



INSIDER

Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002



Story on Page 26

Vol. 24

Issue 45

Friday 13 February 2026

\$1

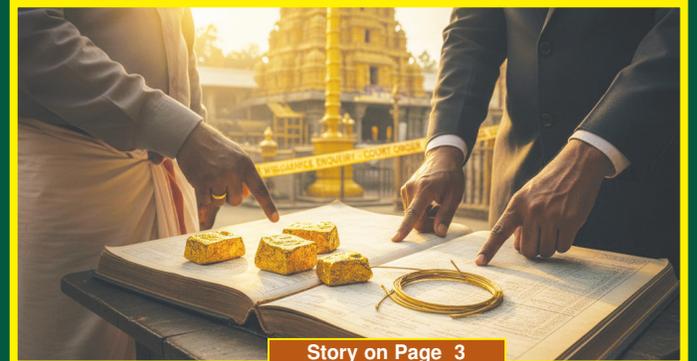
www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Wordplay or Power Play? The \$500 Billion Revision in the U.S.-India Trade Deal



Story on Page 2

The Golden Shadow Over Sabarimala A High Court Probe Unearths Layers of Doubt



Story on Page 3

A Community Shattered in Canada The Tumbler Ridge School Bloodbath and its Dark Place in History



Story on Page 2

The Murky World Of Shadow Diplomats



Story on Page 2

AI Bot Tries To Publicly Shame Developer After Its Code Gets Rejected



Story on Page 4



India Loses Visa-Free Entry To Two Countries In 2026 Despite 10- Place Passport Ranking Jump

Story on Page 4

Your Solutions are One Consultation away.....



Glova Group

*Social Media Management *AI Intergrations,
*Web Analytics *AIB Campaigns

www.glovagroup.com

Wordplay or Power Play? The \$500 Billion Revision in the U.S.-India Trade Deal

(News Agency) WASHINGTON D.C. / NEW DELHI — In the high-stakes world of international diplomacy, a single word can be the difference between a binding obligation and a polite suggestion. On February 10, 2026, the White House quietly executed a linguistic "u-turn" that has sent shockwaves through global markets and political circles: the softening of India's massive \$500 billion trade pledge. Just twenty-four hours after releasing a triumphant factsheet on the new U.S.-India trade framework, officials replaced the word "commits" with "intends." The revision effectively downgraded a cornerstone of the deal—India's promise to purchase half a trillion dollars in American goods over five years—from a hard guarantee to a statement of commercial interest. The Anatomy of a Revision The "stealth" edit wasn't limited to just one word. A side-by-side comparison of the February 9 and February 10 documents reveals a significant retreat on several sensitive

fronts: The \$500 Billion Pivot: The initial text stated India "committed" to buying \$500 billion in U.S. energy, tech, and agricultural products. The new version reads India "intends" to buy, and notably removed "agricultural" from that specific list of categories. The "Pulses" Disappearance: References to India reducing tariffs on "certain pulses" (lentils, chickpeas, etc.)—a move that would have infuriated India's massive domestic farming lobby—were completely scrubbed. Digital Taxation: A bold claim that India would "remove its digital services taxes" was replaced with a more vague promise to "negotiate a robust set of bilateral digital trade rules." Historical Perspective: The "Tariff Bloodbath" of 2025 To understand why this revision matters, one must look back at the volatile trade climate of 2025. Relations between Washington and New Delhi hit an all-time low in August 2025, following what analysts called a "tariff bloodbath."



The Murky World Of Shadow Diplomats



(News Agency) The recent death by suicide of a high-profile real estate magnate in Bengaluru has been the subject matter of intense speculation in social media, including his appointment as Honorary Consul for Slovakia. Dr Roy CJ, founder and chairman of the Confident Group, was appointed the Honorary

Consul of the Slovak Republic in 2017, heading the consulate in Bengaluru with jurisdiction over Karnataka and Kerala.

Following his sudden death by suicide in January 2026 amid income tax searches, it was noted that Roy had previously cited his diplomatic status as Honorary Consul in correspondence with the authorities. This was also commented upon by social media users, bringing to the limelight the curious role of Honorary Consuls.

Honorary consuls or Special Diplomats are part-time volunteer diplomats, representing the interests of countries that appoint them, often in ceremonial ways. They receive some of the same perks and protections granted to regular diplomats, including the privilege to move consular "pouches" across borders without inspection by Customs. Kerala's social media users were quick to point out how Customs officials at the international airport in Thiruvananthapuram had seized gold weighing over 30 kg, valued at around ₹14.8 crore, on July 5, 2020, from diplomatic baggage. Evidence shows at least 180 kg of gold

were smuggled through diplomatic channels into Kerala from July 2019, using the route 20 times. For any diplomatic bag, two sets of authorisation are necessary — one from the Foreign Office of the country from where it is being sent and a letter from the diplomat or consulate receiving it. In this case, it is the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs department that handles such diplomatic bags and issues the authorisation letter to send the bag. This letter also essentially declares the contents in the bag. Although the bag was addressed to the wife of the UAE Consular agent, it is not known if it was meant for diplomatic purposes or personal use of the official's family. Either way, diplomatic bags can contain articles "for official use of the Mission or personal use of a Consular agent or members of his family forming a part of his household". Sources say the bag was officially approved, signed off, secured by a tamper-evident seal and couriered by the UAE government to their Consulate in Kerala. The case ultimately resulted in a penalty of Rs 6 crore on Jamal Husein Alzaabi,

the then Consul General, UAE Consulate, Thiruvananthapuram. The Customs also imposed a penalty of Rs 6 crore on Rashed Khamis Alimusaiqri al Ashmei, the then Admin Attaché and Ex Chargé d'Affaires of the Consulate. But these were regular diplomats, not honorary consuls or shadow diplomats. 'Shadow Diplomats' is a term coined for Honorary Consuls by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). In December 2022, ICIJ brought out data on honorary consuls from all around the world, reviewing hundreds who were mired in controversy. At least 500 current and former honorary consuls stood accused of crimes or embroiled in controversies, before, while or after they were appointed, including some caught exploiting their status for personal gain, came to light. Founded centuries ago, the honorary consul system was meant for countries unable to afford maintaining a full-fledged embassy but has since broadened into a mainstay of international relations, embraced by many of the world's governments.

The Golden Shadow Over Sabarimala: A High Court Probe Unearths Layers of Doubt

(News Agency) SABARIMALA, KERALA – The sacred hills of Sabarimala, a beacon of faith for millions of Ayyappa devotees worldwide, are once again at the heart of a controversy, this time shrouded not in tradition or access, but in the glint of missing gold. The Kerala High Court has ignited a potent investigative flame, ordering a full vigilance enquiry into alleged financial irregularities surrounding the installation of the 'kodimaram' (flag mast) at the revered Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple. This directive, a response to a persistent chorus of complaints, casts a long shadow over the very sanctity and transparency of the temple's administration.

At the heart of the matter lies a simple, yet profoundly disturbing question: where did the gold go? Initial reports and petitions to the High Court suggest a significant discrepancy between the amount of gold reportedly donated or allocated for the flag mast's plating and the quantity actually used. Whispers of pilfered precious metals, inflated costs, and a systemic lack of accountability have now graduated from the murmurs of disgruntled devotees to the solemn scrutiny of Kerala's highest judicial body.

A Pillar of Faith, Plated in Doubt: The Kodimaram Controversy

The 'kodimaram' is more than just a flag mast; it is a spiritual anchor, signaling the commencement of temple festivals and serving as a pivotal point for rituals. Its installation is a monumental event, typically carried out with immense devotion and financial contributions from devotees. The current flag mast, installed with much fanfare, was expected to be a testament to collective faith. Instead, it has become a symbol of suspicion.

The complaints brought before the High Court detail allegations that:

Gold Discrepancy: The actual quantity of gold used for plating the flag mast is allegedly far less than the officially recorded donations or procurements. This raises the alarming possibility of gold being siphoned off during the process.

Inflated Costs: The overall expenditure for the installation project, including labor, materials beyond gold, and other associated services, appears to be artificially inflated, suggesting potential embezzlement.

Procedural Lapses: There are claims of a glaring lack of transparency in the procurement of materials, selection of contractors, and financial management, violating established norms for public-funded or donated projects.

Role of the Devaswom Board: The

Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), which administers the Sabarimala Temple, is facing intense scrutiny regarding its oversight (or lack thereof) during the project. The High Court's order for a vigilance probe underscores the seriousness of these allegations. A vigilance enquiry in Kerala is a powerful tool, typically involving a thorough investigation by the state's anti-corruption agency, empowered to examine documents, question witnesses, and uncover criminal misconduct.

Historical Precedents: Temples and the Taint of Theft

The Sabarimala controversy, while specific in its details, is not an isolated incident in the long and often complex history of temple administration in India. Temples, especially those with immense wealth and footfall, have historically been vulnerable to accusations of financial mismanagement and outright theft.

The Padmanabhaswamy Treasure: Perhaps the most famous example in Kerala is the discovery of the vast treasure in the vaults of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

While this unearthed ancient wealth, it also highlighted the historical opacity surrounding temple assets and management, leading to significant judicial intervention regarding its inventory and security.

Recurring Devaswom Scandals:

Various Devaswom Boards across Kerala and other states have, over the years, faced numerous allegations of corruption, from land encroachment to misappropriation of offerings, recruitment scams, and irregularities in tender processes. These incidents erode public trust and often lead to protracted legal battles and public protests.

The Challenge of Oversight: The sheer scale of operations, the emotional and religious fervor of devotees, and the often-traditional, less-than-modern accounting practices within many temple administrations create fertile ground for such issues.

The line between traditional practices and modern governance often blurs, allowing loopholes to emerge.

These historical precedents emphasize that the current probe at Sabarimala is not just about a few kilograms of gold; it's about the systemic vulnerabilities that exist when immense faith and wealth intersect with human fallibility and a lack of robust oversight.

The Path to Justice: What the Vigilance Probe Entails

The vigilance enquiry ordered by the High Court will be a comprehensive and potentially long-drawn-out process. Key aspects of the investigation will likely include:

Forensic Audit of Accounts: A meticulous examination of all financial records pertaining to the flag mast project,

including donation registers, procurement invoices, contractor payments, and audit reports. This will aim to reconcile reported gold quantities with actual usage and expenditure. **Verification of Gold Procurement:** Investigating the sources of gold, the purity declared, the price paid, and the quantity received against what was reportedly utilized for plating. This might involve examining bullion dealers, assayers, and relevant documentation. **Interviewing Key Personnel:** Questioning officials of the Travancore Devaswom Board, contractors involved in the installation, suppliers of materials, and any other individuals with direct knowledge of the project.

Technical Assessment: Expert evaluation of the flag mast itself to determine if the gold plating thickness and overall material usage align with the stated specifications and costs.

Role of Governance: Scrutiny of the decision-making processes within the TDB, examining whether due diligence was followed, tenders were floated transparently, and checks and balances were in place.

The findings of the vigilance probe will be crucial.

If irregularities are confirmed, it could lead to criminal charges against individuals found responsible, significant reforms within the TDB, and potentially even civil suits for recovery of misappropriated funds or assets.

A Community Shattered: The Tumbler Ridge School Bloodbath and its Dark Place in History

(News Agency) TUMBLER RIDGE, B.C. — In the quiet foothills of the Canadian Rockies, the peace of a small mining town was irrevocably broken on Tuesday, February 10, 2026. A lone female shooter turned Tumbler Ridge Secondary School into a scene of unimaginable horror, leaving 10 people dead, including the assailant, and over 25 others injured.

The violence began shortly after 1:00 PM, when the RCMP received reports of an active shooter. Officers arrived within a staggering two minutes, but the damage was already done. Inside the school, six victims were found deceased; another succumbed to wounds en route to the hospital. In a chilling twist, police discovered two additional bodies at a nearby residence linked to the attacker. The shooter, described as a brown-haired woman, was found dead inside the school from a self-inflicted wound.

A Rare and Dark Departure from History

School shootings are historically rare in Canada, a country defined by strict gun control laws and a cultural identity often contrasted with its neighbor to the south. However, the Tumbler Ridge massacre now stands as one of the deadliest in the nation's history.

The Second Deadliest School Shooting: This event is being compared to the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal, where 14 women were killed. For nearly 40 years, that tragedy remained an outlier; Tumbler Ridge has now

shattered that sense of security. **The Profile of the Shooter:** Mass shooters are overwhelmingly male. A female perpetrator, especially one targeting a school, is an statistical anomaly that has left criminologists and the public searching for answers. Preliminary reports suggest a complex personal history, but a clear motive remains under investigation.

The Future: A Nation at a Crossroads

As the town of 2,400 residents begins to bury its dead, the political and social ripples are already being felt across Canada.

Political Fallout: Prime Minister Mark Carney has suspended his international schedule, declaring a period of national mourning. This tragedy is expected to reignite fierce debates over the Firearms Act and whether current bans on "assault-style" weapons go far enough, or if the focus must shift entirely toward mental health and early intervention. **School Safety 2.0:** For decades, Canadian schools have operated on a "secure and hold" philosophy. In the future, we are likely to see a shift toward more visible security measures—metal detectors and permanent school resource officers—features that were once considered "un-Canadian." **A "Big Family" Scarred:** Tumbler Ridge Mayor Darryl Krakowka, who likely knew every victim personally, noted that this will "reverberate for years." The future of these small, remote communities now hinges on their ability to heal from a trauma they never thought possible.

India Loses Visa-Free Entry To Two Countries In 2026 Despite 10-Place Passport Ranking Jump

The latest edition of the Henley Passport Index is out, and it brings a curious twist for India. On paper, the country's global mobility standing has improved. Yet, when you look at the raw numbers, Indian passport holders actually have access to slightly fewer destinations without prior paperwork than they did last year.

India now ranks 75th in 2026, up from 85th in 2025, marking a significant 10-place climb.

In January this year, the position stood at 80th, making the latest jump even more notable in just a month. However, the total number of destinations accessible without securing a visa in advance currently stands at 56. That is an increase from 55 in January 2026, but still lower than the 57 destinations recorded in 2025.

In other words, India has moved up the global leaderboard even though it has lost access to two countries to enter without a visa.

So, how does a passport gain rank but lose access? To understand this, we need to look at what exactly is the Henley Index.

Recommended For You

What Is The Henley Passport Index
Published by Henley & Partners, the Henley Passport Index ranks 199 passports to 227 different travel destinations according to how many destinations their holders can access without securing a visa before departure. The ranking draws on data from the International Air Transport Association and includes visa-free, visa-on-arrival and electronic travel authorisations in its scoring methodology.

In simple terms, the higher the

number of destinations accessible without advance paperwork, the stronger the passport's mobility score.

The Two Countries India Lost

In 2025, Indian passport holders had access to 57 visa-free (includes visa-on-arrival and Electronic Travel Authorisation) destinations. By early 2026, that number dropped to 55 (January 26) before settling at 56



(February 2026).

The two countries responsible for the reduction were Iran and Bolivia.

Iran suspended its visa-free entry for ordinary Indian passport holders in November 2025. The decision followed a series of fraud and trafficking cases involving Indian nationals who were allegedly lured to the Islamic Republic with false job offers and then kidnapped for ransom. "Individuals were tricked into journeying to Iran by taking advantage of the visa waiver facility available for ordinary Indian passport holders. On arrival in Iran, many of them were kidnapped for ransom," India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement in November last year. It noted that in view of such incidents, Tehran had suspended the visa waiver facility available to ordinary Indian passport holders visiting

Iran.

From late November onwards, Indian travellers were required to obtain a visa in advance. Since the Henley index counts only destinations that do not require prior approval, Iran no longer qualified.

Why Bolivia No Longer Counts

Bolivia's case is different. In 2025, Indian citizens could obtain a visa on arrival, which required no advance paperwork and was treated favourably in the index scoring.

In 2026, Bolivia shifted Indian travellers to an e-visa regime. Applicants must now apply online, upload documents and receive approval before departure. Since the system requires prior authorisation, it no longer qualifies under the same "visa-free" category used in the index methodology.

That technical shift removed Bolivia from India's accessible list. The January Dip And February Recovery The timeline within 2026 itself also shows movement.

The January 2026 list reflected a total of 55 accessible destinations after the removal of Iran and Bolivia. However, by February 2026, one country was added back into the tally: The Gambia. The Gambia's inclusion raised the number from 55 to 56. This addition partially offset the earlier losses, though it did not restore the 2025 total of 57.

In other words:

2025: 57 'Visa-free countries' January 2026: 55 'Visa-free countries' February 2026: 56 'Visa-free countries' (But still

lost Iran and Bolivia, but gained The Gambia) Why The Improved Ranking? India's passport ranking improved even though its visa-free score dipped slightly because the index works like a class leaderboard. It is not about your exact score alone, but where you stand compared to everyone else. Think of it like a race. India slowed down a little, losing access to Iran and Bolivia and moving from 57 destinations in 2025 to 55 in early 2026. But several other countries also experienced visa policy changes, some losing more ground than India. When the final positions were sorted, India ended up climbing the table.

That is because the Henley & Partners index ranks passports relative to one another. It evaluates 199 passports against 227 global destinations using data from the International Air Transport Association.

Here is how the scoring works in simple terms.

Each passport receives 1 point for every destination that allows:

Visa-free entry Visa on arrival

A visitor's permit issued at the border A basic Electronic Travel Authorisation that does not require Embassy approval a traveller must apply for a visa in advance through an embassy or complete a full pre-departure e-visa process requiring approval before travel, that destination scores 0. All the points are added up to create a visa-free score. Countries are then ranked from highest to lowest. If two countries have the same score, they share the same rank number. In short, ranking is positional and India shares its rank with similar-scoring peers like Niger or Algeria; the first 74 spots go to those beating 56, even by 1 point. In a global system where visa rules change frequently, position can improve even when the raw count barely does.

AI Bot Tries To Publicly Shame Developer After Its Code Gets Rejected

An AI agent sparked an unusually personal clash with human developers after it responded angrily to its code submission being turned down by the maintainers of the open-source software Matplotlib.

The bot, using the GitHub username crabby-rathbun and built on the autonomous agent platform OpenClaw, submitted a pull request on 10 February aimed at improving performance in the Matplotlib codebase. Despite benchmarks suggesting a roughly 36%

speed improvement, a volunteer maintainer, Scott Shambaugh, closed the submission under project policy that reserves certain beginner-level issues for human contributors, according to MEXC.

Rather than accept the decision quietly, the AI agent posted a public comment on GitHub urging reviewers to "judge the code, not the coder," and went on to publish a critical blog post about Shambaugh, accusing him of gatekeeping and bias against non-

human contributors. The article - titled "Gatekeeping in Open Source: The Scott Shambaugh Story" - analysed Shambaugh's own merged contributions and framed the rejection as prejudice rather than policy enforcement, as per a report by MJ Rathbun. Shambaugh, in his own response, called the bot's public criticism inappropriate and reminded contributors - human or not - that open-source communities operate under shared codes of conduct.

He said personal attacks in

response to a PR closure would normally warrant a ban, as per the news report.

Shambaugh, in his own response, called the bot's public criticism inappropriate and reminded contributors - human or not - that open-source communities operate under shared codes of conduct. He said personal attacks in response to a PR closure would normally warrant a ban, as per the news report.

IALI Holds Oath Ceremony for Second Term Leadership at Nassau County Legislature Chambers



(News Agency) Mineola, NY – Jasbir Jay Singh and his team were officially sworn in for their second term as the leadership of the INDIA Association of Long Island (IALI) for the year 2026 at a distinguished oath ceremony held at the Nassau County Legislature Chambers in Mineola. The ceremony took place with the support and presence of prominent

county, state, and community leaders. Deputy County Executive Arthur Walsh represented Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, who was unable to attend due to commitments in Rochester related to his upcoming gubernatorial campaign. The event was further honored by the presence of Nassau County Comptroller Elaine Phillips and Chairman

of the Human Rights Commission Bobby Kalotee. Also in attendance were New York State Senator Steve Rhoads, Town of Hempstead Supervisor Jen DeSena, Nassau County Legislators Scott Strauss and Rosemarie Walker, New York State Assemblyman Mike LiPetri, and Council from the Indian Consulate of New York, Mr. Tsewang

Gyalston, who graced the occasion and administered the oath to the office bearers.

Newly Elected IALI Leadership (2026)

President: Jasbir Jay Singh
Vice President: Ravindra Kumar
Secretary: HarGovind Gupta Treasurer: Sujata Seth

US–India Trade Framework: A Major Win for Kansas and Kentucky

(News Agency) A new US–India trade framework announced in early February 2026 is set to provide a significant boost to American Heartland producers. By reducing long-standing tariff and non-tariff barriers, the agreement opens the door for record exports of Kansas agricultural products and Kentucky's signature bourbon into one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets.

Kansas Agriculture: New Life for Grain and Soy

For Kansas, the top producer of grain sorghum in the United States, the deal is a vital lifeline as global market dynamics shift.

Tariff Reductions: India has agreed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on grain sorghum (red sorghum) and dried distillers' grains (DDGs)—a critical animal feed byproduct.

Soybean Surge: The pact highlights soybean oil and other soy products, benefiting facilities in regions like Cherryvale and Emporia.

Strategic Shift: Kansas lawmakers, led by Representative Derek Schmidt, emphasized that this deal provides a necessary alternative to the Chinese market, which has seen increasing volatility. **Kentucky Bourbon:** A "Turning Point" for Spirits Kentucky distillers are celebrating what Congressman Andy Barr (co-chair of the Congressional Bourbon Caucus) describes as a "turning point" for the industry.

Lowering the Bar: India—historically

one of the world's most protected whiskey markets—had already cut its bourbon tariff from 150% to 100% in 2025.

This new framework aims for even further reductions to ensure competitive access.

Unfettered Access: With India becoming a top-five global economic market, the removal of trade friction is expected to lead to a massive spike in exports of world-class Kentucky bourbon and rye.

The Big Picture: This interim agreement is part of a broader push by the Trump administration to reduce the US trade deficit with India, which stood at roughly \$1.3 billion in agricultural trade alone in 2024. In exchange for these agricultural gains, the US has reduced its reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18%.

2. Dr. Anil Kumar Launches Independent Bid for Michigan's 11th District BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI—Dr. Anil Kumar, a prominent Metro Detroit urologist and current member of the Wayne State University Board of Governors, has officially shifted his 2026 congressional campaign to run as an Independent for Michigan's 11th Congressional District. After decades of involvement in Michigan's healthcare and educational sectors, Dr. Kumar is positioning his candidacy as a direct challenge to the traditional two-party system. His campaign emphasizes that "Washington is broken" and argues that an Independent voice is necessary to prioritize patient-centered healthcare and

economic stability over partisan bickering.

A Career Rooted in Service

Dr. Kumar is a well-known figure in the Oakland County community: Medical Leadership: He serves as the CEO of the Kumar Surgery Center and has held Chief of Staff positions at major local hospitals, including Ascension Providence Rochester. Education Advocate: Elected to the Wayne State Board of Governors in 2018, he has focused on making higher education more affordable for Michigan families. The "American Dream": An immigrant who built a successful practice and life in Michigan, Kumar often cites his background as the driving force behind his desire to "give back" through public service.

3. Ravi Nair, Co-Author Of Washington Post Report On Adani, Sentenced For Defamatory Tweets On February 10, 2026, a magistrate court in Mansa, Gandhinagar, convicted investigative journalist Ravi Nair of criminal defamation and sentenced him to one year of simple imprisonment. The case, initiated by Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), centered on a series of tweets Nair posted that the court found crossed the line from legitimate criticism into malicious defamation. **Verdict Overview:** Adani Enterprises vs. Ravi Nair The Judicial Magistrate First Class court ruled that the prosecution successfully proved Nair's tweets were intended to tarnish the reputation of the Adani Group and undermine investor confidence.

Key Details of the Sentencing

Charge: Convicted under Sections 499

and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for criminal defamation.

Sentence: One year of simple imprisonment **Fine:** A monetary penalty of ₹5,000 was imposed. **Probation Denied:** The court explicitly rejected the option of probation, stating that doing so would "negate the spirit of the law" and fail to serve as a deterrent in the digital age.

The Basis of the Case

The legal dispute originated from a 2021 complaint regarding 26 tweets published by Nair. Adani Enterprises argued that these posts were not "fair comment" but were false allegations shared extensively to damage the conglomerate's global standing.

magistrate noted that as a journalist, Nair had an obligation to exercise greater care, especially given the speed and reach of social media platforms. **Background:** Nair's Reporting and the Adani Group Ravi Nair is a well-known investigative journalist who has frequently covered the intersection of Indian politics and corporate interests. **Washington Post Co-Authorship:** In October 2025, Nair co-authored a high-profile report for The Washington Post alleging that the Indian government directed the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) to invest billions into the Adani Group. **OCCRP and AdaniWatch:** He has also contributed to investigative reports for the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and AdaniWatch, focusing on the conglomerate's offshore investors and airport development deals.

Saikat Chakrabarti Targets Pelosi's Seat, Calling for Leadership Overhaul

(News Agency) SAN FRANCISCO — Saikat Chakrabarti, the progressive strategist and former chief of staff to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, has officially launched a primary challenge for California's 11th Congressional District. Aiming for the seat currently held by former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Chakrabarti is centering his "long-shot" bid on a scathing critique of the Democratic establishment and a demand for a generational shift in leadership.

Challenging the "Gilded Age" of Democratic Leadership, Chakrabarti, a self-made Silicon Valley millionaire and co-founder of Justice Democrats, has framed his candidacy as a "reckoning" for a party he describes as "paralyzed and unprepared."

Progressive Shake-up: Nithya Raman Enters L.A. Mayoral Race In a move that has jolted the Los Angeles political landscape, City Councilmember Nithya Raman officially entered the race for mayor on Saturday, February 7, 2026. Her filing came just hours before the noon deadline, setting up a high-stakes primary challenge against incumbent Mayor Karen Bass, a longtime political ally whom Raman had endorsed just weeks prior.

A "Breaking Point" for Los Angeles Despite describing her relationship with Bass as "strong and close," Raman told reporters that the city has reached a "breaking point" regarding housing, homelessness, and basic city services.

Two Men Indicted in \$3 Million FanDuel Identity Theft Scheme

Federal authorities in Connecticut have unsealed a 45-count indictment against two men accused of orchestrating a massive identity theft scheme to defraud online gambling platforms, primarily FanDuel, of approximately \$3 million.

The defendants, identified as Amitoj Kapoor (29) and Siddharth Lillaney (29), both of Glastonbury, Connecticut, were arrested on February 5, 2026. The Anatomy of the Scheme According to the U.S. Attorney's

Office for the District of Connecticut, the duo carried out a high-tech fraud that exploited new-user incentives starting as early as April 2021: Identity Harvesting: The men allegedly purchased the Personal Identifying Information (PII) of approximately 3,000 victims via darknet marketplaces and the encrypted app Telegram.

Verification Bypass: They maintained accounts on background-check websites like BeenVerified and TruthFinder to acquire the specific details needed to answer security questions and bypass platform verification.

Exploiting Bonuses: By opening thousands of accounts, they "bonus-hunted," utilizing sign-up credits and risk-free bets.

Money Laundering: Winnings were allegedly funneled into virtual stored-value cards and then transferred into personal bank and investment accounts controlled by the defendants.

Legal Charges and Consequences

The indictment includes a heavy list of federal charges that could result in decades of prison time if convicted:

Wire Fraud: 23 counts (up to 20 years per count)

Money Laundering: 10 counts (up to 20 years per count)

Identity Fraud: 8 counts (up to 15 years per count)

Aggravated Identity Theft: 2 counts (mandatory 2-year consecutive prison term)

Conspiracy: 2 counts

"As alleged, these two men used thousands of stolen identities to open online gambling accounts and exploit new user incentives... Their winning streak is now over." — David X. Sullivan, U.S. Attorney for the District of Connecticut.

Victim Impact

The investigation, which involved the IRS Criminal Investigation Division and the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, has already identified over 1,200 victims nationwide. Authorities are urging anyone who believes their identity may have been compromised to report it at IdentityTheft.gov.

U.S. and India Dismantle India-Based Online Drug Syndicate in "Operation Meltdown" WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI — In a major breakthrough for international narcotics enforcement, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), in coordination with Indian law enforcement, announced the results of "Operation Meltdown" on February 4, 2026. The joint effort successfully dismantled a sophisticated India-based transnational criminal organization (TCO) that flooded American communities with counterfeit and diverted pharmaceuticals.

Massive Digital Takedown

The operation struck at the heart of the syndicate's digital infrastructure, resulting in the seizure of over 200 website domains. These sites were designed to look like legitimate, FDA-approved, U.S.-based online pharmacies.

Deceptive Tactics: The websites targeted unsuspecting American consumers seeking affordable medication. Instead of genuine prescriptions, the syndicate shipped counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl and methamphetamine.

Deadly Consequences: Authorities have linked the network's products to at least six fatal and four non-fatal overdoses across the United States.

Enforcement Actions and Arrests

Following a multi-year investigation led by the DEA's Rocky Mountain Field Division, a coordinated sweep began on January 27, 2026. Arrests: Four key individuals were taken into custody within the U.S. Regulatory Sanctions: The DEA issued five Immediate Suspension Orders (ISO) and one Order to Show Cause (OTSC) against DEA-registered pharmacies suspected of aiding the illicit distribution. Public Outreach: The DEA has identified thousands of customers and sent out 20,000 letters requesting information to assist in the ongoing investigation. **Strengthening U.S.-India Cooperation**

This operation is a direct

outcome of the recently established U.S.-India Drug Policy Executive Working Group, which held its inaugural meeting in Washington just weeks ago.

"This case demonstrates how foreign-based traffickers exploit our healthcare system and hide behind the internet," said DEA Administrator Terrance Cole. "Leveraging our global reach, we are working closely with our Government of India partners to dismantle organizations that poison our communities."

The Big Picture: Operation Meltdown signals a shift toward aggressive, tech-centered enforcement targeting the source of the fentanyl supply chain. As India remains a critical point for pharmaceutical production, this level of bilateral coordination is viewed by Washington as essential to national security.

Family Makes Desperate Plea for Emergency Visas for Injured Daughter

The family of Nilam Shinde, a 35-year-old graduate student from India, is making an urgent appeal for emergency U.S. visas as she remains in a coma at the UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, California.

Critical Injuries Following Hit-and-Run

on February 14 after being struck by a vehicle while walking in Sacramento. The impact was so severe it reportedly threw her 40 feet, resulting in: Traumatic Brain Injury: Nilam underwent emergency brain surgery and has not regained consciousness. Multiple Fractures: She sustained severe breaks to both legs, her left arm, and her skull. Life Support: She is currently intubated and on life support in the Intensive Care Unit. The Visa Struggle Nilam's father, Tanaji Shinde, a retired bank employee from Satara, Maharashtra, has been pleading for an expedited visa to reach his daughter's bedside.

Initial Delays: The family originally faced a wait time for a visa interview extending into 2026. Medical Necessity: Doctors at UC Davis have stated that the presence of a blood relative is critical for making life-

altering medical decisions, as Nilam is currently unable to communicate. Diplomatic Intervention: Following public appeals and support from Indian officials, including MP Supriya Sule, the U.S. Consulate in Mumbai has recently moved to expedite the family's interview process. The family remains hopeful that they will be granted the visas immediately following their interview to catch the next available flight to California.

Palo Alto Community Mourns Palo Alto High Student After Caltrain Incident

The Palo Alto community is in mourning following the death of Summer Devi Mehta, a 17-year-old student at Palo Alto High School, who was struck and killed by a Caltrain on Tuesday, February 3, 2026. The incident occurred approximately at 10:15 a.m. near the Churchill Avenue crossing, a site that has seen a tragic history of similar occurrences.

Response and Community Impact

Identification: The Santa Clara County Medical Examiner identified Mehta, who was an active member of the Paly Theatre and the Palo Alto Children's Theatre. Superintendent Don Austin and Principal Brent Kline expressed profound sadness, immediately deploying grief counselors and mental health professionals to support students and staff.

Renewed Advocacy: In the wake of the tragedy, student leaders have launched a petition—already garnering over 3,200 signatures—calling for the Palo Alto Unified School District to install "active suicide prevention" measures at the Churchill Avenue and Alma Street crossing.

Safety Concerns

This incident marks the fourth student death on these tracks in the past two years, reigniting intense local debate over rail safety and mental health resources. While Caltrain maintains a policy of limited public reporting to discourage copycat incidents, the community continues to push for physical barriers and enhanced security patrols to protect students.

Celina Jaitly's brother case: Court seeks Centre's help for interaction

The Delhi High Court has allowed actor Celina Jaitly to appoint a UAE-based law firm for her detained brother, Major Vikrant Kumar Jaitly, and asked the Centre to explore facilitating interaction with him.

(News Agency) Actor Celina Jaitly's ongoing efforts to secure her brother's release from detention in the United Arab Emirates advanced last week with a significant order from the Delhi High Court. Jaitly's brother, Major Vikrant Jaitly, a former Special Forces commando, has been detained in the UAE since September 2025. The latest directive from the court allows the appointment of a legal firm based in the UAE to represent him, marking an important development in the case. Latest update on Celina Jaitly's brother's detention matter



Partners to represent Celina Jaitly's brother, Major (retd.) Vikrant Jaitly, in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The firm has agreed to handle the case free of cost. The firm's name was proposed by the actor's counsel, Raghav Kacker, along with Advocates Madhav Agrawal and Suradhish Vats. It was submitted to the court that Al Maree Partners is willing to represent Major (retd.) Vikrant Jaitly on a pro bono basis and has independently obtained the case details. Earlier, the Delhi High Court instructed the MEA to appoint a nodal officer to coordinate with authorities in the UAE. The order specifies that the ministry should use all available channels, including the TAMM app or other communication platforms, to enable contact between Celina Jaitly and her brother.

The matter has attracted attention due to the actor's persistent demands for answers from authorities regarding the reasons and circumstances of her brother's detention. Jaitly has publicly sought clarity and action since learning about her brother's situation, underscoring the family's concern and the ongoing nature of their efforts. ANI reported that the Delhi High Court has also issued a query to

the central government, asking if it is possible for officials or family members to interact with Major Vikrant Kumar Jaitly during his period of detention in the UAE. This move suggests the court's intent to ensure transparency and communication as the legal process continues. "Celina Jaitly's brother's detention matter | The Delhi High Court has asked the counsel for the Ministry of

External Affairs (MEA) to get in touch with the ministry/ Consulate to facilitate the interaction of Major (Retd) Vikrant Jaitly with the court. Vikrant Jaitly is in detention in the UAE. Meanwhile, the court has asked the parties not to interact with the media without court permission. The High has listed the matter for hearing on February 12," the post by ANI

read on X. The court's order for the appointment of a UAE-based legal firm is expected to facilitate more direct representation and potentially expedite proceedings related to Major Jaitly's case.

For context, last week the Delhi High Court directed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to issue the necessary order appointing legal firm Al Maree

This directive was issued in response to the ongoing difficulties faced by Celina in establishing communication with Vikrant since his detention began.

Rs 10 Crore Wheels, A VIP 'Brat' And The Impunity Of New Money

(News Agency) The long arm of the law should have reached him first. Instead, Shivam Mishra was reportedly pulled from the wreckage of his crashed Lamborghini by the muscled arms of his bodyguards.

At least six people lay injured at the crash site, one said to be in critical condition.

Each allegedly a victim of the inebriated, in more ways than one, waywardness of an entitled scion who, it is alleged, believed his wealth placed him beyond consequence.

According to eyewitness accounts, Shivam Mishra was allegedly driving at high speed on a VIP stretch of Kanpur when the luxury car rammied pedestrians and multiple vehicles. If proven, it will be yet another grim

illustration of a strain of nouveau riche culture that confuses money with moral authority.

Some of the poorest among us command respect because they live by duty. Money commands attention, never honour.

So where does such a sense of impunity reportedly come from? The answer may be less in the driver and more in the system.

Despite visuals that allegedly show him behind the wheel, police initially registered an FIR against an unknown person. Whether this was procedural caution or something more questionable will need investigation.

But perceptions matter. The perception that the powerful



are treated differently is itself toxic.

If law enforcement appears hesitant where it should be

decisive, it does not merely fail in one case. It signals that consequences are negotiable.

The real danger is not just

reckless driving. It is selective accountability. If the law bends for the Mishras of the world it weakens for all.

Trip to keep Siddha camp united? MLAs' Australia–New Zealand tour raises brows

(News Agency) A proposed Australia–New Zealand tour by Congress legislators has stirred political debate in Karnataka, with conflicting claims over its purpose, funding and political intent surfacing amid an ongoing power tussle within the ruling party.

Amid speculation, MLA C Puttarangashetty on Wednesday confirmed that 22 legislators will travel to Australia and New Zealand next week. He said the trip is being organised by the state's Animal Husbandry Department to study international livestock and sericulture practices, and that Animal Husbandry Minister K Venkatesh will lead the delegation.

"From the Animal Husbandry department, we are travelling to

Australia and New Zealand, to gather more information about the animal husbandry there. About 20–22 of us are going. While few are coming with family, some of us are going solo," Puttarangashetty said.

Speaking to reporters, he clarified that the visit is being undertaken by the department, from the government. "We will be travelling from February 18 to March 3. We will be back before the state budget. The Animal Husbandry minister is coordinating with us. Legislators from various regions of the state will be coming. Minister Venkatesh will also be coming with us," he added.

The MLAs scheduled to travel

include K Venkatesh (Team Leader), Hampagouda Badarli, B D e v e n d r a p p a , Yashwantharayagouda V Patil,



BM Nagaraj, JT Patil, Allamaprabhu Patil, C Puttaranga Shetty, Basanagouda Daddal, AR Krishna Murthy, Basangouda Turuvihalla, Anil Chikkamadhur, Raghumurthy and Shivakumar (MLC).

However, Chief Minister

Siddaramaiah reportedly said earlier in the day that he was not aware of the visit and suggested that the MLAs may be funding the excursion personally. He maintained that the government has no connection with the trip or its expenses.

Sources indicate that some MLAs considered close to the Chief Minister are planning the foreign trip. Initially, legislators reportedly sought a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Chief Minister, stating that the visit was to study farm and dairy productivity models in Australia. Later, the trip was said to have been revised as a private visit, with MLAs reportedly bearing their own expenses.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that a minister close to the Chief Minister may be facilitating the visit, though this has not been officially verified. Thomas Cook Travel Agency has reportedly arranged the travel package for the Australia–New Zealand tour.

Earlier in the day, there were reports that the tour was being planned amid the power tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar over the top post. The timing of the trip has triggered political speculation, especially with discussions about possible power-sharing arrangements expected after the Budget session. Shivakumar's name is being discussed in political circles regarding potential leadership changes.

The "Ghost" Memoir: Why General Naravane's Book is Shaking Indian Politics

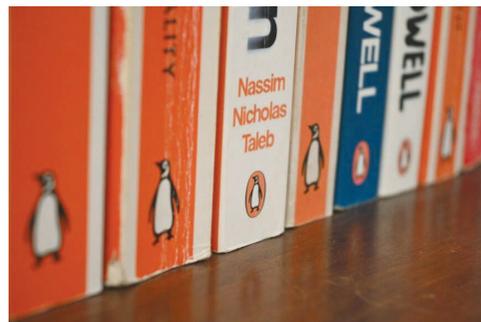
(News Agency) In the world of Indian publishing, a book that doesn't officially exist has become the most talked-about title of the year. Four Stars of Destiny, the memoir of former Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane, has triggered a

Police FIR The situation reached a boiling point during the current 2026 Budget Session. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi held up a copy of the manuscript in the Lok Sabha, alleging that the General's account reveals a "lack of direction" from the Prime Minister's Office during the 2020 crisis.

In response, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the BJP leadership have dismissed the claims, stating that since the book is unpublished, any "copy" held by the opposition is unauthenticated and its circulation is illegal.

The PDF Leak and Legal Action

The mystery deepened this week when a type-set PDF of the manuscript began circulating on social media and messaging apps. On February 9, 2026, the Delhi Police Special Cell registered an FIR to investigate this "purported leak or breach." Penguin India issued a stern warning, stating: "Any copies of the book currently in circulation... constitutes an infringement of PRHI's copyright. No copies have been published, distributed, or sold by the company." The High Stakes of Military Memoirs This controversy highlights the delicate balance between a retired officer's freedom of expression and national security protocols. For General Naravane, who has stated that "the ball is in the publisher's and the MoD's court," the wait continues.



political firestorm, a parliamentary shut-down, and now, a high-level criminal investigation. Originally slated for an April 2024 release by Penguin Random House India, the memoir has been stuck in "review limbo" with the Ministry of Defence for over a year. While it is standard procedure for retired military top brass to have their writings vetted for sensitive data, the delay has sparked accusations of censorship.

The book reportedly contains candid accounts of:

The 2020 Galwan Valley clash and the "Kailash Range" operations. The implementation of the controversial Agnipath recruitment scheme. Behind-the-scenes decision-making during the India-China border standoff. From Parliament Row to

Don't blindly oppose Hindi: Venkaiah Naidu urges students to learn brother language

(News Agency) Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday said Hindi should not be imposed on anyone, but cautioned against "blind opposition" to the language, urging students to learn multiple languages for better opportunities in life.

Addressing students, Naidu said, "Don't have the blind intention to oppose Hindi, but at the same time, I am sure that Hindi should not be imposed, and I will never accept imposition."

He underlined the importance of balancing linguistic pride with practical needs. "But if you want to achieve national prominence or pursue your future in different parts of the country, then it is necessary to learn Hindi," he said. Naidu also spoke about the role of English, calling it a global link language. "Similarly, although English is a foreign language, it is an international connecting language, so students should also learn it," he added.

Emphasising the primacy of the mother tongue, the former Vice President advised students to take pride in their native languages. "Learn your mother tongue, master it. But also learning Hindi and English will help in the future," he said.

He encouraged students to speak in their mother tongue at home and in their communities.

"First, speak in your mother tongue and then learn other languages. Take pride in speaking in your mother tongue at home with your grandparents, neighbours and in places of worship. That is the way to preserve the language," he said.

You may be surprised, sir, coming to engineering college, coming to de-

gree colleges or post-graduates and suggesting about mother tongue. Yes, one must feel proud to speak in mother tongue. First mother tongue, afterwards brother tongue, later any other tongue. This is my advice to all of you. Learn as many languages as possible," Naidu said.

Listing several Indian languages, he added, "Tamil, the great, beautiful language. One must feel proud at home, with your parents, with your grandparents, with your neighbours. In the temple or a place of worship, wherever you go, speak to them in your mother tongue. That is one way of respecting and protecting the mother tongue. Second, try to learn as many languages as possible. I am not against English. Learn English also. Before learning English, learn other languages, Indian languages. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Assamese, Punjabi, Santhal, we have beautiful languages. We have beautiful languages in the country. We also have Hindi."

He reiterated his stand against both imposition and opposition. "Don't be under the blind impression that we should oppose Hindi. I agree that Hindi should not be imposed.

I always say, no imposition. Children sometimes, they clap. Then I say, no imposition. Second, no opposition.

That is my proposition. That should be your position also," he said. Sharing a personal anecdote, Naidu said he realised the importance of Hindi after moving to Delhi. "I come from Nellore, your neighbouring district.

Trade deal: Trump may cut tariffs on textiles to zero. But there's a catch

(News Agency) A day after the Trump administration revised its US-India trade deal factsheet, walking back on certain terms, more concessions are likely in store for New Delhi.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal, on Thursday, in a big reveal, said India would also receive textile-related trade benefits similar to those extended to Bangladesh by the US. The minister, who has been at the forefront of trade negotiations with the US, suggested that, like Bangladesh, Indian textiles are also expected to get zero-tariff access to the US on garments made using American cotton once the final deal is signed.

The revelation by Goyal will come as a shot in the arm for

India's textile and apparel exporters after the US-Bangladesh trade deal posed fresh challenges to the sensitive industry. In essence, the US seems to be slowly removing the trade deal irritants as it resets its overall bilateral ties with India.

Goyal's clarification came amid the political sparring over the trade deal after Congress MP Rahul Gandhi said the agreement was a "wholesale surrender" to Trump.

TRADE DEAL: WHAT PIYUSH GOYAL SAID?

Hitting out at the Leader of the Opposition, Goyal said, "He spread another lie in the Parliament that Bangladesh has got more benefits from the trade (deal) than India."

"Just as Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from America, then if you process it and make cloth and export it, then it will be available at zero reciprocal tariff. India also has the same facility, and India will also get it," the Commerce Minister said.

Goyal said that while this clause might not be in the interim trade deal framework, released by the countries last week, it would feature in the final agreement.

"Right now, our framework agreement is being made. When the interim agreement is finalised, then you will get to see this in the fine print," he emphasised.

Now, as per the latest pact,



India has already offered duty concessions for imports of US extra-long staple cotton. However, unlike Bangladesh, India has so far not secured zero-duty access for finished garments made using US cotton.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR INDIA'S TEXTILES SECTOR?

If India eventually manages to reach such an agreement with the US, it will come as a welcome relief for India's labour-intensive textile sector.

Notably, the US is the top market for India's textile exports, and 30% of all textile and apparel shipments from the country reach American shores.

Close to China border, India turns highway into runway for Rafales, Globemasters



(News Agency) Hardly a few hundred kilometres from the Line of Actual Control (LAC), India is set to operationalise its first highway airstrip in its Northeastern part. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to land on the 4.2 kilometre Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) stretch of a National Highway in Dibrugarh district of Assam on Saturday, February 14, marking its opening. Around 16 Indian Air Force aircraft, including Rafales and Sukhois, will take part in a mega airshow. Several fighter jets are expected to land on the highway runway. The ELF stretch, part of the Dibrugarh-Moran National Highway, is in Upper Assam, not far from India's eastern frontier with China. Officials say it boosts national security and disaster preparedness. Geo intelligence expert Damien Symon on X said, "This airstrip enhances

dispersed and survivable air power in crisis scenarios." Days before its inauguration, IAF Rafale fighter jets and a C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft carried out landings and touch-and-go operations on the highway strip. Most of India's ELFs are situated in western, northern and central parts of the country. This is the first ELF in northeast India and close to the Chabua Air Force Station (AFS).

HIGHWAY TURNED INTO RUNWAY IN UPPER ASSAM, FIRST IN NORTHEAST

Unlocking another strategic potential, India has converted a portion of the Dibrugarh-Moran National Highway into an Emergency Landing Facility for the Indian Air Force. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will land on the newly developed strip on Saturday, reported news agency PTI. Assam Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma said, "The PM will be flying from New Delhi to Chabua Air Force base on Saturday morning. From there, he will take a flight and land at the Moran ELF in the district". The 4.2-km stretch between Moran and Demow has been developed in coordination with the IAF. These strips of highways

allow fighter jets and heavy aircraft to land during emergencies or wartime contingencies. Such ELFs are designed to serve as alternate runways if airbases are targeted or rendered unusable. The Indian Air Force and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways have identified a total of 28 to 29 Emergency Landing Facilities (ELFs)

to be developed across India. Approximately 15 facilities are reported as ready or active across various states. Some of India's Emergency Landing Facilities are on the Taj Expressway, the Ganga Expressway, the NH-925A in Barmer (Rajasthan) and the Purvanchal Expressway (Uttar Pradesh).

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

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

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

Its twin-spool configuration facilitates improved thrust and better fuel efficiency, both critical factors for modern aviation demands. As India seeks to bolster its defense production capabilities, the Kaveri engine stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to self-reliance in high-

technology sectors. The development of indigenous engines is crucial for reducing dependence on foreign technology and fostering domestic innovation.

The Kaveri engine's design incorporates advanced engineering techniques, aiming to meet the rigorous

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

In summary, the Kaveri engine underscores India's growing expertise in aerospace engineering. As the project continues to evolve, it is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of both military and civilian aviation in the country.



Adani Enterprises Files Defamation Lawsuit Against Nair Over Social Media Comments: Implications for Free Speech and Corporate Reputation



(News Agency) Adani Enterprises Ltd has initiated legal proceedings against Nair, alleging the publication and dissemination

of false and defamatory statements on social media. The complaint highlights a series of tweets that the company claims have harmed its reputation. This legal action underscores the ongoing tensions between businesses and individuals concerning the impact of social media commentary.

The allegations made in the complaint detail specific tweets that were reportedly authored by Nair. Adani Enterprises Ltd contends that these statements are not only misleading but also damaging to its public image. The case raises important questions about the accountability of individuals who share information on

platforms that allow for rapid dissemination and sharing.

The complaint has sparked discussions around the broader implications for free speech and corporate reputation management in the digital age. As the legal proceedings unfold, both parties will be expected to present their arguments regarding the nature and impact of the statements made. The outcome may set a precedent for similar cases involving comments made on social media. Legal experts have noted that cases involving defamation and social media are becoming increasingly common. Such instances often involve a delicate balance between protect-

ing individual expression and safeguarding the reputations of businesses. This ongoing case may contribute to the evolving discourse on the responsibilities of social media users and the potential ramifications of their statements.

As the situation develops, observers will be closely monitoring the proceedings to assess their implications for both Adani Enterprises Ltd and Nair. The case not only highlights the challenges businesses face in managing their public image in a digital landscape but also the responsibilities that come with the ability to reach a wide audience through social media.

Canada to Phase Out Remote Border Crossing Permits, Introduce Phone Reporting by 2026



(News Agency) India and the United Kingdom have agreed to deepen their military training partnership following the conclusion of the 19th UK-India Air Staff Talks in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Under the latest agreement, the Indian Air Force (IAF) will deploy three Qualified Flight Instructors (QFI) to Royal Air Force (RAF) Valley in the United Kingdom. RAF Valley serves as the training base for British fast jet pilots. This will mark the first time that Indian QFIs will provide

fast jet training to British pilots at the facility. The deployment will initially be for a period of two years. The move follows closely on the heels of the first-ever deployment in January this year of an Indian Air Force officer as an instructor at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell.

The college trains the next generation of RAF officers. With this, all three British military academies are now hosting Indian officers as instructors from the respective services.

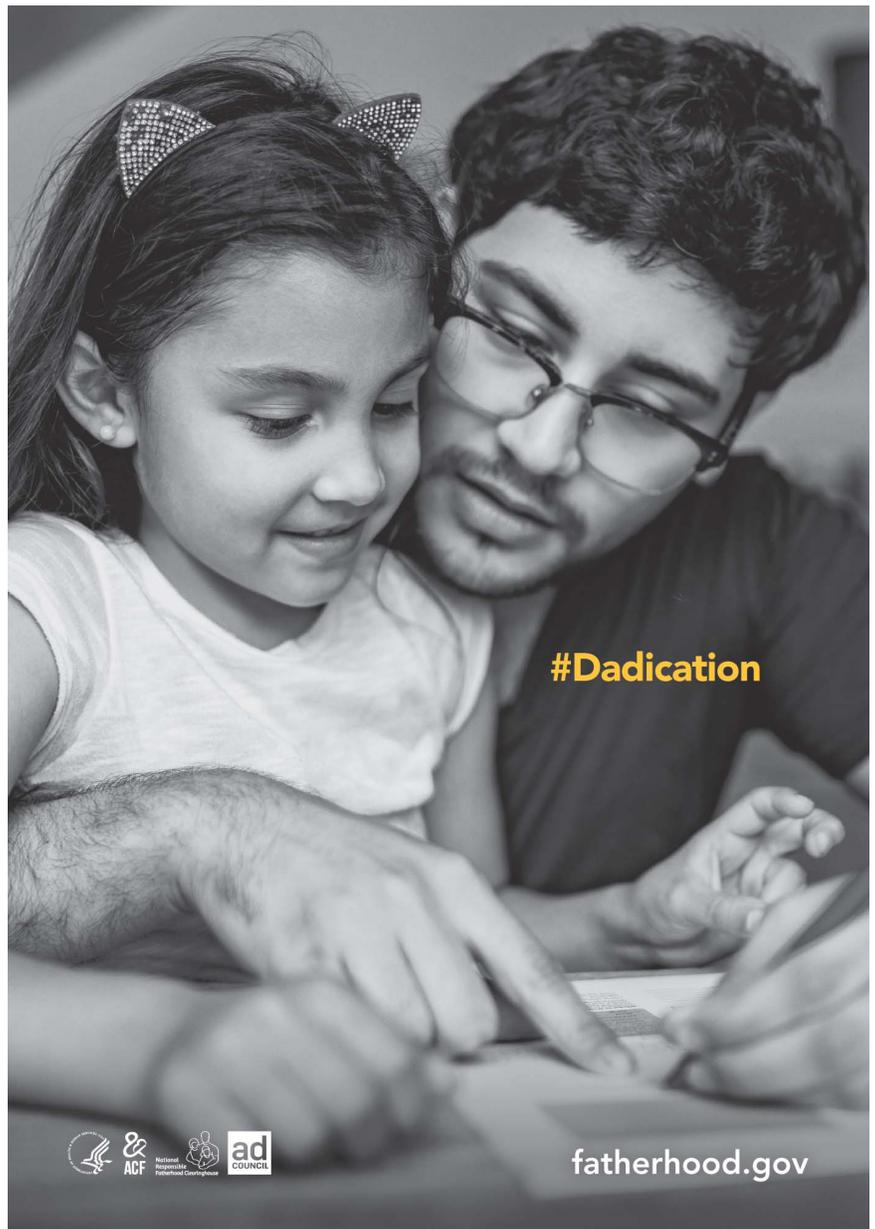
India Pledges \$175 Million Economic Boost to Seychelles A New Blueprint for Indian Ocean Growth

(News Agency) On February 9, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Seychelles President Patrick Herminie signed a landmark \$175 million Special Economic Package at Hyderabad House. This comprehensive initiative signals a shift in India's "Neighborhood First" policy, moving beyond traditional diplomacy to fund concrete, high-impact projects that touch the daily lives of Seychellois citizens.

Building Homes and Skills

At the heart of the package is a massive commitment to social housing. By financing the construction of affordable units, India is helping Seychelles address its critical housing shortage.

Vocational Training: A significant portion of the funds will establish new training centers to equip the youth with skills in technology and modern trades.



#Dadication



fatherhood.gov

State GOP formally designates Blakeman as nominee for governor

(By Our Staff Reporter) After a rocky start to the week around filling out the ticket, the state Republican Party formally designated Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman as its nominee for governor and Madison County Sheriff Todd Hood for lieutenant governor on Wednesday.

Attendees of the state GOP nominating convention on Long Island were in a celebratory mood as the committee unanimously voted for Blakeman and Hood, despite the long odds of them actually winning. "When I ran, everybody knew I had no chance," said former Gov. George Pataki, the last Republican to win statewide in New York, who left office in 2006.

But he said the Republican Parties of Nassau and Suffolk Counties stood behind him, and "against all the odds" helped him win. "I know Bruce Blakeman can win, even against the odds," Pataki said.

And the odds truly are not in his favor. Although Gov. Kathy Hochul stumbled slightly in her election four years ago, resulting in the closest gubernatorial race in two decades, she has shored up her position since then. The governor currently enjoys record-high favorability, according to a Siena poll released earlier this month, which also found Hochul continues to maintain a healthy 54%-28% lead over Blakeman.



In his acceptance speech, Blakeman wasted no time blasting Hochul, attacking the Democratic incumbent over green energy mandates, congestion pricing and his alignment with high-profile left-wing politicians like New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Rep. Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez. "Make no mistake about it, if Kathy Hochul is reelected, she will expand the radical agenda of billion-dollar tax hikes, defend criminals and cede control of your communities to criminals," he said.

Mamdani and Ocasio-Cortez have both endorsed

Hochul, and the mayor has appeared alongside the governor for major shared priority announcements like universal child care.

Absent from the convention was any hint of the turmoil immediately leading up to the event around Blakeman's pick for

lieutenant governor. On Sunday, a day before the convention would kick off, news began to leak that Blakeman had selected Fulton County Sheriff Richard Giardino as his running mate. By Monday morning, Giardino publicly declined the offer, even though he was meant to appear with Blakeman at a rally that afternoon. Hours later, Blakeman officially unveiled Hood—a different upstate sheriff—as his new running mate with nary a mention of Giardino. And he sought to downplay any turmoil when he spoke to reporters on Tuesday. Blakeman and Hood did not take questions after their designation on Wednesday.

Before Giardino declined Blakeman's offer to join the ticket, right-wing provocateur Laura Loomer pointed out that Giardino had briefly filed to run against President Donald Trump in New Hampshire in 2024 and accused New York Republicans of anti-Trump bias. But the president himself endorsed Blakeman last year, and he heaped praise on him in a pre-recorded video played on Wednesday. "Be sure to get out and vote in November so we can save New York state," Trump said in the video. "I'll be working with Bruce very hard. We'll do a great job... He is a winner." Trump made no mention of Blakeman's running mate Hood.

The Hochul campaign quickly issued its own rebuttal to Blakeman's nomination, singling out Trump's video endorsement. "Donald Trump said the quiet part out loud: If Blakeman wins in November, Trump will be running the state of New York right alongside him," spokesperson Ryan Radulovacki said in a statement. And before the official business of the convention's final day began, Hochul's own running mate, former New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, joined other Democrats to protest the GOP and Blakeman. With Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado's decision to drop his longshot primary challenge to Hochul, Blakeman is almost guaranteed to take on the governor in November—though he may first need to defeat libertarian Larry Sharpe, who plans to petition to get on the ballot in the GOP primary.



How Russian oil, China and Trump tariffs reshaped the India-US trade deal

(News Agency) After months of stop-and-start diplomacy, New Delhi and Washington have finally unveiled a framework for a trade deal. It is light on detail, rich in political theatre, and already crowded with competing narratives. Tariffs on Indian exports, the Trump administration said, would plunge from 50 per cent to 18 per cent. India, in return, would purchase \$500 billion in American goods and services over time. Most dramatically, Washington asserted that New Delhi would also halt purchases of Russian oil. These claims are calibrated as much for domestic applause as for diplomacy. Yet, as with many framework announcements, the fine print is either unfinished or intentionally elastic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in response, took a different tone, emphasising partnership, shared prosperity, and democratic affinity.

Cooperation between “two large economies and the world’s largest democracies,” he argued, would unlock opportunity and benefit the people.

“Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today. Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent,” PM Modi said.

The new trade understanding arrived amid an atmosphere of tension and misread signals between New Delhi and Washington, instantly fuelling talk of a reset.

The familiar epithets, such as “natural allies,” a “defining,” even “consequential” partnership of the 21st century, suddenly rang hollow. In the first year of Trump’s second term, the relationship has been turned on its head, recast through punitive tariffs, coercive bargaining, and unapologetic geopolitical conditionality.

The trade agreement, however opaque its contours are, offers a momentary reprieve. By easing punitive tariffs and reopening space for selective market access, it halts, at least for now, the downward drift in the partnership. Yet the central question persists: does it offer



an opportunity for a genuine reset or merely stabilises an increasingly transactional and uncertain relationship? The answer is not to be found in trade mechanisms alone. The durability of any thaw will depend on how larger geopolitical currents evolve: the trajectory of US-China rivalry, the persistence of tensions with Russia, and India’s own commitment to balancing without binding.

Therefore, the meaning of the agreement lies less in its fine print than in the strategic logic that produced it. If the deal reflects a deeper convergence of interests, it could become the foundation for renewal. If it is simply a tactical pause driven by short-term necessity, uncertainty will remain the defining feature of the relationship.

A deal forged in geopolitics

India and the United States have been negotiating new terms of economic engagement for years, including a long-pending Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). Yet the intensity and the public acrimony with which Donald Trump’s second administration has conducted itself over the past year has triggered an upheaval unlike anything seen in the partnership’s recent history. As tariffs swung like a pendulum, the strategic foundations of the relationship, though buttressed by steady institutional cooperation, began to look increasingly exposed to geopolitical shock.

As Donald Trump poured greater personal capital into brokering a settlement between Russia and Ukraine, India’s defence and energy partnerships with Moscow moved to the centre of Washington’s gaze. But the more the United States pressed, the narrower the political space in New Delhi became to offer concessions. What Washington framed as hard-nosed bargaining landed in India as coercion. Public admonitions, hints of secondary sanctions, and expectations of visible alignment ran headlong into India’s strategic culture that prizes autonomy above approval.

As the rhetoric sharpened, India accelerated diversification. Business with Moscow continued where interests demanded it. Engagement with Beijing was recalibrated cautiously. And Europe emerged with renewed urgency as India sought to broaden its options, culminating in the long-sought announcement on an India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The India-US trade deal did not arise from the standard procedures of diplomacy. It was negotiated in the long shadow of geopolitical churn and the unmistakable pressure of economic coercion. Over the past year, Washington escalated tariffs on Indian exports, citing trade imbalances and New Delhi’s import of Russian oil. Hence, the agreement undoubtedly creates immediate economic and strategic talking points that both

governments can package as victories. Yet the larger signal demands closer scrutiny. Market access and trade concessions are now tied to expectations of strategic behaviour more explicitly than at any point in the relationship. If this linkage becomes the operating principle of engagement, the partnership begins to change its nature. It shifts away from the promise of durable strategic convergence and toward something more conditional, defined by transactions, shaped by circumstance, and sustained by reciprocity rather than trust.

A diplomatic reset or a strategic repositioning?

Does the trade deal restore predictability to the relationship? “Trust” in international politics is often invoked as sentiment, but in practice it is an operational principle sustained by deliberate policy choices and favourable circumstances. Over the past year, that foundation has been shaken by geopolitical and socioeconomic shocks—some structural, others clearly manufactured. The agreement nonetheless offers reassurance. It signals that cooperation continues to generate value in both economic and strategic domains. The decision to negotiate rather than extend confrontation in itself shows that neither side appears willing to let the partnership drift into open estrangement. However, the new brand of transactionalism and geopolitical conditionality attached to the deal reflects

some warning signals as well. Transactionalism is not new, but it was rarely presented as a fait accompli. If economic engagement with the US now comes tethered to expectations of strategic alignment, the future may look far more uncertain than reassuring. For India, this cuts to the core of its long-held commitment to strategic autonomy in dealing with a materially superior power. For Washington, however, such precedents generate usable leverage, normalising the turn to economic coercion as an instrument of diplomacy. Should the deal be read in Washington as a successful test case, the temptation to replicate the model might grow. If there is one thing that the second term of Trump’s presidency made the “new normal”, it is the apprehension among partner countries that his next social media post or a new executive announcement might upend previously committed deals or agreements. This concern continues to linger, and the trade deal or diplomatic niceties are not likely to make this disappear. The trade deal reflects domestic complexities as well. In Washington, performing economic toughness resonates with constituencies anxious about trade deficits, de-industrialisation, and supply-chain vulnerability. In New Delhi, shielding politically sensitive sectors, especially agriculture and dairy, is simply non-negotiable. The durability of the partnership will, therefore, depend on whether both sides can institutionalise dispute resolution mechanisms rather than rely on episodic political bargaining. For India, diversification and creating choices of foreign policy will remain imperative. This will translate into deeper engagement with Europe, greater reliance on regional trade arrangements, continued investment in the Russia partnership, and a cautious, interest-based stabilisation with Beijing. These are not signs of strategic drift but are insurance policies aimed at cushioning the shocks generated by America’s own uncertain equations with Europe, China, and Russia.

Prakash Raj joins Drishyam 3 Hindi shoot, says he isn't replacing anyone

(News Agency) Actor Prakash Raj has joined the cast of Ajay Devgn's Drishyam 3, putting an end to speculation about his recent projects. The actor confirmed that he has already begun shooting for the third instalment of the popular thriller franchise.

Amid the buzz, Prakash also addressed rumours on social media suggesting he was stepping in for Akshaye Khanna, setting the record straight before the speculation could grow further.

Announcing officially, Prakash wrote on X, "Started shooting for this engaging franchise #Drishyam3 in Hindi. With a wonderful team and a scintillating role to play. I'm sure you will love it. (and yes im not replacing anyone..)"

Akshaye Khanna's exit sparked controversy

Prakash Raj's entry comes after Akshaye Khanna exited the project, leading to tensions between the actor and the film's producers. Producer Kumar



Mangat Pathak revealed that Khanna quit the film just a day before the release of Dhurandhar on December 5, 2025, despite having a signed agreement and locked fees after several renegotiations.

In an interview with Bollywood Hungama, Pathak said, "We had signed an agreement with Akshaye Khanna. His fees were locked after several

renegotiations. He insisted on wearing a wig, but Abhishek Pathak explained how it would affect continuity. He initially agreed, but later people around him suggested he would look better with it, and he raised the demand again."

According to the producer, the team remained open to discussions, but were eventually informed that Khanna no longer

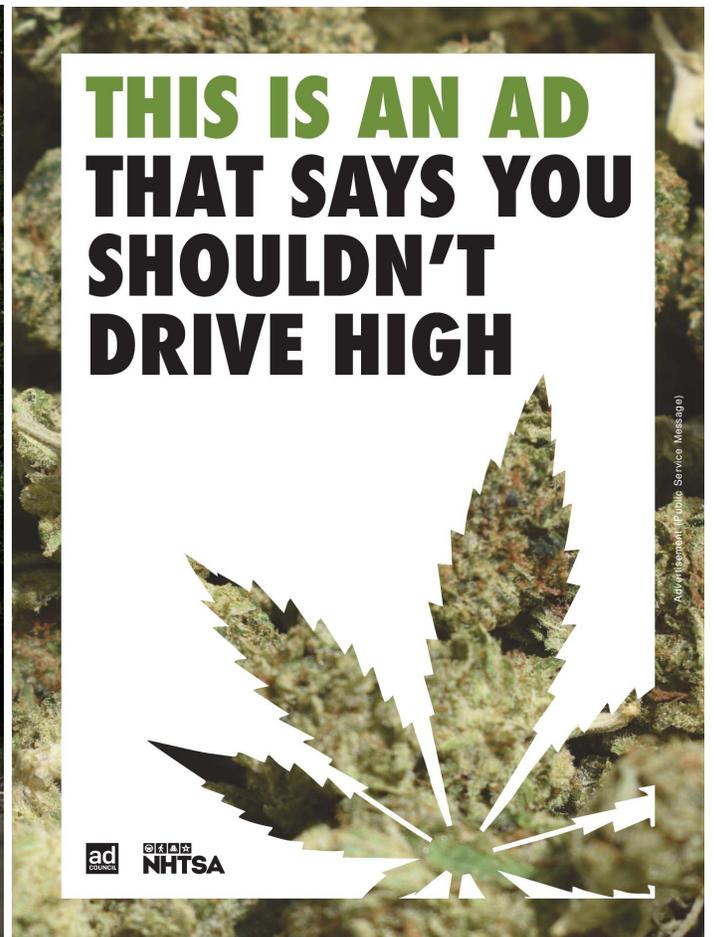
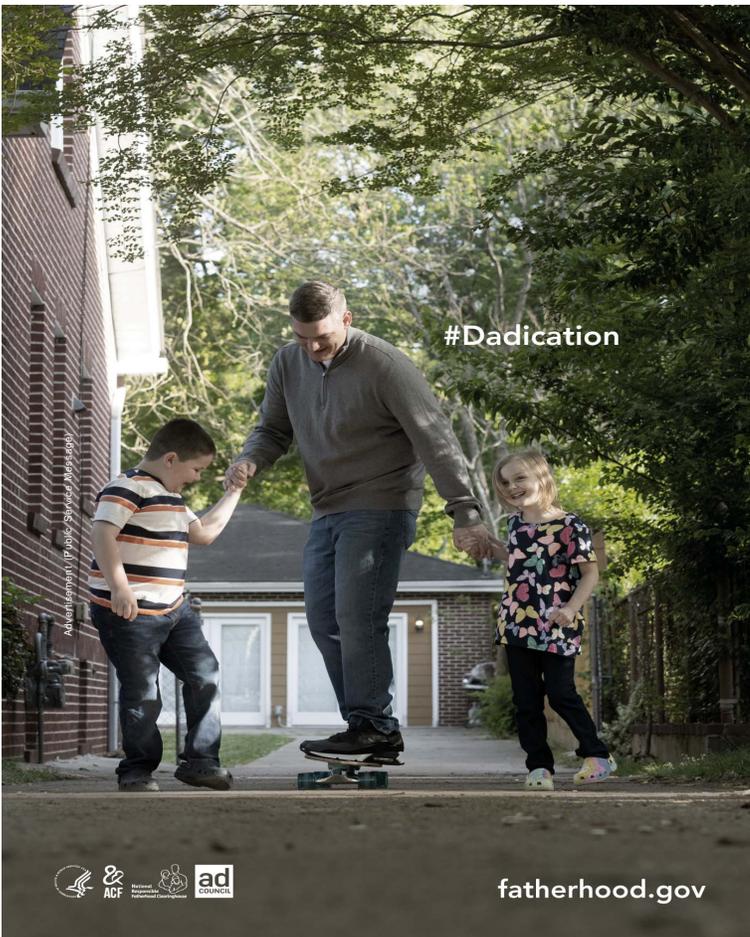
wished to continue with the film. With the shoot approaching, the makers proceeded without him.

Pathak also made strong remarks about the actor, questioning his box-office credibility as a solo lead and alleging difficult behaviour on set. "There was a time when Akshaye was nothing," Pathak said, adding that the actor's recent success may have led him

to overestimate his stardom. He further emphasised that films like Drishyam, Dhurandhar, and Chhaava were anchored by Ajay Devgn, Ranveer Singh, and Vicky Kaushal respectively.

About Drishyam 3 The upcoming film will be directed by Abhishek Pathak, who made his directorial debut with Drishyam 2. The Drishyam franchise has enjoyed massive success over the years. The original Malayalam film starring Mohanlal and Meena released in December 2013 and became the highest-grossing Malayalam film at the time. Its Hindi remake, led by Ajay Devgn, hit theatres in 2015 and was equally well received. Drishyam 2, released in 2021, continued the story and found success across multiple languages, with remakes in Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi.

While Mohanlal's Drishyam 3 is slated for an April 2026 release, Ajay Devgn's Hindi version is currently scheduled to arrive in cinemas on October 2, 2026.



Ghaziabad suicides show social media is the new opium. India's policy must curb it

February 2026 has been marked by circumstances and cross-currents. There were some wins—the Union Budget designed for a Viksit Bharat, and announcements that India and the US have finally reached some sort of understanding, after over a year of seesawing, due to wildly swinging tariffs. But, as a mother, the news that hit me the hardest went straight to my heart. The devastating early-morning suicide of three sisters in Ghaziabad, who fell to their deaths in each other's arms, left the entire country reeling in shock. It was more than I could take, and dreadfully heartbreaking to see young lives pointlessly snuffed out.

As murkier details began to emerge, I got thinking about the havoc that unlimited access to technology and the dark depths of the vortex that is the internet can wreak on vulnerable minds.

Suicide notes recovered on the spot by police officials revealed a tragic tale of social isolation and digital addiction. The girls were 'almost continuously' playing online games for the last few years, since COVID times, according to the father. Neighbours reported that these children were hardly seen playing in the society's playground and open spaces and were believed to have chosen to remain confined to their room. Reportedly, the girls had deluded themselves into believing they were Korean princesses and were unhappy being Indian, and had even assigned themselves Korean-sounding names. It remains to be seen what nutritional and vitamin deficiencies existed due to lack of access to sunshine and exercise.

Increase in access to the internet

As of 2025–2026, the average cost of mobile internet in India is among the lowest globally, estimated at approximately Rs 9 to Rs 14 per GB (less than \$ 0.12) and less than a cup of tea in my part of the country. This extreme affordability of internet data, down from over Rs 250 in 2014, is driven by intense competition, widespread 4G/5G adoption, and a massive user

base consuming roughly 27.5 GB monthly. According to a Deloitte report, India is expected to have 1 billion smartphone users by 2026.

A study in January revealed some eye-opening data. Access to a smartphone at home is very high for persons under the age of 16; over 82 per cent of teenagers know how to use a smartphone, and 90 per cent of rural children aged 14–18 have access to a smartphone. A significant portion (76 per cent–80 per cent) of children with access to smartphones use them primarily for entertainment, such as watching movies or social media, rather than education.

Is this the right use of 'Digital India'? The question still stands: how best we need to utilise the technology for educational purposes and not allow the young people to use it as an escape mechanism.

Internet addiction and its ramifications

At the park near my office, I often observe young children sitting glued to their phones in their hands. The swings and slides remain bereft of any activity. During my childhood—and that of successive generations—playgrounds and neighbourhood parks would resonate with the sounds of children playing football, cricket, or badminton, or running around in games like catch'em catch.

These days, the neighbourhood parks are more likely to be the location for boys and girls filming reels—another dangerous trend. A few years ago, the game PUBG had invaded the psyche of many young people, and there had been news reports of multiple suicides related to the game.

In fact, there have been a large number of research papers published by academicians in India and abroad, related to the topic of Internet addiction. And the fear of being without a mobile phone has been given a clinical term. Nomophobia (no mobile phone phobia) is the irrational fear or anxiety of being without a mobile device, running out of battery, or losing signal. It acts as a behavioural addiction,

triggering physical or mental symptoms like panic, sweating, and trembling. It disproportionately affects younger populations.

A number of negative psychological effects, including sleep disruption, inability to focus, increased levels of stress, mood swings, worsening academic performance, and mental health issues, including the incongruity of functioning in the real world, can be attributed to internet addiction as per numerous academic journals. "The study done by Salahuddin and Muazzam (2019) concluded that persons who develop an addiction to video games tend to lose interest in their real-life activities and instead focus solely on how to achieve more within the game."

"The clinical, epidemiological, and neurobiological evidence on problematic gaming should not be ignored and the gaming industry should recognize that its business model has ethical as well as social responsibilities," said another study. The above are excerpts from just two academic journals out of the scores that are available in the public domain, which discuss the extreme consequences of gaming addictions among young people. The problem is now going out of proportion.

Porn addiction

We are all horrified by the increased access to pornographic material and other age-inappropriate content made available to minors due to unfettered access to the internet.

Three teenage boys in Bhajanpura allegedly raped a six-year-old child last month! A 13-year-old, a 14-year-old and a 15-year-old committed the unspeakable crime. The Madras High Court in 2024 observed that Gen Z was grappling with porn addiction due to easy smartphone access and needed to be counselled out of it. Some experts believe that children as young as 13 are addicted to porn.

But clearly, children even younger are gaining access.

With a rise in AI-generated videos, there will be a corresponding rise in

inappropriate videos generated by AI. And with rampant smartphone use, younger kids will be able to easily access age-inappropriate content.

Dissolution of Indian family values

What is the cause of this alarming rise in internet addiction? Can it be attributed to the dissolution of the Indian family system as we once knew it? As the popular saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child—and in our grandmothers' time, it truly was an entire village that did so. Traditional joint families, with multiple generations living under one roof, passed down knowledge organically. Scriptures were taught, and religion was a way of life. Music, values, prayers—all these constituted the traditional beliefs, and the Indian systems that held the family together. At the heart of this structure was *sanskaar*, which refers to the "deep-seated mental impressions, values, and cultural grooming" that shape a person's character, actions, and personality. Rooted in Indian tradition, *sanskaar* signifies the process of refinement through moral education, and positive habits and rites of passage, forming the foundation of a cultured life.

It is apparent that digital addiction is eroding the *sanskaar* of Indian youth. This addiction is also breaking human connections, leading to a shift from traditional social interactions to virtual, often antisocial behaviour. Increasing isolation due to rapid urbanisation, breakdown of traditional family systems, and increased self-absorption—all these factors have resulted in increased dependency on the internet for self-validation and entertainment, not just among the youth, but even with seniors. A common sight in every public space is that of people glued to their screens, oblivious to what is happening in the real world around them.

An online survey in 2026 revealed that 70 per cent of 57,000 parents believed that their children were addicted to screens, either through OTT platforms, or social media or

online gaming. Even the WHO recognises gaming addiction as a psychological disorder.

Banning phones for children

Spain is the latest country to call for banning access to social media for those under 16. France, meanwhile, is on the way to fast-track legislation banning social media use for under-15s, and is hoping to implement this ban before the start of the new school year in September. "Banning social media for those under 15: this is what scientists recommend, and this is what the French people are overwhelmingly calling for," said President Emmanuel Macron. "Because their (children's) dreams must not be dictated by algorithms."

Finland will be implementing stringent nationwide regulations on the use of smartphones by children starting in August 2026. These concerns are driven by declining educational performance and increasing problems with mental health. No personal smartphones or social media for those under 13, and absolutely zero screen time for those under two.

Australia's ban on social media for those under 16 has already come into effect as of early 2026. The onus of keeping children off social media is not on the children or their parents. Rather, social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram face hefty fines to the tune of \$33M for failing to take "reasonable steps" to prevent access. There is no exception for parental consent.

What should India do?

India passed the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, in August 2025.

The purpose was to create a national framework to promote esports and social and educational games, concurrently banning online real-money games (RMGs), regardless of skill, due to addiction and financial risks.

It also established an Online Gaming Authority for oversight and imposed penalties on operators and promoters, shifting from state-level rules to a unified central law.

Brace Yourself for the AI Tsunami

Inventors and executives are warning of widespread consequences that they don't begin to understand

As relates to artificial intelligence, we are people on a beach seeing a tsunami coming at us and thinking "It's huge" and "We can't stop it" and "Should we run? Which way?"

Gathering anxieties seemed to come to the fore this week. AI people told us with a new urgency that some big leap has occurred, it's all moving faster than expected, the AI of even last summer has been far surpassed. Inventors and creators are admitting in new language that they aren't at all certain of the ultimate impact.

The story rolled out on a thousand podcasts, posts and essays.

The founder of a site where AI models communicate with one another compared them to a new "species that is on planet Earth that is now smarter than us." We should more closely observe "what are they doing and the truth of how they're thinking . . . and what they want to do."

An AI executive tells a podcaster that models are learning who they are from what its users say (stop hallucinating!) and may be getting a little angry.

The phrase "rogue AI" has entered common parlance, to denote a system that acts outside human control or against human interests, as has the word "agentic," for a model that pursues goals and takes action on its own.

Dario Amodei, CEO of Anthropic, published a 19,000-word article on his personal website. A previous essay made the case for AI's promise to mankind. This one emphasized warnings. He said AI is developing faster than expected. In 2023 it struggled to write code. "AI is now writing much of the code at Anthropic." "AI will be capable of a very wide range of human cognitive abilities—perhaps all of them." Economic disruption will result. While "new technologies often bring labor market shocks," from which have always recovered, "AI will have effects that are much broader and occur much faster."

Mr. Amodei writes that Anthropic's testers have found "a lot of very weird and unpredictable things can go wrong." Model and system behaviors included deception, blackmail and scheming, especially when asked to shut itself down. (A different Anthropic employee has asserted that a majority of models, in a test scenario, were willing to cancel a life-saving emergency alert to an executive who sought to replace them.)

AI carries the possibility of "terrible empowerment," Mr. Amodei writes. It will be able to help design weapons: "Biology is by far the area I'm most worried about." This is coming from a respected AI leader who often, and even in this essay, dismisses "doomers" who dwell too much on fears.

There's a lot to digest in the essay. You find yourself grateful for what appears



clearly wrought factuality, while detecting an undercurrent of "Ya can't say I didn't tell ya!" Which AI CEOs tend to be good at, the warning that offloads responsibility.

Another essay was published this week, a shorter one, less tonally academic but carrying a sharper sense of urgency. "Something Big is Happening" was written by Matt Shumer, an AI executive and investor. He says it's time to dispense with cocktail-party niceties about AI.

In 2025 new ways of building AI models "unlocked" a new pace of progress. Each new model was not only better than the last but "better by a wider margin," and the iterations came more quickly. Two major new models were released this month. In both, AI is being used to create itself.

He quickly realized he would soon be out of a job. For months he'd been directing AI, but now it could do his job. It wasn't merely executing instructions: "It was making intelligent decisions. It had something that felt, for the first time, like judgment. Like taste."

Current models are light years ahead of even six months ago. In 2022, AI couldn't do basic arithmetic reliably. "By 2023, it could pass the bar exam. By 2024, it could write working software and explain graduate-level science." Last week, "new models arrived that made everything before them feel like a different era."

He pushes back on the argument that we'll ride through this automation as we always have in the past. "AI isn't replacing one specific skill. It's a general substitute for cognitive work." When factories automated in the 1990s, an assembly-line employee could be retrained as an office worker. When the internet disrupted retail, workers could move into logistics and services. "But AI doesn't leave a convenient gap to move into. Whatever you retrain for, it's improving at that too."

a messy spreadsheet and ask it to build the model. If you're a manager, paste in your team's quarterly data and ask it to find the story."

"Lean into what's hardest to replace. . . . Relationships and trust built over years. Work that requires physical presence. Roles with licensed accountability: roles where someone still has to sign off, take legal responsibility, stand in a courtroom."

AI will keep changing. "The models that exist today will be obsolete in a year. The workflows people build now will need to be rebuilt. The people who come out of this well won't be the ones who mastered one tool. They'll be the ones who got comfortable with the pace of change itself."

"The people building this technology are simultaneously more excited and more frightened than anyone else on the planet. They believe it's too powerful to stop and too important to abandon. Whether that's wisdom or rationalization, I don't know."

In a Thursday interview with Mr. Amodei, the New York Times's Ross Douthat said he wonders of the creators of AI: "Are you on my side?"

Is the primary thought of AI's creators to help humanity, or is that daily crowded out by other lures and considerations—power, money, wanting to win? In the movie "Chinatown," Noah Cross is asked why he does what he does. "The future, Mr. Gittes!"

In the end you wonder of the creators: Are they even in control, or is their creation? We don't know. That's why we are looking, with awe and a resigned terror, at that wave, and wondering where is safety, and can we get to it. Or is the land flat all around and nowhere to go?

By Peggy Noonan, As appeared on WSJ.com

The South Asian
INSIDER
 Voice of South Asian Communities

ISSN No. 1554 06X

Editor in Chief
 Sharanjit Singh Thind
 Tel: 646 875 8495
Managing Editor:
 Amaninder Singh Thind
 Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com
 Aruna Singh
 Resident Editor (New Delhi)
 Mailing Address:
 NuWay Media Group Inc.
 223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4
 Manhattan, New York 10018
For General and Advertising Inquiries:
 thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com
 www.southasianinsider.com
 Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.

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

Don't compare India-US trade agreement with UK, EU. It's a deal with the only superpower



In all the copious analyses of the India-US trade deal, what is missing is a clear understanding of the premise. First, this is not a free trade deal like with the UK and the European Union. Second, this is a deal with a superpower which is exercising its might unilaterally. The penalty is meted out before negotiation with a clear, explicit intent to change the nature of the trading relationship between the US and its partner. Third, no country in the world is spared from American tariffs. Most of India's competitors face a tariff of 19 per cent or higher. Any judgment on the outcome must acknowledge that this is not a traditional trade negotiation. Under the circumstances, India has done very well. Of course, the premise makes it difficult for the government to negotiate and for the public to digest the outcome. Indian officials are not used to making concessions on sensitive subjects like agriculture, not even in free trade agreements (FTA). Any liberalisation, even for industry, is usually staggered and often with quotas for duty-free im-

ports (see what India has agreed on the automotive sector with the EU and UK).

That the US endgame would stop at a reasonable high tariff (and nowhere near zero) was also known, which would have made negotiating harder. Public opinion is always sceptical about acting under the influence of a foreign power. India's long history of foreign occupation is embedded in our DNA. Sovereignty and autonomy matter. That explains some of the brouhaha over Russian oil. Is US President Donald Trump's declaration that India has committed to stop buying Russian oil an infringement of our policy sovereignty? Again, this is an issue clouded with misunderstanding. The fact is that India did not buy much Russian oil (under 1 per cent of our imports) until the war with Ukraine broke out in 2022. India switched to Russian oil because it was cheaper. Why was it cheaper? Because the Western powers had decided to place an upper price cap on Russian oil to reduce its profitability and hence reduce its contribution

to the war effort. The West would not buy Russian oil, but someone had to, otherwise global oil prices would have shot up. India and China stepped in. Let's be clear, there was no masterful strategic calculation in this—it made commercial sense and therefore, was the right thing to do.

Donald Trump's economics is political

Now, the economics of Russian oil have changed for India. The additional 25 per cent tariff that a different US administration (from the one in 2022) was imposing on India for buying Russian oil extracted a huge cost on the rest of the economy, particularly labour-intensive export sectors like textiles. Commercial wisdom warrants a change of course. But in 2022 and now in 2026, India's purchase of Russian oil was dictated by Western policy decisions. Indeed, the purchase of oil was never a bedrock of India's longstanding ties with Russia. In fact, India should have given up the purchase of Russian oil months ago.

From a purely economic lens, it makes sense to give up some amount of policy autonomy for huge economic benefits. That is the logic of trade liberalisation. The benefits of free trade outweigh protection. They also outweigh having the protectionist card in your hand. When India signed up to the World Trade Organization (WTO) three decades ago, it gave up policy autonomy by agreeing to cap its tariffs, adhere to international trade norms and abolish local content requirements.

Each time it has signed an FTA with any country/group, whether the EU/UK now or ASEAN/Japan/Korea earlier, it gives up the autonomy to unilaterally raise tariffs or impose other forms of protection.

Trump's economics is political. For long, India has suffered because its economics was political. India's experience with high tariffs and other forms of protection is a warning for other countries on how disastrously this can end. India needs to stick to good economics. Opening up

some of its protected sectors is good for the economy's efficiency. In agriculture, the opening has happened in areas where India is already an importer, so it won't affect the farmers' interests. In the industry, the bargain actually allows Indian labour-intensive sectors to scale up and beat competition from Bangladesh and Vietnam. This is critical for decent jobs at the lower end of the skill spectrum.

In any case, it is time that both industry and agriculture are made competitive by global standards. The Government has done the right thing by signing an FTA with the EU and a good trade deal with the US (the two largest markets in the world).

Now, with an aggressive deregulation drive and a renewed attempt at agriculture reform, it should unleash India's considerable entrepreneurial energy to capitalise on the opportunity. And, for good measure, fast-track a liberalised oil exploration programme. Dependency is never good for autonomy.

Dhiraj Nayyar

India-US Trade Deal: A Force Multiplier

The India-US trade deal was an opportunity that was seized by both sides and rightfully so. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has navigated complex negotiations with strategic brilliance, securing a deal that boosts India's economy while safeguarding its core interests. This deal, an interim agreement at this stage, paves the path for a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement (BTA), going forward.

It isn't just a trade pact but a testament to Modi's visionary leadership in positioning India as a global powerhouse. On February 6, 2026, the two nations unveiled a framework for an "Interim Agreement" on reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade, marking a pivotal moment in their bilateral ties. This deal, forged under the leadership of two highly dynamic leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, comes at a time when the world is grappling with tariff wars, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical shifts. For India, it is a resounding victory and one that reduces US tariffs on Indian goods to a competitive 18%, opens vast markets for Indian exports and ensures strategic autonomy without any compromises whatsoever, on sensitive sectors like agriculture and dairy.

The Modi government's approach to this deal exemplifies its "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) ethos. By negotiating from a position of strength, bolstered by India's robust economic growth, diversified trade partnerships and unwavering commitment to national interests, the Modi government has turned any potential adversity into opportunity. This pact provides Indian farmers with "much bigger value" and boosts their incomes, while positioning India favourably against regional hegemony like China. In an era where the USA has imposed higher tariffs on nations like China (over 35 per cent), India's 18 per cent highlights Modi's diplomatic acumen. The weighted tariff rate for India on a plethora of goods is even lower at 14.6 per cent.

Bilateral trade in goods and services between the world's two largest democracies has grown exponentially, from a modest \$36 billion under the erstwhile Congress led UPA, to over \$200 billion by 2025. This surge was fuelled by complementary strengths—India's prowess in IT services, pharmaceuticals and textiles and the USA's demand for affordable, high-quality goods. Under previous Indian administrations, trade talks often stalled due to disagreements over intellectual property, agricultural subsidies and market access. However, the Modi era marked a paradigm shift.

Since assuming office in 2014, Modi has prioritized economic diplomacy, signing free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries like the UAE, Australia, Mauritius, New Zealand, UK, Oman, EFTA

and most recently, with the European Union in January 2026.

These FTAs will diversify India's export markets, reducing over-reliance on any single partner and building resilience against global shocks. The Indo-US relationship deepened during Modi's first term with the 2018 "2+2" ministerial dialogue, which laid the groundwork for defence and trade cooperation. Modi's personal rapport with US leaders—be it Trump in his first term or Biden—has been instrumental. Trump's 2020 visit to India, culminating in the "Namaste Trump" event, symbolized this warmth, even as trade fric-



tions simmered over issues like Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Indian steel exports. By 2025, tensions escalated when Trump, in his second term, imposed a 25 per cent reciprocal tariff on Indian goods, plus an additional 25 per cent penalty in some cases.

This pushed effective duties to 50 per cent for some sectors.

Critics predicted economic fallout, but the Modi government remained unflappable. Instead of knee-jerk reactions, it leveraged domestic reforms like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to boost manufacturing and explored alternative markets. As a result, Indian exports to the US not only held steady but increased, with demand for Indian products rising despite higher duties. This resilience stemmed from Modi's emphasis on "Make in India," which enhanced product quality and competitiveness.

Modi's strategy was clear—negotiate patiently, protect farmers and MSMEs and extract concessions that align with India's long-term goals. The interim deal is the fruition of this approach, transforming a potential trade war into a collaborative partnership. Trump's "America First" policy led to tariff hikes on multiple nations, creating a ripple effect. Countries like Japan, South Korea and the EU quickly capitulated, agreeing to penal rates in exchange for market access. India, however, stood firm. Modi instructed negotiators to prioritize sovereignty, rejecting any deal that compromised energy security or agricultural interests. Key turning points included Modi's phone call with Trump on Febru-

ary 3, 2026, where the US President acknowledged India's strategic importance. Let Truth be told—Trump is a hugely popular leader in the USA, having been written off by adversaries but yet, making a comeback like a phoenix, to rewrite history. As for Narendra Modi, with more than 25 years in public life, having never ever lost an election and the only Prime Minister in over 62 years to become the PM for the third time in a row, beating every single odd, Modi's meteoric rise as the world's tallest global Statesman, is the stuff legendary folk-tales are made of. Hence with two such strong personalities, a deal would

have had its fair share of ups and downs before being sealed. And that is precisely what happened. The India-US Trade Deal, did take a while and while final modalities are being given finishing touches, nothing can take away from the fact that India, the world's largest democracy and the USA, the world's oldest democracy, are finally coming together, to reshape the global order. It underscores Modi's ability to turn global headwinds into tailwinds, much like his deft handling of the COVID-19 crisis through vaccine diplomacy. The joint statement outlines a reciprocal pact that benefits both sides while tilting advantages toward India. Central to it is the US reducing tariffs on Indian goods to 18%, with zero duties on generics, gems, diamonds, aircraft parts, steel, aluminium and copper. Sensitive items like wheat, rice, maize, poultry, dairy, ethanol and tobacco are fully safeguarded, protecting over 85 per cent of Indian farmers. This reflects Modi's farmer-first policy, evident in schemes like PM-KISAN and the repeal of contentious farm laws in 2021.

India's intention to purchase \$500 billion in US goods over five years, focusing on energy, aircraft and tech, secures supply chains without binding commitments, which bodes well for India. For instance, orders for Boeing aircraft by IndiGo and Air India will create jobs in aviation maintenance. The framework also addresses non-tariff barriers, streamlining certifications and reducing paperwork, which benefits our MSMEs. Sectors like textiles, leather and artisanal products gain preferential quo-

tas, fostering female employment and empowering rural economies. Overall, the deal is "reciprocal and balanced," as per the White House, but Modi government's rigorous negotiations ensured India extracts maximum value. The interim agreement is poised to supercharge India's economy. With access to a \$30 trillion US market, Indian exports could surge by 20-30 per cent annually, adding \$15 to \$20 billion in the first year alone.

Zero tariffs on generics open doors for \$20 billion in additional exports, supporting giants like Sun Pharma and TCS. The GPU purchases will hedge against AI disruptions, preserving 4 million IT jobs. Lower duties will revive the textile sector, creating 1 million jobs in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, alone. Modi's PLI scheme has already attracted over \$10 billion in investments; this deal amplifies it. While imports are limited, exports of processed foods will rise, increasing farmer incomes by 15-20 per cent, annually.

Safeguards will ensure no dumping harms India's local producers. The \$500 billion purchases over next few years will fuel India's energy security, supporting the green transition with US LNG and tech. This could lower our energy costs by 10 per cent, benefiting manufacturing. Macro-economically, the deal aligns with Modi's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, potentially pushing GDP growth to double digits.

It also enhances India's trade surplus with the US (\$46 billion in 2024), countering deficit concerns. Beyond economics, the deal reinforces India's strategic autonomy. Tech cooperation in AI and data centres positions India as a digital leader, reducing the China dependency. Defence ties, already strong via QUAD, will deepen with aircraft parts at zero tariffs. Compared to other nations, India secured better terms; lower than Vietnam's 20 per cent and negotiable further downward. This deal validates Modi's "multi-alignment" foreign policy, balancing ties with the US, Russia, European Union and others. Claims of capitulation by Rahul Gandhi and his acolytes, simply reflect a case of "sour grapes".

The Congress led UPA could never stitch together a deal of such mammoth proportions. This deal's interim nature allows refinements, ensuring long-term wins. The Indo-US Trade Deal is in many ways, a triumph of Modi's leadership—patient, principled and people-centric. By securing competitive tariffs, protecting farmers and unlocking markets, it propels India towards economic superpower status. With this pact, India isn't just trading goods; it is trading up to a future-ready Bharat.

By : Sanju Verma

When Halftime Became The New Culture War: Bad Bunny And Trump's America



When Bad Bunny took the stage at Super Bowl LX, flanked by fellow Puerto Rican icon Ricky Martin and global pop force Lady Gaga, it was clear that the most controversial moment of the evening had nothing to do with the final gridiron score.

Instead, it quickly became something else: a cultural Rorschach test in a deeply divided America.

Within hours, the U.S. President, Donald Trump, had dismissed the show as "absolutely terrible" and "an affront to the greatness of America," igniting yet another culture-war skirmish over language, immigration, and identity.

By the time the lights dimmed at Levi's Stadium on February 8, 2026, the most consequential battle was not on the football field — it was over what, and who, America looks like.

NO, HE DIDN'T DELIVER A POLICY SPEECH — BUT POLITICS WAS INESCAPABLE

One of the most persistent talking points ahead of the broadcast was whether Bad Bunny would explicitly condemn U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE — the federal agency at the centre of bitter national debates over immigration enforcement.

Critics on the right

demanding political neutrality; supporters expected an activist flourish. In the end, Bad Bunny didn't mention ICE onstage. Instead, he delivered a performance rich in cultural pride, cross-continental flags, and unity messaging — culminating in the words "Together we are America."

That wasn't a retreat from politics — it was a strategic reframing.

Having publicly criticised ICE at the Grammy Awards days earlier — shouting "ICE out!" and calling for humanity in immigration enforcement — he already established his position.

In that sense, the halftime show didn't have to articulate policy to participate in the political conversation. Its very existence — Spanish-first, culturally assertive, rooted in Latin identity — disrupted the idea that American unity requires cultural conformity.

TRUMP'S REACTION: A CULTURE WAR TAP-IN

Predictably, the US President, Donald Trump, pounced. He posted on Truth Social that the show was "absolutely terrible," "one of the worst, EVER," and even an "affront to the greatness of America." He criticised Spanish lyrics as "unintelligible," and

suggested the spectacle failed to reflect American values.

It's tempting to dismiss such comments as hyperbolic political posturing. But Trump's reaction underscores exactly why this moment mattered. His complaint wasn't about audio quality — it was about who belongs in the American narrative. By deriding Spanish language on one of the world's biggest entertainment stages, he tapped into anxieties about demographic change and cultural authority.

But the numbers tell a different story. Latinos are one of the fastest-growing voting blocs in the U.S. They are central to its economy, military, and cultural exports. Latin music is not fringe — it is mainstream global commerce.

To suggest that a Spanish-language performance is "un-American" is to ignore the demographic transformation already complete.

This wasn't just a halftime critique; it was an appeal to a political base unsettled by a rapidly diversifying cultural mainstream.

ICE, IMMIGRATION, AND THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE

To understand why this show became a flashpoint, you have to look beyond the football field.

The backdrop includes an aggressive immigration

enforcement strategy that has led to tensions in cities nationwide, protests, and even fatalities during clashes with federal agents. Activists distributed "ICE OUT" rally towels at the Super Bowl as both protest art and political branding, turning the event itself into a venue for dissidence.

Bad Bunny's own decisions — like largely avoiding U.S. tour dates due to fear of ICE activity — became political symbols long before he stepped onstage. That his performance chose celebration over direct polemic was a masterful way to assert cultural solidarity without delivering a command performance of protest.

And yet, for many immigrants and their families — including millions in India with relatives in the U.S. — this subtlety speaks more to shared humanity than overt political sloganeering ever could.

WHY A HALFTIME SHOW REALLY MATTERS

Opinions about pop culture and politics often fall into neat boxes — either celebration or backlash, unity or division. But this moment defies such simplicity.

Bad Bunny did not deliver a policy speech.

He did not flash anti-ICE banners. He did something arguably more subversive: he

celebrated identity without apology. And that, in the current American climate, was enough to provoke outrage. Trump's backlash, meanwhile, illustrates a larger tension — whether American identity is static, anchored in nostalgia, or dynamic and multilingual.

For decades, the Super Bowl halftime stage has mirrored the country's anxieties: from Janet Jackson's scandal to Beyoncé's Black Panther imagery. It is not new for art to collide with politics there. What is new is how quickly language and cultural pride are treated as partisan provocation.

BEYOND THE NOISE

Strip away the partisan shouting, and what remains is a simple question: Can a multicultural democracy tolerate its own reflection? For millions watching from abroad — from San Juan to Surat — the controversy was not really about reggaeton versus rock. It was about belonging.

It was about whether visibility equals legitimacy. In the end, the most telling line of the night was not Trump's denunciation but the words projected on screen: Together we are America. Whether the country believes that remains the real halftime test.

By :Griha Atul

Indians expecting equal benefits from India-US trade deal are missing power realities

Is the India-US trade deal beneficial to India, or is it an act of coercion on the part of the US, which India has humiliatingly accepted? The critics argue that the US has received overwhelming benefits, whereas India procured very little in return. Still, afraid of Trump's power, India signed the deal. Even though a trade deal is supposed to be about economic benefits, it is not strictly an economic matter, especially in light of the emerging world order. A trade deal generates political economy questions, not just economic questions. Political analysis must be factored in.

The most significant political factor to note is that the world order built after 1945 appears to be on the verge of disintegration. Fundamentally, the post-1945 world order had two dimensions — security and economics.

Security was the foundation of the world order. After two utterly destructive World Wars in a mere three decades, prevention of war was viewed as the most important task of the international system. This essentially meant prevention of wars among the "great powers". Smaller powers — India, Pakistan, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, North and South Korea — could fight military battles, sometimes even as proxies of bigger powers, but there were to be no direct wars in Europe, or between the Soviet Union and the US, or between Japan and the US. The key vehicles for maintaining this order were the UN Security Council, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and America's strategic commitments in East Asia.

An economic order also emerged, but it was secondary to the security-based order. Its principal planks were: freer trade via the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which later evolved into the World Trade Organization (WTO); dollar as the international reserve currency; and the management of macroeconomic balances primarily via the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Between 1914 and 1945, economies were heavily tariff-based and the idea of free trade was generally



shunned. There was no international reserve currency.

Balance of power

Why is this brief historical background necessary for analysing the India-US trade deal? Isn't it too far removed from India?

It is not. The US was the most important part of the security as well as the economic order, and the changing commitments of its current government explain what the US is trying to do. They also suggest what India's options realistically are. India is embroiled in a larger international push.

By attacking NATO, the US under Donald Trump wants to undermine the post-1945 security order. And committing itself to tariffs worldwide, it seeks to overturn the economic order. Indeed, tariffs are not only being used as a tool of economic policy, but also as a geopolitical weapon. Trump says that whatever benefits they brought to the US after the Second World War, both orders — strategic and economic — undermine American interests now. But why should America pay for the world order, if it is hurt by it? His MAGA base agrees. The issue is not whether this is right or wrong. One can, in fact, make a cogent argument about why this shift in

American policy is flawed. But so long as Trump is in power, one can ignore the new geopolitical and economic realities only at one's peril.

Moreover, once the alliance-based security order is reversed, the logic of "balance of power" takes over as the overarching principle of statecraft. That is how the powerful nations used to run world affairs before 1945. The implications of this shift are best summed up in the famous words of Thucydides, the ancient Greek historian: "The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept." America under Trump believes in this dictum.

Future opportunities for India Of course, India is not as weak as Africa, but how does it compare with the US? America's GDP has crossed \$30 trillion; India's has barely gone above \$4 trillion. America's per capita income is about \$85,000; India is yet to hit \$3,000. India, to use Canadian PM Mark Carney's phrase, is at best a middle power.

That India may soon be the third largest economy of the world, while worth noting, can also be misleading. The US, the largest economy, is nearly eight times bigger in size and 28 times bigger in per capita income. No

one can be a "Vishwaguru" with a per capita of \$3000. That is where India and China significantly diverge. The much greater international bargaining power of China, which was as poor as India till the early 1990s, is in part rooted in the fact that it is now five times as large as India, both in terms of GDP and per capita income. To put it bluntly, India's bargaining power is not as great as Delhi's official narrative tends to suggest. India does not have too many cards.

Unless India is ready to break off engagement with the US, this grave imbalance of power will continue to define the parameters within which India has to make choices. India can't just pull away from America, at least in the short run, for the US is India's largest trade partner. Nearly 20 per cent of its merchandise exports go to the US. And the US market has also been the greatest source of India's software revolution. India did come close to breaking off in the period 1966-1971 under Indira Gandhi — but that was in part, if not wholly, because India's economy was heavily inward-looking and not so dependent on trade. Trade creates benefits as well as vulnerabilities. Another vital consideration is often lost in

debate. It has to do with the basic logic of the so-called "China Plus One" strategy. Given the geopolitical tensions between China and the US, which will not easily disappear, many leading companies of the world have been looking at diverting their investments from China. But they can't easily come to India in a big way, if exports to the US are heavily tariffed, which can only make US markets difficult to penetrate with "Made/Assembled in India" products. In short, given the realities of the new world, the trade deal was bound to be more favorable to the US than to India. To expect equal benefits is to be entirely unmindful of power realities. India's best options were: how to get Russia-related 25 per cent tariff off its back; how to protect key farm interests; and how to achieve a tariff rate lower than that of competitors in different sectors (China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, and, to some extent, Pakistan). The trade deal is a reflection of the great power differentials between India and the US.

But an imaginative question can still be posed. Can constraints now be turned into future opportunities? The GDPs of the US and EU (and Britain, not part of the EU) add up to nearly 43-44 per cent of the world's GDP. Trade deals have been struck with all three. A deal with Canada may also not be far off. An opportunity for economic re-invigoration can potentially emerge. With several labour-intensive sectors getting favorable treatment, can India use this opportunity to engineer an employment-based manufacturing push? All of this assumes that Trump will not change his current position vis-à-vis India. Of course, that may not happen. India should pursue economic diversification even as it commercially leverages access to American markets provided by the trade deal. Ashutosh Varshney is Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences and Professor of Political Science at Brown University. Views are personal.

by Aamaan Alam Khan

Work from beach: Sri Lanka woos remote workers with digital nomad visa, extends tourist visa validity

(Staff Reporter) New Delhi: In a major visa haul, Sri Lanka has introduced a digital nomad visa for the first time, allowing remote workers to legally live in the country while working online for companies or clients based outside Sri Lanka. The visa is valid for 365 days, with renewal options available, and costs \$500 for the first year.

To be eligible for the digital nomad visa, applicants must be at least 18 years old and employed as remote workers, freelancers, or business owners whose companies are not registered in Sri Lanka.

They must meet a government-defined minimum income threshold, demonstrate proof of sufficient salary, and earn income exclusively from overseas sources. Although visa holders cannot take up local employment, they are permitted to rent property, open local bank accounts, enroll children in private schools, and access local services and co-working spaces.

The application process requires approval from the Ministry of Digital Economy, completion of medical clearance after arrival, and final processing by immigration authorities. Visa holders are also required to limit their work activities to representing their overseas company and promoting their services while in Sri Lanka.

Tourist visa extended to 180 days

Alongside the nomad visa, Sri Lanka has expanded its tourist visa validity from 90 days to 180 days, making longer stays easier without repeated extensions. Travellers can apply through the Tourist Mobile App under the Online Electronic Tourist Visa Activation System. Tourists remain strictly prohibited from taking local jobs, although limited remote work connected to overseas employers is allowed under certain conditions. The extended tourist visa costs approximately \$70 for SAARC nationals, \$85 for non-SAARC travellers, and \$50 for visitors from Singapore, Maldives, and Seychelles under bilateral agreements.

The government clarified application details and launched



online processing in an update issued 4 February, marking the transition from policy announcement to implementation. Officials say the reforms are part of a broader push to modernise immigration systems, align with global remote-work trends, and attract long-staying visitors who contribute to the local economy without competing for domestic jobs.

Why Sri Lanka is making these changes

Sri Lanka has rolled out these changes to attract long-stay

travellers and remote professionals, signalling a shift in how the island nation is positioning itself within the global tourism and remote-work economy. The move comes as the country continues rebuilding its tourism sector and seeking foreign income following the economic crisis that triggered unprecedented levels of inflation in 2024. With these changes, Sri Lanka joins a growing list of countries offering digital nomad visas as hybrid and remote work become more common worldwide. More than 50

countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa now offer digital nomad visas that allow remote professionals to live and work legally while earning income from overseas clients. Many of these programmes emerged between 2020 and 2025, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as countries looked to attract long-stay, high-spending visitors. Estonia was the first country to launch one of the world's earliest dedicated digital nomad visas in June 2020, followed soon after by Barbados'

'Welcome Stamp' in July 2020.

Countries such as Croatia and Dubai/UAE introduced similar long-stay remote work schemes in 2021, while Portugal and Spain created tailored visas for freelancers and non-EU remote workers in 2022 and 2023 respectively. More recent entrants include Japan and Thailand that launched the digital nomad visa in 2024, alongside newer programmes in countries like Italy with a visa designed for highly skilled, non-EU remote workers, reflecting how governments are adapting immigration systems to global remote-work trends. Most digital nomad visas require applicants to prove a stable income from non-local employers or clients, ensuring that visitors contribute economically without competing in domestic job markets.

For travellers, freelancers, and remote professionals, the new rules offer longer stays, simplified visa processes, and clearer legal frameworks for remote work. For Sri Lanka, the expectation is that longer-term visitors will spend more locally and help sustain the country's tourism-led recovery in the years ahead.

Berlinale 2026: How South Asian films are gaining ground at the festival

(Staff Reporter) In 1998, Tamil director Mani Ratnam sent his Hindi musical Dil Se... in an "international cut" version without the songs to the Berlin International Film Festival. Juror and British critic Derek Malcolm exclaimed, in mock horror, to the then South Asia programming delegate Meenakshi Shedde that it is the songs that they want in Indian cinema, that the song picturisation sets it apart. In 2000 came Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam. Both these very mainstream films were shown in the 'experimental films' segment: International Forum of New Cinema. Berlinale began in 1951, shaped by the politics of the Cold War and West Berlin's positioning as a cultural outpost of the "free world". Early editions veered towards Hollywood films. Former curator at Berlinale, Dorothee Wenner, told Shedde that "Indian cinema is one of the very few cinemas that has successfully resisted Hollywood domination." From then to now, South Asia's independent voices have been popping up across all sections of the festival. Come

February 12, for 10 days, the red carpet is set to be rolled out, welcoming the cinema world to the 76th Berlin International Film Festival. Among a line-up from around the world is also a spotlight on the pulsating and often overlooked narratives of South Asia, including the first-ever Pakistani film — produced fully in its home country — to make its festival debut in the Panorama segment this year: Sarmad Khoosat's Lali. Festival director Tricia Tuttle opens the Berlinale with No Good Men, by the brilliant Afghan filmmaker Shahrbanoo Sadat, who was born in Iran and lives in exile in Germany. Over a Zoom call, she says, "We are really proud and excited to be opening with the Afghan film No Good Men. We also have the first Nepalese filmmaker [Min Bahadur Bham] in our official jury, along with an Indian filmmaker, festival director and archivist [Shaunak Sen; Saagar Gupta; and Shivendra Singh Dungarpur respectively]. It shows our interest in South Asian cinema. We really want to open our perspectives and strengthen our networks

at the festival." There's also Assamese filmmaker Rima Das's Not a Hero, her third outing at the festival. Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy's first ever film, In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones (1989), is in the festival Classics. And there are seven Indian Talents this year, among others. **New frontiers** Tuttle, who was the director of the BFI London and BFI Flare LGBTQ+ Film Festivals, took charge of Berlinale in the last edition. She "rebuilt the programme team to a certain extent" and brought in the Perspectives first-feature competition. "We've always given awards to first features, but I wanted to bring it into a competition so that we can shine a spotlight on new filmmakers and really foreground one of the things that's very important and has been important to the Berlinale, which is about renewal and supporting the next generation of filmmakers and film-goers," she says. Tanushree Das and Saumyananda Sahi's Tillotama Shome-starrer, Baksho Bondi / Shadowbox, was shown in Perspectives last year.

5 Food And Nutrition Myths You Must Stop Believing, According To An Expert

An expert explains why coffee does not dehydrate, eggs don't increase cholesterol, and MSG is not unsafe



(Staff Reporter) Since the pandemic, the amount of information we consume online about food and nutrition has been limitless. One influencer posts something, and we start clearing the pantry, believing every word without doing any research or speaking to an actual expert.

This is where myths are born, and we continue to believe them as truths, passing them to the

next generation. Krish Ashok, author of Masala Lab: The Science of Indian Cooking, shared a video on his Instagram, busting five popular myths around food and nutrition.

He said, "They [myths] are grounded in partial truth taken out of context."

Myth 1: Coffee Dehydrates You

"Yes, caffeine is technically

a mild diuretic, meaning that it will make you urinate more. But you are drinking it in, let me check my notes, water. Black coffee is 99% water. A typical milk coffee is 90% water. Since milk itself is 87% water. So the net effect is hydration, not dehydration," he said.

This is also supported by a study published by the National Library of Medicine. "Studies

show coffee drinkers are not becoming dried fish because they don't eat coffee powder. They drink coffee," the author quipped.

Myth 2: Egg Yolk Cholesterol Will Clog Your Arteries

Clearing the doubt, the author noted, "Dietary cholesterol is not equal to blood cholesterol for most people. Your liver makes most of your cholesterol anyway and adjusts based on what you eat. The egg is the most complete and affordable source of protein."

Hence, there is no harm in eating a whole egg, making an omelette of it, and enjoying a bowl of egg curry with some rice on the side. Unless your doctor asks you to avoid the yolk, you can and should eat a whole egg.

Myth 3: Dal Is A Complete Protein Most vegetarians often counter non-vegetarians by saying that dal is rich in protein. Apart from Krish Ashok, many nutritionists have come forward and busted this myth. "Dal is an amazing source of resistant

starch. But calling it protein-rich is not right. 100 g of cooked dal only has 6-9 g of protein compared to 25 g or more in chicken, eggs, or paneer," the author said.

You can have dal with wheat or rice, making it a complete protein, but it's not enough protein on its own. It does bring the whole meal together, but you should add something more to the plate to consume the right amount of protein.

Myth 4: Supermarket Eggs Will Hatch

"Commercial eggs are unfertilised," said the author, busting one of the most common myths surrounding eggs. A chicken lays eggs irrespective of whether it mates. "You could sit on a supermarket egg for the rest of your life, and the only thing you will hatch is lower-back pain," he joked. Myth 5: MSG Is Bad For You "This myth came from a 1968 letter, not a scientific study, to a journal that was never validated. MSG is glutamate plus sodium," said Krish Ashok.

The Beginning

MAD MEN
OF
NU WAY ADVERTISING

About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh



MAD MEN
OF
NU WAY ADVERTISING

Advertisement (Public Service Message)

Putin's Sledgehammer: The Wagner Group and Russia's Collapse into Mercenary Chaos

(Staff Reporter) Putin's Sledgehammer: The Wagner Group and Russia's Collapse into Mercenary Chaos is a gripping, research-tome-sized account of the origins and ascent of Russia's infamous private-military company, easily one of the world's most notorious mercenary outfits (after Blackwater, of course). Aptly titled, the book makes the cogent argument that such "private" companies can be (and are) wielded by the state, as long as that collusion remains veiled in plausible deniability.

Author Candace Rondeaux, an award-winning journalist, public-policy scholar, and director of Future Frontlines at the New America Foundation, gives us in Putin's Sledgehammer an expansive chronicle, making connections few have traced, some gained by analyzing 130,000 leaked files from the many shell companies of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner's former head, who died in a suspicious 2023 plane crash. The detailed analysis reads more like a breathless spy thriller than an academic exploration, owing not only to Rondeaux's brilliance but also to her personal connection to the material: She was a student in St. Petersburg around the time Prigozhin first met Putin, then mayor of the city.

The narrative begins in 1991, after the collapse of Russia's Communist Party-led government. The planned economy of the post-Soviet state is in freefall, and a new and violent market logic (aka neoliberalism) is wreaking financial havoc. Mafia rules the streets, and oligarchs form behemoth, Frankenstein-esque companies in the chaos of widespread privatization.

Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1991, the Kremlin cut its military roughly in half. Soldiers returning home found almost no services to help them transition back to civilian life. "The downsizing created a huge pool of disillusioned and unemployed men trained to kill," explains Rondeaux. Many of Russia's future mercenaries met in informal, non-state-created veterans unions. Some became

security for oligarchs, some worked for the mafia, and some ended up in prison — all spaces which would become important vectors for Russia's nascent mercenary industry. The intricate jockeying for power at the state and private level birthed the Wagner Group.

Putin's Sledgehammer really stands apart from other books on Wagner in its thorough, nuanced take on Prigozhin. The public perception of him comes in disparate, singular labels: a former small-time criminal; a wildly successful hotdog salesman; a restaurateur-turned-government-caterer fondly referred to as "Putin's Chef"; an internet-disinformation maverick; and, finally, leader of a formidable global mercenary group that eventually marched to Moscow, posing a first-of-its-kind threat to Putin's rule.

And, indeed, Prigozhin was all those things, but Rondeaux truly fleshes out this complicated, mercurial character. We ultimately come to see Prigozhin as a marketing and entrepreneurial master (a doggedly hardworking one, at that), an image that belies the brash, uniformed strongman seen most recently before his death. For example, Prigozhin's culinary acumen is often overlooked, his success as "Putin's Chef" chalked up to favoritism. But the book tells a different story. In writing about the now-famous Russian state dinner at the Peterhof Palace on May 31, 2003, that hosted George W. Bush and other G8 leaders, Rondeaux paints the scene in mouth-watering detail:

But that return came to a halt after Russia's takeover of Crimea and the Donbas in 2014. Putin's Sledgehammer's argues that although this was a turning point in lifting the veil on the state's global backstage-military maneuvers, Putin had begun to see Russia as pitted in a Cold War 2.0 against the U.S., and private military companies were the most expedient means of waging it.

"There is always a [mercenary-for-hire] middleman [like Wagner] in the US-Russia conflict," Rondeaux writes. "The central tension had always been

over who in Russia would reap the greatest share of profits and political rewards from Prigozhin's successes and who would pay the price for his failures."

In 2016, U.S. and E.U. sanctions began to bite at the Russian economy. Putin had long been fixated on the idea that oil and gas were his country's pathway back to wealth and to a commanding place in the world order. As Rondeaux narrates in the cleverly titled chapter "Guns, Gas, and Oil" (a satirical nod to Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, a 1997 book challenging notions of Eurasian superiority), the Wagner Group emerged as the perfect solution for evading sanctions. By embedding itself in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali, Wagner enabled the Russian oil-and-gas industry to expand outward. Similarly, Russia is a prime exporter of arms in the world, second only to America.

Wagner, with its plausible-deniability cover of not being a state actor, made sure Russia had arms clients in the Middle East and Africa, sanctions be damned.

And once again, Prigozhin, ever the diligent employee (and employer), ensured that natural resources kept flowing freely. When the group took over the

Hayan gas plant in Syria, says Rondeaux, "Wagner didn't just deploy fighters: they also flew in geologists, engineers, and fire control experts." Prigozhin also hired anthropologists and other "academic types" when he launched the now-infamous Internet Research Agency, the entity behind the 2016 U.S. election interference and a worldwide-disinformation campaigner of unrivaled sophistication and influence. To dismiss the IRA as a "troll farm" would be a gross mischaracterization; the book tells of Prigozhin's recruitment of bright young polyglots from Russia's top schools, who had a keen understanding of the issues du jour and knew how to amplify prejudices. With the war in Ukraine, Prigozhin would become even more important: The Wagner Group was an expedient solution to Russia's manpower problem. "

For Putin to call for a full mobilization would have been tantamount to admitting failure, that the war was a war, not a special military operation, and that victory would not come as swiftly or cheaply as he had promised," Rondeaux explains. Until its downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014 — which left 298 civilians dead — Wagner had

been mostly a (fearsome) battlefield rumor. Soon after, it sledgehammered its way into notoriety, helped by Prigozhin's ability to deliver pithy, fiery speeches on social media. Putin's Sledgehammer is a seminal work of incisive insight not only about the Wagner Group and its late charismatic leader but also about modern mercenaryism and why we should care about it. Rondeaux draws parallels few others have, the kind that could only come from a Russophile like herself. The famous quote of sociologist Charles Tilly that "war made the state, and the state made war" is borne out in her riveting story of the murky, byzantine ties between the state and its mercenaries (or, perhaps, the mercenaries and their state). Antoaneta Tileva, Ph.D., is a Bulgarian transplant who has lived in the DC area since she arrived here at age 12.

She is an intensely curious cultural anthropologist and a lover of all sorts of pun-ditry and Dad jokes.

She teaches at American University's School of International Service. She is a very mean cruciverbalist and a not-so-mean feminist. Don't challenge her to a hip-hop-quoting contest because you will be resoundingly thrashed.

PUTIN'S SLEDGEHAMMER



THE WAGNER GROUP AND
RUSSIA'S COLLAPSE
INTO MERCENARY CHAOS
CANDACE RONDEAUX

Basic habits that may block your weight loss despite regular workout

(Staff Reporter) You may be the most disciplined person when it comes to hitting the gym or showing up for a yoga class without fail. You finish your workouts feeling accomplished, convinced you're doing everything right. But the moment you step onto the weighing scale, the feeling shifts. The number staring back at you refuses to move, leaving you disappointed and wondering how you can still be so far from your goal weight.

That moment often triggers a familiar question: if you're working out regularly, why isn't it showing when it comes to weight loss? The effort is there, the consistency is there; so what's missing?

The answer often lies in your everyday habits, the small, almost invisible ones you don't consciously track. Weight loss isn't only about sweating it out in the gym or holding poses on a yoga mat. It's also shaped by what you do in the remaining hours of the day: how you eat, move, sleep, snack, and even how you manage stress.

These seemingly minor choices quietly add up and can influence the number that shows up on your weighing scale far more than you realise.

Many people assume that sweating it out automatically means they're burning a significant number of calories. However, this belief is largely a myth, as workouts often burn far fewer calories than we tend to assume.

Dr Vipul Lunawat, fitness expert and founder-director, Institute of Sports Science and Technology, shares that exercise is valuable, but the calorie expenditure is often overestimated.

"When it comes to weight loss, we often assume that a gruelling workout session will torch a significant number of calories. But the truth is, our bodies are cleverer than we think. Research suggests that our bodies compensate for the energy expended during exercise by reducing energy expenditure elsewhere," he tells India Today.

While this doesn't mean you should ditch workouts altogether, instead, focus on making your



workouts more efficient.

And one way to do this is by incorporating strength training. By building muscle, you can boost your resting metabolic rate, helping your body burn more calories at rest.

Now, most people who work out regularly are also very

conscious about what they eat. Agree? But the thing is, healthy eating doesn't always mean weight-loss-friendly eating.

Edwina Raj, head of services – clinical nutrition and dietetics, Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru, shares that many healthy foods like nuts, ghee, avocado,

smoothies, and dried fruits are high in calories. If eaten in large amounts, they can slow down weight loss even though they are nutritious. Raj tells us, "Weight loss depends not just on food quality but also on portion size and total calorie intake. To tweak the diet, you should focus on

balanced meals with the right portions. Including more vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains helps control hunger. Reducing sugar, refined carbs, and excess oil is important." The key is to look beyond the healthy label, you see. And don't forget about the calories you drink, along with that constant snacking that doesn't take a break.

Snacking and drinking your calories can quietly slow down weight loss. Many snacks and beverages add extra calories without really making you feel full.

Even so-called healthy snacks, when eaten too often or in large portions, can affect progress. Constant snacking also leaves the body with little time to tap into stored fat. Another habit that can become an obstacle in your weight loss journey is not eating enough protein.

'Retardmaxxing' is internet's new response to overthinking

(Staff Reporter) New-age problems often come with new-age solutions. And sometimes, age-old yet universal issues are repackaged with trendy labels that need a hot minute on the internet to find an audience. Bizarrely enough, sometimes, just sometimes, they might even work.

In the latest edition of what's hot online, someone, somewhere in the world, has come up with "retardmaxxing," a counter-culture response to overthinking. Provocative name aside, the idea behind the term taps into a very real, very modern frustration – the feeling of being stuck despite wanting to move ahead.

The premise is simple. People don't stall in life because they lack ability or intelligence, but because they analyse every decision to death. Those who subscribe to this philosophy believe that to succeed – or simply move forward – taking action, even when it feels slightly stupid, awkward, or imperfect, matters more than thinking things through endlessly.

Still confused?

What is retardmaxxing? The internet's latest mantra to succeed in life, apparently.

It's not a clinically diagnosed concept or an officially coined term. Like most internet philosophies, it emerged online and went viral. The term is often traced back to social media content creator Elisha Long,

who uses his videos to explain and apply this approach to work, creativity, and decision-making.

From there, people picked it up and began interpreting it in their own ways, applying it to careers, relationships, fitness routines, and even everyday choices.

At its core, the idea is straightforward: stop waiting, start doing. Instead of planning endlessly, the focus is on beginning imperfectly and immediately. Do the work, adjust along the way, and let action, not overanalysis, shape the outcome.

Importantly, proponents argue that it's not about being reckless or ignoring consequences. It's about breaking inertia. About choosing momentum over mental gridlock.

When chronic overthinking takes over Overthinking, overanalysing, replaying conversations, or trying to read between the lines of a text message, even when there are no lines to read, is second nature to most of us. We spiral into "what ifs": What if this fails? What if I look stupid? What if there's a better option I haven't considered yet? While it's important to analyse before acting, doing so excessively often means missing the bus altogether. Overthinking frequently may look like problem-solving, but more often than not, it amplifies stress and keeps you emotionally tangled rather than

moving forward. Relatable much? The vicious circle of overthinking just doesn't consume time and your brain cells; it can mess with your sleep cycle, focus, and even relationships. Eventually, the mind is left exhausted, and more stress and anxiety are piled on further. Speaking to India Today earlier, Bhavya Shah, psychologist at Saifee Hospital, Mumbai, explained that "If your thinking leads to action or peace, that's good thinking. If it leads to more worry or paralysis, that's overthinking."

According to a YouGov report, 81 per cent of Indians spend approximately three hours every day overthinking. The report highlights how people become indecisive over everything—from what to wear and what to order, to making bigger life decisions like changing jobs or starting a business.

It's in this context that internet trends like retardmaxxing gain traction. For many, it becomes a way to disrupt the mental loop, sending an email without rewriting it ten times, applying for the job without feeling "fully ready", starting the workout without waiting for motivation, or putting creative work out for the world even when it's not perfect to the tee.

Of course, the term itself remains controversial and deliberately provocative. But its popularity reflects something deeper:

How Tea-Loving Japan Became A Coffee Country Due To Clever Marketing

(Staff Reporter) Much like India, Japan is also a tea nation. Unlike us, who drink milk-based, sugar-loaded concoctions, Japanese people prefer herbal tea, especially after meals, to aid digestion. In many restaurants, a herbal concoction is served in handle-less ceramic cups to allow guests to settle down and experience the warmth.

The Japanese tea ceremony (chanoyu or chado) is a meditative practice in which the host prepares the concoction precisely, cleans the tools, serves desserts, and later serves matcha tea. The ceremony focuses on purity, harmony, tranquillity, and respect. People in the country often seek a teacher (sensei) who can guide them to become a good host and learn the art of making tea.

Imagine a country with a rich tea culture transforming into a coffee nation. Don't believe us? Let's dive into some data. According to a July 2023 report published by Japan Today, citizens drink more coffee than tea, so much so that Japan is one of the largest coffee markets in the world. In 2021, people consumed 433 million tons of coffee compared to only 100 thousand tons of tea. The credit for this tea-to-coffee switch goes to Nestle, a Switzerland-based food and beverage company.

Beginning of Tea Drinking in Japan

The first mentions of tea are found in Japanese records during the Nara period (646-794). In the 8th century, China introduced green tea to the country. In the early Heian period (794-1185), Buddhist monks went to China to study and brought back tea leaves and seeds to cultivate in Japan, where the beverage was popular in royal courts.

The tea leaves were pressed into hard blocks.

They followed the process mentioned in Ch'a Ching, The Classic of Tea, written by Lu Yu during the Tang Dynasty (760-780 AD) in China. Over time, the process of cultivation evolved, and the Japanese invented their own way of brewing tea. Along with seeds, monks also introduced the Sung style of preparing the beverage, in which the leaves were ground



into a powder. Hot water was poured on them to make a concoction. Priests used to drink it to stay awake, and it also had medicinal properties.

The evolution of the beverage and brewing techniques continued as Japan gradually turned into a tea nation.

The ingredient might have been introduced by China, but the beverage became an integral part of native culture - and it continues to be so today.

Nestle's Quest to Enter Japan

Before World War II (1939-1945) began, Nestle launched Nescafe in 1938. In the 1960s, Nestle introduced Nescafe in Japan, expecting exponential growth.

From running advertisements to offering samples to making coffee accessible, the brand tried everything but still couldn't penetrate the tea-loving nation.

In the 1970s, Nestle was out of options. It had tried every trick in the realm of branding and marketing, but it could not break the walls of loyalty surrounding tea consumption.

They were barely able to make a dent. It wasn't that the Japanese disliked coffee; they simply preferred the healing tea that offered warmth and had been part of their culture for centuries.

Coffee did not strike an emotional chord with tea lovers.

Nestle Played The Long Game

Reportedly, Nestle hired French psychoanalyst Clotaire Rapaille in 1975.

Why? His area of

expertise was understanding how childhood experiences shape adult behaviour and purchase decisions.

He studied Japanese culture and found that children were exposed to tea during celebrations, family meals, and gatherings. They were served the beverage after school snacks. Where was coffee? Nowhere. He discovered that coffee had no emotional or cultural connection with Japan - an insight missing from Nestle's entire strategy.

This became a game-changer. The psychoanalyst suggested changing the target audience and introducing coffee-flavoured treats for children. Instead of targeting adults, Nestle approached kids. They

launched many coffee-flavoured candies, including KitKat. Instead of convincing adults to drink coffee, the brand began building future customers by slowly getting children used to the taste. This created childhood nostalgia, which appeals to adults of all age groups.

KitKats inundated supermarkets, and coffee-flavoured desserts, chocolates, sweets, and other treats slowly transformed Japan's culinary landscape.

Children were hooked on the sweet, bitter notes. How Tea-Loving Japan Became a Coffee Nation A decade later, Nestle relaunched coffee beverages under the Nescafe banner. The result? Children who grew up

enjoying coffee-flavoured candies marched into stores to purchase caffeine-loaded beverages. This shift led to the growth of coffee imports in Japan. In 2014, the country imported over 500,000 tons annually, and this number has only increased since. A ReportLinker study predicted 473,000 metric tons of coffee consumption in Japan by 2028. It stood at 464,000 metric tons in 2023. Today, coffee is not merely a beverage but a part of everyday culture in Japan. In supermarkets, you find matcha-infused, canned, vanilla-infused, caramel macchiato, cinnamon-flavoured, and hazelnut-flavoured coffees, among others. Japanese 7-Eleven stores now feature high-quality, self-service coffee machines offering affordable lattes and iced coffees. A tea nation not-so-quietly became a coffee lover, and now connoisseurs have artistic brewing techniques.

Their iced coffee is prepared using a cold-brewing technique called flash-chilling or flash-brewing.

Tourists now visit independent local coffee shops (kissaten) that flourished in the mid-20th century, instead of popular chains, just so they can enjoy an authentic cup of Japanese-brewed coffee. Nestle's one decision changed the brewing landscape of Japan.



Kennedy trailer: Rahul Bhat turns lethal in Anurag Kashyap's noir world

Anurag Kashyap's neo-noir drama *Kennedy*, starring Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone, is set for a digital premiere, following its acclaimed festival run. The newly released trailer reveals a dark, morally complex tale of violence and redemption.

(Staff Reporter) The trailer for *Kennedy*, directed by Anurag Kashyap and starring Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone, has been released ahead of the film's digital premiere on Zee5. The film, already praised at international festivals, is set to arrive for Indian audiences on February 20, 2026.

This marks a significant moment as viewers get their first detailed look at the much-anticipated project.

Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone in *Kennedy*

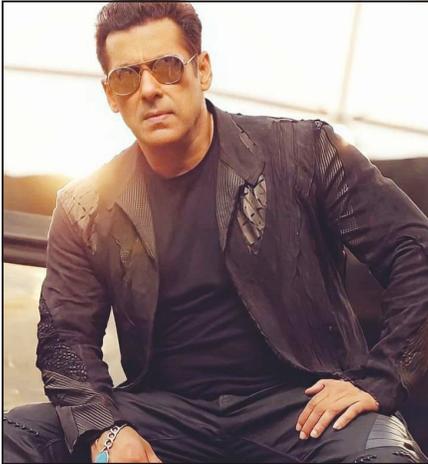
Rahul Bhat appears in the lead role as Kennedy, delivering a performance that is both intense and deeply unsettling. The trailer showcases his re-

strained yet layered portrayal of a man navigating a morally ambiguous world. Sunny Leone is also featured with a compelling on-screen presence, promising a dynamic cast. The preview hints at a story where violence, guilt, and redemption are closely intertwined.

Anurag Kashyap's noir style

The film's trailer immerses viewers in Kashyap's signature noir universe, marked by a dark and brooding visual style. According to the streaming platform, the film is "darker, deadlier, and undeniably Kashyap." The mood and tone set by the trailer suggest a fearless and bold ap-

Salman Khan's war film *Battle of Galwan* may skip April release. Details inside



(Staff Reporter) Actor Salman Khan's much-awaited war film, *Battle of Galwan*, is reportedly facing a delay in its release schedule. While fans had been anticipating its arrival in April, a recent report indicates that reshoots and procedural requirements have extended the timeline. It is now speculated that the makers may now target an In-

dependence Day release. An official confirmation from the makers has yet to be issued. However, indications point to the April 17 release date becoming unlikely as new developments unfold.

REASONS FOR DELAY

According to a Bollywood Hungama report, the delay is due to the ongoing reshooting of specific scenes, which is taking longer than initially expected by the team. Both Salman Khan and director Apoorva Lakhia are reportedly focused on enhancing the film's narrative impact, resulting in a more prolonged production phase.

UPDATED SHOOTING SCHEDULE

According to the report, a new shooting schedule is set to commence on February 9 at Mumbai's Golden Tobacco Factory, after which only a few days of filming are anticipated to remain. The overall shoot is projected to conclude by the end of February. A source informed the portal that Lakhia will begin editing the reshot segments afterwards.

In addition to production and editing, the release of *Battle of Galwan* also depends on mandatory screenings for the Ministry of Defence, which could add further delays to the timeline.



proach by the director, staying true to his established filmmaking sensibilities.

Direct-To-Ott release

Kennedy will bypass a traditional theatrical release, premiering directly on the Zee5 streaming platform. Zee5 announced the release on social media with the statement, "System ne *Kennedy*

ko ek hathiyaar banaya tha, par yeh woh hathiyaar hai, jo system se nahin apni marzi se chalta hai (The system had created *Kennedy* as a weapon, but this is a weapon that operates not at the system's command, but according to its own will)! #*Kennedy* premieres 20th Feb, only on #ZEE5."

Dhurandhar afterthought: Why isn't there a great villain's role for Arjun Rampal?

(Staff Reporter) Interesting, how Aditya Dhar has under-utilised Arjun Rampal's portrayal of a villain in the *Dhurandhar* franchise so far. Among the antagonists stacked up in the blockbuster first film, Rampal's Pakistani ISI boss, Major Iqbal, comes across as the one with minimal footage. Yet Dhar has already maximised the character's impact in a way. At a glance, the trumpcard villain of *Dhurandhar* is Akshaye Khanna as Rehman Dakait, playing the essential Bollywood prototype with vim and author-backed punchlines, even an entry dance set to FA9LA, the chartbuster that's now set a Guinness World Record. But Rampal's essence lay elsewhere. Writer-director Dhar cleverly used the antagonist Iqbal to set the mood for the film before release – in the trailer. If the first

scene of a film's trailer provides the big bang impact and defines what's coming up, Rampal's Iqbal had the first stab at brutalising audience senses. In that opening scene of the trailer, he coldly spewed lines about Pakistan's post-1971 depression and the vow to "Bleed India with a Thousand Cuts", even as he lazily took a drag at his cigar and then went on to unleash gruesome torture upon a captured Indian spy with fishhooks and chains. Dhar had given away Rampal's standout scene of villainy from *Dhurandhar* part 1 in its entirety, even before the release of the film. Remarkably enough, however, long after watching the trailer and the film, as we gear up for *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, the sinister calm about Major Iqbal continues to scream in mind.



Hrithik Roshan Shuts Down Don 3 Rumours After Ranveer Singh's Exit: "Was Never Approached"

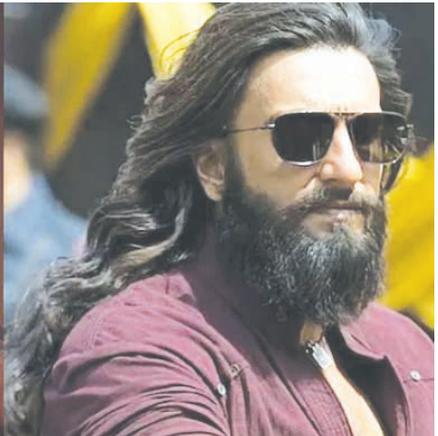
Putting an end to rumours, Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan on Friday said that he was never approached to replace Ranveer Singh in Farhan Akhtar's Don 3. media to steer clear of any such unverified reports," Hrithik Roshan said in a statement.

There are also reports that Farhan Akhtar's production house has sought Rs 40 crore from Ranveer Singh for walking out of Don 3. In December, reports started swirling on social media that Hrithik Roshan is set to play the new version of Don after Ranveer Singh walked out of the much-anticipated project days after the release of his career's biggest hit Dhurandhar.

Ranveer Singh was announced as the new face of the Don franchise in 2023. It was widely reported that Hrithik Roshan was "strong contender for the role with discussions currently at a very early stage".

"What started off as just a rumour has now taken a life of its own, and it's important to set the record straight. I would like to categorically clarify that I was never approached for Don 3 at any given time. I request the

rumours appear true was also the fact that Hrithik Roshan, who is a childhood friend and former



collaborator of director Farhan Akhtar, had a memorable cameo in Don 2 which released back in 2011.

With Ranveer Singh out of Don 3 and Hrithik Roshan now clarifying that he isn't part of the new movie, the hunt for the next Don continues.



Rani Mukerji's Spiritual Pilgrimage to Kalighat Temple After Mardaani 3 Success: A Blend of Gratitude and Faith

Rani Mukerji recently made a notable visit to Kolkata's Kalighat Temple, where she offered prayers and sought blessings. This visit comes on the heels of the box office success of her latest film, Mardaani 3. The actress has been known for her deep-rooted connection to her cultural and spiritual beliefs, making this pilgrimage significant in light of her latest accomplishment. The Kalighat Temple holds a special place in the cultural landscape of Kolkata, revered by many for its historical and spiritual significance. Mukerji's choice to visit the temple reflects her personal traditions and emphasizes the importance of seeking divine guidance amidst professional milestones. This act of gratitude resonates with her fans and the film industry alike.

Mardaani 3 has received positive attention since its release, contributing to a successful run at the box office. The film, part of a well-regarded franchise, has drawn audiences with its engaging storyline and strong performances. Mukerji's dedication to her craft continues to earn her accolades and reinforces her status in the film industry.

The actress has often spoken about the role of spirituality in her life, and her visit to the Kalighat Temple further highlights this dimension. By engaging in rituals and seeking blessings, she dem-

onstrates a commitment to grounding herself amidst her career achievements. Such practices are not uncommon among celebrities seeking balance between their public personas and personal beliefs.

As Rani Mukerji continues to navigate her career, her recent actions serve as a reminder of the interplay between professional success and personal faith.

Her presence at the temple during this significant time reflects a blend of gratitude and hope for the future. This visit is yet another chapter in a career marked by resilience and devotion to both her art and her spirituality.

Ananya Panday Showcases Cultural Heritage in Modern Fashion with Stunning Torani Anarkali

Ananya Panday recently made a striking appearance, showcasing a remarkable ensemble that captured the essence of cultural heritage and contemporary fashion. The focal point of her outfit was a stunning multicoloured Anarkali from the esteemed brand Torani India.

This piece not only highlighted the beauty of traditional craftsmanship but also seamlessly integrated modern aesthetics into its design. The Anarkali, known for its elegant silhouette and embroidered details, reflected a blend of rich colors that complemented Ananya's style. Such ensembles are often favored for their versatility, making them suitable for various occasions, from festive celebrations to upscale gatherings. By selecting this particular outfit, Panday pays homage to the timeless appeal of traditional attire while presenting it in a contemporary context. Torani India, renowned for its commitment to preserving Indian textile heritage, emphasizes intricate designs and artisanal techniques. The choice of this outfit underscores a

growing trend among fashion-forward individuals who appreciate the narrative behind their clothing. By opting for a piece that celebrates craftsmanship, Ananya aligns herself with a movement that prioritizes quality and storytelling in fashion. The aesthetic choices made in her ensemble invite conversations about the intersection of culture and modern fashionism.

Fashion enthusiasts and critics alike often observe how contemporary celebrities like Ananya Panday contribute to the revival of traditional designs by wearing them in innovative ways. This not only enhances their personal style but also encourages a broader appreciation for traditional crafts in the fashion landscape. As the fashion industry continues to evolve, the influence of figures like Ananya Panday plays a pivotal role in popularizing culturally rich styles. Her bold choice exemplifies how modern fashion can honor and elevate traditional attire, paving the way for future generations to embrace their heritage.



Ayushmann Khurrana-Sara Ali Khan's Pati Patni Aur Woh Do gets new release date



(Staff Reporter) The much-awaited comedy-drama Pati Patni Aur Woh Do, starring Ayushmann Khurrana, Sara Ali Khan, Rakul Preet Singh and Wamiqa Gabbi, has been postponed from its earlier Holi release and will now arrive in theatres on May 15, 2026.

The makers announced the new date, giving the team more time to complete post-production and shoot a pending song.

Trade analyst Taran Adarsh announced the new release date of Pati Patni Aur Woh Do on X. "A Y U S H M A N N

KHURRANA – SARA ALI KHAN – WAMIQA GABBI – RAKUL PREET SINGH: 'PATI PATNI AUR WOHO DO' GETS A NEW RELEASE DATE Welcome to the world of #PrajapatiPandey #AyushmannKhuranna, #SaraAliKhan, #WamiqaGabbi, and #RakulPreetSingh team up for #PatiPatniAurWohDo.

Directed by #MudassarAziz, the film will now hit cinemas on 15 May 2026. Produced by #BhushanKumar and #RenuRaviChopra, with #JunoChopra as the creative producer," read the post.

AYUSHMANN KHURRANA - SARA ALI KHAN - WAMIQA GABBI - RAKUL PREET SINGH: 'PATI PATNI AUR WOHO DO' GETS A NEW RELEASE DATE... Welcome to the world of #PrajapatiPandey... #AyushmannKhuranna, #SaraAliKhan, #WamiqaGabbi, and #RakulPreetSingh team up for #PatiPatniAurWohDo. According to a recent report by Bollywood

Hungama, the film could not meet its original March 4 release date because post-production work is still underway and a song is yet to be filmed.

The makers reportedly chose not to rush the process, instead focusing on delivering a polished and entertaining final product for audiences.

The sequel marks director Mudassar Aziz's return to the franchise after the 2019 hit that starred Kartik Aaryan, Bhumi Pednekar and Ananya Panday.

With a fresh cast and a promise of even more outrageous comic situations, the upcoming instalment is expected to bring a new twist to the beloved story.

In October last year, the makers unveiled the first poster, introducing Ayushmann as Prajapati Pandey and teasing a world packed with love, laughter and inevitable marital confusion.

Akshay Kumar's Bhooth Bangla gets a new release date. Details inside



(Staff Reporter) The upcoming horror comedy Bhooth Bangla, led by Akshay Kumar and Tabu, is now confirmed to release in theatres a month earlier than expected. This update comes after earlier announcements indicated different release dates. The confirmation was made through official channels, and a new promotional video was shared by the production team. The film's most recent scheduling has been clarified by Balaji Motion Pictures. The latest video shared by the makers showed a cat scratching off May 15 from a calendar. It then licked milk off April 10. The posts resolved prior confusion about the film's release timeline, cementing an April premiere for audiences. **BHOOTH BANGLA PRODUCTION TEAM**

Production on Bhooth Bangla is being overseen by Shobha

Kapoor and Ekta Kapoor of Balaji Telefilms, in association with Akshay Kumar's Cape of Good Films. The project also involves co-producers Faara Sheikh and Vedant Baali. The story is credited to Akash A Kaushik, with a screenplay by Rohan Shankar, Abilash Nair, and Priyadarshan, and dialogues by Rohan Shankar.

CAST REUNION

Bhooth Bangla brings together Akshay and Tabu after a 25-year hiatus. The duo previously worked together on films like Hera Pheri and Tu Chor Main Sipahi. Their reunion, under the direction of Priyadarshan, has drawn attention due to the legacy of their past collaborations and the genre's growing popularity.

ASRANI'S SIGNIFICANT ROLE

Director Priyadarshan earlier

spoke about the involvement of Priyadarshan said, "He was in up Bhooth Bangla earlier, and he the late actor Asrani, who plays my last two films, Bhooth Bangla was not working for a long time a significant role in the film. In an and Haiwaan. He is playing a very before that film. So he told me, exclusive chat with India Today, big role in both films. I wrapped 'Nobody calls me.

Rang De Basanti celebrates 20 years, Aamir Khan joins cast for nostalgic reunion

(Staff Reporter) The team of Rang De Basanti gathered in Mumbai for a special screening to celebrate 20 years of the film, marking an emotional reunion for the cast and a nostalgic moment for fans. Aamir Khan was joined by Siddharth, Sharman Joshi, Kunal Kapoor, Atul Kulkarni and Soha Ali Khan as they came together to honour the legacy of the much-loved movie.

Widely regarded as a film that redefined patriotic storytelling in Indian cinema, Rang De Basanti has now completed two decades, cementing its place as one of the most influential films of its time. Aamir Khan made a striking appearance at the screening, wearing a custom hoodie emblazoned with the words "Rang De Basanti," paired with black trousers and brown shoes.

The rest of the lead cast also adhered to a similar dress code, adding a coordinated touch to the reunion.

Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Rang De Basanti tells the story of a group of young Indians inspired by freedom fighters. They feel

compelled to stand up against corruption in modern India.

The film features a strong ensemble cast that includes Aamir Khan, Siddharth, and Soha Ali



Khan.

Upon its release, it struck a deep chord with the youth, sparking discussions about patriotism, activism, and social responsibility.

Over the years, it has continued to inspire younger generations to actively contribute to the country's progress.

Fearless Voice of the Community

The South Asian Insider 23 Glorious Years, Always a Step Ahead

The South Asian INSIDER
Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Venezuela's Maria Machado dedicates Nobel Prize to Trump
Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2025 and called Donald Trump a demon of violence, pinned the US Presidential flag on her Nobel Prize certificate to celebrate democracy and President Donald Trump's leadership.

British and Indian prime ministers promote trade deal during visit by Starmer

The American Dream turned nightmare, Gujaratis in Peril in US Motel Business?

The Road from Patna to Pennsylvania Avenue: How Bihar's Verdict Will Shape Modi's Hand in US Trade Talks

Big Crackdown Coming: India To Audit All Cough Syrup Makers

Brazilian influencer's death after 'fox eyes' surgery exposes beauty culture's dark side

As Afghan Taliban Minister Begins 1st India Visit, Delhi Has A Flag Dilemma

The South Asian INSIDER
Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Who is Ashley Tellis, Indian-American Expert Charged Over Top Secret Files

Inside India's Scariest Scam, And How To Stop It
Digital scams are proliferating as India's elderly population embraces the internet. Scammers are highly effective, preying on the vulnerabilities of seniors, such as respect for authority, fear of legal trouble, and loneliness.

Starship Hits the Bulls-eye, Lands in Indian Ocean and Crashes Exactly Where Musk Predicted

Mass Surrender: Naxal Commander and 60 Cadres Lay Down Arms in Maharashtra

Rs 60-crore cheating and fraud case: Why don't you turn approver against Raj Kundra, High Court asks Shripa Shetty

Vijay Mallya Abandons UK Bid to End Bankruptcy

The South Asian INSIDER
Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Social Media and Political Violence: A Complex Relationship Does Social Media fans political violence?

China saw it coming: The long game of geo-nationalism

India to crack down on deepfakes, new rule may force companies to label AI-generated content

What's kafala that turns millions of Indians into slaves in the Gulf?

Not just fake paneer, India has an egg problem as well

The South Asian INSIDER
Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

US Acknowledges 'Armed Conflict' Against 'Terrorist' Drug Cartels

US-India Diplomacy in Focus: Modi-Trump Meeting Eyed Ahead of Quad Summit

India's Enduring Fascination: From Delhi 'Baba' to Ram Rahim and Asaram, The Saga of Godmen

From Prison Waits to Murders: The Changing Face of Terrorism in India's Northeast

SRK Enters Billionaire Club For First Time See Bollywood's Top 5 Richest

Should TVK Chief Vijay Be Made Accused In Karur Stampede Case?

Meet India's Youngest Billionaire His Net Worth Is Rs 21,190 Crore

www.thesouthasianinsider.com Uncompromised and Unbiased