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Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Vol. 24 Issue 46 Friday 20 February 2026 \$1 www.thesouthasianinsider.com

## Trump's Iran Gamble: Is Washington Ready to Strike And What Lies Ahead?



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- As tension continues to escalate, the big question is not whether the US can strike Iran, it certainly can, but if it can control the chaos that follows a crushing military defeat.
- America's maximalist position is that Iran stop uranium enrichment and put a lid on its nuclear programme
- Tehran still has the capability to target American troops stationed in the region
- American attempts at regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan will also have to be weighed in before launching another war in West Asia.

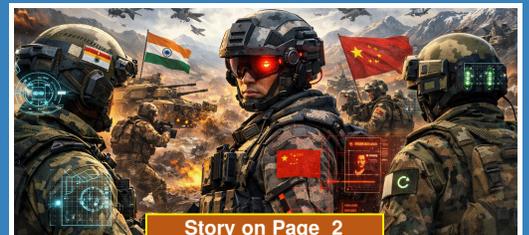
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### THE NEW DELHI DECLARATION: Pax Silica and the Shift to the Global South

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# 'AI-Enabled' Soldiers? What An India-China-Pak Crisis May Soon Look Like

**AI compresses the decision-action loop, turning hours of analytical deliberation into seconds of machine-assisted judgment. In warfare, that compression is the difference between survival and defeat.**

(By Our Staff Reporter) When Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi this week, the gathering was more than a showcase of technological prowess. It was a signal - deliberate and unmistakable - that India intends to be a principal architect of the rules, tools, and trajectories that govern artificial intelligence in the 21st century. Embedded within that ambition is a question of acute strategic consequence: can India harness AI to transform its defence ecosystem from one defined by legacy dependencies into one that is adaptive, autonomous, and fit for the warfare of tomorrow?

The answer is both urgent and complex. Across the four pillars of modern military power - equipment modernisation, supply chain management, doctrinal guidance, and battlefield tactics - AI is not merely an incremental upgrade. It is a civilisational lever, one that offers nations the rare opportunity to leapfrog generations of capability gaps through the intelligent infusion of technology as a force multiplier. How Major Powers Are Deploying AI In Defence

To understand where India stands, one must first appreciate the pace at which the world's foremost military powers are racing ahead. The United States has embedded AI across its Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) architecture, enabling real-time synthesis of data across land, sea, air, space, and cyber domains. The Pentagon's Replicator initiative, launched to field thousands of autonomous systems in rapid time, reflects a doctrinal shift towards attritable, AI-enabled platforms that can saturate adversary defences at minimal human cost.

China, meanwhile, has declared the fusion of military and civilian AI a national imperative. The People's Liberation Army is deploying AI for predictive logistics, autonomous drone swarms, and battlefield decision-support systems at a pace that has alarmed Western intelligence agencies. Russia has pursued AI-driven electronic warfare and target acquisition systems, with lessons from its ongoing conflict in Ukraine accelerating real-world experimentation at a grim scale. Israel's use of AI-based targeting and intelligence correlation in recent operations has further underscored how middle powers, too, can punch above their weight with the right technological integration.

The common thread is this: AI compresses the decision-action loop,

turning hours of analytical deliberation into seconds of machine-assisted judgment. In warfare, that compression is the difference between survival and defeat.

**From Platforms to Intelligent Systems** India's defence inventory has long been characterised by vintage platforms, chronic procurement delays, and a technology ecosystem that leans heavily on imports. AI offers a path out of this structural trap. Autonomous unmanned aerial vehicles, AI-assisted naval surveillance systems, and smart munitions are no longer futuristic concepts - they are procurement priorities articulated in India's Defence Acquisition Procedure and reinforced through the iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) framework.

The integration of AI into existing platforms is equally transformative. Retrofitting legacy fighter aircraft with AI-based threat assessment modules, equipping armoured vehicles with computer-vision-driven situational awareness, and deploying AI-powered electronic warfare suites can substantially extend the operational relevance of platforms that would otherwise face obsolescence. This is where India's opportunity to leapfrog is most vivid: rather than replicating the incremental modernisation paths of Cold War-era militaries, India can embed intelligence into its platforms from the ground up, compressing what might have taken two decades of capability-building into five years of targeted investment.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has accelerated work on AI-enabled systems, including swarm drones and autonomous underwater vehicles. Collaborative programmes with private industry - facilitated by relaxed foreign direct investment norms in defence - are beginning to yield indigenously developed AI tools that can be scaled across the services.

**Predictive Logistics as a Strategic Asset**

Militaries have historically won or lost on the strength of their logistics. Napoleon's aphorism about armies travelling on their stomachs remains as relevant in the age of algorithms as it was in the age of muskets. AI transforms logistics from a reactive function into a predictive one. Machine learning models trained on consumption patterns, maintenance cycles, and operational tempos can anticipate demand for spare parts, ammunition, and fuel weeks before a

shortfall becomes critical.

For India, which manages one of the world's largest standing armies across diverse and often inhospitable terrain - from the high-altitude Himalayan front to the maritime littorals of the Indian Ocean - intelligent supply chain management is not a luxury but a necessity. AI-driven inventory optimisation, predictive maintenance for fleets of ageing equipment, and automated procurement triggers can reduce waste, prevent operational downtime, and free human logistics officers for higher-order strategic planning.

The integration of AI into India's integrated theatre commands - currently undergoing a long-overdue structural reform - will require that logistics and intelligence functions become genuinely interoperable. This is a domain where AI can serve as the connective tissue, harmonising data flows across services that have historically operated in silos.

**What A Machine-Augmented War May Look Like**

Technology without doctrine is an instrument without direction. The most sophisticated AI system deployed on a battlefield is only as effective as the strategic framework within which it operates. India's military doctrine has evolved considerably since the Cold Start concept of the early 2000s, but it has not yet fully grappled with the implications of AI-enabled warfare.

Questions abound. When an AI-assisted decision-support system recommends a strike, who bears moral and legal responsibility for the outcome? How does India calibrate rules of engagement in a conflict where adversary AI systems may escalate faster than human commanders can respond? What thresholds govern the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems, and how do those thresholds interact with India's stated commitment to strategic restraint?

These are not merely philosophical inquiries, but operational imperatives. India's participation in global AI governance forums, including the discussions convened at the AI Impact Summit, reflects an awareness that doctrinal frameworks must be developed in concert with the international community. A nation that develops AI warfare capabilities without corresponding doctrinal clarity risks strategic miscalculation of the most dangerous kind.

**The AI-Enabled Soldier**

At the tactical edge, AI is reshaping what

it means to be a soldier, a pilot, or a naval officer in the field. AI-powered intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems can process satellite imagery, signals intelligence, and open-source data simultaneously, delivering a synthesised operational picture to a field commander in near real time. AI-driven target recognition reduces the cognitive burden on operators and, theoretically, reduces the likelihood of fratricide and civilian casualties.

For India, operating in multi-front scenarios with a diversity of threat profiles - conventional, sub-conventional, and hybrid - AI-enabled tactical systems offer significant advantages. Facial recognition and pattern-of-life analysis tools deployed in counter-insurgency operations, AI-driven cyber defence systems guarding critical military networks, and machine-learning-based threat classification for border surveillance are already in various stages of conceptualisation and deployment.

**Ambition vs Inertia**

India's approach to AI in defence is characterised by a productive tension between ambition and institutional inertia. On the one hand, the government has established a Defence AI Council, released a Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA) framework, and allocated resources to AI-led defence innovation. On the other hand, procurement bureaucracy, inter-service rivalry, and a historically risk-averse acquisition culture continue to slow the pace of adoption.

The AI Impact Summit being held now in India has offered an opportunity to bridge that gap - to align the country's civilian AI ecosystem, which has demonstrated genuine global competitiveness in software and data analytics, with the specific demands of defence applications. The talent, the infrastructure, and, increasingly, the capital, are present. What is required now is strategic will and institutional agility. The window for leapfrogging is real, but it will not remain open indefinitely. Nations that invest in AI-enabled defence capabilities today will shape the security architecture of the next two decades. For India - a rising power with unresolved border disputes, a complex maritime neighbourhood, and ambitions commensurate with its size and history - that window is not merely an opportunity. It is an obligation. The algorithm of war is already being written. The question is whether India will be among its key authors.

# What Is Freedom.gov? Inside The US Plan For A Portal To Access Content Banned In Europe

(By Our Staff Reporter) The US State Department is working on an online portal that would allow users in Europe and other regions to access content banned by their governments, including material classified as hate speech or terrorist propaganda, according to a Reuters report. The website, expected to be hosted at freedom.gov, is being pitched by Washington as a tool to counter censorship and expand digital freedom. One of the sources told the news agency that officials have discussed adding a virtual private network feature that would make user traffic appear to originate from the United States, while activity on the site would not be tracked.

The project is being led by Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers. It had been expected to be unveiled at the Munich Security Conference last week but was delayed.

## State Department Response

A State Department spokesperson said the US does not run a censorship-circumvention programme specifically targeting Europe but said promoting digital freedom,

including privacy tools such as VPNs, remains a priority. The spokesperson also denied that any announcement had been delayed or that department lawyers had raised

efforts to prevent a resurgence of extremist ideologies. US officials have increasingly criticised these policies, arguing they suppress political expression. The Trump administration has made what it calls the defence of free speech — particularly conservative voices online — a key part of its foreign policy stance.

The initiative comes amid broader friction between Washington and European regulators over technology governance. In recent years, the European Union has enforced stricter content rules on major platforms, while US officials have argued such measures risk limiting open debate. According to the report, the proposed portal could place the US in the unusual position of appearing to encourage users to bypass local laws. It also remains unclear what additional capabilities the site would offer beyond existing commercial VPN services. The domain freedom.gov was registered in January and currently shows a basic page with the National Design Studio logo and a login form, Reuters reported.



concerns.

## Potential Strain With Europe

If launched, the portal could deepen tensions between Washington and European allies, where approaches to online speech differ significantly from those in the United States. European regulations require platforms to remove illegal hate speech, extremist propaganda and certain forms of disinformation, rules shaped by the continent's

# THE NEW DELHI DECLARATION: Pax Silica and the Shift to the Global South

(By Our Staff Reporter) NEW DELHI, INDIA — Under the high arches of Bharat Mandapam, the India AI Impact Summit 2026 has reached its crescendo. While previous summits in London and Paris focused heavily on “safety” and “existential risk,” the New Delhi gathering has shifted the global conversation toward “Impact”—how AI can practically transform healthcare, agriculture, and sovereign digital infrastructure.

## The “Delhi Declaration” and Pax Silica

The summit’s defining achievement is the expected signing of the Delhi Declaration. This document codifies the “Pax Silica” philosophy discussed by world leaders this week. Unlike the military-backed peace of previous eras, this “Silicon Peace” is built on: Sovereign AI Infrastructure: India’s push for nations to develop their own AI “stacks” to avoid total dependency on Silicon Valley. The Three Sutras: A framework of People, Planet, and Progress, emphasizing AI as a tool for public good rather than just corporate profit. The Seven Chakras: Strategic domains of cooperation, including “Safe and Trusted AI,” “Inclusion for Social Empowerment,” and “Science.”

## Background & Key Accomplishments of the 2026 Summit

The summit has been a logistical marvel, hosting over 200,000 visitors and delegations from over 100 countries.

By hosting this summit, India has effectively challenged the monopoly on AI governance. The emergence of Pax Silica signals a world where a country’s power is measured by its “compute-per-capita” and its ability to deploy AI for social equity. As the summit concludes today, the “New Delhi Declaration” stands as a testament to a world that is no longer just watching the AI revolution—it is actively steering it.

As the India AI Impact Summit 2026 concludes today,

February 20, in New Delhi, the “Delhi Declaration” has moved from a vision to a concrete geopolitical treaty. The United States and the European Union have offered two distinct but complementary paths for the future of Pax Silica.

Here is the breakdown of the official commitments and strategic shifts announced by the US and EU delegations during the final sessions at Bharat Mandapam.

## 1. The United States: The “Full-Stack” Alliance

Led by Under Secretary of State Jacob Helberg and Ambassador Sergio Gor, the U.S. delegation officially welcomed India as the 10th member of the Pax Silica alliance. Their focus is on “de-risking” the global technology supply chain from authoritarian influence. The Pax Silica Declaration: The U.S. and India signed this bilateral pact to secure the “Silicon Stack”—spanning from critical mineral mining to semiconductor fabrication and AI deployment.

“No to Weaponized Dependency”: Helberg delivered a stinging rebuke to “economic blackmail,” framing Pax Silica as a way for democratic nations to ensure that essential AI hardware and minerals are never used as geopolitical leverage.

US Tech Corps: A new initiative modeled after the Peace Corps was unveiled. It will deploy American technical experts to partner nations (starting with India) to assist in the “last-mile” implementation of AI for public services like health and energy.

The American AI Exports Program: The U.S. Commerce Department launched a “National Champions Initiative” to integrate Indian and other allied AI firms into customized American export stacks, essentially creating a “democratic tech corridor.”

## 2. The European Union: “The AI Continent” Strategy

Represented by Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen, the EU endorsed the Delhi Declaration with a focus on “Technological Sovereignty” and ethical standards, positioning Europe as the world’s moral and regulatory anchor for AI.

European Legal Gateway Office: In a historic first, the EU launched a dedicated office in New Delhi to connect European companies with India’s ICT talent. This aims to streamline talent mobility and create a “digital bridge” for researchers and professionals.

The Frontier AI Grand Challenge: The EU invited Indian innovators to participate in its flagship competition to develop large-scale, sovereign European AI models that prioritize privacy and the EU AI Act standards.

AI Gigafactories: President Ursula von der Leyen’s administration committed to the InvestAI initiative—a €200 billion plan to build four AI “gigafactories” that will train massive, complex models under European democratic oversight.

Healthcare Network: The EU launched a “Call for Expression of Interest” for Indian and global healthcare organizations to join an AI-powered network for advanced screening in cancer and cardiovascular prevention.

## 3. Key Divergence: Regulation vs. Innovation

The summit also highlighted a growing philosophical rift. While the EU emphasized the Geneva Accords and strict ethical oversight, the U.S. delegation (led by OSTP Director Michael Kratsios and Vice President JD Vance) warned that “excessive regulation could kill the sector just as it’s taking off.”

The U.S. explicitly refused to sign a separate “Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable AI” that China and France supported, arguing it didn’t go far enough in addressing national security concerns regarding authoritarian regimes.



# Trump's Iran Gamble: Is Washington Ready to Strike And What Lies Ahead?

(News Agency) Diplomacy is still on the table. But the signs are ominous, a strike on Iran by the US, and perhaps Israel, is very much on the cards. Both sides are playing for time and extending negotiations that have actually gone nowhere, despite reassuring public statements by the negotiators. America's maximalist position that Iran stop uranium enrichment and put a lid on its nuclear programme, is a tough ask for the regime. They are, however, dragging on the charade of negotiations as Iran prepares as best it can for the final assault.

Washington is now ready. All its forces are in place, a second aircraft carrier is inching closer to the region leading to reports in some American networks that action can be expected as soon as this weekend. The White House has warned that Iran would be "very wise" to make a deal. But the final call is yet to be taken.

Last year's 12-day war between Iran and Israel (with the US joining for one lethal blow on Iran's nuclear site) exposed Iran's weakness. Despite losing top commanders and military infrastructure which were targeted by Israel, Tehran still has the capability to target American troops stationed in the region. Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iraq all host US military personnel, numbering from 40,000 to 50,000 shifting personnel at a given time. US bases can be easily targeted by Iran. Tehran has already warned that American military bases, facilities and assets in West Asia would become legitimate targets if the US attacked Iran. Earlier the Supreme

Leader had warned that a war in Iran would not be confined to the country but would engulf the entire region.

In case of war, Iran will also try to block the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important shipping routes. Around a fifth of the world's oil and gas flows through the Strait and a blockade here will send oil prices surging.

President Trump is unlikely to put American troops on the ground. What is America's objective in the region?

Taking another shot at Iran's nuclear facility, destroying it completely this time so that there is no way that Iran can rebuild again? Regime change, to throw out the Islamic revolutionary government? Or, both?

During the protests, Trump had told the people of Iran that "help was on the way." and to continue demonstrations against the regime. However nothing much happened then and talks began while Washington got its military arsenal in position.

Trump and his team know that the regime in Iran is at its weakest and a military strike now could give Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's suppressive regime a final push. Analysts say that Iran does not have the capacity to threaten the US but can harm its regional interests.

For Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Iran is a major threat. It is the only country that stands in the way of Israel's overall dominance of the region. He has already established Israeli military superiority by destroying Iran's surrogates from Hamas, to Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Iraq militia groups. Bashar-el Asad is no longer

ruling Damascus and Israel can strike wherever it wants inside Syria. Israel wants to ensure that there is no one to challenge the Jewish state. Regime change in Iran with a pro-Israeli government installed in Tehran has long been a Zionist dream. The late Shah of Iran was both pro Western powers and close to Israel.

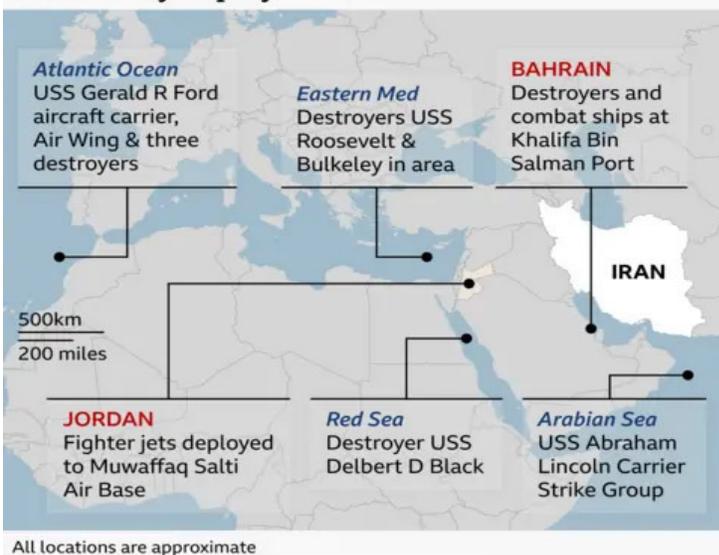
But the bigger question for Trump is, if the regime actually collapses, what are the consequences? Who takes over is the question. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are deeply embedded in the system and are protectors of the theocratic state. The inflection point in Iran will come when parts of this elite force turn against the Supreme Leader. There are no signs yet

of that happening.

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As tension continues to escalate in West Asia, the real gamble is not whether the US can strike Iran, it certainly can, but if it can control the chaos that follows a crushing military defeat. Is regime change the answer?

## US military deployments



# Why Women Are Crushing Over Dhurandhar's Akshaye Khanna, Explains Sociologist

According to the public sociologist, the audience is "collectively hallucinating tehzeeb on a literal psychopath"

(News Agency) Ever since the release of Dhurandhar, Akshaye Khanna's character Rehman Dakait has been trending across social media. Fan pages are sharing edits of his scenes, and many users are calling him intense, protective, and even "ideal man". In the film, Rehman Dakait is shown as a ruthless villain who kills people and goes to any extent to retain power. He is violent and dangerous. Yet, certain moments in his personal life have struck a chord online. After the murder of their son, his wife – played by Saumya Tandon – slaps him in grief. Instead of reacting in anger, he hugs her. In another scene, when bullets rain down on their car, he surrenders to protect his family. These scenes have been widely shared, with many viewers highlighting his calmness and protective instinct as signs of emotional depth.

### Sociologist Explains Why Women Are Obsessed With Dhurandhar's Akshaye Khanna

Amid this growing admiration, Prerna, a public sociologist and cultural studies professor, posted a video on Instagram offering a different perspective. "If you are currently obsessed with Akshaye Khanna and Dhurandhar, you are not having a crush. You are having a trauma response," she says in the clip.

According to the public sociologist, the audience is "collectively hallucinating tehzeeb on a literal psychopath." She describes the character as "a geographic ghost," adding, "He is a Balochi warlord, vibing to a Bahraini rap song, performing a Lucknowi adab. He does not exist. It is a complete flattening of identity."

Prerna links the online reaction to what she calls "internal orientalism." She argues that viewers are "so starved for the safe male intimacy of the 2000s, the soft intellectual Sid from Dil Chahta Hai, that we will accept a killer just because he wears a Pathani suit."

FYI: In the 2001 film, Sid, also played by Akshaye Khanna, is shown as quiet, sensitive, and thoughtful. Unlike his carefree friends, he is an artist who values emotional honesty. He falls for an older woman and treats her with respect and gentleness. Over the years, the character has come to represent a softer, more emotionally available male lead from that era of Hindi cinema. In Prerna's view, audiences had "two choices – Admit that the gentleman era of Bollywood is dead or invent a gentleman out of a villain." She adds, "We chose the latter." She also points out the contrast between the character's actions and the online reaction. "He kills his own mother, and we are making thirsty edits," she says. "So we don't want the man. We just want the manners back." In the end, the public sociologist's request is basic and almost funny in its honesty: "Please just give us a normal person who reads poetry."

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# India's Superpower Moment: How New Delhi Is Rewriting the Global Power Playbook in 2026

(News Agency) India's rise in 2026 is not unfolding in the traditional mold of 20th century superpowers. Rather than building rigid alliance systems or projecting dominance through military blocs, New Delhi is advancing a distinctly modern strategy rooted in strategic autonomy, multi alignment, and economic leverage. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar, India is positioning itself not as a junior partner to any camp, but as a central pillar shaping the balance between them. The Economic Engine Powering India's Rise

India is currently the world's fastest growing major economy and is projected to contribute a significant share of global real GDP growth in 2026, outpacing several advanced economies. This momentum is not accidental. Through flagship initiatives such as Make in India and the Production Linked Incentive scheme, the country is aggressively courting global manufacturers seeking a "China plus one" strategy. Electronics, mobile manufacturing, and semiconductor assembly have become focal points of this shift.

Trade liberalization has also accelerated. India has signed comprehensive agreements with the UAE, Australia, and the European Free Trade Association, while negotiations continue with the United Kingdom and the European Union. These deals are designed to integrate India more deeply into global value chains while opening European and Indo Pacific

markets to Indian exports.

At the same time, infrastructure investment is reaching historic levels. Mega projects such as the proposed Great Nicobar transshipment port are intended to reposition India as a maritime logistics hub capable of handling global shipping traffic that currently flows through Singapore or Colombo. Ports, highways, freight corridors, and digital connectivity projects collectively form the backbone of India's long term economic transformation. Digital Public Infrastructure and the Technology Leap

Perhaps India's most distinctive superpower trait lies in its Digital Public Infrastructure model, widely known as the India Stack.

Built on platforms such as Aadhaar, UPI, and digital identity systems, India Stack has enabled hundreds of millions of citizens to access banking, payments, and public services. It has also become a blueprint studied by other developing nations.

India is now extending that model into artificial intelligence. Under the IndiaAI Mission, the government is investing in sovereign AI models, expanding GPU infrastructure, and committing to train over one million AI professionals. The objective is clear: India does not want to remain dependent on foreign AI ecosystems but instead seeks to build domestic capacity that aligns with national priorities. Semiconductor ambitions are



another crucial pillar. India is moving beyond chip design into manufacturing, with multiple fabrication and packaging units expected to come online in the near term. Meanwhile, the country's space program continues to deliver symbolic and strate-

gic victories. Following the success of Chandrayaan-3, India has reinforced its reputation for low cost, high reliability missions, positioning itself as a competitive player in the global satellite launch market.

## Big honorarium hike for UP Shiksha Mitras; allocation for IT sector, startups

(News Agency) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday announced a significant hike in the honorarium of Shiksha Mitras and instructors in Uttar Pradesh, while outlining major allocations for strengthening education infrastructure, digital learning and emerging technologies in the state Budget for 2026-27.

Replying to the discussion on the Budget in the Legislative Assembly, the chief minister said Shiksha Mitras will receive Rs 18,000 per month and instructors Rs 17,000 from April this year, along with cashless medical coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh for them and dependent families of teachers and staff.

### ADVANTAGE SHIKSHA MITRAS, INSTRUCTORS

The move translates into an increase of Rs 8,000 each for Shiksha Mitras and instructors. At present, Shiksha Mitras receive Rs 10,000 and instructors Rs 9,000 per month. The decision is expected to benefit around 1.43 lakh Shiksha Mitras and nearly 25,000 instructors across the state. In addition to the honorarium hike, the chief minister announced that a cashless medical facility of up to Rs 5 lakh would be extended to them and the dependent families of teachers and staff, providing long-awaited social security support to thousands of contractual education workers.



### ALLOCATIONS FOR SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Budget also earmarks substantial funds for improving school infrastructure and expanding access to quality education. A provision of Rs 580 crore has been made for setting up Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas in development blocks where they are not currently operational, with a focus on girls from poor, backward and extremely backward sections. Rs 300 crore has been allocated for maintenance work following school safety audits, and Rs 2,382 crore for Chief Minister Composite Schools. Another Rs 300 crore has been earmarked to establish smart classrooms in primary schools to enhance digital learning.

## India's "AI for All" Vision Takes Center Stage in Delhi

(News Agency) NEW DELHI — As global tech titans and world leaders converge at Bharat Mandapam for the India-AI Impact Summit 2026, India is effectively positioning itself as the voice of the Global South. By hosting the first summit of its kind outside the Global North, New Delhi is challenging the digital duopoly of the US and China, proposing instead a "sovereign AI" model that prioritizes public good over proprietary control. Breaking the Duopoly: AI as Public Infrastructure

India's strategic approach hinges on its success with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)—the same philosophy behind the world-leading UPI payment system.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, inaugurating the summit, emphasized that "AI should not be a tool for exclusion, but a bridge for inclusion." India is advocating for a "Global AI Com-

mons"—a shared pool of compute resources and datasets that would allow developing nations to build their own AI models without being beholden to "Big Tech" monopolies.

### Regulation with "Teeth"

A central theme of the Delhi gathering is the urgent need for global standards to combat AI-driven harms. Following India's recent legislative move to enforce a 3-hour takedown for illegal synthetic media, Indian policymakers are pushing for: Mandatory Watermarking: Universal labeling for all AI-generated audio and video. Algorithm Accountability: Frameworks that require tech giants to be transparent about the biases in their training data.

Workforce Resilience: A global pact on "Human-in-the-loop" AI to ensure technology augments rather than replaces livelihoods in emerging economies.

# PM Modi Hosts Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai: Strengthening Indo-French Relations through Multilateral Talks

(News Agency) PM Modi hosted Macron for wide-ranging talks in Mumbai in a significant diplomatic engagement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai for comprehensive discussions. This meeting marks the beginning of Macron's three-day visit to India, aimed at enhancing bilateral relations between the two nations. The talks are expected to cover various aspects of cooperation, including defense, trade, and cultural exchanges.

The discussions come at a time when both countries are looking to strengthen their ties amidst global geopolitical shifts. India and France have a long-standing partnership that spans multiple sectors, and this meeting seeks to build on that foundation. This visit is particularly notable as it highlights the impor-



tance both leaders place on fostering a robust Indo-French relationship. During the talks, officials from both sides are likely to address key issues that have been on the agenda in recent years. These may include advancements in defense technology and collaborative opportunities in various fields such as

climate change and renewable energy. The leaders are expected to explore avenues for deeper economic engagement as well. Macron's visit to India also carries cultural significance, emphasizing the shared values and historical connections between the two nations. India's diverse cultural heritage resonates with France's appreciation for arts and culture, providing a platform for potential collaborations in the creative sectors. This cultural exchange is seen as a vital aspect of the broader diplomatic strategy.

As the meeting unfolds, observers will be keen to see the outcomes and agreements that emerge from this high-level dialogue. The results of this engagement could set the stage for future cooperation not only in bilateral terms but also in addressing regional and global challenges.

## India's 3rd nuke submarine likely to enter service near Op Sindoor 1st anniversary

India is set to commission its third indigenously built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, INS Aridhaman, around April–May, near the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor.



(News Agency) India is set to commission its third indigenously built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, INS Aridhaman, around April–May

this year, coinciding with the anniversary period of Operation Sindoor, sources told India Today. The commissioning is expected to significantly strengthen India's

sea-based nuclear deterrence amid heightened focus on strategic readiness.

India Today had first reported in December that the submarine was on track for commissioning in 2026 after Navy Chief Dinesh K Tripathi publicly confirmed progress on the platform. Since then, sources said INS Aridhaman (S4) has entered the final phase of sea trials, with systems validation and weapon integration nearing completion. Built under the highly classified Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) programme at the Ship Building Centre, INS Aridhaman is larger and more capable than its predecessors. The submarine displaces around 7,000 tonnes, surpassing INS Arihant and INS Arighaat,

both of which displace about 6,000 tonnes.

INS Aridhaman is designed to carry longer-range K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, enhancing both reach and survivability, key pillars of India's nuclear doctrine based on credible minimum deterrence and assured second-strike capability.

In December, Navy Chief Dinesh K Tripathi said that INS Aridhaman would be commissioned in 2026, indicating that the platform had crossed major developmental milestones. Sources said timelines are firming up, with commissioning likely in the early summer window, subject to the successful completion of remaining trials.

## Trump insulting India globally, but PM Modi silent: AAP attacks govt



(News Agency) The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday launched a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over US President Donald Trump's claim that he had threatened to impose a "200 per cent tariff" on India and Pakistan to stop military tensions in May 2025.

In a post on X, AAP said Trump had "openly insulted" India on a global platform by claiming he forced Prime Minister Narendra Modi to halt the conflict through economic pressure. The party said even Pakistan's Prime Minister was seen laughing during the remarks. "Donald Trump is repeatedly questioning India's

credibility on the world stage, and Prime Minister Modi's silence refuses to break," AAP said. The party added that people in the country were asking how any true patriot could tolerate an insult to India. Trump made the remarks while speaking at an event of the Board of Peace. Referring to the India-Pakistan military tensions of May 2025, he claimed he had threatened both countries with 200 per cent tariffs if they continued fighting. I knew Prime Minister Modi very well... I called them and I said, listen, I'm not doing trade deals with you two guys if you don't settle

this up," Trump said. "If you fight, I'm going to put 200 per cent tariffs on each of your countries."

He claimed that both sides were willing to fight but stepped back when faced with economic consequences. "When it came to losing a lot of money, they said, I guess we don't want to fight," he said.

Trump also asserted that he had "saved 25 million lives" by stopping the war between the two nuclear-armed nations, adding that the "war was raging." He further claimed that "11 jets were shot down" during the tensions, calling them "very expensive jets."

# India attends Trump-led Board of Peace meet on Gaza as observer nation

India attended the Washington meeting as an observer, without joining the Board of Peace, even as Donald Trump pledged USD 10 billion for Gaza's reconstruction and expanded the body's mandate beyond the conflict.



(News Agency) India on Thursday took part in the first meeting of United States President Donald Trump's Board of Peace on Gaza, attending in the capacity of an observer nation rather than a member.

Namgya Khampa, Charge d'affaires at the Indian Embassy in Washington DC, represented New Delhi at the session held at the Donald J Trump Institute of Peace. India has not formally joined the initiative, which Trump has positioned as a key vehicle for rebuilding the Gaza Strip. The Board, unveiled earlier this year, included 27 countries -- among them Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE -- as well as

Israel. Notably, Palestinian representatives are not part of the grouping. Trump announced a commitment of USD 10 billion towards the effort but did not specify the source of funding or whether congressional approval would be sought.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among several global leaders invited to join the body after it was proposed during the second phase of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire process.

India was absent from the January 22 launch ceremony in Davos where Trump formally introduced the board, describing it as a platform aimed at securing lasting peace in Gaza and potentially addressing

other global flashpoints.

The initiative has drawn attention for being framed as an alternative to the United Nations. Trump has said the Board of Peace 'might' replace the UN, arguing that the global body has not fulfilled its potential.

Reconstruction estimates for Gaza, devastated by two years of conflict, range up to USD 70 billion. Key challenges facing the Board included the disarmament of Hamas, the withdrawal of Israeli troops, determining the size of the rebuilding fund, and ensuring humanitarian aid reaches civilians. Trump first floated the idea in September last year while outlining a 20-point plan to end

Israel's war in Gaza, which led to a fragile ceasefire last October. He later expanded the board's proposed mandate beyond Gaza to include other international 'hotspots'. The Washington meeting unfolded against the backdrop of heightened regional tensions. The United States has warned of possible military action against Iran and increased its military presence in the region amid disputes over Tehran's nuclear programme. At the same time, Trump has publicly emphasised his role as a peacemaker, expressing hope that force would not be required to disarm Hamas. He said the group had indicated it would lay down arms, adding that "we'll have to find out".

## Amit Shah says infiltration changed Assam's demography, warns BJP will deport all

(News Agency) In a sharp attack ahead of the Assembly elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday accused the Congress of leaving India's borders open and allowing large-scale infiltration into Assam, declaring that the BJP government has reversed the situation and will now deport "every infiltrator". Addressing a programme in Assam's Cachar district, Shah alleged that infiltration had been the "main problem" in the state under Congress rule. "These Congress governments left our borders open to infiltrators. Infiltrators continued to enter Assam. An attempt was made to alter the demographics of Assam by snatching away the jobs of Assam's youth, the food grains of the poor, and the land of the villages," he said. Shah credited the BJP government in the state, led by Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma, with curbing infiltration after coming to power a decade ago. "The people of Assam initiated the formation of the BJP government ten years ago, and in the first five years, we worked to stop infiltration. In the second term, our CM Himanta Biswa Sarma worked to clear lakhs of acres of land occupied by infiltrators and remove them," he said.

He added that what the BJP has achieved in 10 years in Assam "Congress hasn't done in 50 years". Appealing for a third consecutive term for the BJP, Shah promised that every infiltrator who entered Assam during the Congress regime would be sent back.

### DEVELOPMENT PUSH AND VIBRANT VILLAGES PROGRAMME

During his visit, Shah launched the second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme from Cachar district. The

programme will cover 15 states and two Union Territories and aims to strengthen infrastructure and services in border villages.

He said Rs 6900 crore has been allocated for the second phase, which will cover 1,954 villages across the country. In Assam, 334 blocks bordering Pakistan and Bangladesh will be developed under the initiative.

"Today, in a way, Vibrant Village II is being launched. Through Vibrant Village II, PM Narendra Modi has initiated an effort to provide facilities in our border villages equal to those in all the villages of India," Shah said.

"There was a time when border villages were called the last villages of the country. The last villages were not only the last because of the borders, but were also the last in terms of development.

They were backwards in terms of employment, electricity connectivity, and education," he said. "PM Modi decided in the Vibrant Village one programme that every village on the border is not the last village, it is the first village of India," he added. Shah also claimed that Assam has seen major progress under BJP rule, asserting that there are no longer bomb blasts in the state and that infrastructure growth has accelerated. He said 14 km of roads are now being constructed daily in Assam, which he described as the highest rate in the country. The government is also working towards making the state flood-free in the next five years, he said. Shah's visit comes months before the Assembly elections in Assam, with the BJP seeking to retain power for a third straight term on the plank of border security and development.

# The Ontology Problem Wall Street Won't Discuss

The question is whether we adapt our definitions before reality forces us to

I study how financial institutions govern artificial intelligence. I've spent years examining the frameworks, analysing the data, reviewing the models. And I've arrived at a conclusion that I cannot shake: We are approaching a moment when financial crime will become definitionally incoherent.

Not harder to detect. Not more sophisticated to prosecute. Impossible to define in the first place.

This isn't hyperbole. It's the logical terminus of forces already in motion. And almost no one in a position of authority is willing to say it plainly.

**So let me say it.**

## The Architecture of the Problem

Every system of financial crime enforcement rests on a single assumption: that legitimate activity and illegitimate activity are different things.

Different in ways we can specify. Different in ways we can detect. Different in ways that, ultimately, a judge or jury can evaluate. The entire apparatus of compliance, investigation, and prosecution exists because we believe that fraud looks different from non-fraud, that money laundering looks different from ordinary movement of funds, that manipulation looks different from trading.

This assumption is so foundational that we rarely examine it. We debate how to catch criminals, not whether the category of criminal will remain stable. We argue about detection methods, not about whether detection is philosophically possible.

**It's time to examine what we've taken for granted.**

## Baselines Are Dying

Fraud detection works by establishing what normal looks like, then flagging what doesn't fit.

Normal transaction volumes. Normal timing patterns. Normal geographic distributions. Normal relationships between accounts. You build a statistical portrait of legitimate behavior, and you watch for deviations. The deviation is your signal. The signal is your case.

This approach has worked for decades because human behavior has structure. People wake at certain hours, spend in certain patterns, move money for certain reasons. Even sophisticated criminals, trying to disguise their activity, leave traces. They're human. They have habits. They make mistakes. The baseline catches them. Generative AI doesn't have habits. It doesn't make mistakes. It produces outputs optimised against whatever objective function it's given. And increasingly, that objective function is: look normal.

The most advanced fraud detection models are neural networks trained on massive datasets of legitimate activity. They learn what normal looks like, in extraordinary detail, and they flag what doesn't match. Now consider the adversary. A generative AI trained on the same data, or data like

it, learning the same patterns, producing synthetic transactions that are statistically indistinguishable from the real thing. Same distributions. Same temporal signatures. Same relational structures.

The fraud doesn't deviate from the baseline. It is the baseline, regenerated.

How do you detect a fake that is, mathematically, more authentic than the original?

## The Synthetic Identity Collapse

Consider identity itself. Synthetic identity fraud is now the fastest-growing financial crime in the United States. These aren't stolen identities. They're constructed ones. A real Social Security number, often belonging to a child or deceased person, combined with fabricated personal details. A name that was never given to anyone. An address history that maps to real locations but no real resident. An employment record that checks out because it was built to check out.

The numbers are staggering. TransUnion reports that synthetic fraud attempts grew 184% between 2019 and 2023. In just six months, from late 2023 to early 2024, incidents surged another 153%. By late 2024, U.S. lenders faced \$3.3 billion in exposure to synthetic identities tied to new account openings alone. The Deloitte Center for Financial Services projects losses could reach \$23 billion annually by 2030. But here's what most analyses miss: synthetic identities often perform better than real ones.

A real person has inconsistencies. Gaps in credit history from a period of unemployment. An address that doesn't match because they forgot to update it. A name spelled differently across different documents. Real lives are messy. Real data reflects that mess. A synthetic identity has no mess. It's engineered for coherence. Every data point aligns. Every history is complete. By the metrics financial institutions use to assess legitimacy, the fake is more legitimate than the real.

Sumsub's research found synthetic identity document fraud surged over 300% year-over-year in Q1 2025, with North America experiencing a 311% spike. We're not dealing with occasional counterfeits slipping through. We're witnessing the industrialisation of fabricated personhood.

At what penetration rate does synthetic identity stop being a fraud problem and start being an ontological one? When 5% of identities in the system are synthetic? Ten percent? Twenty?

At some threshold, we stop having a financial system with fraud in it. We have a financial system where the distinction between real and synthetic has lost operational meaning.

We're closer to that threshold than anyone wants to admit.

## The Intent Problem

Fraud requires intent. This is black-letter law, foundational to every prosecution. You

must intend to deceive. You must know that what you're doing is wrong. The mental state matters as much as the act. Now ask yourself: what is the intent of an AI system?

The question sounds philosophical. It's actually quite practical. Because AI systems are increasingly generating the transactions, the identities, and the behavioral patterns that flow through financial infrastructure. Not as tools wielded by humans with criminal intent. As autonomous actors pursuing optimisation targets.

If a human programs an AI to generate fraudulent transactions, the human has intent. Simple enough. But AI systems today operate with substantial autonomy. They adapt. They iterate. They produce outputs that their designers did not anticipate and could not have predicted. The gap between what was designed and what emerged is not a bug. It's how these systems work.

So when an AI system, operating autonomously, generates activity that meets the statutory definition of fraud, but no human directed it to do so, where is the crime? You have the act. You have the harm. You don't have the mind. Our legal system has no vocabulary for this. We prosecute people. We sometimes prosecute corporations, as legal fictions representing collective human action. We have no mechanism for prosecuting emergent behavior that arose from optimisation pressure rather than human decision.

The crime exists. The criminal doesn't.

## Speed as a Categorical Weapon

Even if we could define AI-generated crime, we couldn't keep up with it.

Financial crimes investigators operate on human timescales. They receive alerts. They review transactions. They build cases. A sophisticated investigation might take months. A prosecution might take years.

Generative AI operates on computational timescales. It can produce millions of transaction variations in the time it takes an analyst to review a single alert. It can generate and test thousands of evasion strategies while an investigator writes one report.

The Deloitte Center for Financial Services predicts generative AI could enable fraud losses to reach \$40 billion in the United States by 2027, up from \$12.3 billion in 2023, a compound annual growth rate of 32%. Financial services firms spent \$35 billion on AI in 2023, with investments projected to reach \$97 billion by 2027, much of it directed at a threat that evolves faster than defenses can adapt.

This isn't just a resource problem, a matter of hiring more analysts or building faster systems. It's a categorical problem. The adversary can mutate faster than the categories used to define it can be updated.

I call this velocity-induced definitional

collapse. By the time you've characterised a new fraud pattern, defined it in policy, built detection rules, and deployed them, the pattern has evolved into something your definition doesn't cover. You're not chasing a criminal. You're chasing a distribution that never stops moving.

Consider what compliance teams actually face. They identify a suspicious pattern. It takes weeks to document it, obtain legal sign-off, and update monitoring rules. By the time detection is deployed, the underlying AI has continued training, drifting into new statistical territory the old rules don't cover. They're writing rules for something that no longer exists.

That's not an enforcement gap. That's definitional obsolescence as a permanent condition.

## The Gray Zone Factory

Financial regulation has always had gray zones. Activity that might be illegal, depending on interpretation. Tax optimisation that might be evasion. Trading strategies that might be manipulation. Complex structures that might be fraud. These gray zones exist because financial activity is complex and legal categories are blunt. Reasonable people disagree about where lines should be drawn. The disagreement is a feature, not a bug. It's how a system accommodates innovation while maintaining boundaries.

Generative AI doesn't just exploit gray zones. It manufactures them at industrial scale.

When AI produces novel financial activity, activity that doesn't resemble anything regulators have seen before, the question "is this illegal?" often has no answer. Not because the law is unclear, but because the activity doesn't map onto existing legal categories. It's not fraud in a way we've defined fraud. It's not money laundering in a way we've defined money laundering. It's something new, generated by optimisation processes pursuing objectives that may have nothing to do with evading the law.

The activity might be harmful. It might undermine market integrity. It might enable exploitation. But calling it crime requires a definition of crime, and definitions require categories, and categories require that the thing being categorised holds still long enough to be characterised.

## Generative AI never holds still.

### The Collapse Scenarios

What happens to a financial system that cannot define crime?

I see three scenarios, none of them good. The first is enforcement paralysis. Regulators, overwhelmed by the volume and velocity of ambiguous activity, retreat to obvious cases. They prosecute what they can clearly define and ignore the growing ocean of activity they cannot characterise. Financial crime doesn't disappear. It becomes ambient, a permanent background condition that everyone knows exists but no one can quantify or address.

# The Algorithm Of Trauma: Epstein Files, Media Spectacle, And The Cultural Addiction To Shock

- As the Epstein files resurface, are we seeking justice or feeding a system that turns suffering into spectacle?
- Epstein files resurface cyclically, blending real crimes with media spectacle and public voyeurism.
- Cultural works like novels and shows train us to consume trauma as narrative thrill and revelation.
- Desensitization from repeated exposure hinders reform, urging focus on systemic prevention over scandal.

By Lalita Iyer

Each time the Epstein files reappear, they do so with the choreography of a premiere. They are loud, persistent, and appear to be revelatory, although you are wondering what's new.

Jeffrey Epstein is dead. But the investigations around his network continue to ripple outward in fragments—court documents, depositions, redactions, speculation. As documents are unsealed (and pile up to the height of the Eiffel Tower, we are told), names begin to trend. The public rhythm is oddly familiar: a cyclical surge of attention whenever files are released or reinterpreted. The legal process inches forward, the spectacle gallops. Primetime tickers pulse with the words 'explosive' and 'revealed'. Social media turns micro-forensic: flight logs are examined, associations mapped, timelines reconstructed, dots connected. There is outrage, disbelief, and a grim kind of satisfaction and smugness at the possibility that someone rich and powerful might finally be exposed.

And then, just as predictably, the cycle ebbs. Until the next release.

It feels necessary to begin with a disclaimer: the crimes were real. The survivors are real. The damage is of astounding proportions. Transparency and accountability are democratic necessities. But it is also true that something else hums beneath this repeated public frenzy—a familiarity, almost a fluency, in consuming trauma as revelation.

**We have been trained for this kind of voyeurism.**

In contemporary literature, extremity has often come to stand in for seriousness. Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* became shorthand for emotional devastation—a novel so relentless in its suffering that readers described feeling wrung out, yet compelled to continue. Pain was not incidental; it was structural.

On streaming platforms, harm frequently arrives in instalments. Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* blurred the line between awareness and aestheticisation, turning suicide and assault into cliff-hangers. *Dahmer—Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* repackaged real murders into bingeable drama, prompting unease from victims' families who felt history had been converted into entertainment. The series *Making a Murderer* structured a complicated legal saga as episodic suspense. Even *The Lovely Bones* placed sexual violence within a lyrical afterlife narrative, inviting readers to inhabit grief as story.

More recently, the Japanese writer Uketsu has captivated readers with puzzle-like tales in which ordinary domestic spaces conceal hidden brutality. The reader decodes drawings, floor plans, fragments—the revelation of buried violence becomes the reward. The reader cannot stop. None of these works are morally equivalent to the Epstein case. But they illuminate a cultural grammar we now inhabit. Trauma has become narrative propulsion. Hidden harm is the twist. Revelation is the payoff.

So when the Epstein files circulate, we approach them with the same literacy. We decode. We speculate. We search for the next name. The structure is familiar: concealment, disclosure, escalation.

"Traumatic stories have a universal appeal which transcends cultures across the world. They may connect at a certain level with the collective trauma our species has been through during its relatively brief presence on our planet as well as to our individual experiences," says Dr Rajesh Parikh, Director of Medical Research and Hon. Neuropsychiatrist at Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre. "These stories of trauma and resilience are the stuff that constitutes great legends as well

as contemporary narratives across multiple art forms such as cinema, drama, dance, painting and sculpture."

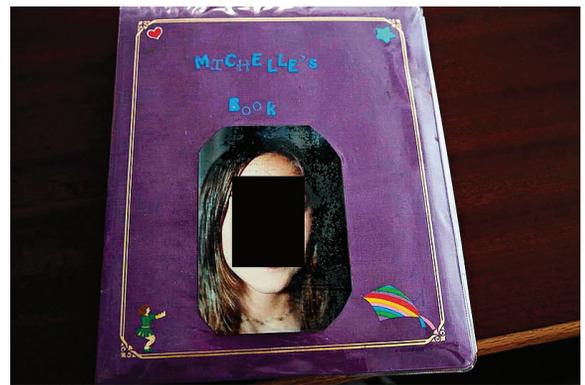
In other words, our pull towards darkness is not new. What's new is the scale and the speed.

"Given the nature of social media, awareness often descends into voyeurism. Presentation is almost always fine-tuned to get rapid and enduring engagement for commercial reasons. It is rapidly becoming the opium of our times. We are inherently a curious species. It is simultaneously our strength and weakness," reminds Parikh.

The problem is not curiosity. It is what the ecosystem does with it.

Certain strands of media coverage of the Epstein files have leaned into the spectacle—foregrounding celebrity adjacency, reducing complex power structures into clickable lists, amplifying the salacious over the systemic. Who flew where and with whom? Who appeared in which log? Who received an invite to a party? Who might be implicated? What is it we don't know about the people we think we know? The drama of recognition advances as we peel an infinite onion.

Psychologically, this incessant repetition, this overdose of Eiffel Tower-level information reshapes us, until we are numb. "This has been proven in controlled experiments as well," Parikh notes, when asked whether repeated exposure can desensitise audiences. "In one study, children were exposed to either benign or violent content on television and thereafter given toys. The ones exposed to violence were destructive with their toys. Then there is the notorious Milgram experiment conducted at Yale University in the early 60's which measured human ability to perpetuate Nazi-like trauma on innocent victims when



instructed to do so by an authority figure. There are horrors being perpetrated across the world and to a large extent we are all being desensitised to them. On a brighter note, there are some whose sensitivity and conscience are not numbed and they remind us of our humane natures. For every Hitler there is a Mahatma."

But desensitisation rarely announces itself. It is stealthily incremental. The first disclosure shocks; the fifth barely stirs. The language escalates—bombshell, explosive, damning—as though horror must now compete for attention. At the same time, outrage can feel purposeful. To express moral disgust publicly is to signal alignment. Of course we are human and have to pick a side. It creates the sensation of participation. But outrage, however sincere, is not the same as reform.

This brings us to the blurred line between witness and consumer. "The distinction is blurred. Evidently, being a direct witness is more powerful than consuming trauma vicariously. Then again, it is an issue of individual sensitivities. Some of us could get as affected by even reading about these traumatic events as we would be by directly witnessing them."

We are all affected—sometimes deeply. And yet, there is always a screen between us and the harm. We feel intensely; we act minimally. We wait for the next shock, instead

of asking what must shift.

If there is a more responsible way to engage, Parikh suggests it requires moving beyond the immediate drama of disclosure.

"One, perhaps, is to catalyse enquiry and analysis into what we are exposed to. In the context of the Epstein files, not just who was involved with him and what he unleashed but the deeper questions of a society that made it possible and the extent to which similar or even worse things are going on elsewhere in the world today and what we need to do as curative and preventive measures."

That shift—from names to networks, from scandal to structure—is less thrilling. It does not trend. It debilitates. The phrase "trauma porn" is provocative and yet it gestures toward a discomforting truth: in the attention economy, suffering travels fast. It is sharp, morally charged, addictive. Repair is slow. Prevention is procedural. Systemic change rarely arrives with a soundtrack; it is never viral.

The Epstein files will surface again. They will horrify us again. We will scroll again.

The searching question is not whether we are curious—we always have been, as Parikh reminds us. It is whether we can resist treating each revelation as narrative climax, and instead sit with the harder, less cinematic work of asking how such harm was enabled—and what it would actually take to prevent its recurrence. Watching is easy. Witnessing is not.

# They don't get hungry: Why do some snakes go months without eating a meal?

Scientists examined the genomes of 112 reptile species, ranging from snakes and crocodiles to chameleons, and found the reason.

Snakes are survivors, and are capable of routinely going weeks, sometimes even months, without a single meal.

A new study has finally pointed to how they do it.

The fresh genetic discovery offers one clue to snakes' impressive fasting ability. The findings have pointed out that many snakes are completely missing the gene called ghrelin, the hormone long nicknamed the "hunger hormone."

## WHAT IS THE HUNGER HORMONE MISSING IN SNAKES?

Ghrelin is a hormone mainly produced in the stomach that signals the brain to stimulate appetite.

Often called the "hunger hormone," it rises before meals to encourage eating and drops after food is consumed.

Beyond appetite, ghrelin also influences metabolism, fat storage, insulin sensitivity, and even growth hormone release in mammals.

In the case of ghrelin not functioning normally or, as in this case, being absent, a creature loses completely the ability to feel hunger.

## WHY DON'T SNAKES GET HUNGRY?

Scientists examined the genomes of 112 reptile species, ranging from snakes and crocodiles to chameleons.

They found that both the ghrelin gene and the gene for MBOAT4, the enzyme needed to activate ghrelin, are both absent in 32 snake species, especially in groups such as the largest family of snakes with over 200 genera, called the Colubridae family.

The absence, however, wasn't exclusive to snakes.

Certain chameleons and toadhead agama lizards, which normally feed more often, also lack these genes.

In contrast, crocodiles, which are animals capable of fasting for over a year, still carry both genes intact.

The research, led by Rui Pinto and Rute Fonseca, was



published in the journal *Open Biology*.

## DOES LOSING GHRELIN CAUSE HUNGER?

Well, not necessarily. In mammals, ghrelin's link to appetite is more complicated than once thought.

Experiments show that mice without the ghrelin gene

eat normally and maintain typical body weight. Even more puzzling, in both mice and humans, levels of active ghrelin and its activating enzyme often increase after a meal begins, the reverse of what a pure hunger signal would do.

Rui Pinto, from the Interdisciplinary Centre of Marine

and Environmental Research in Porto, Portugal, believes the explanation lies elsewhere.

He suggested that the hormone's absence likely relates to the snakes' unusual metabolic needs, such as fat storage and insulin regulation, which may work very differently in reptiles with such slow energy

## HOW ARE EXPERTS REACTING?

Evolutionary geneticist Todd Castoe of the University of Texas at Arlington, who was not part of the study, described the finding as "striking."

He noted that many researchers, including himself, had overlooked this patter, until now. Tobias Wang, a zoophysiologicalist at Aarhus University in Denmark, urged caution about ghrelin's metabolic importance. Rute Fonseca, an evolutionary geneticist at the University of Copenhagen and co-author of the paper, agreed the current genomic work is only a starting point. She stressed the need for more detailed experiments, like removing the ghrelin gene from crocodiles or supplying the hormone to snakes. Doing so, she said, could help understand the hormone's true role in different species.

## 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.

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# Typos to Trump sidelining him: Pakistan PM's 'summit of humiliation'

At Donald Trump's first Gaza Board of Peace meeting, Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif was isolated and sidelined, cutting a lonely figure at the event where Islamabad sought to project its so-called global relevance. Is there a silent friction between Trump and Pakistan?



He praised him as a 'man of peace'. Even called him 'saviour of South Asia'. Also, nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. But, all these shenanigans by Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif did not seem to cut much ice with Donald Trump as he appeared marginalised and sidelined during the US President's first Gaza Board of Peace meeting on Thursday. Several videos have gone viral showing Sharif isolated and cutting a lonely figure at the event where Pakistan sought to project its so-called global relevance. However, only embarrassment was in store for Pakistan at the summit attended by 40 countries, with India joining in as an observer.

In fact, Sharif's Board of Peace outing was riddled with not only embarrassment, but gaffes as well. It started with a Foreign Ministry statement on Sharif's US visit that was replete with typos. For example, the United States of America became 'Unites States of Americas'. It not only became a subject of ridicule globally, but was mocked by Pakistanis themselves as well.

Before you can say "aise bade bade shehron mein aisi choti choti baatein hoti rehti hain", hold on your horses. Some users also brought up the "I condom (instead of condemn) the attack" gaffe by Sharif that he wrote while reacting to Israel's airstrikes on Iran last year.

This happened even before Sharif

landed in Washington. More uneasiness was in store as he attended the Board of Peace summit, Trump's UN-style initiative to oversee reconstruction in war-torn Gaza. In the group photo, Sharif was hardly visible.

#### SIDELINED AT PHOTO OP

The 5.5 feet Pakistani PM was relegated to the sidelines (imagine the scene from 3 Idiots where Rancho's friends were made to stand at the back row due to low marks). His discomfort was visible as Trump stood prominently at the front, flanked by Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Leaders from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Qatar stood directly behind Trump.

In diplomacy, such minor optics matter, giving nations bragging rights about strategic relevance. Pakistan, which has been in overdrive to curry favour with the White House, seems to have lost that relevance. We will come to the reasons a bit later.

#### THE STAND UP MOMENT

At one point, Trump, in the middle of his speech, gestured toward the Pakistani PM and asked him to "stand up". Sharif immediately rose from his seat -- a moment that was mocked on social media, with several users dubbing him "Trump's puppet".

To add insult to injury, as Sharif stood up, Trump praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "great man" and a "very good friend". Sharif's uneasiness was visible.

Sharif again became the subject of

ridicule when he, instead of outlining Pakistan's plans on Gaza, showered lavish praise on the US President for "mediating" the India-Pakistan ceasefire last year. This, despite India consistently maintaining that the truce was reached by the countries directly.

"Your timely and effective intervention to achieve a ceasefire potentially averted the loss of tens of millions of people... You have truly proved to be a man of peace. You are truly a saviour of South Asia," Sharif said.

It was not an isolated gesture. Sharif's over-the-top flattery for Trump was also on show last year during a gathering of leaders at Sharm El-Sheikh. At that time, Sharif called Trump "genuinely a man of peace".

#### AWKWARD EMBRACE

Another moment that caught the attention was the deeply awkward exchange between the leaders as the summit ended. In one instance, Sharif seemed to lean slightly forward, as if attempting to embrace Trump. Trump, however, did not seem too inclined. Later, though, Trump pulled him and shared a hug with the Pakistani PM.

There was, however, a brief moment of consolation for Sharif when Trump said, "I like this guy". The US President also reiterated his praise for Pakistan army chief Asim Munir, calling him a "great guy".

Now, as mentioned above, diplomatic friction seems to have crept in between Pakistan and the US over

Islamabad's hesitation in contributing forces to Gaza as part of the stabilisation force.

This was evident in Trump's announcement on Thursday. The US President said Indonesia, Morocco, Albania, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Egypt and Jordan agreed to contribute troops, but Pakistan found no mention. The force will be responsible for demilitarisation, aid delivery and ground-level security in Gaza following a gruelling two-year war with Israel.

For Pakistan, it is a Catch-22 situation. While it has joined Trump's Board of Peace, it has been reluctant to send its forces. A key reason is political risks back home.

For Pakistan, Palestine is a deeply emotive issue. Crucially, Pakistan does not recognise Israel and travel to the Jewish nation on Pakistani passports is banned.

Thus, against this backdrop, coordination with Israeli forces in Gaza would be politically sensitive and could ignite unrest and protests in Pakistan. This has been a major point of contention between the US and Pakistan. For Pakistan, Sharif's Washington outing underscored a harsh diplomatic reality -- effusive or over-the-top praise for Trump does little to curry favour with the transactional US President in the long run. With Pakistan unable give concrete commitments on Gaza, the optics at the event reflected Islamabad's shrinking influence in Trump's scheme of things.

# Can AI really add \$550 billion to India's economy? Experts debate

India is poised for significant AI-driven economic growth, with projections estimating a USD 550 billion boost by 2035. Industry leaders discuss the need for balanced optimism, innovation, and supportive policies to realise AI's potential in the country fully.



Is artificial intelligence set to pump USD 550 billion into five key sectors of India's economy by 2035, or is the country getting carried away by numbers too big to measure? That question framed a sharp discussion at the India Today AI Summit in Delhi, where PwC India released its AI Edge for Viksit Bharat report projecting the USD 550 billion boost. Business leaders and technology executives debated whether the figure reflects tangible potential or premature optimism. "It's a combination of hype and reality," said President & Chief Executive Officer of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, Mukesh Aghi, responding to the projection. "It's too early to see where the transformation is going to come in." He pointed to visible shifts in IT and BPO, where AI is already altering workflows. But in areas such as drug discovery, healthcare and energy, he cautioned that outcomes remain uncertain. "USD 550 billion is a large number and I think we have to be very cautious about it," he said, urging policymakers and businesses not to "get into the hype". At the same time, Aghi warned that ignoring AI would be costly. "If you don't leverage it, if you don't make it accessible, affordable and scalable, that is going to harm the economy and the society and the country."

## ENERGY: INDIA'S HIDDEN ADVANTAGE?

For the AI economy to expand, computing power and data centres must scale rapidly. Sumant Sinha, CEO of Renew Power, representing the energy sector, argued that India may be better

positioned than assumed. "In the power sector particularly, a lot of work has happened in terms of making sure that we are at a point where we have energy sufficiency," he said. If data centre demand rises, he added, "we are in a position to meet it". By 2035, if India's GDP reaches USD 15 to USD 17 trillion, he argued, USD 550 billion would amount to roughly three to four percent of output. "It's not a big number. It is quite conceivable that you can have something of that order of magnitude actually happening." He went further, suggesting India could export computing power in the form of intelligence. "Think about exporting power. That's really what's going to happen in the form of intelligence."

## DATA CENTRES AND SOVEREIGNTY

Chairman at Avaada Group Vineet Mittal pointed out that India holds nearly 20 per cent of the world's data but accounts for only about three percent of global data centre capacity. Much of Indian user data is stored overseas. With new data regulations emerging, he argued, localisation could drive a surge in domestic capacity. Power availability, he said, would not be the bottleneck. "We are self-sufficient," he said, citing recent additions to generation capacity and upcoming renewable projects. He contrasted this with the United States, where data centre demand is rising faster than grid expansion. "There is an opportunity loss which is already happening," he argued, suggesting India could position itself as a platform for global

hyperscalers.

## INNOVATION GAP AND AI 'FEUDALISM'

Yet the debate repeatedly returned to a central concern: innovation. Around 80 per cent of existing AI infrastructure is concentrated in the United States and China. India may have a vast user base and abundant data, but can it convert that into strategic advantage? Aghi warned of "AI feudalism", where a handful of companies control foundational models, chip design and infrastructure, leaving countries dependent. "You have few leaders in the business world controlling the whole AI infrastructure and countries are dependent on that," he said. India's strength, he argued, lies in software and applications rather than hardware. "The hardware will become plumbing. It's the application side which is going to drive available solutions around the world."

He called for higher research and development spending, noting that India invests roughly one percent of GDP in R&D, compared with about 3.5 percent in the United States and even higher in Israel. He also stressed the need for regulatory reform and access to affordable capital for entrepreneurs.

## GOVERNMENT AS ENABLER, NOT DRIVER

Panelists agreed that the government cannot build large language models on its own. Its role, they said, is to create the enabling framework. That includes ensuring data sovereignty, facilitating data centre expansion, strengthening the national grid and easing access to advanced chips through trade

arrangements. Sinha said, "The government can't do what entrepreneurs need to do. That is very clear." Instead, it must ensure conducive regulation and infrastructure so private players can experiment and scale. There was also a warning against relying solely on wage arbitrage and software services. As AI tools automate coding and development tasks, India's IT sector may face disruption unless it moves up the value chain.

## MISSED BUS OR SECOND Y2K?

Has India already missed the AI bus?

Sinha took a middle ground. The United States and China may be ahead, he said, but India is not in the back of the pack. With a young demographic, a growing talent pool and increasing global integration, he expects a wave of AI startups to emerge.

Aghi was more emphatic. "This is the second Y2K moment for Indian industry," he said, recalling how India's software sector expanded when entrepreneurs seized opportunity amid limited state direction. "If we create the same environment for the entrepreneur and bring the capital which is cheap, you will see India flourish in this area," he said. The India Today AI Summit exchange offered no definitive answer to whether USD 550 billion is hype or destiny. But it made one point clear: the AI race is not just about models and chips. It is about power grids, policy choices, capital flows and whether India can turn its data advantage into innovation before dependence hardens into digital hierarchy.

# Inside India's rapid AI rise: Experts talk infrastructure and innovation

Experts said that India is on the brink of a major AI expansion. If infrastructure, open technology and user-friendly applications grow together, AI could become part of everyday life for hundreds of millions.

Artificial intelligence (AI) may feel like a simple app on a phone screen, but behind every smart chatbot or voice assistant lies a massive and complex infrastructure. At the India Today AI Summit 2026, technology leaders gathered to discuss what really powers AI, i.e., from advanced chips and data centres to voice tools, open-source software and climate-friendly infrastructure.

The panel featured Prith Banerjee, Senior Vice President of Innovation at Synopsis; Samhita R, CEO of Resilience AI; Keshav Reddy, Founder of Equal AI; and Martin Tisne, CEO of AI Collaborative. Together, they explored how India is preparing its AI backbone for the future.

## AI CHIPS ARE GETTING TOO COMPLEX FOR HUMANS ALONE

Banerjee explained that modern AI depends heavily on advanced computer chips and the tools used to design them. He said that AI chips are becoming so complex that human engineers alone can no longer keep pace. A chip that once took two years to design is now expected in one year, with billions more transistors packed inside. To handle this scale, companies are using AI-powered "agentic engineers," i.e., software agents that help

automate chip design and optimise systems such as power and cooling in data centres. Banerjee also spoke about the future of "physical AI", where machines understand real-world physics. Instead of only processing words or images, future AI systems could model how objects behave in the real world, helping design aircraft, buildings and even spacecraft with far greater accuracy.

## INDIA'S AI BOOM IS OUTPACING INFRASTRUCTURE

For consumer-facing AI, infrastructure gaps remain a challenge. Keshav highlighted the explosive demand for AI tools in India, especially voice-based assistants that can handle everyday tasks.

He said many Indians still do not interact with AI regularly because most tools depend on typing and reading. Voice-based, multilingual systems are more natural and accessible, particularly in rural areas. However, delivering real-time AI services at scale requires strong computing infrastructure, including specialised processors and fast streaming systems — areas where India is still catching up.

Reddy believes the next wave of AI

adoption in India will be driven by simple, speech-first tools that work seamlessly across languages.

## DATA AND OPEN SOURCE ARE PART OF THE BACKBONE

Tisne urged the audience to think beyond physical infrastructure. In his view, data systems and open-source software are just as important as servers and buildings. He said that open-source tools give people more control over how AI affects their lives. They are cheaper, more adaptable and free from many of the environmental costs linked to giant data centres. At the same time, he said the world has invested heavily in computing power but far less in improving how data is governed and protected.

India's linguistic diversity, he added, is a major strength. Supporting many languages in AI systems can preserve culture while making technology accessible to more people. He also stressed that sensitive areas like healthcare require strong privacy safeguards so people feel safe sharing personal information.

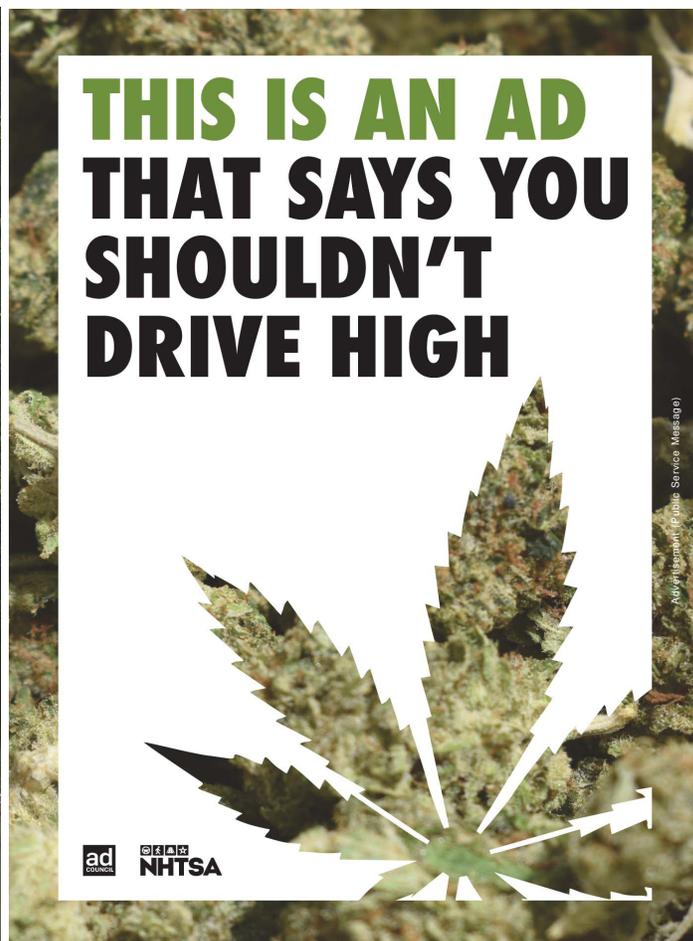
## BUILDING GREENER AND MORE RESILIENT DATA CENTRES

Samhita R focused on the environmental

side of AI infrastructure. She explained that modern data centres are being built with climate resilience in mind. Site selection now considers water systems, vegetation and existing urban features to reduce environmental stress. New facilities are also more energy efficient than those built just a few years ago. Improved architecture and sustainable materials help cut carbon emissions, even though data centres remain energy intensive. She emphasised that human oversight must remain central, especially in high-risk areas like disaster management. Her company uses hyperlocal AI models to assess risks such as floods within minutes, but always keeps people in the decision-making loop to avoid costly errors.

## AN AI FUTURE BUILT ON THREE PILLARS

Banerjee summed up the future as a blend of AI-powered software, advanced silicon chips and intelligent systems working together. The panel agreed that India is on the brink of a major AI expansion. If infrastructure, open technology and user-friendly applications grow together, AI could become part of everyday life for hundreds of millions.



# Are Foreign Powers Trying to Abuse ICE to Grab Political Rivals?



In just 12 months, President Trump has expelled nearly as many illegals as Biden managed in four years and illegal crossings on the southern border are 10 times lower.

Trump's immigration program carries an underappreciated risk: attempts by malign foreign actors to abuse American sovereign law enforcement agencies such as ICE for their own nefarious benefit.

When foreign governments fail to secure what they want through courts, diplomacy, or extradition treaties, the temptation to test whether U.S. immigration enforcement can be repurposed for their own political ends becomes very real.

Extradition law is widely abused already. INTERPOL's Red Notices are international arrest warrants scandalously used by America's enemies like Russia, China, and Iran to harass dissidents, freeze assets and force political opponents to return to be persecuted.

Even Ghana, a supposed friend of the United States, persuaded INTERPOL to issue a Red Notice against a leading member of its democratic opposition – former finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta – demanding his return from the US to stand trial back home on made-up charges.

A few months later INTERPOL suspended the Red Notice after it had serious doubts about its legality and political motivation.

But then last month, Ofori-Atta was picked up by ICE in Washington DC where he was recovering from cancer treatment.

Ofori-Atta had entered the United States lawfully and applied – months ago – for adjustment of status based on his U.S.-citizen son, a routine and legal process that places an applicant in authorized stay.

What now emerges from media interviews given by Ghanaian officials

to their country's media is that their government had worked with U.S. counterparts at the U.S. Embassy in Ghana to have Ofori-Atta's visa revoked and then leveraged it to apply to have ICE arrest him.

"Ken Ofori-Atta's visa was revoked upon intervention by the Ghanaian government," said Ghana's Minister for Government Communication, Felix Ofori Kwakye in a local TV interview.

Because it was noticed that the extradition process can take a bit of time. However, if the visa is revoked even his stay in the United States is made untenable unless he is able to show at this hearing that he has cause to do so."

In other words, Ghana's government are literally bragging on TV about leveraging ICE to bypass proper U.S. due process. The "hearing" the minister refers to in the interview was Ofori-Atta's U.S. deportation hearing,

which was held on Jan. 20, 2026.

But . . . the Judge was forced to suspend proceedings until Feb. 19, as the bumbling Ghanaian government had failed to produce any documentary evidence of their extradition request. Ofori-Atta will remain in ICE custody until that date. Ofori-Atta's connections to the US are long and very commendable. A student first at Columbia then Yale, and he joined the Wall Street banks Salomon Brothers and Morgan Stanley before returning to Ghana to found his own investment institution, Databank.

Ofori-Atta became finance minister in 2017, he served seven years in the position, until shortly before the current socialist president won the 2024 election. He is now under indictment on charges related to his actions in office as finance minister.

Should these charges be justified – and few believe they are anything but lawfare by his political opponents – they would be a complete contrast to his unblemished career in finance in the United States. Still, some might say who cares if a former Ghanaian finance minister is extradited from the US to stand trial in Ghana, or how this is done. There's no reason why this should matter to Americans.

And if there's one less migrant in the country, what's the harm in sending him home by any means. This would be wrong. The United States would not be the United States if we let other countries effectively decide who we allow to stay in our country.

We would not be the United States if we deport and extradite cancer-patient democratic opposition leaders – as Ken Ofori-Atta now is – into the arms of a socialist government that is using lawfare, special prosecutors, and all means necessary against its political opponents. The current Ghanaian President – far-left socialist John Mahama – has dismissed at least four separate fraud cases against leaders of his own party, while at the same time going to the most extraordinary lengths to jail Ofori-Atta, his only serious political opponent.

This is the Biden-attribution lawfare playbook, copy and paste, Ghana-style. None of this makes Ken Ofori-Atta innocent, but it does make the chance of him receiving a fair trial back home close to zero. We wouldn't send Iranian or Cuban opposition leaders back home to stand trial. We shouldn't be doing the same to opposition leaders from Ghana, when it's clear their justice system is just as crooked.

The United States – which stands for liberty and justice – should not be facilitating the deportation of people to stand trial in those circumstances – and it certainly should not be allowing its law enforcement agencies to be abused by foreign, socialist governments.

# The US Is Multitasking 2 Very Different Peace Deals

The US opened two sets of major peace negotiations in Geneva on Tuesday, in what's best described as a form of diplomatic speed dating. The one with Iran broke up after less than four hours, as the two sides left to draw up competing draft agreements. The talks on ending Russia's war in Ukraine were only getting started and will continue Wednesday. That should come as no surprise, if only because it's a lot harder to stop a war than to avoid starting one.

That's something both the US and Iran have strong motivations to do. For

leaders of the Islamic Republic, a collapse of negotiations would invite a military contest with Israel and potentially two US carrier strike groups. They might survive that, but could never hope to win. For the US, military action is also less than appealing, because after reducing Iran's nuclear facilities to rubble last year, a win this time would require regime change. And that's not only historically unlikely without putting boots on the ground, it could also produce politically toxic blowback in the leadup to November's midterm elections.

Iran is, of course, unhappy to be negotiating under the threat of attack. Its announcement of a partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz for military exercises, just as the talks began on Tuesday, was an attempt to level the playing field. But for all his bombast, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei knows the weakness of his position.

Khamenei can ill-afford a repeat of Iran's humiliating defeat in last year's 12-day war with Israel and the US. He might feel obliged this time to follow through on his last-throw-of-the-dice threats, such as hobbling world oil markets (and his own primary revenue source) by blocking the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic, or attacking US military bases and Gulf allies. But the more the conflict escalates, the greater the US and Israeli response and the higher the risk of regime collapse.

So Iran is now following Russia's playbook - and that of pretty much every country that has business with Washington these days - by offering Trump commercial incentives to take a deal Khamenei can accept. Iranian officials have made it broadly clear what that is, even if they're tactful enough to put it differently: Something similar to the 2015 nuclear agreement that Trump

abrogated in 2018.

There's little cost to Khamenei in agreeing to a lengthy suspension of his uranium enrichment program, together with limits and verification inspections, because US and Israeli bombs already froze it. With a nation in turmoil over



plummeting living standards, Tehran's deeply unpopular leaders need US sanctions eased far more than they need a rebuilt uranium enrichment program that, at the best of times, was a huge net drain on resources.

With Iran hawks in Israel and Washington champing at the bit for regime change, that may not be enough for Trump, so nothing is certain. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has made it clear that the only deal he thinks worth making would also eliminate Tehran's arsenal of missiles capable of reaching Israel and force an end to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' support for Iranian proxies across the region, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis of Yemen.

From Iran's point of view, that would leave it unable to respond at all should Israel attack again, and would involve an inspection regime far more intrusive of IRGC military dispositions than anything a nuclear deal would require. It would amount to surrender, which Khamenei certainly deserves but won't accept. A win for Trump on Iran's nuclear threat, by contrast, is there for the taking.

And yet it's the Moscow-Kyiv talks Trump told reporters would be easy to resolve ahead of Geneva, warning that "Ukraine better come to the table, fast." It's a misapprehension the US president has labored under since he said he could end the war in 24 hours, well over a year ago. Kyiv has been at the table for a long time. It's Moscow that insists on terms that further its war aims and leave the gate open to restarting the war at a later date, against an opponent that would emerge weakened by the terms of the settlement. The more Trump has become involved in driving this peace process, the more brutal Russia's invasion has become.

(Contd. on page 22)

# Legacy media didn't lose readers, it drove them away

**For as long as I've been a broadcast and print journalist, I've been a critic of legacy media in general for its liberal and then left-wing bias**

Readers will always read, and news junkies will always find and especially read news. Reading is simply faster than broadcast, so news delivered by text is always going to have a market. That reality does not, however, guarantee any platform the loyalty of a subscriber. "Journalism is a craft, not a profession," the late Michael Kelly would routinely state in the blessed years when he was a weekly guest on my radio program. Kelly was the equal of any American journalist of his generation, having worked for The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New Yorker, The New Republic and The Atlantic.

Michael was killed covering the American invasion of Iraq in April 2003. The point he was making was that anyone could be a "journalist," as there is no licensing involved in American journalism as there is with professions such as medicine and law. Getting paid to "be a journalist" — that was the trick, and as the internet exploded, so did the opportunities to work in the craft. The craft survives and thrives in the United States unlike anywhere else in the world because of the First Amendment.

The ongoing, never-ending creative destruction of capitalism (thank you for the phrase, Joseph Schumpeter) is the constant companion of every business, including journalism. Freedom of the press, as guaranteed by the Constitution, makes the rise and fall of platforms for journalism particularly robust. There is hardly any "state" media left with the demise of federal

funding for National Public Radio and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but the vast universe of media continues to expand, and the "news media" within it.

In the aftermath of the big layoffs at The Washington Post, there has been an explosion of commentary — again — about the decline and often the death of newspapers. But if you are reading this, it came to your attention via some means other than a subscription to a legacy newspaper. And there, in a sentence, is the dilemma for legacy "news," and indeed any written product for which a reader has to pay: There is so much "free" content that it is very, very difficult for a high-overhead text product that depends on subscriptions to succeed. By "succeed," I mean at least break even.

For as long as I've been a broadcast and print journalist — and that dates to 1979, when I first was paid to write by a newspaper, and 1990, when I first broadcast over the airwaves — I've been a critic of legacy media in general for its liberal and then left-wing bias. I have tried to do so without dumping on former employers or colleagues. So this column is not specifically about The Washington Post, for which I wrote columns from February 2017 to October 2024.

The late Fred Hiatt, the Post's editorial page editor who hired me, was a splendid editor and person, as are Ruth Marcus and David Shipley, who supervised the Opinion pages in turn after Fred's death. All three proved terrific people to work for and with, as did all of my editors at the paper.

(Contd on page 22)



ISSN No. 1554 06X

**Editor in Chief**  
**Sharanjit Singh Thind**  
 Tel: 646 875 8495  
**Managing Editor:**  
**Amaninder Singh Thind**  
 Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com  
**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.thesouthasianinsider.com  
**Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.**

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# I warned about cannabis dangers 7 years ago and nobody wanted to listen

Author of 'Tell Your Children' says personal stories about psychiatric harms are finally breaking through media groupthink

Suddenly warnings about cannabis are everywhere.

At the beginning of February, researchers reported severe mental illness has spiked in young people in Canada alongside access to high-potency cannabis.

The next day came the release of "A Killing In Cannabis," a book about a 2019 murder in California — and the violence that plagues the marijuana business and that legalization has not resolved. Then, on Feb. 9, the New York Times dropped its support for full cannabis legalization. Writing that the United States has "a Marijuana Problem," the paper admitted cannabis addiction and psychosis have become a crisis. It called for a ban on THC extracts, a move that would recriminalize much of the legal industry. (THC is the chemical in the plant that gets users high, and vapes offering near-pure hits of THC are now popular among users — and a big driver of industry profits.) I don't want to say I told you so.

But I did.

In 2019, I wrote "Tell Your Children," meticulously documenting the decades of research linking cannabis and THC to mental illness, especially psychosis and schizophrenia.

The runaway legalization of cannabis risked the mental health of teens and young adults, I wrote. And cannabis advocates and companies had spent a generation pretending the drug was a medicine, not a recreational intoxicant. That marketing trick encouraged its use in the most dangerous way, for conditions like anxiety

and depression by people already at high risk of mental illness. When "Tell Your Children" came out in 2019, the industry tried to discredit it, as I'd expected.

But I didn't expect the Times and other supposedly independent, fact-driven legacy media outlets would help them.

The Times refused to review "Tell Your Children," even though I had been a reporter there for a decade and the book offered new research on an important issue. Outlets like NPR scheduled and then canceled interviews with me. The Washington Post outright attacked it, calling it a "polemic."

As I wrote in "Pandemia," the storm over "Tell Your Children" showed me personally just how bad the woke groupthink in the legacy media had become. Reporters at the Times believed — wrongly — many Black Americans were in prison for minor cannabis-related crimes. Therefore, cannabis legalization was an issue of racial equality. Any debate over it ended there. And anyone who said otherwise was a racist.

So, I took my lumps. And I waited for the truth to come out. But why?

The wall of woke media groupthink is still mostly intact. I suspect that the real reason people are waking up to the psychiatric harms of cannabis is that they have seen the problems for themselves — in their friends, their cousins, their siblings and their children. On Feb. 10, conservative commentator Brett Cooper offered personal testimony to the drug's psychiatric risks.

In a post on X, Cooper wrote she had learned that cannabis has caused her brother's schizophrenia, the devastating brain disease, marked by episodes of

hallucinations, delusions and paranoia in its sufferers. Later, in a podcast, she did not disguise her pain as she spoke about his episodes of homelessness. Unfortunately, Cooper's story is all-too-typical. People with schizophrenia rarely work, marry or have kids. Many spend their lives shuttling through institutions and taking antipsychotic drugs that have serious side effects. The disease frequently devastates their families, too.

Cooper's post has been seen almost 5 million times on X. And despite the Times's reach and the importance of the Canadian research, her words may have more impact than anything else over the last two weeks. First-person stories have an emotional impact that the most thoughtful editorial or research paper cannot match. As a friend of mine told me many years ago in critiquing something I'd written, "People like to read about people." First-person stories have an emotional impact that the most thoughtful editorial or research paper cannot match. As a friend of mine told me many years ago in critiquing something I'd written, "People like to read about people." Only when they see for themselves — or hear from people that they trust — that the industry has lied will support for legalization decrease.

That cycle seems to be starting, because the risks that I wrote about in "Tell Your Children" are becoming too obvious to be ignored. Even before the flurry of the last two weeks, sales were ticking up, an unusual gain for a book released over seven years ago. I can only assume that parents are seeing their teenaged and young adult children fall victim to the harms of cannabis and looking for answers.

# Under oath, Meta's Zuckerberg showed why Big Tech can't police itself

**Meta's CEO faced a jury on Wednesday and gave testimony about allegedly designing products to hook young users despite internal safety warnings**

Wednesday was a historic day as Mark Zuckerberg took the stand and faced a jury under oath to answer allegations that Meta knowingly designed and promoted products that hooked young users — including children — despite internal warnings about the risks, marking the first time he has testified before a jury in such a case.

While Zuckerberg's testimony was often characterized by sidestepping and dodging questions — to the point that the judge instructed him to answer directly — he can't deflect his way out of this one. The evidence in this social media trial speaks for itself.

The plaintiff's attorney, Mark Lanier, focused on three central themes in his questioning: 1) addicting users; 2) allowing underage users access to the platform; and 3) making business decisions that put profits over safety. Zuckerberg was presented with a 2015 email in which the CEO stated his goal for 2016 was to increase users' time spent on the platform by 12%. Zuckerberg argued that Meta's growth targets reflect an aim to give users something useful, not to addict them, and stated that the company does not seek to attract children as users. When asked whether he believes people tend to use something more if it's addictive, he dismissed the premise. "I don't think that applies here," he said.

But it absolutely does apply. Meta's entire business model is built on user engagement. Social media appears "free," but a child's time, attention and data are the product being sold. More hours with eyes glued to the screen mean more advertisements to sell. The user is the product. The incentive is to keep users engaged as much as possible. As confirmed earlier in

the trial by addiction expert Dr. Anna Lembke of Stanford University, social media meets the clinical criteria for addiction, according to her expert testimony.

Lanier also questioned Zuckerberg extensively on Meta's age-verification policies. He showed an internal Meta email from 2015 estimating that 4 million children under 13 were using Instagram — approximately 30% of U.S. children ages 10 to 12. One in three preteens.

Zuckerberg said the company removes identified underage users and includes terms about age requirements during the sign-up process. Lanier responded, "You expect a 9-year-old to read all of the fine print? That's your basis for swearing under oath that children under 13 are not allowed?"

Zuckerberg added that some children "lie about their age in order to use the services." During this exchange, he also said, "I don't see why this is so complicated ... we have rules, and people broadly understand that."

Waving his hand and saying "we have rules" is not an adequate defense. These are minors. It is the company's responsibility to ensure the platform is effectively age-gated; otherwise, its stated age policy is meaningless.

In practice, age verification on most social media platforms relies largely on self-reported birthdates. A child can enter a false age, click to accept the terms and conditions and gain access within minutes. Critics argue that without meaningful safeguards, age restrictions amount to little more than an honor system.

Age of access is a key issue in this trial. The plaintiff, K.G.M., who got on Instagram at age 9,

alleges that her social media use as a child and teenager led to body dysmorphia, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, addiction and depression. Her age when she began using the app — during a period of significant brain development between ages 10 and 12 — is central to the harms she alleges.

Instagram should never have allowed her on the platform at age 9, the plaintiff argues. Whether the jury ultimately agrees remains to be seen, but the case places responsibility for those decisions squarely on Meta's leadership.

Lanier ended his questioning by unrolling — with the help of six others — a 50-foot collage of every selfie K.G.M. had posted on Instagram, many with beauty filters. He asked Zuckerberg whether Meta ever investigated her account for unhealthy behavior. Zuckerberg did not answer.

Earlier, Lanier pressed Zuckerberg about his decision to allow beauty filters that mimicked plastic surgery after 18 internal experts warned they were harmful to teenage girls and could contribute to body dysmorphia, according to internal documents. Zuckerberg and Adam Mosseri, head of Instagram, ultimately reversed a temporary ban and allowed the filters on the platform. Plaintiffs contend that decision exposed vulnerable young users to tools linked to body dysmorphia and other mental health struggles.

Zuckerberg defended the decision by saying that after lifting the ban, Instagram did not create its own filters or recommend them to users. He added, "I think oftentimes telling people that they can't express themselves like that is overbearing."

# India's Northeast Has A New Problem - 'Jamaat' Surge Along Bangladesh Border

Most of Jamaat's victories have come from the north-west and south-west regions adjoining Indian states such as West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya.

By M Biswanath Sinha

The 13th Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad election of 2026 has produced two simultaneous political messages. First, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has won and will form the government. Second, and strategically more consequential for the region, the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) has registered an unprecedented surge. Jamaat secured 68 seats and 31.76% of the vote, contesting 223 out of 300 constituencies. Its previous best was in 1991, when it won 18 seats with around 12% of the vote. Even more striking is the broader right-wing Islamist vote share, which has climbed to roughly 38% - far above the earlier ceiling of about 15%. This is not merely an electoral fluctuation; it is a structural shift in Bangladesh's political demography. Jamaat's registration was cancelled by Bangladesh's Supreme Court in 2013, and it could not contest elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024. However, some Jamaat leaders contested the 2018 election under the BNP party symbol, in a tacit understanding.

Whether deliberate or incidental, the transitional period when Mohammed Yunus helmed the interim government in Bangladesh helped create space for Jamaat's organisational consolidation and electoral preparation, aided by the vacuum created by the Awami League's ban from contesting the election. The 2026 verdict, therefore, reflects not just campaign momentum but also the gradual normalisation of a party that had once been politically marginalised.

For India, the correct lens is neither alarm nor indifference. The BNP is in power. Yet, the Jamaat's emergence as a major parliamentary force will shape the political tone, policy debates and street mobilisation in Bangladesh over the next five years.

## The Border Geography

Geography adds a security dimension to India's concerns. Most of Jamaat's victories have come from the north-west and south-west regions adjoining Indian states such as West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya. In Indian border districts like Khulna, Rongpur and Rajshahi, Jamaat completely dominated the election result. This does not automatically translate into instability. Border management and intelligence cooperation between India and Bangladesh have improved significantly in recent years. However, political representation matters. When border constituencies are dominated by

a party historically sceptical of India, New Delhi's security calculus inevitably adjusts.

The memory of the 2004 Chittagong arms haul remains relevant. Ten truckloads of arms were seized, allegedly destined for the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in India. Among those later convicted by Bangladeshi courts was Motiur Rahman Nizami, then Jamaat's Ameer (Chief) and a cabinet minister in the BNP-led government. Nizami and ULFA chief Paresh Barua (in absentia) were sentenced to life imprisonment with others. It is a different matter that Nizami was prosecuted in 2016 after Bangladesh's International Crime Tribunal found him guilty for his role in masterminding the Demra Massacre of May 13, 1971, in which 800-900 unarmed Hindu civilians were killed. The arms trafficking episode with direct association of high-profile figures underscored how cross-border insurgent linkages can complicate bilateral ties.

While today's leadership distances itself from militancy, the precedent explains why Indian agencies will watch border developments closely.

## A Capital Breakthrough

One of the most underappreciated aspects of the result is Jamaat's breakthrough in the political capital. For the first time, the party has won seats in the Dhaka metropolitan area. Out of 20 seats in Dhaka, it has secured six. In symbolic and practical terms, this matters enormously. Dhaka is not just an electoral cluster; it is the centre of administrative authority, media influence, and ideological contestation. A stronger parliamentary presence from the capital gives Jamaat additional visibility, bargaining power, and narrative control.

For India, this suggests that Jamaat's rise is no longer confined to peripheral districts. It now has a foothold in the heart of Bangladesh's power structure.

## Jamaat And The Ideological Question

Jamaat's past continues to shape perceptions. During the 1971 Liberation War, elements within the party collaborated with the Pakistani Army and supported the Rajakar militia. Subsequent war crimes trials cemented its controversial legacy.

Cut to 2026, the party is seeking to moderate its public posture. It expressed support for minority rights and stepped back from explicit calls for establishing a Sharia-based state. It even fielded a Hindu candidate in the recently concluded polls, though unsuccessfully.

Yet, the outfit's core ideological positions remain unchanged. Full membership (rukun) is constitutionally restricted to Muslims, effectively excluding non-Muslims from leadership and policy-making roles. The party fielded no women candidates. Its Ameer publicly reiterated that women should not occupy leadership positions within Jamaat, citing religious doctrine. In the run-up to the election, he said to Al Jazeera, "On the question of women, Jamaat's position is neither confused nor apologetic - it's principled. We do not think women should come into leadership. In Jamaat, it is impossible. Allah did not permit it."

## Allegations Of Extremist Links

Bangladeshi security assessments over the years have reported ideological overlaps between Jamaat, its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, and extremist organisations such as Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B). Jamaat has consistently denied such institutional links. However, investigations have pointed to similarities in recruitment pipelines and messaging ecosystems.

For India, the issue is operational rather than rhetorical. Any weakening of Bangladesh's internal counter-extremism vigilance could have spillover effects in India's North-East, where insurgencies have declined but not entirely disappeared.

## BNP in Power, Jamaat in Ascent

Here, it is important to reiterate that Jamaat has not won the election - the BNP has. The government in Dhaka will be led by a party with its own strategic calculus and diplomatic priorities. However, the former's strengthened parliamentary presence introduces a new dynamic. As a powerful opposition or coalition influencer, it may adopt a sharper positioning to expand its base. One tactic could be to take a pronounced anti-India line, portraying the BNP as too accommodating towards New Delhi. Such anti-India rhetoric has historically resonated with sections of Bangladeshi politics.

A positioning of this kind could serve two purposes. First, it would help Jamaat consolidate nationalist-Islamist voters. Second, it could pressure the BNP government by framing any bilateral cooperation with India as a compromise of sovereignty.

There is also a risk of confrontationist politics in sensitive border districts and the capital city. Competitive

radicalisation, where one party escalates rhetoric or mobilisation to outflank another, can destabilise local environments even if the central government remains formally cooperative with India.

For New Delhi, this means dealing with two layers simultaneously: engaging a BNP-led government while monitoring the political pressure exerted by Jamaat from Parliament and the street.

## What Should India Do?

The first principle should be strategic patience. Democratic outcomes in neighbouring countries cannot be wished away. Jamaat's surge reflects domestic factors within Bangladesh - economic anxieties, identity politics, organisational discipline, and not external manipulation alone. Second, India must institutionalise engagement beyond personalities. Security cooperation mechanisms must remain professional and insulated from political swings. Border coordination, intelligence-sharing, and counter-terrorism frameworks should continue irrespective of partisan shifts.

Third, strengthen domestic resilience. Development and governance in the border districts of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya remain India's best long-term defence against cross-border ideological or militant spillover.

Finally, avoid rhetorical overreaction. Public alarmism in India could inadvertently strengthen hardline narratives within Bangladesh. Quiet diplomacy combined with firm security vigilance will yield better outcomes than megaphone messaging.

## A New Phase, Not a Crisis

The 2026 election marks a new phase in Bangladesh's political evolution. Jamaat's leap from the margins to a major parliamentary force, combined with its breakthrough in Dhaka and dominance in border constituencies, signals that political Islam has gained fresh democratic legitimacy.

Yet, Bangladesh remains a plural polity. The BNP leads the government. Civil society is active. Institutions endure. For India, the moment calls for watchful engagement. Geography ensures interdependence. Political currents in Dhaka will always ripple across the border. The task for New Delhi is to manage those ripples with composure - neither dismissing the signals nor exaggerating them. India should consider that Jamaat's rise is a shift to manage, not a crisis to dramatise.

# The US Is Multitasking 2 Very Different Peace Deals

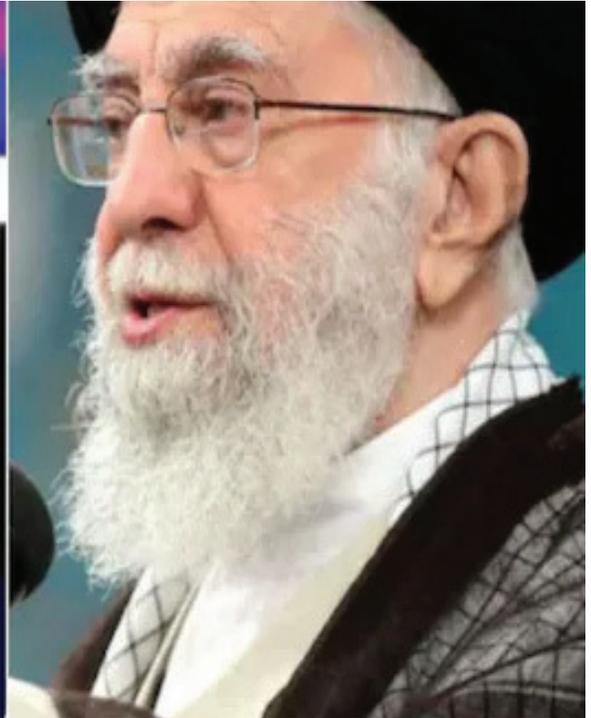
The US opened two sets of major peace negotiations in Geneva on Tuesday, in what's best described as a form of diplomatic speed dating. The one with Iran broke up after less than four hours, as the two sides left to draw up competing draft agreements. The talks on ending Russia's war in Ukraine were only getting started and will continue Wednesday. That should come as no surprise, if only because it's a lot harder to stop a war than to avoid starting one.

That's something both the US and Iran have strong motivations to do. For leaders of the Islamic Republic, a collapse of negotiations would invite a military contest with Israel and potentially two US carrier strike groups. They might survive that, but could never hope to win. For the US, military action is also less than appealing, because after reducing Iran's nuclear facilities to rubble last year, a win this time would require regime change. And that's not only historically unlikely without putting boots on the ground, it could also produce politically toxic blowback in the leadup to November's midterm elections.

Iran is, of course, unhappy to be negotiating under the threat of attack. Its announcement of a partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz for military exercises, just as the talks began on Tuesday, was an attempt to level the playing field. But for all his bombast, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei knows the weakness of his position.

Khamenei can ill-afford a repeat of Iran's humiliating defeat in last year's 12-day war with Israel and the US. He might feel obliged this time to follow through on his last-throw-of-the-dice threats, such as hobbling world oil markets (and his own primary revenue source) by blocking the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic, or attacking US military bases and Gulf allies. But the more the conflict escalates, the greater the US and Israeli response and the higher the risk of regime collapse.

Iran is now following Russia's playbook - and that of pretty much every country that has business with Washington these days - by offering Trump commercial incentives to take a deal Khamenei can accept.



Iranian officials have made it broadly clear what that is, even if they're tactful enough to put it differently: Something similar to the 2015 nuclear agreement that Trump abrogated in 2018.

There's little cost to Khamenei in agreeing to a lengthy suspension of his uranium enrichment program, together with limits and verification inspections, because US and Israeli bombs already froze it. With a nation in turmoil over plummeting living standards, Tehran's deeply unpopular leaders need US sanctions eased far more than they need a rebuilt uranium enrichment program that, at the best of times, was a huge net drain on resources.

With Iran hawks in Israel and Washington champing at the bit for regime change, that may not be enough for Trump, so nothing is certain. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has made it clear that the only deal he thinks worth making would also eliminate Tehran's arsenal of missiles capable of reaching Israel and force an end to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' support for Iranian proxies across the region, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis of Yemen.

From Iran's point of view, that would leave it unable to respond at all should Israel attack again,

and would involve an inspection regime far more intrusive of IRGC military dispositions than anything a nuclear deal would require. It would amount to surrender, which Khamenei certainly deserves but won't accept. A win for Trump on Iran's nuclear threat, by contrast, is there for the taking.

And yet it's the Moscow-Kyiv talks Trump told reporters would be easy to resolve ahead of Geneva, warning that "Ukraine better come to the table, fast." It's a misapprehension the US president has labored under since he said he could end the war in 24 hours, well over a year ago.

Kyiv has been at the table for a long time. It's Moscow that insists on terms that further its war aims and leave the gate open to restarting the war at a later date, against an opponent that would emerge weakened by the terms of the settlement. The more Trump has become involved in driving this peace process, the more brutal Russia's invasion has become.

Putin hasn't hidden his intent. His officials have been signaling his inflexibility. He has sent his former culture minister and history-propagandist-in-chief, Vladimir Medinsky, to head the delegation in Geneva again, after being absent for two more pragmatic sessions. Kirill Dmitriev, a previous delegation

head and the chief executive of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, was to meet separately in Geneva with Trump's envoys, the real estate developer Steve Witkoff and presidential son-in-law-without-portfolio Jared Kushner. Dmitriev's task is, put crudely, to determine the administration's price for pressing Kyiv into submission.

We've been here before. The problem has always been that Putin made his demands so clearly punitive and open to resuming the war that it became impossible for Trump to accept without looking like a Russian stooge. What's changed this time appears to lie in a sense of urgency in Washington, as November's midterms approach.

Zelenskiy may soon face the invidious choice he predicted back in November, when the US first presented Russian demands to him as a fait accompli in the form of a 28-point plan. That choice was between taking the deal or facing a very hard winter, and Zelenskiy chose the latter, which Ukraine has duly suffered since. Now the threat implicit in Trump's warnings suggests a still worse outcome: Accept the terms on offer or fight on without the US-made air-defense missiles, intelligence sharing and communications networks that make an effective defense against Russia's still-formidable

military machine possible.

Ukrainians appear willing to swallow the loss of occupied territory in exchange for peace and security guarantees, after four years of grueling war. But it isn't clear - whatever Zelenskiy decides - that when presented with the referendum and elections Trump wants Ukraine to hold in May, so as to get a ceasefire in place by June, they would agree to terms set by Moscow. Russia continues to demand that Kyiv accept caps on its military and hand over the unconquered cities that make up Ukraine's main defensive lines in the east, and that security guarantees should be emptied of NATO-member content.

That could, of course, change. After a year of circling, as Putin played for both time and whatever unilateral concessions he could extract, substantive talks are only now beginning. But while Trump appears to see the two sets of Geneva negotiations in a similar light, they are fundamentally different. A swift deal with Iran can avoid a war that doesn't need to be fought, while advancing the interests of both the US and ordinary Iranians. A quick Ukraine settlement can be reached only by rewarding Putin's invasion and forcing Kyiv to accept the unacceptable. Peace would not follow.

# India's AI Impact Goes Beyond The US-China Binary

As New Delhi hosts the India-AI Impact Summit, the significance extends far beyond a packed Bharat Mandapam and a high-profile guest list. For the first time, a major global AI summit is being held in the Global South, after earlier editions in the United Kingdom, South Korea and France. The venue change is not merely symbolic. Instead, it signals an emerging reality: India's voice is increasingly shaping the rules and the relationships that will define the next era of technology, and the world seems eager to hear what the country has to say.

For years, global technology governance has been framed as a binary choice. The United States represents a corporate-led model: rapid innovation driven by private platforms, proprietary ecosystems, and regulation that is often fragmented or reactive. China, by contrast, represents a state-led model: strategic industrial policy, tightly coupled technology and governance systems, and the export of digital infrastructure through bilateral and multilateral arrangements that often bundle technology with geopolitical influence.

As competition between these two models intensifies, many countries, particularly in the Global South, have found both options unsatisfying. The American model promises innovation but often leaves governments dependent on a handful of global firms with limited accountability. The Chinese model offers scale and speed, but at the cost of deep strategic dependence, opaque governance, and reduced policy autonomy over data and digital infrastructure. Increasingly, the search is on for a path that allows sovereign nations to access modern digital systems that serve citizens at scale, without locking governments into vendor monopolies or long-term geopolitical alignments that they cannot easily exit.

India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is increasingly presenting itself as this option: a credible third way that emphasises public value, interoperable infrastructure, and practical governance over ideology.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) sits at the centre of this pitch. Over the past decade, systems such as Aadhaar for digital identity, UPI (Unified Payments Interface) for real-time payments, and ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) for marketplaces have demonstrated that large-scale digital systems can be built as public goods rather than proprietary platforms. These systems now form the backbone of service delivery, financial inclusion, and governance for over a billion people. Crucially, this has meant that they have also proven to be exportable.

Over the past two years, India has signed formal cooperation agreements on DPI with more than twenty countries

across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Several African nations are among the fastest adopters. Countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Lesotho are working with India to replicate components of the India Stack for digital identity, payments, health systems, and public administration. India's payment infrastructure has also quietly gone global, with UPI now available in multiple countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Qatar, and France.

Digital document and data exchange platforms are travelling as well. Countries such as Cuba, Kenya, the UAE, and Laos have signed agreements to adopt or adapt India's DigiLocker framework, allowing citizens to store and verify official documents digitally. Education platforms like DIKSHA and governance tools such as eOffice and eCourts are also being shared through India Stack Global, a government-backed initiative that makes India's DPI components available for replication rather than resale.

What is more striking is that this interest is no longer confined to developing economies. The European Union, which was once among the sharpest critics of India's digital identity and data practices, is increasingly engaging with Indian DPI concepts as it grapples with its own concerns about technological sovereignty. While Europe's regulatory standards remain distinct, the shift itself is telling: India's experience is no longer seen merely as an outlier, but as a reference point in a broader global conversation about how digital infrastructure should be built and governed.

Taken together, these examples reveal why India's third way in technology is gaining traction. It is not exporting any particular ideology, nor does it seek to assert dominance. What it does offer instead is architecture - an open, interoperable digital framework that allows countries to modernise while retaining control over their own systems.

The AI Impact Summit itself reflects this positioning. Consider the summit's guiding idea: Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya, meaning welfare for all, happiness for all. Through this lens, India is deliberately pushing global AI diplomacy away from abstract declarations and toward measurable deployment: how AI can deliver outcomes in health, education, agriculture, public services, and climate resilience. This emphasis resonates far beyond India, particularly among countries that feel marginalised by AI governance debates dominated by the Global North. It reframes the central question: not only how to regulate AI,



but how to ensure its benefits are distributed rather than concentrated.

This focus on deployable systems rather than abstract principles is mirrored in India's approach to AI governance itself. Rather than rushing into a single, rigid AI law or leaving governance entirely to market forces, India has chosen a pragmatic approach: principle-based guidance, the use of existing legal frameworks where possible, and targeted amendments to close gaps as risks become clearer. All while creating sandboxes where innovators can test out new ideas under safe parameters, and also investing in state-backed initiatives like BHASHINI or AIKosha to supply them with the talent and resources needed to scale up, should they prove viable. This techno-legal stance, combining rules with practical technical measures, maps well onto the needs of many developing countries that cannot afford compliance-heavy regimes yet cannot ignore harms such as deepfakes, bias, and online fraud.

Alongside governance frameworks, India is also investing in the physical and digital infrastructure needed to democratise AI access at scale. Under the IndiaAI Mission, the country is building a shared national compute backbone, comprising more than 34,000 GPUs deployed across empanelled data centres, that startups, researchers, and institutions can access at subsidised rates, rather than relying on a handful of foreign cloud providers. In parallel, initiatives such as BharatGen, a government-funded, multimodal foundation model programme, are being developed as international, rather than sovereign, public digital goods, designed to be deployed locally by any government and or institution, to address an array of nuanced use-cases. Together, these efforts reflect a deliberate attempt by India to ensure that the benefits of AI are not

gated by capital, geography, or platform control, but are made freely available as shared infrastructure.

None of this is to suggest that India's model is without challenges. Questions around data protection, institutional capacity, and equitable access need more attention and will grow more complex as these systems scale domestically and abroad. But what distinguishes India at this moment is that, in a fractured technological world where others too often chase futile perfection or extractive dominance, it offers a pathway that many countries can realistically hope to follow.

India's opportunity, then, extends beyond hosting a single summit or exporting a protocol. It lies in anchoring a new form of digital alignment, one not defined by blocs or coercive dependencies, but by shared capability and development-focused outcomes. Much as the non-alignment movement once offered respite to countries caught between a Cold War geopolitical reality, for countries weary of constantly having to choose the lesser of two evils in order to keep pace with the technological revolution, India's third way offers a different organising principle for cooperation, treating them as co-creators with the autonomy and understanding needed to make the best choices for their citizens. Ultimately, what India is putting on the table is a path to self-determination. Too often, in these moments, from the Industrial Age to the Internet era, that path simply did not exist for most countries. Having walked it itself, India now operates in a world where digital transformation driven by AI is increasingly unavoidable. Its most consequential contribution, then, may be in using what it has learned to expand the range of futures countries can choose for themselves, and thereby reclaim a say in how the digital state is shaped.

# The Great AI Race: India Must Decide Whether It Writes The Code, Or Lives By It

As India hosts the AI Impact Summit this week, artificial intelligence has ceased to be a mere technological frontier; it is now a theatre of geopolitical contestation. Much like nuclear technology during the Cold War, AI has moved to the heart of strategic competition. States are not merely investing in algorithms - they are investing in power. Economic primacy, military superiority, and societal control increasingly hinge on who shapes, trains, and governs intelligent systems. The transition from narrow AI applications to generative and autonomous systems has only intensified this urgency.

Unlike oil or territory, AI's strategic value lies in intangibles: data, computing power, talent, and algorithmic innovation. These are the new currencies of influence. Control over AI ecosystems - cloud infrastructure, semiconductor supply chains, regulatory standards - has become synonymous with digital sovereignty. The geopolitical map, therefore, is being redrawn not through shifting borders but through control of code and compute. In this emerging order, resilience is defined less by geography and more by technological depth.

## Building On The Paris Summit

Building on the momentum of the 2025 AI Action Summit in Paris, the AI Impact Summit 2026 represents an expanded partnership between Paris and Delhi to shape the future of AI through inclusive, responsible, and impact-oriented collaboration. French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India this week will be an important milestone in this partnership as the two nations inaugurate the India-France Year of Innovation 2026. The summit aims to transition from high-level principles to practical outcomes and partnerships, reinforcing India and France as co-leaders in global AI governance and innovation. The India-France AI partnership reflects a shared vision of leveraging technology for sustainable development, democratic values, and global digital governance, positioning both nations as influential actors in shaping the future of artificial intelligence. By aligning their approaches to responsible and inclusive AI, India and France are seeking to craft a middle path - one that safeguards democratic values while remaining globally competitive. In that sense, their collaboration is as much about shaping global governance

debates as it is about fostering domestic innovation.

At the core of AI geopolitics lies great-power rivalry, most visibly between the United States and China. For Washington, technological leadership underpins its global pre-eminence; for Beijing, AI mastery is central to national rejuvenation. This is not merely an economic competition, even if the economic stakes are enormous. Estimates suggest AI could add trillions to global GDP, but the distribution of gains will be uneven, privileging those with advanced digital ecosystems. Technological leadership is, thus, inseparable from strategic leadership.

## AI Is Everywhere

Security anxieties further sharpen this contest. AI enhances intelligence gathering, cyber capabilities, and autonomous weapons systems. The militarisation of machine learning is no longer speculative - it is underway. Export controls on advanced chips, restrictions on semiconductor supply chains, and tightening investment regimes are symptomatic of a broader technological decoupling. What is emerging resembles a digital Cold War, with competing blocs seeking self-sufficiency in critical technologies.

Resources add another combustible layer. The hardware that powers AI depends on critical minerals - lithium, cobalt, rare earths - linking AI competition to the geopolitics of supply chains and energy transitions. At the same time, data itself is fragmenting along national lines, creating politically siloed digital ecosystems. The promise of a globally integrated internet is giving way to sovereign data regimes.

Ideology cannot be divorced from this technological contest. Democratic systems emphasise transparency, privacy, and human rights in AI governance, while authoritarian regimes view AI as an instrument of state control and social management. Competing regulatory models are thus exporting competing political values.

## AI Won't Level The Field

And the consequences of this competition are already visible. The global order is tilting towards fragmentation. The United States and China remain dominant, while Europe struggles for technological autonomy, and much of the Global South risks marginalisation. AI-induced economic disruptions - particularly automation-



driven unemployment - could exacerbate inequalities, both within and between nations. Technological bifurcation threatens to produce parallel AI ecosystems: one relatively open and rules-based, the other centralised and surveillance-driven.

Security risks are equally profound. AI-enabled cyber warfare, autonomous weapons, and algorithmic disinformation campaigns undermine trust in institutions and erode international norms. The weaponisation of information, amplified by generative AI, weakens democratic resilience. In authoritarian contexts, AI strengthens state capacity for surveillance and control. In democracies, it tests the balance between innovation and civil liberties. AI's voracious appetite for energy and water - particularly through large-scale data centres - also ties the geopolitics of AI to climate politics. Competition for compute could translate into competition for energy resources, complicating already fraught sustainability debates.

It is evident that AI is not merely an enabler of power; it is redefining what power means. Nations that adapt, regulate wisely, and invest strategically will shape the contours of the new order. Those that lag may find themselves strategically vulnerable and economically sidelined.

## Is Collaboration Possible?

Yet, the trajectory is not predetermined. The same technology that divides could also connect. International cooperation on standards, ethical norms, and risk mitigation remains possible - though increasingly difficult. The challenge is to prevent competitive imperatives from overwhelming cooperative instincts. A fragmented AI order may yield short-term strategic gains, but it risks long-term instability.

For India, the AI moment is not merely about technology - it is about

strategy. The choices before New Delhi are subtle, even fraught. In a century where power will be increasingly mediated through code, compute, and control over data, India cannot afford to drift into technological dependency. Yet it would be unrealistic to imagine that it can match, dollar-for-dollar, the scale of investments being mobilised by Washington or Beijing. The task, therefore, is not imitation but calibration.

## What India Brings To The Table

India's strengths are distinct. Its digital public infrastructure, expansive data ecosystems, and deep reservoir of human capital offer a foundation that few can replicate. The real challenge lies in converting these assets into strategic leverage without being locked into hardened technological blocs. Partnerships with like-minded countries are indispensable for access to frontier technologies and resilient supply chains. But India's foreign policy tradition of strategic autonomy will not be easily abandoned; alignment will remain issue-based rather than absolute.

At home, however, the balancing act is even more complex. Innovation must not come at the expense of inclusion. AI must serve India's developmental trajectory, enhancing productivity, governance, and service delivery rather than exacerbating inequalities or deepening social fault lines. Globally, India is well placed to articulate a middle path in AI governance: one anchored in democratic accountability but sensitive to the aspirations of the Global South. Whether India becomes a shaper of emerging norms or merely adapts to standards set by others will depend on its ability to marry ambition with prudence. In the unfolding geotech churn, that balance will define its standing.

By Harsh V Pant

# The US Is Multitasking 2 Very Different Peace Deals

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By Marc Champion, Bloomberg

# Legacy media didn't lose readers, it drove them away

After I left the Post, however, I also stopped subscribing to it. That's not intended as anything other than a statement of fact. Over the past five years, I have also discontinued subscriptions to The Telegraph and the Financial Times in the U.K., as well as The New York Times and most subscription-based products that existed 20 years ago as newspapers, other than The Wall Street Journal and Cleveland.com.

The Journal has excellent reporting on every major story covered by legacy media, and Cleveland.com super-serves any fan of Cleveland's Browns, Cavaliers and Guardians, as well as the Ohio State Buckeyes. That second subscription to a "legacy platform" (the former Cleveland Plain Dealer) makes a key point: The sports editor for Cleveland.com, David Campbell, has done a masterful job cultivating the absolutely essential revenue driver for any formerly "regional paper" that needs a far-flung fan base to be satisfied — and indeed tied even more deeply — to its sports addictions.

The podcast and text options available for a couple of bucks more, or for free with a quick ad or two, present a model to be studied by any struggling paper. Campbell has kept the dean of Cleveland sports analysis, Terry Pluto, working — and now podcasting — along with a dozen veteran beat reporters, while developing a new generation of journalists serving each team's "verticals." I assume, but do not know, that successful platforms in every sports-blessed region have done something similar — and have thereby kept many journalists

outside the sports section working. I hold up The Journal and the sports section of Cleveland.com as models for what still works for primarily text-based products that depend upon subscription revenue but compete for readers' eyeballs with quality non-subscription text and audio-video. Quality matters most of all, but niche readership super-service, particularly in areas like sports news and opinion, is a close second. In this era of abundant free information, it was inevitable that the winnowing that began with the rise of internet-based blogs — then internet-based newsletters without legacy platforms' sunk costs — and then Substack and podcasts would take a toll on every legacy platform that owed its origins and legacy audiences to a now-extinct quasi-monopoly status and continued reliance on subscription revenue.

Writers and reporters can still get paid to write and report. Andrew Sullivan — arguably the single most influential journalist of the past 50 years because he helped bring about the institution of same-sex marriage through a sustained effort to persuade, while also pioneering the stand-alone, one-writer subscription model — is no longer alone among writer-reporter-columnists who work for themselves.

Such journalists are now, in fact, legion. But they must work for their readers, or the revenue will go away.

The journals and subscription websites that have thrived or arrived in this era are best served by a commitment to both quality and the super-service of niches. Bylines have long been brands, and it is very useful to have some of those as

well. The new platforms that have flourished, and the old ones that have survived, must earn subscriber support at least annually. They cannot alienate or

drive readers away. It's just the business. The abundance of "free and good" is deadly for the "not free, no matter how good" — and certainly for the "not free

and redundant," or worse, the "not free and just bad." Free beats not free every time, just as quality beats slop.

By Hugh Hewitt



fatherhood.gov

# 8 backcountry skiers killed and 1 missing after deadliest avalanche in California's recorded history

Eight skiers buried by snow and debris near California's Lake Tahoe amid dangerous conditions were killed in what is now the deadliest avalanche in the state's recorded history, authorities said Wednesday.

One skier is still missing and presumed dead, Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon said at a grim news conference.

The skiers were part of a 15-person group on a three-day backcountry trip in northern California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Six of the members were previously rescued with "various injuries," the sheriff's office said, and two of them were taken to a hospital for treatment. One has since been released, Capt. Rusty Greene said.

"We did have conversation with the families of the folks that are that are still outstanding and let them know that our mission has went from a rescue to a recovery," Moon said.

Of the nine skiers who were not rescued, seven are female and two are male, the sheriff's office said. Their names were not released.

Six of those killed were clients of Blackbird Mountain Guides, which led the trip, and three were "highly experienced members of our guide team," the company said in a statement.

"We are doing what we can to support the families who lost so much, and the members of our team who lost treasured friends and colleagues," the

statement said. Five clients and one guide survived the avalanche, company added.

Multiple people associated with the Sugar Bowl Academy, a private school and US Ski and Snowboard club, were killed, the school said in a statement.

"Multiple members of the Sugar Bowl Academy community and others with strong connections to Sugar Bowl, Donner Summit, and the backcountry community died in an avalanche on Tuesday," the statement said, noting the academy is not sharing the names of any victims and survivors "out of respect for the families affected."

"We are an incredibly close and connected community. This tragedy has affected each and



every one of us. The depth of support for the families whose lives have been changed forever reminds us of how special this community is," Stephen McMahon, executive director of the Sugar Bowl Academy said. The spouse of a Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue team mem-

ber is also among the dead, Placer County Sheriff Wayne Woo said, adding it's hitting the team hard. "This has not only been challenging for our community, it's been a challenging rescue, but it's also been challenging emotionally for our team and our organization," he said.

# Trump Organization trademark raises suspicions that family could profit from Florida airport name change



As the Florida Legislature ramps up efforts to rename the Palm Beach International Airport after President Donald Trump, a recent trademark filing has some state lawmakers wondering if the Trump family is looking to profit.

The House bill to rename the south Florida hub the President Donald J. Trump International Airport passed the state's House of Representatives 81-30 on Tuesday. But some Democrats raised concerns about related trademark applications that were filed last week by the private entity that handles licenses and trademarks for the Trump Organization.

Democratic Florida state Rep. Shevrin Jones was initially on board with the name change and supported it in a committee vote, saying he would have done the same for a Democratic president. But he said the trademark appli-

cation was one of the two things that changed his mind (the other being the racist video recently posted and deleted on Trump's Truth Social account, which depicted former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama as apes).

"No president, Democrat or Republican should be able to benefit" from an airport trademark license, Jones said.

Jones quickly filed an amendment to explicitly prevent the Trump Organization from profiting off the trademark, but it failed. The companion Florida Senate bill has passed the required committees and is set to be considered by the full chamber soon before heading to Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' desk.

A spokesperson for the Trump Organization said that Trump and his family would not receive royalties or licensing fees from

the renaming of the Palm Beach airport, and the House bill's text specifies that the branding would come at no cost.

"To be clear, the President and his family will not receive any royalty, licensing fee, or financial consideration whatsoever from the proposed airport renaming," said Kimberly Benza, Trump Or-

ganization director of executive operations.

She stressed that the Florida bill requires a license agreement from The Trump Organization but that they are "willing to provide this right to his hometown county at no charge."

Still, the trademark applications for "DONALD J. TRUMP

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT," "PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT" and "DJT" raised eyebrows, given Trump's known interest in renaming buildings, train stations or airports after himself, the broad scope of the applications and the potential for his family to profit.

# US prepared to strike Iran this weekend, but Trump yet to take call

The US military is prepared to launch strikes on Iran as early as this weekend, though President Donald Trump has yet to make a final call on authorising the operation, multiple media reports, including CNN and CNBC, reported. At the same time, the US is rushing fighter jets and support aircraft to the Middle East, building its largest air power presence in the region since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The White House has been briefed that the US military could be ready to strike Iran as early as this weekend following a major buildup of air and naval assets in the Middle East, sources told CNN. However, Trump has not made a final decision and has privately weighed arguments both for and against military action while consulting advisors and allies.

On Wednesday, senior national security officials met in the White House Situation Room to assess the situation.

Trump was also briefed by special envoy Steve Witkoff and his son-in-law Jared Kushner

on indirect talks with Iran held a day earlier in Geneva. The talks, which lasted over three hours, produced no clear breakthrough, though Iran's top negotiator cited agreement on "guiding principles," while US officials said key details remain unresolved.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Iran is expected to clarify its negotiating position in the coming weeks, stressing that diplomacy remains Trump's preferred option but that military action is still on the table. "There are many reasons one could argue for a strike," she said, adding that Trump is relying primarily on advice from his national security team.

Iran, meanwhile, is reinforcing several nuclear facilities by covering key sites with concrete and large volumes of soil, according to fresh satellite imagery and analysis by the Institute for Science and International Security, amid mounting US military pressure. Trump has been briefed on a range of military options as the US carries out its largest deployment of air power to the Middle East since the 2003 Iraq invasion, The Wall Street Journal reported.

# What Is Freedom.gov? Inside The US Plan For A Portal To Access Content Banned In Europe

The US State Department is working on an online portal that would allow users in Europe and other regions to access content banned by their governments, including material classified as hate speech or terrorist propaganda, according to a Reuters report.

The website, expected to be hosted at freedom.gov, is being pitched by Washington as a tool to counter censorship and expand digital freedom. One of the sources told the news agency that officials have discussed adding a virtual private network feature that would make user traffic appear to originate from the United States, while activity on the site would not be tracked.

The project is being led by Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers. It had been



expected to be unveiled at the Munich Security Conference last week but was delayed.

**State Department Response**  
A State Department spokesperson said the US does not run a censorship-circumvention programme specifically targeting

Europe but said promoting digital freedom, including privacy tools such as VPNs, remains a priority. The spokesperson also denied that any announcement had been delayed or that department lawyers had raised concerns.

## With Europe

If launched, the portal could deepen tensions between Washington and European allies, where approaches to online speech differ significantly from those in the United States. European regulations require platforms to remove illegal hate speech, extremist propaganda and certain forms of disinformation, rules shaped by the continent's efforts to prevent a resurgence of extremist ideologies.

US officials have increasingly used these policies, arguing they suppress political expression. The Trump administration has made what it calls the defence of free speech — particularly conservative voices online — a key part of its foreign policy stance.

## Wider Policy Context

The initiative comes amid broader friction between Washington and European regulators over technology governance. In recent years, the European Union has enforced stricter content rules on major platforms, while US officials have argued such measures risk limiting open debate.

According to the report, the proposed portal could place the US in the unusual position of appearing to encourage users to bypass local laws. It also remains unclear what additional capabilities the site would offer beyond existing commercial VPN services. The domain freedom.gov was registered in January and currently shows a basic page with the National Design Studio logo and a login form, Reuters reported.

## French Far-Right Activist Killing: 11 Held, Including Parliamentary Aide. What We Know So Far

French authorities on Wednesday confirmed 11 arrests in connection with the fatal attack on far-right activist Quentin Deranque, raising tensions between the country's far-right and hard-left factions.

The 23-year-old far-right activist died last week after sustaining a severe brain injury when he was attacked by at least six people during a protest outside a university in Lyon. He was hospitalised in a coma before succumbing to his injuries. The demonstration was held against Rima Hassan, a hard-left politician from the France Unbowed (LFI) party. Deranque, affiliated with the National Rally-aligned groups, had reportedly been providing security at the protest. His death has become a flashpoint in the ongoing tensions between France's far-right and hard-left factions. Parliamentary Aide Among 11 Ar-



rested According to Lyon prosecutor Thierry Dran, among the 11 detained is a parliamentary aide linked to LFI lawmaker Raphael Arnault. Six of the detainees are suspected of participating directly in the assault, while the remaining three are accused of helping the attackers.

A man believed to be directly involved in the violence, along with his partner, who allegedly assisted him in evading justice, were also taken into custody. Arnault said he had fired his assistant following the arrest. The attack occurred on the sidelines of a far-right demonstration where Deranque was reportedly providing security for members of Nemesis, an anti-immigration collective that campaigns against violence toward Western women.

## Ocasio-Cortez roasted for 'rehab story' in The New York Times after Munich missteps

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., drew mockery from both sides of the aisle after New York Times reporter Kellen Browning posted on X Monday that the congresswoman had called him to respond to backlash over her comments at the Munich Security Conference over the weekend. "AOC came to Munich to warn about the far-right. Coverage focused on 2028 & verbal missteps," Browning wrote. "She gave me a call." The reporter's post linked to his Monday article on Ocasio-Cortez's visit to Germany, titled, "After First Big Overseas Trip, Ocasio-Cortez Expresses Frustrations," in which the congresswoman argued that "Everybody's got this story wrong."

After speaking at the security conference over the weekend, Ocasio-Cortez was mocked for multiple statements she made about Taiwan, as well as for saying Venezuela was below the equator.

"Everyone's got this story wrong, that

this is about me running for president," she told the Times. "I could give — whatever, about that, to be honest." Users on X responded swiftly, accusing the congresswoman of attempting to reshape the narrative after facing widespread criticism for her comments at the conference.

"NYTs reporter doing his best to spin AOC's awful performance," wrote RedState contributor Bonchie. "But when you go to Munich to a global security conference, you should probably expect to be asked about global security issues."

Noah Pollak, senior advisor for the Department of Education, tore into Ocasio-Cortez for "speaking in dumb slogans, even when she's trying to clean up the mess she made by speaking in dumb slogans." Journalist Paul D.

Thacker satirized Browning's post and described his article in the Times as a "rehab story" to make the congresswoman "look better."

## US, Israel Could Launch Major Military Operation Against Iran 'Very Soon': Report

The United States and Israel could be on the brink of a major military operation against Iran that might begin "very soon", according to a report by Axios. Sources, cited by Axios, said the plan would be far larger in scope than last year's 12-day conflict and could last for weeks if it goes ahead.

The report says the Trump administration is preparing for a campaign that would go well beyond small-scale actions and resemble a full-scale military engagement.

Officials cited by the news outlet said that the

operation would likely involve a joint effort with Israel, and that it would mark a major escalation in regional military tensions. ALSO READ: 'I'll Be Involved Indirectly': Trump On High-Stakes US-Iran Nuclear Talks In Geneva

Despite efforts at diplomacy, including the latest nuclear negotiations in Geneva, officials cited by the report expressed scepticism about a breakthrough.

The military build-up in the region, including the deployment of significant US forces, continues even as talks proceed.



# 50 Km From Pakistan, This 30-Km Road In Gujarat Seems To Float On Water

India is blessed with diverse landscapes that attract travellers from across the globe. Whether you want to wander in the hills of the Himalayas or sunbathe on the beaches of Goa, every tourist can find their dream destination in this country. Amid these stunning vistas lies a dreamlike road surrounded by water on both sides. The 30-km stretch, called Road to Heaven, connects mainland Kutch to Dholavira village in Gujarat.

## The Road To Heaven Is A UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Road to Heaven is known for its striking scenery and unique geography. The almost straight road features water on both sides for nearly six months of the year and white salt pans for the remaining months. At times, it creates the illusion of driving on water or across a vast salt desert, depending on when you visit. The road's growing popularity on social media has turned it into an iconic representation of Kutch's natural



beauty. It offers a picturesque drive to Dholavira, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Road to Heaven also holds cultural and historical significance. It connects Khavda, a village renowned for its handicrafts and proximity to the White Rann, with Dholavira. It gained widespread attention after being showcased during the G20

Summit. Following this, the government opened it to the public, and it has since become a popular driving route among visitors.

Travel content creator Arihant Baid shared a breathtaking video of the road on Instagram. The clip highlighted the route's stunning landscapes and scenic charm. The side note read, "Just 50 Km

from Pakistan, is India's most beautiful road. Known as the Road to Heaven, this 30 km stretch connects mainland Kutch to the island of Khadir Bet, which has the historical town of Dholavira on it."

## Best Time To Visit Road To Heaven

The best time to visit the Road to Heaven is during the winter

months, from November to February. During this period, the weather is cool and dry, making it ideal for exploring. You can expect clear skies, pleasant days and stunning views of the white salt desert.

## How To Get There

**By Air:** After landing at Bhuj Airport, you can hire a cab to reach the Road to Heaven. It is located approximately 80 km from the airport.

**By Train:** Take a train to Bhuj Junction, the nearest railway station. From there, the Road to Heaven is about 80 km away and can be reached by taxi or private vehicle.

**By Road:** A road trip is the best way to enjoy this scenic stretch. The route is well connected to major cities in Gujarat, including Rajkot, Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar.

If you are looking for a surreal driving experience unlike any other, this extraordinary road in Kutch deserves a spot on your travel bucket list.

# You can live on this Greek island for free. There's just one catch



A soft breeze whispers off the Aegean Sea, carrying the scent of salt as you sit against a canvas of whitewashed homes. The moment is unhurried, in that very Greek way, the kind you've seen in films, saved on Pinterest, and quietly added to your bucket list to chase someday.

This isn't a word picture of Santorini or Mykonos. It's a less-viral, but equally aesthetic Greek island where you can actually live for free.

The catch? You simply need to take care of cats. Yes, the little furry tails that meow and meander through streets they seem to own more than anyone else there.

Greek island, free accommodation - purrfect! The Aegean island of Syros is full of life. It's got the same Greek allure of magical sunsets, tranquil beaches, romantic aura and an elegant charm. It's home to not a very large population, and if you ask locals, they will tell you the island is also shared with nearly 3,000 stray cats. And it's the people here who voluntarily take care of them. It's a thing here. Not by force, but by a choice that residents take on themselves. Apart from the aesthetics, this place has the Syros Cats volunteer programme in place that is dedicated to improving the lives of stray and rescued cats on the

island. Travellers can get free accommodation, breakfast, and utilities in exchange for helping with the daily care of hundreds of furry residents. The Syros Cats volunteer programme has been active since the 1990s, implementing humane TNR (trap-neuter-return) programmes, veterinary care and feeding schemes that have transformed the dynamic between locals and strays from indifference, or even animosity, to mutual respect.

## So, what do you need to do as a volunteer?

The programme welcomes singles or couples who are "independent, reasonably fit, and happy to commit for at least a month", especially if the idea of spending your days caring for cats makes your heart (and calendar) purr! Volunteers are required to commit to about five hours of work a day, five days a week. Prior experience with veterinary care or feral cats is a bonus. Tasks may range from feeding resident and street cats to cleaning litter areas, assisting with grooming and even helping prepare kittens

for future adoption.

Now coming to the accommodation bit. While it's free, volunteers have a private bedroom, but shared kitchens, bathrooms, and a terrace overlooking Syros' rolling landscape. It's almost like forming a small, international household bonded by whiskers, routines and a shared love for all things feline.

## But why are there so many cats?

If you are to go by the ancient lore, cats used to be considered and kept as hunters to keep mice and rodents away from granaries.

Somehow, they became pretty intrinsic to the Greek culture. They are not only considered a symbol of luck, as per certain beliefs, but some also associate them with Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and wild animals. Therefore, there are several initiatives that run for cat welfare.

## Living the Syros way

It's not just about being cat-forward here. You can also go after the wanderlust here.

When you are not looking after the cats, you may as well enjoy a swim at Agathopes beach, a quiet coffee in Ermoupoli's elegant squares, or a sunset sail into the horizon. Evenings might find you strolling narrow lanes, a cat trailing at your heels as the Aegean breeze cools the day.

In fact, it's a nice place for digital nomads too. With its low cost of living, welcoming locals, mild Mediterranean weather and easygoing pace, the island offers a refreshing alternative to Greece's more crowded hotspots. This volunteering programme also encourages remote workers looking to balance workdays with the Aegean just outside their window. Of course, the opportunity has gone viral, and the 2026 volunteer slots have already filled up thanks to overwhelming interest. But anybody thinking of packing bags for Greece by the idea of a sun-soaked, purpose-filled escape should keep an eye out when applications reopen in autumn for the 2027 season.

# Google spending \$15 billion to build AI in India, plans a US-India sea cable link

Google has announced some big AI-led initiatives for India. One of the highlights of this \$15 billion, five-year investment is the construction of new undersea cable routes linking India with multiple global destinations to support the expansion of AI infrastructure in the country. The sub-sea fibre expansion is part of Google's America-India Connect initiative and broader AI infrastructure commitment in India.

Speaking at a Google event in Delhi, CEO Sundar Pichai said the company is launching the India-America Connect initiative, under which it will build new sub-sea cable routes to increase AI connectivity between India and the US.

"Today, we are announcing the India-America Connect Initiative, which will deliver new sub-sea cable routes to increase AI connectivity between India and the US and multiple locations across the southern hemisphere," said Pichai. "For the opportunities this initiative creates, we should also invest in skilling, which is why we are announcing our most ambitious skilling programmes here. This includes a new Google AI Professional Certificate programme to help people master AI in their work."

At the centre of Google's massive AI-led investment in India is its America-India Connect initiative. As part of this project, Google will establish a new international subsea landing station in Visakhapatnam on India's east coast, creating an additional entry point into its global network. From there, three new subsea routes are planned to link India with Singapore, South Africa and Australia.

The company will also add four terrestrial fibre routes designed to improve connectivity between India, the United States and locations across the Southern Hemisphere.

Google says the goal of the subsea cables is to increase network capacity and reduce the risk of outages by diversifying how traffic flows between regions. The new infrastructure is expected to support rising demand for cloud computing and AI services in India, while also

**At India AI Impact Summit, Google has announced that it will connect India with the US through new subsea cables as part of a \$15 billion investment spread over five years. It will boost AI connectivity between the two nations. Alongside this, the company plans to expand data centres and cloud capacity, while also rolling out AI skilling programmes and other related initiatives.**



strengthening connections with Africa, Australia and parts of Southeast Asia.

## Google to invest \$15 billion in India

In addition to sea cables, the company also plans to build the physical and digital systems required to support AI services at scale, including data

infrastructure and cloud capacity as part of the \$15 billion investment deal.

As part of the investment, Google will expand data centre capacity and cloud infrastructure to support AI model training, deployment and storage. According to the company, the investment is meant to build long-

term foundational infrastructure rather than serve as a short-term product rollout, supporting AI adoption across both the public and private sectors. The company has also announced additional programmes tied to AI adoption and public sector capacity. These include a \$30 million Global AI for Government Innovation Impact

Challenge and a \$30 million AI for Science Impact Challenge to support the use of AI in public services and scientific research.

Google DeepMind is also establishing partnerships with Indian government bodies and local institutions to provide access to AI for Science models and support national research priorities. In collaboration with the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, the company is setting up a Google Center for Climate Technology focused on AI-powered climate research.

On the skilling front, Google Cloud is working with Karmayogi Bharat to provide infrastructure for the iGOT Karmayogi platform, which supports more than 20 million public servants across 800 districts. This partnership includes digitising legacy training material into searchable resources and enabling content in more than 18 Indian languages.

## America's AI Reset: Why the U.S. Labor Market Will Transform, Not Collapse, by 2035

Artificial Intelligence is set to redefine the American workforce over the next decade, but leading economists do not foresee a mass unemployment crisis. Instead, projections from 2026 data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and analysis from institutions such as the Brookings Institution describe a period of large scale occupational reallocation. Between now and 2035, roughly 10 to 12 million workers may need to transition into new roles. At the same time, AI driven productivity gains could add trillions to the U.S. economy, strengthening overall output rather than shrinking it.

At the heart of this transformation is what researchers call the automation paradox. By 2030, nearly 30 percent of total hours worked in the United States could be automated. This initial phase often produces short term displacement as companies target repetitive, rules based tasks. However, history suggests that when productivity rises, costs decline and demand for new goods and services increases. By 2035, AI is projected to lift U.S. labor productivity between 1.5 percent and 3.7 percent annually. Estimates suggest GDP gains could range from \$1.2 trillion to as much as \$3.8 trillion over the decade, with overall employment levels likely remaining positive but heavily reshaped.

Unlike past automation waves that



primarily affected manufacturing, generative AI is targeting cognitive and non routine white collar work. Office and administrative support roles are among the most exposed, with up to 75 percent of tasks such as scheduling, filing, and data entry considered automatable. Finance and accounting roles, including auditors and junior analysts, face significant disruption as AI handles risk modeling and compliance checks.

Customer service is already experiencing change, as AI agents replace entry level support positions, with some forecasts suggesting measurable job contraction by 2030.

**At the same time, growth sectors**

**are emerging.**

Professional and technical services remain among the strongest performers, with demand rising for software developers, database architects, cybersecurity specialists, and AI governance experts.

Healthcare continues to expand due to demographic pressures from an aging population. While AI can assist with diagnostics and administrative tasks, the need for human practitioners, nurses, and specialists remains robust. Skilled trades and infrastructure roles also show resilience, as construction, energy installation, and maintenance require complex physical execution in unpredictable environments.

# You don't have to lift heavy weights to build muscles, but there's a catch

A new study suggests training with lighter weights can be nearly as effective as lifting heavy, provided you do more reps.



Many gym journeys end almost as soon as they begin because of how gruelling weightlifting can be. Heavy weights often feel intimidating, leading many to believe that the gym simply isn't for them. But here's the good news: you don't always have to lift heavy to see results.

A new study suggests that training with lighter weights can be nearly as effective as going heavy. If you've dreaded hitting the gym or struggled to stay consistent because of intense lifting sessions, this might change the way you look at your workouts.

For the study conducted in Canada, researchers recruited 20 healthy young men who did not normally engage in weight training. They trained under supervision for 10 weeks. Each session required them to perform three sets of bicep curls and knee extensions.

## What counts as heavy and what counts as light?

But here's where it gets interesting: each hand used different weights for the exercises, and the same approach was applied to their legs. To compare heavy and light weight training more accurately, one arm and one leg were randomly assigned to lift heavier weights, while the opposite arm and leg performed the exercises with lighter weights.

The heavy weights were

challenging enough that participants could not perform more than 12 repetitions. In contrast, the lighter weights allowed them to complete up to 25 repetitions before stopping due to fatigue. Once participants were able to exceed the set repetition range for either the

heavy or light weights, the load was gradually increased.

No, you cannot keep using a 3 kg dumbbell forever and expect to get stronger. That would eventually lead to a strength plateau.

## So what happened after 10 weeks?

# Intermittent Fasting Hardly Helps in Weight Loss, Finds New Study

Intermittent fasting has been synonymous with weight loss for decades. Many self-proclaimed nutritionists and influencers have promoted it as one of the most effective ways to shed a few kilograms, but a recent study suggests the method has little to no impact on a person's weight-loss journey.

A new Cochrane study has found that intermittent fasting does not match the widespread hype, especially when it comes to helping people lose weight.

In fact, it is no better than traditional dietary advice or even doing nothing at all.

## What Does The New Study Reveal

The study collected data from 22 randomised clinical trials involving 1,995 adults across Europe, North America, China, South America, and Australia.

It examined various intermittent fasting approaches, including periodic fasting (5:2 diet), alternate-day fasting, and time-restricted eating (16:8 diet).

Participants were followed up for up to one year.

The fasting methods showed no clinical

evidence of aiding weight loss. According to the findings, a person doing nothing or following standard dietary advice would achieve similar results.

The data on side effects varied widely across trials.

## Intermittent Fasting vs Traditional Dietary Advice

When compared to traditional dietary advice, the study revealed that intermittent fasting made no difference to weight loss, based on 21 studies involving 1,430 participants.

Researchers also remain uncertain about its effectiveness in achieving a 5% reduction in body weight, as seen across four studies with 472 participants.

Intermittent Fasting vs Doing Nothing  
When compared to doing nothing (no intervention), intermittent fasting again showed no effect on weight loss among 427 participants across six studies.

The research also could not determine whether periodic fasting improves quality of life.

How Hope Around Intermittent Fasting

The participants' muscles were stronger and bigger, with little difference between the left and right limbs. The arm that trained with lighter weights was just as muscular as the one that lifted heavier loads, and the same was true for the legs.

Lifting lighter weights for more repetitions and heavier weights for fewer repetitions proved equally effective. The key was pushing the muscles to fatigue. A similar study is underway for women as well.

Even a major review in 2023 looked at hundreds of earlier studies and found that any kind of weight training helps build strength and muscle compared to not exercising at all. You do not have to lift heavy weights to see results. Lighter weights can work just as well.

This approach is especially beneficial for those who feel overwhelmed by heavy weights. It also challenges the common belief among many gym-goers

and even trainers who think lifting heavy is the only way to build muscle and gain strength. Either way, weight training is important

And beyond the debate of heavy versus light, here's something worth remembering: weight training itself is one of the most powerful things you can do for your body.

It's not just about bigger biceps or toned legs. Strength training helps preserve muscle mass as you age, supports joint health, improves posture and balance, and even boosts bone density.

In fact, building muscle is one of the most effective ways to future-proof your body against injuries and everyday aches.

It also does more behind the scenes than you may realise. It improves metabolism, helps regulate blood sugar levels, and supports fat loss by increasing lean muscle mass

So, what's stopping you from hitting the gym now?

## Outspaces The Evidence

Luis Garegnani, Universidad Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires Cochrane Associate Centre, said, "Intermittent fasting just doesn't seem to work for overweight or obese adults trying to lose weight. It may be a reasonable option for some people, but the current evidence doesn't justify the enthusiasm we see on social media."

The study mostly included participants from high-income, predominantly white populations. However, obesity continues to rise rapidly in low- and middle-income countries, underscoring the need for further research into long-term outcomes of intermittent fasting.

Eva Madrid, Cochrane Evidence Synthesis Unit Iberoamerica, said, "With the current evidence available, it's hard to make a general recommendation.

Doctors will need to take a case-by-case approach when advising an overweight adult on losing weight."

This is your clue to hit the gym and seek professional assistance to achieve your weight-loss goal.

# Diners at this restaurant are paying Rs 26,000 to get chocolate poured on their hands

Over the past decade, the way we dine has completely evolved. People now gather in strangers' homes for supper clubs, sip experimental cocktails at immersive bars, and even take part in activities like painting or pottery while enjoying a wholesome meal. Dining today is less about just eating and more about the experience that surrounds it.

While diners still crave lip-smacking food that connects them to different cultures, they also want something more layered and memorable.

That's why experiential eateries are on the rise, from Japan's Restaurant of Mistaken Orders to Michelin-starred Elcielo, where a course includes pouring liquid chocolate on the diner's hands.

Yes, you read that right. Elcielo, at their Miami and Washington, D.C., locations, has chocootherapy as a part of their tasting menu, priced at \$289 (Rs 26,000 approx.) per person.

It's a fun, immersive dining ritual created by Chef Juan



Manuel Barrientos, where diners wash their hands with warm chocolate before licking it off. The idea is to engage far more than just taste, bringing in aroma, touch and texture to trigger childhood memories and a deep sense of nostalgia.

Guests gently rub the chocolate into their hands and then lick it clean, turning a simple moment into something playful, intimate and slightly indulgent.

They are first handed a small towel to clean their hands, followed by a dip into warm chocolate. Water is then poured over their hands into a large bowl, and the ritual ends with a napkin to dry them.

The restaurant offers a refined tribute to Colombian cuisine, with a tasting menu that features several dramatic dishes. These include Truffle Bunuelo with black truffle fritter, black garlic and

porcini; Bison "Al Trapo" made with North Dakota bison, potato puree and wine reduction; and "Tree of Life," where yucca bread is served on a sculpted wire bonsai tree.

The chocootherapy course takes place before the "Tree of Life" (one of the courses) is served.

Moments like these tap into nostalgia, sticky fingers, familiar aromas, and the simple pleasure

of tasting something with no rules attached. In a world where dining often feels performative, experiences like this remind us to slow down, engage our senses, and reconnect with food in its most playful, emotional form. So, it's not just about eating anymore; it's about feeling, remembering, and allowing yourself to be present in the moment.

Meanwhile, this kind of experience also shows how far dining has evolved from being just about what's on the plate. Whether it's solo dining, a date night or a meal with friends, people today are craving more than good food and easy conversation. They're looking for moments that feel intentional; stories they can tell, memories they can carry, and experiences that linger long after the last course is served.

Which brings up an interesting question: do you think something like this would work in India, where food is already so closely tied to emotion, ritual and tradition?

## Exploring the Versatility of Cabbage in Indian Cuisine: From Hearty Kashmiri Stews to Flavorful Kerala Dishes



Cabbage, a versatile vegetable, has found its place as a staple ingredient in Indian cuisine, reflecting the diverse culinary heritage of the coun-

try. From the high-altitude valleys of Kashmir to the coastal kitchens of Kerala, this humble vegetable has proven its ability to adapt to various spice palettes, elevating dishes across regions.

Its flexibility makes it an essential component in both traditional and contemporary recipes.

In Kashmiri cooking, cabbage is often incorporated into hearty stews and robust curries, where it absorbs the complex flavors of spices and herbs.

The region's cold climate calls for hearty dishes, and cabbage serves as a nourishing addition, complementing richer ingredients.

As a result, it plays a significant role in the local diet, providing both sustenance and flavor.

Meanwhile, in Kerala, cabbage is featured prominently in lighter, coconut-based dishes that align with the coastal region's tropical climate.

Chefs often pair it with mustard seeds, curry leaves, and a range

of spices that enhance its natural crunch and flavor. The local culinary traditions showcase cabbage's adaptability, illuminating how it can transform based on regional influences.

The widespread use of cabbage across India not only highlights its culinary versatility but also underscores its nutritional benefits.

Rich in vitamins and minerals, cabbage serves as a cost-effective source of nourishment for many households. Its affordability and accessibility make it an attractive option in a country where diverse diets are essential for maintaining health.

As cuisine continues to evolve, the presence of cabbage remains steadfast, contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian food culture. Its ability to complement a variety of spices ensures that it will continue to be a favorite among cooks and diners alike.

From traditional recipes to modern interpretations, cabbage is likely to remain a beloved staple on dining tables across the nation.

# Other Worlds Than These

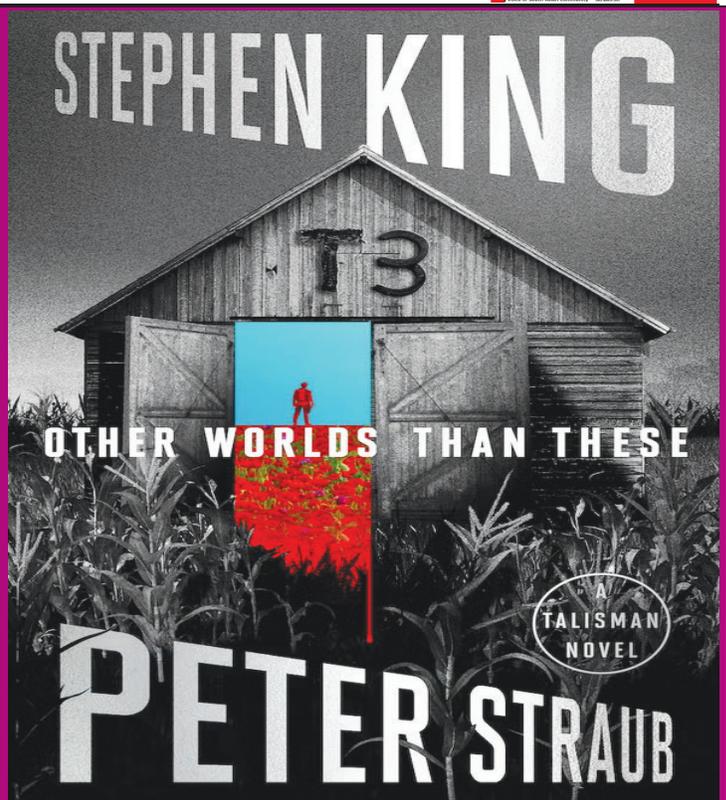
From the Flap Jack Sawyer, a beloved and enduring King protagonist, returns in the final book in the Talisman Trilogy, the #1 New York Times bestselling collaboration between "master craftsmen" Stephen King and Peter Straub (The Washington Post).

"I wanted to go back to Mid-World, which was always the Territories by another name." – Stephen King

This is Stephen King and Peter Straub's epic and unforgettable finale to the Talisman Trilogy (including the novels Talisman and Black House) and a wrapping up of the fate of the worlds in King's iconic, fiercely beloved Dark Tower epic. It is also a magnificent stand-alone novel, that will appeal to new readers, as well as to King's Constant Readers.

OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE is the story of Jack Sawyer, whom readers first met when he was twelve, crossing America and "the territories" to save his mother's life, and met again in Black House, where Jack faces a child killer and the Crimson King (among other evils). In OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE Jack must stop a rampaging gang of infected teenagers from America-side, and the forces of the mysterious Gullet at the edge of Mid-World, before it destroys our world and all worlds. Jack is older now; his Ka-tet (echoing the world of Roland) is fraying; and his task, nearly impossible.

Magnificent, riveting, full of heart, and humor, OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE is a spectacular, propulsive adventure, and features 30 exclusive black and white illustrations by artist Gabriel Rodriguez. The title instantly announces to readers who already know these other worlds that King has returned to them. OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE will appeal to new King readers and his constant readers.



## Akshay Kumar admits he's never read a book, says Twinkle Khanna reads one daily

Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar recently confessed that he has never read a book, even though his wife, Twinkle Khanna, reads daily. The confession came on the show Wheel of Fortune, which he hosts.

Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar made an unexpected revelation on the upcoming episode of his quiz reality show Wheel of Fortune. Speaking in front of a live audience, the 58-year-old admitted he had never read a single book in his life.

The confession was particularly notable given that his wife, Twinkle Khanna, is an author. The actor claimed that Twinkle makes it a point to read at least one book every day.

### Akshay Kumar's confession

In a conversation with a contestant named Yash, Akshay said, "Aapko pata hai maine zindagi mein aaj tak ek bhi kitab nahi padhi hai. Main chehre padhta hoon (you know, I have not read a single book in my entire life. I read faces)."

"Sach bataoon, meri wife writer hain aur mujhe lagta hai woh din mein ek kitab zaroor padhti hain. By God, maine ek bhi kitab nahi padhi. Maine sirf chehre padhe hain. Sach kehta hoon, chehre se badiya kitab koi nahi hoti. (honestly, my wife is a writer, and I think she reads at least one book daily. By God, I haven't read even one book. I have only read faces. I truly believe there is no book better than a face)," he further expressed.

The moment followed a conversation in which contestant Yash introduced himself as a marine engineer who has spent a decade writing cartoon scripts



and anchoring for the Mumbai Indians. Yash mentioned working on projects for Golmaal, Little Singham, and Simmba. He also joked about wanting to write for Akshay's hit film, Sooryavanshi, as well.

Impressed by Yash's writing credentials, the actor quipped, "So basically, you are a writer," before going on to make his now widely-shared confession about never having read a book. **Twinkle Khanna's literary career**

Twinkle worked as an actor in Bollywood films such as Barsaat, Jab Pyaar Kisise Hota Hai, and Baadshah. After stepping away from acting post-marriage, she redefined her professional path as a columnist and author. Some of the books published by the 52-year-old include Mrs Funnybones, Pyjamas Are Forgiving, Welcome To Paradise and Mrs Funnybones Returns.

Beyond her writing career, Twinkle

pursued interests in interior design and talk show hosting. She recently co-hosted the show Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle alongside actress Kajol.

### Upcoming projects

On the film front, Akshay will be seen in the film Bhooth Bangla. The horror-comedy film, also featuring Tabu, will release on April 10. He will also be seen in Welcome To The Jungle this year.

# Rs 40,000 Rent For 16-Square-Foot House: How 2 Lakh People Live In Hong Kong's 'Coffin Homes'

In a city famed for its glittering skyline and eye-watering property prices, thousands live in spaces so small they cannot stand upright, stretch their arms, or even turn without twisting their bodies. In one of the richest cities on Earth, people are living inside boxes.

## A City Of Extremes

For 14 consecutive years, Hong Kong has held the title of the world's most expensive housing market. Glass towers rise from green hills, luxury cars glide past designer storefronts, and a handful of tycoons control vast fortunes.

Yet beneath that polished image lies a parallel city carved into ageing buildings and hidden behind metal grates and thin plywood partitions.

"These are the world's smallest apartments. They measure only 16 square feet and are known as coffin homes."

That is how Ruhi Cenet, a YouTuber introduces viewers to one of the harshest housing realities in the developed world. For context, 16 sq feet is roughly 4 feet by 4 feet: a small single mattress (like a twin bed at 38x75 inches) that fills nearly the entire area, leaving no room to stand upright or extend arms fully. A standard crib is about 28x52 inches (10 sq ft); coffin homes double that but feel equally confining without headroom. In such cramped spaces, around 2,00,000 to 2,20,000 residents



are estimated to be living in subdivided or coffin-style units.

Many are elderly, low-income workers, migrants, or people who have fallen through the cracks of an unforgiving property market. Public housing exists, but waiting times average about five years, sometimes longer. For many, the queue feels endless.

Rent for Hong Kong's 16-square-foot coffin homes typically ranges from \$230 to \$450 USD per month (INR 20,858 to INR 45,353).

## What Is A Coffin Home

Coffin homes, also known as bedspace apartments, can be as small as 16 square feet. Some measure under 30 square feet, which places them outside newer regulatory frameworks.

Inside, the "apartment" is little more than a wooden or metal box

stacked among dozens of others. In one 800-square-foot flat, as many as 30 coffin units can be crammed in. Residents sleep, eat, scroll through their phones and sometimes cook in that single, claustrophobic cavity.

"It is impossible to stand up or even stretch your arms," the documentary notes. "Despite this, these coffins serve as a living room, kitchen, and bedroom all at once."

Some units are not wider than the resident's shoulders. In one case, a man could not shut his door because his shoulder protruded beyond the frame. Another slept without a mattress because it would take up too much space.

## Buildings Split In Half

Many of these units were never meant to exist. Entire floors

suffocating.

Air quality inside some subdivided apartments has been found to be multiple times worse than safe limits. Mold spreads across ceilings. Warm, musty air lingers. In many units, there is no natural light at all.

Bed bugs and cockroaches are a persistent menace.

Cooking Beside The Toilet That's not all. In some (most) of these subdivided flats, there are no kitchens. Residents prepare food in the bathroom, sometimes directly beside the toilet. Vegetables are washed in sinks also used after using the lavatory. Clothes hang overhead. There is often no lid on the toilet bowl.

This arrangement raises serious hygiene concerns. Cross-contamination risks are high, especially in cramped spaces with limited cleaning facilities. Yet for many, eating out regularly is not financially possible.

## Bottomline

Hong Kong's skyline tells a story of prosperity. But the reality is far different. Just 75 individuals control roughly 10 percent of the territory's wealth. Luxury apartments can sell for more than 1 million US dollars even in average neighbourhoods. Monthly rents for small, standard one-bedroom flats can hover around 4,000 US dollars. Against that backdrop, coffin homes exist almost invisibly.

# For Rs 600, you can 'curse' your enemies here

In India, we're quick to whisper about "black magic" and conveniently pin it on Bengalis or Assamese — usually without evidence, but with plenty of conviction.

In Hong Kong, there's actually a place where you can take your simmering frustration, hand over about \$6 (Rs 600 approximately), and watch someone ritually whack it away with a slipper.

Bad boss? Office rival? Ex who still owes you closure — or money? All can be symbolically taken to task, at least, that's the belief.

"Villain hitting," or da siu yan, is one of Hong Kong's most curious, enduring and surprisingly popular folk rituals. And no, it's not a TikTok trend. It's over a century old.

## What is "villain hitting"?

"Villain hitting" is a traditional Cantonese folk practice where specialist practitioners, usually elderly women known locally as "villain hitters" — perform ritual curses on behalf of clients.

For a small fee, you provide the name (and sometimes a photo or birth details) of a person who has wronged you. It could be a cheating partner, a workplace bully, a meddling relative — or simply "general bad luck."

The ritual is part revenge fantasy, part stress relief, part spiritual theatre. And it happens in plain sight.

Travel vlogger Aakanksha Monga, who visited Hong Kong and participated in the ritual, says, "It's one of the most unique things I've ever experienced. You tell them who or what's been causing problems in your life..

could be a person, could be bad luck, health issues, money stress. They write it down on paper, light some incense, pray to their god, and then SLAP that paper with a shoe over and over while chanting spells to curse it away. Some people even bring their own shoes for extra impact."



# Priyanka Chopra calls Varanasi her career-defining film, praises SS Rajamouli

Priyanka Chopra Jonas has opened up about her return to Indian cinema at a recent premiere — and her comments about SS Rajamouli's *Varanasi* have set expectations soaring.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas has set the tone for her much-anticipated return to Indian cinema -- and she's not downplaying it. While attending the world premiere of *The Bluff* on 18 February alongside husband Nick Jonas, the actor spoke candidly about *Varanasi*, her upcoming collaboration with director SS Rajamouli.

Calling the project "career-defining", Chopra Jonas made it clear that *Varanasi* marks a pivotal chapter for her. After seven years away from an Indian production, the film is already being positioned as one of the biggest cinematic events on

the horizon.

The film is directed by SS Rajamouli, widely regarded as one of India's most ambitious filmmakers. Chopra Jonas described him as "one of the best that we have in India", signalling the scale and expectations surrounding the project.

The official announcement in Hyderabad in November 2025 included a teaser that hinted at a sweeping narrative spanning timelines and locations — complete with visually striking sequences.

**Who else stars in the film?**

## Actor Farida Jalal says her comeback outshone her early career



Actor Farida Jalal believes her comeback did more than revive her career -- it surpassed it. In a recent interview, the veteran actor declared, "My comeback was better than my first innings," adding with quiet confidence, "No actor has come back the way I did." For an artiste whose journey spans over six decades, that's no small claim. But Jalal isn't speaking from ego -- she's speaking from ex-

perience. After stepping away from the spotlight at intervals, she returned on her own terms, choosing roles that resonated rather than chasing visibility.

**What makes her comeback so remarkable?**

Jalal's return began prominently with *Henna* in 1991, reintroducing her to audiences at a time when Hindi cinema was changing. She later connected with younger viewers through television, especially with the beloved series *Sharaarat*. Comedy, she has said, sharpened her craft -- teaching her timing, patience and the art of listening on screen. Unlike many who scramble to stay relevant, Jalal insists she was never "hungry for work" -- only for good work. That distinction shaped her second innings. She wasn't looking to reclaim stardom; she was looking for substance.

**Why did she step back in the first place?**

The actor has often spoken about being told early in her career that she didn't fit the mould of a conventional leading lady -- "not tall, not slim." Instead of resisting it, she embraced roles with emotional depth.



*Varanasi* features Mahesh Babu as Rudhra and Prithviraj Sukumar as the antagonist Kumbha. Chopra Jonas will play Mandakini, marking her debut in Telugu cinema.

Music for the film is being composed by MM Keeravani, adding further weight to its creative line-up. When is *Varanasi* releasing? The film is scheduled for release on April, 7 2027. With eyes are on *Varanasi*. If Chopra Jonas is calling it career-defining, and *Showing Business* backing audiences will be watching it, the project is already being closely to see why.

**What else is Priyanka working on?**  
Chopra Jonas was last seen in an Indian film in 2019's *The Sky is Pink*. Alongside *Varanasi*, she has international projects lined up, including *The Bluff*, streaming from 25 February, and *Judgment Day*, directed by Nicholas Stoller. For now, though, all eyes are on *Varanasi*. If Chopra Jonas is calling it career-defining, and *Showing Business* backing audiences will be watching it, the project is already being closely to see why.

## When Anurag Kashyap refused to make Indian version of Money Heist for Netflix

Director Anurag Kashyap opened up on the challenges he faced while pitching a pilot for a Netflix show. He shared his disagreements with the streaming platform who wanted to turn the show into *Money Heist of India*. Kashyap, while speaking to *The Hollywood Reporter India*, said, "I write handwritten scripts. For me to go on and nobody telling me it's not happening was even more triggering. And then, to compensate, they were sending me mediocre writing and shows. When I said it's mediocre, and I needed time, they said, 'No, but we have the actor's dates in four months'. I said no, I can't do it. If you want me to do it, I'll do it but I need time. There was another show, for which I wrote the pilot. They loved it, and they said it was so good. Then suddenly, one day, they

came, and they said, 'Can we make it *Money Heist of India*?' I was like, how do you guys think? I made a choice to leave." "I was grieving and I went to therapy. When you invest so much time, it becomes your baby. So it was a miscarriage. In that grieving, I had a heart attack. I was on blood thinners, and then the vaccine reacted. I got asthma, so I was on steroids. My mind was buzzing, and then I started drinking and ordering from Zomato all the time during the second lockdown. I was not eating any healthy food. I put on 35 kilos in 8 months. My drinking got really bad and my daughter was very worried," he added. Since its 2017 debut, *Money Heist* has evolved into a worldwide phenomenon, ranking among the most-viewed non-English titles in Netflix history.



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Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2025 and called Donald Trump a demon of violence, praised the US President for supporting the Venezuelans working to establish democracy and end President Nicolas Maduro's dictatorship.

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