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PM Modi May Visit US Soon



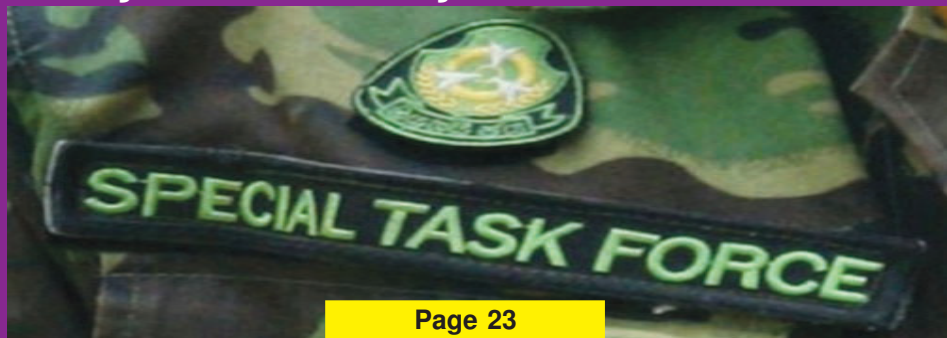
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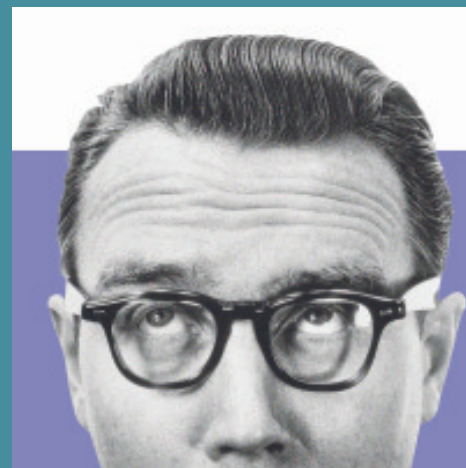
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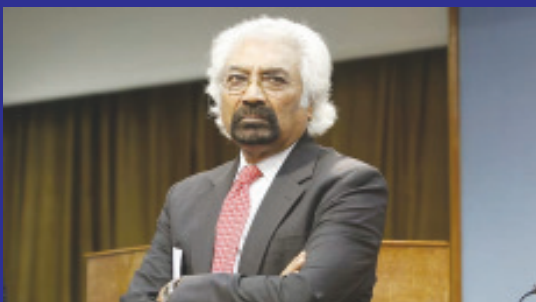
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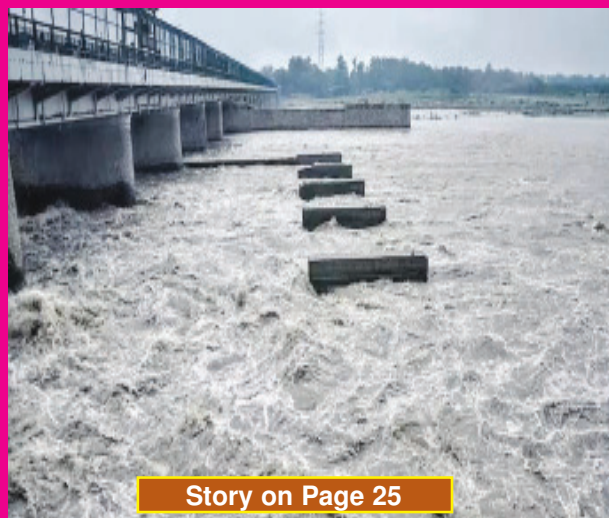


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AAP Claims 'Poison in Yamuna'

Canada report accuses India of election meddling, Centre rejects 'insinuations'

India has rejected a report by the Canadian Commission accusing the government of interfering in Canada's elections and blamed Ottawa for meddling in New Delhi's internal affairs. In a strong rebuttal to the foreign interference commission report, which comes amid a strain in ties, the Ministry of External Affairs attempted to turn the tables by accusing Canada of creating an environment for "illegal migration" and "organised criminal activities".

"It is in fact Canada which has been consistently interfering in India's internal affairs. This has also created an environment for illegal migration and organised criminal activities. We reject the report's insinuations on India and expect that the support system enabling illegal migration will not be further countenanced," the



MEA statement said.

The inquiry, led by Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue, alleged that the government might have attempted to use "proxy agents to clandestinely provide financial support to preferred candidates during the 2021 election".

It also labelled India as the second most active country engaging in electoral interference in Canada.

The report further said that India also uses disinformation as a key form of foreign interference in Canada. The report also mentions "challenges" in

relations between the nations over India's perceived national security concerns about Khalistani separatism.

However, the inquiry found that there was no evidence of parliamentarians in Canada plotting with foreign governments to interfere with the country's elections.

The report has become the latest flashpoint between India and Canada since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claimed in 2023 that Indian agents were allegedly involved in the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The issue flared up dramatically last year after the Canadian government claimed that Indian diplomats were "persons of interest" in the Nijjar murder investigation. India responded by withdrawing these diplomats, and also expelled six Canadian diplomats from the country.

Hitman Sentenced To Life For Murder Of Air India Kanishka Bombing Suspect Ripudaman Singh Malik

A contract killer in Canada was convicted on Tuesday (local time) of murdering an acquitted suspect in 1985 Air India bombings that had claimed 331 lives. Tanner Fox was sentenced to life in prison for killing Ripudaman Singh Malik, who was shot dead outside his business in July 2022.



emergency calls were issued. The aircraft operating the flight was a Boeing 747-237B registered VT-EFO and named Emperor Kanishka.

The attack was considered the deadliest aviation terrorism incident until the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. Most of the passengers on the flight were Canadian citizens, who were visiting relatives in India. Simultaneously, another explosion was reported at the Narita airport in Japan claiming the lives of two baggage handlers, who were loading luggage onto an Air India aircraft.

Tanner Fox and his associate Jose Lopez pleaded guilty last October to the second-degree murder of Malik. They confessed that they were paid to carry for killing Malik in a suburb of Vancouver in western Canada, but they did not disclose who paid them. Lopez's next court appearance is scheduled for February 6.

About Kanishka Bombing

On 23 June 1985, Air India flight 182 from Toronto to Mumbai Canada to India blew up off the Irish coast, killing all 329 people on board. The jet disintegrated in midair just 45 minutes from its destination. No warning or

Both suitcase bombs were later traced back to Vancouver, home to a large Sikh immigrant population. As per the Canadian government reports, the bombings were believed to have been carried out by Canadian-based Sikh separatists in revenge for the Indian Army's 'Operation Blue Star' at Golden Temple in Punjab.

Five months after the disaster, two suspects-- Talwinder Singh Parmar and Inderjit Singh Reyat were arrested. Charges against Parmar, who was believed to be the masterminded the attack, were dropped due to lack of evidence.

Donald Trump Seeks Elon Musk's Help To Bring 'Stranded' Sunita Williams Home

Billionaire Elon Musk on Tuesday (local time) said that US President Donald Trump had asked him to facilitate the return of the two Boeing Starliner astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, who have been on the space station since June 2024, as soon as possible.

The SpaceX CEO claimed that it was "terrible" that the pair were left "stranded"

months on the International Space Station.

"Elon will soon be on his way. Hopefully, all will be safe. Good luck Elon!!!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, without specifying when the mission would take place.

NASA has continuously said that astronauts are not stranded and that they are healthy, and in good spirits.

The Mission

Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams launched to the ISS aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft in June 2024. The flight, which was intended to last only 10 days, experienced a rocky journey. After arriving at the space station, NASA and Boeing worked for weeks to better



at the International Space Station (ISS) by former President Joe Biden's administration for so long, even though NASA had already roped in SpaceX months ago to return both astronauts as part of its Crew-9 mission.

"The @POTUS has asked @SpaceX to bring home the 2 astronauts stranded on the @Space_Station as soon as possible. We will do so," Musk said in a post on X. "Terrible that the Biden administration left them there so long," he added.

Trump Responds

US President Donald Trump said Tuesday that SpaceX will "soon" begin a mission to repatriate two American astronauts who have been stranded for

understand the problems in the spacecraft but it was ultimately decided that it was too risky to return the Starliner with the crew.

Following this, in August 2024, the space agency announced that it had asked SpaceX to bring Williams and Wilmore home aboard the SpaceX Crew-9 capsule. SpaceX, the private company founded by billionaire Musk, has been flying regular missions every six months to allow the rotation of ISS crews.

The two astronauts were slotted into Crew-9, with NASA removing two of the four crew members who were set to launch on the SpaceX Dragon in September.

30 dead, 60 injured in Maha Kumbh stampede, Yogi Adityanath orders probe

Thirty people were killed and 60 injured after a stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the situation was under control and urged devotees not to fall for rumours.

Thirty people were killed and 60 injured after a stampede at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj early on Wednesday. The incident occurred as thousands of devotees broke through barriers while thronging the Triveni Sangam for a holy dip on Mauni Amavasya, the day of the second Shahi Snan.

The incident took place at around 2 am on Wednesday when tightly-packed crowds were gathering at the Sangam - the confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. According to police, barricades placed at the ghats broke, which led to people inadvertently stepping on devotees sleeping on the ground.

"There were barricades placed around the Sangam and other areas. The barricades around the ghat and the akhadas were broken. Because of this, the devotees who were sleeping on the ground waiting for the brahma muhurat (auspicious time) were stepped on by other devotees rushing to take ritual bath. Some people sleeping on the ground were crushed as the crowd surged forward in a rush," DIG Mahakumbh, Vaibhav Krishna said on Wednesday evening. Of those who died, 25 people have been identified and the



identification of the remaining five is being done.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered a court-monitored probe into the stampede, and also announced compensation of Rs 25 lakh each for the families of those killed in the incident. He also said that the situation was under control and urged people not to spread rumours about Maha Kumbh.

"There is a huge crowd in Kumbh. Eight to ten crore devotees are present in Kumbh. Nearly six crore devotees came

yesterday and took a holy dip at the Sangam. The incident occurred between 1 am and 2 am. The seers will proceed with the Amrit Snan once the crowd reduces," he said at a press conference. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the incident "extremely sad" and expressed his condolences. "The accident that happened in Prayagraj Maha Kumbh is extremely sad. My deepest condolences to the devotees who have lost their loved ones in this," the Prime Minister tweeted.

He said bathing was halted for some time due to the incident, but it resumed later. "For some time, the process of bathing had been halted, but now for several hours, the yatris are taking a bath. I once again convey my condolences to the families," he said at a rally in Delhi. In a tweet, Adityanath appealed to the devotees to take the holy dip at the nearest ghat at Ganga and not go towards Sangam Nose, where the stampede occurred.

He said that many ghats have been built for the holy dip and urged the people to follow the administration's instructions and cooperate with them.

Mauni Amavasya is known as the most auspicious day for the devotees to take a holy dip in the Ganga. Strict crowd control measures were imposed ahead of Mauni Amavasya, including no-vehicular zones and sector-wise restrictions.

Being held after 12 years, the Maha Kumbh kicked off on January 13 and will continue till February 26. The Uttar Pradesh government, hosting the fair, expects a total footfall of around 40 crore pilgrims at the largest spiritual gathering on the planet.

Foetus inside foetus: Pregnant woman's case baffles doctors in Maharashtra

A rare medical phenomenon known as 'foetus in fetu' was recorded in Maharashtra as a baby was found inside the stomach of an unborn child.

In an extremely rare medical phenomenon, a baby was discovered inside the stomach of an unborn child in Maharashtra's Buldhana.

The case of 'foetus-in-fetu' was detected at a government hospital when a 32-year-old woman underwent a sonography two days ago. This rare congenital anomaly has been documented in only about 200 cases worldwide, with just 15-20 reported in India.

"I was initially surprised and then carefully re-examined the images," said gynaecologist Dr. Prasad Agarwal, who discovered the foetus, which was not developing. "It was indeed a case of a foetus-in-fetu," he

added.

The woman was in her ninth month of pregnancy, and this anomaly went undetected in earlier scans due to its extreme rarity and unpredictability.

"This was missed in the previous sonography because this is a very rare condition in which no one can even imagine that such a condition can exist. So, I did a detailed study from a couple of doctors and confirmed it," Dr Agarwal said.

"The mother is likely to have a normal delivery", explained Dr Bhagwat Bhusari, a Civil Surgeon of the Buldhana hospital. "However, the baby may require immediate medical attention after the birth", he added.



Rahul Gandhi says BJP wants India where 'maharajas' have rights, Scindias react

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed that "maharajas (kings) enjoyed rights" while the backward classes, including Dalits and tribals, did not have such entitlements. His remarks triggered a war of words between the BJP and Congress.

(News Agency)-Congress leader Rahul Gandhi ruffled the BJP's feathers after he claimed on Monday that backward classes had no rights before independence and only "maharajas (kings) enjoyed such rights". His remarks triggered a stinging response from Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who accused him of ignoring the contribution of the royal families, and a sharp retort from the Congress.

Addressing a rally in Madhya Pradesh's Mhow, Rahul Gandhi alleged that the "BJP and RSS" wanted a pre-independent India where the "poor suffer in silence" while "the country is run by billionaires". "The change was brought with independence. You got land and rights. The BJP-RSS wants an India of pre-independence, where common people had no rights and only the likes of (Gautam) Adani and (Mukesh) Ambani had rights. They want the poor to suffer in silence and not dream while the country is run by billionaires," he said.

JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA, COUSIN JAB RAHUL GANDHI

Rahul Gandhi's remarks drew a response from Scindia and his cousin and BJP MP Dushyant Singh, accusing the Gandhi scion of ignoring the contributions of erstwhile royal families.

In a tweet, Scindia, a member of the erstwhile royal family of Gwalior, and who was also once an aide to Rahul Gandhi during his Congress days, lashed out at



his former boss, saying his remarks "exposed his narrow thinking and understanding". "The statement given by Rahul Gandhi, a leader who considers the Constitution as his 'pocket diary', about the role of the royal families of India before independence exposes his narrow thinking and understanding. In his hunger for power and position, he has forgotten that these royal families had laid the foundation of equality and inclusive development in India years

ago," he said.

Scindia recalled that Baroda king Sayajirao Gaekwad provided financial assistance to Constitution maker Babasaheb Ambedkar for pursuing his education.

"Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj laid the foundation of social justice in 1902 by giving 50 per cent reservation to the Bahujans of the country in his governance system for the first time. To educationally empower the backward

classes, Madhav Maharaj I of Gwalior opened education and employment centres throughout the Gwalior-Chambal region," he said.

Scindia alleged that the Congress gave birth to the "dictatorial ideology and worked to undermine the rights of Dalits, the deprived and the backward classes". "Rahul Gandhi, first read history, then make statements!" Scindia, who had quit the Congress to join the BJP in 2020, added.

On the other hand, Dushyant Singh slammed Rahul Gandhi and said his statement was yet another example of his "reckless hit-and-run politics" without understanding history. "Claiming that royal families did nothing for the poor shows ignorance of the immense contributions made by leaders like Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, who championed social reforms, and the Gaekwad family of Vadodara, who supported Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's education," he tweeted. Giving more examples of the contribution of royal families, the BJP MP wrote, "The Dholpur royals also played a crucial role in social and infrastructural development. Maharaj Rana Nihal Singh modernised the state's administration, built hospitals and developed essential public infrastructure like roads and railways, while his successor continued these progressive efforts." Dushyant Singh alleged that such remarks "exposed" Rahul Gandhi's habit of making "baseless comments" for political mileage.

Andhra man kills sister to claim Rs 1 crore insurance, arrested for murder



(News Agency)-A real estate businessman in Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh, has been arrested for allegedly murdering his divorced and childless younger sister to fraudulently claim a Rs 1 crore insurance payout. The accused, 30-year-old Malapati Ashok Kumar was taken into custody for the

crime, which occurred on February 2, 2024, near a petrol station in Podili, the police confirmed on Tuesday. Kumar, who was struggling with heavy debts, allegedly devised a plan to insure his sister's life with multiple insurance companies, murder her, and stage it as an accident to claim the payout.

Investigators revealed that he had meticulously planned the crime, ensuring the policies were in place before executing his scheme.

On the day of the incident, Kumar lured his sister into his car under the pretext of a hospital visit to Ongole. During the return journey, he allegedly administered sleeping pills to her before smothering her to death. He then attempted to stage the murder as an accident, police said. Following an investigation, authorities arrested Kumar and charged him under several sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 120(B) (criminal conspiracy), 302 (murder), and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence). Further inquiries are ongoing to determine whether he had accomplices or had attempted similar crimes in the past.

Mumbai jewellery brand CEO arrested in multi-crore Torres ponzi scheme

The Mumbai Police arrested Torres Jewellery CEO Tausif Riyaz and three others in a Rs 57-crore Ponzi scheme targeting 3,700 investors.



(News Agency)-The Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested Tausif Riyaz, the CEO of Torres Jewellery, in connection with over a 57 crore investment fraud case.

Riyaz, also known as John Carter, who

had been absconding since the case was registered at Shivaji Park Police Station, was arrested in Lonavala on Monday based on specific intelligence. Earlier, a look-out circular was issued against him.

Following his arrest, Riyaz was

presented in court and remanded to police custody until February 3. The officials are actively searching for other suspects involved in the scam. The jewellery company is accused of duping thousands of investors through Ponzi and multi-level marketing (MLM)

schemes. The fraud surfaced when hundreds of investors protested at the company's Dadar store, leading to a police probe.

The case, involving over 3,700 investors and losses exceeding Rs 57 crore, was transferred to the EOW due to its magnitude. Raids conducted as part of the investigation have led to the seizure of cash and jewellery worth crores.

The Mumbai Police has also arrested three others linked to the scam, including Sarveh Ashok Surve, 30, an Aadhaar card operator named as a director of Platinum Hern Private Limited (the parent company of Torres Jewellery), Tania Karaxanovna Xasatova, 52, an Uzbek national who served as the company's general manager; and Valentina Ganesh Kumar, 44, a Russian national who was the store in-charge. The investigation is still underway and the police are in search of others accused in the case.

Cosmetics worth Rs 7 lakh seized in Kerala over harmful mercury content

(News Agency)- Kerala Health Minister Veena George announced that cosmetics worth over Rs 7 lakh were seized for being manufactured and distributed without proper license or adherence to the standards prescribed under the Cosmetics Rules 2020. Cases have

warned.

Minister George urged consumers to exercise caution when purchasing cosmetics. "Before buying such products, it is necessary to check the label to see if it is manufactured with a proper licence and whether the manufacturer's address is clearly



mentioned," she stated. She also encouraged the public to report complaints to the Drugs Control Department via the toll-free number 18004253182 'Operation Soundarya', initiated by the

been registered against 33 establishments as part of the crackdown conducted during the first two phases of "Operation Soundarya". Tests conducted on lipstick and face cream samples revealed mercury levels exceeding permissible limits, with some samples showing mercury levels 12,000 times higher than allowed. "This has the potential to cause adverse effects that can even affect internal organs," the Minister

State Drugs Control Department in 2023, has been conducting inspections across Kerala in two phases. The Minister has now directed the State Drugs Controller to make the tests more stringent and to intensify public awareness campaigns.

The third phase of the operation will commence soon, focusing on preventing the entry of counterfeit cosmetics into the market.



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Gujarat man dies after cousin shoves compressor pipe in private parts 'for fun'

(News Agency) -A man died in Gujarat on Monday after his cousin allegedly inserted a compressor pipe in his private parts while pulling off a prank, police said.

The incident occurred when the victim, Prakash, visited his brother Ghevabhai and his friends, who were working in a metal company in Kadi. In the evening, everyone was relaxing when Alpesh, Prakash's cousin, jokingly shoved a compressor pipe up his private parts, due to which the victim's body was filled with air, police said.

As a result, Prakash started to vomit and fell unconscious. He was taken to



the nearest hospital, but was later shifted to the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, where he was declared dead. Prakash had visited his brother and his cousin as his company was closed on Republic Day on Sunday, police said.

According to Ghevabhai, Prakash's brother, Alpesh was aware of the high air pressure in the compressor pipe and despite that, he inserted it into the victim's private parts, which resulted in his death.

Police began investigating the matter by registering a complaint lodged by Ghevabhai. They said the incident occurred for fun.

Case against Elvish Yadav for threatening members of Maneka Gandhi's NGO

A complaint was filed against Bigg Boss OTT2 winner Elvish Yadav for allegedly threatening members of People for Animals NGO.

(News Agency) -In fresh trouble for Bigg Boss OTT2 winner Elvish Yadav, the Ghaziabad Police on Tuesday filed a case against him for allegedly threatening members of Maneka Gandhi's People for Animals NGO. A case was registered against the YouTuber at Nandgram police station on the orders of a court.

A case has also been filed against Elvish Yadav's friend and Bigg Boss OTT3 contestant Lovekesh Kataria.

PFA members Saurabh Gupta and Gaurav Gupta had filed a complaint in Ghaziabad's Nandgram alleging that the Bigg Boss OTT2 winner threatened them on social media. However, when the police did not take any action in the

matter, the duo approached the court requesting it to intervene. The Gupta brothers alleged that in May 2024, Elvish Yadav with a few other men forcibly entered a society in Noida where they lived and carried out a ruckus of the locality. After that incident, PFA lodged a police complaint with the Noida police, following which Yadav was arrested.

After he was released on bail, Elvish Yadav allegedly started threatening Saurabh and Gaurav Gupta on social media. On Friday, the court took cognisance of the entire matter and directed the Ghaziabad police to register an FIR against Elvish Yadav and initiate the necessary action.



The latest case adds another layer to the snake venom case, which began on Nov 3, 2023, when Elvish and five others were booked under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC

at Noida's Sector 49 police station.

Five persons were arrested with nine snakes and a 20ml vial containing venom. Elvish was apprehended on March 17, 2024, and released on bail five days later.

History-sheeter chased, murdered in public view in Srirangam, Tamil Nadu

(News Agency) A history-sheeter was murdered by a gang in full public view in Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu. The victim, identified as Anbu, was a member of a Dileep gang and had been facing multiple pending cases. He was attacked on Tuesday while returning home from the gym.

According to eyewitness accounts, Anbu was surrounded by a gang as he approached Theppakulam.



Sensing danger, he attempted to flee and ran nearly 500 metres before being overpowered by the assailants. The gang then hacked him, leaving him with severe injuries to his head and a completely severed right wrist. Onlookers rushed to assist Anbu and transported him to Srirangam Government Hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries and was declared dead on arrival. Following the incident,

Anbu's family staged a protest outside the hospital, demanding justice for his murder. Meanwhile, Srirangam Police have registered a case and are investigating the incident.

Adding to the outrage, a video of Anbu lying on the ground, covered in blood and pleading for help, has gone viral on social media, sparking widespread condemnation of the crime and calls for swift action against the perpetrators.

India, Indonesia renew maritime security agreement for 3 more years

India and Indonesia extended their maritime security cooperation for three years, focusing on search and rescue, pollution response, and law enforcement to enhance safety in the Indo-Pacific region.



(News Agency) -The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Indonesia Coast Guard (BAKAMLA) have renewed their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on maritime safety and security cooperation for another three years. The agreement was signed during the 2nd High-Level Meeting (HLM) at the ICG headquarters in New Delhi on January 27, 2025.

The meeting was led by ICG Director General Paramesh Sivamani and BAKAMLA Chief Vice Admiral Irvansyah, who arrived in India with an eight-member delegation for an official visit from January 24-28. Discussions focused

on strengthening operational cooperation in key areas such as maritime search and rescue, pollution response, and law enforcement. Both sides highlighted the importance of sharing best practices and maintaining professional exchanges to improve safety and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

As part of these efforts, ICG Ship Shaunak is currently deployed in Jakarta from January 27-30 to enhance operational ties with BAKAMLA.

The renewed agreement reflects the commitment of both nations to maintaining a secure and cooperative maritime environment in the region.

Unacceptable: India summons Sri Lankan envoy after 5 fishermen injured in firing

An incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island was reported in the early hours of Tuesday. India has lodged a strong protest with the Sri Lankan envoy.

(News Agency) -Five Indian fishermen sustained injuries, two of them critically, after the Sri Lankan Navy opened fire at them in the proximity of Delft Island early on Tuesday. The incident has sparked a strong response from India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which summoned Sri Lanka's acting High Commissioner in New Delhi to register a formal protest against the action.

Calling the action 'unacceptable', the Foreign Ministry stated, "An incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island was reported in the early hours of this morning".

"Out of the 13 fishermen who were on board the fishing vessel, two have sustained serious injuries and are currently receiving treatment at the Jaffna Teaching hospital," it added. Three more fishermen onboard the same vessel received minor injuries and were admitted to hospital for treatment. Meanwhile, the Indian Consulate officials in Jaffna have visited the injured fishermen and are extending all possible help.

"The Sri Lankan acting high



commissioner in New Delhi was called in today morning to the Ministry of External Affairs and a strong protest was lodged over the incident," MEA said. Additionally, the Indian High Commission in Colombo has raised the matter with the Sri Lankan foreign ministry. "The government of India has always emphasised the need to treat issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner, keeping in mind livelihood concerns," the MEA statement read further. "The use of force

is not acceptable under any circumstances whatsoever. Existing understandings between the two governments in this regard must be strictly observed," it added.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Navy claimed that an accidental firing took place as the Indian fishermen, acting as an organised group, attempted to assault naval personnel. "The Indian fishermen, as an organized group, have attempted to assault naval personnel and made an attempt to

snatch a firearm from a naval officer, endangering the lives of the naval personnel. In the process, an accidental fire has taken place, causing slight injuries to two Indian fishermen," the Sri Lankan Navy said in an official statement. Earlier this month, eight Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters. The arrests took place on January 11 during a special operation conducted in the sea area north of Mannar.

China flags handling differences, maintaining stable ties in talks with India

The fire broke out at around 3.30 am in the restaurant of the 12-storey Grand Kartal hotel in the resort of Kartalkaya in Bolu province, officials and reports said. The cause of the fire was under investigation.



(News Agency) China said it stressed on properly handling differences, and promotion of India-China relations on a stable track in the just concluded talks with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri while highlighting decisions to resume Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and direct flights.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri who arrived in Beijing on Sunday for a two-day visit held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Sun Weidong on Monday to stabilise and rebuild relations stalled for over four years due to the military standoff at Eastern Ladakh.

Misri was the former Ambassador to Beijing, while Sun was the former envoy to Delhi.

The External Affairs Ministry issued a press release on Monday stating that the two sides reviewed the state of India-China bilateral relations comprehensively and agreed to take certain people-centric steps to "stabilise and rebuild ties".

In its readout in Mandarin issued on early Tuesday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the dialogue focussed on promoting the implementation of the important consensus reached by the leaders of China and India in the Kazan meeting last year and discussed measures to improve and develop China-India relations.

It highlighted the consensus reached between the two sides during the talks which included the resumption of direct flights, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra for Indian pilgrims and a meeting of the

India-China Expert Level Mechanism to discuss the resumption of the provision of sharing hydrological data pertaining to trans-border rivers.

In the talks, China emphasised that the two sides should proceed from the fundamental interests of China, India and adhere to the strategic height and long-term perspective of China-India relations, the readout said.

Both sides should actively promote dialogue, exchanges and practical cooperation with a frank and constructive attitude, positively guide public opinion, increase trust and resolve misgivings, properly handle differences, and promote the development of ties on a healthy and stable track, it said.

The two sides held a frank and in-depth exchange of views on issues of mutual

concern, it said.

Highlighting the issues of consensus reached between the two sides, it said India has expressed its willingness to fully support China's work as the rotating presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) this year and will actively participate in various activities hosted by Beijing under the framework of the organisation.

Also, the two sides agreed to use bilateral and multilateral occasions to carry out active interactions at all levels, strengthen strategic communication, and enhance political mutual trust, it said.

Both sides agreed to jointly commemorate this year the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India and carry out media and think tank

exchanges, track two dialogue and other cultural exchanges.

They also agreed to resume direct flights between the two countries and take measures to facilitate personnel exchanges and the exchange of journalists between the two countries.

The facilitation of media exchanges raised expectations of the resumption of journalists from both countries to reopen their bureaus after a two-year disruption. Currently, China permits only the PTI bureau to function from Beijing.

Also, the two sides agreed to promote the resumption of Indian pilgrims' pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in China's Tibet Autonomous Region this year. Relative arrangements will be negotiated as soon as possible, the readout said.

The two sides also agreed to continue cross-border river cooperation and maintain communication by holding a new round of expert mechanism meetings as soon as possible.

India and China established the Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) in 2006 to discuss various issues related to trans-border rivers under which China provides India with hydrological information on the Brahmaputra river and Sutlej river during the flood seasons.

India has expressed concern over China's decision to build the world's largest hydropower dam over Brahmaputra also locally known as Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet.

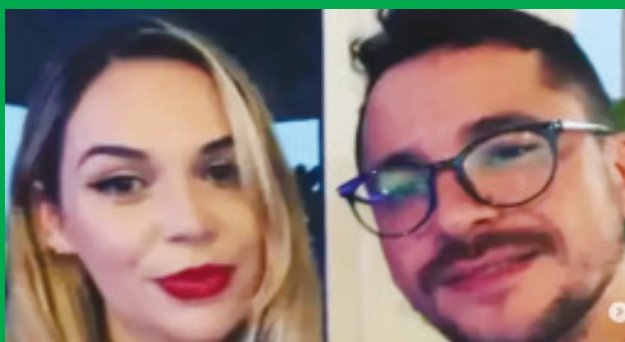
During his visit, Misri called on Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Liu Jianchao, Minister of the influential International Department of the ruling Communist Party of China.

UK Couple Died In Vietnam Villa After Drinking Contaminated Alcohol: Cops

(News Agency) A British consuming tainted "homemade" three weeks before their deaths. On Christmas Eve, they ordered two

woman and her South African finance limoncello. who were found dead at a villa in Vietnam last month were killed after consuming a contaminated drink. According to People, Greta Marie Otteson, 33, and Arno Quinto Els, 36, were found dead in December last year. Their bodies were found in separate rooms at the Hoi An Silverbell Villa in Hoi An. The

Vietnamese police now confirmed that the two died from methanol poisoning from contaminated alcohol after



According to People, Mr Els and Ms Otteson, who moved to Vietnam in February 2024, had gotten engaged

bottles of limoncello from a restaurant and the next day they woke up with the "worst hangover ever". They tried to "sleep it off". Ms Otteson also contacted her parents via WhatsApp on Christmas Day to tell them about her hangover and that she was seeing "black spots" in her vision. A "fantastic friend" called the couple and wanted to take them to hospital but they refused, according to Global News.

67 trafficked Indians rescued from cyber-scam centres in Laos

(News Agency) Sixty-seven Indians who were trafficked and forced to work in cyber-scam centres in Laos have been rescued by the Embassy of India in Vientiane, officials here said on Monday. These youngsters were forced to work there under intimidation and abuse by criminal syndicates operating in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) in Bokeo province of Laos, the Indian mission here said in a press release.

"The Embassy of India has successfully rescued 67 Indian youths who had been duped and trafficked into cyber-scam centres operating at the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) in Bokeo Province of Lao PDR," it said. Acting promptly on their requests for help, the Embassy dispatched a team of officials to GTSEZ, coordinating closely with Lao authorities to secure their release. Following necessary procedures and paperwork, the rescued individuals were transported from Bokeo to Vientiane, where the Embassy provided accommodation, food, and other



essential support. Ambassador of India to Laos, Prashant Agrawal, met with the rescued young people to discuss their experiences, assure them of their safety, and guide them on the next steps, including filing complaints against the agents responsible for their trafficking. He reaffirmed the Embassy's commitment to ensuring their safe return to India as a top priority, the release said.

"Embassy officials are currently working closely with concerned Lao authorities for completion of their exit formalities, following which all of them would be able to travel back to India shortly," it said. The Embassy expressed gratitude to Lao officials for their cooperation and has urged decisive action against the criminal syndicates operating in GTSEZ. "The matter has been raised at the

highest levels," it said.

The Embassy has so far rescued 924 Indians, of which 857 have already been safely returned to India, it said.


The Embassy also cautioned Indian youngster considering overseas job offers.

"Indian youth who may have been promised a job in Thailand, but upon arrival there, are asked to travel by road to Chiang Rai close to Thai-Lao border, are cautioned that this is a sure indication that they are being trafficked to GTSEZ in Lao PDR. Once they arrive in GTSEZ, their passports may be taken away by criminal syndicates and they are made to sign a so-called 'work contract' in a foreign language which endangers them to exploitation," it said.

The Embassy has urged individuals to consult the detailed advisory on its official website or contact them for verification before accepting any suspicious job offers.

It also urged individuals to reach out to the Embassy to prevent falling prey to such scams.

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Roman Abramovich may owe HMRC £1bn for unpaid taxes, analysis shows

(News Agency) Roman Abramovich, the billionaire Russian oligarch, may owe British tax authorities as much as £1bn, according to analysis of documents that suggests his companies failed to pay tax on profits made through an elaborate offshore investment scheme.

Leaked papers and court filings shed new light on how the income from a \$6bn (£4.8bn) cash pile amassed by one of the world's richest men was managed.

The former owner of Chelsea FC entrusted nearly half of his fortune to more than 200 hedge funds, including some of the world's most prestigious money managers, using a circuitous structure routed through Cyprus and the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the files show.

The structure endured until at least 2022, when Abramovich was among a group of powerful Kremlin allies hit with sanctions by western governments in response to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Today, an international investigation by the Guardian, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the BBC indicates that while the investments were made by BVI-based companies, they appear to have been controlled for nearly two decades by a senior executive working for Abramovich, who was based in



England from 2004.

If the key investment decisions were made in Britain, the oligarch's companies could owe more than £500m in tax, analysis of the documents suggests. Factoring in interest and penalties for late payments, HMRC could be owed as much as £1bn.

Although the files are very detailed, it is possible that some elements are missing. But the leaked material is sufficient to raise questions about whether UK tax should have been paid, according to experts.

Chelsea FC may also have benefited from the hedge fund investments because one of the companies at the heart of the scheme bankrolled other Abramovich vehicles, some of

which financed the London club. The investigation is part of the Cyprus Confidential series, based on the largest ever leak of financial information from the Mediterranean tax haven, which the Guardian and its reporting partners have been examining since 2022. At a time when the UK chancellor, Rachel Reeves, is struggling to fund crucial public services, the latest findings are expected to fuel calls to review the Abramovich tax file.

The chair of parliament's cross-party group on responsible tax said HMRC should "thoroughly investigate" the case.

Lawyers for Abramovich declined to answer detailed questions, responding only in the broadest terms. They said

he had always acted in accordance with professional tax advice. They denied that he was personally responsible for any alleged failure to pay taxes that were due.

The hedge fund network

It was the \$13bn deal to sell his Siberian oil and gas business to Russia's state-owned Gazprom that propelled Abramovich into the ranks of the super-rich in 2005.

Much of the money did not stay in Russia. Over two decades, Abramovich acquired luxury homes in London and the south of France, a valuable art collection and a London football club. But he also made investments, using a structure at the centre of which sat one company, BVI-registered

Keygrove Holdings Limited.

Keygrove was owned first by the Sara Trust, then from 2010 by the HF Trust. Both trusts were based in Cyprus and counted Abramovich as their sole beneficiary until 2022, when he was replaced by his five children.

Keygrove, in turn, owned more than a dozen BVI companies, each of which poured hundreds of millions of dollars into investments including hedge funds around the world.

These offshore investment companies, the files suggest, did not pay UK corporation tax. But the Cyprus Confidential files raise serious questions about whether they should have.

Abramovich's right-hand man

The list of hedge funds invested in by Abramovich is a roll-call of the top firms on Wall Street and in the City of London, but their names will mean little to the average saver: clients must typically invest a minimum of \$100,000 to join these exclusive clubs.

They included the world's largest asset manager, BlackRock; the UK group Brevan Howard, whose founder Alan Howard donated £1m to the Conservatives before the last general election; and Marshall Wace, whose founder Paul Marshall bankrolled Britain's rightwing GB News and has just acquired the conservative news magazine the Spectator.

Putin Says Talks With Ukraine Possible, But Not With Zelensky

US President Donald Trump has put pressure on both sides to end the nearly three-year conflict, saying last week that Zelensky wanted to negotiate a "deal" to stop the fighting.

(News Agency) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that talks with Ukraine were possible but not with its President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom he deemed "illegitimate". US President Donald Trump has put pressure on both sides to end the nearly three-year conflict, saying last week that Zelensky wanted to negotiate a "deal" to stop the fighting. "If (Zelensky) wants to participate in the negotiations, I

would allocate people to take part in the negotiations," Putin said, calling the Ukrainian leader "illegitimate" because his presidential term expired during martial law.

"If there is a desire to negotiate and find a compromise, let anyone lead the negotiations there... Naturally, we will strive for what suits us, what corresponds to our interests," he added.

Putin also claimed the fighting

would end in two months or less if the West cut its support to Kyiv.

"They will not exist for a month if the money and, in a broad sense, the bullets run out. Everything would be over in a month and a half or two," Putin said. The conflict has shown no signs of de-escalating despite Trump's promise to enact a quick ceasefire once in office. Russian officials said Monday that nobody in Trump's team had



reached out about setting up a meeting with Putin, but that both sides appeared to be ready for one.

Kyiv has warned against it being excluded from any peace talks, accusing Putin of wanting to "manipulate" Trump.

Donald Trump offers US federal workers buyouts to resign



Government employees' union says offer pressures career workers to quit and will cause chaos in federal programs

(News Agency) - The Trump administration has offered buyouts to almost all of the roughly 3 million people who work for the US government if they leave their jobs by 6 February, as the White House attempts to gut the civil service. The US office of personnel management (OPM), the government's human resources agency, sent an email to the entire federal workforce on Tuesday evening with four directives that it says Trump is mandating. They included a full-time return to the office for most employees. The email said that the federal workforce would be subjected to "enhanced standards of suitability and conduct", aiming to retain only employees who were "reliable, loyal, trustworthy". It warned that most agencies would be downsized. "If you choose not to continue in your current role in the federal workforce, we thank you for your service to your country and you will be

provided with a dignified, fair departure from the federal government utilizing a deferred resignation program," the email reads. It offered workers more than seven months' salary, and asked them to reply with the word "Resign". The email had the same subject line - "Fork in the road" - as one sent by Elon Musk to employees at Twitter in 2022 when he bought the social media platform. Musk has been tasked by Trump with cutting as much as a quarter of all government spending. He does not work at the office of personnel management but a former employee of Musk's, Amanda Scales, was recently made its chief of staff. The unprecedented move appeared to defy rules that protect government employees from political interference and to immediately kneecap all federal government agencies. Unions representing federal workers immediately condemned the offer.

The Virginia senator Tim Kaine called it a trick. "If you accept that offer and resign, he'll stiff you," Kaine said, referencing Trump's well-documented history of attempting to avoid paying contractors. "He doesn't have any authority to do this," Kaine said. "Do not be fooled by this guy." Trump has pledged to radically remake government, including significantly shrinking the federal workforce and cutting trillions of dollars of spending - an agenda his administration is attempting to implement at breakneck speed. Since Friday, the US president has fired a dozen independent federal government watchdogs, as well as Gwynne Wilcox, a senior official at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), who described her dismissal as "unprecedented and illegal". On Monday, the administration moved to freeze all grants and loans disbursed by the federal government - an effort that a judge blocked on Tuesday. The American Federation of

Government Employees denounced the latest move. The union's president, Everett Kelley, argued the offer was an effort to pressure workers who are not considered loyal to the new administration to leave their jobs - which could cause upheaval in federal programs. "Purging the federal government of dedicated career federal employees will have vast, unintended consequences that will cause chaos for the Americans who depend on a functioning federal government," Kelley said in a statement. "Between the flurry of anti-worker executive orders and policies, it is clear that the Trump administration's goal is to turn the federal government into a toxic environment where workers cannot stay even if they want to." The mass departure of federal workers - from frontline healthcare workers in the veterans affairs department to the officials charged with processing loans for homebuyers or small businesses - could have

sweeping consequences for Americans. The New York Times reported that it could seriously disrupt American life on a vast scale, including most benefits traditionally termed "welfare" - including Medicare, social security and food stamps - as well as travel, tax returns, the normal function of national parks and national museums, passport renewals, medical research, other forms of science, the inspectors and regulators who make sure that food, water and pharmaceutical drugs are safe to consume, and even the accurate functioning of the National Weather Service. The US government is the nation's largest workforce with more than 2.4 million employees, not including post office workers. Project 2025, the conservative manifesto that has guided much of Trump's policy goals, calls for mass firings of federal workers and suggests replacing many of them with political appointees.

Under Trump 2.0, Content Creators Enter White House As "New Media" Outlets

Karoline Leavitt, the youngest White House press secretary in history, noted that young people are shifting away from traditional media to consume news through podcasts, blogs, social media, and other independent platforms.

The White House briefing room under President Donald Trump's administration looks younger than ever. The Trump administration has opened the briefing room to representatives from "new media" outlets, including podcasters, social media influencers, and content creators.

At her first daily media briefing on Tuesday (local time), Mr Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "Millions of Americans, particularly young people, have shifted away from traditional television and newspapers to consume news through podcasts, blogs, social media, and other independent platforms."

Twenty-seven-year-old Leavitt, who is the youngest White House press secretary in history, noted that the move was crucial for her team to share President Trump's message widely and adapt the White House to the evolving media landscape of 2025.

She said the seats along the wall at the front of the briefing room,



traditionally reserved for White House press staff, will now be designated the "New Media Seat."

Ms Leavitt also invited independent journalists, podcasters, social media influencers, and content creators to apply for White House press credentials through the newly launched website, whitehouse.gov/newmedia.

The Balancing Act

She gave the first question of

her tenure to a reporter from the conservative Breitbart site, who sat in one of those seats, before turning to the Associated Press reporter who typically opens press briefings.

The press secretary also said the White House would restore 440 press passes revoked under the prior administration.

During her first briefing, Ms Leavitt fielded questions from new media representatives, including outlets that rank

among the most-viewed news websites in the country but have never had a seat in the briefing room.

When asked about the initiative, she reiterated the administration's commitment to upholding the First Amendment. "It's a fact that Americans, especially young people, are consuming news from a variety of platforms. As the youngest press secretary in history, thanks to President

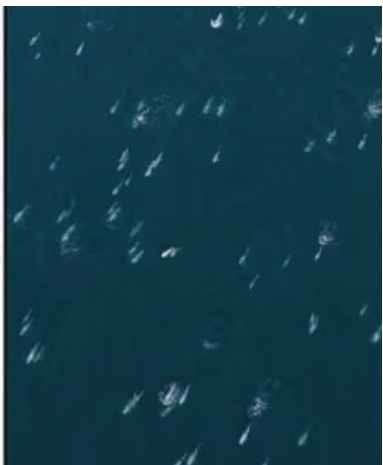
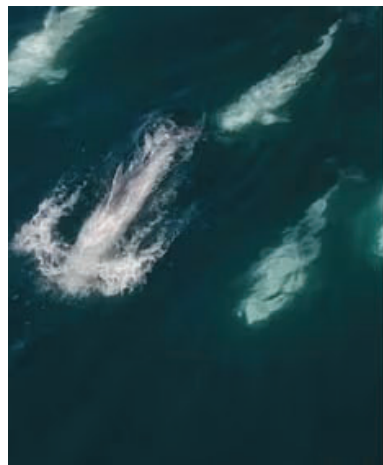
Trump, I take great pride in opening this room to new media voices to ensure the president's message reaches as many Americans as possible," she said.

She added, "We will ensure that respected outlets like Axios and Breitbart have a permanent seat in this room every day. We also encourage anyone in the country-- whether you're a TikTok creator, blogger, podcaster, or any other type of content producer -- apply for press credentials if you are producing legitimate news content, regardless of the platform."

The move marks a significant shift in the White House's approach to media engagement, reflecting the changing ways Americans access and consume news in the digital age.

Ms Leavitt also emphasised the administration's commitment to the First Amendment, announcing plans to reinstate press passes for 440 journalists whose credentials were revoked under the previous administration.

'Super pod' of more than 1,500 dolphins spotted off California coast



A miles-long cluster of dolphins has been filmed leaping and gliding across Carmel Bay off the central coast of California, forming an unusual "super pod" of more than 1,500 of the marine creatures.

"They were on the horizon I feel

like as far as I could see," said Capt Evan Brodsky, with Monterey Bay Whale Watch, who captured drone footage of Friday's huge gathering of Risso's dolphins.

The sighting was rare: Risso's dolphins typically travel in

groups of only 10 to 30 animals, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

From a 20ft (about 6-meter) inflatable boat, Brodsky and a small team out searching for grey whales watched mesmerized as the dolphins jumped out of the bay, peeking around as they leaped into the air. This type of dolphin with its stocky body and bulbous head can weigh as much as 1,100lb (about 499kg) and reach up to 13ft (3.9 meters) long.

Colleen Talty, a marine biologist on the trip to track the annual migration of grey whales headed to breeding lagoons off Mexico's Baja California coast, called it

"pretty amazing" to see more than 1,500 dolphins cavorting all around their boat.

Some, she said, were even swimming at the front of the vessel and using the waves to propel them forward, a technique known as bow riding. "They were just having a great time. So they were breaching everywhere ... tail slapping, coming right over to the boat. They looked like they were having a big party," she said.

The large mix of adult and juvenile dolphins was likely the result of several pods coming together and swimming south, she said.

Although this is not the first time they have seen this large of a group, it is not a common

occurrence, Talty said.

The Monterey coastline is a particularly ideal location to spot the dolphins because they prefer extremely deep water. The area's underwater submarine canyon means they may swim much closer to shore than elsewhere along the California coast, said Talty.

The team did not initially grasp the size of the super pod that appeared Friday morning, thinking there were only several hundred dolphins.

"Once we put the drone up, I was just blown away ... I kept saying: 'Look at my screen. Look at my screen. Look how many there are,'" said Brodsky. "It just blows my mind every time. It never gets old."

DeepSeek is the dawn of a new world order, say the Chinese

DeepSeek, China's "dark horse" in the artificial intelligence race, is being hailed as a game-changer; its rise seen as a monumental leap for China's AI industry. This is the general sentiment across Chinese online discussions, where many view the launch of DeepSeek R1 as a serious shake-up that casts doubt on the US tech dominance.

Investors are increasingly questioning whether the substantial investments and rising costs of American firms such as OpenAI and Nvidia will continue to yield returns.

The numbers back these claims. According to Chinese estimates, DeepSeek's downloads surged by 375 per cent during 20-26 January, reaching over 3 million since its launch on 11 January. About 80 per cent of this growth has occurred in the past week. On 26 January, the app topped the Apple App Store and daily active users jumped by 110 per cent on 17 and 18 January. Liu Wei, director of the Human-Computer Interaction and Cognitive Engineering Laboratory at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, emphasised that DeepSeek's primary strength lies in its algorithm improvements and optimisations. A Shanghai-based commentator credited the AI model's popularity to its ability to perform complex tasks at lower computing costs, paired with clever engineering design.

It is no surprise that Chinese media and social media platforms are overflowing with articles discussing the implications of DeepSeek for both China's AI industry and its competition with the US.

One social media commentator wrote, "Tomorrow marks the beginning of the Chinese New Year. As the nation enters a long holiday and embraces a period of relative calm, the US, on the other side of the globe, seems anxious. In stark contrast, the realm of artificial intelligence has suddenly experienced a significant disruption. The force behind this upheaval is none other than DeepSeek, a product of China's burgeoning AI

sector." Commentators in China view DeepSeek as a direct challenge to US AI supremacy. Shen Yi, Associate Professor at Fudan University's Department of International Politics, said that DeepSeek's emergence could disrupt both Chinese and American tech industries by shifting market dynamics, which is critical for the advancement of AI technology.

Qian Yaxu, a lecturer at Southwest Jiaotong University, asserted that AI will be the deciding factor in the China-US competition, in which China stands a strong chance of prevailing. Since AI has traditionally been a domain of US superiority, China's strides in the field may undermine Washington's confidence. Liu Dian from Fudan University commented, "DeepSeek is not merely challenging the established rules; it is fundamentally rewriting the game." In doing so, the platform opens new avenues for China's AI industry, propelling its ascent in the global market. According to Liu, the diminishing dominance of the US in AI technology, coupled with shifts in the capital market, signals the dawn of a new world order. This shift represents more than just a technological revolution—it is a recalibration of global power dynamics, heralding the beginning of a transformative era in AI. The industry's perspective in China mirrors these sentiments. Zhou Zhimin, manager at Chuangjin Hexin Technology Growth Fund, said that DeepSeek's popularity has alleviated domestic concerns and boosted confidence while fuelling panic among major US companies. Sun Jiaxu, fund manager at Cathay Internet+, emphasised that DeepSeek's rise positions China as a global leader in AI. In Chinese discourse, DeepSeek's emergence is seen as proof of China's formidable AI strength, especially after the US tech export restrictions to China, which triggered fierce competition.

Economic Survey's Growth Paradox: Soaring Profits, Stagnant Wages And Need For Reform

The recently released Economic Survey 2024-25 presents a paradox. The Indian economy continues to clock impressive GDP growth, and corporate profitability has reached a 15-year high, yet wage growth remains tepid; capital is being raised through IPO but private sector capital expenditure is still lukewarm, raising critical concerns about the sustainability of this growth trajectory. The growing disconnect between corporate earnings, employment expansion and wage growth is at the heart of this puzzle.

According to the Survey, corporate profits surged 22.3 per cent in FY24, while employment in these firms increased by 1.5 per cent. In stark contrast, employee expenses saw only a 13 per cent rise, down from 17 per cent in FY23, indicating that firms focus more on cost-cutting than hiring. The Economic Survey is the opinion of economists and rarely connects with what the budget will or will not do; it is a parallel exercise to the budget and should be seen independently of what will happen when the Finance Minister presents the budget a day later.

The total resource mobilization from primary markets (equity and debt) stood at Rs 11.1 lakh crore from April to December 2024, reflecting a 5 per cent increase from the previous year. More importantly, this accounts for 25.6 per cent of gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), signalling healthy private investment activity. IPOs surged 32.1 per cent, increasing from 196 in 2023 to 259 in 2024, with a nearly threefold jump in capital raised—from Rs 53,023 crore to Rs 1,53,987 crore. This robust momentum starkly contrasts the post-pandemic slowdown in private investment

witnessed in FY22 and FY23, when risk aversion dominated the corporate sector. The debt market, however, remains undercapitalised. While corporate bond issuances stood at Rs 7.3 lakh crore, making up a significant portion of private financing, India's corporate bond market remains at just 18 per cent of GDP, compared to 80 per cent in South Korea and 36 per cent in China. This Economic Survey also marks a shift in tone from previous editions. The Economic Survey 2022-23 was cautious, reflecting a landscape dominated by high inflation, global economic uncertainty, and rising interest rates. It focused on government-led investment and fiscal prudence to stabilise growth. The Economic Survey 2023-24 took a more optimistic stance, acknowledging structural reforms but warning of headwinds in private investment. The 2024-25 Survey, in contrast, strikes a balance between private capital revival and the persistent wage stagnation problem.

Past Economic Surveys highlight different trends. The Economic Survey 2023-24 pointed to a sluggish private investment climate, emphasizing the need for greater policy support for MSMEs and start-ups, while the Economic Survey 2022-23 raised concerns over rising interest rates and global uncertainty, which led to a dip in fresh investments. However, the Economic Survey 2024-25 shows signs of a resurgence in private capital formation, backed by strong equity markets and corporate bond issuances. However, private greenfield investments are still below pre-pandemic levels.

(Contd. on page 26)

Maha Kumbh tragedy : Safety of devotees must be prioritised

A great tragedy has cast a shadow on the Maha Kumbh festival, the most magnificent spectacle India presents to the world every 12 years. Better crowd management could have prevented the stampede that took place in the Sangam area as crores of pilgrims jostled to take a holy dip on the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya in the wee hours of Wednesday. Ensuring a safe pilgrimage was an enormous challenge from the outset, and it is apparent that some lapses led to the pre-dawn melee. Anticipating a huge congregation, the mela authorities had issued an advisory on Tuesday, urging devotees to follow safety guidelines. However, the

organisers and security personnel were caught off guard when some pilgrims climbed over the barricades at Akhara Marg. The Uttar Pradesh Government has tried to downplay the incident, probably with the intention of averting panic and avoiding negative publicity, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences to the devotees who lost their family members. A thorough probe is a must to find out how the situation spun out of control and who all were guilty of dereliction of duty. Creating a veil of secrecy will only fuel rumours and misinformation.

(Contd. on page 26)

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There's A Five-Letter Word Haunting Trump



You don't want to fall into the trap of romanticising the East as Orientalists, steeped in Christianity and its binaries of good and evil, have done over the last 200 years. But a well-known Chinese invocation comes to mind as one absorbs the beginnings of the second Trump presidency: may you live in interesting times. All times are interesting for those living through them; our generation is no different. However, one may allow oneself the indulgence that the post-Trump II world would be more interesting than, say, the post-World War II years.

Partly, this is because Trump is upending much of the global institutional structure the US primarily created post-World War II: the United Nations and its many offshoots, which serve as global watchdogs and regulators on socio-economic issues, and the Bretton Woods institutions, which underpin global trade and finance. Just as importantly, the US commitment to lowering tariffs to increase market access for poorer countries in wealthier markets is also in question.

A Much Stronger China

More significantly, a tectonic shift has been underway as China awakens, bringing with it the disruptions Napoleon once apprehended. China is not a status quo power—indeed, no emerging superpower is when there is only one other around. But China also represents a culture, an imagination, and therefore a morality and civilisational view that the Christian West, steeped in notions of Right and Wrong and One Truth, struggles to comprehend.

How will Trump II handle a China that is much stronger than it was eight years ago? Not only has China advanced technologically in key strategic sectors despite sanctions introduced by Trump and expanded by Biden, but it has also gained adherents to its alternative worldview—one that debunks Western-style democracy and prioritises order,

stability, and material progress. Tough Against Immigrants And Deep State

Trump returned to power because he was seen as more competent in handling the economy, reducing prices, cracking down on illegal immigration, and restoring faith in government by dismantling and refashioning it. His campaign made explicit promises to his MAGA base: mass deportations of the “15–20 million” undocumented immigrants, dismantling the “Deep State” that “stole” the 2020 election and pursued “illegal prosecutions” against him, seeking vengeance against those who opposed him, and rewarding loyalty as never before in a constitutional democracy.

In his inaugural address and his first days in office, he has done exactly as he promised, disappointing neither his loyalists nor his critics. His speech invoked the imperial America of the late 19th century when it had expanded its territory—this time, with real estate targets including Panama and Greenland. On his first day in the Oval Office, he signed 26 executive orders (EO), the most ever by a president, addressing a wide swath of campaign commitments. Though many of these EOs face legal and legislative hurdles, the rapid pace has continued, reshaping the US government to align with the MAGA worldview both domestically and internationally. The intent was to shock and awe—to announce to the world that there was a new Big Chief in Washington.

Two Sticky Decisions

Two decisions have particularly inflamed his critics: the launch of the cryptocurrency World Liberty Financial and the meme coin TRUMP on the eve of the inauguration, along with President Trump's blanket pardon of the perpetrators of the January 6, 2021, assault on the Capitol. Critics argue that because cryptocurrencies allow for anonymous transactions,

Liberty provides a pathway to those seeking to strike deals with the transactional president—offering financial gratifications for favourable policy tweaks without anyone being the wiser. The meme coin TRUMP and Liberty, in this view, serve as emblematic tools of a presidency that blends governance with personal financial gain.

The launch inevitably became controversial when it was erroneously reported that the Trump family had made \$500 million through the sale of crypto “tokens”. In reality, TRUMP quickly gained a market capitalisation of \$13 billion, and the Trump Organization earned \$7 million in “liquidity fees”. Critics argue this is only the beginning; by the time Trump leaves office, his target, they claim, is to swell the family fortune by \$5 billion.

Blatant Pardons

Trump's pardon of the January 6 rioters, including those convicted of assaulting police officers, continues to enrage his critics. Even The Wall Street Journal, otherwise largely supportive of Trump editorially, was critical, citing its own poll that found that nearly six in 10 Americans opposed pardoning the convicts. The pardon was also unexpected—one, because Trump had stated the pardons would go through a vetting process, and two, because Vice President J.D. Vance had publicly assured everyone before the inauguration that convicted individuals would not be pardoned. Reportedly, as the staff laboured through the vetting process, an impatient Trump declared, “This is taking too long, eff it, I will pardon the whole lot and also show J.D. who is boss.” At the opposite end of the spectrum is the case of General Mark Milley, retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During his campaign, Trump suggested Milley had committed treason and should be put to death. Milley was pardoned by Biden to prevent a court-martial, but he now faces an inquiry for “insubordination” while serving as Joint Chiefs Of Staff (JCS) under Trump. The objective: humiliate Milley by “demoting” him in retirement. Milley had reassured his Chinese counterpart post-Capitol insurrection that Trump was not planning an attack on China in his efforts to undo the 2020 election results. He also publicly supported a peaceful transition of power.

Trump has frequently referenced Biden's pardons of family and

friends, as well as his political opponents. “Biden pardoned his entire family even as I was making my inaugural speech,” Trump quipped. His continued focus on Biden is evident in an executive order directing federal agencies to investigate whether the Biden administration committed illegal acts to curb freedom of speech and to take “remedial measures” if proof is found. Ominously, Trump said gleefully on Fox News that Biden had not pardoned himself.

Trump's executive order delaying the ban on TikTok was classic Trump. The ban, written into law by an overwhelming majority in the House and upheld by the US Supreme Court, was postponed by 75 days under the guise of “national security” considerations. However, in typical Trump fashion, he admitted publicly that the real reason was TikTok's role in helping him win the election. The platform had significantly influenced young voters to switch their votes to Trump.

The Deportation Spree

The immigration crackdown was among the most significant executive orders and the campaign promise implemented most swiftly. Declaring a national emergency at the border, Trump ramped up deportations of illegal immigrants, involved the military in anti-immigration measures and lifted immunity protections for religious places that had become major sanctuaries.

As promised, Trump rescinded birthright citizenship, despite its firm foundation in the US Constitution through the 14th Amendment and its repeated affirmation in Supreme Court rulings. The executive order denies citizenship not only to children of illegal immigrants but also to those born to parents on work or student visas. Trump's hardline stance on immigration is certain to dominate headlines across many countries, including India, for the foreseeable future.

Trump also declared a national emergency on energy, a move that even The Wall Street Journal found perplexing. His “drill, baby, drill” mantra underpins an aggressive push for fossil fuel exploitation, ostensibly aimed at lowering retail prices by reducing natural gas costs. Notably, this was Trump's only decision explicitly targeting prices, despite soaring everyday costs being the primary reason for Biden's election loss.

Trump Actions May Impact Republican Base

The intended curbs on renewable energy and the rollback of incentives for electric cars made little sense—even to corporate America, now busy grovelling before Trump. For one, the US pumped more fuel last year than ever before, becoming a net exporter. Second, as Tom Friedman pointed out, the largest producers of wind and solar energy in the US are five Republican-led states, and the greatest potential for these renewable sources lies in the vast plains of the US heartland—MAGA strongholds. Third, even if one is a climate change-sceptic, as much of the MAGA world is, it is intuitive that any major country's energy policy must be an “AND” strategy, not an “OR” strategy.

Predictably, Trump sent the 2.28 million-strong federal bureaucracy into a spin with a flurry of executive orders, including a blanket freeze on DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives and an exhortation to report employees still pursuing DEI efforts. He also imposed a blanket ban on the disbursement of federal aid, including foreign aid—later rescinded and modified—and introduced an enticement for federal employees to resign en masse in exchange for eight months of salary. This was framed as a purely “voluntary” offer, though with the implicit threat that jobs would not be guaranteed after the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) completed its review. Oddly enough, the DOGE notification itself was modest in its stated objectives: to harness the full power of digital technology to make government more efficient and effective, echoing the Department of Digital Services established under Obama with the same goals.

Trump has championed higher tariffs since the 1980s, but apart from a threatened 25% tariff on Mexico and Canada starting February 1, no major action has been taken against China—let alone a blanket tariff on all nations, as signalled in his campaign. Even Trump's own government colleagues and ideologues struggle to counter the primary argument against tariffs: that they would raise domestic prices. Moreover, the rest of the world has already adjusted to a global economy where the US holds a diminishing share of international trade, meaning punitive tariffs would likely hurt the US more than its trading partners

China and Pakistan could use Bangladesh against India. New Delhi must stabilise the Northeast

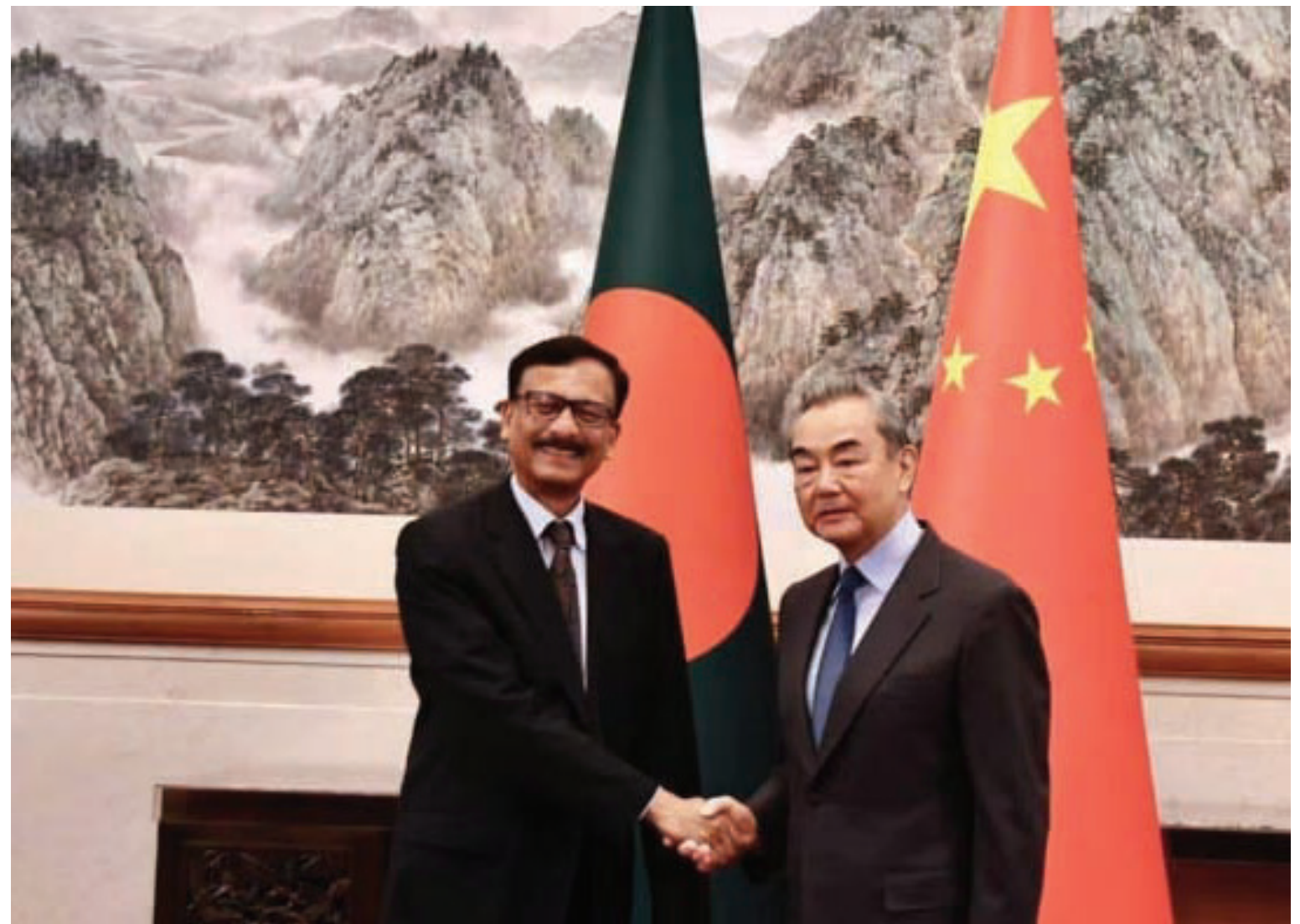
Last week, a military delegation from Pakistan, which also included ISI officials, went to Bangladesh and visited Rangpur district, which is located near the 'Chicken Neck' in India.

Bangladesh's Constitution Reform Commission, set up by Chief Adviser to the interim government Muhammad Yunus, has proposed dropping three fundamental principles: secularism, socialism, and nationalism, and replacing them with equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism. The commission has recommended retaining 'democracy' in the preamble. If implemented, these changes would mark a major shift in Bangladesh's constitutional identity. Secularism and nationalism, in particular, reflected the country's divorce from Pakistan, a state founded on theocratic principles. While the inclusion of 'pluralism' could be a fig leaf providing cover for the exclusion of secularism, it exposes a profound departure from earlier constitutional framework—one that has already manifested in violence against Hindu minorities.

Bangladesh's growing dependency on China

Notably, Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan and China have been warming. There has been an exchange of visits between military leaders from Pakistan and Bangladesh. In January, Lt Gen SM Kamr-ul-Hassan, the second-in-command of the Bangladesh Army, visited Pakistan and reportedly met with Pakistan Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir and Lt Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations said that they held extensive discussions on the evolving security dynamics in the region and explored avenues for enhancing the bilateral military cooperation. An invitation to the Pakistan Army and the ISI to visit Bangladesh was also extended. Following the meetings, a Pakistan military delegation—which supposedly included ISI chief Lieutenant General Asim Malik and three other Maj Generals—visited Bangladesh on 21 January. What would have certainly raised hackles in India were media reports suggesting that the delegation visited Rangpur district, located near the Siliguri Corridor, also known as the 'Chicken's Neck', a narrow slice of land that



connects the Northeast to other states of India.

The officials were also scheduled to visit the Chittagong Hill Tracts. While there is some dispute over whether the delegation was indeed headed by the ISI chief, the visit by Pakistani officials to these two highly sensitive regions in Bangladesh—in terms of India's national security—have not been contested. Overall, the ISI's visit signals a cause of concern, raising questions about the potential motives and implications of such engagements.

Last week, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who went to the US for the swearing-in ceremony of President Donald Trump, said he had a brief discussion on the current situation in Bangladesh with the newly appointed US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz. Though he did not divulge any details, the fact that Bangladesh figured in the discussion is indicative of India's concerns.

New Delhi's concerns are magnified by China playing a strategic role in Bangladesh. On 21 January, the Advisor for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh's interim government, Touhid Hossain, made his first foreign

visit and met China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing. Yi expressed China's readiness to join hands with Bangladesh and carry forward traditional friendship, strengthen strategic communication, and advance strategic cooperative partnership. Hossain remarked that friendship with China is a cross-party consensus in Bangladesh, supported by successive governments and the entire nation. Bangladesh was one of the first South Asian countries to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a key project for expanding China's geopolitical influence. Bangladesh has been going through an economic downturn since the internal unrest began two years ago. It owes China \$5.57 billion, which is about nine per cent of its total external debt. China is the fourth-largest lender to Bangladesh. During the Hossain-Yi meeting, China agreed to provide relief by reducing the interest rate on loans from 2-3 per cent to 1 per cent and extending the period of repayment from 10 to 30 years. This gesture expands China's geopolitical influence through the BRI. China also assured Bangladesh of its continued support for economic and social

development.

Ominous signs for India

One could clearly expect increased dependence of Bangladesh on China. Considering China's quest for expanding its influence in South Asia in the context of its global geopolitical struggle with the US, India will have to be wary of how China utilises its growing proximity to Bangladesh.

China could use its growing ties with Bangladesh to keep India contained and, in particular, leverage the porous borders of the Northeast to foment internal instability, especially in Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Manipur. Manipur's ongoing ethnic strife provides fertile ground for such machinations.

With the recent visit of Pakistan's ISI officials to the areas of the Siliguri Corridor and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the signs for India are ominous. India may have to deal, in due course, with both Pakistan and China using Bangladesh territory for inimical activities in the northeastern states.

India could expect a shift in Bangladesh's ideological orientation, away from the secular outlook of its Constitution. Of course, the actual course that the country

adopts will be witnessed after national elections which are presently scheduled for late this year or early 2026.

The internal churn in Bangladesh expands India's threat spectrum and could open a third continental front. India must be prepared to deal with the potential adverse situation. The synergy of China-Pakistan-Bangladesh is potentially a serious security threat that calls for India's security planners to first and foremost take whatever internal steps required to stabilise the northeastern states and avoid providing generative grounds for exploitation. Externally, the challenge is to use India's political, diplomatic, and strategic tools to prevent Bangladesh from being used by China and Pakistan. China's economic and strategic clout and the growing Pakistan-Bangladesh proximity combined with deteriorating relations of India with the three countries is the crux of the threat. Also, India-Pakistan relations have shown no signs of improvement. Though efforts to repair India-China ties are underway, the state of relations will remain hostage to the shadows of geopolitical tensions in the US-China rivalry. This is going to be a major challenge and the writing is on the wall.

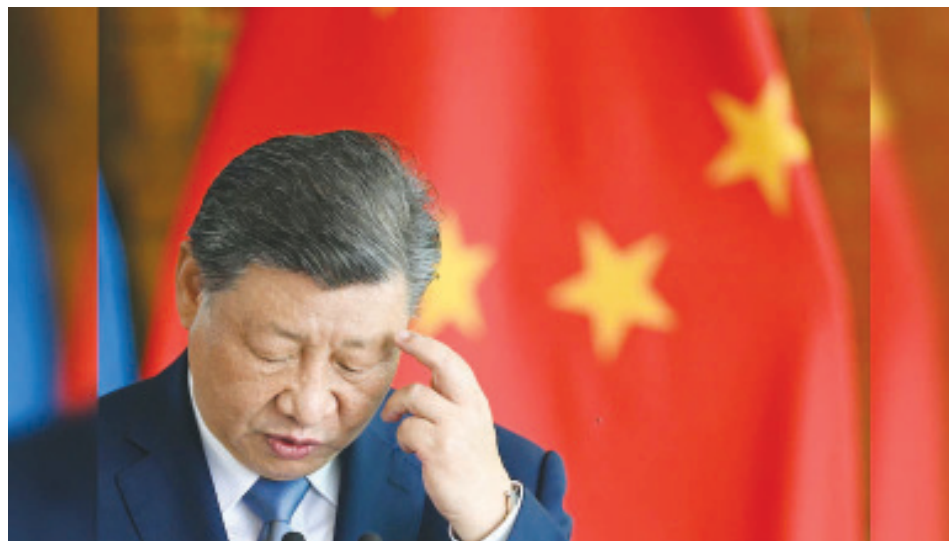
A Record Number Of US Firms Are Leaving China

By Kalpit A. Mankikar

At a time when the newly elected U.S. President, Donald Trump, is making a pitch to reshore manufacturing to America, its companies operating out of China are having second thoughts about what was considered a miracle economy. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Trump made a simple pitch that if companies invested in American manufacturing capabilities, then they would be subject to the lowest taxation. While Trump has not made good on his campaign pledge—a 60% blanket tariff on Chinese merchandise—he has threatened imposition of a 10% levy from February 1 if Beijing does not act on the exports of ingredients for fentanyl, a harmful synthetic opioid. Among the first Presidential orders that he signed was a comprehensive review of trade with China, including supply chains that use other countries to evade exposure to tariffs.

A 100% Rise

Given these rising geopolitical tensions, a record number of American corporates—as many as 30%—are either contemplating shifting out some operations from China or are already in the process of relocating elsewhere, revealed the annual survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China. This exodus of America Inc from China is twice as big as in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic had led China to impose strict lockdowns as a response to



the contingency.

One of the factors for this mass departure is that the bottom line for any commercial venture is the profits it makes. More than 50% of the firms interviewed stated that they were barely managing to break even or bore huge losses in 2024. This has affected the 'consumer' and 'services' sectors, where the figures for companies that are in the red or just breaking even are 60% and 57%, respectively. The corresponding numbers for the 'industrial' and 'technology and research' segments are 48% and 45%. As many as 17% of respondents revealed that they had actively begun to shift out production and procurement outside of China—an increase of nearly 10 percentage points since 2020. Forty-four per cent cited Sino-American trade rows as a prime cause for this development. And, as many as

38% of the respondents saw developing nations in Asia, such as India, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, as preferred destinations for the relocation; 18% are keen to reshore to the U.S.

Foreign-owned firms are also increasingly feeling the heat as China queers the playing field. Nearly 50% of the companies interviewed in the technology sector grudge that local Chinese ventures are being given preference over them in the research and development and advanced technology sectors. In the same segment, as many as 93% of businesses stated that lack of market access had affected operations.

China No Longer A Top Investment Priority

The number of American companies that did not see China as a top priority in their investment plans has increased,

reaching 21% in 2024. This is despite China pulling out all stops to improve the investment climate in recent times. It expanded market access and eased visas and investment restrictions last year in an effort to improve investor sentiment. However, a crackdown on business consultancies and audit firms has increased apprehensions among foreign businesspeople.

China is facing headwinds in other places too. As Germany heads to the polls in February, Friedrich Merz, who is considered a frontrunner for the country's chancellorship, has cautioned its companies about the "risk" of investing in China, describing it as part of an "axis of autocracies" that did not adhere to "rule of law".

Discontent In Europe Too

In a similar development last year, the European Union (EU) Chamber of Commerce in China in a paper revealed that there was a notion that foreign businesses operating in China were in for diminishing returns on their capital invested in the country, which did not justify the increasing risks of operating in the market. Investors had taken a view that challenges in the Chinese market appeared to be of a "permanent nature" that forced a "substantial strategic rethink" of their investment. Furthermore, as many as 44% of EU Chamber members perceived bleak prospects with respect to future profitability.

What An Indian 'Thali' Can Tell Us About DeepSeek

By Madhavan Narayanan

Why are US stock markets recovering a bit after a day of bloodbath linked to China's AI wonder, DeepSeek? To understand the question, we need to do some deep-seeking to figure out the intricate interplay between technological wonders, economic behaviour and stock market movements. But, first up, something about India's thali meals—they can tell us something about the open-source-based artificial general intelligence (AGI) engine that has set tongues wagging as it rivals ChatGPT and Gemini at a fraction of development costs.

In India, you can buy a cheap thali at a roadside stall that serves a wholesome meal at Rs 50 a plate, or go for a lavish unlimited thali at a five-star hotel for Rs 1,500. There are differences in their features, style, and details. At the roadside stall, you may get a small thermocol plate with just a couple of dishes to go with the main course rice, while liveried waiters will fawn on you with silver cutlery in an air-conditioned environment when you order a thali at a

five-star place.

DeepSeek Is Food For Thought

What the Chinese-backed hedge fund, High-Flyer, has given us through DeepSeek is like a decent, affordable

matches up to in-vogue engines such as ChatGPT.

DeepSeek is food for thought, even in literal terms, as it does the work of a human brain. Its R1 engine built at an



thali. It is based on open-source technology that allows people to tweak its features, much like a thali that allows a second helping after a plate is served. It is based on limited specifications, but it also cleverly circumvents some advanced, ambitious features, and

estimated cost of only \$5.6 million by a one-year-old startup that matches ChatGPT offers a lesson in utilitarian economics.

An easier way to understand the phenomenon is to compare DeepSeek with a Chinese-made Android phone

equipped with features quite comparable to an iPhone that runs on Apple's proprietary iOS. By developing Android as an easily usable mobile OS platform, Google gave the world's phonemakers a cheaper alternative to iOS. DeepSeek seems to be returning the favour with a cut-rate AI engine that may help proliferate the use of AGI, much like how Asians seized on Android while the US-centric iPhone got blissfully isolated in its elite, high-profit ecosystem. Another way to look at DeepSeek is to see it as an equivalent of the open-source Linux OS platform that challenged Windows in its prime. Windows survived and grew with its own strategy, but Linux changed the way the industry behaves. It is still a great technological force behind the scenes.

DeepSeek Challenges 'Core' Players

Understandably, US President Donald Trump called DeepSeek's arrival a wake-up call for American giants. I want to call DeepSeek the Android of AI for its potential power to proliferate its use and challenge established technology leaders.

Rahul Gandhi Has Been Reduced To An Emperor Without An Empire



By Shubhabrata Bhattacharya

The letter “K” distinguishes two phonetically similar but meaningfully different words in the English language: bloc (a combination of parties working toward a common goal) and block (to obstruct). Arvind Kejriwal’s “K” has become the reason Rahul Gandhi’s allies in the INDIA bloc are blocking Congress’s ambitions in the Delhi elections. The ‘common intent’ behind the INDIA bloc now seems to extend beyond just anti-BJPism—the initial reason for its formation—into opposition against the Congress itself. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has clearly emerged as the darling of the INDIA bloc. The Trinamool Congress, the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Nationalist Congress Party (led by Sharad Pawar), Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray), and even the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)—whose leader Lalu Prasad Yadav once envisioned Rahul Gandhi as the ‘dulha’ (bridegroom) in the bloc’s ‘baraat’ (wedding procession)—have all signalled their preference for AAP over Congress.

A Withering Group

With its formidable strength of 99 seats in the Lok Sabha, the Congress may have the satisfaction of seeing Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP). But in reality, the INDIA bloc allies seem to favour the AAP, which holds just three Lok Sabha seats. Thus, Rahul Gandhi as LoP is reminiscent of the last Mughal emperors—rulers without an empire.

Trinamool has deployed its Asansol MP, Shatrughan Sinha, to campaign for the AAP. Poorvanchali voters, with roots in

Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, form a large vote bank in the national capital. In addition to Sinha, Trinamool is likely to field its Durgapur MP, Kirti Azad, to support Arvind Kejriwal’s party. Both Sinha and Azad were Congress MPs in the past. Some Samajwadi Party MPs may also be deployed by Akhilesh Yadav in the coming days.

In contrast, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) are perhaps the only parties in the INDIA bloc that have not actively opposed Congress. The Left parties, who maintain a tenuous connection with the bloc, have fielded candidates in six of the 70 seats.

Rahul Gandhi has been included in a list of eleven ‘corrupt’ politicians by Kejriwal. An AAP poster featuring the tagline “Kejriwal ki imaandari saarey beimaano par padegi bhaari” (Kejriwal’s honesty will spell trouble for the corrupt) shows Rahul Gandhi alongside others.

Why Rahul Has Been Soft Towards AAP

The Congress has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission regarding the poster. While party leaders have attacked Kejriwal for corruption, Rahul Gandhi has taken a softer stance—he has refrained from directly addressing the corruption allegations against the AAP. However, he did liken Kejriwal to Modi in terms of “propaganda and false promises”.

From the very first meeting of the INDIA bloc in Patna, the AAP has successfully managed to bully the Congress—once the target of the AAP’s founders during the India Against Corruption Movement. The Congress was forced to oppose the Delhi Services Bill in Parliament, and the

Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee voiced its objections to the legislation. Dr Manmohan Singh’s last appearance in Parliament, in a wheelchair, was prompted by the Congress’s three-line whip in support of the AAP’s peculiar stance, which was eventually negated by the ruling NDA’s strategists.

Delhi Congress leaders were the first to raise the allegations surrounding the liquor excise policy, which led to the arrests of Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia. Rahul Gandhi has maintained a relatively soft position towards the AAP, and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has adopted a similar stance, much to the frustration of many Congress workers in Delhi. AAP leader in the Rajya Sabha, Sanjay Singh, has been the intermediary through whom Gandhi and Kharge maintained dialogue with the AAP until the Delhi elections began. However, the local Delhi leadership ultimately thwarted the AAP’s attempt to treat Congress as its ‘B’ team.

MIA In Delhi

Rahul Gandhi’s near absence from the Delhi campaign has been attributed to ‘ill health’. Sources within the Delhi Congress reveal that the only occasion on which Rahul Gandhi discussed poll strategy with them was during a Zoom call, in which he was abrupt. Expressing his displeasure with the local unit’s functioning, he abruptly ended the call. Priyanka Vadra, who was also on the Zoom call, later informed the participants that Rahul Gandhi was upset with them.

Interestingly, while Rahul Gandhi cancelled his rallies in Delhi due to ill health, neither Priyanka Vadra nor Mallikarjun Kharge stepped in on his

behalf during this crucial election season, when every day is precious. Instead of focusing on the Delhi campaign, the Congress leadership travelled to Mhow in Madhya Pradesh on January 27 to hold a rally in honour of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who hailed from the region. The rally’s themes—Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan—were meant to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar and to continue the campaign for safeguarding India’s Constitution. (Ambedkar was never a member of Congress. In 1936, he founded the Independent Labour Party and contested against the Congress in the 1937 elections. Later, he joined the Central Assembly, with opposition from the Congress but backed by the Scheduled Castes Federation. Post-Independence, he was defeated by the Congress in two Lok Sabha elections. Ambedkar founded the Republican Party of India in his final years. He was a minister in Jawaharlal Nehru’s interim government, a coalition formed to seek national unity.)

At the Mhow rally, however, Mallikarjun Kharge criticised Home Minister Amit Shah for taking a dip in the Ganga at the Mahakumbh that day (Kharge, like Ambedkar, has embraced Buddhism). His speech did not address any of the three themes of the rally.

An Alienated Leader?

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi continued his diatribe against the Adani-Ambani business empires. He launched an attack on the media, claiming that India’s media was oblivious to the facts on the ground and only reported on ‘Adani-Ambani weddings’. Rahul Gandhi’s fixation on the Adani-Ambani narrative does not resonate well either within the Congress or among INDIA bloc allies.

Rahul Gandhi’s soliloquy, which has already distanced him from allies, is now beginning to alienate him from Congress workers as well. The current election in Delhi is a do-or-die battle for many party workers fighting for their survival. In the last assembly elections, the Congress polled just 4% votes. If the party faces another defeat, then, unlike the last Mughals whose empire stretched from ‘Delhi to Palam’, Rahul Gandhi will find himself seated in the newly constructed Indira Bhavan on Kotla Road—without a functioning party organisation worth its name in Delhi.

In 1969 and 1978, when Indira Gandhi split the Congress to emerge supreme, the party workers of Delhi provided the backbone. Without the Delhi party setup and shunned by its regional allies, the Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi, faces isolation and oblivion.



A Sabarmati Riverfront-Like Makeover For Yamuna

By Bharti Mishra Nath

In the run-up to the Delhi election, politics over the river Yamuna, foaming with pollutants, has taken centre-stage with Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleging poisonous levels of ammonia in water from Haryana and the BJP hitting back.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has threatened to sue the former Delhi chief minister for defamation if he doesn't apologise.

Before the "ammonia" row erupted, the BJP's Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, a former MP contesting from the New Delhi constituency, had been targeting Arvind Kejriwal over the polluted Yamuna by immersing a cut-out of the AAP chief in it. Not the way to protest, perhaps, given that he added to the water pollution.

The once great river Yamuna now resembles a giant sewage canal.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's promise to develop the Yamuna Riverfront on the lines of the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad has regained interest.

The proposal for developing the Yamuna riverfront on the lines of the Sabarmati Riverfront first came up when Prime Minister Narendra Modi took Chinese President Xi Jinping for a stroll along the Sabarmati in September 2014. Later, PM

Modi took off on a seaplane, showcasing the riverfront development days before the 2017 Gujarat polls.

Is a similar makeover possible for the Yamuna?

Making of Sabarmati Riverfront

Sabarmati is linked to Ahmedabad's rich history and has been its lifeline for ages. At one point, Sabarmati, like the Yamuna, was highly contaminated with sewage-laden stormwater outlets and the dumping of industrial waste, which posed major health, ecological and environmental hazards. The river was inaccessible to most people. That's when the proposal to develop a portion of the Sabarmati Riverfront with a mix of commercial, recreational and residential development along both the banks began gaining momentum.

Since the 1960s, there were suggestions from urban experts to develop the riverfront. Yet it was in 1997 that comprehensive planning was undertaken by the AMC (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation) for the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project, which could finally take off in February 2004. Old-timers in the city vouch for the efficient collaboration between the politicians, bureaucrats and private-sector representatives in executing the riverfront project.

M Thennarasan, Ahmedabad Municipal Commissioner, says the stretch of 11.5-km on both sides of the riverbank has been completed while work on 5 km is in progress. The remaining 20 km is under planning. Today, the Sabarmati riverfront is a beautiful part of Ahmedabad, with large public spaces that are a big draw. But downstream, the Sabarmati waters continue to be highly polluted (near Vasna) because of its unique problem. Sabarmati is a seasonal river, coming alive only during the monsoon. However, in something of a marvel, water from the Narmada River was released into the Sabarmati River through the Sardar Sarovar dam in 2002. The Gujarat government constructed check-dams to maintain water levels in the riverfront by using the Narmada Canal.

Still, cleaning the river Sabarmati is a challenge because it is not a perennial river, and can only be treated like a lake. Authorities have taken steps to rejuvenate the water and increase the oxygen levels. However, there is still a long way to go for the water quality to improve substantially throughout the river stretch.

Politics over Yamuna

When it comes to cleaning and rejuvenation of the river Yamuna, three Yamuna Action Plans were developed and over Rs 8,500 crore have been spent

since 1993. Still, the 22-km stretch of the river that passes through Delhi is choked and dying. Successive governments of BJP, Congress and AAP in Delhi have used these funds to carry out works like repairing sewers, wastewater treatment plants and consultancy services for the Yamuna Action Plan. But without results. Politics over Yamuna pollution has peaked ahead of voting in Delhi on February 5.

AAP has often claimed that pollution in the Yamuna is a gift to Delhi from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, both BJP-ruled. Both states discharge pollutants into the river and Haryana doesn't release enough fresh water into the Yamuna for it to be rejuvenated, AAP alleges.

The fact is Yamuna waters are over-utilised by Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi - for drinking, irrigation and industrial purposes. This leaves the river with little freshwater in its Delhi stretch. Add to that the weight of untreated industrial effluent and sewage from all of Delhi. Inevitably, no flora or fauna can survive in this muck of a river.

A Sabarmati riverfront-style blueprint for river Yamuna is not an easy idea to implement. Each river and city are unique. The Yamuna and Delhi have their own issues - like flooding during monsoons and low water levels during summers.



By Jiten K. Agarwal

US President Donald Trump, on the very first day of assuming office, laid out a sweeping plan to maximise oil and gas production, including declaring a national energy emergency to speed the permitting of projects, rolling back environmental protections, suspending new federal offshore wind leasing proposals pending an environmental and economic review, and withdrawing the US from the Paris climate pact. He also signed an executive order reversing efforts by former President Joe Biden to restrict oil and gas drilling in the Arctic and large areas of the US coastline. This is a dramatic U-turn in Washington's energy policy after former President Joe Biden during his four years in office encouraged a transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy in the world's largest economy.

President Trump said in his inaugural address, "America will be a manufacturing nation once again, and we have something that no other manufacturing nation will ever have — the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on earth — and we are going to use it. We will bring prices down, fill our strategic reserves up again right to the top, and export American energy all over the world."

Crude oil is produced in 32 states in the US and its coastal waters. Texas is by far the largest oil-producing state in the country. In 2023, it produced a total of over 2 billion barrels. Its \$172-billion energy sector employed more than 9 lakh energy workers as of 2022. President Trump has already started pushing for an increase in oil and gas production to lower energy costs and drive prices down.

Is it all as simple as it sounds? Price Is King

The biggest incentive for oil and gas firms to either stimulate oil production or curtail it is usually price. In general, high oil prices push oil companies to produce more, while low prices lead them to pull back. The government has limited power to affect the price of oil as it is controlled by market dynamics. Higher prices may lead to more production, but they also upset consumers who will be forced to pay more at the pump, which will make not only gas but other commodities costlier. In recent years, oil companies have resisted the temptation to significantly invest in expanding drilling when prices rise, embracing instead the ability to sell their oil for a high price. Not all oil reserves can be exploited profitably. Instead of drilling at new locations, many oil companies have focused on extracting every dollar from existing wells.

What could be a solution then? India Is An Attractive Destination The answer may lie in the export of products such as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). President Trump understands this well, and has thus lifted the previous administration's freeze on export permits. The decision could lead to almost 100 million metric tonnes per annum (MTPA) of additional LNG being exported by 2031 by projects that are significantly advanced, further cementing the US as the world's largest exporter of the fuel.

US Senator Ted Cruz has also already introduced legislation to repeal the Biden administration's Natural Gas Tax in the Inflation Reduction Act. Rolling it back it is an important step towards ensuring affordable, reliable energy for all.

According to Shell's LNG Outlook 2024, global demand for LNG is expected to increase by more than 50% by 2040. This will be driven largely by the move away from higher-emission fossil fuels, a shift underway in a large country such as India and further along in other emerging markets. In 2020, China was the United States' largest oil export destination, while India stood fifth. A year later, the roles had reversed, with India taking the top spot and China going down to fifth. Various factors were responsible, including China imposing tariffs on US imports,

the American ban on investments in Chinese energy firms, and the growing demand for LNG in India. A long-term contract worth \$10 billion was signed between India and two LNG export terminals in Texas and Louisiana. There are more in the works, with Corpus Christi and Freeport in Texas, along with other Gulf Coast towns.

Why A Complete Repeal Is Not Feasible

In an executive order last week, Trump suspended funding disbursements under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a step part of a sweeping set of directives to begin setting the new administration's energy agenda. While it is not uncommon for new governments to pause funding for evaluation, federal agencies have 90 days to submit their review and spending recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget and the National Economic Council. The IRA contains key tax subsidies that foster energy production from renewable sources such as solar, hydrogen, wind and others. It also bolsters manufacturers in the supply chain with incentives and investments. Renewable energy manufacturers are eligible for two federal tax credits under the IRA. In addition, the IRA provides support for emerging capabilities, like carbon capture

and technologies that facilitate the production, storage and utilisation of hydrogen energy.

While the disbursements may be suspended, it is not prudent to repeal the law in its entirety for several reasons, including the fact that Red states, such as Texas, greatly benefit from it. In general, many renewable energy projects are in rural areas, which usually send Republicans to Congress. For example, Texas has 689 firms engaged in solar manufacturing and distribution, with a \$45.2 billion investment as of September 2024, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association report. Thus, there must be a balance against the need to avoid rolling back the considerable stimulus the IRA provided to the economy.

There is considerable foreign investment in the renewable energy sector in the US. Recently, an India-based solar panel maker established its first American solar module manufacturing and integrated US-made solar cell facility in Texas. The firm is planning to invest \$1 billion in the state over the next four years and create over 1,500 jobs when at full capacity. There are several local firms engaged in the supply chain and manufacturing of components needed for renewable energy production on the Gulf Coast.



How India Can Deal With Trump And His Tariffs 'Creatively'

BY Syed Zubair Ahmed

Colombian President Gustavo Petro became the first major casualty of Trump 2.0's no-nonsense approach—some might argue, his unchecked ire. The US President wasted no time in showing the world that his recent fiery rhetoric wasn't just for show.

The Colombian President tried to go toe-to-toe with the world's most powerful man. First, Petro made a show of defiance, refusing to allow US military planes carrying illegal Colombian immigrants to land on his turf. He even lobbed a couple of undiplomatic words at him, calling Trump a “white-slaver” allegedly bent on “wiping out the human species”. Subtlety was clearly missing. And when Trump fired back with a threat of 25% tariffs on Colombian goods, Petro, trying to punch above his weight, promised to counter with 50%. National Hero To Humiliation So far so good. But just hours after posting his defiant salvos on X, Petro folded faster than anyone could imagine. To everyone's surprise, he agreed to take back his undocumented citizens—on US terms. That meant they would be sent on military planes, shackled and handcuffed. If you are feeling charitable, you might spin this

as both sides “reaching a resolution”. But the truth is that Petro got steamrolled. He went from being a national hero to national humiliation in record time. One moment, he was the fearless leader standing up to the world's most powerful country; the next, he was the guy who caved in, leaving his critics and supporters alike cringing. The lesson is that going toe-to-toe with Trump may create a good spectacle, but in practice, it might just leave you wounded and scarred. At the end of the fiery spectacle, a smug White House issued what can only be described as a global warning with menace: “Today's events make clear to the world that America is respected again.” The message was that if you crossed Trump, you might just find yourself on the receiving end of his “America First” doctrine.

'Tremendous Tariff-Makers'

Trump wasted no time flexing his muscles either. He has been openly critical of India. Barely a week into his second term, he lumped India, China and Brazil into the “tremendous tariff-makers” club—essentially rebranding his friends and foes from the first term into a single category of troublemakers. The man who once rolled out the red carpet for “Howdy, Modi!” now

seems more inclined to roll out the tariff charts.

Interestingly, while he's been busy berating EU countries and throwing shade at NATO, one country remains conspicuously untouched: Britain. In fact, he went out of his way to heap praise on Prime Minister Keir Starmer—for reasons no one seems able to pinpoint. What's next? One wonders why the same generosity of spirit couldn't extend to India, especially after the spectacle of mutual adoration during Modi's US visits in his first term.

Trump's unpredictable style and transactional worldview seem poised to complicate Washington's relationship with New Delhi. There is no re-election bid this time to temper the impulses of an unfiltered, unrestrained Trump. If his recent moves are any indication, his second term might see less fanfare and more hardball. And for India, navigating these waters may require more than just charm and photo ops—it'll demand some serious diplomatic footwork.

'America First' vs 'Make In India'

If Trump has made “America First” his battle cry, India has long sworn by its own foreign policy doctrine—strategic

autonomy. A doctrine that, in theory, allows New Delhi to chart its own course without bending to external pressures. But theory and reality, as history reminds us, don't always shake hands. Since COVID-19, nations—including India—have doubled down on domestic markets, expanded production bases and vowed to build supply chains as resilient as their political speeches claim them to be. But now, the world is faced with a resurgent America under Trump 2.0, whose zero tolerance for global balancing acts is well documented. Will India hold its ground, or will the weight of tariffs, trade imbalances and immigration disputes force it to “adjust”?

India A 'Tariff King'?

Do not forget, Trump has previously described India as the “tariff king”, highlighting what he viewed as excessively high import duties on US products. Examples of high tariffs, furnished by the US side to back their complaints, are as follows:

Agriculture: tariffs on almonds (17%) and apples (70%)

Luxury goods: India's 150% tariff on imported alcoholic beverages like bourbon whiskey

Technology: India imposes high duties on high-end electronic goods, such as iPhones and

laptops

High-end motorcycles: India has imposed tariffs as high as 100% on luxury motorcycles, including those from Harley-Davidson—a frequent talking point for Trump in his first term

Medical Devices: India's price caps on imported medical devices, like stents, have drawn criticism from US manufacturers

Trump could push for sweeping tariff reductions or reciprocal measures. He may also threaten retaliatory tariffs on Indian exports if there's no progress.

Clues From Trump 1.0

Trade relations under Trump's first term were, at best, a mixed bag. While bilateral trade grew, tensions over tariffs and market access simmered. I recall how in 2019, Trump's abrupt withdrawal of the benefits India enjoyed under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) dealt a significant blow to relations. It highlighted his administration's tough stance on trade imbalances. I reckon under the current Trump rein, trade negotiations would likely remain contentious, with the US pushing for greater access to Indian markets, particularly in agriculture, dairy, and e-commerce

Is Trump Serious About Annexing Canada? Or Is He Just Being Trump?

BY Syed Zubair Ahmed

Years ago, during my one and only trip to Pakistan to report on the 50th anniversary of independence for a Western media outlet, I had the pleasure of meeting some bright, articulate students at the famed Government College in Lahore. Feeling magnanimous (and admittedly swept by their genuine warmth), I decided to drop a bombshell of an idea: why not reunite India and Pakistan? Should we not right the wrongs of Partition, restore the subcontinent to its undivided glory, and perhaps save on visa fees?

Their reaction shook me up no end. Polite smiles laced with a palpable 'what-is-this-guy-talking-about?'. Most of them agreed that Partition was a disaster—but, they were quick to add, not their disaster. The blame, they insisted, lay squarely with the Urdu-speaking folks, many of whom had fled to Karachi and now live as 'muhajir' (immigrants). One student practically bristled at my proposal and said my suggestion reeked of a "typical Indian response" from the post-Partition generation, which was a rather diplomatic way of calling me naïve. I get it.

From their post-Partition Pakistani



perspective, the students argued, reunification was a no-go. Sure, their country wasn't perfect—admittedly not on a par with India—but it was their own. Sovereign, independent, and, crucially, theirs to nurture or mess up, without unsolicited advice from nostalgic neighbours across the border. The message was clear: the idea of negating Partition, no matter how silly they thought it was, wasn't up for debate. Period.

It was a perspective that had never crossed my Indian-bred mind. It reminded me of the shock Canadians are feeling at President Donald Trump's latest

shenanigan—his not-so-casual declaration that he would like to annex Canada and turn it into America's 51st state. Last week, Trump, always a fan of the spotlight, used an international platform to float the idea. Addressing the Davos economic forum via video link, he coolly tossed out the notion to an audience of CEOs and business honchos. Predictably, gasps echoed through the room. And somewhere in Ottawa, I imagine, jaws hit the floor.

What's surprising isn't just the audacity of Trump's suggestion but the sheer persistence of it. His rhetorical swipes at

Canada's independence have become so frequent that one wonders if he is genuinely serious or just bored with his neighbours.

The US-Canada overlap is everywhere—from culture to sports to shared traditions. Neighbours for sure, but they are more like squabbling siblings. In 2023, the US-Canada trade hit over a trillion dollars, with \$2.8 billion crossing their border every single day. They are each other's biggest trade partners, with Canada sending 78% of its goods and services to the US every year, and over 4,00,000 people moving across their shared 5,525-mile border daily.

'No, Thanks'

The reactions to Trump's comments range from polite Canadian indignation to outright laughter. Meanwhile, Americans seem split between "Wait, can we actually do that?" and "Why would we even want to?". Let's unpack these views: Recently, BuzzFeed ran an article that asked Canadians about their thoughts on Trump's eyebrow-raising proposal to annex Canada as America's 51st state. Unsurprisingly, the responses were a mixed bag, though they leaned heavily towards a polite but firm "No, thanks".

US, China, Russia, Europe: In Trump Era, Everyone Wants To Be India's Friend

By : Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

India has a global reputation—that of mastering the art of balancing ties and maintaining close relations with all major powers in the world. Yet, China has remained a sore spot, especially after the Galwan Valley clash of 2020. Minus China, India shares amicable relations with both the United States and Russia. Now, China is emerging as a key focus area, with both New Delhi and Beijing trying to quickly bring down tensions and revert to a "normal" bilateral relationship. To that end, Indian foreign secretary Vikram Misri flew to Beijing over the weekend, where he met Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi and the head of the international department of the CCP's central committee, Liu Jianchao. The talks in Beijing turned out to be quite productive, as India and China decided to resume the sacred Kailash Mansarovar Yatra this summer, while also agreeing to operate direct flights between the two nations. The two sides also agreed to promote and facilitate people-to-people exchanges. Misri's meetings are the latest in a series of high-level engagements between India and China since October last year when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and



President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Russia. That groundbreaking meeting came against the backdrop of both countries announcing a border patrolling and disengagement arrangement. Soon, external affairs minister S Jaishankar held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil. Then, on November 20, defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun met in Laos on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting. This was followed by a meeting of national security

adviser Ajit Doval and Wang Yi in Beijing. So, what is going on? That's the all-important question. Why are India and China engaged in a flurry of high-level meetings? The answer lies in Donald Trump's return as President of the United States. With his return, the world stands at the cusp of a fundamental change in the rules-based order. Trump is a protectionist who wants to rewrite the rules of global engagement—with friends and foes alike. For India, Trump's return opens a wide window of opportunity, one which must be seized at all costs. The previous US administration, led by Joe

Biden, complicated India's strategic calculus in more ways than one. With Trump back, India is hoping for a free hand in dealing with the host of security and economic challenges it faces.

Besides, Trump's priorities are wildly different from those of his predecessor. For example, if Biden was all about arming Ukraine and defeating Russia through a proxy war in Eastern Europe, Trump is fiddling with the idea of taking over Greenland. Where Biden wanted to keep tensions with Iran in check, Trump is all in favour of flattening Tehran, especially its nuclear programme. Donald Trump considers the Arctic region—and the emerging competition there—deserving of his immediate and total attention. His threats of turning Canada, Greenland, and even the Panama Canal into American territories are all part of a strategy to establish disproportionate dominance across the Arctic and Atlantic regions.

How India has been presented with a historic opportunity

Essentially, Donald Trump is focussing on the situation within the US and its immediate neighbourhood. In doing so, the foot has been lifted—even if slightly—from the China paddle.

India Should Regulate Its Adventure Tourism Sector Before It's Too Late

By Bharti Mishra Nath

Just a few seconds of fear as you negotiate the initial lift-off, and lo, you are in the air, paragliding. Navigating the vast sky provides an adrenaline rush, which is quickly replaced by a sense of serenity. You feel like a free bird. Amid the myriad emotions you feel, ranging from fear to thrill to joy, one often forgets everything else. Those 15 minutes in the sky were among my most memorable moments, I must confess. However, the unfortunate deaths of four thrill-seeking tourists in Himachal Pradesh and Goa last week, in three separate incidents, have forced this writer to think of the dangers associated with adventure tourism in India.

Local authorities in Himachal Pradesh have suspended paragliding activities at the site of the incident and a magisterial inquiry has been initiated. In Goa, the tourism department clarified that it had not granted permission for paragliding at the location. The Goa Police stated that the victim had chosen to paraglide with an adventure sports company operating without legal authorisation,



and a case has been registered against the company owner. That's a typical, predictable, reactive, bureaucratic response. In a few weeks, things will return to normal. The grief of the loss will be for the grieving families to bear alone. Nothing will change.

Unsafe And Uncared For

These avoidable incidents highlight the still-unregulated adventure tourism sector in India, where neither authorities enforce safety norms nor are tour operators or

tourists sufficiently aware of the safety practices to be followed. At a time when the government is trying to promote domestic tourism, these accidents underline the urgent need to raise awareness and enforce best-in-class safety standards across the country.

Adventure tourism in India has seen significant growth over the past decade due to rising demand for thrilling experiences. The government has also turned its attention to making India a

global destination for adventure tourism; the sector is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 20% over the next five years. To keep up with this market, the Ministry of Tourism formulated a National Strategy for Adventure Tourism in 2022. According to the document, India has set ambitious goals, targeting a \$3 trillion tourism economy by 2047, with adventure tourism contributing \$800 billion. This entails welcoming 20 million foreign tourists and 80 million domestic adventure travellers, and generating \$90 billion in foreign exchange. It envisions India becoming one of the top 10 adventure tourism destinations in the world.

Himachal Pradesh's Bir-Billing is known globally as a "paraglider's paradise". The second edition of the Paragliding World Cup Association Asian Tour 2024 was held here from November 2 to 9 last year. Ninety-four paragliders from 26 countries, including 32 from India, participated in the event. The place also holds the distinction of being one of Asia's highest paragliding sites.

Can AAP Overcome Hurdles To Retain Delhi? The Key Factors At Play

By : Sayantan Ghosh

The 2025 Delhi Assembly election, scheduled for February 5, is a high-stakes battle for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its leader, Arvind Kejriwal. For AAP, retaining power in Delhi is crucial not only for its political survival but also for Kejriwal's stature as a key player in Indian politics. With the party already grappling with significant challenges in Punjab, losing Delhi would deal a severe blow to its prospects.

Several factors will shape the outcome of this election. One major concern is the corruption allegations against the AAP. Whether these claims resonate with voters to the extent of altering their preferences will be a critical determinant. Another pressing challenge is the weight of anti-incumbency. After 11 years in power, managing public discontent is no small task, and AAP will need to convince voters that it remains the best choice for Delhi. The party's famed welfare schemes, or "freebies," which played a decisive role in the 2020 election, will also be put to test. The question is whether these initiatives still hold the same appeal in 2025. Lastly, AAP's reliance on the "Kejriwal Vs who?" narrative will be crucial.

Can Kejriwal's charisma continue to win over Delhiites, or has his magic begun to wane?

CORRUPTION CHARGES: A CRUCIAL TEST FOR AAP'S IDENTITY IN 2025



Born from Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has always prided itself on a staunch stand against corruption. This image helped Arvind Kejriwal and AAP secure significant support, especially among Delhi's middle class. Reports indicate that 53 per cent of middle-class voters backed AAP in the 2020 Assembly elections, compared to 39 per cent for the BJP. However, the scenario is starkly different in 2025.

Over recent years, AAP's clean image has been tarnished by allegations of corruption, including the controversial liquor policy scam. Top leaders like Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Sanjay Singh faced imprisonment but are now out on bail. For AAP, this election will act as a referendum on these allegations. A victory would signal

public rejection of these charges, reaffirming trust in the party's governance.

Conversely, the BJP views these allegations as a significant dent in AAP's credibility. They hope that the middle class, a key voter base for AAP in assembly elections, may reconsider their support.

Ultimately, the perception of voters regarding these corruption charges will play a decisive role. Will Delhi's electorate overlook the allegations and continue to trust AAP's governance, or will this election mark a turning point in its fortunes?

AAP'S ANTI-INCUMBENCY CHALLENGE

The 2025 Delhi Assembly election is a litmus test for the Aam Aadmi Party, marking over a decade in power. Anti-

incumbency looms large, threatening to disrupt the party's grip on the capital. Despite proactive measures like replacing 30 per cent of its sitting MLAs to address voter dissatisfaction, AAP faces formidable challenges in navigating public discontent.

Anti-incumbency reflects a natural fatigue with prolonged governance, amplified in AAP's case by allegations of corruption and perceived governance lapses. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri recently underscored these issues, citing unfulfilled promises and administrative shortcomings. Such narratives resonate with voters seeking accountability and change.

To counter this, AAP has introduced new candidates based on performance surveys, aiming to present a refreshed image. However, this strategy carries risks. New faces may lack the recognition and trust built by incumbents, potentially weakening AAP's voter base. Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is poised to exploit the anti-incumbency sentiment, focusing on AAP's alleged governance failures and corruption charges.

On the ground, dissatisfaction over stalled infrastructure projects and unfulfilled promises could sway voters. Corruption allegations have further dented AAP's credibility, leaving the party to grapple with a complex political landscape as it seeks to retain Delhi.

Trump says PM Modi may visit US next month after 'productive' phone call

US President Donald Trump has said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit the White House for a meeting with him next month. He made the remarks after a "productive" phone call with the Prime Minister, wherein the two leaders sought a move towards having "fair" trade ties.

"I had a long talk with him this morning (Monday). He is going to be coming to the White House over the next month, probably February. We have a very good relationship with India," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on his way back to Joint Base Andrews from Florida.

Trump made the remarks in response to a question on the phone call he had with PM Modi. "Everything came up (in a phone call with Modi)," he said when asked about what he discussed with the Prime Minister. In a statement released by the White House, Trump

and PM Modi discussed expanding and deepening cooperation. They also discussed a range of regional issues, including security in the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East and Europe, the readout said.

"Today, President Donald J Trump held a productive call with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India. The two leaders discussed expanding and deepening cooperation," it said.

"The President emphasised the importance of India increasing its procurement of American-made security equipment and moving toward a fair bilateral trading relationship," the White House said.

"The leaders discussed plans for Prime Minister Modi to visit the White House, underscoring the strength of the friendship and strategic ties between our nations," according to the readout. Both PM Modi and Trump emphasised

their commitment to advance the "US-India strategic partnership and the Indo-Pacific Quad partnership, with India hosting Quad Leaders for the first time later this year".

PM Modi on Monday said he was delighted to speak with his 'friend' Trump and stressed both countries were committed to a mutually beneficial and trusted partnership. "We will work together for the welfare of our people and towards global peace, prosperity and security," he tweeted.

According to sources, both leaders discussed bilateral relations between India and the US during their telephonic conversation.

PM Modi had earlier spoken to Trump after he won the presidential election in November last year. During that conversation, Trump had praised the Prime Minister, describing him as a magnificent man and said that the whole world loved him.

TRUMP-PM MODI CAMARADERIE
Trump and PM Modi enjoy a good friendly relationship. During his first term as president, Trump's last foreign

trip was to India. The two leaders addressed thousands of people at two different rallies in Houston in September 2019 and in Ahmedabad in February 2020.

Monday's phone call between Trump and PM Modi came at a time when there have been some concerns in New Delhi over the Trump administration's approach to immigration and tariffs.

Trump, who once called India the "king of tariffs", has already talked about slapping 100 per cent tariffs on the BRICS grouping, a bloc that includes India as well.

The phone conversation also came nearly a week after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held separate meetings with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz in Washington DC. Jaishankar, who attended Trump's inauguration ceremony on January 20, also attended the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in the American capital. The meeting was the Trump administration's first foreign policy engagement.

CYBER CRIMEUP STF Arrests Mastermind Behind 'Digital Arrest' Cyber Fraud Syndicate



The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (UP STF) has apprehended Suresh Kumar Sain, the alleged mastermind of a nationwide cyber fraud syndicate, at IGI Airport in New Delhi. The 43-year-old suspect, a school dropout from Rajasthan, had fled to Cambodia following a series of cyber scams, including the infamous 'digital arrest' frauds.

According to Vishal Vikram Singh, Additional SP, STF, Suresh led a sophisticated network of criminals who impersonated officials from the CBI, Narcotics Bureau, and Crime Branch to intimidate and defraud victims. Using fear and manipulation, the syndicate coerced individuals into believing they were under investigation, extorting large sums of money from them in the process. The STF's investigation revealed that Suresh had orchestrated

numerous scams across India before fleeing the country to evade capture. His operations involved creating false identities and leveraging advanced tactics to exploit victims' vulnerabilities. Upon his arrest, the STF recovered multiple items, including Cambodian employment cards, SIM cards, an ATM card from Cambodia's ABA Bank, and \$160 in cash.

Suresh's capture marks a significant breakthrough in the crackdown on cybercrime in the state. The STF is now working to dismantle the broader network of operatives linked to the syndicate and has urged the public to remain vigilant against similar scams. The arrest underscores the growing global dimensions of cybercrime and the commitment of Indian law enforcement to pursue criminals beyond national borders.

Saif Ali Khan attacker's relative in West Bengal arranged Aadhaar for SIM: Police

The Bangladeshi national arrested for allegedly attacking Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was helped by a relative in West Bengal to obtain a SIM card using a woman's Aadhaar, police sources said.

The investigating officers probing the January 16 robbery attempt and stabbing at the actor's Mumbai flat travelled to West Bengal and questioned the relative of the accused Shariful Islam Shehzad, as well as the woman whose Aadhaar was used.

Details of the relative emerged after the police first questioned the woman, Khukumoi Jahangir Sheikh. However, the woman claimed that her phone was stolen. She has neither been detained nor arrested by the Mumbai Police.

The Mumbai Police team is also trying to trace the agent who helped the accused infiltrate India.

Saif Ali Khan sustained multiple injuries in an attack by the intruder who broke into his home at around 2:30 am. The actor intervened during a heated argument between the intruder and a household staff member, resulting in the actor being stabbed multiple times.

Saif sustained injuries to his back,

wrist, neck, shoulder, and elbow, with wounds ranging from 0.5 cm to 15 cm in size. He was rushed to Lilavati Hospital by his manager, Afsar Zaidi, where he underwent surgery and was later discharged.

The police arrested Shariful Islam Shehzad, a Bangladeshi national who entered India illegally last year and was using the alias Vijay Das. The accused was arrested a few days later in Thane and remains in police custody until January 29.

In response to claims that the police have arrested the wrong person, the authorities rejected the doubts about his identity and said they have several hours of CCTV footage of the accused. They are completely confident that they have arrested the correct individual. So far in the investigation, the police have determined that the accused planned the attack on Saif's house alone, and no involvement of any other person has been revealed. Regarding the speculation about why the actor was taken to the hospital in an autorickshaw, the police stated that the matter of who took Khan to the hospital is unrelated to the investigation.

All in the mind? The surprising truth about brain rot

Andrew Przybylski, a professor of human behaviour and technology at Oxford University, is a busy man. It's only midday and already he has attended meetings on "Skype, Teams, in person and now FaceTime audio". He appears to be switching seamlessly between these platforms, showing no signs of mental impairment. "The erosion of my brain is a function of time and small children," he says. "I do not believe there's a force in technology that is more deleterious than the beauty of life." Przybylski should know: he studies technology's effects on cognition and wellbeing. And yet a steady stream of books, podcasts, articles and studies would have you think that digital life is lobotomising us all to the extent that, in December, Oxford University Press announced that its word of the year was "brain rot" (technically two words, but we won't quibble) – a metaphor for trivial or unchallenging online material and the effect of scrolling through it. All this has sown widespread fears that the online world that we – and our children – have little choice but to inhabit is altering the structures of our brains, sapping our ability to focus or remember things, and lowering our IQs. Which is a disaster because another thing that can significantly impair cognitive function is worry.

It may come as some relief to hear, then, that for every alarmist headline there are plenty of neuroscientists, psychologists and philosophers who believe this moral panic is unfounded. "Since 2017, there has been a constant drumbeat of: 'Screens and tech and social media are a different universe that is bad for you and bad for your kid,'" says Przybylski. "And two things happen. The first is low-quality research that confirms our biases about technology. It gets immediate press because it's consistent with our existing biases. It's really easy to publish low-quality research that kind of shows a correlation, and then exaggerate it, because it'll get attention and it'll get funding."

No one is denying that dangers lurk online, but that doesn't mean you're guaranteed to come to harm. "Living is risky, leaving the house is risky, crossing the street is risky," says Przybylski. "These are all things that we have to help young people learn to do – to size up risks and act anyway. The internet is risky." There has also been, he says, "a real push in opinion pieces and popular-press books that are sloppy scientifically but stated so confidently. The ideas in these books are not peer-reviewed." The published studies they cite tend to have small samples and no control groups, and to be based on associations rather than proving cause. "People will say: 'The iPhone was invented in 2007 and

Instagram became popular in 2012 and, oh my God, look, tech use has gone up at the same time mental health has gone down!' It seems like common sense – that's why you have this kind of consensus. But it just isn't scientific."

In 2023, Przybylski and his colleagues looked at data from almost 12,000 children in the US aged between nine and 12 and found no impact from screen time on functional connectivity ("how different parts of the brain kind of talk to each other", he explains), as measured with fMRI scans while the children completed tasks. They also found no negative impact on the children's self-reported wellbeing. "If you publish a study like we do, where we cross our Ts, we dot our Is, we state our hypotheses before we see the data, we share the data and the code, those types of studies don't show the negative effects that we expect to see." And of course no one talks about the positive effects of tech, such as finding connection and community. "If we zoom out, we find that if young people have access to phones that can connect with the internet, if they have high-speed internet at home, their wellbeing is higher. They say they're happier across a wide range of metrics of wellbeing."

"When the Lancet commission on self-harm does an evidence review, when the National Academy of Sciences in the US does an evidence review, when academic researchers do their meta scientific research, these things don't come out in line with this tech panic," he says. "That's because this tech panic is not based on evidence. It's based on vibes."

The "study" that spearheaded this cascade of concern in 2005, and is still quoted in the press today, claimed that using email lowered IQ more than cannabis. But Shane O'Mara, a professor of experimental brain research at Trinity College Dublin, smelled a rat when he couldn't find the original paper. It turns out there never was one – it was just a press release. That finding was the result of one day's consultancy that a psychologist did for Hewlett Packard. He would later state that the exaggerated presentation of this work became the bane of his life.

Alongside a survey on email usage, the psychologist conducted a one-day lab experiment in which eight subjects were shown to have reduced problem-solving abilities when email alerts appeared on their screens and their phones were ringing. He later wrote: "This is a temporary distraction effect – not a permanent loss of IQ. The equivalences with smoking pot and losing sleep were made by others, against my counsel." The studies finding changes to brain structure sound particularly alarming,

even if they are looking specifically at people with "problematic internet use", as opposed to the general population. The trouble with these studies, says O'Mara, "is that they can't determine cause and effect. It may be that you go on the internet [excessively] because you've got this thing there already. We simply don't know, because nobody has done the kind of cause-and-effect studies that you need, because they're too big and too difficult."

Besides, brain structures change throughout life. Grey matter has been observed to decrease during pregnancy, for instance, and start regrowing after, along with other brain changes. "The brain is remarkably plastic," agrees O'Mara.

He also thinks we're being deeply ahistorical when we berate ourselves for scrolling cute animal reels, celebrity regimes or cup-winning goals on social media. "Humans have always been distractible. We've always sought solace in the evanescent. If you look at the history of media in the UK, just as a simple example, back in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, how many millions of tabloids were sold every day? Staggering numbers, because people indulged in that stuff. This is something people have always done, and we're being a bit moralistic about it." Has the internet age led to greater numbers of plane crashes or patients dying on operating tables? "The answer is no: we're much better at all of those things." We've always had to watch out for our "attentional bottleneck", he says. "For as long as I've been reading and researching in psychology, we've always taught our students: 'Don't do two things at once. You can't.'" Multitasking and its associated dilution of efficacy were not invented by the internet. As Przybylski alluded to, having children is a classic route to task-juggling, with constant interruptions leading to intelligent adults not being able to string a sentence together. Similarly, if you use your smartphone while driving, of course you'll increase the likelihood that you'll crash.

What about the terrifying proclamations that tech is on the rise while IQ is in decline? I call Franck Ramus, the head of the cognitive development and pathology team at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Mercifully, he says it's not yet clear if IQ is truly going down. Scores rose globally during the 20th century but growth started slowing towards the turn of the millennium. This plateau effect had long been expected, as we neared the limits of the human brain. "Height has been increasing over decades, but we're never going to reach three metres, are we? So there are limits to human physiology, including brain

size."

Any small IQ decreases that do seem to have been detected, Ramus says, aren't considered conclusive at this point – the studies would need further replication. "There's a meta-analysis of all the data until 2013, and the score seems to be progressing at least until 2010 or so. At the same time, it is true that some studies have documented a slight decrease in some countries. For example, there is a widely discussed Norwegian study that found a slight decrease in the last two decades. But there are also a greater number of studies that continue to observe increases."

As for screen exposure, he says, what do we even mean by that? "It could be anything. The screen is just a medium but what matters is content. So when you talk about screen, you might as well talk about paper. Paper is another medium, and anything can be written on paper."

This brings us neatly to Plato, who wrote about brain rot in relation to the invention of writing, says Tony Chemero, a professor of philosophy and psychology at the University of Cincinnati, whose 2021 paper in *Nature Human Behaviour* asserted: "Technology may change cognition without necessarily harming it." "This worry that people are having, Plato had as well, 2,500 years ago or so, writing about how the written word will make people stupid because their memories will be worse and they'll be worse at telling stories."

Chemero does not love smartphones or AI – and laments the hassle the latter has created for professors like him having to find new ways to check their students aren't handing in ChatGPT-generated work. "But the one thing that they don't do is make us stupid," he says. "Over the history of hominids, many of our biggest challenges have involved adapting to new kinds of environments – and that's being smart. This is just a new environment we're in." So while he can still remember the phone numbers of high-school classmates, younger people's brains are simply freed up for other activities. "What we really want from technology is to do the things that are difficult and boring, such as lots of complex calculation, rote memorisation: humans just aren't very good at that without technology."

The relevant question, he says, is what is memory in this situation, when we're outsourcing some of it to tech? "Is it something that your brain does or is it an ability that you have? If [technology helps you] remember more things while your brain does something different, I don't think that your memory is worse. It's just different. What really matters is what we are able to do."

China's DeepSeek AI Triggers Market Chaos, Threatens Tech Giants' Dominance

In an unexpected twist, China's groundbreaking artificial intelligence platform, DeepSeek, has sent tremors across the global tech market. The announcement of its advanced capabilities and potential to dominate the AI sector has triggered a sharp selloff in tech stocks, with giants like NVIDIA and Alphabet suffering heavy losses. As reported by Reuters, the disruptive nature of DeepSeek has led to widespread investor uncertainty, pushing major indexes into a downward spiral.

According to Bloomberg, the ripple effect of DeepSeek's launch could potentially wipe out Rs 98,88,000 crore in market value from tech stocks globally. The platform, developed under tight secrecy by a coalition of Chinese tech firms and government-backed initiatives, is said to offer unparalleled efficiency in data processing and predictive analytics. Its debut raises serious questions about the future dominance of Western companies in the AI race. NVIDIA, a key player in AI hardware, saw its stock sink by over 7%

in intraday trading. The Wall Street Journal highlighted concerns that DeepSeek could dramatically undercut demand for NVIDIA's GPUs in the Chinese market, which has been a significant revenue source for the company. The Financial Times pointed out that DeepSeek's arrival also brings into focus the broader geopolitical stakes in AI development. Many Western firms are now scrambling to assess whether they can maintain their competitive edge against China's accelerated advancements.

Experts believe DeepSeek's launch signals a shift in the balance of power within the AI sector. However, critics warn that such concentrated innovation risks leaving smaller players marginalized. "Technology development must be democratic," industry analysts argue, emphasizing the need for collaborative, transparent progress in AI to avoid monopolistic practices. As the dust settles, global investors and tech leaders alike are bracing for the long-term implications of DeepSeek on the AI landscape.

Sam Pitroda, again. Remark on illegal Bangladeshis sparks row, gives BJP ammo

Congress veteran and Rahul Gandhi's close aide Sam Pitroda stoked a row by advocating for illegal migrants to settle in India and attacked the government for "hounding" them. The remarks by Pitroda, in a video that has gone viral, come days ahead of the Delhi elections, where illegal immigration has been a burning topic.

In a swipe at the BJP, Pitroda, who is no stranger to controversies, emphasised that the government should focus more on issues like global warming than hounding "poor and hungry" immigrants.

"They do so much work to come here. Even though illegal immigration is wrong, we are busy targeting illegal Bangladeshis and minorities," Pitroda said. "We should include everybody. If we have to suffer a little bit, it's okay. But, nobody wants to share (resources). They want to keep their pie bigger and bigger," Pitroda, who is also the chairperson of the Indian Overseas Congress, asserted. The issue of illegal immigration has dominated the narrative ahead of the February 5 Delhi polls. While the Delhi Police has ramped up its crackdown on

illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, the BJP has promised to free the capital from illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas if it wins the election.

The BJP has also accused the AAP of getting ration and Aadhaar cards made for Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' to secure their votes - a charge dismissed by the ruling party in Delhi.

The BJP was swift to pounce on Pitroda's remark, calling it "outrageous". "Rahul Gandhi's right-hand man Sam Pitroda's statement advocating for illegal migrants to settle in India, even at the country's

expense, is shocking and irresponsible," BJP's national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari tweeted.

"Now you wonder how Congress, since the last 70 years, worked overtime to settle illegals in our country!" he further said.

Not new to controversies, Pitroda had to step down from his post last year during the Lok Sabha elections after his remark that Indians in the East resemble the Chinese while those in the South look like Africans triggered widespread criticism.

Haryana water department official dismisses AAP's 'poison in Yamuna' claim

The allegation made by the AAP-ruled Delhi government that Haryana is deliberately releasing ammonia-laden water into Delhi's water supply is baseless, said an official of Haryana water department.

"No untreated ammonia-mixed water is being released by Haryana. Delhi can only treat 1 ppm (part per million) ammonia. Why can't they increase their treatment capacity like Agra, which handles up to 24 ppm due to the pollution from their leather industry?" Haryana Water Department Chief Engineer Sandeep Taneja said in an exclusive interview with India Today TV. Explaining the pipeline construction, the official detailed that the flow from diversion drain no. 8 has been redirected into abandoned drain no. 6, which connects to the Bakner drain. The Bakner drain then flows into supplementary drain no. 2, which finally empties into the Yamuna downstream of the Wazirabad Barrage. "This means

there is no chance of polluted water mixing into the natural flow of the Yamuna river upstream of Wazirabad, where Delhi gets its water," he added. The row escalated after AAP accused the BJP-ruled Haryana government of deliberately polluting Yamuna water ahead of the Delhi assembly elections. AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi alleged on Monday that ammonia levels in water supplied from Haryana had increased, accusing the BJP-led Haryana government of polluting the Yamuna River to disrupt Delhi's water supply ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections.

Arvind Kejriwal accused the Haryana government of mixing "poison" in the Yamuna water to disrupt Delhi's water supply.

In response, the Haryana government refuted the allegations and countered by accusing the AAP government of polluting the Yamuna instead. Sources

in the BJP have confirmed that the Haryana government is planning to file a defamation case against Arvind Kejriwal over his remarks. Also, the BJP intends to approach the Election Commission (ECI) with a formal

Baba Siddique murder: Son Zeeshan names politicians, builders in police statement

The Mumbai Police's investigation into the murder of NCP leader Baba Siddique has taken a new turn after his son, Zeeshan Siddique, alleged that his father had been in touch with several builders and politicians, including a BJP leader, regarding slum redevelopment projects in Bandra.

Baba Siddique was shot dead on October 12, 2024, a couple of days before his expected nomination to the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC). In a four-page statement to the police, Zeeshan Siddique alleged that his father maintained contact with several builders

and politicians, including BJP leader

Mohit Kamboj, regarding slum redevelopment projects in Bandra. Zeeshan said his father was to be nominated for the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC) in just a couple of days after his murder. The nominated leaders were sworn in on October 15, 2024.

Zeeshan said that on the day of the murder, his father had written about Mohit Kamboj in his diary and mentioned WhatsApp communication between 5.30 pm and 6 pm about a project by Mundra Builders.



What led to Maha Kumbh stampede? Congress blames VIP culture; CM cites overcrowding

Maha kumbh Stampede: Congress blamed poor management and VIP culture for the stampede that claimed 10 lives at the Maha Kumbh mela in Prayagraj.

A stampede broke out on Wednesday as millions of people flocked to the ghats to take a holy dip in Prayagraj where the grand Maha Kumbh mela is taking place. Ten people lost their lives while many others were seriously injured in the incident that gave Opposition an opportunity to attack the state government. Congress blamed 'VIP culture' for the unfortunate incident, targeting the Yogi Adityanath-led administration.

Till 8.30am on Wednesday, around 3.5 crore pilgrims had taken holy dip at Maha Kumbh mela, CM Yogi said, emphasising the enormous crowd the event is attracting. However, he assured that he is continuously monitoring the situation along with senior officers. **CONGRESS BLAMES VIP CULTURE**

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi said the news from Prayagraj is heart-rending and alleged poor management by the state government. "Poor management and prioritising VIP movement over ordinary pilgrims is responsible for

this tragic incident," he said, adding that the government should make proper arrangements to prevent a recurrence of such an incident. "VIP culture should be checked and better arrangements must be made for the pilgrims," Gandhi said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has said in a post on X, "Half-baked preparations, VIP movement and a focus on self-publicity instead of management is responsible for this. Such preparations despite spending thousands of crores in condemnable."

"Facilities for lodging pilgrims and first-aid must be expanded and VIP movement checked. Our saints want the same," he added.

The Congress leaders' jabs over VIP culture come after high-profile BJP leaders, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, visiting the Mahakumbh to take the holy dip. Coldplay frontman Chris Martin also arrived at Maha Kumbh Mela with his girlfriend Dakota Johnson.

WHAT CM YOGI SAID

"Around 8-10 crore devotees are present in Prayagraj today. There is continuous pressure due to the movement of devotees towards the Sangam Nose. A few devotees have suffered serious injuries when they tried to cross barricading on Akhara Marg. The injured been shifted to hospitals for medical treatment."

The CM said the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called four times so far to stake stock of the situation. He further assured that the situation is under control and "The situation in Prayagraj is under control but the crowd size remains massive...There are large crowds at Sangam Nose, Nag Vasuki Marg and Sangam Marg," the CM said. He also appealed to devotees to not pay attention to any rumour and take holy dip at the ghats nearest to them. **WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED**

The stampede broke out at around 2 am when a sea of devotees converged at the Sangam to take a holy dip on the occasion of Mauni

Amavasya. The Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj is the sacred meeting point of the Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati rivers. Pilgrims believe bathing here cleanses sins and ends the cycle of rebirth. As a result, the Sangam Nose became the most visited spot during the Maha Kumbh. Several people suffered injuries, while many families have been separated, an eyewitness told India Today TV.

Visuals from the Kumbh Mela site showed total chaos and people running for their lives as authorities and security personnel tried to bring the situation under control.

Ambulances rushed to the site and the injured persons were rushed to nearest hospitals for treatment.

Maha Kumbh, touted as humanity's biggest gathering, is likely to witness 400 million devotees. The Kumbh mela holds even more significance this time as it is taking place after 144 years, due to a rare alignment of planets.

Economic Survey's Growth Paradox: Soaring Profits, Stagnant Wages And Need For Reform

The capacity utilization rate for manufacturing firms stood at 74.7 per cent in Q2 FY25, above the long-term average of 73.8 per cent, indicating strong industrial activity. The data suggests a steady recovery as manufacturers are scaling up operations to meet rising demand. A notable point is the 23.6 per cent YoY increase in order books of capital goods companies, which far exceeds the 4.5 per cent CAGR observed over the last four years. This jump signals a shift towards new investments in capacity expansion rather than merely running existing operations at higher utilisation rates. Historically, utilisation hovered around 70 per cent in FY22, with manufacturers reluctant to expand due to global inflation and weak domestic demand. FY23 saw an improvement to 73 per cent, supported by government-led capital

expenditure. The jump to 74.7 per cent in FY24-25 is the strongest sign of industrial revival, supported by private investment recovery and an uptick in infrastructure spending.

Despite this improvement, challenges remain. Private greenfield investments are yet to reach pre-pandemic highs, indicating that businesses are still cautious about long-term commitments. While capital goods and infrastructure have grown substantially, consumer-oriented industries (FMCG, real estate) remain slow. Although bond market activity has risen, bank lending to the industry has not seen a proportionate rise, limiting faster expansion in investment cycles, maybe due to the high interest rates. The Economic Survey 2024-25 suggests private sector investment is

reviving but not booming. The stock market fundraising boom has provided businesses with capital, but deployment in new industrial projects



remains uneven. Capacity utilization rates above 74 per cent indicate that companies may need fresh investment soon, which could kick-start a new private capex cycle in 2025-26. However, much depends on interest rates, global demand, and government-led policy incentives.

The Economic Survey projects real GDP growth of 7 per cent for FY25, marking another year of robust expansion. While this is commendable, the growth must be examined against wage trends and job creation. India's past high-growth phases, such as 2003-08, witnessed higher employment elasticities, where growth translated into better wages and jobs. However, this time, despite profit-to-GDP ratios hitting 4.8 per cent—the highest since 2008—real

wage growth remains mainly stagnant. While nominal wages in agriculture and non-agriculture have risen by around 5-7 per cent annually, the actual wage

increase (adjusted for inflation) remains below 2 per cent. Workers have minimal incremental purchasing power, leading to sluggish demand growth.

For instance, while self-employed workers saw nominal earnings increase from Rs 12,913 in FY18 to Rs 16,007 in FY24, inflation-adjusted (real) earnings tell a different story—they barely grew from Rs 9,454 to Rs 10,116. This is a serious concern, affecting the quality of life for a large segment of society, and is not a good sign for the economy either. Hence, there is talk of demand-led stimulus for this segment by cutting down taxes. Whether the FM does that in the budget will be revealed tomorrow. One of the more intriguing arguments in the Survey is the concept of

“enlightened self-interest” regarding job creation. The document subtly nudges businesses towards higher wage payouts by arguing that higher incomes fuel consumption, supporting corporate revenues. This is a soft form of socialism—where instead of the state enforcing wage hikes, the government is appealing to corporate conscience. A classic free-market response would be that wages rise when productivity does. However, the current trend indicates that while corporate EBITDA margins have stabilised at 22 per cent over four years, wages, particularly in IT and manufacturing sectors, have stagnated. If capital

continues to extract a disproportionate share of GDP growth, it will suppress demand and threaten long-term economic sustainability. But it is unlikely that corporates should listen to any talk of enlightenment as they will focus on profitability only. The Economic Survey 2024-25 paints an optimistic picture of growth, but the disconnect between corporate profits, employment growth, and wages poses risks. Without higher wage growth, demand-side pressures will constrain long-term expansion. Policymakers must double down on deregulation for MSMEs, encourage fair income distribution, and focus on AI-driven skill development. Otherwise, India risks a top-heavy, capital-skewed economy that ultimately hurts both businesses and workers.

Maha Kumbh tragedy : Safety of devotees must be prioritised

The administration did appeal to devotees to bathe at the first ghat they reached so as to prevent overcrowding, while emphasising that all ghats at Sangam were equally sacred. However, this appeal should have been backed by proactive steps to make pilgrims move ahead in a disciplined way. The Sangam stampede should prompt the mela organisers to review security arrangements and do course correction. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that the government's first priority is to ensure the safety of devotees. This should be the way forward during the remaining four weeks of the Maha Kumbh. The spectre of death should not be allowed to mar a festival that proudly showcases India's spiritual grandeur.



70-hour workweek: Are Indians working more or less than the world?

70-hour workweek: It started with Infosys founder Naryana Murthy's statement that young Indians should work 70-hour workweeks for India to develop, which was met with a lot of flak.

India's corporate leaders in the past few months have ignited a heated debate about work culture, suggesting that achieving developed nation status requires employees to work up to 70 hours per week.

It started with Infosys founder Naryana Murthy's statement that young Indians should work 70-hour workweeks for India to develop, which was met with a lot of flak.

Another comment came from the L&T Chairman SN Subrahmanyam, advocating a 90-hour workweek. His remarks, including, "how long can you stare at your wife," drew massive criticism online and led to fresh discussions on the importance of work-life balance. "Nation-building is at the core of our mandate," said L&T defending its chairman. It further said that achieving extraordinary results requires extraordinary effort, particularly in a time when India is striving for progress.

But amid all this talk of nation building, are other fast-developing countries put in the hard yards and extending their working hours?



A comprehensive report by Dr. Shamika Ravi, a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, provides a data-driven perspective on this controversial claim. The report reveals that Indians currently spend an average of 422 minutes (approximately 7 hours) per day on paid economic activities, translating to 42 hours per week. This is lower than the proposed 70-hour benchmark, but not as far off as some might assume. The report shows that

India's work hours are comparable to other emerging economies. Countries like Vietnam, China, Malaysia, and the Philippines report similar working patterns, while developed OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries average just 33 hours per week. The study shows variations within India itself. Union Territories like Daman & Diu lead with over 10 working hours daily, while Northeastern states and Goa report less than 6 hours. Urban workers clock 7.8

hours compared to rural workers' 6.65 hours.

Gender disparities are particularly notable. Women spend considerably less time on paid work – about 2 hours less in urban areas and 1.8 hours less in rural regions. "Women who work outside the household have the least amount of leisure time compared to all other demographics," the report highlights.

The economic implications are compelling. The research found that a 1% increase in working time correlates with a 1.7% rise in per capita Net State Domestic Product. For large states, this relationship is even stronger, with a 3.7% NSDP increase.

Sector-wise differences are also huge. Tertiary and secondary sectors report longer working hours compared to the primary sector. Government employees work 45 minutes less per day than the national average, while private company employees tend to work longer hours.

Gujarat leads in the proportion of people working over 70 hours weekly at 7.21%, while Bihar has the lowest at 1.05%.

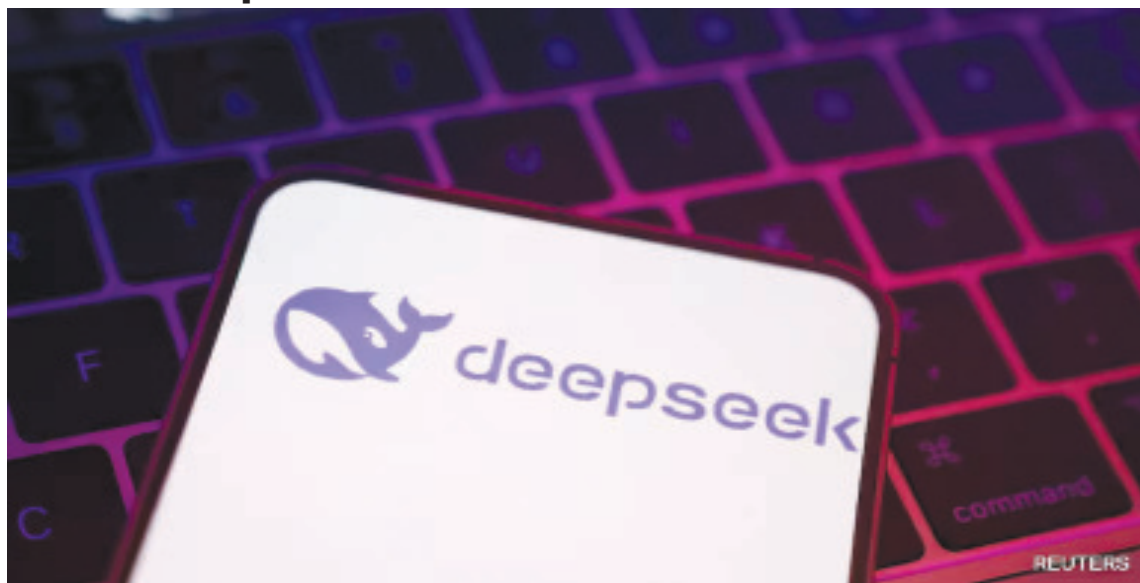
NDTV Explainer: How DeepSeek, Once A Stock Trader, Became A Major AI Player

Just when Silicon Valley giants OpenAI and Google thought there was no match for their dominance in the artificial intelligence landscape, a Chinese start-up came as an unexpected disruptor. DeepSeek, which started as a finance-focused hedge fund, is suddenly a force to reckon with - because its AI model is powerful, efficient and most importantly affordable.

Finance to AI

DeepSeek's journey began in the financial sector under its parent company, High-Flyer, a hedge fund specialising in quantitative trading. Unlike traditional AI research firms, DeepSeek's initial focus was leveraging machine learning to analyse China's volatile stock market. But regulatory crackdowns in 2021 compelled it to pivot away from speculative trading and step into the AI space.

By prioritising research over



commercial fanfare, DeepSeek developed an AI model that claims to rival OpenAI's offerings but at a fraction of the cost. The firm reportedly trained its model for just \$6 million, significantly lower than the estimated \$100 million expenditure behind OpenAI's GPT-4.

Rise of DeepSeek

DeepSeek's new AI assistant,

launched on January 20, quickly became the most downloaded free app on Apple's App Store. The AI is optimised for tasks like math and coding, making it a strong competitor in the AI space.

Unlike many Western models, DeepSeek follows China's strict censorship rules. When asked about sensitive topics, it avoids direct answers, reflecting

government control over digital content. Despite this, experts praise its efficiency, as it uses advanced and lower-grade chips to deliver high performance at a lower cost. DeepSeek's vision

DeepSeek's founder, Liang Wenfeng, a Zhejiang University graduate with a background in electronic engineering and computer

science, built his reputation in the finance sector before venturing to AI. He has been vocal about China's need to innovate rather than imitate, claiming that the real gap between Chinese and American AI lies in originality.

His ambitions align with Chinese President Xi Jinping's push to make AI a national priority.

Global reactions

DeepSeek's rise has not gone unnoticed by global markets and policymakers. The launch of its AI assistant coincided with a historic \$600 billion market value drop for Nvidia, a key player in AI chip production. The US government's ongoing restrictions on advanced chip exports to China have raised concerns about Beijing's technological independence, yet DeepSeek's success suggests that China is rapidly advancing despite these barriers.



DeepSeek: How A Small Chinese AI Company Is Shaking Up US Tech Heavyweights

DeepSeek's breakthroughs have been in achieving greater efficiency and getting good results with fewer resources.

Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) company DeepSeek has sent shockwaves through the tech community, with the release of extremely efficient AI models that can compete with cutting-edge products from US companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic.

Founded in 2023, DeepSeek has achieved its results with a fraction of the cash and computing power of its competitors.

DeepSeek's "reasoning" R1 model, released last week, provoked excitement among researchers, shock among investors, and responses from AI heavyweights. The company followed up on January 28 with a model that can work with images as well as text.

So what has DeepSeek done, and how did it do it?

What DeepSeek did

In December, DeepSeek released its V3 model. This is a very powerful "standard" large language model that performs at a similar level to OpenAI's GPT-4o and Anthropic's Claude 3.5.

While these models are prone to errors and sometimes make up their own facts, they can carry out tasks such as answering questions, writing essays and generating computer code. On some tests of problem-solving and mathematical reasoning, they score better than the average human.

V3 was trained at a reported cost of about US\$5.58 million. This is dramatically cheaper than GPT-4, for example, which cost more than US\$100 million to develop.

DeepSeek also claims to have trained V3 using around

2,000 specialised computer chips, specifically H800 GPUs made by NVIDIA. This is again much fewer than other companies, which may have used up to 16,000 of the more powerful H100 chips.

On January 20, DeepSeek released another model, called R1. This is a so-called "reasoning" model, which tries to work through complex problems step by step. These models seem to be better at many tasks that require context and have multiple interrelated parts, such as reading comprehension and strategic planning.

The R1 model is a tweaked version of V3, modified with a technique called reinforcement learning. R1 appears to work at a similar level to OpenAI's o1, released last year.

DeepSeek also used the same technique to make "reasoning" versions of small open-source models that can run on home computers.

This release has sparked a huge surge of interest in DeepSeek, driving up the popularity of its V3-powered chatbot app and triggering a massive price crash in tech stocks as investors re-evaluate the AI industry. At the time of writing, chipmaker NVIDIA has lost around US\$600 billion in value.

How DeepSeek did it

DeepSeek's breakthroughs have been in achieving greater efficiency: getting good results with fewer resources. In particular, DeepSeek's developers have pioneered two techniques that may be adopted by AI researchers more broadly.

The first has to do with a mathematical idea called "sparsity". AI models have a lot of parameters that determine their responses to inputs (V3 has around 671 billion), but only a small fraction of these parameters is used for any given input.

However, predicting which parameters will be needed isn't easy. DeepSeek used a new technique to do this, and then trained only those parameters. As a result, its models needed far less training than a conventional approach.

The other trick has to do with how V3 stores information in computer memory. DeepSeek has found a clever way to compress the relevant data, so it is easier to store and access quickly. What it means

DeepSeek's models and techniques have been released under the free MIT License, which means anyone can download and modify them. While this may be bad news for some AI companies – whose profits might be eroded by the existence of freely available, powerful models – it is great news for the broader AI research community.

At present, a lot of AI research requires access to enormous amounts of computing resources. Researchers like myself who are based at universities (or anywhere except large tech companies) have had limited ability to carry out tests and experiments.

Why is Pakistan's Economic Revival Faltering?

By : Arun Anand

Today's Pakistan can be succinctly described as existing in a state of "perpetual uncertainty". The country faces an unyielding and comprehensive crisis of significant proportions, threatening the very existence of the state and impacting all facets of national life. This situation is manifested through political instability, severe internal security challenges, and governance weaknesses.

The complexities arising from these systemic issues are epitomised by the nation's ongoing economic unpredictability. Despite receiving substantial financial support amounting to billions from both bilateral and multilateral international creditors over the past year, Pakistan's economic outlook remains precarious, lacking any meaningful or sustainable recovery. This reality underscores the persistent systemic failures at the upper echelons of a military-dominated ruling structure, characterised by entrenched elite corruption and a continual disregard for necessary structural policy reforms. These elements remain central to Pakistan's economic policymaking framework, exacerbating its broader systemic issues and perpetuating its prolonged state of uncertainty. The mismanagement of Pakistan's economy has been a persistent issue throughout the nearly eight decades of its history, becoming increasingly pronounced over the last fifteen years. By mid-2022, Pakistan's economy had entered a steep decline, with the threat of sovereign default on external debt looming large.

This situation was the result of a decade-long pattern of aggressive debt accumulation without any significant economic growth, leading to formidable challenges in fulfilling debt-servicing obligations amid a worsening balance of payments crisis. This crisis triggered severe inflationary



pressures that adversely impacted the socioeconomic conditions of the population, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to cover their daily expenses. The inevitability of Pakistan's economic crisis can be traced back to its rising debt trajectory, predominantly fuelled by extensive infrastructure projects, particularly those associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For example, within just two years of CPEC's launch in 2015, the federal government, under then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, amassed over \$35 billion in loans from China and its related financial institutions. This borrowing significantly increased Pakistan's external debt profile, ensnaring the nation in what experts have referred to as China's 'debt-trap diplomacy'.

The growth in Pakistan's external debt is notable: it rose from \$52.4 billion during Asif Ali Zardari's administration in 2013 to \$75.3 billion by the end of Nawaz Sharif's term in 2017, and further escalated to \$110.6 billion under Imran Khan's government by 2022. As of September 2024, the external debt is estimated at approximately \$133.5 billion, reflecting a staggering increase of 154.77 per cent over the past decade. This relentless expansion of debt underscores the systemic economic vulnerabilities that have left Pakistan unable to escape a cyclical reliance on external financing, thereby

perpetuating its structural financial difficulties.

Despite ongoing political instability, Pakistan has made several attempts to stabilise its economy over the past two years. Initiatives such as capital injections from international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and bilateral lenders including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been implemented to address economic vulnerabilities. For instance, in June 2023, the IMF approved a \$3 billion bailout package aimed at alleviating Pakistan's balance of payments crisis, which had seen the country's foreign exchange reserves plummet to a record low of \$6 billion—insufficient to cover even two months of essential imports.

Subsequently, in July 2024, the IMF extended a second bailout package of \$7 billion within a two-year period, marking the 23rd intervention since 1950. Additionally, major bilateral creditors like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have agreed to roll over their debt obligations for varying durations, with China also consenting to restructure a portion of its loans.

The series of bailouts received by Pakistan underscores its acute economic vulnerability and deep-seated dependence on external financial support to address longstanding structural issues. However, these interventions have largely functioned as

temporary solutions aimed at alleviating immediate fiscal pressures.

Two interconnected factors exacerbate this ongoing crisis. The first is the widespread prevalence of chronic systemic corruption, while the second involves the misallocation of external economic aid towards military expenditures.

Pakistan faces a significant challenge with endemic corruption affecting all branches of governance, including the executive, judiciary, and military. According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Pakistan was ranked 133rd out of 180 countries, with a low score of 29, highlighting the widespread nature of this issue. This is further evidenced by the historical fact that no civilian government in Pakistan has ever completed a full five-year term, with nearly all prime ministers facing corruption allegations. Such pervasive corruption has severely compromised the effectiveness of international financial aid, as this assistance often fails to reach essential economic sectors that could drive sustainable recovery.

External creditors have consistently raised concerns about this systemic problem; for example, in 2023, Saudi Arabia, a long-time financial supporter of Pakistan, made its economic aid contingent upon concrete economic reforms aimed at reducing corruption. Following this

development, other Gulf Arab nations have also shifted from their previous practice of providing unconditional aid and now commit to extending financial assistance solely in the form of loans or grants tied to strict conditions, with combating corruption being a primary focus.

The second factor contributing to the ongoing crisis is the disproportionate allocation of the budget to Pakistan's military establishment, even in the face of a deteriorating economic situation. For instance, the budget for the Pakistan Army saw a significant increase of 14.35 per cent in the 2024-25 fiscal year, despite the country's foreign reserves being at an alarmingly low level. This prioritisation diverts essential resources away from critical socio-economic sectors, thereby perpetuating the country's developmental stagnation. Collectively, these issues highlight the structural barriers that render international financial aid inadequate in addressing Pakistan's entrenched economic vulnerabilities and achieving sustainable economic stabilisation.

As Pakistan continues to confront its prolonged struggle for economic recovery, it is compelled to reassess the systemic inadequacies entrenched within its governance framework, where chronic corruption has become a defining feature. This situation necessitates heightened accountability from the Pakistani establishment, particularly from international lenders such as the IMF. These institutions must urge Islamabad to enact long-overdue structural reforms, which include robust anti-corruption initiatives and mechanisms to prevent the misallocation of financial aid from essential socioeconomic sectors to military expenditures.

Try to amicably resolve dispute: Bombay High Court to Lodha brothers



The Bombay High Court on Monday suggested that brothers Abhishek and Abhinandan Lodha attempt to amicably resolve their legal dispute over the use of the "Lodha" trademark.

The Lodha brothers, sons of BJP leader and Maharashtra Skill Development Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha, are engaged in a legal battle over the family name. Abhishek

Lodha's company, Macrotech Developers Limited, has filed a Rs 5,000 crore intellectual property rights (IPR) suit against Abhinandan Lodha's real estate firm, House of Abhinandan Lodha.

The lawsuit alleges that the "Lodha" trademark belongs to Macrotech Developers and seeks a permanent injunction against Abhinandan's company from using it. Justice Arif Doctor, hearing the matter, pointed out the familial nature

of the dispute and suggested mediation.

"This appears to be a dispute between two brothers. Has any effort been made to resolve it amicably?" the judge remarked. The court proposed appointing a former chief justice or retired Supreme Court judge as a mediator if the brothers agreed. Senior counsel Darius Khambata, representing Macrotech Developers, argued that the company is the registered proprietor of the "Lodha" trademark and the aggrieved party in the case. The court, however, noted that resolving the brothers' differences could address the larger conflict.

According to Macrotech Developers, the "Lodha" trademark has been the cornerstone of the Lodha Group's identity since the 1980s. The company claimed to have invested Rs 1,700 crore in brand-building over the past decade, with domestic property sales exceeding Rs 91,000 crore between FY 2013-14 and

FY 2023-24.

The dispute stems from a 2015 decision when Abhinandan Lodha separated from the Lodha Group to start his own venture, House of Abhinandan Lodha. Family settlement agreements in 2017 and 2023 established his company's name, but Macrotech Developers alleges it was not a party to the 2023 agreement and never granted permission for the use of the "Lodha" trademark.

Abhishek Lodha contends that the "Lodha" name, built over four decades, commands significant goodwill domestically and internationally. The lawsuit emphasizes the group's extensive investment in advertising and its reputation as a leading real estate developer.

The court has asked both parties to confirm by Tuesday if they are willing to pursue mediation. Pending resolution, the court will continue hearing the case.

Elon Musk's X will launch its first digital wallet this year



Elon Musk owned social media platform, X (formerly Twitter) will soon introduce financial services on its app. X has recently announced its partnership with Visa, signalling its first digital wallet. The company will use Visa Direct, Visa's real-time money transfer solution, to fund X Money's wallet, link to a debit card for payments to other users, and enable seamless transfers back to your bank account.

In a post, X CEO Linda Yaccarino stated that X Money is scheduled to launch later this year. This X-Visa partnership will allow secure and instant funding to users' X Wallet via Visa Direct, she added. It will also connect debit cards, allowing person-to-person payments. X

Money will also give users an option to instantly transfer funds to your bank account. Yaccarino claims that this is the "first of many big announcements about X Money this year". The thought of adding financial services to X was communicated right after Musk took over. With this partnership, it looks like the services will arrive in the US first and then expand to the rest of the world. But as per previous reports, this service will be available to selected states first. App researchers have repeatedly discovered code related to X Money, highlighting features such as the ability to load funds into a wallet on the platform and make payments to other users.

Why China's DeepSeek triggered a slide in global AI stocks



Last night's trading session on Wall Street left tech and artificial intelligence (AI) companies reeling, with investors scrambling to make sense of the damage. Leading AI chipmaker Nvidia saw its market value nosedive, while shares of tech giants such as Microsoft, Alphabet, and Dell Technologies also faced sharp declines. The tremors weren't just limited to Wall Street; AI stocks worldwide felt the impact, all thanks to a Chinese startup called DeepSeek and the buzz around its AI models, DeepSeek-R1 and DeepSeek-V3. DeepSeek rattled the global tech landscape with its low-cost AI chatbot. Its arrival poses a serious challenge to industry-leading AI models in the US, given the fact that it does it at a fraction of the cost. The Chinese startup's impact hit Wall Street hard during the overnight trading session. The Nasdaq Composite plunged 3.07% while the S&P 500

dropped nearly 1.5%. Tech giants led the fall, with Nvidia's shares dropping nearly 17% to close at \$118.58. This marked a staggering \$593 billion market-cap loss in a single day—doubling its previous record. The damage spread further as the Philadelphia Semiconductor Index tumbled 9.2%, marking its steepest drop since March 2020, with chipmakers facing heavy selling pressure. DEEPSEEK'S 'SPUTNIK MOMENT'

DeepSeek's breakthrough has people questioning the worth of industry leaders like OpenAI. Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen didn't mince words, calling DeepSeek's R1 model AI's "Sputnik moment." The comparison hits home—just as the Soviet Union's Sputnik launch kicked off the space race in the 1950s, DeepSeek's breakthrough could reshape the AI landscape.

PM pushes for 'concert economy' after Coldplay's tour: India has massive scope

Coldplay Ahmedabad Concert: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about British rock band Coldplay's sold-out shows in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, stressing that India has a massive scope for live concerts.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday highlighted the "fabulous pictures" of British rock band Coldplay's concerts held in Mumbai and Ahmedabad and said India has a massive scope for live concerts. He said he expected the state governments and the private sector to focus on infrastructure and skills to give a boost to the 'concert economy' sector.

"You must have seen fabulous pictures of Coldplay concerts organised in Mumbai and Ahmedabad. It shows that India has a massive scope for live concerts. Big artists from around the world are attracted towards India," PM Modi said at the 'Utkarsh Odisha – Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' in Bhubaneswar. He said that the 'concert economy' sector was growing in the country and said the trend of live shows and concerts has increased in India for the past decade. "Today, the concert economy sector is also growing in India. A country which has such a huge legacy



of music, dance and storytelling, India is a huge consumer of concerts. There are many possibilities for the concert economy. The trend of live events and concerts has increased in the last 10 years," he said.

PM Modi's remarks came after Coldplay held five concerts in India as part of the Music of The Spheres World Tour. The



British rock band's tour to India was a huge success, with all of its shows sold out. The concerts were widely praised for their seamless organisation and vibrant crowd.

Coldplay held three shows in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai earlier this month, before heading to Ahmedabad for two concerts on January 25 and 26.

The band's frontman, Chris Martin, was the talk of the town for interacting with the audience in Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati. He also gave shoutouts to actor Shah Rukh Khan and cricketer Jasprit Bumrah, who attended the Ahmedabad event on Sunday.

As Sunday's concert coincided with Republic Day, the Grammy-winning rock band also tapped into patriotic fervour with soulful piano renditions of 'Vande Mataram', followed by 'Maa Tujhe Salaam'.

Several celebrities, including Kartik Aaryan, Suhana Khan, Vijay Varma and former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar also attended Coldplay's concerts.

Coldplay previously performed in the country in 2016 at the Global Citizen Festival in Mumbai.

The British rock band also includes guitarist Jonny Buckland, bassist Guy Berryman, drummer and percussionist Will Champion, and manager Phil Harvey.

Why wellness retreats in India are stealing the global spotlight



By Tiasa Bhowal

Kate Winslet, Oprah Winfrey, Uma Thurman, Halle Berry, Prince Charles, and Camilla Parker Bowles—what do they have in common? Each of them, at some point in the last decade, has traveled to India to rejuvenate at some of the country's most renowned wellness retreats.

While we often look to the West for inspiration, wellness tourism in India is witnessing a significant boom, in a way, actually leading the way for the world to look up to and follow. The reasons are many, but the primary driver is the increasing mindfulness around health and

lifestyle. More than ever, people are focusing on holistic wellbeing, embracing practices like meditation, yoga, and traditional healing techniques. Many are also turning toward veganism, vegetarianism, or a sativic lifestyle to achieve a balance of body, mind, and soul.

India, with its deep-rooted wellness heritage and diverse offerings, is perfectly poised to cater to this growing demand. So, it was but natural to experience one up close to understand what makes these retreats so life-changing and why they attract people from across the globe.

At Swastik Wellbeing Sanctuary – back

to the roots

It's becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with life's demands these days. Our hectic schedules leave little to no room to reconnect with ourselves, our surroundings, or even to appreciate the small joys of life. Perhaps, that's the first thing we realised on Day 1 at the wellness sanctuary – the importance of appreciating the little things. It was a small little ritual before the meals that brought back fond memories (more about that later). Dr Rajesh Srinivas, general manager at Swastik Wellbeing, says, "Indians have understood the importance of wellbeing - not just physical but also mental, emotional and spiritual. With growing affluence and an increasingly young workforce wellbeing holidays are the way to go. These provide a quick reboot and return to work with more engagement and productivity."

Now, Swastik Wellbeing is located in Peacock Valley, Khed, Pune, surrounded by the Sahyadri Hills and the serene Khadakwasla backwaters, far removed from the maddening city crowds. Spanning across 51 acres, the property is a haven of lush greenery, exuding peace and tranquillity – a stark contrast to chaotic city life. At Swastik, a range of personalised experiences are on offer,

each rooted in the core values of Health, Wealth, Love, Bliss, and Spirituality.

Even greetings here are not a casual "hello" or "hi." They are imbued with a deep sense of spirituality. As a gesture of respect and connection, people greet one another with atma naman (my soul acknowledges your soul).

A day in the wellness 'sanctuary'

For someone aiming to bring a change in their life, mentally or physically, Swastik provides the much-needed awakening your body and soul require. Your days will be spent in the retreat as per your dincharya (daily routine), which will be prescribed to you once you have consulted with the experts. Your consultation with the Ayurvedic practitioner will be the deciding factor for many things, including your diet and the therapies you undergo there. Now, that could range from halotherapy (salt therapy) to resonance therapy (sound healing), arogyam massages, or meditation. However, everything depends on how long you plan to stay at the retreat; they offer tailored plans starting from 1 to 14 nights. From IBS to fertility, from PCOS to menopause, they have programs to accommodate seekers willing to transform themselves both physically and spiritually.

Alia Bhatt in micro choli and black saree stuns at '25 years of Sabyasachi' show



Actress Alia Bhatt made a fashion-forward statement in a black saree at designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee's special show to commemorate 25 years of his eponymous brand in Mumbai on January 25.

Alia, who wore the celebrated

couturier's designs for her wedding day and also one of her Met Gala look, turned up wearing a Murshidabad silk saree paired with a micro choli. While the expanse of her silk saree was plain, the embellished sleeveless blouse stole the show.

It boasted rich embroidery and was

also adorned with hand-painted appliqué, semi-precious stones, and sparkling elements. As for her glam, she kept it simple with a dewy base and nude lipstick. Her kohl-rimmed eyes, a dainty black bindi, and a side-parted hair bun with soft curls added a hint of drama to the look.

Several Bollywood stars, including Sonam Kapoor, Bipasha Basu, Ananya Panday, Rani Mukerji, and Aditi Rao Hydari, turned up at the venue wearing stunning black ensembles to celebrate 25 years of Sabyasachi. New mom Deepika Padukone, meanwhile, opened the show for the designer in a monochromatic look featuring ivory separates, opera gloves, and a layered statement jewels.

Known for his regal ensembles and opulent stores, Sabyasachi left no stone unturned in putting up an extravagant show and turned the event into a majestic Kolkata-inspired setup.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, who is on a quest to build India's first global luxury brand, has five standalone stores, (including one in New York) along with a dedicated jewellery store in Hyderabad. Over the years, he has become a name synonymous with Indian bridal fashion and has dressed leading actresses, including Anushka Sharma, Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, Alia Bhatt, and Katrina Kaif, on their big days.

Male infertility on the rise: Why sperm freezing is gaining popularity in India

In the 1960s, India had a fertility rate of 5.92. This means that, on average, a woman would bear almost six children if she lived through her childbearing years. This figure was significantly higher than the 'replacement level' needed to maintain a stable population. Fast-forward to today, and there has been a significant decline in the fertility rate. According to the latest data, the fertility rate has dropped to 2, in 2023, which is just 0.1 point below the required replacement level (the average number of children a woman needs to have to replace herself and her generation). However, experts warn that even this small difference could eventually lead to a population decline.

Why the drop?

This drop in fertility rate can be because of various reasons, apart from the sheer rise in couples who don't want to have kids. Apart from this, both data and experts suggest that there has been a clear increase in infertility amongst Indians. For men, this means, if we go by the definition provided by The World Health Organization (WHO), "the inability



to make a fertile female pregnant after one year of unprotected intercourse".

In India, male infertility has become a significant concern, contributing to 40-50 per cent of infertility cases amongst young couples. This number is 15 per cent world wide. We asked various experts regarding the reason for this stark difference between India and various other nations, and the answers simply seem to come down to one thing: the

changing lifestyle. Dr Durga G. Rao, co-founder and medical director of Oasis Fertility, explains, "The quality of life we lead is significantly affected by environmental factors: pollution, pesticides, food adulteration, and the air we breathe, all of which contribute to infertility. Lifestyle factors like stress, poor diet, lack of sleep, and pollution also play a role in male fertility issues, making preservation more relevant now than

ever."

Dr Sheetal Jindal, senior consultant and medical director medical genetics program Jindal IVF, Chandigarh, further adds that other factors include late marriages, demanding work schedules, obesity, poor diets, and lifestyle habits such as smoking, drinking, and drug use.

All these have caused, in many men, particularly in their late 20s to early 40s, a dip in sperm quality and count, leading to the growing need for fertility preservation options. This is where sperm freezing comes in.

Enter: Sperm freezing

With the increasing awareness of male infertility, sperm freezing has emerged as a viable option for preserving male fertility. Sperm freezing, or sperm cryopreservation, offers a solution to preserve sperm for later use. This is relevant in cases where men have a low sperm count right now and may face infertility in the future and also particularly in cases where men are undergoing medical treatments.

Nayanthara documentary: Madras High Court rejects Netflix's plea against Dhanush

In a win for South star Dhanush, the Madras High Court on Tuesday dismissed Netflix India's plea to dismiss 'Raanjhanaa' actor's copyright claims over the documentary 'Nayanthara: Beyond the Fairytale'. The documentary, which chronicles actress Nayanthara's wedding, was released on Netflix's OTT platform on November 18.

Dhanush's Wunderbar Productions, which had produced the film 'Naanum Rowdy Dhaan', filed a case claiming that behind-the-scenes footage from their film had been used without permission in the documentary. They sought compensation of ₹10 crore, arguing that the footage had been used improperly.

Judge Abdul Kuthus dismissed Netflix's plea. The main copyright case filed by Wunderbar Productions will now be heard on February 5, Live Law reported. Senior Advocate R Parthasarathy, who appeared for Netflix's Los Gatos, had urged the Court to reject Wunderbar's plea, saying that the Madras High Court had no jurisdiction over the suit since Wunderbar's registered office was not in Chennai, but in Kanchipuram district.

Advocate General PS Raman, representing Wunderbar Films, told the Court that at the

time Nayanthara signed her contract for the 2015 film with Wunderbar Films, she and Wunderbar had their respective registered offices in Chennai. A part of the film too was shot in Chennai and the Netflix documentary had been released to be watched all across India, including Chennai. Therefore, Wunderbar had every right to file its suit before the Madras High Court, he had said.

WHAT IS THE CASE?

'Nayanthara: Beyond The Fairytale' sheds light on the actor's entry into cinema, her struggles, past relationships and how she survived amid controversies in the male-dominated industries. The documentary released on November 18 last year. Prior to the release, Nayanthara wrote a

scathing open letter to Dhanush after he denied issuing an NOC (No Objection Certificate) for the use of Naanum Rowdy Dhaan clips.

Dhanush had also issued a legal notice threatening to sue the couple for using BTS visuals in the documentary. In the notice, he mentioned that he will demand Rs 10 crore as damages if they go ahead with the usage of clips.

After the release, Dhanush, on behalf of his production house, Wunderbar Films Private Limited, had filed a case against actor Nayanthara, Vignesh Shivan, their production house, Rowdy Pictures Private Limited, and two others.



Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor request paparazzi not to take photos of Taimur, Jeh

Actors Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor's PR manager have requested the paparazzi not to take pictures of their children, Taimur and Jahangir anywhere, whether it be at a garden where they have gone to play, or at a birthday party or at some sports center. The statement comes days after Saif was stabbed six times by an intruder at his Bandra residence on January 16. However, it was conveyed that pictures of Kareena and Saif can be taken if they are attending any event, but their team requested the paparazzi to not stand below their residence and click them while they are leaving or coming back to their residence. Saif Ali Khan was stabbed nearly six times by an intruder who entered his house last week to attempt burglary. The actor fought him back and suffered deep injuries. He was rushed to the hospital and underwent multiple surgeries. The 54-year-old actor was discharged from the hospital on January 21. On the work front, Saif Ali Khan was last seen in the Jr NTR film Devara, while Kareena appeared in the Hansal Mehta directorial, The Buckingham Murders.

