGA infrastructure of grievance that stretched from prime-time television to the darkest corners of the internet. Mamata has her cadres and a ferocity of personality that has never needed infrastructure, only an audience and a grievance. Trump's fraud claims were rejected by court after court after court. Mamata's claims are yet to find a court patient enough to hear them.

Trump eventually, reluctantly, conceded to an orderly transition of power in a televised statement, pressured by his Cabinet and the public outrage against him, and presumably by the dawning realisation that the National Guard was not going to march for him regardless of how many hints he dropped. Mamata shows no such pressure. She has found support from fellow INDIA Alliance travellers, which is to say, from people who also lost badly and would like company. She now waits for the world to catch up with her version of events. The world, as usual, is in no hurry.

There is also this: in 2021, the mob that stormed the Capitol was trying to stop a democratic process. In 2026, the violence in Bengal aims at stopping a ceremonial process to mark the conclusion of a democratic process. One attacked democracy

at the door. The other is attacking it in the driveway. The car has already left.

Democracy is a strange and demanding system. It asks of its participants something that is, on reflection, genuinely difficult. The willingness to lose. To accept that a free and fair election, however imperfect the system, however fallible the voters, is the mechanism by which power is transferred and legitimacy is conferred. Most politicians understand this. Stalin understood this. They accept it. They go home, regroup, and come back after five years, slightly humbler and considerably better at retail politics.

Some do not. Some decide that the election was wrong, the commission was biased, and that their loss is, in the deepest sense, a crime against the natural order of things. They say so, loudly, to large crowds who are already disappointed, already angry, already looking for someone to blame. The results may have been difficult to predict, but the result of the results was predictable. In Bengal, they have always been entirely predictable. What is remarkable is that the companies of central forces have remained mute spectators. Weren't they supposed to stay on for an extended period to prevent exactly this? The forces were deployed to ensure a free and fair vote. Apparently, nobody thought the boots on the ground could also ensure a free and fair aftermath. And bloody to boot.

This is not a pandemic, says WHO as hantavirus cases linked to cruise rise to 5

WHO has confirmed five hantavirus infections linked to the cruise ship MV Hondius. A WHO expert joined by Dutch doctors and a specialist from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is conducting health checks on all passengers and crew.



on April 6 and died onboard on April 11. At the time, hantavirus was not suspected, as symptoms resembled other respiratory illnesses and no samples were taken.

The outbreak surfaced after the United Kingdom alerted the World Health Organisation to a cluster of severe respiratory illness cases among passengers on the Dutch-flagged vessel. So far, eight cases have been identified, including three deaths. Five have been confirmed as hantavirus, while three are still suspected. Officials said none of the remaining passengers are showing symptoms.

WHO ALERTS 12 COUNTRIES

They are conducting medical as-

sessments of all passengers and crew while collecting data to evaluate infection risks. The World Health Organization has also alerted 12 countries whose nationals disembarked earlier in the voyage: Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States.

The World Health Organisation has stressed that the outbreak linked to the cruise ship does not pose a significant public health threat as the existing containment measures are adequate and there is no indication of widespread transmission.

"Most hantavirus strains do not

transmit between people," the agency said.

Health experts also drew a clear distinction between hantavirus and COVID-19, noting that the two diseases spread very differently. "This is not SARS-CoV-2. It doesn't spread the same way," WHO DG said. "This is no coronavirus. It is not a new virus. This is not a pandemic."

According to the agency, human-to-human transmission remains rare and typically requires very close and prolonged contact. In most cases, hantavirus spreads through exposure to infected rodent droppings or contaminated environments, rather than contact between people.

(TSAI Bureau) The World Health Organisation said on Thursday that five hantavirus cases linked to the cruise ship MV Hondius have been confirmed, while three more remain under investigation, according to Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Speaking at a media briefing,

Tedros said the overall public health risk is low, despite the deaths of three people linked to the outbreak. He added that more cases could emerge due to the virus's incubation period, which can extend up to six weeks. The first known case involved a passenger who developed symptoms

Fear, hunger and debt: Indian sailors trapped in Hormuz recount Iran war ordeal

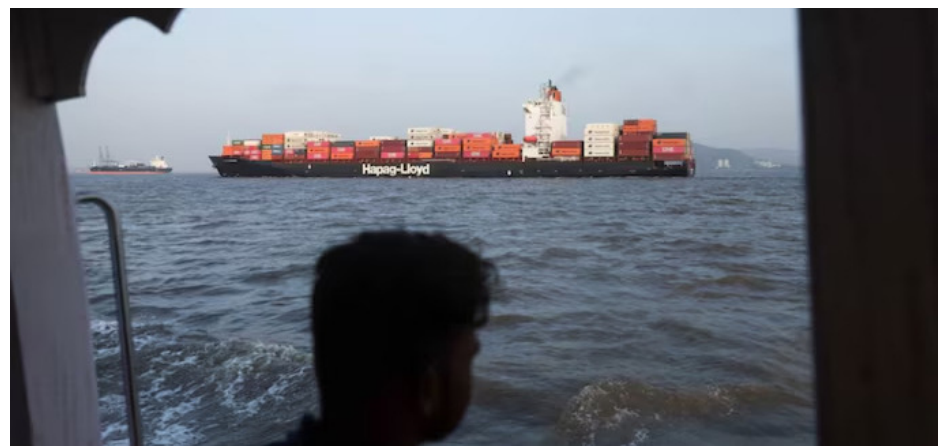
Indian sailors stranded near the Strait of Hormuz recount nights of missile fire, food shortages and mounting debts after the Iran conflict choked Strait of Hormuz.

(TSAI Bureau) Missiles and drones exploded in the nightly sky. Indian sailors waited helplessly on stranded ships near the Strait of Hormuz. Food supplies ran low. Families back home had no idea if they were safe. What was once a busy trade route came to a standstill due to a naval blockade caused by the Middle East conflict.

Among them was Tithi Chiranjeevi, a 28-year-old sailor who spent over a month aboard an Iranian vessel caught in the crisis. He said nightly bombardments terrified him. "Around 10 to 20 missiles struck every night. No one could sleep," he told news agency Reuters after returning to India following a 15-day journey that took him through Iraq, Armenia and Dubai. Chiranjeevi had spent six months working on the cargo ship Ilda, carrying construction materials to Dubai, when the Strait of Hormuz was suddenly blocked due to the conflict.

FOOD SHORTAGES, NO CONTACT WITH HOME

The vessel was among nearly 2,000 ships trapped near the narrow waterway, which typically carries about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies. Before



hostilities erupted in February, around 138 ships crossed the strait daily, according to maritime data cited by Reuters. For many sailors, the crisis went beyond safety fears. Food supplies ran low, and communication lines broke down, cutting them off from their families back home. Chiranjeevi said he lost touch with his widowed mother in Visakhapatnam as conditions worsened. "They (our families) were very concerned," he said.

Anant Singh Chauhan, another Indian sailor stranded on the same vessel, spoke about the mental stress as the situation worsened. "Sometimes, we used to feel we won't be able to make it

back home," Chauhan said. At least three Indian sailors have been killed in the conflict.

COST OF SURVIVAL

India is one of the world's largest suppliers of maritime workers, with a workforce estimated at around 300,000. The government has coordinated evacuation efforts, bringing back nearly 3,000 sailors from the Gulf region, including at least 23 in recent days.

However, the financial burden on individual workers has been severe. Both Chiranjeevi and Chauhan said they had taken loans at high interest rates to

secure overseas jobs, paying about 450,000 each to recruitment agents. With savings depleted during the crisis, many returned home with mounting debt but a sense of relief.

"It is like a rebirth for us," Chauhan said in Mumbai, standing near the Gateway of India.

US-IRAN TALKS SIGNAL LIMITED BREAKTHROUGH

Amid the boiling tensions, diplomatic efforts to halt the conflict have gained momentum. The US and Iran are moving towards a limited, temporary agreement aimed at stopping hostilities. Under the plan, both sides would first formally end the war and ease naval blockade around the Strait of Hormuz. That would then open a 30-day window for talks on a broader settlement. US President Donald Trump expressed optimism about the talks. "They want to make a deal it's very possible," he said, adding later that "it'll be over quickly". However, there are also indications that the two nations have failed to reconcile their differences despite positive developments. The proposed agreement also fails to meet the US requirement to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Saudi's pushback for US to use bases forced Trump's U-turn on Hormuz: Report

US President Donald Trump paused the mission to reopen the Strait of Hormuz after Saudi Arabia reportedly blocked American military access to key airspace and bases, according to a report.



(TSAI Bureau) US President Donald Trump abruptly paused "Project Freedom," a US-led effort to help ships transit through the Strait of Hormuz, after Saudi Arabia pushed back against the operation and suspended American military access to critical airspace and bases, two US officials told NBC News.

Trump had announced the operation on social media on Sunday as a move to break Iran's blockade in the Strait of Hormuz. However, the announcement report-

edly caught key Gulf allies, including Saudi Arabia, by surprise and angered the Kingdom's leadership. In response, Saudi Arabia informed the United States that it would not allow US military aircraft to fly from Prince Sultan Airbase near Riyadh or pass through Saudi airspace to support the operation, the officials said.

NBC News reported that a phone call between Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman failed to resolve the dis-

agreement, forcing the US president to pause Project Freedom in order to restore access to vital regional airspace, the officials added. Other Gulf allies were also reportedly caught off guard. Trump spoke with leaders in Qatar only after the operation had already begun. A Middle Eastern diplomat told NBC News that the United States coordinated the initiative with Oman only after Trump publicly announced it. "The US made an announcement and then coordinated with us," the diplomat said, adding that Oman was "not upset or angry."

A Saudi source told NBC News that Trump and the Saudi crown prince "have been in touch regularly." The source said Saudi officials were also coordinating with Vice President JD Vance, US Central Command and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The source denied any major fallout and said developments were unfolding

"quickly in real time." Saudi Arabia also expressed support for Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to broker an agreement between Iran and the United States to end the conflict. A White House official maintained that "regional allies were notified in advance" about the operation.

Before the operation was paused, the US military had lined up additional ships in the Gulf to transit through the strait. US Central Command had announced that two US-flagged ships had successfully passed through the Strait of Hormuz as part of Project Freedom.

In a social media post announcing the pause, Trump said Project Freedom would remain suspended "for a short period of time" to determine whether an agreement to resolve the conflict "can be finalised and signed."

The US military currently main-

tains fighter aircraft, refuelling tankers and air defence systems at Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia. American officials stressed that military operations in the region depend heavily on cooperation from Gulf allies for "access, basing and overflight," commonly referred to as ABO. Saudi Arabia and Jordan are critical for basing aircraft, Kuwait is important for overflight access, while Oman supports both naval logistics and overflight operations. Officials said military aircraft were essential to provide a defensive umbrella for ships participating in Project Freedom.

Trump also spoke with the Emir of Qatar after the operation began. According to a Qatari statement, both sides discussed the ceasefire agreement and the "implications for maritime security and global supply chains," while emphasising the need for de-escalation.

China sentences 2 ex-ministers to death with reprieve on corruption charges

The armed forces have been one of the main targets of a broad corruption crackdown ordered by President Xi Jinping after coming to power in 2012. The purges reached the elite Rocket Force, which oversees nuclear weapons as well as conventional missiles, in 2023.



(TSAI Bureau) Former Chinese defence ministers Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu were both sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve over graft charges, state news agency Xinhua reported on Thursday, underscoring the severity of the purge in the military.

The armed forces have been one of the main targets of a broad corruption crackdown ordered by President Xi Jinping after coming to power in 2012. The purges reached the elite Rocket Force, which oversees nuclear weapons as well as conventional missiles, in 2023.

Earlier this year, they escalated further, resulting in the removal of the top general in the People's Liberation Army, Zhang Youxia, who was a Politburo member and was long seen as an ally of Xi. Past reports in Xinhua said Li had been suspected of receiving "huge sums of money" in bribes as well as bribing others, and an investigation found he "did not fulfil political responsibilities" and "sought per-

sonnel benefits for himself and others". An investigation launched into Wei in 2023 found that he had accepted "a huge amount of money and valuables" in bribes and "helped others gain improper benefits in personnel arrangements", Xinhua reported in 2024, adding that his actions were "extremely serious in nature, with a highly detrimental impact and tremendous harm".

A death sentence with reprieve in China is typically commuted to life imprisonment if the offender commits no crimes during the period of reprieve. After the commutation, they will be imprisoned for life without the possibility of further commutation or parole, Xinhua said.

China's ongoing military corruption purges are leaving serious deficiencies in its command structure and are likely to have hampered the readiness of its rapidly modernising armed forces, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said this year.

AI Enters the "Year of Truth" – South Asian Tech Leaders Drive Real Impact

2026 is no longer about flashy AI pilots — it's about cold, hard business results.



(TSAI Bureau) Analysts have dubbed this the "Year of Truth for AI", as enterprises shift from experimentation to Proof-of-Impact. South Asian-led firms in New York, New Jersey, and Silicon Valley

are at the forefront of this transition.

From fintech giants in Manhattan to AI startups in Jersey City, Indian American executives are embedding AI into core operations — automating supply chains, enhancing cybersecurity, and delivering measurable ROI. Capgemini and other consultancies report that companies with strong South Asian talent pipelines are pulling ahead, turning AI from a cost center into an "enterprise backbone."

One NYC-based Indian American CTO told us: "Last year we tested AI. This year we're firing it if it doesn't move the needle on revenue or efficiency." With Indian Americans holding key roles at Google, Microsoft, and countless startups, the community is perfectly positioned to dominate this high-stakes phase. Expect more IPOs and acquisitions from Desi AI firms in the coming quarters.

India Set to Become 3rd Largest Economy - NY Desi VCs Smell Massive Opportunity

Get ready for the India gold rush.



(TSAI Bureau) BCG's latest projections confirm India will overtake Germany to become the world's third-largest economy by the end of the decade. Already on track to surpass Japan and claim fourth place soon, India's sustained 6-7% growth is re-writing global investment maps.

New York Indian American venture capitalists are moving fast. Tri-state funds are reallocating capital toward Indian AI, manufacturing, renewables, and consumer tech plays. Diaspora networks are leveraging family ties and deep market knowledge to secure early positions in high-growth startups. "India is no longer just a back-office story — it's becoming the growth engine," said one prominent NY-based Desi investor.

With India's GDP approaching \$4 trillion and a booming middle class, remittances, reverse brain gain, and cross-border deals are set to explode. For South Asian professionals and entrepreneurs in New York, this marks a historic wealth-creation

moment. Bottom line: The India story is no longer coming — it's here. Smart money from New York is already betting big.

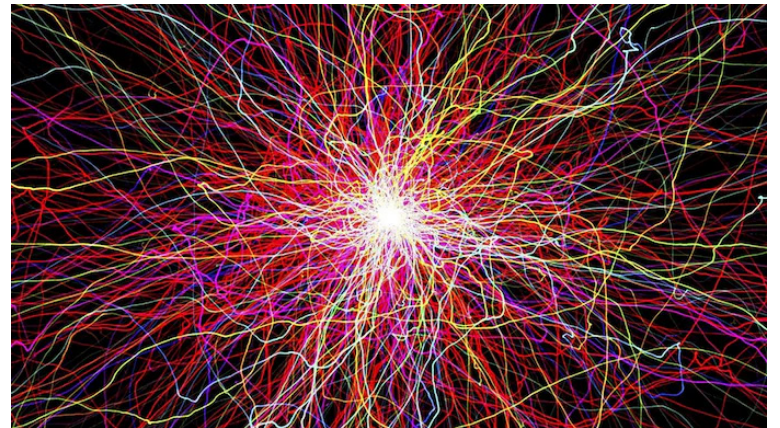
GameStop's pursuit of eBay has analysts scratching their heads

(TSAI Bureau) New York — It's not just in your head: GameStop's pursuit of eBay doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. ICYMI: The video game retailer on Sunday made an unsolicited offer to buy eBay, a company nearly four times bigger than GameStop, for \$55.5 billion, or \$125 a share — a 20% premium to eBay's Friday closing price. GameStop said the deal would be financed 50-50 in cash and stock. Ebay said it was reviewing the

offer. Maybe you're thinking, "Eh, companies buy one another all the time, what's the big deal?" This is not one of those run-of-the-mill acquisition offers, and analysts were mostly left scratching their heads. (That doesn't include the diamond-hands crowd on Reddit and other retail investing sites, where many who view GameStop CEO Ryan Cohen as a kind of Millennial Warren Buffett were quick to praise the eBay effort.)

Quantum Leap: MIT's Anand Natarajan Puts Indian Americans on the Physics Map

Indian American brilliance just got quantum-level recognition.



(TSAI Bureau) MIT professor Anand Natarajan is trending in scientific circles for groundbreaking work that defines the fundamental limits of quantum computation. His research on quantum complexity is helping map exactly how powerful future quantum systems can become — a critical step toward practical quantum advantage. Natarajan's contributions are gaining attention as the world races toward fault-tolerant quantum computers. Experts say his insights could accelerate break-

throughs in drug discovery, materials science, and cryptography. For New York's South Asian community, this is more than academic glory — it boosts visibility for Indian American scientists in cutting-edge fields and inspires the next generation of STEM talent. With quantum funding surging, Desi researchers are expected to capture an even bigger share of federal grants and private investment. Anand Natarajan is proving once again that Indian American minds are shaping tomorrow's technology today.

US Iran conflict escalates as Hormuz tensions spark global war fears and Trump warns Tehran

(TSAI Bureau) Tensions between the United States and Iran intensified on Friday after renewed military exchanges in and around the Strait of Hormuz triggered fears of a wider regional conflict and a major global oil supply disruption. The Strait of Hormuz remains under heavy military activity involving both US and Iranian forces, leading to sharp spikes in global energy prices amid concerns over supply disruptions. According to the US military's

Central Command, American forces carried out strikes on Iranian military targets after Iranian forces allegedly attacked three US destroyers transiting the Strait of Hormuz on Thursday.

US President Donald Trump warned Tehran against further escalation and urged Iran to agree to a deal quickly, saying the country would face a "lot of pain" if it refused. Trump also claimed that Iran wanted a deal "more than I do" and described the US strikes as a "love tap" following the confrontation in the Gulf region.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates reported incoming Iranian attacks, raising concerns about a broader regional spillover. China on Friday expressed "deep concern" after a Chinese tanker was reportedly affected amid the ongoing conflict in the region. Human rights groups also accused Iran of carrying out near-daily secret executions of prisoners. According to reports cited by The Guardian, at least 24 people have reportedly been executed since March, including six executions over a two-day period.

AIRBNB PROVIDES 1,000 FIFA WORLD CUP 2026™ TICKETS TO LOCAL YOUTH ACROSS NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

Airbnb announces largest private sector effort to give youth the opportunity to attend historic tournament

(TSAI Bureau) New York, NY – Today, Airbnb announced it will provide 1,000 FIFA World Cup 2026™ tickets to local youth from communities across New York and New Jersey, giving the next generation the opportunity to attend this historic sporting event. As an official tournament supporter and in partnership with community organizations, Airbnb will provide match tickets to locals, helping ensure more communities across the region can share in the excitement of the tournament.

The announcement took place at the Jamaica YMCA, where Airbnb was joined by representatives from the YMCA of Greater New York, local elected officials, and community groups and leaders. Students from M.S. 217Q Robert A. Van Wyck were surprised with the announcement and participated in a soccer experience with local coaches.

"The World Cup is a once-in-a-generation moment, and locals should be a part of it. We're especially excited to be giving the next generation of fans across the region the chance to witness history in their own backyard. We want to make sure the biggest sporting event on the planet has a positive, lasting impact for the everyday folks who live in this community, especially the kids," said Jay Carney, Global Head of Policy and Communications for Airbnb.

As part of the initiative, Airbnb will identify nonprofit organizations across New York and New Jersey to select ticket recipients. The selected youth will have the opportunity to attend a FIFA World Cup 2026™ match at NYNJ Stadium, which for many, will be their first time attending a global sporting event of this scale, or even a soccer match.

"Hosting the World Cup is about so much more than the game being played on the field. It's about engaging our local communities and giving New Jersey families memories that will last a lifetime," said New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill. "We are thrilled to partner with Airbnb to give kids from New



Jersey the opportunity to be part of this historic moment."

"New York is ready to welcome the world for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and we're grateful for Airbnb's efforts to bring the excitement of the game to the fans that call New York home," said New York Governor Kathy Hochul. "This free ticket giveaway is an incredible partnership that will give our youngest fans a ticket to the front row, ensuring families in every community get to be a part of this historic event."

"As a forever educator and a champion for youth, I believe moments like this demonstrate what is possible when we lead with vision and partnership. The FIFA World Cup is one of the world's greatest stages, and through strong public-private collaboration, we are ensuring that underserved young people are not excluded from it, but fully included in its promise and possibility. This initiative is about more than access to a game, it is about expanding horizons, inspiring dreams, and affirming for our young people, especially those in foster care, that they belong in every space the world has to offer. I am proud to champion partners like HeartShare St. Vincent's, whose commitment to supporting foster youth is creating life-changing opportunities for them to

experience this historic moment firsthand. This is the kind of investment we must continue to make, one that centers equity, opens doors, and reminds every young person that their future is limitless," said New York City Council Member Rita Joseph.

"Tickets to experience a once-in-a-lifetime event like the FIFA World Cup don't just create lasting memories; they expand horizons, especially for our youth," said New York City Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers. "I applaud Airbnb's efforts not only to invest in our city's economic success throughout the World Cup but also in the future leaders of NYC. Sharing tickets with kids who might not otherwise have the chance to attend helps them see themselves as part of something bigger and may help them imagine new possibilities for their future."

"Our kids deserve a seat at the table, or in this case, a seat in the stadium. For many of these young people, this will be their first time at an event of this scale, and for a kid from Brooklyn, that could be life-changing. Thank you to Airbnb and all the partner organizations for making that happen. I'll be rooting loud from District 46, and I'll be even louder if we get a USA-Haiti final," said New York City Council Member Mercedes Narcisse. "The YMCA of Greater New York is proud to partner with

Airbnb to provide FIFA World Cup 2026 tickets to youth & families in New York City," said Sharon Greenberger, President & CEO of the YMCA of Greater New York. "Airbnb's generosity will give hundreds of New Yorkers the opportunity to experience the magic of World Cup soccer firsthand, strengthening their connection to the game and creating memories that will last a lifetime."

"For many of the New York families we serve, opportunities to attend a global event like the World Cup are simply out of reach," said Christine C. Quinn, President & CEO of Win NYC. "Airbnb's commitment to bring moments like this to more families, especially young people, helps ensure that more families, regardless of their financial circumstances, can feel included in the cultural life of their communities. We commend Airbnb and congratulate all the many children and families celebrating this moment."

"We are committed to ensuring the legacy of the World Cup grows the game and creates lasting opportunity for the next generation of New Yorkers and New Jerseyans," said Alex Lasry, CEO of the New York New Jersey Host Committee. "Through this extraordinary commitment from Airbnb, young people

from communities across New York and New Jersey will have the chance to be part of a once-in-a-generation moment—helping inspire future players, fans, and leaders across our region."

This initiative builds on Airbnb's over \$1 million commitment to build new soccer mini-pitches across New York and New Jersey and support community celebrations during the tournament. Through the Airbnb Host City Impact Program, we are working to create spaces for youth to play, grow, and share in the excitement, and define the legacy of the tournament for future generations. This March, Airbnb donated 1,000 FIFA World Cup 2026™ tickets for young fans from underserved communities across Mexico as part of our commitment to making the games accessible for more communities.

According to Deloitte, Airbnb hosts in the New York–New Jersey region are expected to welcome approximately 25,000 guests, generating \$288 million in GDP, supporting over 1,100 full-time equivalent jobs through 2026, and creating nearly \$6,000 in supplemental income per stay. These benefits highlight the powerful role short-term rentals play in expanding access to the region's tourism economy for everyday residents.

Modern Postpartum Nutrition: Clarissa Wei's "Sitting the Month" Goes Desi

(TSAI Bureau) New York's South Asian new mothers are buzzing about Taiwanese-American journalist and cookbook author Clarissa Wei's latest release, *Sitting the Month: Postpartum Recipes for Rest & Recovery*. Released in April 2026, the book offers a modern, science-backed twist on the traditional Chinese practice of *zuo yue zi* ("sitting the month") — a 30-day period of confinement and special nourishment after childbirth. While rooted in East Asian traditions, Wei's approachable recipes and practical advice are resonating strongly with Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi moms in Queens, Jersey City, and Long Island.

"After my first baby, I followed every traditional rule — ginger chicken, sesame oil, rice wine, no cold water, no washing my hair for a month," Wei shared in recent interviews. "It helped, but it felt extreme. For my second, I wanted warmth and healing without losing my sanity." Her book blends ancestral wisdom



with contemporary nutrition: warming soups, collagen-rich broths, iron-packed greens, and gentle spices that support milk production, reduce inflammation, and rebuild energy.

South Asian mothers are adapting these ideas to familiar ingredients. "I swapped pig trotters for goat leg and added ajwain, fennel, and turmeric — classic postpartum spices in Indian households," says Priya Sharma, a Jackson Heights-

based software engineer and mother of a newborn. "Clarissa's ginger-scallion chicken soup reminds me of my mom's *adraki ki chai* and *moong dal khichdi*, but with clear science on why these foods aid recovery."

Traditional South Asian postpartum care already emphasizes similar principles: *gond laddoos*, *methi* (fenugreek) for lactation, *haldi doodh*, and nutrient-dense *dals*. Wei's work validates these practices while

updating them — think easier one-pot meals for busy diaspora families, freezer-friendly batches, and nutritional breakdowns that appeal to health-conscious parents.

Local nutritionists at Flushing and Edison community centers are incorporating Wei-inspired sessions into AAPI Heritage Month events. "Many South Asian women face higher risks of postpartum anemia and gestational diabetes," notes Dr.

Meena Patel, a Queens-based OB-GYN. "Warming, anti-inflammatory foods with high fiber and protein — exactly what lentils, ginger, and bone broths provide — make perfect sense."

Wei's book also addresses emotional realities: the isolation many immigrant mothers feel far from extended family. Her recipes encourage partners and families to participate in meal prep, turning recovery into a collective act of care. Pre-orders have spiked in tri-state Desi WhatsApp groups, with many planning "sitting the month" meal trains using a mix of Chinese and Indian elements.

In a fast-paced city where new moms often return to work quickly, Wei's balanced approach feels revolutionary. As one Murray Hill mom posted: "Finally, a postpartum guide that respects tradition but doesn't trap you in the kitchen 24/7." For South Asian families navigating dual cultural expectations, this cross-Asian dialogue is pure gold.

Stinky Tofu vs. Strong Spices: The Scent Discrimination Debate Heating Up in NYC

(TSAI Bureau) While some celebrate culinary traditions, others are pushing back — sometimes literally holding their noses. In the tri-state area, a growing "scent discrimination" debate pits lovers of authentic Asian flavors against complaints about strong aromas from South Asian and Chinese restaurants. From Jackson Heights' curry lanes to Flushing's night markets, the conversation is sizzling.

The flashpoint? Stinky tofu — the beloved Taiwanese fermented delicacy with a pungent, unforgettable aroma — and the bold, lingering scents of South Asian spices like *asafoetida* (*hing*), cumin, mustard seeds, and slow-cooked *masalas*. Recent complaints in New York and nearby New Jersey have led to fines, neighbor disputes, and even temporary menu removals at some eateries.

"We've had people call the health department because of the smell of our *tadka*," says Rajesh Kumar, owner of a popular Indian restaurant in Edison. "They say it 'stinks up the block.' But

this is how real Indian food tastes and smells. Would they complain about garlic in an Italian restaurant?"

Similar tensions have hit Chinese spots. In one high-profile California case that echoed in New York discussions, a Taiwanese restaurant was forced to stop serving stinky tofu after neighbor complaints and fines. New York's dense neighborhoods amplify the issue: apartment buildings above restaurants, shared commercial kitchens, and gentrifying areas where newer residents are less accustomed to intense aromas. Advocates call it culinary racism or cultural insensitivity. "Strong smells are part of the joy of ethnic food streets," argues Ayesha Khan, a food blogger and Jackson Heights resident. "The same people who line up for *biryani* on weekends complain when the vent smells like home cooking. It's about whose culture gets to exist in public space."

On the flip side, some residents — including long-time Asian Americans — argue for balance. "Ventilation matters," says a Flushing business owner. "No



one wants grease and odors in their living room, but shutting down authentic flavors isn't the answer."

Community forums and social media are ablaze. During AAPI Heritage Month, panels are addressing the topic head-on: "Does 'progress' mean toning down our food for white comfort?" South Asian and Chinese restaurant associations are collaborating on better exhaust systems and awareness campaigns. Some spots now offer "mild aroma" seating or stronger takeout packaging.

This debate goes beyond inconvenience — it touches belonging. For genera-

tions, South Asian immigrants endured schoolyard taunts of "curry smell." Today's restaurants represent pride and economic success. Suppressing those smells risks erasing identity.

As one viral post put it: "Love our food on your plate but not in the air? Pick one." In diverse New York, the aroma of spices and fermented goodness is the smell of home for millions — and the city's food scene is richer for it.

The solution? Mutual respect, smarter infrastructure, and celebrating rather than sanitizing our flavors. After all, in a true melting pot, some things are supposed to have bite — and aroma.

Summer Glow: 5 Ayurvedic Skincare Rituals That Actually Work in Humid Weather



As temperatures climb and humidity makes skin rebel, it's time to turn to grandma's wisdom with a modern twist. Ayurvedic skincare isn't just trendy — it's climate-smart.

Start your day with Ubtan face wash: mix besan, turmeric, and rose water into a paste. The gram flour gently exfoliates while turmeric fights pigmentation common in South Asian skin tones. Follow with rosewater + glycerin mist — keep it in the fridge for an instant cooling spritz.

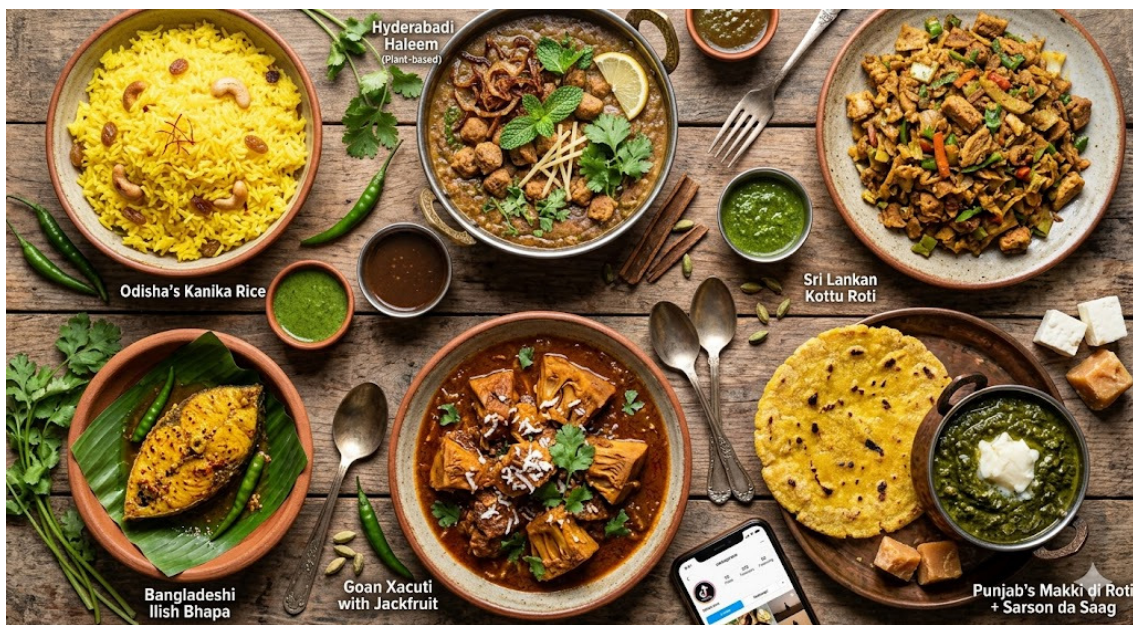
Dermatologist Dr. Ayesha Khan (Karachi) recommends Neem + Aloe cool-

ing gel at night: "Neem controls oil and acne triggered by sweat, while aloe restores the skin barrier." For hair, try a weekly Hibiscus + Methi hair mask — it strengthens strands damaged by AC and pollution.

Pro tip from Chennai beauty influencer Priya Menon: add a drop of sandalwood oil to your night cream. "It balances Pitta dosha and gives that natural 'just-back-from-holiday' glow."

Bonus: Swap heavy creams for Kumkumadi tailam (saffron oil) — a few drops go a long way and smell divine.

Beyond Butter Chicken: 6 Regional Comfort Foods Gen-Z is Rediscovering



The new generation isn't rejecting tradition — they're remixing it. From Dhaka to Dubai, young South Asians are proudly posting plates their grandparents would recognise. Odisha's Kanika rice (sweet saffron rice) is going viral as a quick dessert.

Hyderabad Haleem is now being made with plant-based soya chunks for vegetarian friends.

Sri Lankan Kottu Roti has become the ultimate late-night TikTok food.

Punjab's Makki di Roti + Sarson da Saag is reimagined with millet for gluten-free diets. Bangladeshi Ilish Bhapa (steamed hilsa) is finding love among NRIs who finally found frozen ilish in their local stores. Goan Xacuti with jackfruit is the new favourite vegan curry.

Food anthropologist Dr. Rukmini Iyer notes: "After years of Instagramming avocado toast, our youth are realising that regional Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi foods are both healthier and more sustainable."

Try one new regional dish every weekend — your tastebuds (and your grandparents) will thank you.

Modern Vastu for Small Urban Homes: Create Calm in 500 sq ft



Living in a Mumbai 1BHK or a London flat doesn't mean you can't follow Vastu. Interior designer Farah Ahmed (Lahore/Dubai) shares practical hacks:

Main door: Keep it clutter-free and paint it deep maroon or navy for positive energy.

Kitchen: Place the stove in the southeast corner. If not possible, use a mirror on the opposite wall to "reflect" the ideal direction.

Bedroom: Head of the bed should face south or east. Avoid mirrors facing the bed — they create rest-

less sleep, especially for couples.

Living room: Heavy furniture in the southwest corner grounds the home. Add a Tulsi or money plant near the east window for prosperity.

"Vastu isn't superstition," says Farah. "It's about energy flow. Even small changes like keeping the toilet seat down and clearing shoes from the entrance dramatically reduce daily stress."

Add a small brass diya or Himalayan salt lamp in the northeast corner for instant serenity.

Monsoon Magic: 6 Natural Ways to Beat Humidity, Frizz & Low Energy

The rains bring petrichor and relief, but also sticky skin, fungal infections and that constant lethargy. Here's how to thrive this season the South Asian way.

Start with Tulsi-Ginger tea every morning — it boosts immunity and clears dampness from the body. For skin, use multani mitti + rose petal face pack twice a week; it absorbs excess

oil without stripping moisture. Keep feet dry with neem powder in your socks or shoes to prevent athlete's foot.

Nutritionist Dr. Shalini Mehra (Delhi) suggests eating light: "Focus on barley water, moong dal khichdi with turmeric, and seasonal fruits like jamun and lychee. Avoid fried pakoras every day — they make you feel heavier."

For hair, a hibiscus + fenugreek rinse controls frizz and promotes growth. Light yoga flows (especially twists and forward bends) help release monsoon-induced stiffness and mood dips.

Pro tip: Burn camphor or sambrani (benzoin) once a week in the evenings — the traditional aroma instantly lifts energy and keeps mosquitoes away.



Solo Travel for South Asian Women

5 Safe & Soul-Filling Destinations in 2026

More single South Asian women are travelling solo than ever — and doing it smartly.

1. Bhutan – The happiness index is real. Stay in a homestay in Paro, trek to Tiger’s Nest, and experience zero plastic pollution.
2. Kerala Backwaters – Houseboat stay in Alleppey feels like therapy. Learn Ayurveda, eat fresh seafood, and wake up to Kingfisher calls.
3. Sri Lanka’s Hill Country – Ella and Nuwara Eliya offer cool weather, tea plantations, and safe hiking. Great English-speaking locals.
4. Ladakh – Summer (June–September) is perfect. The high-altitude landscape and Buddhist



monasteries offer unmatched peace.

5. Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh – World’s longest beach with incredible seafood. Opt for women-only tour packages.

Safety tips: Use apps like “She Will Travel”, join women-only groups on Facebook, carry a local SIM, and always inform a family member of your daily plan. Wear modest clothing that respects local culture while staying comfortable.

Travel blogger Sana Qureshi (who has visited 18 countries solo) says: “The freedom you feel sitting alone watching the sun set over the Himalayas is worth every anxious moment before the trip.”

Handloom Revival: Why Your Wardrobe Needs Khadi, Jamdani & Kota This Summer



Fast fashion is out. Conscious desi fashion is in — and it’s more beautiful (and breathable) than ever.

Young designers are reimagining classics: Lucknowi chikankari kurtas with modern silhouettes, Bangladeshi Jamdani sarees paired with jeans, and Pakistani ajrak block-print shirts that

work from boardroom to brunch. “Handloom isn’t just clothing, it’s climate-friendly and supports rural artisans,” says sustainable fashion influencer Meher Khan from Karachi. “A good khadi kurta keeps you cooler than any synthetic fabric during 40°C heat.”

Where to buy:
 India: FabIndia, Khadi Village, or Instagram @sustainablebychoice
 Pakistan: Khaadi’s heritage line or @craftsbyfarah
 Bangladesh: Aarong for Jamdani
 Diaspora: Local South Asian boutiques or online platforms like Etsy “desi handloom”
 Style hack: Pair a Kota saree with a crop top for a fusion look that turns heads at summer weddings and office events alike.

The New Joint Family: How Millennials & Gen-Z Are Making Multi-Generational Homes Work

Gone are the days when everyone dreamed of moving out. Rising rents and the desire for emotional support have brought many young South Asians back to (or never left) joint family set-ups.

Architect and family counsellor Sameer Rao (Bengaluru) shares practical tips:
 Create “micro-zones” — a small reading nook or balcony corner for personal space.
 Weekly family meetings over chai to discuss boundaries and chores.

Respect elders’ wisdom while gently introducing new habits like Sunday digital detox.

“My parents now meditate with me using the Calm app,” laughs software engineer Ayesha from Lahore. “And I’ve learnt their secret recipe for perfect biryani. It’s a beautiful exchange.”

Bonus: Convert one room into a multi-purpose “grandparents + grandchildren” activity space with board games, art supplies and a comfortable daybed — it strengthens bonds across generations.

Desi Mindfulness: 5 Ancient Practices That Beat Modern Burnout

In a world of endless scrolling and hustle culture, South Asians are returning to their roots for calm.

Pranayama before checking phone: 5 minutes of Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing) reduces anxiety instantly.

Gratitude in the desi way: Write three things you’re thankful for in a journal — or simply say them during evening dua/prayer.

Mindful eating: No phones at dinner. Savour every bite of your dal-chawal like it’s a meditation.

Forest bathing, subcontinent

style: Walk barefoot on grass in a nearby park or tend to your tulsi plant.

Sound healing at home: Listen to classical ragas or bhajans — research shows they lower cortisol better than generic lo-fi.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Priyanka Reddy (Hyderabad) notes: “Our grandparents practised these naturally. Reclaiming them helps us handle the unique pressures of being South Asian in today’s competitive world — parental expectations, career stress, and cultural identity.” Start small: Choose just one practice for 7 days and notice the difference.



Fiber-Maxxing: The 2026 Gut Health Revolution South Asians Are Leading



Forget protein overload — New York's South Asian kitchens are quietly dominating the year's hottest wellness trend: Fiber-Maxxing.

In May 2026, as AAPI Heritage Month highlights cultural contributions to American health, "fibermaxxing" has exploded from TikTok into mainstream conversations. Johns Hopkins experts and nutritionists across the tri-state area are pointing to classic Desi staples — dal, chickpeas (chana), rajma (kidney beans), and sabut moong (whole green gram) — as perfect vehicles for

this powerful movement.

The trend, which encourages maximizing daily fiber intake for superior gut health, blood sugar control, and disease prevention, couldn't be more perfectly aligned with traditional South Asian eating patterns. While many Americans struggle to hit the recommended 25–38 grams of fiber per day, a single hearty serving of rajma or moong dal can deliver 12–16 grams of fiber packed with protein and essential micronutrients.

Dr. Priya Patel, a Queens-based registered dietitian specializing in

South Asian metabolic health, explains: "South Asians already have the blueprint. Our grandmothers' dal-chawal wasn't just comfort food — it was medicine. With rising diabetes rates in our community, fibermaxxing is a return to roots with modern validation."

Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future named fiber one of the top food trends for 2026, noting a staggering 9,500% increase in online interest. Whole Foods predicts fiber-forward labeling and bean-based innovations will dominate shelves. For South Asian Americans, this is validation of ancestral wisdom.

Why Fiber Matters More for South Asians

South Asians face disproportionately higher risks of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and visceral fat accumulation. High-fiber legumes slow glucose absorption, improve insulin sensitivity, feed beneficial gut bacteria, and promote satiety — helping combat the "skinny fat" phenomenon

common in the community.

A typical fibermaxxed Desi plate might include:

Sabut moong dal (sprouted or whole) — high in soluble fiber
Rajma or chickpeas in salad or curry

Mixed vegetable sabzi with skin-on produce

Milletts or brown rice instead of white rice

A side of dahi (yogurt) for probiotics

NYC nutritionist Meera Sharma, who runs Heritage Month workshops in Jackson Heights and Edison, reports record turnout.

"We're teaching families to 'maxx' without losing flavor. Add roasted cumin, turmeric, and ginger — suddenly your everyday dal becomes a superfood bowl."

Practical Tips for Tri-State Families

Start slow to avoid bloating: increase intake gradually and drink plenty of water. Try overnight soaked sabut moong salad with tomatoes, onions, and chaat masala for breakfast. Turn leftover

rajma into high-fiber veggie burgers. Blend chickpeas into hummus with extra tahini and spices for snacks.

Local restaurants are catching on. Jackson Heights spots now advertise "Fiber-Maxxed Thalys," and health-conscious parents are packing kids' lunchboxes with chana chaat instead of chips.

The trend also addresses mental wellness. Better gut health links to improved mood and reduced inflammation — crucial during stressful periods like visa uncertainties or demanding careers.

As one Long Island mother shared at a recent workshop: "I grew up thinking dal was 'poor people food.' Now doctors say it's gold. My whole family feels lighter and more energetic."

Fiber-Maxxing isn't a fad — it's a cultural homecoming. In 2026, South Asian Americans aren't just participating in the trend; they're leading it, one delicious, gut-friendly bowl at a time.

Modern Postpartum Nutrition: Clarissa Wei's "Sitting the Month" Revolution Reaches New York Desi Moms



New York South Asian new mothers are turning to a modern twist on ancient Asian postpartum traditions, thanks to author and food writer Clarissa Wei's groundbreaking work.

Wei's forthcoming book *Sitting the Month: Postpartum Recipes for Rest and Recovery* blends centuries-old Chinese "zuo yue zi" practices with practical adaptations for busy diaspora lives. The concept — resting for 30–40 days while consuming warming, nutrient-dense foods — resonates deeply with Indian Ayurvedic jaappa traditions that many Desi families already fol-

low.

In Chinese custom, new mothers avoid "cold" foods and focus on ginger, bone broths, sesame oil, and protein-rich soups to replenish blood, boost circulation, and support lactation. Wei modernizes this with science-backed recipes that fit New York kitchens while honoring cultural roots. For South Asian mothers in Queens, Jersey City, and Long Island, the book arrives at the perfect time. "We have similar ideas in Ayurveda — warm foods, ghee, spices like turmeric and fenugreek for recovery and milk supply," says Dr. Anika Rao, an

OB-GYN practicing in Manhattan who recommends Wei's approach to patients. "Many immigrant moms feel pressure to 'bounce back' quickly. This gives permission to heal properly."

Key Elements Trending Among Desi Moms

Warming spices & ingredients: Ginger, turmeric, cumin, and fenugreek (methi) feature heavily — familiar from Indian postpartum laddoos and panjiri.

Nourishing broths & porridges: Adaptations of congee using moong dal khichdi or masala oats.

Protein & collagen focus: Bone broths, slow-cooked meats (or vegetarian alternatives with paneer and lentils), nuts, and seeds.

Avoiding cold & raw: No ice water, salads, or refrigerated leftovers during the first weeks.

Wei's recipes include practical swaps: a turmeric-ginger chicken soup that doubles as rasam base, or a vegan "sitting month" porridge using oats, almonds, and cardamom — perfect for vegetar-

ian families. New mothers in WhatsApp groups and mommy circles across the tri-state are sharing modified versions. One Edison mom combined Wei's

sesame oil chicken with her Punjabi mother-in-law's gond laddoo recipe. "It felt like both sides of my heritage coming together for healing," she shared.

Why It Matters in 2026

Modern life — shorter maternity leave, nuclear families, and career pressures — often leaves new moms isolated. Wei's approach emphasizes community support and intentional nourishment, countering the Western "snapback" culture.

Nutrition during this window impacts long-term health: reducing postpartum depression risk, supporting hormone balance, and establishing healthy milk supply. South Asian women, who face higher gestational diabetes rates, benefit especially from blood-sugar-friendly, anti-inflammatory meals.

Local events during AAPI Heritage Month feature Wei-inspired cooking demos at community centers in Flushing and Jersey City. Dietitians teach how to prepare large batches of freezer-friendly postpartum meals using pressure cookers — a game-changer for working moms.

As one participant noted: "My mother stayed in bed for 40 days after I was born. I thought it was old-fashioned. Now I understand it was self-care before the term existed."

Clarissa Wei's work bridges tradition and modernity, giving South Asian American mothers tools to honor their bodies while navigating contemporary life. In a fast-paced city, the message is powerful: healing takes time, and food is medicine.

For new and expecting moms in the tri-state, this may be the most important trend of Heritage Month.

50% Tariffs on India: How South Asian Small Businesses in New York Are Absorbing a Body Blow

From Jackson Heights jewelers to Lexington Avenue grocers and Queens textile importers, the cumulative 50% U.S. tariff on Indian goods has reshaped the arithmetic of survival for thousands of South Asian entrepreneurs. One year in, the damage is real — and Washington is not watching.

(TSAI Bureau)
NEW YORK —

Sunita Kanwar has run Shri Krishna Jewelers on 74th Street in Jackson Heights, Queens, for nineteen years. The shop specializes in Indian gold and diamond ornaments — bridal sets, festival pieces, the intricate 22-karat work that a South Asian family in New York buys once and keeps for generations. Since August 2025, when the U.S. cumulative tariff on goods imported from India reached 50 percent, Kanwar has watched that calculation collapse. 'A \$100 item becomes over \$200 by the time it gets to us,' she told a reporter from Documented NY last September. 'And remember — the importer, the distributor, the wholesaler, everyone is affected. Instead of buying a gift, people will just give cash now.'

Kanwar's predicament is shared, in varying form, by thousands of South Asian-owned small businesses across the New York metropolitan area. The tariffs — imposed in two tranches under executive authority, first a 25 percent reciprocal tariff tied to India's trade surplus with the United States, and then a punitive 25 percent surcharge for India's continued purchase of discounted Russian crude oil — represent a structural shock to an import-dependent community that had no hand in the foreign policy decisions that produced them.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE PAIN

The Manhattan Chamber of Commerce released a comprehensive analysis in February 2026 documenting the aggregate damage: New York City small businesses were absorbing approximately \$4.5 billion in tariff-related



costs annually, while the average New York City household faced \$4,200 in additional annual expenses — more than three times the national average. The New York State Comptroller's office found that U.S. exports declined to nearly half of New York's trading partners in 2025 as retaliatory pressures built, and that prices for household goods had risen measurably across categories driven by tariffed imports.

For South Asian importers specifically, the affected categories read like a catalogue of community life: gold and diamond jewelry, Indian spices and lentils, textiles and embroidered garments, ayurvedic products, Bollywood-licensed merchandise, and artisanal goods. Many of these items have no domestic American substitute — they are culturally specific goods tied to wedding seasons, religious festivals like Diwali and Eid, and community events that drive a significant share of small-business revenue in New

York's South Asian enclaves. **STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITY OF SMALL IMPORTERS**

What makes South Asian small businesses particularly exposed is what economists call supply chain concentration. According to the American Action Forum's research, 94 percent of small businesses with fewer than 20 employees import from four countries or fewer — meaning they cannot quickly diversify suppliers the way a multinational corporation can. For a Jackson Heights sari shop whose inventory comes entirely from artisans in Surat or Varanasi, there is no Canadian or Mexican alternative supply chain to pivot to. Finding a new supplier takes an average of three years, a timeline incompatible with the quarterly survival decisions these businesses are already making.

In India, the damage runs in the other direction. Reuters reported in August 2025 that over 50,000 export-oriented small businesses —

spanning textiles, jewelry, and chemicals — were scrambling to find replacement markets in Europe, Africa, and the Gulf. A survey by the India SME Forum found 57 percent of affected exporters were exploring re-routing shipments through third countries. Indian banks were tightening credit to small exporters, with one state-owned lender acknowledging it was 'holding off on giving new loans to small and medium export-centric businesses.'

NO RELIEF IN SIGHT

As of May 2026, no tariff relief specific to Indian goods has been announced. Trade negotiations between Washington and New Delhi, which the two sides described as progressing in April 2025, stalled repeatedly — over India's refusal to open its

agricultural and dairy markets, over American frustration with India's Russia energy purchases, and over the diplomatic deterioration following Operation Sindoor and Trump's public rebukes of India's ceasefire narrative. The New York State Attorney General's office filed suit in March 2026 challenging the tariff authority on procedural grounds; the case is pending.

For South Asian American entrepreneurs, the political framing of the tariffs — as a response to India's geopolitical choices — obscures a simpler human reality: the people paying the price are not Indian government officials. They are shopkeepers in Queens, restaurant owners in New Jersey, textile importers in the Bronx, and their American customers who live and celebrate inside South Asian cultural life in New York. Washington's trade war has an address. In many ZIP codes, it is 74th Street, Jackson Heights.

THE H-1B THREE-YEAR PAUSE BILL:

IS CONGRESS ABOUT TO SHUT THE DOOR ON SOUTH ASIAN TECH WORKERS?



Even if the bill dies in committee, its introduction is a message in the political environment in Washington now allows legislators to propose the permanent exclusion of Indian professionals without political cost. That signal does not require a Senate vote to land.

Introduced April 22, 2026, the End H-1B Visa Abuse Act combines a complete three-year freeze on new visas, a cap of 25,000, a \$200,000 salary floor, the elimination of OPT, and a permanent block on adjusting to permanent residency. Immigration attorneys say it cannot pass the Senate - but the political signal it sends is already reshaping how Indian professionals think about their future in America.

(TSAI Bureau)

On April 22, 2026 - one week before this edition went to press - Congressman Eli Crane of Arizona introduced the End H-1B Visa Abuse Act of 2026 in the U.S. House of Representatives, backed by seven Republican cosponsors. In breadth and severity, it is the most aggressive legislative challenge to the H-1B visa program in the program's 35-year history. Immigration accountability expert Rosemary Jenks, who helped draft the bill, called it plainly 'the strongest H-1B bill that has ever been introduced in Congress.'

The bill's architecture is sweeping. It would impose an immediate three-year moratorium on the issuance of any new H-1B visas - a complete freeze, not a reduction. When the program resumed after that pause, the annual cap would be cut from 65,000 to 25,000, and all existing exemptions would be eliminated. A mandatory minimum salary of \$200,000 per year would apply to every H-1B holder, a threshold that would price out a large share of current positions - particularly entry- and mid-level technology and healthcare roles where Indian professionals are concentrated. The lottery system that currently governs visa selection would be replaced by a wage-based selection algorithm.

THE PROVISIONS THAT STRIKE DEEPEST

For South Asian professionals already in the United States, two provisions carry the most immediate threat. First, the bill would eliminate Optional Practical Training - the post-graduation work authorization period that currently allows F-1 students to work for up to three years after completing a U.S. degree. OPT functions as the primary bridge between American higher education and H-1B employment; eliminating it would sever the pathway for the 330,000-plus Indian nationals currently enrolled in U.S. universities. Second, and perhaps most consequentially, the bill would prohibit H-1B holders from adjusting their immigration status to pursue permanent residency - effectively capping their legal existence in the United States at temporary status regardless of how many years they work, contribute, and pay taxes.

The combination of these provisions would, if enacted, dismantle what immigration attorneys call the 'study-to-work ladder' - the sequence by which an Indian student earns a U.S. graduate degree, transitions to OPT, wins an H-1B lottery, and begins the multi-decade EB-2 green card queue. Under the proposed bill, that entire pathway collapses. An Indian engineer who arrived for a master's degree in 2023 would face not only the end of OPT but also, if H-1B were somehow obtained before the freeze, the

permanent closure of any path to a green card.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROGNOSIS

The bill's proponents describe it as a correction to a program 'hijacked' by large corporations to replace American workers with cheaper foreign labor. Cosponsors including Paul Gosar, Brandon Gill, and Wesley Hunt argued the federal government 'should work for hardworking citizens, not the profit margins of massive corporations.' The argument finds real resonance in districts where technology layoffs have created genuine anxieties about labor displacement - and where the H-1B program's structural complexity makes it easy to demagogue.

The legislative reality is more constrained. Immigration attorneys Rahul Reddy and Emily Neumann, analyzing the bill publicly, said there is 'no clear or realistic path for the bill to become law.' Any immigration legislation must clear a 60-vote cloture threshold in the Senate, and the bill has no Democratic support and limited bipartisan business-community backing. Major technology employers - who depend on the H-1B pipeline - retain significant lobbying influence. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which is already in federal court challenging the \$100,000 H-1B proclamation fee, is unlikely to sit out a fight over a three-year freeze.

THE SIGNAL IS THE DAMAGE

What immigration attorneys and community advocates are watching is not the bill's floor prospects but its normalization effect. Every time legislation of this severity is introduced, two things happen regardless of outcome: the Overton window for H-1B restriction moves, and South Asian professionals - engineers in Sunnyvale, physicians in Houston, students making decisions about graduate school applications - recalibrate their sense of welcome in the United States. A survey of international students conducted by Stop AAPI Hate found just four percent report feeling 'very' or 'extremely' safe in the United States today. The bill is one reason. Canada's Global Skills Strategy, Australia's Global Talent Visa, and Germany's Opportunity Card are others.

For a South Asian American community that built much of its identity on the legitimacy of the meritocratic pathway - education, hard work, legal immigration, professional achievement - the End H-1B Visa Abuse Act of 2026 is not simply a legislative proposal. It is a statement about who that pathway is for. And whether or not it passes, a community that has built careers on the assumption that legal compliance would be honored is reckoning, uncomfortably, with the possibility that the assumption was never as stable as it appeared.

AAPI HERITAGE MONTH UNDER FIRE:

CELEBRATING CULTURE WHILE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

2026 THEME: POWER IN UNITY: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER.

“ Our history is American history, and it deserves to be recognized as such – especially at a time when our nation’s leaders seek to diminish or erase it.

— CONGRESSWOMAN GRACE MENG
CAPAC CHAIR



\$35 MILLION
IN ANTI-HATE FUNDING
ELIMINATED



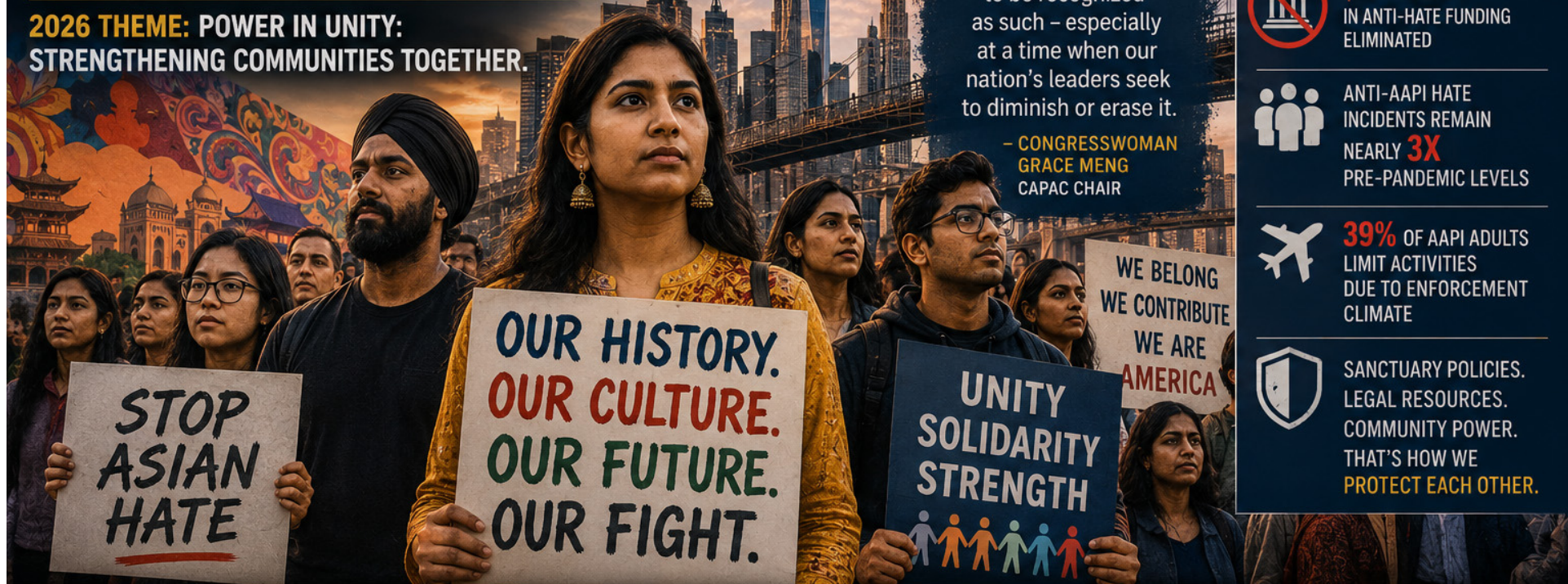
ANTI-AAPI HATE
INCIDENTS REMAIN
NEARLY **3X**
PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS



39% OF AAPI ADULTS
LIMIT ACTIVITIES
DUE TO ENFORCEMENT
CLIMATE



SANCTUARY POLICIES.
LEGAL RESOURCES.
COMMUNITY POWER.
THAT’S HOW WE
PROTECT EACH OTHER.



The 2026 theme is 'Power in Unity: Strengthening Communities Together.' It arrives as federal anti-hate programs are defunded, deportation fear suppresses civic participation, and a political environment actively hostile to immigrant communities forces South Asian Americans to confront what celebration means when the community it celebrates is under sustained threat.

(TSAI Bureau)

Every May since 1992, the United States has officially designated the month as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month - a federal recognition of the history, culture, and contributions of communities who trace ancestry from across Asia and the Pacific Islands. The month was anchored to two dates: May 7, 1843, when the first recorded Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States, and May 10, 1869, when Chinese laborers, working under dangerous conditions for wages far below their white counterparts, drove the golden spike that completed the transcontinental railroad. The recognition was hard-won - it took fifteen years from the first congressional resolution in 1977 to the permanent designation enacted in 1992 - and it was always meant to do two things simultaneously: celebrate achievement and name the history of exclusion, violence, and discrimination that preceded and accompanied it. In May 2026, that dual mandate has never felt more urgent or more difficult. The theme chosen by the Federal Asian Pacific American Council is 'Power in Unity: Strengthening Communities Together.' The imagery of bridges and collective resilience is deliberate. So is the gap between what the theme proclaims and what the community is actually living.

THE FEDERAL CONTEXT: DEFUNDED, DEPRIORITIZED, DISMISSED

Heritage Month 2026 arrives after the Trump administration eliminated the \$35 million in Department of Justice funding for hate crime prosecution and prevention

programs that had been specifically expanded in the wake of the Stop AAPI Hate surge documented during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Stop AAPI Hate's most recent national survey found that anti-AAPI hate incidents remain nearly three times their pre-pandemic levels, with a documented shift in the language of attacks - perpetrators now invoke deportation rhetoric, tell community members they 'don't belong here,' and reference specific Trump administration policies by name. The Asian American Foundation's 2026 national survey found that 40 percent of Americans still believe Asian Americans are 'more loyal to their countries of origin than to the United States' - the perpetual foreigner stereotype that has driven anti-Asian discrimination for 175 years and that no amount of Heritage Month programming has yet extinguished.

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Chair Grace Meng, speaking at the Heritage Month launch on May 1, connected the celebration explicitly to the present threat: 'Our history is American history, and it deserves to be recognized as such - especially at a time when our nation's leaders seek to diminish or erase it.' Her reference was not abstract. Multiple federal programs addressing AAPI civil rights, health equity, and language access have been reduced or eliminated since January 2025. The White House has not issued the traditional presidential proclamation for AAPI Heritage Month in 2026. The gap left by Washington has been filled, unevenly, by cities, community organizations, houses of worship, and

local elected officials. **SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS: CAUGHT BETWEEN CELEBRATION AND CRISIS** For South Asian Americans specifically - a population that includes Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and other communities under the AAPI umbrella - Heritage Month 2026 requires navigating a particularly complicated set of realities. The same month marks the one-year anniversary of Operation Sindoor, the four-day India-Pakistan military conflict that divided South Asian American communities along national and religious lines, generating heated disagreements within families and community organizations about solidarity, patriotism, and where loyalty lies when the homeland countries are at war.

Stop AAPI Hate's survey data shows 39 percent of AAPI adults have limited their activities - travel, public participation, social media engagement - because of the enforcement climate. For undocumented South Asian community members, those who are in H-1B status, or those with family members whose immigration situations are complex, attending a Heritage Month festival or cultural event carries risk calculations that did not exist five years ago. The community is being asked to celebrate its belonging in a country whose government is simultaneously detaining its members at airports, revoking student visas based on social media posts, and deporting people who have lived here for decades.

WHAT UNITY LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE The activist response has

been, in many ways, the most visible evidence of the 'Power in Unity' the theme proclaims. Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California has expanded free legal clinics throughout May, offering immigration consultations alongside Heritage Month cultural programming. The New York Immigration Coalition praised Mayor Mamdani's sanctuary city executive order as a model of the kind of governmental action that turns heritage rhetoric into structural protection. In the five boroughs, Sikh gurdwaras, Hindu temples, mosques, and cultural centers are hosting Know Your Rights sessions alongside traditional Diwali and Eid displays, folding legal self-defense into the fabric of cultural celebration.

The Smithsonian Institution's AAPI Heritage Month exhibits this year include, for the first time, a dedicated section on contemporary immigration enforcement and its impact on Asian American communities - an acknowledgment, from one of the nation's most authoritative cultural institutions, that heritage cannot be separated from present-day political conditions. In New York, community leaders are circulating Mayor Mamdani's 30,000 multilingual Know Your Rights flyers through the same distribution networks - temples, community centers, cultural festivals - that have long organized Heritage Month celebrations. Heritage Month's founding logic was always that visibility and recognition are preconditions for political power, that a community that cannot be seen cannot be protected. In 2026, that logic is being tested in the most direct terms.

Who Is a South Asian American?

The Fractures and Solidarities the Trump Era Is Forcing Into the Open

The India-Pakistan conflict of May 2025, the Bangladesh geopolitical pivot, immigration crackdowns falling on all national-origin groups equally, and a second-generation community that thinks about both homeland and America differently than its parents - the 'South Asian American' identity is being stress-tested as never before. The question is whether it holds.

(TSAI Bureau) Walk down 74th Street in Jackson Heights on a weekday and the contested nature of 'South Asian American' as a category is immediately apparent. Shri Krishna Jewelers and its Indian gold sits thirty feet from a Pakistani halal butcher, which is around the corner from a Bangladeshi sweets shop. On the same block, a Nepali restaurant competes with a South Indian lunch counter. The street's commercial density is a product of shared geography, overlapping immigration histories, and the economic logic of ethnic enclaves. It is not, necessarily, a product of political solidarity. And in the year since Operation Sindoor, the distance between proximity and solidarity has grown measurable.

The term 'South Asian American' was always a political construction as much as a cultural one. It was assembled in the 1990s by advocacy organizations seeking to build a coalition large enough to matter politically - combining Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and other communities under a single umbrella that could contest elections, lobby Congress, and represent shared interests on immigration, civil rights, and economic policy. The coalition held, more or less, through periods of relative diplomatic normalcy between the region's governments. The May 2025 war put it under a different kind of pressure.

OPERATION SINDOOR'S FAULT LINES

In the days of the India-Pakistan military conflict, the South Asian American community did not respond as a unit. Indian American WhatsApp groups - particularly those with strong Hindu nationalist sympathies, a significant presence within older first-generation communities - expressed pride in Operation



Sindoor and outrage at Trump's ceasefire intervention. Pakistani American communities, many with direct family in Lahore and Rawalpindi - cities that experienced airport closures, school shutdowns, and stock market panic - experienced the four days of conflict as a threat to the lives of their relatives. The emotional registers were not merely different; they were incompatible.

Indian restaurant owners in London - including one that closed after 16 years, attributing its decision to disturbances linked to conflict-related tensions in the broader South Asian community - documented the street-level consequences of geopolitical division among diasporic neighbors. In the United States, organizations that had built cross-community coalitions on immigration advocacy found themselves navigating requests from Indian American members to take explicit positions supporting Operation Sindoor and counter-requests from Pakistani American members to condemn civilian casualties in Lahore. Most organizations said nothing, which was itself a position that satisfied no one. **THE BANGLADESH FACTOR AND THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT**

The geopolitical fracturing runs beyond the India-Pakistan binary. Bangladesh's post-revolution trajectory - its Yunus-era pivot toward China and Pakistan, the resumption of direct flights with Pakistan for the first time in fourteen years, the renewed trade relationship, and the broader warming of Dhaka-Islamabad ties - created a separate set of anxieties within the Bangladeshi American community. Bangladeshi Americans who trace their family roots to the 1971 Liberation War - a war fought against Pakistani occupation, with Indian support - found themselves watching their homeland's government reverse the diplomatic logic of that history with uncomfortable speed.

Meanwhile, the second generation's relationship to these homeland political calculations is categorically different from their parents'. Research on second-generation South Asian diaspora identity, published in the South Asian Diaspora journal in 2024 and drawing on communities across North America and Europe, documents that these individuals identify as 'bicultural' - navigating between South Asian heritage and American

civic life - but are less likely to inherit their parents' specific political attachments to homeland governments. A second-generation Indian American in Parsippany, New Jersey, may feel genuine pride in Indian culture and cuisine while being deeply uncomfortable with Hindu nationalist politics. A second-generation Pakistani American in Fremont, California, may identify strongly with Karachi while being sharply critical of ISI-backed proxy warfare. These are not the identity profiles of their parents' generation, and they do not map neatly onto the political coalitions either Indian or Pakistani governments would prefer.

THE CASE FOR THE COALITION

Despite the fractures, there are structural arguments for why 'South Asian American' solidarity remains politically functional - and perhaps more necessary than ever. The Trump

administration's immigration enforcement does not distinguish between Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Nepali immigrants in its deportation dragnet. ICE arrest data shows Indians second among Asian nationalities detained, but Nepalis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans are also represented in detention statistics. The \$100,000 H-1B fee falls on South Asians broadly. The per-country EB-2 green card cap hits Indian nationals hardest but the policy logic of country-of-birth discrimination affects all national-origin groups. Anti-AAPI hate, documented by Stop AAPI Hate at three times pre-pandemic levels, does not ask its targets for their national-origin documents before attacking.

The South Asian American community does not need to agree on Operation Sindoor to agree that ICE should not operate without judicial warrants. It does not need to resolve the Kashmir dispute to demand equal treatment of the EB-2 backlog. The political challenge - and it is a genuine one - is building advocacy structures that can hold homeland disagreements and American civil rights solidarity simultaneously. Some organizations are managing it. Many are not. The Trump era has not created the fractures in the South Asian American community. It has illuminated the fractures that were always there - and forced the question of whether the common ground is large enough to build on.

"The category was always political - assembled for advocacy purposes, not because Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis have identical interests. The question is whether shared exposure to American racism and immigration enforcement creates enough common ground to hold it together under pressure."

Desi Gen Z vs. the Diaspora Elders: The Fault Lines on Operation Sindoor, Modi, and American Loyalty

The second generation of South Asian Americans came of age watching Modi's WhatsApp nationalism on their parents' phones and scrolling TikToks about Kashmiri human rights abuses simultaneously. When India and Pakistan went to war, they processed it differently — through American civic values, social media, and identities their parents neither share nor always understand.



"The first generation came to America and built a success they thought politics would not threaten. The second generation is learning that no success is immune from politics - and is acting accordingly."

American, explicitly plural, and explicitly uncomfortable with the homeland nationalism that animated their parents' political identities.

Toward an Uneasy Coexistence

(TSAI Bureau) In the weeks after Operation Sindoor, a pattern emerged in South Asian American households across New York, New Jersey, and California that community leaders and family therapists began describing with some precision: the same WhatsApp video of Indian Air Force strikes would arrive simultaneously on a parent's phone — greeted with pride, shared to a dozen contacts — and on a child's phone — greeted with complicated silence, private conversations with American-born friends, and sometimes an opposite-direction social media post. The generational split was not universal. But it was widespread enough, and consistent enough in its direction, that it has become the defining cultural story of South Asian America in the year since the conflict.

The conflict between first-generation immigrant political loyalty and second-generation civic identity is not new to any community. What makes the South Asian American version of this generational tension distinctive — and particularly acute in the current political moment — is that it plays out along several axes simultaneously: homeland nationalism versus American

pluralism, Hindu identity politics versus secular civic norms, enthusiasm for Modi versus awareness of democratic backsliding, and — for Pakistani Americans — complex feelings about a military that is simultaneously a source of family pride and the instrument of proxy warfare that provoked Operation Sindoor in the first place.

What the Second Generation Saw

For second-generation South Asian Americans — broadly, those who were born here or arrived as young children and were educated in American schools — the India-Pakistan conflict arrived through a set of lenses unavailable to their parents. They encountered it alongside a steady stream of social media content about Kashmiri civil rights restrictions that Indian government policy has imposed since 2019 — internet shutdowns, detention of political leaders, demographic engineering through the Citizenship Amendment Act. They encountered it alongside academic literature and journalism on Hindu nationalism's rise and its documented effects on Muslim minorities in India. They also encountered it, on the other side, alongside video documentation

of the Pahalgam massacre — 26 civilians selected for killing based on religion — and a genuine, grounded understanding of what cross-border terrorism costs.

The result was not simply anti-India sentiment. It was a more complicated political stance — one that could simultaneously mourn the Pahalgam victims, question Operation Sindoor's strategic logic, critique the Modi government's civil liberties record, and resist the framing that any questioning of Indian government policy is equivalent to anti-Indian sentiment. This position, which is second nature to students trained in American critical inquiry, felt — to many first-generation parents — like a betrayal of cultural identity and national solidarity.

The American Loyalty Question The generational divide also intersects with a question about American civic identity that the Trump era has sharpened considerably. Many first-generation South Asian immigrants arrived in the United States with a transactional relationship to American politics — vote, pay taxes, stay out of controversies, succeed professionally. The Trump administration's targeting of Indian American professionals through H-1B restrictions, the

derogatory language about Indian immigrants on social media ecosystems embraced by MAGA, and the open hostility to the legal immigration pathways through which the first generation arrived have complicated that transaction significantly. Parents who counseled political non-engagement are watching their American-born children's futures be threatened by policies they never imagined would reach them.

Second-generation South Asian Americans, raised inside American civic education, are drawing different conclusions. A community that the Carnegie Endowment's 2026 Indian American Attitudes Survey found has one in two members experiencing discrimination is not a community that can afford political non-engagement. Zohran Mamdani's election as New York's first South Asian mayor — supported by 65 percent of Asian voters in New York City — is one expression of this generational shift. It is not the only one. Across college campuses, civic organizations, and local politics in New York, New Jersey, California, and Texas, a second-generation South Asian political sensibility is emerging that is explicitly

The generational fracture within South Asian American communities is not a problem to be solved; it is a maturation to be navigated. Every immigrant community produces a second generation that processes its heritage differently than its parents, that holds its homeland politics more critically, and that builds an American identity that does not map cleanly onto the national identities its ancestors carried across the ocean. What is distinctive about the South Asian American version of this process is its scale, its political salience, and the speed at which the current political moment is accelerating it.

The community organizations, newspapers, temples, mosques, and gurdwaras that serve both generations are performing a difficult balancing act — honoring the first generation's cultural contributions and emotional bonds to homeland while creating space for the second generation's American civic identity to develop without being shamed as disloyalty. The communities that navigate this balance successfully will be better positioned for political influence in New York and nationally. Those that don't risk a generational rupture that leaves both sides diminished.

China's Weapons in the India-Pakistan War: What the PL-15 Missile Changes for the Whole Region

When Pakistan's J-10C fighters fired Chinese-built PL-15 beyond-visual-range missiles at Indian Rafale jets during Operation Sindoor, it was the first time Beijing's most advanced air-to-air weapons had been used in live, high-intensity combat. The implications - for India's security calculus, for U.S. arms sales in Asia, and for the South Asian diaspora whose homelands are at the center of this great-power contest - are only beginning to be understood.

(TSAI Bureau) In the hours after India launched Operation Sindoor on the night of May 6-7, 2025, something happened over the skies of Punjab that defense analysts had been theorizing about for years: Chinese weapons entered a real war against a capable adversary, at scale, for the first time. Pakistan's Air Force, flying J-10CE fighters and JF-17 Block III aircraft - both Chinese-built platforms - fired salvos of PL-15 beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles at Indian formations that included French-built Rafale jets. When debris recovered on the Indian side of Punjab included identifiable remnants of at least one largely intact PL-15, China's weapons were no longer theoretical. They were evidence.

The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, in a report published November 18, 2025, was unambiguous in its assessment: 'Pakistan's military success over India in its four-day clash showcased Chinese weaponry.' The commission found that Beijing had 'opportunistically used' the conflict to test and promote its latest combat systems against a capable adversary - turning a regional security crisis into a live-fire advertisement for its defense export industry.

WHAT THE PL-15 DEMONSTRATED

The PL-15 is China's most advanced active radar-guided beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile, comparable in capability to the U.S. AIM-120D AMRAAM. According to an analysis by the Royal United Services Institute, the PL-15 'outranges the latest AIM-120D model' - the AMRAAM being the flagship missile integrated into F-15s, F-16s, F-22s, F-35s, and nearly all major NATO aircraft worldwide. In the May conflict, Pakistan's J-10C fighters used the PL-15's extended range to engage Indian aircraft from



standoff distances that reportedly exceeded the engagement envelopes of Indian countermeasures. Pakistani forces claimed strikes against 26 Indian military targets without losing a single PAF aircraft - claims that India has not fully confirmed or denied.

The conflict also validated the broader Chinese-Pakistani weapons ecosystem. Pakistan's HQ-9 and HQ-16 air defense systems, SH-15 self-propelled howitzers, and VT-4 main battle tanks all performed in a live environment. Indian officials alleged that China had provided 'live inputs' on 109 Indian military positions, facilitating Pakistani targeting - a claim that Beijing and Islamabad denied but that, if accurate, would represent a qualitative escalation in Chinese operational support for a third party in a conflict with India.

INDIA'S PATCHWORK VERSUS CHINA'S KILL CHAIN

The conflict exposed a structural vulnerability in India's force posture that defense analysts had warned about for years. India operates what the Belfer Center described as a

'patchwork of platforms': Russian air defense systems, French fighter jets, Israeli drones, and U.S. artillery shells - each with different technologies, communication protocols, and operational frameworks. Pakistan, by contrast, is now almost entirely equipped with Chinese hardware, operating within what analysts described as a Chinese-built 'kill chain' where the radar, the missile, the aircraft, and increasingly the data network are designed to operate together.

India's response has been to accelerate both indigenous development and Western procurement. New Delhi is expanding its Astra active radar-guided air-to-air missile program, deepening defense cooperation with the United States and France, and issuing NOTAM notifications for long-range missile tests over the Bay of Bengal. Islamabad, for its part, is reportedly exploring acquisition of the PL-17 - an even longer-range Chinese missile designed to strike airborne early warning and control aircraft - which would extend Pakistan's

engagement envelope to 300 to 400 kilometers, a range capable of threatening Indian AWACS platforms critical to command and surveillance.

THE GREAT-POWER DIMENSION

For the South Asian American community, the China dimension of Operation Sindoor adds a layer of complexity that the dominant India-Pakistan binary tends to obscure. The conflict was not simply a bilateral dispute about terrorism and retaliation. It was, simultaneously, a live demonstration of Chinese military capability conducted at India's expense, a test of American crisis management influence in a region where Washington's leverage has visibly diminished, and a signal to the broader Indo-Pacific security community about the combat readiness of Chinese platforms.

The U.S.-China rivalry runs through South Asia in ways that are rarely discussed in community media. India is a Quad partner and increasingly integrated into American Indo-

Pacific strategy; Pakistan is now receiving what National Interest magazine called 'unprecedented' diplomatic elevation in the Trump administration - partly because of its counterterrorism deliverables, partly because of its willingness to provide the kind of swift, opaque commercial commitments that Trump's transactional foreign policy rewards. The geopolitical triangle of Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi is being redrawn, and the South Asian American community sits at its human center - families, careers, and identities distributed across all three power centers' competing claims. Understanding that the PL-15's trajectory over Punjab last May was also a trajectory across the entire Indo-Pacific security architecture is not a call for alarm. It is a call for the kind of informed, clear-eyed engagement with great-power competition that a diaspora with roots in the region and citizenship in the United States is uniquely positioned to provide - if it chooses to look past the nationalist framing that both sides of the conflict are offering.

Bangladesh's Post-Revolution Pivot and the New Map of South Asian Loyalties

Under Muhammad Yunus's interim government, Bangladesh resumed direct trade with Pakistan for the first time since 1971, opened direct flights, and held high-level military dialogues with Islamabad. A new BNP government, elected February 2026, is attempting to reset relations with India - but the Yunus era's geopolitical recalibration has left a mark on South Asian alignments that will not be quickly erased.



(TSAI Bureau) When Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate who led Bangladesh's interim government from August 2024 to February 2026, visited Beijing in March 2025, he described India's northeastern states as 'landlocked' and characterized Bangladesh as the 'sole guardian of the ocean' - framing that New Delhi interpreted as an invitation for Chinese strategic encirclement of India's most vulnerable regional flank. The remarks were not diplomatically accidental. They were the verbal expression of a foreign policy reorientation that the Yunus government had been executing in practice for months: deepening ties with China and Pakistan simultaneously while distancing itself from India, the patron of the Awami League government it had replaced.

The speed and breadth of the Bangladesh-Pakistan rapprochement during the Yunus period was, for many observers, the most striking geopolitical development in South Asia since Operation Sindoor. Bangladesh resumed direct trade with Pakistan for the first time since 1971 - the year Bangladesh won independence from Pakistani military occupation in a war in

which hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed and an estimated 200,000 women were raped. Bangladesh resumed direct flights with Pakistan after a fourteen-year suspension. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met Yunus twice. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar visited Dhaka to 'reinvigorate' the relationship. High-level military dialogues were held. The institutional architecture of normalization was being assembled with unusual speed.

WHY THE PIVOT HAPPENED Understanding the pivot requires understanding the politics of the July Revolution that preceded it. When students toppled the Hasina government in August 2024 after sixteen years of increasingly authoritarian Awami League rule, the backlash was not just against Hasina personally - it was against everything associated with her political project, including her government's close relationship with India. Sheikh Hasina had cooperated with New Delhi on security, transit routes, and cross-border insurgent crackdowns in ways that many Bangladeshis experienced as Indian interference in domestic affairs. Her flight to New Delhi for refuge - where she remains, with

India refusing Pakistani and Bangladeshi extradition requests - made India's association with her toxic in the public mood the interim government was navigating.

In this political environment, a tilt toward Pakistan and China served multiple purposes for Yunus: it signaled independence from Indian tutelage, it appealed to Islamist parties whose support was needed for political stability, and it positioned Bangladesh as a player in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor ecosystem rather than a dependent of Indian regional hegemony. Al Jazeera's analysis, drawing on independent Bangladeshi political analysts, concluded that Pakistan's strategic objective was straightforward: 'heighten India's security concerns to its east by developing close strategic ties with Dhaka.'

THE FEBRUARY 2026 ELECTION AND THE RESET The February 12, 2026 election produced a decisive Bangladesh Nationalist Party victory under Tarique Rahman, ending the interim period and installing a government with different incentives. Indian Prime Minister Modi posted congratulations within hours

and spoke with Rahman by phone - a sharp contrast to the chill that had characterized the Yunus period. Indian dignitaries attended the BNP swearing-in ceremony. The International Crisis Group, which had been monitoring the bilateral tension, noted that 'the elections offer the chance for a reset.'

The BNP, historically, has had a difficult relationship with India - it has served as the opposition to the Awami League for decades, and its political base includes constituencies that harbor genuine resentment of Indian regional power. But the post-election signals have been pragmatic. Bangladeshi analysts broadly agree that 'any government coming to power in Dhaka will find it difficult to neglect its largest neighbour' given the economic and security interdependencies that bind the two countries. Geography does not negotiate: India surrounds Bangladesh on three sides. Trade and transit flows, the management of shared rivers, border security, and the movement of people require bilateral engagement regardless of political preferences.

The post-Yunus thaw represents a recognition of those constraints. India has appointed a political heavyweight - former Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi - as its next High Commissioner to Dhaka, a signal of intent to invest political capital in the reset. Bangladesh has not yet matched the gesture with an equivalent appointment, a calibrated asymmetry that analysts read as Dhaka acknowledging India's effort while quietly reminding New Delhi that the burden of repair falls primarily on the party that enabled a sixteen-year autocracy.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS

For the Bangladeshi American community - concentrated in New York's Bronx and Queens, in New Jersey, in Detroit, and in Houston - the past eighteen months have been a period of acute political complexity. The July Revolution was, for many, a source of genuine pride: a triumph of democratic youth politics over autocracy, a 'Monsoon Revolution' that proved Bangladesh's civic capacity. The subsequent Yunus-era geopolitical pivot was, for many of those same people - particularly those with roots in families that fought in the 1971 Liberation War - far more disturbing. Normalization with Pakistan, conducted without the apology for 1971 atrocities that Bangladesh has sought for decades, touched a generational wound.

For Indian Americans watching Bangladesh drift toward Pakistan and China, the implications were strategic: a potential encirclement of India's northeast, a weakening of the neighborhood that Modi's 'neighborhood first' foreign policy was supposed to have secured. For Pakistani Americans, the Bangladesh rapprochement offered a different narrative - evidence that India's regional dominance is contestable, that smaller neighbors have the sovereign right to pursue their own alignments. The February 2026 election suggests that Bangladesh's voters ultimately chose stability over ideological realignment - a pragmatic verdict that may gradually restore some of the regional order that the Yunus period disrupted. Whether the BNP government can maintain that balance, navigate the pressures from Islamist coalition partners, manage India's expectations, and preserve the democratic gains of the July Revolution simultaneously is the question that will define Bangladesh's trajectory - and the peace of mind of a diaspora community watching from New York.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Orlando Bloom to star in Matt Smukler's thriller Reset

Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Orlando Bloom are set to headline the upcoming survival thriller Reset directed by Matt Smukler. The film follows a woman stranded in the wilderness who must rely on a mysterious stranger to survive.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas is set to share screen space with Orlando Bloom in the upcoming survival thriller *Reset*, directed by Matt Smukler. The film is expected to go on floors in August and will centre on a gripping survival story filled with mystery, danger and distrust.

According to the film's official synopsis, *Reset* follows a woman who wakes up alone in the wilderness with no memory of how she landed there. Stranded days away from civilisation, her only hope of survival depends on trusting a charming stranger who may not be telling the truth. Opening up about casting Priyanka and Orlando, Smukler said in a statement, "I was looking for a pairing where attraction and mistrust could effortlessly coexist." The filmmaker further added that both



actors possess an "uncanny ability to make you believe both at once. Their chemistry is undeniable."

The screenplay for the film has been written by Jordan Rawlins. The project will be produced by Jon Hoeber and Erich

Hoeber under Fratricidal Films, Michael Lazarovitch for Chemically Altered, and Matthew Rhodes for Rhodes Entertainment, alongside Priyanka Chopra Jonas' Purple Pebble Pictures and Orlando Bloom's Amazing Owl.

Priyanka was last seen in *The Bluff* and earlier starred alongside Idris Elba and John Cena in *Heads of State*.

She will next be seen in Season 2 of *Citadel* and also has SS Rajamouli's *Varanasi* in her lineup.

Meanwhile, Bloom was most recently seen in *The Cut*, which he also produced through Amazing Owl. He also featured in the action comedy *Deep Cover* and will next appear alongside Rooney Mara and Kate Mara in *Bucking Fastard* directed by Werner Herzog.

Sanjay Dutt's Aakhri Sawal: CBFC clears film, trailer on May 8

Sanjay Dutt's *Aakhri Sawal* has secured CBFC clearance, and the film's theatrical release date has been finalised. The trailer is scheduled to be out on May 8.



After a delay linked to scrutiny by the Central Board of Film Certification, Sanjay Dutt's *Aakhri Sawal* has received clearance and is now set for a theatrical release on May 15, 2026. The makers have also announced that the film's trailer will be released tomorrow.

The production company, Nikhil Nanda Motion Pictures, shared an Instagram update on *Aakhri Sawal*, which read, "Tomorrow, the nation will witness the truth. The wait is over — the most awaited trailer drops tomorrow. #AakhriSawal trailer out tomorrow...Get ready to know the answer on May 15 only in cinemas. The film's trailer launch

had remained on hold while the censor board review process was under way, creating uncertainty around the film's release plans. Earlier, India Today had exclusively learnt that the trailer of *Aakhri Sawal* was currently pending clearance from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). Now, after receiving a clearance and official green signal from the CBFC, all concerns have finally been resolved. The recently-released teaser of the film draws on historical events and debates, including references to the ban imposed on RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination

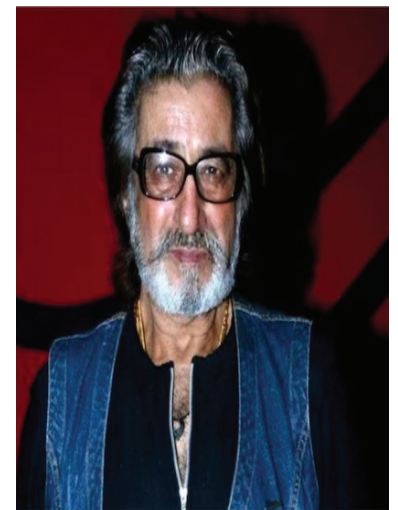
and the controversy surrounding the Babri Masjid demolition. It positions the narrative around questions that have persisted in public discourse over the years. *Aakhri Sawal* is directed by National Award-winning filmmaker Abhijeet Mohan Warang. It is co-produced by Nikhil Nanda, Sanjay Dutt, Puneet Nanda, Dr Deepak Singh, Gaurav Dubey and Ujjwal Anand.

The story, screenplay and dialogue of the film have been written by Utkarsh Naithani. *Aakhri Sawal* is scheduled to release in cinemas in Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

Shakti Kapoor reacts strongly to death hoax, vows complaint against rumour-mongers

Veteran actor Shakti Kapoor has reacted strongly to viral fake reports claiming that he had died, calling the rumours "not good" and making it clear that he is "healthy and happy." In a video message, Kapoor asked people not to share unverified information online and said he plans to file a complaint against those spreading the hoax.

Addressing viewers directly, the actor spoke in a calm but firm tone as he dismissed the reports and urged people to ignore them. He also raised concern over how quickly misinformation travels online, particularly when it relates to something as serious as a person's death. In the video, Kapoor said, "Hello everyone, the news of my death is completely fake. I am healthy and happy. Please ignore it. I am going to complain about it. But this is not good. That's not good." His response came after false claims about his death circulated widely on social media. Kapoor also used the message to appeal to the public to act responsibly online. He warned against forwarding information without checking whether it is true, saying such



rumours can spread very easily and create unnecessary panic and confusion. Kapoor's reaction comes after a similar case involving veteran actor Raza Murad last year. Murad was also subjected to false reports about his death after a social media post wrongly claimed that he had passed away. He later filed a complaint at Andheri Police Station over the matter.

Speaking to ANI at the time, Murad said the post did not just spread fake news about his demise but also claimed that despite spending decades in the film industry, no one remembered him. The episode had once again drawn attention to the damaging impact of misinformation circulating online.



Robert Downey Jr rejects influencers as stars of future, avoids the 'rabbit hole'

Actor Robert Downey Jr. has dismissed the idea that social media influencers are the stars of the future. He said people can now become celebrities without doing much besides pointing a phone at themselves.

Actor Robert Downey Jr reflected on the debate around social media influencers and celebrity, criticising the idea that influencers are the "stars of the future." He said he did not agree with that view and described it as "absolute horses**t." In an interview with Conversations for our Daughters podcast, Downey Jr said people can now create celebrity "without ever doing much besides rolling a phone on themselves," but added that he does not see that as entirely negative. Instead, he said it reflects a challenge in which "individuation" is being pushed further. The actor said he hoped a larger section of young people in America would decide that path was not

for them. He said he wanted them to say, "Yeah, but that's not my thing. I want to go do something, I'm going to make something, I want to build something, I want to educate myself." "When I hear people talk about, 'Oh, the stars of the future are going to be influencers', I go, 'I don't know what world you're living in, but I think that that is absolute horses**t'," he added.

Downey Jr, who has 58.1 million followers on Instagram, said his own social media following was built largely during his run as Tony Stark, or Iron Man, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. He also said that, over the years, he had met several influencers while promoting films

and had found many of them to be grounded, accomplished and "genuinely cool people."

Downey Jr on going deep down the rabbit hole

Despite his own large online presence, Downey Jr said he avoids going "too deep down the rabbit hole" because he does not want "to be consumed." He said people often tell him audiences enjoy seeing him appear off the cuff and getting a glimpse into his life, but he feels that would be manufactured for them.

Recalling an earlier moment from his career, he said actor Jon Favreau was tweeting on stage when they brought the teaser for Iron Man to Comic Con, and

he saw how audiences were beginning to feel they were "on the steering committee of this thing." He said that was the new landscape. Downey Jr will next be seen in Avengers Doomsday (2026), co-directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo. The fifth instalment in the Avengers franchise and features the full debut of Doctor Doom, portrayed by Downey Jr, following a cameo in Fantastic Four: First Steps. Avengers Doomsday also features actors Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, Anthony Mackie, Sebastian Stan, Paul Rudd, Florence Pugh, Simu Liu, Tom Hiddleston, Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Joseph Quinn and others in key roles.

Kangana Ranaut's Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata gets release date; first look out

The first-look poster announcing the release date of Kangana Ranaut's upcoming film Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata is out. The film is based on a tragic incident during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

Actor and politician Kangana Ranaut is all set to return to the big screen with Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata, and the makers have now officially announced the film's release date along with its first look.

On May 6, the makers launched the film's first-look poster on Instagram, to announce its release date and set the mood for what promises to be an intense and emotionally-driven narrative. The poster hints at a story rooted in courage and resilience during one of India's darkest chapters. It gives a peek into what the audience can expect from the film. Along with the announcement, the makers wrote in the caption, "Extraordinary story of ordinary people! The story of the night, when humanity stood taller than fear. When responsibility became sacrifice. When unity became duty. And courage saved lives. The untold story of India's real heroes #BharatBhaagyaViddhaata

Releasing in cinemas on 12th June

When will Kangana Ranaut's next film release? Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata, directed and written by Manoj Tapadia, is described as a cinematic tribute to unsung heroes and is based on incidents at Mumbai's Cama and Alibless Hospital during the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. The film is set to unfold on the big screen on June 12, 2026.

According to a report by Variety India, the film will focus on how hospital staff responded during the crisis and showed exceptional bravery amid chaos. Kangana is expected to play the role of a nurse, while Girija Oak also features in a leading role.

Kangana was last seen in Emergency, a political drama which she also directed and co-produced. The film saw her portray former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and explored the 21-month Emergency period between 1975 and 1977.

