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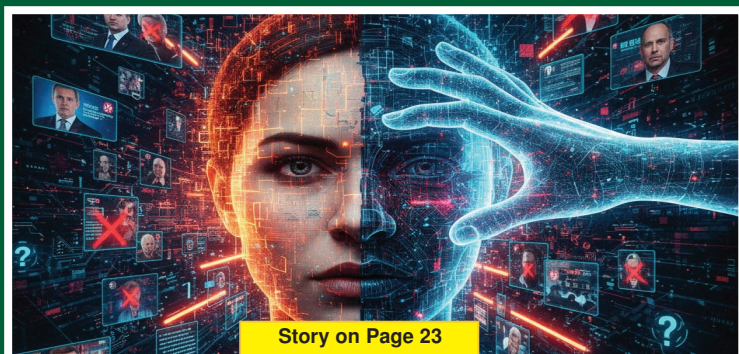
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President Trump Celebrates Diwali at White House, Praises PM Modi as 'Great Friend'

(By Our Staff Reporter)
Washington D.C.—President Donald Trump marked the Festival of Lights, Diwali, by hosting a celebration at the White House on Tuesday, extending warm wishes to the people of India and the Indian-American community.

The President participated in the traditional lighting of a diya (lamp) in the Oval Office, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. The event, attended by a small delegation of senior administration officials and prominent Indian-American business leaders, underscored the growing cultural significance of Diwali in the United States and the strong relationship between the US and India.

During his remarks, President Trump spoke highly of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Let me extend our warmest wishes to the people of India. I just spoke to your Prime Minister today. Had a great conversation... He's a great person, and he's become a great friend of mine over the years," Trump stated. The leaders reportedly discussed trade and regional peace, with the President noting efforts to prevent conflict between India and Pakistan.

Among the attendees were several Indian-American officials, including FBI Director Kash Patel and ODNI Director Tulsi Gabbard, as well as India's Ambassador to the US, Vinay Mohan Kwatra. Ambassador Kwatra expressed his honor in joining the celebration, conveying warm Diwali greetings on behalf of Prime Minister Modi.

The President reflected on the deeper meaning of the festival, saying the diya's flame reminds everyone "to seek the path of wisdom and to work with diligence and to always give thanks for our many blessings."

The celebration continues a White House tradition and highlights the vital



contributions of the Indian diaspora to American society and the strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between the two democracies.

US President Donald Trump lit lamps at the White House on Tuesday to mark the festival of Diwali, celebrating the occasion with Indian-American members of his administration and other community figures. Key figures, including FBI Director Kash Patel and Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard joined the gathering to observe the "Festival of Lights," celebrated by Hindus across the world. A traditional brass five-wick lamp stood on a flower-decked table in front of the Resolute Desk as Trump read a message highlighting the spiritual meaning of Diwali. He said the lamp symbolised "the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil". Just before the ceremony,

Trump said that he spoke with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi focused primarily on trade issues. Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, Trump said, "We talked about a lot of things, but mostly the world of trade." He also repeated that India would not be purchasing significant quantities of Russian oil in the future. He extended greetings to the Indian community and reiterated his comments about the discussion with PM Modi. "Let me also extend our warmest wishes to the people of India. I just spoke to your Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) today. We had a great conversation. We talked about trade. We talked about a lot of things, but mostly the world of trade. He's very interested in that," he said. The US President added that the conversation briefly touched on regional peace, noting that he had previously urged both India and Pakistan to avoid conflict.

"Although we did talk a little while ago about let's have no wars with Pakistan. And I think the fact that trade was involved, I was able to talk about that. And we have no war with Pakistan and India. And that was a very, very good thing," he said. He praised Modi as "a great person" and "a great friend," recalling his years-long relationship with the PM Modi. However, India has not confirmed Trump's latest claims. The US president had made similar claims a week earlier, saying he spoke with PM Modi, who assured him that New Delhi would stop buying oil from Russia, calling it "a big step" in his efforts to isolate Moscow over the war in Ukraine. India, however, rejected the statement outright, clarifying that no such conversation had taken place. "There was no phone call between the two leaders," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

TRUMP DEFENDS HIS TRADE POLICY WITH INDIA

The US president's remarks come amid ongoing trade tensions between Washington and New Delhi. Trump has imposed a 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods in response to India's continued purchase of Russian oil, bringing the total tariff rate on imports from the country to around 50 per cent this year. Earlier in the day, Trump repeated his use of tariffs, claiming they have not only strengthened the US economy but also prevented potential wars.

"I mentioned eight wars. Of the eight, five were based solely on trade and tariffs," he said. Trump claimed his intervention through trade diplomacy helped avert a major conflict. "India and Pakistan were going at it -- two nuclear powers and serious nuclear. Seven planes shot down. They were ready to go, and I called them up," Trump said. According to Trump, the warning was effective. "We stopped the war. We stopped a potential disaster, a nuclear disaster, because of trade." India has consistently rejected US President Donald Trump's repeated claims of brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. Indian officials have clarified that the ceasefire understanding was achieved directly through communication between the two countries' Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs), with no third-party intervention.




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Godara gang fires at man in Canada, warns it's only the beginning

The Godara gang has claimed in a social media post that it orchestrated a recent shooting targeting a man in Canada. The group warned that this was only the beginning and issued threats against anyone who assists its rivals.



Three men associated with the beginning." The online gangster Rohit Godara have confession comes amid a series of confessed to shooting a man in violent acts attributed to Indian Canada and warned that "this is only gangs operating in Canada, including

Century Cricket Centers Launches First U.S. Location in Houston



(By our staff reporter) New York Century Cricket Centers has officially opened its first U.S. location in Houston, Texas - a world-class, 24/7 indoor cricket training facility featuring cutting-edge technology and flexible access for players of all levels. The official launch takes place Saturday 25 October, followed by a Community Open Day from 12 p.m. to 12 midnight, welcoming everyone to experience the future of cricket training first-hand. Century has partnered with Stance Beam and Straight Drive to bring advanced data, video, and smart bowling

systems together under one roof. The launch coincides with Century Cricket's President and CEO Stuart Giles speaking at the Cricket Impact Summit in San Francisco on the panel "The Innovation Engine: Disrupting Cricket's Norms," highlighting Century's role in shaping the next generation of cricket innovation. Community Open Day: Saturday 25 October 2025 | 12:00 p.m. - 12:00 midnight Location: Century Cricket Houston | 14639 Beechnut St Ste B-4, Houston, TX 77083 For more information, visit their Website www.century.cricket

recent attacks reportedly connected to both the Godara and Lawrence Bishnoi gangs. In the post, the members named as Mahender Saran Dilana, Rahul Rinau, and Vicky Phalwan claimed responsibility for the shooting, stating, "We carried out the shooting in Canada at Teji Kahlon. He was shot in the stomach. If he understands, fine. If not, next time we will finish him." The statement alleges that the targeted individual was supporting the gang's enemies through financial aid, supplying weapons, and sharing information. The post asserts that the victim was involved in planning attacks against the gang's associates and warns that similar actions could be met with severe consequences. The confession also contained specific threats to anyone who might assist the gang's rivals, including businessmen, builders, and financial intermediaries. "Let me make it clear, if anyone, even by mistake, supports our enemies or helps them in any way, we will not spare their families. We'll destroy them. This is a warning to all brothers, businessmen, builders, hawala operators, and whoever else. If anyone helps, they will be our

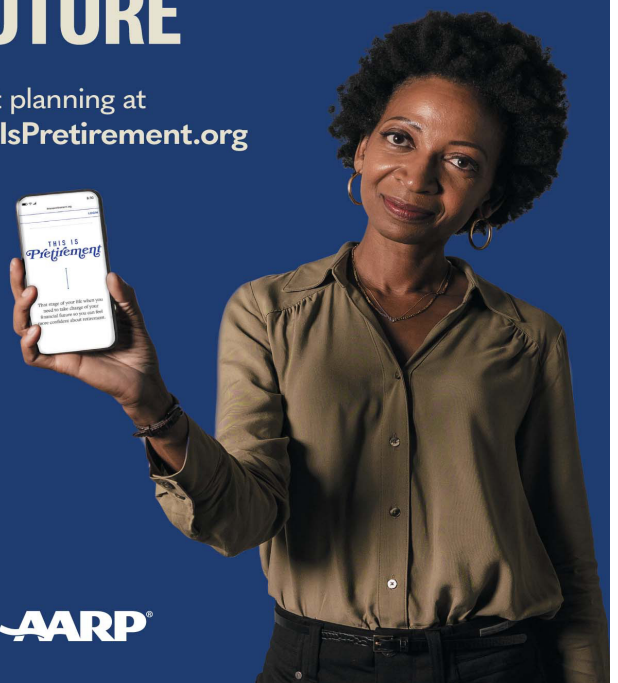
enemy. This is just the beginning. Watch what happens next," it added. This latest claim follows a pattern of escalating gun violence in Canada, with other factions such as the Bishnoi gang also being cited for repeated shootings. On October 16, comedian Kapil Sharma's Kap's Cafe in Surrey, British Columbia, was attacked for the third time in a span of just four months. Associates of gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi, Kulveer Sidhu and Goldy Dhillon took joint responsibility for the attack in a social media post. The cafe was attacked for the first time on July 10, while the second one took place on August 7. After the first two incidents, security arrangements for Kapil Sharma in Mumbai and other locations were reviewed. Another shooting incident on October 16 was carried out by associates of the Bishnoi and Goldy Dhillon gangs, targeting a restaurant in Brampton. On October 7, the Bishnoi gang carried out yet another firing incident in Canada and targeted multiple properties of a restaurant owner in Surrey. The gang accused the restaurant owner of harassing female employees and withholding salaries of several workers.

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India's Envoy Says Canada Still Not a Reliable Energy Partner, But Sees Path to Stronger Ties



As Canada and India work to rebuild diplomatic relations, India's new High Commissioner to Canada, Dinesh Patnaik, says Canada is "not yet" considered a dependable supplier of oil and gas. Speaking on CTV Question Period with host Vassy Kapelos, Patnaik emphasized that while India is open to cooperation, reliability remains a key factor in energy trade decisions. The statement comes after years of diplomatic

tension between the two countries. Relations sharply deteriorated when former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged that Indian government agents were involved in the killing of a Sikh activist in British Columbia. Subsequent RCMP claims that Indian diplomats were tied to wider criminal activity in Canada

deepened the rift, prompting both nations to expel diplomats and suspend trade talks. India dismissed the accusations as politically motivated, leaving negotiations for a free trade agreement on indefinite hold. Recent months, however, have signaled a thaw. Prime Minister Mark Carney invited Indian

Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the G7 Summit in Alberta this past June, and Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand met with Modi again during her recent visit to India. Both countries have since issued a joint statement reaffirming their interest in expanding trade and economic cooperation.

India's 2025 Diwali Gold Rush: Buying More for Investment, Wearing Less for Display

As Diwali lights up India, gold continues to shine at the heart of the celebrations—though in a very different way this year. In Delhi's bustling Lajpat Nagar market, jewellery shops are brimming with crowds eager to buy gold and silver, yet the trend is shifting from ornate jewellery to smaller, investment-driven purchases. Despite prices soaring past \$1,440 (?1.2 lakh) for 10 grams, Indians remain undeterred in their devotion to the yellow metal, though they're now buying

smarter rather than larger. For many, Dhanteras and Diwali mark the most auspicious time to bring gold into their homes. Shoppers are now prioritizing coins and bars over heavy ornaments, driven by both tradition and financial foresight. According to jewellers like Prakash Pahlajani of Kumar Jewels, the fear of missing out is fueling demand. Customers worry prices may climb even higher, and as a result, stores are seeing steady footfall.

Delhi Chokes Under Thick Smog After Diwali Despite 'Green Crackers'



Delhi awoke to a blanket of toxic haze on Tuesday morning, with air quality plunging to "very poor" levels following widespread Diwali fireworks, despite a Supreme Court order permitting only low-emission "green crackers." Residents across the city reported reduced visibility, a thick smoky odor, and breathing discomfort as pollution levels soared overnight. The Air Quality Index (AQI) reached 360, far above the safe limits set by the World Health Organization, which recommends no more than 15 micrograms of PM2.5 particles per cubic meter over 24 hours. Some areas in the capital recorded pollution levels nearly 24 times higher than that benchmark. The Supreme Court had allowed the use of green crackers—advertised as emitting 20-30% fewer pollutants—during specific time windows: one hour in the morning and two in the evening on Diwali and the day before. However, fireworks continued well past midnight across Delhi and its suburbs. Despite the official ban on traditional crackers since 2020, BBC reporters observed them being sold openly in markets in the days leading up to the festival. The relaxed enforcement and late-night celebrations led to dense smog accumulation, worsened by already stagnant air and low wind speeds. Delhi's pollution crisis, chronic throughout the year, worsens significantly during the winter months when farmers in nearby states burn crop stubble. This seasonal practice, combined with vehicular emissions,

industrial activity, and dust, creates a deadly mix of pollutants that linger over the capital due to cold, stagnant air. Officials have invoked Stage II of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), restricting diesel generator use and prohibiting the burning of coal and firewood to curb further deterioration. Residents shared alarming experiences of the morning after Diwali. BBC's Vikas Pandey, commuting from Noida to Delhi before dawn, described the scene as "the familiar smell of burning charcoal was back," with the city's skyline completely obscured. "I could taste ash in my mouth," he said, as visibility dropped to just a few meters in some areas. Experts warn that easing restrictions on firecrackers risks undoing years of public awareness about the health dangers of air pollution. For many, the situation feels unchangeable. "You can't even think of stepping outside," said Delhi resident Paras Tyagi, noting that both urban and rural neighborhoods were engulfed in smog. Despite measures on paper, enforcement gaps and public defiance have left India's capital once again gasping for clean air after what was supposed to be a "green" Diwali celebration.

India's High Commissioner Pushes for Full-Scale Trade Deal as Canada Relations Improve



India's new High Commissioner to Canada, Dinesh Patnaik, is calling for a comprehensive trade and investment agreement between the two nations, urging Ottawa to move beyond limited, sector-specific deals toward a broader economic partnership. In an interview with The Canadian Press, Patnaik said India prefers a "high-ambition" approach that goes beyond basic goods exchange to include services, education, culture, technology, and research collaboration. Patnaik emphasized that Canadian businesses should not wait for the formal signing of a deal to expand into India, suggesting that early cooperation could yield immediate gains. Trade discussions between the two countries began in 2010 but have been repeatedly stalled, most recently in 2023 when Canada halted negotiations following

allegations that Indian officials were involved in the assassination of a Sikh activist in British Columbia. Despite these setbacks, trade between the two countries has continued, though Patnaik noted it has not reached its full potential given Canada's G7 status and India's position as the world's fourth-largest economy. Prime Minister Mark Carney's government has made restoring ties with India a foreign policy priority. Earlier this month, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand visited New Delhi, where both nations released a joint statement reaffirming their intent to "renew momentum toward a stronger partnership." The move marks a significant improvement in tone compared to the strained relations of recent years, during which Canada expelled Indian diplomats and India reduced protections for Canadian envoys.

21-year-old man arrested for rape, murder of minor girl in Jharkhand



A 14-year-old girl was in Jharkhand's Palamu district, allegedly raped and murdered police said on Wednesday. The

accused, identified as 21-year-old Arun Kumar, has been arrested. Officials said the case, registered on October 18, was solved within days following a focused investigation. According to Medininagar Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Mani Bhusan Prasad, the girl had left home on the night of October 16, saying she was going to stay at her cousin's house. "When she did not return the next day, her family members

enquired and found that she had not reached her cousin's house. Around 4.30 pm on October 17, her body was found in a pond near the village," Prasad said. Police said Kumar allegedly intercepted the girl on her way, raped her at an isolated spot, and strangled her to death. "Thereafter, the accused strangled her and dumped her body in the pond. The victim's phone was thrown into the pond, while her slippers and

clothes were found in a well," the SDPO added. Following the recovery of the body, police launched an investigation and detained Kumar, who reportedly confessed to the crime. "The accused allegedly threw the body into a pond after the murder and dumped her clothes in a well," an officer said. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, and forensic reports are awaited. Police said further investigation was in progress.

Delhi's Air Quality Plunges on Diwali, Most Monitoring Stations in Red Zone

Delhi's air quality took a sharp hit on Diwali, with 34 of the city's 38 monitoring stations falling into the red zone, marking "very poor" to "severe" pollution levels. According to official data, Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI), recorded at 4 p.m., reached 345—up from 326 on Sunday—placing the city firmly in the "very

poor" category.

Data from the Central Pollution Control Board's SAMEER app revealed that four major stations—Dwarka, Ashok Vihar, Wazirpur, and Anand Vihar—had already entered the "severe" category, with AQI readings ranging between 404 and 423. Another 30 stations across Delhi registered

"very poor" levels, all recording AQI above 300. By the afternoon, 31 of the 38 stations had air quality classified as "very poor," while three remained in the "severe" range. The CPCB's data shows that transport emissions contributed 15.6 percent to Delhi's overall pollution levels on Monday, while industrial and other

sources accounted for roughly 23.3 percent. With stagnant weather conditions expected to persist, experts warn that air quality could further decline into the "severe" category over the next two days. In anticipation of worsening conditions, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) activated

Stage II of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across Delhi-NCR on Sunday. The decision followed assessments from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), which both predicted rising particulate levels.

Canada and India Forge 'Ambitious' Roadmap to Rebuild Relations After Diplomatic Rift

Canada and India have agreed to a new expel diplomats and suspend talks. India plan to strengthen political and economic ties, marking a major step toward restoring relations that fractured two years ago following the killing of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Foreign Affairs Minister Anand met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in New Delhi on Monday, where the two sides announced an "ambitious" roadmap designed to deepen cooperation across multiple sectors. According to a joint statement, both countries acknowledged that "a strong and resilient India-Canada bilateral relationship is essential" amid global economic uncertainty and rising geopolitical tensions. The agreement

the G7 summit in Alberta earlier this year, outlines upcoming ministerial-level talks on trade and investment, along with joint efforts in agriculture, science and technology, civil nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, critical minerals, and broader energy collaboration. Officials said the renewed partnership aims to strengthen supply chains, foster innovation, and promote stability in an increasingly complex global environment. The announcement represents a significant thaw after relations hit a historic low in 2023, when then-prime minister Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of being linked to Nijjar's killing. Ottawa and New Delhi, some members of Canada's Sikh community have criticized the renewed partnership.



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Pakistan can't bend Taliban with bombs. It must stop the Yemen-isation of Durand Line

The deadliest week on the Durand Line since 2021 has ended with an immediate ceasefire agreed in Doha under Qatari and Turkish mediation on Saturday. Before the truce, there was a grim sequence of events—Pakistan's unprecedented strikes on Kabul, intense cross-Durand line fire exchanges, closures of Torkham and Chaman crossings, and later bombing in Paktika, where an airstrike killed civilians, including three young Afghan cricketers Kabeer Agha, Sibghatullah and Haroon, prompting Afghanistan's withdrawal from a planned tri-series in Pakistan.

The deadly clashes that began with Pakistan's bombing of Kabul for the first time in history on 9 October, apparently targeting Noor Wali Mehsud, the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), brought relations to their lowest point after violating Afghanistan's sovereignty.

Historically, ceasefires have been temporary pauses rather than lasting solutions. Unless concrete steps are taken, this pause after the Doha talks will only delay the next round of violence. A strategic shift is hidden beneath the bombardment of Kabul, Kandahar and Paktika. For decades, Islamabad's doctrine of "strategic depth" instrumentalised Afghan actors to offset India's influence. It hasn't delivered at home: inflation and currency shocks have deepened poverty, with lower-income hardship rising in recent years. Politics has swung between civilian cabinets and long stretches of military rule, with the latter still shaping key decisions. Meanwhile, Baloch separatist attacks, including on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Chinese targets, have grown more brazen. Net result: "depth" bought neither leverage in Kabul nor security or prosperity in Pakistan.

Despite retaining channels and leverage in Kabul, Islamabad chose airstrikes to focus more on the dramatisation of its own victimhood instead of resolving the TTP problem. Reaching for airpower as a stand-in for political brokerage was a poor trade. The Taliban are no longer a guerrilla band. They control a state apparatus and domestic revenues that can sustain coercion even in isolation. Bombs are unlikely to coerce a fiscally solvent movement that has so far prized internal cohesion. Moreover, Taliban forces hit back strongly along stretches of the Durand Line, overrunning several Pakistani posts, seizing light arms and uniforms, and later displaying them in cities as trophies.

Who desires this war?

This confrontation is unnecessary and not authored by Afghans and Pakistanis. Its choreography looks subcontracted—

escalation to re-establish indispensability to outside capitals while squeezing Kabul back under an old paradigm. Against that backdrop, Pakistan's powerful army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, mounted an unusual US outreach this year, including a White House lunch with US President Trump in June and a second meeting alongside Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in late September. The optics underscored how Afghan pressure and US courtship ran on parallel tracks, with Pakistan again casting itself as the indispensable interlocutor. History offers lessons. When ISI chief General Faiz Hameed visited Kabul in September 2021, it was more than optics. Under Taliban mediation, Islamabad initiated talks with the TTP, leading to a month-long ceasefire on 9 November 2021, which collapsed when the TTP publicly terminated the truce. The episode demonstrated two points: Pakistan is capable of engaging in dialogue when it chooses, and a coercion-first approach without a solid political path only pushes all sides back towards violence. Responding to that pattern at a higher intensity will only increase the costs. Language is deepening the spiral. Over the past few weeks, state-aligned messaging and statements from prominent clerics in Pakistan have increasingly branded the Taliban's associates as "fitna" or "khawarij", sometimes pairing those labels with claims of "India-sponsored fitna". When the pulpit uses language typical of the parade ground, de-escalation seems heretical, and verification appears as capitulation. If the Doha window is to hold, the moralising frame must give way to a technical one: hotlines that work, incidents logged and investigated, and public narratives that stop turning neighbours into theological enemies.

Realignment in motion

Diplomacy continued to advance smoothly in India while fighting persisted in Afghanistan. India hosted Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in the same week that Pakistan launched its bombing campaign in Afghanistan. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, during his meeting with Muttaqi, pledged to upgrade the Kabul mission to a full embassy without recognising the Taliban. This move towards clear normalisation by stages is a victory for the Taliban and a significant step in India-Afghanistan relations. On 3 July, Russia became the first country to formally recognise the Taliban government, widening Kabul's external options and narrowing Islamabad's veto. Coercion that once aimed to confine Afghanistan's choices is now accelerating its diversification away from Pakistan.

By FARID MAMUNDZAY

Trump Ended Immigration Caravan, Democrats Can't Handle It

On the campaign trail last year, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump pledged to stop the flow of illegal immigrants flooding across America's borders and "carry out the largest domestic deportation operation" in U.S. history. Since winning reelection, the Trump administration has delivered on its promises.

Within the first 250 days of the president's second term, the Department of Homeland Security has deported more than 400,000 illegal aliens.

Another 1.6 million voluntarily self-deported. In August, arrests on the southern border were down nearly 90% from a year earlier, and September marked the U.S. Border Patrol's fifth consecutive month with zero releases.

President Trump's decisive action stands in stark contrast to former President Joe Biden, who refused to act and sought to deflect blame for his administration's porous borders. "I've done all I can do," Biden whined — even as Republicans and Democrats alike urged him to take executive action to address the crisis.

Congress should "show some spine," Sleepy Joe puffed in February 2024 — the same month that border crossings exceeded 9 million, not including over 1.8 million "got-aways."

"It has become clear that the current situation remains untenable," 15 House Democrats pleaded in May 2024. "All of our constituents, no matter our congressional district, have felt the impacts of the current border situation."

Trump has given those leaders (and most Americans) what they asked for: secure borders, safer streets, and a plan to rid our country of violent criminals here illegally. But you wouldn't know it listening to Democrats and the liberal media. The left's spin machine insists that Trump's tough immigration policy — which is exactly the kind of action Democrats implored of Biden — is "illegal," "unconstitutional" and "fascist." It has compared ICE to the

Gestapo and terror squad.

It's proclaimed that "we are at war" and called on the public to "shut down" cities.

Democrats' reckless hyperbole is divisive and incendiary. It directly contributes to violence against our law enforcement.

It's abetted by mainstream media that would have the public believe that good, law-abiding citizens are being tormented.

And it's utterly unmoored from reality.

Entering our country illegally is a crime, and those who are here that did not go through the proper immigration process have committed a crime.

There are repercussions — in this case, a free ticket back to the country they came from.

Except for victims of human trafficking, who undoubtedly would welcome the opportunity to return to their homes and families, no illegal immigrant is here by accident.

They made a choice.

Under the Biden administration, roughly 1.2 million illegal immigrants were ordered out of the country by immigration judges but remained.

They had their day in court and opted instead to defy our rule of law, hiding in the shadows and daring America to arrest and deport them. Their decisions carry an enormous price, paid for by ordinary taxpayers. Illegal immigrants cost Americans at least \$110 billion each year — a number that is projected to grow to nearly \$170 billion annually by 2029. Democrats are happy to ignore our country's immigration crisis — and bemoan Trump's bold action to address it — because it's good for them. They accuse Republicans of violating civil rights (which, in fact, are afforded to legal citizens) and portray them as tyrants for enforcing the law, even as they feed the problem. Biden stopped construction of the border wall, prohibited deportations during his first 100 days in office and ended the Remain in Mexico policy.


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The Afghan Trap: How Pakistan's Quest For Strategic Depth Has Turned Into Strategic Death



When Pakistan's military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq conceived the doctrine of strategic depth in Afghanistan in the 1970s, it was presented as a master vision that would finally secure Pakistan's western frontier and gain a psychological advantage against India. But four decades later, that vision has collapsed under its own contradictions. What was once imagined as a growing geopolitical expansion of Pakistan in Central Asia and a shield against India has become a wound that is mortally festering at Pakistan's core. Afghanistan, instead of being Pakistan's envisioned strategic depth, has turned into its strategic death.

Pakistan's obsession with Afghanistan began not with Zia, but much earlier. The roots lay in the early 1950s and 1960s when Afghanistan persistently questioned Pakistan's territorial integrity. Kabul from early on started laying claims over the Pakistani-controlled North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and parts of Balochistan, arguing that Pakistan's Pashtun belt, overwhelmingly aligned ethnically with Afghanistan, should have the right to opt for independence or merge with Afghanistan. The disputes escalated into diplomatic ruptures, leading to the severance of diplomatic relations twice, in 1955 and then again in 1962.

Haunted by these claims, Pakistan's military establishment began to view Afghanistan less as a neighbour and more as a potential threat. Thus, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan's military establishment—then under military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq—saw

an opportunity to reshape the region in its favour. General Zia, buoyed by U.S. and Saudi funds, saw the Afghan jihad not merely as a religious war but also as a significant geopolitical project. His goal was to install a pliable, pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul that would forever neutralize Afghanistan's irredentist claims.

The concept of strategic depth soon took shape. Zia's military strategists argued that Pakistan's elongated geography—narrow in the east, with little hinterland to fall back upon—had left it vulnerable to India. A friendly Afghanistan, they reasoned, would give the Pakistani army the strategic space to regroup in case of a prolonged Indian invasion. Even more ambitiously, Pakistan envisioned Afghanistan as a base from which to train and arm insurgents under its doctrine of bleeding India through a thousand cuts.

But as Pakistani scholar Ekbal Ahmed once warned, this very strategy was "a country caught in an iron web of wrong assumptions, maginotic (magic-believing) concepts, failed policies, fixed postures, and increased sectarian violence."

The Mirage of Strategic Depth

The idea of using Afghanistan as an extended zone ignored a basic truth: the true security of a stable nation arises from internal stability, economic resilience, education, and peaceful regional relations—not from proxy wars and militant puppets. Pakistan's militarised approach, rooted in paranoia and radical ideological zeal, blinded it to this truth.

Initially, raising radical reli-

gious militant leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—who, along with other warlords, led the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union—Pakistan later tried to manage the fragmented jihadist groups through the creation of the Taliban. The Taliban, raised largely in Pakistan-based madrassas, were overwhelmingly Pashtun, religiously hardline, and initially completely dependent on Pakistan's patronage. Islamabad believed that once firmly in power in Kabul, they would recognise the Durand Line—the colonial border that no Afghan government till then had ever accepted. Pakistan also believed a pro-Pakistan government would suppress Pashtun nationalism that threatened Pakistan's own unity.

But the Taliban had other plans. They refused to play along. Not only did they decline to recognise the Durand Line, but they also fostered Pashtun nationalism of an Islamic character that seeped into Pakistan's own Pashtun areas. Worse still, the Taliban began giving sanctuary and support to violent Sunni extremist groups in Pakistan—such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba—that unleashed waves of sectarian violence, targeting Shias and other minorities while openly challenging the Pakistani state itself.

Instead of exporting radicals outward, Pakistan found itself absorbing them inward. The "strategic depth" in Afghanistan had inverted, and Pakistan was now the rear base for the Taliban's ideological and militant expansion.

As French scholar Olivier Roy aptly warned in 1997, "The de facto absorption of Afghanistan will accentuate centrifugal tendencies within Pakistan." His words proved prophetic. The Talibanisation of Pakistan began in earnest, further blurring the border between the two countries and eroding Pakistan's sovereignty within.

ISI: State Within a State

At the heart of Pakistan's Afghan misadventure lies its most powerful institution—the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). During the Afghan jihad, the ISI became the principal manager of Pakistan's foreign and security policy, thanks to the flood of money that flowed uninterrupted

from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Under Zia's dictatorship, it faced no challenges whatsoever—no civilian oversight, no political opposition, and no institutional accountability. The agency developed both immense power and a culture of impunity.

When Zia died in 1988, the ISI had grown too large and too ideologically entrenched to be restrained. Its Afghan policy became fragmented, influenced by competing internal lobbies—some pro-Taliban, others pursuing personal or sectarian agendas.

Many ISI officers operating in Afghanistan were Pashtuns themselves, steeped in Islamist ideology. Working closely with warlords like Hekmatyar and later the Taliban, they began to identify more with their clients than with Pakistan's national interest. One retired ISI officer candidly admitted to Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid: "These officers became more Taliban than the Taliban."

This ideological capture crippled the ISI's analytical capacity. Its assessments became riddled with clichés, wishful thinking, and religious bias rather than grounded geopolitical reasoning. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ISI had become "a state within a state"—too powerful to reform, too rigid to adapt, and too compromised to pursue a coherent national strategy.

Talibanisation and the Internal Collapse

The Taliban's second rise to power in Kabul in 2021 was initially celebrated by Pakistan's military establishment as vindication of its decades-long policy. But the jubilation was short-lived. The Taliban refused again to recognise the Durand Line, openly clashed with Pakistani border forces, and provided safe havens to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—a group responsible for hundreds of attacks inside Pakistan.

Far from providing strategic depth, the Taliban have turned Afghanistan into a launchpad for Pakistan's internal insurgents. The "victory" in Kabul has only deepened Pakistan's strategic predicament. The border between the two countries is now virtually meaningless, allowing the free movement of militants, weapons,

drugs, and ideology.

The contagion of Talibanisation has seeped deep into Pakistan's own fabric, especially in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where local Taliban factions now openly challenge the state's writ. As Pakistan's economy collapses, inflation soars, and governance fails, the state finds itself trapped in a vortex of its own making.

Public concern about growing extremism has gone largely unheeded by Pakistan's leaders, both military and civilian. The Taliban's ideological penetration continues to feed chaos, eroding state authority and entrenching radicalism among the masses as a political and social force.

From Failed State to Dying State

Today, Pakistan stands perilously close to implosion. Once the world's most celebrated "frontline state" in the Cold War, it is now widely seen as a failed state with its economy in ruins, politics fractured, and security in disarray.

This decline, however, is not accidental. It is the cumulative outcome of decades of flawed policies pursued by a military-political elite intoxicated by the illusion of strategic depth and blinded by ideological arrogance. What was once a dream of regional influence has become a nightmare of internal decay.

Pakistan's strategic doctrine, driven by paranoia and radical religious zeal rather than realism and reform, has turned its western flank into a black hole of instability. It now faces a hostile Afghanistan to its west, an alienated Iran to its southwest, an assertive India to its east, and a disenchanted China to its north.

The grand illusion of using Afghanistan as a "backyard" for strategic manoeuvring has finally collapsed, leaving behind a Pakistan that is encircled, isolated, and imploding under the weight of its own contradictions.

As history closes the loop, the verdict is unambiguously clear: Afghanistan was never Pakistan's strategic depth but always its strategic death—a slow, self-inflicted unravelling of a state that mistook fanaticism for strategy and illusion for security.

By Raja Muneeb

A Prince, A Teen, Queen's Hush Money: The Sex Scandal Rocking UK's Royal Family

It's all about privilege, how sexual encounters happen in high places and how victims have nowhere to go. Virginia Giuffre's posthumous book, *Nobody's Girl*, officially released on October 21, is the story of a girl who was nobody until she met Jeffrey Epstein and his associate Ghislaine Maxwell, and later Prince Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles of the United Kingdom. What she could not achieve in life she achieves in death: reveal all.

Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz once wrote, "Zabaan-e-tishna khamosh ho sakti hai, magar khoon apna fasaana nahi bhoolta", that is, "the thirsty tongue may fall silent, but blood remembers its story." It is often used to suggest that even in death, truth speaks through memory.

Or memoirs. Surely so is the case with Giuffre's *Nobody's Girl*. Even before its official release, it set the British Royal House on fire and marked one of its darkest days in recent history. Much of what she has written was already in the public domain, but she has added exact details, background and context the world was unaware of earlier.

The 367-page book is a memoir of surviving abuse and fighting for justice. But it's also a testimony to the fact that even the most privileged and protected men who indulged in abuses and exploitations cannot escape the ruin brought by a commoner. Giuffre, who allegedly took her own life in April, details her encounters with Epstein and Maxwell. But it is Giuffre's account of her alleged sexual encounters with Prince Andrew that has caused an uproar across the United Kingdom. Prince Andrew, of course, has denied all the allegations.

Giuffre writes that she had sex with Prince Andrew three times, including once during an "orgy" on Epstein's private island with eight other girls, many of whom she believed were under 18. She herself was barely 17 on one of the three occasions Prince Andrew slept with her, she alleges in the book.

Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, is the second son of the

late Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. He was married to Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, and divorced in 1996. Their two daughters are Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie, both married. In the memoir, Giuffre outlines the pressure she



claimed she faced from Prince Andrew's legal teams. She also suggests that some media organisations were afraid to cover her story due to fears of losing access to the Royal Family.

The King's brother has since relinquished his Duke of York title.

"He was friendly enough," Giuffre writes, "but still entitled - as if he believed having sex with me was his birthright."

The Explosive Revelations

The memoir lays bare Giuffre's tangled and traumatic relationship with Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein - who died in a US prison in 2019 - and the Prince. It dives deep into the world they built - a world filled with wealth, predation and silent complicity, where a teenage girl's body became currency.

She writes that Maxwell told her, "Just like Cinderella, you're going to meet a handsome prince", before introducing her to Andrew for the first time in March 2001. The book says: "It was going to be a special day, she said. Just like Cinderella, I was going to meet a handsome prince. Her old friend Prince Andrew would be dining with us that night and we had lots to do to get me ready."

That "handsome prince" turned out to be the man now fighting to salvage what remains of his public reputation. Prince Andrew's image is in tatters.

Giuffre claims their first en-

counter took place at Maxwell's London townhouse, after a night out at Tramp nightclub - the evening immortalised by the now-infamous photograph of her standing beside Andrew, smiling, his arm casually around her waist. "I remember running for my

Kodak FunSaver camera to snap the picture," she recalls, "because my mom would never forgive me if I met someone as famous as Prince Andrew and didn't pose for a picture."

In the book, she says Andrew guessed her age correctly: seventeen. "My daughters are just a little younger than you," he told her, according to her account.

Their subsequent encounters, she writes, took place in Epstein's Manhattan townhouse and later on Little St James - the Caribbean island where Epstein hosted what Giuffre describes as an "orgy" with "approximately eight other young girls". "The other girls all appeared to be under the age of 18," she recalls. "Epstein laughed about how they couldn't really communicate, saying they are the easiest girls to get along with."

Denials, Legal Battle and Compromise

After years of denial, deflection and legal warfare, Giuffre alleges how the Prince's legal team allegedly tried to intimidate her and even hired internet trolls to harass her after their settlement. "We would never get a confession, of course," she writes. "That's what settlements are designed to avoid. But we were trying for the next best thing: a general acknowledgement of what I'd been through."

She recalls the night the settlement was finalised. "My lawyer read the duke's agreed statement at 2:30 a.m. Florida

time - through tears, both hers and mine."

The memoir also recounts her reaction to Prince Andrew's infamous 2019 Newsnight interview - an event she describes as "an injection of jet fuel" for her legal team. In the interview, Andrew had insisted he had "no recollection" of ever meeting Giuffre and claimed he could not have been with her in March 2001 because he was at a Pizza Express in Woking with his daughter, Beatrice.

The arranged interview was meant to exonerate the Prince. Instead it sealed his downfall. "If we deposed the princesses," Giuffre wrote, "his family members could potentially poke holes in his alibi."

Giuffre describes watching the interview in disbelief - a man denying the undeniable, failing to show sympathy for Epstein's victims and clinging to implausible defences. The interview triggered global outrage and led to Andrew's withdrawal from public duties, followed by the eventual loss of his Duke of York title.

What stands out about Giuffre's memoir is that it doesn't merely recount the abuse but also exposes the system of silence that protected powerful, privileged men and shamed their victims into isolation. She writes that after Epstein's death in 2019, she felt cheated of justice. "This wasn't how justice was supposed to work out," she says. "He was supposed to face the women he had destroyed."

Even after his death, the spectre of Epstein obviously looms large in her narrative - a symbol of impunity. Maxwell, now serving a 20-year sentence for sex trafficking, features prominently in the book as the manipulator and recruiter who first enticed Giuffre. "She looked to be in her late thirties," Giuffre writes. "Her British accent reminded me of Mary Poppins." That genteel mask of refinement, Giuffre suggests, concealed the machinery of exploitation.

But amid the horror, there are flashes of determination - a woman's will to reclaim her story. In one of the book's most poignant moments, she writes of using her settlement not for re-

venge, but for redemption: "I look forward to disseminating some of the Crown's money to do some good."

She never discloses how much she was paid, though reports suggest the amount exceeded GBP 9 million - allegedly covered by the late Queen herself to protect the monarchy's dignity. "That his mother, the Queen of England, had footed the bill," she notes dryly, "was not lost on me."

The Same Old Story

We often wrongly believe that kings and princes, leaders and celebrities are meant to be models of virtue and righteousness. We do not expect them to indulge in soliciting for sex, entrapping young bodies in their grip and exploiting them like predators. Also, the #MeToo movement in India was, in its own way, a naked display of power and privilege by those in positions of authority. I wonder whatever happened to that movement.

Ultimately, the stories of the privileged and powerful - the toasts of the charmed circles - are often similar to those of the common people. Power rules. The vulnerable are exploited. There are always enough 'madams' and 'middlemen' springing up, like Maxwell and Epstein. It's a story that unfolds in any society, any city. I vividly recall, as a young reporter, writing about a 16-year-old girl in Delhi sold to a 'madam' by her greedy uncle and later rescued by police. Looking at her tender age and beauty, she was "served" only to the privileged, powerful customers. There aren't rewards for guessing what kind those privileged and powerful were. Giuffre's voice, often silenced and often doubted, speaks through her pages with unsettling clarity. It is the voice of a woman wronged, scarred and yet unbroken. "In my mind," she writes in her closing passage, "I hold a picture of a girl reaching out for help and easily finding it. I picture a woman, too, who - having come to terms with her childhood pain - feels that it's within her power to take action against those who hurt her. In the end, Virginia Giuffre's tongue was silenced when alive. In her death, her blood and her words remember their story."

By Syed Zubair Ahmed

Elections Hit by Inflation, Democracy in Danger

Corruption is a feature, not a bug of the system of democracy. But reasonable restrictions must apply to prevent it from becoming an out and out kleptocracy.



Democracy is not perfect, but of all the systems of government known today, it's the best because it is a system in which people participate in determining their destiny, directly or indirectly. If you agree with the above, you would agree that no good thing, except air and sunlight, comes for free. Corruption is the price we pay for democracy because corruption is the oxygen that keeps democracy alive. But at what cost?

Corruption is essential for democracy because democracy requires elections, and elections require loads of hard cash to first buy the ticket to contest and then more hard cash to buy votes to win.

Having said that, a reasonable limit would be appreciated. I am told by multiple sources that ticket prices in Bihar have gone through the roof.

Since I am only just above 50 years old, I do not remember the time when a ticket was earned through sweat, piety, or at least hard work. Now, it's a simple matter of who's got the fattest gunny bag or the shiniest suitcase. People are saying you have to cough up a few crores to be tagged as the face of "public service". The symbol costs real cash.

And then there's the voter, that noble sovereign of democracy, wooed with the finesse of a street hawker. Why bother with promises of schools or hospitals when you can hand out crisp 500-rupee notes, a crowing cock, or a coupon for free country liquor? In the

hinterlands, where hope is scarcer than power in the power lines, voters are courted with everything from pressure cookers to pilgrimage packages, officially, and unofficially, plain bribery, cash for votes. Entire constituencies are carpet-bombed with goodies: a festive redistribution of wealth that lasts till the EVMs are sealed.

The problem is both are becoming expensive. The voter is used to handling cash thanks to government DBT schemes. Their expectation from a politician's black money stash is a little more than the usual because, unlike government doles, here they have something to offer in return: one precious vote. If a candidate has to spend all his or her money on a ticket, how will one buy enough votes to make the ticket worth its price?

India is a low-income country, and Bihar is one of its poorest regions. Hence, it's concerning to see no price controls even after five decades of socialist rule.

Politicians pay lip service to socialism, but when it comes to ticket pricing, they follow prohibitively exorbitant practices. This is extortion, an unreliable source told this correspondent.

If a candidate spends so much of his ill-gotten wealth on just getting elected, he will be forced to divert funds from public works budget. After all, the winner takes all. This in turn raises the overall cost of democracy, and ultimately people have to bear the cost.

Because they have chosen to be ruled by the crooks they elect instead of crooks they have not.

Everything has a limit. Hence, this columnist seeks an urgent review and cost revision. An unbridled rise in the cost of democracy will undermine

democracy and push people towards less attractive systems. In the interest of democracy, I request all stakeholders to sit down and, by consensus, make the process affordable for the rich and powerful so that they are not excessively cruel to the poor people this democracy is meant for. This corruption doesn't thrive in isolation. The bureaucracy has to make money for the politician so that the politician can keep democracy alive. Many bureaucrats complain, of course in private, that the system appropriates them before they forget the spelling of honesty. Popular politicians share power with meritorious bureaucrats; power corrupts, and shared power corrupts equally. Corruption is the very foundation of the edifice named government. Of course, in a democracy, it is by the people,

of the people, and far off the people.

Inflation is a reality, and prices go up. Nothing is cheap, so why should democracy come cheap? But nothing is impossible too. So, if the guardians of our Constitution can create a consensus to reduce prices, of course adjusted to inflation, it will be in the nation's interest and more in the interest of democracy itself. Our netas, the tireless champions of public service, have elevated graft to an art form so sublime it deserves a wing in the National Museum of Arts. In the last 77 years, we have seen this timeless tradition passed down from babu to babu, neta to neta, with the finesse of a Tendulkar on the crease. We have to thank our politicians who have turned governance into a Money Heist series that beats Netflix. Only, the audience is broke!

By Kamlesh Singh

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Acrimony To 'Anand'?: The Return Of Good Sense In India-Canada Ties

Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand's recent visit to New Delhi marked the most definitive step yet in the cautious and pragmatic "reset" of the deeply strained Canada-India relationship. Following a turbulent two-year period triggered by former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations regarding the killing of a Sikh separatist on Canadian soil, the visit signalled a mutual commitment to prioritising shared economic and strategic interests over past political friction.

The core outcome of the trip was the agreement on a "New Roadmap for India-Canada Relations", establishing a step-by-step approach to restore and invigorate institutional cooperation across key sectors, demonstrating a mutual willingness to move forward from the diplomatic low point of 2023. The three-day visit, which included high-level meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, centred on revitalising dormant mechanisms and injecting positive momentum.

A Clear Pivot From Trudeau Days

Politically, the Anand visit itself was the primary highlight, as the first high-level ministerial engagement since the 2023 crisis. It follows the earlier reinstatement of High Commissioners and National Security Advisor-level dialogues, confirming the restoration of basic diplomatic functionality. The agreement on a "New Roadmap" - a structured framework focused on restoring and strengthening political, economic, and technological cooperation - is a clear pivot toward pragmatic diplomacy, avoiding sweeping declarations in favour of tangible work plans.

A slew of key dialogues have been reactivated. Crucial mechanisms slated for immediate revival include a commitment to hold ministerial-level talks soon on trade and investment; a Canada-India Ministerial Energy Dialogue (CIMED), relaunched with a focus on clean energy, LNG, and critical minerals; and a joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee, which should give a fillip to technology collaboration, especially in emerging areas. Minister Anand's travel to Mumbai to meet with in-

vestors and business leaders also underscored the importance of the vibrant Canadian-Indian diaspora to which she belongs, which remains a bedrock of the bilateral relationship.



Trade Talk

The economic and technological sphere emerged as the lowest-hanging fruit and the most active area for renewed cooperation, driven by a mutual need to de-risk supply chains and diversify trade away from reliance on the US and China. While formal Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations remain paused, the focus is on boosting current trade and investment grounded in principles of mutual respect and trust. India is Canada's seventh-largest goods and services trading partner, and the economic potential is immense. The discussions specifically targeted mutually beneficial opportunities in agriculture and agri-value chains, clean technology and renewable energy, and perhaps most interestingly, critical minerals, currently a Chinese near-monopoly. This could align Canada's resource wealth with India's industrial needs.

The relaunch of the CIMED signals a strategic alignment on climate goals. Canada, with its clean energy expertise and resources, is positioning itself as a key partner for India's ambitious decarbonisation and renewable energy expansion plans. The agreement to relaunch the Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee points to a shared future in high-tech fields. Emphasis was placed on research partnerships in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, and fintech. The possibility of a Canadian Prime Ministerial visit

to the AI Summit in New Delhi next year was also discussed, suggesting high-level interest in this sector. Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in education, with plans to expand Cana-

dian academic presence in India through overseas campuses and revitalise the Joint Working Group on Higher Education - all of which had suffered during the recent downturn in our relations.

The Elephant In The Room

The challenging area remains that of national security, which lay at the heart of the problems that had bedevilled the India-Canada relationship. One learns that the security dialogue, though highly sensitive, saw significant and crucial progress toward establishing a framework for cooperation, reflecting a determination to manage, and perhaps eventually resolve, the core areas of dispute. The joint statement explicitly mentioned moving toward establishing a framework for strategic cooperation on security. This is critical as it provides a diplomatic channel to discuss complex and sensitive issues. Let us not forget that the Foreign Minister's visit was directly preceded by a meeting between the National Security Advisors of both countries, which laid the foundation for advancing cooperation in counter-terrorism, combating transnational organised crime, and intelligence exchanges.

Minister Anand confirmed that Canada would maintain its law enforcement and security dialogue with India. This is a balancing act, allowing Canada to continue its legal investigation into the Nijjar case while simultaneously addressing India's core security concerns about extremist elements operating on Canadian soil. The prospect is not one

of deep, immediate intelligence sharing, but of establishing a stable, respectful channel where security concerns can be addressed away from the glare of media publicity, based on the "mutual respect for shared democratic values, the rule of law, and a commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Critically, both sides have agreed to progressively deploy necessary expertise in their respective Missions for advancing the shared ambitious agenda. For public representatives like myself, frequently assailed by requests

from constituents facing impossible delays and hurdles in obtaining Canadian visas, the hope is that the Canadians will strengthen the numbers of their visa-processing staff, which will go a long way towards facilitating people-to-people exchanges and student arrivals.

Inherited Challenges

Despite the positive reset, the relationship remains constrained by deep-seated political and structural challenges that will unavoidably limit the pace of progress. The unresolved core issue of the 2023 allegations around Nijjar, the fugitive Khalistani militant who was murdered in Canada, remains an inherent limitation. While the diplomatic surround-sound has decreased, the ongoing legal investigation in Canada (with four Indian nationals facing charges) ensures that the matter of alleged foreign interference and what North Americans call "transnational repression" will continue to affect public and political discourse. For India, the free rein given to pro-Khalistan elements in Canada, and the permissive environment for the issuance of threats and worse by them against India, remains a significant security concern as well as a diplomatic irritant.

The earlier breakdown created a massive trust deficit at the government-to-government level. The new roadmap is explicitly a "step-by-step approach" where progress in one area (like diplomatic staffing) is seen as a prerequisite for advancing to the next (like trade

missions or CEPA talks). This incrementalism inherently slows down the realisation of the full economic and security potential and needs to be overcome. But Canada's holier-than-thou refusal to issue visas to even retired Indian army or police personnel who have served in Kashmir, Punjab and the North-East (implicitly accusing them of complicity in human rights violations) understandably sticks in Indian crawls. There are well-known, widely-reported cases of individual Canadian peacekeepers on UN duty having been involved in human rights abuses, sexual assault, torture and even murder; does that entitle India to refuse visas to any former Canadian military personnel on the grounds that they are all tainted by association?

Roadblocks Remain

It is also noteworthy that the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations are not officially back on the table. Canada has historically cited India's obstructive positions in the World Trade Organization (WTO), particularly concerning agriculture, as a major issue. Furthermore, there is domestic pressure in Canada from diaspora groups, mainly the Khalistanis, who are sceptical of prioritising trade over security and human rights concerns. This is an issue that requires further work by the newly-restored High Commissioners in both countries to overcome. While both nations share an interest in the Indo-Pacific, their geopolitical priorities diverge slightly. Canada views the relationship primarily through the lens of economic diversification and its Indo-Pacific strategy, while India sees it in the context of broader global stability and strategic autonomy, with a keen focus on internal security amid threats from China. This story has great potential, but is still unfinished. To summarise: the visit successfully turned the page from the lowest point of crisis to a new chapter of "pragmatism and positivity". However, the speed and depth of future cooperation will be determined by the political will to manage the sensitive security file quietly, allowing the significant economic and people-to-people connections to finally drive the relationship. We can only hope that the visiting Minister's name ("Anand" means "bliss", after all) portends a happier phase in India-Canada relations.

By Shashi Tharoor

Trump's H-1B Move, And The Global Competition For Indian Talent



US President Donald Trump's "Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers" dilutes the relevancy of H1-B visas and has repercussions for attracting foreign students. H1B has been essential to American economic innovation and competitiveness. Instead, students may increasingly choose other economies, like Australia, France, and Germany. The US has opportunities to course correct by revising and strengthening the H1B program, consulting stakeholders, and investing in manufacturing and skill development to retain talent and build a strong domestic industrial base.

The \$100,000 fee per new H-1B petition will affect private employers seeking foreign talent, especially in tech and computer-related fields. In FY-2024, employers obtained 255,250 H1-B visas for computer-related fields alone - 64% of the total H1-B visas issued. That year, 283,397 Indians received H1Bs-an astounding 71%.

Indians seeking a US education with work opportunities post-graduation may increasingly consider options such as Australia, France, and Germany, that offer a more attractive picture:

Australia: Australia's "A New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India", outlines plans to leverage India's growing youth population through education, people-to-people exchanges, and recognition of

Indian qualifications. The Mobility Arrangement for Talented Early-professionals Scheme (MATES) allows Indian university graduates and early-career professionals in STEM to work temporarily in Australia for up to two years.

France: France plans to welcome 20,000 Indian students by 2030. The International Classes Scheme, launched by India and France in September 2024, offers Indian students one year of French language study before they begin degree programs. Under the India-France Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement, France allows Indian students who have a master's degree or complete even a semester in France to obtain a five-year short-stay Schengen visa.

Germany: India and Germany maintain a Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement, and the Germans have increased visas for skilled Indian workers to 90,000 (up from 20,000), reduced bureaucratic hurdles in visa applications, and simplified recognition of Indian qualifications. Its new Skilled Immigration Act further facilitates migration with low language requirements and guarantees of family reunification.

The Trump Administration has made tech and manufacturing central to the agenda. This takes time to build, and H1-B visa holders play a role in supporting American innovation. The US must protect its STEM pipeline through

better policy, combined with a focus on rebuilding domestic industry. These go hand in hand: employment for Americans and a focus on retaining the best talent from overseas is a balance that must be struck for long-term talent gain.

The US should consider the following options:

Revise and Review: Section 3(b) mandates that the government re-examine this policy 30 days after the next H-1B lottery to decide whether extending the policy "is in the interests of the United States." That judgment will hinge on two critical questions: whether technology firms continue offshoring jobs to Global Capability Centers and whether American graduates can step into roles requiring urgent hiring. Both outcomes remain uncertain and reducing H1Bs might not increase domestic US hiring. **Protect American Education:** NAFSA found that international students studying in the US contributed \$43.8 billion and supported 378,175 jobs during the 2023-2024 academic year. Their outlook for 2025 presents a bleak picture: a loss of \$7 billion and 60,000 jobs. If international students are no longer interested in an American education, it will result in a catastrophic financial loss. **Consult Stakeholders:** If the H-1B disadvantages American STEM graduates, as the U.S. argues, then it has a responsibility to design stronger, better alternatives. This requires consultation with industry and higher education to strike the

right balance between protecting domestic workers, especially when evidence exists to prove industry misuse of H1B visas, and attracting the world's best - who can help compete in issues such as tech and AI. China's recently announced "K visa" aims to lure global STEM talent. The US cannot afford to fall behind. Replacing the lottery system with a merit-based visa would better serve US interests. Invest in Manufacturing and Skills: The government should invest heavily in re-starting domestic manufacturing. For example, the Advanced Manufacturing Production Credit should be expanded to more critical sectors. Manufacturing relies heavily on skilled labor and will soon involve new tools like AI. To beef up manufacturing, the government needs to invest and subsidize Americans who can contribute to these sectors - otherwise, concerns will remain over losing H1-B workers who can contribute. While tariffs can discourage offshoring, they are no substitute for robust tax credits and incentives, along with stable economic policy. While the Trump Administration's restrictions on H1-B aim to prioritise American workers, they risk weakening competitiveness in STEM by discouraging foreign students, who go on to contribute to the US's economy. Other countries are creating long-term policies to attract and retain talent, signaling a potential loss to the United States if we fall behind.

By Aryan D'Rozario

More Americans deem violence necessary to 'get the country back.' That's horrifying



Little more than a month after conservative star Charlie Kirk was fatally shot on a college campus Sept. 10, liberals think it's fine to mock – even celebrate – his death.

One incident at the Oct. 18 “No Kings” protest against President Donald Trump in Chicago has gone viral, and it really is disturbing. The rallies were held across the country, much like they were in June.

A video of a woman yelling at someone driving by with a flag honoring Kirk shows her pointing an imaginary gun at her neck and saying “bang, bang.” Kirk was assassinated by a bullet to the neck as he was talking to college students in Orem, Utah.

The woman is reportedly an elementary school teacher in the Chicago Public Schools district.

Also in Chicago, another alleged educator at the No Kings rally was caught on video saying: “You gotta grab a gun, we gotta turn around the guns on this fascist system. These ICE agents gotta get shot and wiped out. The same machinery that’s on full display right there has to get wiped out.”

Both these incidents have received

a lot of attention on social media, with prominent Republican lawmakers and officials like Education Secretary Linda McMahon condemning these actions.

What happened should be condemned by everyone, however. As actual political violence becomes more common in this country, this kind of rhetoric must be taken seriously.

More Americans think political violence is acceptable

These incidents out of Chicago speak more broadly about the current climate of political division and contempt for the “other side.”

A recent NPR/PBS News/Marist poll found that 30% of Americans think violence may be necessary to “get the country back on track.” That’s up from just about 20% a year ago. Democrats have moved the most in the past year to thinking violence is acceptable, to 28% from 12% last year. Republicans went from 28% last year to 31% this year. Similarly, a September poll from YouGov published shortly after Kirk’s assassination found a sizable political divide between Republicans and Democrats over whether it’s accept-

able to “be happy about the death of a public figure they oppose.” The poll found that 11% of Democrats said it is “always” or “usually” acceptable compared with 6% of Republicans. While the majority of Americans still don’t support finding joy in someone’s death, it’s a concerning number who think it’s OK.

I saw this firsthand in the responses I got after writing about UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson’s fatal shooting in December. Progressives acted as if his death was important and justified because of their frustrations with the health insurance system. They couldn’t see him as a human being, apart from his work. Thus, his life seemed meaningless to them.

It also makes me wonder what the end goal of these No Kings demonstrations is.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, which is a partner of the No Kings movement, encouraged people to attend the rallies, saying, “America is about democracy, not dictatorship.”

She’s certainly right about that,

and it is why all the protesters who showed up could exercise their First Amendment rights to scream against an administration they hate.

Yet, what Weingarten and other organizers want their followers to believe is something much more sinister. The whole point of the No Kings demonstrators is that they think Trump is acting like an authoritarian – never mind he won the popular vote in November and is following through on his campaign promises.

In a recent book, “Why Fascists Fear Teachers,” Weingarten makes the connection that anyone – like Trump – who pushes back against teachers’ unions is a “fascist,” even though it’s unions that promote the undemocratic philosophy that school choice is wrong and that public schools deserve full control of the country’s children. Democrats may not like the results of the 2024 election. And they have every right to protest the Trump administration’s policies. Equating an elected president to a dictator, however, is dangerous territory when political violence is already on the rise.

By Ingrid Jacques

Between Beijing And Kabul: India's Quest For Multi-Alignment

In a shifting geopolitical landscape, it's not the hard alliance but the soft influence of heritage, culture and dialogue that will endure India's strategic presence in Afghanistan

In the midst of global headwinds of geopolitics, Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India marks a tentative diplomatic thaw in relations between the two countries. The visit is seen as India's subtle re-engagement strategy with Afghanistan while carefully keeping the debate on recognising the Taliban government at bay. The move is timely, keeping in mind China's expanding influence and the recent fallout in Afghanistan–Pakistan relations. From India's standpoint, the visit aligns with the country's multi-alignment foreign policy and its opportunity to turn contradictions into leverage.

India's shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment is a pragmatic strategy. While engaging with multiple, even competing, power centres in the region simultaneously, New Delhi holds on to autonomy and maintains its relations with the United States, Russia, and ASEAN members. Now, Muttaqi's visit to India complements India's foreign policy vision. While India works towards strengthening its position as a key regional player, it does so by acknowledging every regional stakeholder. This way, India not only caters to its own national interests but also seeks to sustain long-term engagement by interacting with regimes that are not only controversial but also diagonally opposite to India's ideology.

India's re-engagement with Afghanistan is proof of its multi-layered diplomacy and relationships that are sustainable. For example, while Iran's Chabahar port is critical to India's trade through Central Asia, India's defence and strategic alignment with Russia serve as critical support vis-à-vis China and the West. Similarly, India cooperates on maritime security with the US and Japan in the Indo-Pacific and ensures counterterrorism coordination with countries in Central Asia.

Now, by adding Afghanistan to this eclectically profound foreign policy, India extends its continental reach, counterbalancing China's westward expansion. From the Straits of Malacca to the Hindu Kush, India's multi-alignment foreign policy encompasses both land and sea. This strategic agility demonstrates India's willingness to foster meaningful and long-lasting stability and peace in the re-



gion.

THE CHINA FACTOR

Since its inception in 2013, India has been wary of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has emerged as a challenge for India in its own immediate neighbourhood. Through heavy infrastructural investments and security partnerships in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, the Belt and Road Initiative has sidelined India in the region and posed a significant security challenge. Moreover, Beijing's closeness to Pakistan and Afghanistan risks the consolidation of a China–Pakistan–Afghanistan axis, which could further undermine India's position in the region.

However, long before China made mining deals in Afghanistan, India had already left its investment footprints across Afghanistan's developmental landscape. The Afghan Parliament, Salma Dam, and the Zaranj-Delaram Highway are not simply engineering feats; they are statements of India's intent in Afghanistan. These infrastructures are reminders that India's presence has always been constructive, not merely transactional like China's. India's engagement in Afghanistan stands in sharp contrast to Beijing's resource-driven diplomacy.

By hosting Muttaqi, India has challenged Beijing's dominance in Kabul. The reopening of the diplomatic mission in Afghanistan helps India maintain its visibility and influence through limited but important engagements in humanitarian aid and trade talks. This also signals the revival of almost two

decades of India's development investments in Afghanistan — in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The renewed relations between the two nations clearly indicate India's commitment to preventing any form of strategic exclusion and reclaiming its seat at the geopolitical chessboard of South and Central Asia.

DEOBAND CONNECTION

Another interesting aspect of the visit is Muttaqi's stop at Darul Uloom Deoband. This 19th-century Islamic seminary in Uttar Pradesh is the birthplace of the global Deobandi movement, a school of thought with deep roots in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The visit symbolised civilisational soft power—another arrow in India's diplomatic quiver. Many Taliban clerics in Pakistan also trace their intellectual and ideological lineage to the Deobandi school of thought. By welcoming Muttaqi to Deoband, India demonstrated its ownership of an intellectual origin that has shaped much of South and Central Asian Islamic learning. This diplomatic move, embedded in religious and historical continuity, projected India's soft power at its peak.

Here lies India's potential leverage against China's Belt and Road Initiative. While Beijing's engagement with Kabul is purely transactional — centred around mining and counterterrorism cooperation — it lacks cultural and humane depth. Moreover, Beijing's own record in Xinjiang undermines its legitimacy in the Muslim world. This is where India

can assert its advantage. Anchored in civilisational, educational, and spiritual terms, the Deoband school of thought preaches secular democracy, moderation, and coexistence — ideologies diagonally opposed to Pakistan's sectarian politics and China's authoritarianism. Deoband, therefore, could serve as India's alternative channel for engaging with Kabul — without coercion or capital.

THE WAY AHEAD

As pragmatic and successful as it may seem, engaging the Taliban comes with clear risks. While India has still not recognised the Taliban government, the citizens and past investments it has in the country must be protected. The coherent and complex balancing act that India is navigating encapsulates the logic of India's twenty-first-century foreign policy: engagement is leverage. Engaging Afghanistan without formal government endorsement while using soft power tools as leverage is akin to walking a diplomatic tightrope — leverage must not be confused with legitimacy. A moral distance must be maintained while India continues calibrated diplomatic contact. At the same time, Beijing's strong monetary presence in Kabul can be counterbalanced by the religion, pluralism, and historical continuity that India offers. In the shifting geopolitical landscape, it's not hard alliances but the soft influence of heritage, culture, and dialogue that will ensure India's enduring strategic presence in Afghanistan.

By Ila Joshi

Car Crashes Into White House Security Gate, Driver Arrested

Visuals from the crash outside the White House have gone viral on social media. Footage shows Secret Service officers checking the crashed car, measuring it and taking photographs of the vehicle.

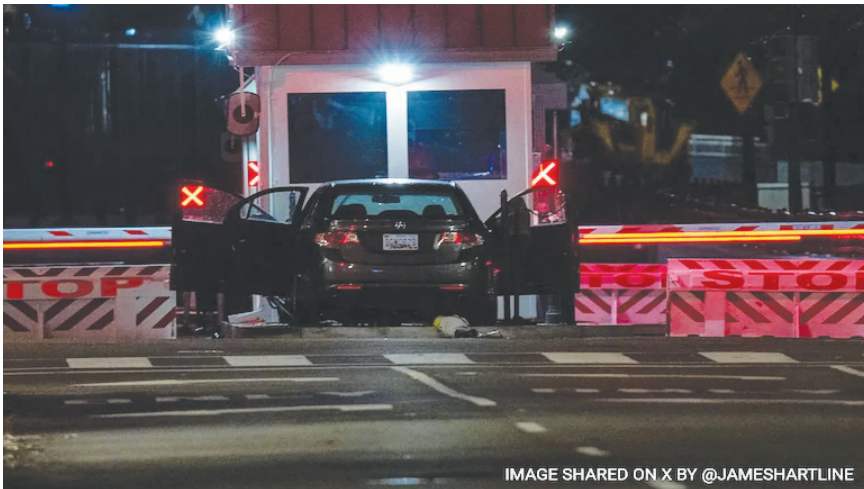
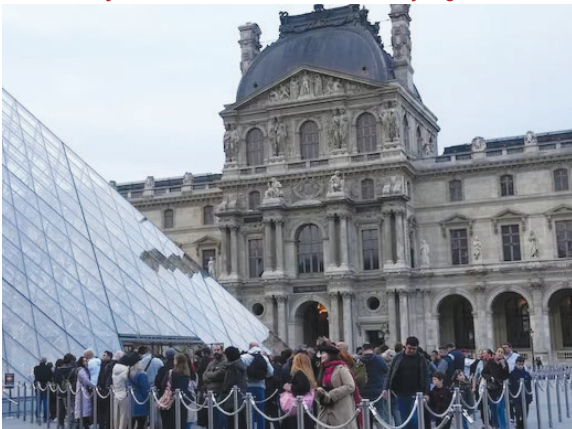


IMAGE SHARED ON X BY @JAMESHARTLINE

A motorist was arrested after he "drove his vehicle" into a security gate outside the White House complex, authorities said. The incident took place around 10:37 pm on Tuesday when the man crashed into the security gate at the White House, located near the corner of 17th and E Streets, the US Secret Service said. The agency said in its statement that the vehicle was deemed safe after checks by its officers and officials from Washington's Metropolitan Police Department. However, the driver was immediately arrested.

Louvre Museum reopens 3 days after French crown jewels robbed in daylight heist



The Louvre reopened Wednesday morning, three days after thieves forced open a window and stole French crown jewels in a daring, daylight raid on the museum. The Apollo Room where the theft occurred remained closed to visitors, while crowds — hundreds deep — waited outside the museum's glass pyramid entrance. The Louvre is normally closed on Tuesday and had been shut since the

theft for investigation. No arrests have been announced, and the stolen jewels remain missing. The Paris prosecutor said Tuesday that the stolen crown jewels were worth an estimated 88 million euros (\$102 million), not including their historical value to France. About 100 investigators are involved in the police pursuit of the suspects and jewels after Sunday's theft from the world's most-visited museum.

If she's a 10, you're an asset: Elon Musk on 'sex warfare' in Silicon Valley

The Times reported that attractive Chinese and Russian spies are infiltrating US tech companies by seducing employees to steal trade secrets. Tech magnate Elon Musk reacted to the report in his usual memelord style.

SpaceX CEO and tech billionaire Elon Musk has weighed in on a new report claiming that Chinese and Russian operatives are using seduction and deception to infiltrate America's technology sector.

Reacting to the revelations on X, Elon Musk quipped, "If she's a 10, you're an asset."

The tongue-in-cheek remark, part humorous and part cautionary, quickly went viral. According to an investigation by The Times (UK), "sex warfare" has emerged as a covert strategy among foreign intelligence agencies, with operatives posing as entrepreneurs, investors, or romantic partners to extract sensitive data from US tech insiders.

The report alleges that Chinese and Russian agents are targeting innovation hubs from Silicon Valley to Seattle, seeking access to confidential research, defence technology, and artificial intelligence projects.

LUST AND LIES AS TOOLS OF ESPIONAGE

According to the report, US counterintelligence agencies are alarmed by what they describe as a wave of "seductive spies" deployed to extract trade secrets and intellectual property from American technology firms. Experts say these operations blur the line between human intelligence (HUMINT) and cyber espionage, relying on emotional manipulation rather than hacking tools to breach sensitive systems. "China is targeting our startups, our academic institutions, our innovators," Jeff Stoff, a former US national security analyst, told The Times. "It's all part of China's economic warfare strategy — and we've not even entered the battlefield."

James Mulvenon, Chief Intelligence Officer at Pamir Consulting, told the publication, "It's the Wild West out there." He described receiving a flurry of LinkedIn requests from "the same type of attractive young Chinese woman," suggesting a coordinated intelligence effort.

THE RISE OF 'SEX WARFARE'

US counterintelligence officials warned that this so-called "sex warfare" extends beyond flirtation. In several cases, operatives have reportedly married targets, including aerospace and defence employees, as part of long-term intelligence-gathering missions. One former official cited by The Times described a "beautiful Russian woman" who married an American engineer and later moved into crypto and defence-tech circles, calling it a "lifelong collection operation". "They have an asymmetric advantage when it comes to sex warfare," Mulvenon admitted, noting that US agencies, constrained by law and ethics, are less willing to use such tactics.

CHINA'S 'WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY' ESPIONAGE STRATEGY

US intelligence officials claimed Beijing's approach to spying has gone mainstream, using civilians — from students to businesspeople — as potential intelligence assets. "We're not chasing KGB agents in smoky rooms anymore," one senior official told The Times. "Our adversaries, especially the Chinese, are using a whole-of-society approach." The financial stakes are staggering. The Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property estimates that economic espionage and trade secret theft cost the US economy up to \$600 billion annually, with China responsible for the majority of cases.

" Hamas Could Be Put Out In 2 Minutes": Trump Warns Against Ceasefire Violation

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday described Hamas as "violent people" and stated they "could be put out in two minutes," while noting that the group was being given an opportunity to uphold the ceasefire agreement. Speaking at a Diwali celebration at the White House, Trump highlighted the broader context of his peace efforts, saying, "We are forging peace all over the world... We're getting everybody to get along. I just got a call from the Middle East. We're doing very well there. We have many countries signed on to peace in the Middle East, and nobody thought they'd ever see that happening." Turning specifically to the situation with Hamas, Trump reiterated the group's violent nature and the US's approach, stating, "The Hamas situation, they're pretty violent people. We could put that out

in two minutes. We're giving them a chance. They agreed that they'd be very good and straight. They wouldn't be killing people." He emphasised that swift action would follow if the ceasefire was violated: "If they don't honour the deal, they'll be taken care of very quickly. It is total peace in the Middle East; we have levels of friendship with everybody. Every country that hated each other now loves each other. Nobody ever saw anything like it..." This firm stance echoed his warning from October 21, when Trump had cautioned Hamas not to breach the Gaza peace plan, expressing hope that the group would act responsibly and adding that "if they do not, an end to Hamas will be fast, furious and brutal." The President made the statement in a post on his social media



platform, Truth Social, outlining the support of US allies in the region. In his post, Trump wrote, "Numerous of our NOW GREAT ALLIES in the Middle East, and areas surrounding the Middle East, have explicitly and strongly, with great enthusiasm, informed me that they would welcome the opportunity, at my request, to go into GAZA with a heavy force and 'straighten our

Hamas' if Hamas continues to act badly, in violation of their agreement with us. The love and spirit for the Middle East has not been seen like this in a thousand years! It is a beautiful thing to behold! I told these countries, and Israel, 'NOT YET!' There is still hope that Hamas will do what is right." He further added, "If they do not, an end to Hamas will be FAST, FURIOUS, & BRUTAL! I would like to thank all

of those countries that called to help. Also, I would like to thank the great and powerful country of Indonesia, and its wonderful leader, for all of the help they have shown and given to the Middle East, and to the U.S.A. TO EVERYONE, thank you for your attention to this matter." Meanwhile, both Israel and Hamas reaffirmed their commitment to the US-mediated ceasefire despite recent weekend clashes. On Monday, Israel confirmed that Hamas had transferred the body of one hostage, bringing the total number of returned bodies to 13 out of the 28 promised. A statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office stressed that Hamas must fulfil its pledge to return all hostage remains for the ceasefire agreement to be fully implemented.

Donald Trump Says Rupert Murdoch 'Can't Prove' Jeffrey Epstein Birthday Note Is Real



President Donald Trump urged a judge to let him continue a \$10 billion libel lawsuit against Rupert Murdoch over a Wall Street Journal article claiming he sent a bawdy birthday note to Jeffrey Epstein, saying the news outlet still hasn't been able to prove the letter is real. An identical birthday note handed over to the House Oversight Committee by the Epstein estate does not prove that Trump actually wrote and sent the letter, the president's lawyer said in a filing Monday, urging the court to deny Murdoch and News Corp.'s request to dismiss the case. "On the contrary, the defendants' reliance on a purported letter released over a month after the complaint was filed proves that defendants did not actually possess, or even

review, any purported letter before publishing the false and defamatory article," Alejandro Brito, Trump's lawyer, said. News Corp didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment on the filing. The report, which described a 2003 note containing a sketch of a naked woman that bore Trump's signature and was compiled with other letters into a "birthday book" for Epstein's 50th birthday, was published amid a firestorm of criticism over the Trump administration's handling of documents from the financier's criminal case. Trump claimed in his suit that he never wrote the letter and accused News Corp. and its chairman emeritus of defaming him. The media giant asked a judge to dismiss the suit last month, arguing that the July

17 article was bolstered when the Epstein estate gave the note to the House committee investigating the deceased financier's sex-trafficking. In his suit, the president, who has claimed he cut ties with Epstein nearly two decades ago, accused Murdoch and News Corp. of trying to malign his character. Brito said in Monday's filing that the article was an attempt "to wrongly and inextricably" link Trump to Epstein. "It is clear that the article intended to subject President Trump to public hatred and ridicule," the lawyer. "Defendants did not publish the article on the front page of the Wall Street Journal based on a mere harmless joke between friends." Murdoch and News Corp. have stood by the accuracy of the story, noting that Trump "acknowledged his friendship with Epstein." Lawyers for News Corp. and its 94-year-old chairman emeritus have called Trump's suit an attempt to chill the media's critical reporting on the president. It's one of several cases Trump has brought against the media, including a \$15 billion lawsuit accusing the New York Times of smearing his reputation with false stories.

Ay yay yay! Trump fumes as cameraman knocks 400-year-old White House mirror

A high-stakes White House press event briefly turned into a comedy of errors when US President Donald Trump paused mid-sentence to reprimand a cameraman who accidentally bumped into a 400-year-old mirror in the Cabinet Room. Trump, seated beside Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, was discussing a new USD 8.5 billion critical minerals deal when the clatter caught his attention. "We're here to talk about trade, submarines, lots of other military equipment," Trump began, before suddenly stopping. "Oh, you got to watch that. Watch that. You're not allowed to break that. That mirror is 400-years-old. A camera just hit the mirror. Ay yay yay!" The US president then lightened the mood in his signature style. "I just moved it up here, special from the vaults, and the first thing that happens, the camera hits it. Hard to believe, isn't it? Hard to believe, but these are the problems in life." The brief distraction occurred during a meeting meant to highlight the signing of a critical minerals partnership between the United States and Australia, a deal

both leaders marked as a milestone in countering China's grip on rare earth exports. Trump said the agreement had been in the works for several months,



while Albanese called it a step that takes the US-Australia partnership to the next level. The pact is part of Washington's effort to reduce dependence on Chinese minerals vital for defence, clean energy, and technology manufacturing. It comes as Beijing imposes stricter export controls on materials containing rare earths or produced using Chinese technology. Trade and defence cooperation were also on the agenda, though Trump has yet to confirm whether his administration will continue the AUKUS security pact signed under his predecessor.

Pakistan has egg on face as Imperial College London busts Lahore campus claims

The Punjab government of Pakistan announced a new campus of London's Imperial College campus in Lahore. However, the UK university quickly denied the claim, saying it had "no such plans". The fake claim by the Maryam Nawaz-led provincial government, which she herself amplified, sparked criticism from an alumnus of the Imperial College, who slammed the government.

A few days after the Maryam Nawaz-led government in Pakistan's Punjab province announced plans to open a campus of Imperial College London at the Nawaz Sharif IT City in Lahore, the university denied the claim. It stated that it currently has no plans to establish a campus outside the UK. The claim of the Punjab government also drew criticism, with an Imperial College alumnus slamming it for the announcement. The Punjab government on October 18 said the UK-based institution would open a campus in Lahore's IT City. The post on X also said that the foundation stone would be laid in November. The post also indicated that the campus would include a 300-bed hospital. The announcement was also echoed by Punjab's senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, who made a similar statement in a separate post on X. Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz also reposted the government's post. However, Imperial College London swiftly refuted the claim. In an official correction published on Tuesday, the university stated that "reports that Imperial College London plans to open a campus overseas are incorrect". "There have been erroneous reports in the media and online that Imperial is opening a campus at Nawaz Sharif IT City in Lahore, Pakistan," the UK-based university said in the statement. The varsity also reaffirmed that "Imperial has no such plans, with all the university's campuses based in the UK". For students seeking to enquire about the developments



pertaining to the Imperial College of London, the institution said that it is necessary to check with its official statements.

CLAIM OF IMPERIAL COLLEGE IN LAHORE DREW CRITICISM FROM ALUMNUS

A former chairman of the

Islamabad-based National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC), Javed Hassan, who is also an alumnus of Imperial College, slammed Maryam Nawaz's government's false claim. "As an Imperial alumnus, I was briefly bemused

by the bold claim of a campus in Nawaz Sharif IT City. Turns out Imperial College is less adventurous — its campus plans remain firmly UK-bound. Verification, it seems, is still a novel concept," Hassan posted on X.

Pak Terror Group Jaish-e-Mohammed Launches Online 'Jihadi Course' For Women. Fee Is 500 PKR

Masood Azhar is ramping up his 'donations' drive; after a public address - at the Markaz Usman O Ali in Bahawalpur last month - the Jaish is now collecting 500 PKR (156 INR) from every woman.



commanders, will teach others about their 'duties' with reference to jihad and Islam. The recruitment drive - to be conducted online - is scheduled to begin November 8.

'Lectures' will last 40 minutes per day and be led by Azhar's two sisters, Sadiya Azhar and Samaira Azhar, whose classes will 'encourage' women to join the Jamat ul-Muminat. Sadiya Azhar, his younger sister, has been given charge of the Jamat, sources said. Sadiya's husband, Yusuf Azhar, was one of several Masood Azhar family members killed during an Operation Sindoor airstrike on the Jaish HQ in Bahawalpur in May. The airstrike was India's military response to the April terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam. Afreer Farooq, the wife of Umar Farooq, one of the Pahalgam

attackers, has also been included. Azhar, meanwhile, is ramping up his 'donations' drive. After his last public address - at the Markaz Usman O Ali in Bahawalpur last month - the Jaish is now collecting 500 PKR (156 INR) from every woman enrolling in this 'course' and making them fill an online information form. The online component is to circumvent extremist social norms in Pakistan that consider it improper for women to go out alone. And the collection of 500 PKR, sources said, underlines Pak's hypocrisy in claiming to have implemented Financial Action Task Force regulations. Azhar announced the Jamat women's unit on October 8. On October 19, in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, there was an event called 'Dukhtaran-e-Islam' to start bringing women into the group.

Earlier this month NDTV revealed how the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed - designated a terrorist organisation by the United Nations - is creating the Jamat ul-Muminat, a women's unit. Now, in new documents seen exclusively by NDTV, it appears the group has launched an online training course - called Tufat al-Muminat - to collect

funds and carry out recruitment. As part of this course, women family members of Jaish leaders, including relatives of founder Masood Azhar and his

Bangladeshi tribunal prosecution warns army over serving officers' trial

The ICT-BD issued arrest warrants against 16 serving army officers and 14 others, including deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, on October 8 for their alleged role in the "enforced disappearances or abduction and torture of political dissidents" during the past Awami League regime.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal prosecution team on Tuesday warned the army that 15 of their serving officers will be declared "fugitives" unless they were produced in court on Wednesday. "If they fail to appear or are not produced tomorrow, the tribunal will set a new date, and notices with their summons will be published in two newspapers. Non-appearance on that date would lead to them being declared absconding," ICT-BD Prosecutor Gazi MH Tamim told reporters. He said the tribunal earlier issued arrest warrants against several former and current officers and the police inspector general was ordered to execute that order while "copies of the warrants were also sent to the heads of the (armed) forces concerned". "Under the International Crimes Tribunal Act, the accused officers can either appear voluntarily or be arrested by the law enforcers and brought to the tribunal," Tamim said. The ICT-BD issued arrest warrants against 16 serving army officers and 14 others, including deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, on October 8 for their alleged role in the "enforced disappearances or abduction and torture of political

dissidents" during the past Awami League regime. The army in a media briefing on October 11 said they took into "military custody" 15 of the 16 officers soon after ICT-BD issued arrest warrants. However, it declined to have received any copy of any warrant amid anxious speculations over their trial in a civil court under the ICT-BD Act instead of court marshal under the Army Act. ICT-BD Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam demanded their court appearance for two consecutive days after the army announcement but the military ignored the call. The government, meanwhile, declared a building inside the Dhaka Cantonment as a makeshift "prison" without detailing its purpose while a sense of unease visibly gripped Bangladesh over their trial. Bangladesh Army's adjutant general Major General Mohammad Hakimuzzaman told during the October 11 press conference that 16 of their officers were asked to report to army headquarters and 15 of them responded and they were kept in

military custody. "We acted even before receiving warrants," Hakimuzzaman said without detailing if they would be produced before the ICT-BD but added that



the Army Act does not apply to nine retired officers and police might act upon the warrant. He said the 16th serving officer, a major general who earlier served as the deposed premier's military secretary, went into hiding but steps were taken to prevent his departure abroad. Several former military officers and security analysts said the serving officer's production in a civil court under an amended ICT-BD Act instead of army law could affect the morale

of the armed forces personnel. Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which emerged as the main party in the political landscape, last week cautioned interim government chief Muhammad Yunus against antagonising the army. "We (BNP) want you to maintain a good relation with the armed forces we don't want to draw any risk as we will not be able to afford it," BNP's standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told Yunus during a meeting with political parties. He said the BNP did not want to see the creation of any "imbalance in the armed forces"

as "we cannot afford it at this moment" in an oblique reference to planned general elections in February next year. A violent student-led street campaign dubbed as July Uprising ousted the Awami League government on August 5, 2024 when Hasina left for India and three days later Yunus flew in from Paris and took charge of the interim government. Yunus's administration amended the ICT-BD law to try the leaders of the past regime, including Hasina, appointing Tajul Islam as its chief prosecutor. The ICT-BD was formed by the past government to try hardened collaborators of the Pakistani troops during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War, when Tajul Islam appeared as a key-lawyer to defend the accused. Most Awami League leaders and key figures of the past government are now in jail or on the run at home and abroad but its activists and supporters are trying to make visible their presence by staging flash street marches in Dhaka and elsewhere. Several such flash marches were held in Dhaka streets on Tuesday as well when police arrested at least six activists.

Sri Lankan Politician Assassinated In Office, Gunman Fired Multiple Shots

A Sri Lankan opposition politician was shot dead in his office on Wednesday, police said, the latest in a wave of assassinations and the first to target a political figure. Lasantha Wickramasekara, 38, the council chairman of the coastal city of Weligama, was meeting with constituents when a gunman burst in and fired multiple times with a revolver. No one else was wounded, and the gunman fled the scene. "An investigation is underway to track down the killer," police said in a statement, adding that the motive for the attack remains unclear. Wickramasekara was a member of the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB)

party, which has been locked in a bitter power struggle with the ruling party over control of the Weligama council. Sri Lanka has seen a surge in violent crime this year, much of it linked to drug gangs and organised crime. Official figures show at least 50 people have been killed in more than 100 shootings.

This marks the first assassination of a politician since President Anura Kumara Disسانayake's government came to power last year, pledging to restore law and order. The most brazen attack was in February when a gunman dressed as a lawyer shot dead a suspect inside a courthouse in Colombo.



Image posted on X by @ImThimira07

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

In 2017, a nurse from Karnataka landed in Saudi Arabia drawn by the promise of a Rs 25,000 per month salary, only to be trafficked and enslaved by her kafeel (sponsor/employer). After enduring starvation, backbreaking work, threats of violence, and slavery, her ordeal ended with a fight for freedom that dragged on for months. Saudi Arabia has now scrapped the 50-year-old kafala system that enabled the Indian nurse's exploitation and torture.

Though the kafala chapter might be over in Saudi Arabia, it persists in several other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Around 24 million workers still live under kafala-style control across Gulf nations, with Indians making up the biggest chunk with 7.5 million people, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Human Rights Watch (HRW). In a landmark move last week, Saudi Arabia scrapped the much-criticised kafala sponsorship system. The reform is expected to impact nearly 13 million migrant workers, including more than 2.5 million Indians who form a massive chunk of the Saudi workforce. The system, widely criticised by rights groups as "modern-day slavery", bound workers to a single employer, requiring their sponsor's permission to change jobs, exit the country, or even report abuse. That's now over. Workers will now be able to change jobs freely, leave Saudi without employer approval, and approach labour courts. All these, without needing the kafeel's nod. In short, the kafala is a system that leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation and inhuman conditions. Many GCC countries still allow the kafala system in one form or the other. Qatar loosened a few rules ahead of the FIFA World Cup in 2022, but Saudi junking it altogether is a defining moment. So, what is the kafala system? How did it enable modern-day slavery? And why did Saudi Arabia scrap the kafala system?

WHAT IS THE KAFALA SYSTEM, AND WHO IS A KAFEEL?

The system gets its name from the Arabic word, kafala, which means "sponsorship". It has been the backbone of migrant labour control across the Gulf for decades. Born in the



1950s to manage the flood of foreign workers during the oil boom, it ties a worker's legal status to a single employer or kafeel. In this arrangement, the sponsor holds all the powers, like, controlling visas, jobs, and even where workers can live or travel. Essentially, workers are trapped under their employer's thumb. The system was meant to protect local jobs and ensure a steady workforce, but it quickly became a nightmare for millions, including Indians. In Saudi Arabia alone, nearly 40% of the population are migrants (over 13 million people) and under kafala, workers need their sponsor's permission just to change jobs, leave the country, or even keep their own passports. This made workers easy targets for exploitation and abuse. The kafala system primarily applies to blue-collar and low-wage migrant workers, especially those in domestic work, construction, hospitality, cleaning, and other manual labour sectors. These workers are typically from countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Nepal, and Ethiopia. White-collar professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and corporate employees, are not usually subjected to the harshest aspects of the kafala system, though technically they also require sponsorship for residency and employment. The kafala system is still alive across the Gulf, including the

UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and in places like Lebanon and Jordan in slightly tweaked forms. Qatar loosened some rules before the 2022 World Cup, letting workers change

jobs without employer permission, but strict controls like exit visas stayed. The UAE and Bahrain made small reforms, but only Saudi Arabia has scrapped kafala fully, marking a huge breakthrough. However, 24 million workers, including 7.5 million Indians, still live under kafala-style control across the Gulf nations.

HOW KAFALA SYSTEM ENABLED SLAVERY?

Kafala has rightly been called "modern-day slavery". By handing all power to the employer, it opened the door to horrific abuses like passport seizures, unpaid wages, brutal working hours, physical and sexual violence, and forced labour. Many workers, especially domestic helpers and low-wage labourers from India, were trapped in isolation with no legal backup. For instance, in 2017, a nurse from Karnataka, Haseena Begum, was trafficked to Saudi Arabia under the kafala system. Promised a salary of Rs. 1.5 lakh per month, she was instead forced into servitude. She endured physical and emotional abuse. Haseena was thrown from the third floor of a building in Dammam by her kafeel and was also beaten at a police station, reported The Times of India. It was only after then-External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and the Indian Embassy in Saudi

Arabia stepped in that Haseena could be freed. In 2010, a 57-year-old building painter, Mahavir Yadav, moved to Saudi Arabia seeking better opportunities. After six years of

shifting there, Yadav died of a heart attack in 2016, reportedly due to the extreme stress and inhumane working conditions he endured. His employer allegedly subjected him to physical abuse, withheld his wages, and confiscated his passport, leaving Mahavir vulnerable and isolated, reported The Diplomat. Reports from Amnesty, HRW, and the ILO back up these stories with hard data showing thousands of similar cases of abuse every year. If one looks at the ILO's Forced Labour Convention of 1930, the definition of forced or compulsory labour isn't very different from what the kafala system had turned into. The ILO states it as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily". A May 2025 op-ed on Boston University's website was titled: 'The Kafala Sponsorship System Fuels Modern Day Slavery' "This corrupt strategy resembles a form of indirect slavery, making it harder for migrants to escape such dreadful situations. Female domestic workers who attempt to run away fall victim to sex traffickers. The power of the Kafala system is the fuel for contemporary modern-day slavery," according to the op-ed. Leading up to the abolition of the kafala system earlier this

year, when reforms were underway in Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International's Head of Economic and Social Justice, Iain Byrne, said, "If this program is to be truly transformative for migrant workers, it must, among other things, fully address the core features of the abusive kafala system that leave workers completely dependent on their employers". While abolishing the kafala system is huge, the fight against it may not be over yet. Enforcement gaps may remain, as labour courts are reportedly overwhelmed. Plus, most Gulf countries may still want to keep parts of kafala alive, leaving millions vulnerable.

WHY SAUDI ARABIA ABOLISHED THE KAFALA SYSTEM?

On October 14, Saudi Arabia finally junked the system. But what nudged it to act finally? Saudi Arabia was forced to abolish the kafala because the system had become indefensible in the face of mounting international scrutiny and domestic reform pressures. The move is part of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030. It is a push to diversify the economy, attract global investment, and overhaul the Kingdom's image. Under the new framework, Saudi Arabia will move to a contract-based employment system. For years, global rights groups had condemned the system for enabling rampant abuse of migrant workers. Abolishing kafala gives nearly 13 million workers in Saudi Arabia, including 2.5 million Indians, legal rights without their employer's permission. This was earlier denied under the sponsor-controlled framework. For 2.5 million Indian workers and millions more, the move by Saudi Arabia is a game-changer. It will break the chains that kept the workers trapped for decades. It's a bold step that could reduce forced labour in the Gulf substantially. But as Amnesty warns, scrapping laws on paper must turn into real justice on the ground. The end of kafala in Saudi Arabia is a win, but the battle for migrant dignity continues across other countries in the Gulf.

Smriti Irani Confirms Bill Gates Appearing In Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2: "This Marks A Historic Moment"

Earlier today, reports circulated online stating that Smriti Irani's Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2 is set to achieve another milestone. Businessman and philanthropist Bill Gates is scheduled to appear in the ongoing limited series via video call, with his storyline spanning three episodes. Smriti Irani has now confirmed that this is indeed happening.

What's Happening

In what can only be described as a momentous occasion, Smriti Irani told CNBC-TV18, "This marks a historic moment in Indian entertainment. For far too long, women's and children's health has remained at the margins of mainstream dialogue. This initiative is a powerful step towards changing that." A new promo for Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2 has also been



through storytelling."

Smriti Irani Working On Social Causes

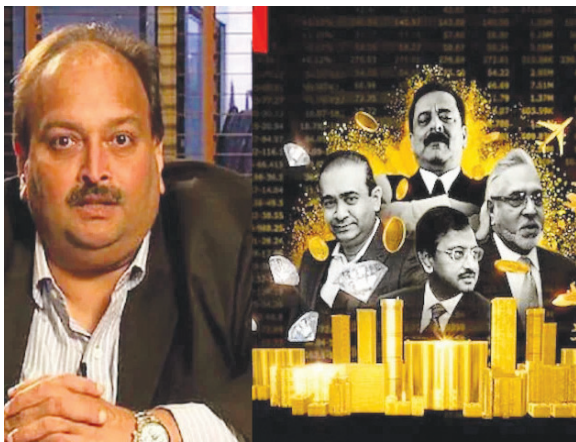
Since returning to the set, Smriti Irani has been keen to weave social issues into the narrative of Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2 and has consistently been at the forefront of raising awareness for various causes. The show has addressed numerous social issues since its revival. "We took up the issue of ageing and body shaming because these are fundamental challenges women face every day. For me, as someone who has been part of the creative industry, it was important to highlight them," the actor told Mumbai Mirror. She also spoke about the storyline involving her on-screen daughter filing a false case of domestic violence against her in-laws.

released, in which Tulsi Virani (Smriti Irani) hints at the show's new guest. The caption reads, "Kaun hai yeh mehmaan... jisse milne ka sabko intezaar hai?" About Bill Gates' Cameo In Kyunki 2 Speaking about her wish

for this collaboration to feature on the platform and focus on "health and social awareness", a source earlier told ETimes, "The storyline focuses on creating and improving awareness about the health of pregnant women and

newborns. Since the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation actively works on these causes, the collaboration happened naturally. Smriti wanted to use the show as a platform to promote health and social awareness

Why Mehul Choksi Went To Court Against Netflix Series Bad Boy Billionaires In 2020



The 2020 Netflix docuseries Bad Boy Billionaires stirred controversy in India, not just for exposing high-profile financial scandals, but also because it prompted Mehul Choksi, the PNB scam accused, to approach the Delhi High Court. Choksi sought to pre-screen the series, arguing that its portrayal could negatively impact ongoing legal proceedings against him and affect his personal reputation.

The Legal Battle

Choksi and his nephew Nirav Modi are accused in the Rs 13,500-crore Punjab

National Bank (PNB) fraud case. In 2019, Choksi left India and was granted citizenship of Antigua and Barbuda. According to a 2023 PTI report, he filed a plea in 2020 seeking the matter be remanded to the single judge who had earlier dismissed his petition. He argued that a two-minute segment in the Bad Boy Billionaires series allegedly showed him in a negative light, potentially affecting various legal proceedings against him in India. Single Judge's Dismissal The single judge

had, on August 28, 2020, court noted that his remedy lay in filing a civil suit, granting him liberty to raise the issue of enforcement of a private right through that channel. The division bench of the Delhi High

Court later sought responses from the Union of India and Netflix regarding Choksi's appeal challenging the single judge's order.

Lucky Ali's 'apology' to Javed Akhtar after salvo: Even monsters have feelings

Singer Lucky Ali issued a clarification after criticising veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar over the latter's viral video on Hindu-Muslim dynamics. He also issued an apology while adding, "I apologise if I hurt anyone's monstrosity." Lucky Ali in his new X post after criticism over Akhtar's 'don't become like Muslims' remark', wrote, "what I meant was that arrogance is ugly.... it was a mistaken communique' on my part.... monsters may have feelings too and I apologise if I hurt anyone's monstrosity.....(sic)." The footage that started it all shows Akhtar speaking at a public gathering, reportedly addressing issues relating to democracy and freedom of expression. An X post which shared the video read, "Javed Akhtar tells Hindus, 'Don't become like Muslims. Make them like you. Don't become like Muslims. It's a tragedy.' West Bengal Urdu Academy was right in withdrawing its invitation to this

shameless bigot masquerading as a wise man (sic)." Responding to the post, Lucky Ali wrote, "Don't become like Javed Akhtar, never original and ugly as fuck (sic)." During his speech, Akhtar referenced the 1975 film 'Sholay' to highlight changes in the cultural landscape, stating: "'Sholay'-there was a scene where Dharmendra hides behind Shivji's murti and he speaks from that place and Hema Malini thinks Shivji is talking to her. Is it possible to have a

scene like that today? No. I will not write a scene. Were there no Hindus in 1975? Were there no dharmik people? They were." Lucky Ali is the son of late legendary actor-filmmaker Mehmoond. He was already 37 when his debut album 'Sunoh' was released in 1996. The singer made his breakthrough in Bollywood with two hit tracks in the 2000 movie 'Kaho Na Pyaar Hai', marking Hrithik Roshan's acting debut.



Karan Johar Reveals Losing Virginity At 26, Shocks Janhvi Kapoor By Claiming He Was "Intimate" With Her Family Member

Karan Johar dropped some truth bombs and jokes on the latest episode of Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle

Another episode of Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle is here, featuring Karan Johar and Janhvi Kapoor on the couch. The filmmaker surprised the Dhadak actress by revealing he had been "intimate" with a member of her family. He also confessed that he lost his virginity at 26.

What's Happening

Karan Johar dropped some truth bombs and jokes on the latest episode of Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle. In a segment titled Truth or Lie, Janhvi asked Karan Johar, "Tell us one scandalous truth about yourself and make up one lie, and we'll guess which one is true." He said, "I lost my virginity when I was 26 years old, and I've been intimately involved with a member of your family." Karan immediately clarified his statement, saying, "I was late to that party, and I have not been intimate with any member of



your family. Though the thought has crossed my mind a couple of times."

About Two Much

In the first episode of the show, the Khan duo, Aamir Khan and Salman Khan, engaged in

a heartfelt conversation with the hosts. From their first meetings to crucial junctures in their lives, Aamir and Salman opened up during the chat. The second episode saw Varun Dhawan and Alia Bhatt take over the couch



with Kajol and Twinkle - a first-of-its-kind talk show hosted by two of the sharpest voices in Indian entertainment, who are set to reinvent the genre." He added, "With a mix of charismatic celebrities on the guest list, Kajol and Twinkle will bring their signature blend of wit, feistiness, and unparalleled insights to sparkling conversations that are humorous, unfiltered, and unapologetic. Joining forces with Banijay Asia, we are creating something truly bold, fresh, and unforgettable for our audiences."

In A Nutshell

In the fourth episode of Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle, Karan Johar and Janhvi Kapoor appear as guests and are seen having a great time. While the filmmaker shocks Janhvi with his earlier claim, he later clarifies the statement about being "intimate" with a member of her family.



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Walmart pauses H-1B hiring after visa fee hike. Check which jobs will be hit

Retail giant Walmart, the largest private-sector employer in the US, has paused hiring candidates needing H-1B visas. This comes after the Trump administration's introduction of a \$100,000 fee for new H-1B visas. Check who will be hit the most.

Retail giant Walmart Inc has paused hiring candidates who require an H-1B visa, according to a report in Bloomberg. The move comes in response to a significant policy shift by the Trump administration, which recently introduced a steep \$100,000 (Approx Rs 88 lakh) fee for new H-1B applications. On September 19, President Donald Trump introduced the fee hike on H-1B visa petitions, aiming to discourage the hiring of foreign skilled workers and encourage companies to hire American talent first. Walmart's H-1B pause shows how Trump's decision is forcing big firms to rethink hiring, hitting overseas recruitment and US competitiveness. The move will also impact Indians, who are the largest beneficiaries of H-1B visas—70% of recipients in 2024 were Indian nationals. Sources familiar with the matter told Bloomberg that the change primarily affects corporate roles within Walmart, rather than positions in retail stores or distribution centres. The company, which employs about

1.6 million people in the US, currently has around 2,390 H-1B visa holders on its payroll, Bloomberg reported, citing government data.

WALMART HALTS H-1B OFFERS, CITES 'THOUGHTFUL' APPROACH

A company spokesperson said Walmart was "thoughtful about H-1B visa hiring". "Walmart is committed to hiring and investing in the best talent to serve our customers, while remaining thoughtful about our H-1B hiring approach," Bloomberg cited the Walmart spokesperson as saying. The pause illustrates growing corporate unease with the Trump administration's new visa regulations. Introduced last month, the administration's \$100,000 visa fee is aimed at deterring what it calls "overuse" of the H-1B system, which enables US companies to temporarily employ foreign workers in speciality occupations. While Walmart is the largest user of H-1B workers among retail chains, it remains a relatively modest participant

compared to tech giants like Amazon, Microsoft, and Meta, which each employ significantly higher numbers of foreign tech workers under the program.

UNCERTAINTY GROWS AS WALMART PAUSES HIRING

The pause to new H-1B hiring adds to the confusion that has beset employers and H-1B holders since the change was announced, according to the report. H-1B visa holders call the policy unpredictability frustrating despite following US law, while employers say visa quotas hinder staffing. The US Chamber of Commerce, a powerful conservative business advocacy group, slammed the fee hike. The advocacy group has filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration, challenging the move, calling it "unlawful and 'harmful' to small and medium-sized businesses. "The new \$100,000 visa fee will make it cost-prohibitive for US employers, especially start-ups and small and mid-size businesses, to utilise the H-1B program, which was created by



Congress expressly to ensure that American businesses of all sizes can access the global talent they need to grow their operations here in the US," Neil Bradley, executive vice president of the Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement following the lawsuit. However, the White House has defended the visa fee hike, calling it a "lawful" measure and a gradual move toward broader H-1B programme reforms. Some critics argue that the H-1B programme, originally designed in 1990 to fill targeted labour gaps, has been misused in ways that disadvantage

qualified US professionals, according to the Bloomberg report. Today, visas are used primarily by the tech industry, which has pointed to a dearth of professionals with science, math, and computer skills. Universities and hospitals also rely on them to recruit researchers and lecturers, the report added. Walmart paused the fresh hiring for H-1B visa holders after the Trump administration clarified exemptions to the controversial \$100,000 H-1B visa fee introduced via a presidential proclamation.

OpenAI takes on Chrome and Perplexity Comet with ChatGPT Atlas AI browser: Top features, availability

OpenAI has launched ChatGPT Atlas, its first AI-powered web browser that integrates ChatGPT directly into browsing. This move challenges established browsers and could redefine how users interact with the internet.

OpenAI is no longer content living inside your tabs; it wants to own the window too. The ChatGPT maker has officially launched ChatGPT Atlas, its first-ever AI-powered web browser, setting its sights on rivals like Google Chrome and Perplexity's new Comet browser. Billed as a personalised and intelligent browsing experience, Atlas aims to change how people interact with the web. Instead of endless clicking and scrolling, users can now ask ChatGPT to handle tasks directly from within the browser. From booking flights and editing documents to summarising articles and helping shop for recipe ingredients, all can be done on ChatGPT Atlas. "With Atlas,

ChatGPT can come with you anywhere across the web, helping you in the window right where you are, understanding what you're trying to do, and completing tasks for you, all without copying and pasting or leaving the page," claims OpenAI. "This is an AI-powered web browser built around ChatGPT," said OpenAI CEO Sam Altman during a livestreamed launch event on Tuesday. Altman called AI a "once-a-decade opportunity to rethink the browser", suggesting that Atlas could redefine what it means to "go online." The launch also intensifies competition with Perplexity AI, whose own browser, Comet, reimagines web navigation through conversational

search and task automation. Meanwhile, Opera and The Browser Company's Arc are also ramping up AI integrations, each trying to make browsing smarter and more seamless.

ChatGPT Atlas: Top features

OpenAI is pitching ChatGPT Atlas as a next-generation browser that's not just faster and sleeker, but also built to deliver a more interactive, intelligent web experience. At its core, Atlas revolves around three main pillars, Chat, Memory, and Agent, each designed to make browsing more seamless and personal. With Chat, users can call upon ChatGPT anywhere on the web to tackle everyday tasks, from

drafting emails and summarising lengthy articles to comparing products or analysing data from any site. The chatbot effectively travels with you, turning static pages into dynamic, conversational spaces. Every time you visit a website on Atlas, a small "Ask ChatGPT" button appears on the screen. Click it, and a sidebar opens, letting you chat directly with the AI about what's on that page. Reading a long review? Ask for a summary. Browsing recipes? Get a shopping list or place an order. Looking at travel sites? Have ChatGPT find better deals. Unlike traditional browsers that treat search and browsing as separate experiences, Atlas

blends the two, the page you're viewing becomes interactive, and ChatGPT acts as your co-pilot. Next up, the Memory feature takes personalisation a step further. It allows Atlas to recall details from previous interactions, gradually learning from context to offer more relevant help over time. For example, a user could ask, "Show me all the job listings I checked last week and summarise the key hiring trends." This memory-driven capability transforms browsing into an ongoing dialogue rather than a series of disconnected searches. OpenAI emphasises that memory use will be entirely optional.

Too many Diwali sweets and no clue what to do? Shake them into cocktails

Across India's best bars and kitchens, chefs and mixologists are reimagining mithai as liquid inspiration. From Gulab Jamun Old Fashioneds to Kulfi Negronis, these drinks are sweet, nostalgic, and surprisingly sophisticated, if you do them right.

The post-Diwali fridge always tells a story. Layers of barfi, laddoos, gulab jamuns, and kaju katlis stacked like edible Tetris blocks, each box lovingly re-gifted until no one quite remembers where it began. This year, instead of forcing yourself through another round of sugar overload, bartenders suggest a better idea: drink your mithai. Across India's best bars and kitchens, chefs and mixologists are reimagining mithai not as leftovers, but as liquid inspiration. From Gulab Jamun Old Fashioneds to Kulfi Negronis, these drinks are sweet, nostalgic, and surprisingly sophisticated, if you do them right.

When mithai meets mixology

"Indian desserts are a treasure trove of flavours and textures that can serve as a lush foundation for innovative cocktails," says Rahul Ravindran, beverage manager at Fairmont Jaipur. He points to gulab jamun, jalebi, and kheer as natural muses for bartenders. "The rose and sugar syrup of gulab jamun can be reimagined into a refreshing, aromatic cocktail, think rose-infused gin or a syrupy vodka highball. And the saffron-cardamom warmth of kheer blends beautifully with creamy textures."

Ajay Nayyar, COO at Tulleeho

and jury member for 30 Best Bars India, agrees that Indian sweets "bridge culture and creativity beautifully." For him, it's all about using flavour as memory. "Kesar, elaichi, gulkand, jaggery, rose, coconut, and even filter coffee, these flavours can transform a cocktail into something truly memorable," he says. "They evoke nostalgia, but when paired with the right spirit, they feel modern." He breaks it down simply: "Whiskey or rum works best with jaggery or saffron; gin or vodka sings with rose and coconut; and brandy pairs beautifully with coffee or dried fruits."

Not too sweet, not too sinful

The biggest pitfall? Overdoing it. A mithai-inspired cocktail can quickly slip from 'inventive' to 'liquid dessert.' "Restraint is key," says Nayyar. "Use dessert flavours as accents, not bases. A saffron tincture instead of syrup, a rose mist instead of rose water, subtle cues that remind you of the sweet, not replicate it." Ravindran agrees: "Acidity is your friend. Citrus, tart fruit, or even a dash of bitters can counter the sweetness without compromising flavour." His go-to move is to use natural sweeteners and build layers, "sweetness balanced with spice, bitterness, and a touch of savoury." Chef Vaibhav

Bhargava, who heads the kitchen at Zuki and has previously worked with Hyatt and ITC, goes even deeper into the science of balance. "Sweetness is only one of five axes - acidity, bitterness, salt, alcohol heat, and texture must counterpoint it," he explains. His tricks include tamarind and kokum for acid, bitters or tea tannins for depth, and even saline finishes to "magnify flavours while reducing perceived sweetness." In fact, Bhargava often uses ghee fat-washing to bring in that signature Indian creaminess without sugar overload. "It keeps the drink rich, silky, and unmistakably Indian, but balanced."

How to serve it

Here's a pro tip: treat your mithai cocktail like digestif. "Portion control is key," says Bhargava. "Keep it short and elegant, 60 to 90 ml, so it's sipped slowly and leaves a lingering note of indulgence." He also recommends rethinking formats: "For day drinking or brunch, use lighter mithai notes like rose or mango in spritz-style cocktails with soda or tonic. For after-dinner serves, go for rich, creamy compositions, Saffron Kulfi Negroni or a Gulab Jamun-Infused Old Fashioned." Pairings matter too. Ravindran suggests serving a jalebi-inspired drink with spicy samosas,



"the sweet-spice interplay is unforgettable." Or a clarified kheer cocktail alongside spiced nuts and dry fruits for an elevated after-meal moment.

Bars that are doing it right

This isn't just theoretical. Some of India's top bars are already leading this delicious movement. At Call Me Ten, an omakase-style restaurant in Delhi, the bar team uses mithai flavours not as gimmicks but as narrative. Their Mango Sticky Rice cocktail blends tempered with acidity and bitterness. Another standout is Tirreti Bazaar, a Kolkata-inspired drink with mishti doi, pandan, wasabi, and mosambi. "The goal is resonance, not replication," says Bhargava. "The idea is to evoke memory, not mimic dessert."

Meanwhile, Delhi's AABCC is known for pushing the boundary between patisserie and bar, with drinks that layer texture and temperature. Think boozy hazelnut mousse or French toast sundaes with berry compote and Bailey's ice cream. "It's indulgent, but never cloying — balance is the backbone," Bhargava adds. And long before it became a trend, Farzi Cafe was already ahead of the curve. Nayyar recalls, "Their Gulab Jamun cocktail, made with gulab syrup, jamun pure, and vodka, was one of the earliest and most balanced attempts at marrying Indian sweets and spirits." The takeaway If Diwali has left you drowning in laddoos and kaju katlis, you don't have to eat your way through the excess. You can sip it or, better, serve it as a drink.

Feeling the festive hangover? Not just your body, your brain needs a reset too

The get-togethers, the endless laughter, the plates full of delicious food, and those long nights of catching up with family and friends, it's all part of the festive magic we wait for every year. But once the lights dim and the music fades, reality comes running. Your body feels tired, your sleep schedule is off, and all you wish for is morning naps that extend till noon. While we often talk about giving our bodies a detox after indulgent weeks, we rarely let our brains rest. The constant socialising, chit-chatting, overstimulation, and even the emotional highs of festivities can leave your brain feeling just as exhausted as your body. So, once the celebrations are over, it isn't just your diet or routine that needs a reset; your

brain deserves a festive cleanse too. It needs a chance to slow down, declutter, and gently ease back into normal life. Dr Sarthak Dave, an Ahmedabad-based psychiatrist, tells India Today that even on usual days, it's impossible to keep working every day and follow a fixed routine indefinitely. Sooner or later, the mind becomes fatigued. So, it's essential to give it a break to reset, refresh, and recharge. Without such pauses, you may develop burnout, and your capacity to function normally starts to diminish. So, you can imagine how exhausting it must be for your brain with so much stimulation and the dopamine boost that happens during the festivities. What goes on in the post-festive brain? "Festive

season is all about high dopamine stimulation that happens via food, socialising with people, celebrations, and social media," says Dr Virinchi Sharma, consultant - psychiatry, Aarete Hospitals, Hyderabad. Post the festivities, there is a drop in the stimulation, which can lead to low mood, fatigue, and irritability. Just like your stomach needs a break to recover from all the festive bingeing, your brain deserves one too. Dr Sharma goes on to explain that sometimes there can also be feelings of emptiness post the festive season. Further, Dr Dave shares that after the festive season, your mind experiences a sense of calm, a welcome pause from the daily rush. However, this doesn't mean the

underlying stress you have been carrying simply disappears. The calm you feel during the holidays helps you recharge and return to your routine with renewed energy, but there's also a part of the mind that resists letting go of that peaceful state. This inner tug-of-war can play out in two ways. If the longing for that calm outweighs your motivation, you might experience mild withdrawal, feeling sluggish or unfocused as you readjust to work. But as the routine settles in, productivity naturally picks up. On the other hand, if the break truly replenished your energy, you may notice an immediate boost in focus and efficiency right from the start. Meanwhile, as we celebrate the festivals, we tend to eat more sugar, sleep less,

and rely on caffeine to stay awake. All of this affects blood sugar levels and mood-regulating hormones. So, if you are feeling drained after the festivities, you can partly blame it on the food you ate.

Why is a mental cleanse crucial?

If you think that giving your brain a chance to reset isn't important, you might be making a big mistake. After a period of overstimulation and activities, your brain needs time to process thoughts, release tension, and regain focus. So, a cleanse can improve clarity, balance emotions, reduce anxiety, and boost productivity, making it easier to return to your routine with energy and a clear perspective.

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

In 2009, when China blocked Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, the world rolled its eyes. Western commentators saw paranoia; Silicon Valley saw an open goal. “Let China wall itself off,” they said. “The internet will route around it.” Fifteen years later, the picture looks very different. While Silicon Valley built for scale, Beijing built for sovereignty. The West treated technology as global commons. China treated it as contested territory — the next arena of sovereignty and statecraft. Today, as the US bans TikTok, Europe regulates AI, and nations from India to Indonesia assert digital sovereignty, it’s clear: China saw geo-nationalism coming long before anyone else.

From Isolation to Insight

The Great Firewall was never just about censorship. It was an act of strategic imagination. By walling off foreign platforms, China didn’t retreat from the internet — it re-architected it. It created space for domestic champions to grow, and in doing so, built one of the world’s most self-contained and self-reliant digital ecosystems. Then came Made in China 2025, a policy to reduce dependence on Western technology and dominate critical sectors like semiconductors, AI, and 5G. And soon after, the Digital Silk Road — Beijing’s plan to export its digital infrastructure across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These weren’t isolated initiatives. They were the scaffolding of a new model: geo-national technology — technology aligned with national interests, designed for geopolitical leverage. What looked like isolation was actually anticipation. The Architecture of Sovereignty: China’s playbook for digital power can be understood through three interlocking pillars: control, scale, and narrative.

1. Control the Stack

Beijing realised early that sovereignty begins at the hardware layer. Data sovereignty is meaningless if your chips are made abroad, your cloud runs on foreign code, or your supply chain depends on another superpower. So China poured hundreds of billions into domestic chip fabrication, cloud infrastructure, and satellite networks. The result: partial self-reliance in every layer of the digital stack — from silicon to software. When the US restricted exports of advanced

semiconductors in 2023 and 2024, China didn’t collapse. It improvised. Because for two decades, it had been preparing for that day. You can’t be sovereign on borrowed compute.

2. Scale the Ecosystem

The next step was scale — not just in production but in platform reach. Inside its firewall, China incubated national champions: Alibaba in commerce, Tencent in social media, Baidu in search, and ByteDance in AI-driven entertainment. These companies thrived in a market of a billion users, protected from foreign competition but fiercely competitive with one another. Outside its borders, China has extended its influence through the Digital Silk Road — a network of fiber cables, smart-city systems, and 5G networks across the developing world. By financing and building digital infrastructure abroad, Beijing exported its technological standards and governance models. This was statecraft by other means: a way to project power through platforms rather than politics.

3. Shape the Narrative

Perhaps China’s most underappreciated move was narrative discipline. While Western democracies treated

digital regulation as a constraint, Beijing presented it as nation-building. Control was framed not as censorship, but as sovereignty and stability. Chinese citizens came to see platforms like WeChat, Alipay, and Douyin not as state instruments, but as national achievements — symbols of self-reliance in a global system stacked against them. That sense of collective digital destiny gave China something many open societies lack: alignment between the state, private enterprise, and the citizen. The Result: From Follower to Framer Two decades ago, China was the student of Western technology. Today, it is the one writing the rules — whether in AI governance, 5G infrastructure, or export controls. When the West debated whether platforms were too powerful, China had already fused its digital ecosystem with state priorities. When Washington began restricting chip exports, Beijing had already built fallback capacity. When Europe drafted the AI Act, China had already implemented algorithmic filing requirements. In many ways, the geo-national age we live in is China’s design — not its dilemma.

The Inevitable Catch-Up

The irony is that the same governments that once ridiculed China’s “digital sovereignty” are now adopting their own versions of it. The US forces TikTok to restructure its ownership. The EU mandates algorithmic transparency. Democracies everywhere debate data localisation and AI safety. Each move echoes a principle China adopted long ago: control the technology you depend on, or someone else will control you. While Silicon Valley built for users, China built for nations. What the World Misunderstood For years, Western analysts saw China’s model as illiberal and unsustainable. They missed the deeper logic: China was building resilience in an age of interdependence. It is understood that the 21st century won’t be defined by territory but by technological spheres of influence. And it acted accordingly — creating digital borders before digital warfare became mainstream, investing in chips before supply chains fractured, and blending public and private sector capacity before AI became dual-use. The result is that China enters the 2030s not as a tech colony or consumer

market, but as a geopolitical force with its own stack, standards, and story.

The Lesson for the World

You don’t have to admire China’s methods to acknowledge its foresight. It saw that technology would be the new language of power — and built fluency early. Geo-nationalism isn’t an accident of politics. It’s the natural evolution of technology once it becomes too strategic to be neutral. China didn’t stumble into that reality. It architected it. China saw the age of geo-national tech — and built the playbook everyone else is now following. The Closing Thought History often rewards those who see the next paradigm before it becomes visible to everyone else. China did that in technology. It turned sovereignty into software, regulation into leverage, and data into diplomacy.

The next question — and the subject of my next column — is whether India can write the sequel: Can a democracy design its own model of digital sovereignty, one built not on control but on trust? For now, one thing is clear. China saw it coming. And the world is only just catching up.

Front Page Feature

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

India is gearing up to introduce new legal obligations aimed at curbing the rising menace of deepfakes online. As reported by Reuters, the government on Wednesday proposed fresh regulations that would compel artificial intelligence (AI) developers and social media platforms to label any content generated by AI.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said the move is in response to the “significant growth” in the misuse of generative AI tools to cause harm, spread misinformation, manipulate elections, or impersonate individuals. Under the proposed rules, social media companies would also be required to ensure that users declare if they are uploading deepfake material. The rules are aimed at creating greater transparency and accountability in how AI-generated content is shared online. With nearly a billion internet users, India faces a particularly high risk of harm from manipulated media—especially in a country as diverse as India, where

misinformation can inflame communal tensions or disrupt democratic processes. Officials say the proposal aims to safeguard citizens from deceptive and potentially harmful content while preserving trust in digital ecosystems. Deepfakes, a term for realistic yet fabricated videos, audio, or images created using AI, pose a mounting challenge to online safety and information integrity.

These tools, once confined to entertainment or satire, are increasingly being weaponised for political propaganda, scams, and character assassination. Through this proposed regulation, the government would make it mandatory for platforms and AI firms to identify and label such content clearly, ensuring users know when they are viewing something generated or manipulated by AI. Notably, India is not the only country bringing in rules to control AI-generated deepfakes. Governments across the world, including the United States and the European

Union, are weighing or enacting similar labelling requirements to contain the spread of deceptive AI-generated material. India, with over a billion internet users, has also witnessed the negative impact of deepfakes, including the spread of fake news during elections. The proposed draft regulation will form part of India’s IT Rules, which are being updated to account for emerging risks from AI technologies. While the government has not yet detailed the enforcement mechanisms or penalties for non-compliance, officials are reportedly in discussions with technology firms, AI developers, and civil society organisations to shape the final framework. If approved, the new obligations could significantly reshape the responsibilities of digital platforms operating in India. Social media companies may need to develop or integrate automated systems capable of identifying AI-generated content, while AI developers could face new disclosure requirements for their tools.

Social Media and Political Violence: A Complex Relationship

When the George Floyd protests happened and some protestors decided to assault people or destroy property, did you consider that political violence? When the 2017 Unite The Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., resulted in Heather Heyer being fatally struck by a car, did you consider that political violence? When protesters in Los Angeles threw bricks and bottles at Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, did you consider that political violence? When Trump supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, did you consider that political violence? The answer to all of those is yes. We have been living in an age of political violence for some time now, and politicians, pundits, social media companies, and influencers have been telling us that the violence has been one sided, and it's not the side you agree with. With the assassination of Charlie Kirk, we are seeing it yet again. Yes, it is obviously an act of political violence and should be condemned. But as many of us middle Americans saw, Republicans including the president blamed the "radical left" for Kirk's death while Democrats struggled to keep people from celebrating or justifying the murder. These people are now being doxed and losing their jobs, by the way. While politicians, pundits and influencers called for us to "bring the temperature down," they themselves were setting the oven to 500 degrees. Kirk's death isn't a start of a new era of political violence as some would like to say. We have been living in an age of political violence for some time now. And many pessimistic Americans feel that is just going to get worse. And who can blame them? Even though we take a lot of pride in being very individualistic, Americans still follow the leader when it comes to expressing ourselves. We look at our phones, computers, televisions and tablets and are inundated with hateful messages from the people telling us not to hate. Yes, this is a "both sides" issue. And before you start telling me that the other side has said the worst possible things, I would say I am sure you have a reason

to feel that way. But your side hasn't exactly been angelic. As a liberal, I have seen over the last two decades just about every Republican politician be compared to Nazis. President George W. Bush was one because of the Iraq invasion, but then that insult also applied to John McCain, Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan, Liz Cheney and many others who have opposed Donald Trump were themselves called fascists. And before you Republicans get on the high horse, just think of all the crazy claims you made about President Obama alone, much less any other Democrat. We have turned the massacre of kids at Sandy Hook into a political conspiracy that went beyond gun control. We turned the death of Trayvon Martin into political theatre that went beyond race relations. We took a 30 second video of Nicholas Sandmann and used it to project all our feelings about MAGA voters on a kid who didn't do anything wrong. Who led the charge? You know the answer. We live in an age where being first, loudest and crassest means you will get the most attention,

money and clout. Let's take a look at Kirk himself in one particular instance. Before the Maui wildfires' cause could be verified and the damage assessed, Kirk went on his show to proclaim that somehow the fires had to do with some native Hawaiians being "pagan." Now, mind you he could have said that some Hawaiian officials mismanaged water resources, or there was a failure of government that needed to be investigated. But instead, he had to insult an indigenous religion and insinuate it was the reason for Maui burning. Why? Because it made him more money. That is "raising the temperature" when you don't have to. And this is just one out of thousands of instances where those with the microphones raise the temperature just to get views/money/clout. Does this mean the man deserved a bullet to the neck? Of course not. But you also can't pretend that the man simply wanted to have honest conversations with people. Kirk was a big star in a competitive world of social media influencers.

There is a race to be the loudest and find things to be outraged over. Ben Shapiro was outraged by the movie "Barbie." Liberals were outraged by a John Wayne Playboy interview in the 1970s and "Friends" episodes from the '90s. People are even criticized for not being outrageous enough. As the investigation into Kirk's alleged shooter continues, some MAGA folks and left wing influencers are claiming Tyler Robinson was a Gropper, an acolyte of Nick Fuentes. There are proclamations that Kirk was killed for being too mainstream. Is it true? Who knows? Will it get clicks? You bet. If you really want to bring the temperature down and end this age of political violence, then politicians need to start coming to terms with their actions. The news media has to stop chasing outrage. And we as a country need to come to terms with what we allow to be dispersed to the population on social media. Are those easy things to do? No. Is it the solution? I think we can all agree that it is. Again, let me criticize liberal politicians. We have taken a lot of glee in California Gov.

Gavin Newsom's newfound social media personality. He just repeats what Donald Trump says and posts from another angle. So let me ask a question of liberals. Does that lower the temperature?

For all you conservative politicians. I get that Kirk's death is devastating. Does it do you any good to blame "radical leftists" for a crime before we even knew who the suspect was? Do you really think all liberals would shoot the guy? Is that what you want to put out into this country? Kirk's death isn't a warning to regular Americans. We know we have been living in an age of political violence for some time. It is a warning to those politicians, pundits and influencers who are chasing the high of views, likes, followers and clout. Americans have already been killing each other. How much more followers do you need before you realize you have been the ones raising the temperature? Jos Joseph is a published writer and is a graduate of the Harvard Extension School and Ohio State University. He is a Marine veteran who served in Iraq. He currently lives in Anaheim, Calif.

I Was Targeted by a Bomb Threat After Charlie Kirk's Murder. I Blame Social Media.

This month, my family and I faced something I would not wish on anyone: a credible bomb threat directed at our home in Detroit, aimed at me as lieutenant governor of Michigan. The threat came the day after the murder of Charlie Kirk, amid an alarming rise of political violence in recent months across the country. What was once unthinkable now feels disturbingly familiar. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, whom I serve alongside in Michigan, was the target of a 2020 plot to kidnap her and spark a civil war. Public servants across the nation have similarly chilling stories. Unfortunately, in the hours after Kirk's murder, we saw a troubling pattern repeat itself: an immediate rush to assign political blame. Politicians, pundits and anonymous accounts flooded social media, spreading partisan accusations long before the facts were known,

and more online hate and threats followed. Threats like the one directed at me do not materialize out of nowhere. They are stoked by divisions that are amplified by algorithms designed by social media companies that profit from mining our attention and our outrage. Before I entered public office, I worked as a software engineer at Microsoft and later co-founded the Center for Social Media Responsibility at the University of Michigan. There, my team studied how and why disinformation and extremism spread online. We examined everything from misinformation festering on fringe platforms like 4chan to how a single video on Facebook or YouTube could lead someone, through just a few algorithmic recommendations, down a rabbit hole of extremist propaganda or gruesome violence. What I learned then is even more clear now: The very architecture of today's social

media is designed to amplify the most toxic voices. Tech billionaires don't just allow hate and outrage to spread – they reward it. The more incendiary the content, the more clicks it gets, the more time we spend on the site and the more advertising revenue they collect. The business model thrives on marshalling our attention toward the worst content and erodes our public discourse and shared reality. A 2022 report from the Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Government Affairs concluded that social media companies prioritize making a profit over taking down harmful rhetoric that leads to violent extremism. In releasing the report, Sen. Gary Peters, a fellow Michigan Democrat, noted that the more "provocative" the content, the more it fuels profits for Silicon Valley. All that online rage is also accelerating real-world political violence that is

putting lives at risk. To address this, we do not have to silence anyone or police speech. But we do need to hold companies accountable for how their systems are designed. Today's algorithms reward outrage and elevate dangerous content. That has to change. We can start with transparency – sunlight builds trust and accountability. Social media platforms should be required to publicly report how often violent or extremist content is amplified and how quickly they respond when that content leads to real-world harm. We should implement annual independent content audits whose results are made public. And we must ensure that when platforms amplify anger that triggers threats and violence, victims are supported with appropriate mechanisms, including strong legal action, to hold platforms accountable for harms caused.

Manipur's Lazarus Moment To End Illegal Opium Poppy Crisis

The hills of Manipur may appear beautiful, but behind the blossoms lie hunger, fear, and loss. Many farmers live in extreme poverty. Communities are breaking up under pressure. It is not just another drug issue. What it really is, is a huge human tragedy where desperation has replaced dignity, and placed a burden on every single person in Manipur. The response must begin with empathy, and a clear understanding of the people behind the thousands and thousands of acres of illegal opium poppy fields. Most farmers do not plant illegal opium poppies by choice. They are threatened and intimidated, and their choices are not really choices at all, but a trap of bondage through fear and violence. Poppy cultivation in Manipur happens under the shadow of fear so pervasive that people have accepted as 'normal' the existence of drug lords and armed traffickers in their society.

How Trap Is Set

The trap is set for the farmers when they are in desperate need of money for medical emergencies, children's education, or basic survival. Once they accept the advance payment for illegal opium poppy 'product'. Farmers growing illegal cultivation, the money turns into opium poppies often receive chains that coil around their feet payment partly in raw opium. Like a snake. Trouble and What begins as occasional use violence will pay their families a spirals into dependency with visit if the farmers do not deliver merciless efficiency – young the harvest as agreed while men who should be the accepting the advance payment. backbone of agriculture get This is how families in Manipur addicted; they don't want to become indebted to the very work, and families disintegrate forces that are exploiting them. under the compounding strains They are hostages to a mix of of poverty, addiction, and economic pressure and threat of shame. Communities lose their violence which can last for many most productive members to the years of crop cycles. The pattern twin scourges of substance of fear, economic control, and abuse and captivity. It is not just violence converging on remote an economic crisis, but a farming communities proves spiritual and social death Manipur's issue is not about affecting entire generations. Raids crime and punishment, but a or crop destruction drives alone systematic exploitation of cannot solve Manipur's poppy vulnerable people. Addressing it crisis. While such actions are needs more than law welcome, they only meet political enforcement; it needs moral and administrative expectations, courage and collective action. but ignore the deeper causes that

Communities Corrode

The harm from illegal opium the first place. Destroying an poppy cultivation extends illegal opium poppy field does beyond farmers. Poppy farming nothing to the criminal groups who erodes community ties and could force its replanting at the destroys traditional farming same site or somewhere else in knowledge built over the remote hills. generations. Young people,



seeing the apparent profitability of opium, lose interest in education and legitimate

livelihoods. Why study when

when they are in desperate need quick money seems to grow in

of money for medical fields? The most tragic part of

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Lazarus Moment

The story of Lazarus mirrors Manipur's struggle. Lazarus had been dead for four days when

Jesus arrived, his tomb sealed by a heavy stone. The situation

seemed beyond hope, with death

appearing final. Then Jesus called

out, "Lazarus, come out." But

here's the crucial detail we often

overlook – Jesus doesn't move the

stone Himself. He commanded

the community gathered there to

roll the stone away, "Take away

the stone," He told them. The

miracle of resurrection needed

communion. The people had to

believe enough to act, to remove

the barrier physically, to participate

in the impossible becoming

possible. And even after Lazarus

emerged from the tomb, still

wrapped in a burial cloth, Jesus

issued another command, "Take

off the grave clothes and let him

go." The community had to

complete the work of liberation

themselves. Manipur's illegal

poppy-growing communities are

like Lazarus in that tomb, bound

by the forces of intimidation,

economic pressure, and fear.

The stone of oppression has

been rolled over them by those

who profit from their captivity.

Many have been in this tomb for

so long that hope itself seems

dead. But resurrection is

possible only if the community

comes together to roll away the

stone. It means the community

must physically act to protect

their own. When villages unite,

fear loses power. Collective

strength makes intimidation

harder and restores moral order,

turning resistance into pride and

poppy farming into shame.

Choosing Life

We can mobilise

communities to create protective

networks where farmers can

safely refuse poppy cultivation.

We must roll away the stone of

fear, unbind those who are

trapped in cycles of debt and

intimidation, and support each

other in choosing life over the

living death of the opium

economy. Ending illegal poppy

farming will foster peace,

stability, and honest work. It will

free farmers from addiction, and

let Manipur's communities,

forests, and traditions thrive

again. This vision is not utopian

– it is entirely achievable if we

commit ourselves to it

collectively. But achieving this

vision requires action at every

level. The government must

create real economic

alternatives, enforce the law

with fairness, and protect

those who stand against the

drug trade. The civil society

must build awareness, support

vulnerable communities, and

push for solutions to the

causes, not just the effects.

Religious and community

leaders must use their

influence to delegitimize drug

cultivation and consumption.

Most importantly, we must

show compassion to those

caught in this system while

maintaining firm opposition to the

system itself. Farmers growing

illegal opium poppies under

intimidation need a way out; they

need the community to roll away

the stone and unbind them.

Communities must support one

another to ensure young people

at risk of addiction get proper

education and opportunity.

Turning away from this crisis by

dismissing it as someone else's

problem or purely a matter of law

enforcement shows moral failure.

The people of Manipur deserve

much better than having their

state synonymous with drug

production. Farmers deserve to

work their land free from fear that

shapes their every choice.

Manipur stands on the crossroad

of life or death. If the current path

continues, communities will fall

deeper into addiction, violence,

and environmental ruin.

Communities must instead

choose to break oppressive

chains. With collective action,

genuine alternatives, and

courage, Manipur can reclaim

its future. The road ahead will

be hard because those who

profit from drug trafficking will

resist. Real change demands

persistence, support, and

above all, a renewal of

community spirit strong enough

to face intimidation. This is our

Lazarus moment. The time to

act is now.

Pakistan's vulnerable coastline and fear of the Indian Navy



Prime Minister Narendra Modi spent his first Diwali with the Indian Navy on the night of October 20. It was his 12th such celebration with the armed forces but first with the Indian Navy. The Prime Minister's visit and message during his day at sea was directed at General Headquarters Rawalpindi, the seat of power in Pakistan. "Just a few months ago, we witnessed how the name INS Vikrant sent waves of fear across Pakistan... such is its might, a name that shatters the enemy's courage even before the battle begins. That is the power of INS Vikrant," he said, addressing crew in the aircraft hangar of the 45,000-tonne warship, India's largest indigenously built vessel. This was not hyperbole. Satellite imagery of the 88-hour conflict analysed by India Today revealed how the Pakistan Navy fled its traditional bases in Karachi as well as PNS Jinnah in Ormara. The Pakistani warships anchored themselves in

civilian berths in Karachi, at the Chinese-built Gwadar Port over 500 kilometres west, or in Pasni closer to Iran -- all locations where they would be safe from Indian missile attacks. The source of Pakistan's discomfiture lay just 300 nautical miles to the south, where the Vikrant carrier battle group was on the prowl. Sources say that at least four of the Vikrant's escort vessels were ready with BrahMos missiles primed to strike at Karachi. A ceasefire was announced on May 10 before the strike orders came. If the Indian Navy had struck at Karachi and other ports along Pakistan's 1000-kilometre coastline, it would have had a few immediate effects. Global merchant shipping would have steered clear of Pakistani ports to protect themselves or hike shipping costs. The attack would disrupt Pakistan's daily energy flow from the Persian Gulf -- Pakistan is heavily reliant on daily imports of over 500,000 barrels of oil per day.

Its commercial stocks provide for around 10-20 days of consumption. Further, an Indian Naval blockade would convert Pakistan into a landlocked state entirely dependent on its neighbors like Iran, Afghanistan and China for sustenance -- Pakistan's major ports handle over 95 per cent of its international trade by volume and over 65 per cent by value.

THE VULNERABLE COASTLINE

Two factors work heavily against Pakistan. Its coastline is a geographical cul-de-sac. And, its navy is weak, unable to protect its merchant shipping and heavily overmatched by the Indian Navy. During Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force's attacks on frontline Pakistan Air Force bases and the loss of a US-built surveillance radar at Malir Cantonment in Karachi, ensured it could not deploy against the Indian Navy. In times of war, Pakistan effectively becomes a landlocked country, a sovereign state entirely

enclosed by land, with no direct access to an ocean or open sea. Its navy is useful for drills and flag-showing anti-piracy missions in peacetime but would be bottled up in harbour during combat. This is not a far-fetched scenario. During the two-week-long December 1971 war, the only wartime use of the Indian Navy, saw India inflict a catastrophic naval defeat on Pakistan. The lightning maritime campaign saw Indian naval task forces severing the sea lanes of communication between East and West Pakistan. Three Indian missile boats destroyed a Pakistani surface fleet in a sea battle off Karachi, sinking the destroyer PNS Khaibar, disabling the destroyer PNS Shah Jahan, and sinking the minesweeper PNS Muhafiz and the merchant ship MV Venus Challenger that was carrying a shipment of US weapons, ammunition, and spare parts for the Pakistan Army. In the East, the INS Vikrant (predecessor to the indigenous warship in service today) carrier battle group

bottled up the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan, preventing a seaborne escape into the Bay of Bengal. The Vikrant group in fact captured several merchantmen packed with soldiers that were running away from the battle. The gallant INS Panvel led a raid over 100 kilometres deep inside East Pakistan, the Indian Navy's only such riverine gunboat raid, in support of the army advancing towards Khulna. In 2025, Pakistani warships hid in the Chinese-built Gwadar. Field Marshal Asim Munir's offer of Pasni to the US signals the creation of a second safe harbour for his country's warships and another route bypassing any potential Indian blockade. Pakistani defence minister Khawaja Asif recently mentioned how Islamabad was facing a two-front crisis, sandwiched between Afghanistan and India. The political signalling from Prime Minister Modi's Diwali address reaffirms the existence of a third and far more vulnerable third front for Pakistan.

Why Prince Andrew's 'Punishment' Is Very Exemplary

Sherlock Holmes' recorded career as the world's most famous fictional sleuth began in 1891 with his investigation of 'A Scandal in Bohemia'. The intention was to save the blushes of a peccadillo-prone European royal, as his mistress had some compromising photos of them in her possession. Holmes did the needful back then, but another similarly inclined British prince may have been better off if some Holmesian character had been around for the Epstein Scandal. But no one, it seems, sought such help for Prince Andrew, the beleaguered second son of the late Queen Elizabeth II, and hence he now stands stripped of his Duke of York title and apex royal honours such as the Order of the Garter and the Royal Victorian Order. And all because he got embroiled with the highly dubious if rich American Jeffrey Epstein and did not fully extricate himself even as damning evidence emerged of his trafficking young girls and other shady activities. It appears to be a case of supreme stupidity, enhanced by an overweening sense of entitlement; and of course, plain greed. And at the heart of it lies the principle of male primogeniture practised in the British royal family for centuries, which meant the eldest son (or barring a male heir, the eldest daughter) inherited pretty much everything. That always left the others at the mercy of their reigning parent and then the one sibling destined to be monarch, for their very livelihood.

Now it is no longer male primogeniture. After King Charles III, his first-born son Prince William will be monarch, whose son Prince George is next. In the latter's case, though, it is no longer because he is the eldest male but because he is the eldest child. If George then has a first-born daughter she will reign after him. But that does not resolve the issue of impecunious younger royal siblings, totally dependent on the monarch for their rozi-roti and even permission to marry.

In the case of Prince Andrew, it was easier when his mother was Queen as she was inclined to give him plenty of leeway when it came to finances, even getting



him a palatial mansion on lease from the Crown Estate (at a "peppercorn" or paltry rent), even allowing his wife to live there with him after their divorce. And the Queen also allowed him to maintain "business links" with questionable people from dubious countries till the press got wind of financial impropriety.

No wonder the pampered prince thought he did not need a Holmesian brain to help extricate himself from the scandal of Virginia Guiffre's allegations and the simultaneous implosion of Epstein's shady empire. He either misjudged the resourcefulness of the British press when it came to unearthing secrets about him or was too stupid to realise the implications of such revelations. Why else would he have posed with the girl for photos or sent telling emails to Epstein? He also made the fundamental mistake of applying the now outdated unofficial Windsor family motto of 'Never Complain, Never Explain' even when the first photo emerged in the media of him with his arm around the then under-age Guiffre and obstinately maintained he had nothing to do with her even as Epstein collapsed under the weight of financial and criminal scandals. He mendaciously promised (as did his wife) that he would abjure Epstein's company too.

Only now, emails and texts have come to light showing that the former Yorks both maintained fawning contacts with Epstein during and after his spectacular fall from grace even as they pretended to have shunned him "forever". Once a lie is exposed, everything that a person has ever said or will say in the future becomes doubtful. And hence all of the Yorks' frequent protestations of innocence and assurances of probity are now being openly discounted and challenged.

The Metropolitan Police in London has announced it will probe the recent media report that Prince Andrew had asked his personal protection officers (part of the police force) to obtain Guiffre's US social security number and date of birth, which he then passed on to Epstein in order to ferret out potentially adverse information with which to smear his accuser. This was just the day before the telltale photo of Andrew and Guiffre was splashed in the UK press.

Virginia Guiffre was no Irene Adler but nor was the British media. Ignoring the lethal power of that photograph featuring a smiling Andrew with his arm around her waist as Epstein's girlfriend (and alleged procurer) grinned in the background was also a monumental mistake.

Once the photo came into the

public domain (which Holmes averted in 'A Scandal in Bohemia') and more revelations followed, it threatened the very integrity and credibility of the monarchy.

Clearly decisive and visible action was necessary. The royal family's institutional memory would have recalled that the silence during the disintegration of the Charles-Diana marriage and the Charles-Camilla affair merely made the British media even more determined to unearth "the truth", often with very sordid results. And silence and inaction in the initial days after Princess Diana's death were even more deleterious, as Queen Elizabeth II finally realised and remedied.

There is no doubt that the Andrew-Epstein saga has dragged on for far too long, hogging headlines and diverting attention from whatever King Charles III wishes to be his legacy as monarch. It has not been pleasant for his heir Prince William either, who has his own controversial brother to contend with, albeit not for the same kind of transgressions. Father and son surely want definitive action to be taken. And if the crime was princely, the punishment has to be princely too.

Divesting Prince Andrew of titles and 'orders' appears to be a redundant exercise to those who have not been born to or lived amid feudal splendour. But in a

family where the rather archaic sounding 'His/Her Royal Highness' or 'His/Her Majesty' is crucial to their sense of self, the removal of such accoutrements is akin to stripping them naked in public. The horror of being 'common' for a 'prince of the blood royal' cannot be imagined, presumably for the general public.

Though Prince Andrew did not go on trial for contravening the law proscribing sex with minors (as a member of the plebeian populace may have done for similar transgressions) he was put in the dock by his own peers—senior members of the Windsor family—and been given the ultimate death-like penalty of being divested of not his head but all the letters that come before and after his name. Only other royals will be able to fathom the exquisite humiliation of it.

Prince Andrew (now without any further suffixes) and his ex-wife (with not even a princess tag) Sarah Ferguson face a bleak future, bereft of Christmases in Sandringham, summers in Balmoral and Easter at Windsor along with the "Family" and other royal perks. Their ability to generate incomes to live in their 30-room royal mansion in Windsor without their titles is also moot. They must regret not getting a latter-day Sherlock Holmes to do the needful in time.

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



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Inside India's Scariest Scam, And How To Stop It



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➤ Digital scams are proliferating as India's elderly population embraces the internet.

➤ Scammers are highly effective, preying on the inherent vulnerabilities of seniors, such as respect for authority, fear of legal trouble, and loneliness.



Starship Hits the Bullseye: Lands in Indian Ocean and Crashes Exactly Where Musk Predicted

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



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



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Vijay Mallya Abandons UK Bid to End Bankruptcy

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