

The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

Published From New York Since March 2002

Canada Ablaze: Inside the Fire That Two Governments Can't Agree On

A third straight catastrophic wildfire season is burning across Canada's boreal forest, choking American skies and reopening the U.S.-Canada relationship to a new grievance - even as scientists say the underlying story is bigger than either government wants to admit.



Page 2-4

Trouble for Pakistan on four fronts. Is a new nation on the horizon?

From Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to POK and the Afghan border, Pakistan is facing four distinct but increasingly interconnected crises. Together, they reveal the erosion of state authority and the limits of Asim Munir's security-first approach. A former Afghan leader suggests that a new country might be taking shape.

Page 6-7

US Attack On Chabahar, And Why It's Time India Stopped Playing By Others' Whims

As the US destroys Chabahar in Iran, one thing is clear: India cannot wait eternally for the whims of others to do what is vital for its own interests.

Page 8

Is Sharad Pawar Planning To Merge NCP With NDA? Behind The Ongoing Calculations

The NCP patriarch, turning 86 this year, will have to take a decision soon - before someone else takes it for him.

Page 5

Also In This Issue

Iran, China, Canada: A Defense of Trump's Grand Strategy

Page 11

Hambantota And Gwadar: Dhaka Snubbed PM Modi On Mongla But Will Eventually Pay For It

Page 17

US soldier Michael Swinton killed in Iraq during Iranian drone detonation

Page 21

Modi govt unlikely to let CJP protests upstage its big Parliament agenda

Page 27

India Association of Long Island Celebrates a Spectacular Annual Gala Honoring "The Creators of Icons"

Page 31-32

Anne Hathaway Is Giving Mother Energy In Ethereal Prada Gown For The Odyssey

Page 41

State of Nation



Page 3

CANADA ABLAZE

INSIDE THE FIRE THAT TWO GOVERNMENTS CAN'T AGREE ON.

(By Our Staff Reporter **NEW YORK / TORONTO / WASHINGTON**)

The Numbers Behind the Smoke

By mid-July, Canada was fighting close to 900 active wildfires, with dozens burning fully out of control across Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. The country has logged more than 3,500 individual fires this year and upward of 6 million acres burned — a pace that started slower than the historic infernos of 2023 and 2025 but accelerated sharply once summer heat set in. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre now rates British Columbia, Alberta and the Northwest Territories at the highest risk levels for the remainder of a season that typically runs into October. The consequence has crossed the border in a way no tariff schedule ever has. Smoke plumes have repeatedly blanketed the U.S. Northeast, Midwest and Mid-Atlantic through July, casting the orange haze over New York and Washington that Americans have now seen in four of the last five summers, and triggering air-quality alerts as far south as Tennessee and Missouri. This is not new — the record 2023 season sent smoke across the Atlantic into northern Europe — but 2026 marks a third consecutive year of extreme fire activity in Canada's carbon-rich

boreal forest, a run without recent precedent, and one that federal officials in Ottawa openly acknowledge is testing the limits of the country's firefighting capacity.

How the Fires Actually Started

There is no single culprit, and readers should be wary of anyone who claims otherwise. Canadian fire agencies track ignition sources in three categories — natural, human and undetermined — and the split has held remarkably steady for decades: roughly half of the country's wildfires are sparked by lightning, and roughly half by human activity, from unextinguished campfires and discarded cigarettes to power-line failures, farm and forestry equipment, off-road vehicles and industrial sparks. Of 28 new fires Canadian officials classified on a single day in mid-July, 15 were ruled human-caused, eight natural and five undetermined — a snapshot consistent with the historical pattern that holds true, in the words of one Manitoba wildfire official, "year after year, decade after decade."

The two ignition types behave very differently, and the difference matters for how each government responds. Human-caused fires tend to start earlier in the season and closer to communities, which is part of why they are more often caught and suppressed while still small. Lightning-caused fires, concentrated in the remote boreal interior far from roads, are

harder to reach and account for roughly 90 percent of total area burned in a given season — and researchers at Natural Resources Canada warn that a warming climate is likely to produce more lightning strikes over drier fuel, a combination that favors bigger, faster-moving fires in the years ahead. British Columbia's provincial data show a majority of its fires are lightning-sparked; Alberta's data show the opposite, with as much as 80 to 88 percent of its fires in recent years attributed to human causes — underscoring that "how the fires started" is really a province-by-province story rather than one national narrative.

Arson deserves a precise accounting, because it has become the subject of considerable misinformation. Provincial and federal data show deliberate arson accounts for roughly one to four percent of human-caused fires annually — a real but small share. When Alberta's provincial government amplified arson claims during the 2023 season, wire-service fact-checkers and independent journalists found the claims unsupported by the RCMP's own case data; investigators had opened inquiries into a number of "suspicious" fires, but suspicious does not mean arson, and confirmed arson cases — including recent Manitoba prosecutions — remain a small fraction of the total fire count. This

publication's standard applies here as it does to any accusation: until a person is charged and the case is adjudicated, allegations of deliberate fire-setting are allegations, not findings, and claims that arson rather than climate or weather conditions explain the scale of a given season have been repeatedly found misleading by independent fact-checkers.

Washington's Response: Tariffs, Blame and a Fight Over "Forest Management"

President Trump has taken a considerably harder line. In a series of Truth Social posts in mid-July, he accused Canada of "Willful Negligence" for what he called a refusal to conduct "basic Forest Management and Debris Removal," and said the cost of the resulting pollution would be added to existing tariffs on Canadian goods — an escalation layered on top of trade tensions already strained by this year's tariff disputes, some of which apply even to goods compliant with the USMCA/CUSMA trade agreement. "The cost is incalculable," he wrote, adding that the smoke had "unnecessarily invaded" American air and calling the situation "totally unacceptable." He said he intended to raise the matter directly with Carney, and later told reporters he had done so in person while the two leaders sat together at the World Cup final.

The political pile-on followed quickly. Ohio Senator Bernie Moreno announced plans to introduce legislation sanctioning Canadian officials over what he called "this atrocity," and four Michigan House Republicans — John James, Jack Bergman, John Moolenaar and Lisa McClain — wrote directly to Carney: "This is the third consecutive year we have had to write to Canadian officials about a crisis that Canada has the tools to prevent and has chosen not to... If Canada will not manage its forests to prevent these fires, the United States will look elsewhere, and act on our own, to protect our people." That argument — that better forest management, meaning more aggressive logging, brush clearance and prescribed burning, could have prevented this — is a real position with real advocates in forestry science, and it is one this publication will not caricature. Dense underbrush and fuel accumulation genuinely do make fires burn hotter and spread faster near populated areas, and both the U.S. and Canada have, at various points, under-invested in prescribed burning relative to what fire ecologists recommend. But it is a substantially incomplete explanation for a fire season straddling nine provinces and territories over an area the size of a small country, most of it uninhabited boreal wilderness far

from any logging road, ignited primarily by lightning during a record-hot, record-dry summer. Critics of the administration's framing — including commentators writing in outlets sympathetic to Democrats — have also pointed to what they call an irony: the same administration blaming Canada for cross-border air-quality harm rolled back, in January, the EPA's decades-old practice of assigning a dollar value to a human life (previously just under \$12 million) in domestic pollution cost-benefit analysis, effectively zeroing it out. Whether that regulatory rollback is good policy is a separate, genuinely contested question that reasonable people disagree on; readers deserve to know it exists as context for the administration's newly urgent concern about cross-border air quality, without this publication rendering a verdict on the underlying EPA policy itself.

Carney, for his part, has largely declined to escalate rhetorically, telling reporters in London, Ontario, that he has walked Trump through the scale of Canada's forest and the drought conditions driving this year's fires, while also emphasizing Canada's own contributions to American disaster response in past years. Foreign-policy analysts, including Imran Bayoumi of the Atlantic Council's GeoStrategy Initiative, have cautioned publicly that tariffs "are not going to fix the problem" and risk further eroding an already strained bilateral relationship that was, in his words, already "at a kind of low point" before the smoke became a talking point.

The Alleged Versus the Real: What the Evidence Supports Stripped of politics, the scientific literature converges on a narrower, less partisan explanation than either government's public messaging fully captures. Canada's boreal forest has now recorded extreme fire activity for three consecutive years — 2023, 2025 and 2026 — with total carbon emissions across that span exceeding the combined emissions of the previous fifteen years, according to peer-reviewed analysis published this year in a leading earth-sciences journal. Researchers attribute the run primarily to a compounding of hot, dry summers, more frequent lightning, and — in the near term — an emerging El

Ottawa's Response: Money, Aircraft and a Candid Admission

The Carney government has not disputed that Canada is under strain. Ottawa points to roughly C\$12 billion invested in firefighting capacity in recent years and more than 5,000 firefighters deployed nationally, alongside a newer federal commitment — \$316.7 million over five years, allocated through Budget 2025 — to build a national aerial firefighting surge fleet through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. That fleet, leased for the first time this season, includes four air tankers, a bird-dog spotter aircraft and five heavy-lift helicopters that provinces and territories can call on when local resources are overwhelmed, on top

of standing agreements that let jurisdictions request federal assistance once an emergency exceeds their own capacity.

Prime Minister Mark Carney's rebuttal to American criticism has centered on scale and physical geography rather than denial. Canada's forest, he has told reporters, covers an area roughly eight times the size of Texas, and much of it — from the Canadian Prairies through the upper Midwest, in his own framing — has been sitting in effective drought conditions this year. Emergency Management Minister Eleanor Olszewski has cast the crisis as a shared federal-

provincial-Indigenous responsibility, one in which Ottawa "stands ready to assist" but cannot unilaterally fireproof a forest larger than most countries. Notably, current 2026 wildfire activity nationally remains below the five-year average even as danger continues to climb through the summer — a detail Canadian officials have cited that complicates any narrative of straightforward government failure. Carney has also pointed to Canada's own record of sending firefighters and aid south during past American disasters, framing the relationship as reciprocal rather than one-directional.

Niño pattern that the World Meteorological Organization expects to strengthen through the Northern Hemisphere winter, raising the odds of further drought and fire risk across North America.

Forest-management practices matter, but at the margins closer to communities, where fuel-reduction work, defensible-space requirements and better zoning genuinely reduce structure loss and protect lives — a lesson reinforced by post-mortem analysis of California's devastating January 2025 fires, which found under-resourced brush clearance and vegetation management contributed materially to how fast those fires spread through populated hillsides. But management alone does not explain why fire activity is simultaneously intensifying across boreal Canada, the western United States, Siberia, southern Europe, and parts of the Southern Hemisphere in the same multi-year window — regions with entirely different logging practices, land-use histories and governments. The claim that this is fundamentally a Canadian mismanagement story, and the opposite claim that it is entirely disconnected from any human policy choices, both oversimplify a problem that is, at its core, about a hotter, drier atmosphere meeting forests and grasslands that were never built to withstand fire

this often, this intensely, this many years in a row.

A World on Fire: How Canada Fits the Global Pattern

Canada's crisis is not occurring in isolation — it is one signature inside what researchers are calling an unprecedented global fire year, and placing it beside other 2025-2026 wildfire disasters is instructive about what is genuinely new versus what is simply Canada's familiar seasonal burden arriving on schedule.

More than 150 million hectares burned worldwide between January and April 2026 alone, roughly 20 percent above the previous record for that period and nearly double the same window in 2024, according to a May briefing from World Weather Attribution, a climate-science research collaboration. Africa's savanna belt absorbed the largest share — about 85 million hectares, the highest level since 2012 — while South and Southeast Asia recorded roughly 44 million hectares burned, some 40 percent above the previous 2014 record, with India, China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand all badly affected. Scientists explicitly flagged a developing El Niño as a multiplier that could push the back half of 2026 into what one Imperial College London researcher called "an unprecedented year of global fire," with NOAA in May putting the odds of El Niño

emerging by summer at 82 percent, rising to 96 percent by winter.

The pattern repeats with sobering regional variation closer to home. Los Angeles's January 2025 fires killed 31 people, destroyed nearly 12,000 homes and forced more than 150,000 evacuations, ranking among the five costliest disasters in world history at roughly \$140 billion in total losses and \$40 billion in insured losses alone — the fifth-costliest insured natural disaster on record. A 2026 atmospheric-science analysis found that the "hot drought" behind those fires — abundant vegetation growth from a wet prior winter, followed by extreme dryness — made fires of that intensity 149 percent more probable than baseline conditions, and increased the probable burned area by 210 percent. It is a strikingly similar mechanism to what is now unfolding across parts of the Canadian Prairies.

The Mediterranean endured its worst fire season in over two decades in 2025, with more than 2 million hectares burned across Europe overall and combined European Union burned area exceeding a million hectares for the first time since 2017-era record-keeping began — more than 30 deaths, over 260 injuries, and upward of 105,000 people evacuated. Spain recorded its largest burned area since 2002, at roughly 350,000

to 393,000 hectares depending on methodology; Portugal endured the largest wildfire in its recorded history; and six European nations simultaneously requested emergency firefighting assistance from their neighbors, an extraordinary strain on a continent-wide mutual-aid system built for isolated national emergencies, not simultaneous multinational ones.

The Southern Hemisphere's 2026 opened just as violently. A record-setting heat dome pushed Australian temperatures near 50 degrees Celsius in January, while catastrophic fires swept remote Patagonia in Argentina and killed 21 people in coastal Chilean towns; South Africa, separately, endured its worst wildfire season in years. Reinsurer Swiss Re calculates that wildfires accounted for roughly 1 percent of global insured natural-disaster losses before 2015 and now represent about 7 percent — a sevenfold jump in under a decade — with global insured wildfire losses estimated at \$42 billion in 2025 alone, versus a \$4 billion annual average between 2000 and 2024.

What distinguishes Canada within that global picture is not the raw number of fires but where the carbon goes. Boreal forest holds some of the densest terrestrial carbon stores on Earth, so three consecutive extreme seasons there carry a

climate footprint one-off emergency response; disproportionate to the acreage burned relative to, say, African savanna fires, which burn larger areas but release far less carbon per hectare and are, in many cases, part of long-established agricultural and land-management cycles rather than a departure from them. The downstream health toll compounds accordingly: a peer-reviewed estimate attributed roughly 22,000 early deaths across Europe to smoke that traveled the Atlantic from Canada's 2023 fires alone — a reminder that “local” wildfire smoke is, increasingly, a hemispheric public-health event.

On the American side, the near-term trajectory looks more political than operational: another round of tariff threats, a possible sanctions bill targeting Canadian officials, and continued friction layered onto an already tense trade relationship — with little public indication either side is preparing the kind of joint cross-border forest-and-fire-weather strategy that scientists say the shared boreal-to-prairie fire corridor genuinely requires. That absence is notable given history: in 2023, the Biden administration deployed federal firefighting assets to assist Canada directly after a Biden-Trudeau call, a model of bilateral cooperation that has not been publicly revisited this year even as the underlying crisis has, if anything, grown larger. Longer term, the scientific consensus is blunt and largely untethered from which party governs in either capital:

Where This Is Headed

Short term, both governments are making essentially the same bet: more aircraft, more firefighters, and hope that this year's strengthening El Niño does not fully materialize before the fire season winds down in October. Canada's new aerial surge fleet and its five-year funding commitment suggest Ottawa expects — correctly, based on the trend line — that 2027 and beyond will require standing capacity rather than

as long as global temperatures keep rising and El Niño-strengthened summers become more frequent, boreal North America should expect this to keep happening, on something close to the current cadence of three extreme seasons out of every four. Reinsurance markets are already pricing that expectation in, and fire researchers interviewed by wire services this year have been candid that some of the largest, most intense wildfires — including several of Canada's 2026 blazes — are now simply beyond the physical capacity of any firefighting force to stop outright once conditions align; the honest goal in those cases becomes evacuation, containment of edges, and protection of communities, not extinguishing the fire itself.

What It Means — for Canada, the U.S., and One Earth

For Canada, this is now a structural feature of the national ledger, not an

anomaly to be weathered: a boreal forest larger than most countries, increasingly burning in a pattern that strains provincial and federal budgets, tests interprovincial and Indigenous cooperation, and now exports a foreign-policy liability along with the smoke. The country's own investment numbers — a five-year, \$316.7 million aerial surge program on top of billions already committed — suggest Ottawa has internalized this shift even if its American critics have not credited it.

For the United States, the episode is a preview of a harder truth: that a warming atmosphere does not respect a border drawn along the 49th parallel, and that a purely transactional response — tariffs, blame, sanctions threats — addresses a political grievance without touching the physical one, even as the same administration relaxes its own domestic accounting for pollution's cost to human life. A bill sanctioning Canadian officials, however satisfying

politically, will not reduce lightning strikes over the Northwest Territories or lower the drought index across the Prairies. And for the world, Canada's third consecutive extreme fire season sits inside a global pattern — from the Amazon's edge to the Mediterranean to Siberia to the Los Angeles hillsides — that suggests the boundary between a “Canadian” problem and an “American” problem, or a “developed world” problem and a “developing world” problem, is increasingly artificial. The 150 million hectares that burned globally in just the first four months of 2026 did not respect continental boundaries any more than Canada's smoke respects the U.S. border. The air over New York in July carried carbon that started as a lightning strike in a forest most Americans will never see. That, more than any tariff schedule, is the actual balance sheet — and it is one every government sharing this atmosphere will eventually have to reconcile, together or not at all.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Start planning at
ThisIsPretirement.org



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



Is Sharad Pawar Planning To Merge NCP With NDA? Behind The Ongoing Calculations

The NCP patriarch, turning 86 this year, will have to take a decision soon - before someone else takes it for him.

By Arati R Jerath

The recent flurry of activity around Sharad Pawar and his faction of the NCP has sparked speculation about his next move. His decision could well upset the political chessboard in Maharashtra, where equations remain fragile amid continuing turmoil and uncertainty despite the apparent stability of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA government.

On the face of it, the meetings he and his party leaders have held over the past couple of weeks suggest that Sharad Pawar is seriously considering the option of joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Certainly, this is what the BJP hopes, as Pawar's eight MPs in the Lok Sabha would add much-needed numbers should the Modi government make a second bid to get the contentious delimitation bill passed in the monsoon session of Parliament beginning on July 21.

However, Sharad Pawar is known to keep his cards close to his chest. Consequently, it would be unwise to second-guess a leader who has built himself a formidable reputation as one of the canniest politicians in the country.

A String Of Visits

Despite this caveat, it is obvious that Sharad Pawar is weighing the benefits of leading his party into the NDA. Over the past couple of weeks, he has met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as well as Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Following these interactions, a close aide of Sharad Pawar, Maharashtra MLA Jayant Patil, held late-night talks with Fadnavis. Two prominent MPs from the rival NCP faction headed by late Ajit Pawar's widow Sunetra Pawar, Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare, were also present. Two days later, Patil met Shinde along with another Sharad Pawar loyalist, Jitendra Awhad. The three of them were closeted in a room for more than an hour, and Shinde had to delay his trip

to Delhi for an important NDA meeting ahead of the Parliament session.

If no decision has been announced so far despite all these hectic moves, it's because a second and far more tempting option is unfolding behind the scenes: the possibility of reviving his dream of reuniting his splintered party and preserving the Sharad Pawar legacy in western Maharashtra.

Ajit Pawar's Death

A reunification would have happened by now but for nephew Ajit Pawar's unexpected death in a plane crash in January this year. Although the younger Pawar had dealt his uncle a personal blow by splitting the NCP, joining the NDA, bringing down the MVA government Sharad Pawar had crafted with Uddhav Thackeray as chief minister, and then going on to thrash the NCP(SP) in the assembly elections in 2024, he had a change of heart in late 2025 and had started talks for a merger of the two factions. The timeline was set for early 2026, after the local polls. But then came the tragic passing of Ajit Pawar. It was a bolt out of the blue. Apart from the personal loss, Sharad Pawar found his reunification plan unravelling as the BJP persuaded Ajit Pawar's widow, Sunetra Pawar, to take

on her husband's mantle, lead his party, and fill his position as deputy chief minister in the Fadnavis-led NDA government. **Why Party Leaders Are Miffed With Sunetra Pawar**

According to those who are familiar with the politics of the Pawar clan, she took these steps without consulting Sharad Pawar, who has always ruled the family like a benevolent patriarch. Not surprisingly, she is now rapidly losing authority and control. Being a complete greenhorn in politics, Sunetra Pawar has been increasingly relying on her sons, Parth and Jay, for decisions. This has angered senior members of her party who are chafing at the bit. Mounting resentment in the Ajit Pawar faction towards Sunetra

Pawar and her sons has opened a door to renegotiate a merger with Sharad Pawar. There is no official confirmation of this, but there are several signals that all is not well in Ajit Pawar's NCP. One is the recent late-night meeting Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare had with Sharad Pawar aide Jayant Patil and Devendra Fadnavis. Apparently, Sunetra Pawar was kept in the dark. This has driven another wedge between her and senior leaders of her party. Two, party leader Sachchidanand Singh has come out in the open and waved the flag of rebellion. He served a legal notice to Sunetra Pawar, objecting to her appointment as NCP(AP) resident. The notice said the appointment had violated the party's constitution and should be declared "illegal, non-existent and void". Three, although Praful Patel officially denied reports of trouble within the party, he did acknowledge that "corrective measures" were necessary in the method of functioning. It was a significant admission from a leader who specialises in evasiveness.



BJP Waits With Anticipation

The BJP must be viewing these developments with consternation. It would want to stop the reunification of the NCP at all costs. It understands the stature Sharad Pawar enjoys in Maharashtra, which is why it tends to handle him with caution.

It is worth noting here that the BJP did not try to scuttle his election to the Rajya Sabha earlier this year. This is in sharp contrast to the tactics it has employed in other states against Opposition candidates. If the two factions of the NCP get together again, it would only strengthen Sharad Pawar and make him a more formidable force to contend with. Although his influence is largely limited to western Maharashtra, this region, with its cash-rich sugar cooperatives and significant levels of development, is highly-prized. Sharad Pawar has guarded his fiefdom zealously and managed to prevent the BJP's entry till his party broke and Ajit Pawar crossed over to the NDA.

In the winter of life, as he approaches his 86th birthday, Pawar would want nothing more than to re-establish his control and power in a region that has been his political hunting ground for decades. According to those who know him well, he is looking to complete two tasks before his current term in the Rajya Sabha ends in 2032. One is to leave behind a lasting political legacy. The other is to secure daughter Supriya Sule's political future.

A Difficult Choice

This is where his dilemma lies. He is aware that joining the NDA will destroy his stature and turn him into just another BJP ally.

This is unacceptable for a man who has moved with cunning skill through many ups and downs to rise as Maharashtra's tallest leader and worthy successor to his idol, the late YB Chavan.

He is also sensitive to Supriya Sule's discomfort with the BJP. In fact, those who know her well say that she has consistently opposed an alliance with the BJP, although her father seems to have come close to it several times in recent years. She enjoys a good rapport with Congress leaders, particularly Rahul Gandhi, who seems to be keen to see a homecoming of sorts of Congress splinter groups like the NCP and Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.

Yet, Pawar Sr cannot ignore pressures from within his party as leaders, even those loyal to him, worry about their future in a post-Sharad Pawar scenario. The power seekers are pushing to join hands with the BJP.

Unfortunately, for Sharad Pawar, time and health are not on his side. He will be 86 this year and is physically frail. He has always preferred to wait and watch before making any move. Today, he may not have such luxury of time - not with the BJP breathing down his party's neck. He will have to take a decision soon - before someone else takes it for him.

Trouble for Pakistan on four fronts. Is a new nation on the horizon?

From Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to POK and the Afghan border, Pakistan is facing four distinct but increasingly interconnected crises. Together, they reveal the erosion of state authority and the limits of Asim Munir's security-first approach. A former Afghan leader suggests that a new country might be taking shape.

By Sushim Mukul

Pakistan is battling fires on multiple fronts. One is an insurgency, another an uprising. Across the border, unrest is simmering, and then, there is also one that Islamabad has effectively turned into an undeclared conflict.

From Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) and the Afghanistan border, the Pakistani establishment, led by military chief Asim Munir, is facing four distinct but increasingly interconnected crises. Armed Baloch rebels are demonstrating greater reach and coordination in their attacks. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is hammering Pakistani security forces in KP and expanding into Pashtun areas of Balochistan. In POK, a movement over political representation, rights and resources is surviving arrests, killings and communication blackouts, even as the establishment has pushed in at least 8,000 personnel into the disputed and occupied Indian region.

Meanwhile, on the Durand Line, Pakistan's former Taliban allies have become adversaries. Air strikes, drones and artillery have replaced the cordial dua-salaam over kehwa in Kabul's Serena Hotel lobby.

According to the Global Terrorism Index 2026, 1,139 "terrorism-related" deaths in 2025 (the highest since 2013) were reported in Pakistan. Although attacks declined in June 2026, the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) recorded 118 attacks, 112 fatalities and 148 injuries during the month. While terrorism is indefensible, many of these armed groups are blowback from Pakistan's decades-long pursuit of "strategic depth" in the region.

"Daily attacks, one day it is KP, next day it is Balochistan and then again next day KP. We are now facing a total war-like situation in two of our four provinces," Bahawalpur-based entrepreneur Bilal Khalid said on X.

It was amid these signs of overstretch that former Afghan vice-president and intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh posted a cryptic message on July 13. "There are preliminary signs that a new country will be born in our region. Guess its name," Saleh wrote on X.

He did not identify the territory he was referring to. But the Pakistani establishment is taking a beating almost every other day, and the signs are far from what Munir would want to see. The simultaneous crises have revived questions, even from quarters in Pakistan, about whether its establishment would prefer to remain buried.



Strategic affairs expert Brahma Chellaney, in a post on X on Thursday, said Pakistan was confronting a "widening crisis of state authority" as protests and insurgency exposed a shared pattern of marginalisation and political disenfranchisement. Their problems, he argued, exposed the limits of Islamabad's "security-first approach" and its weakening ability to govern through "consent rather than brute force".

BALUCHISTAN'S TWO-HEADED INSURGENCY

In Balochistan, which Pakistan illegally annexed after betraying and forcing the Khan of Kalat to step down in 1948, is facing the worst brunt of armed resistance. Rooted in long-standing grievances over political exclusion, resource exploitation and enforced disappearances, armed resistance has been a mainstay in Balochistan. At the same time, peaceful activists such as Mahrang Baloch have faced arrests and life imprisonment sentences. Others have been forcibly disappeared.

Recently, in the first and second weeks of July, TTP militants overran a police post near Mangi Dam in Balochistan's Ziarat district. They killed nine policemen, including two station house officers. Eighteen policemen were abducted and subsequently executed.

Two days later, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants ambushed a Pakistan Army convoy in the Bela-Winder area of Lasbela district, killing 11 soldiers, including a junior commissioned officer. Along with another attack near Quetta that killed four civilians, the violence left at least 38 Pakistani security personnel and four civilians dead in four days.

Recently, the chief of JUI-F, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, dared Asim Munir to "remove his uniform and contest elections". At the same rally, Rahman said, "Even today, the writ of the Pakistani government does not exist in Balochistan."

What makes the crisis in Balochistan

particularly difficult for Islamabad is that it is fighting two ideologically distinct enemies, according to experts. The BLA seeks an independent Balochistan, while the TTP wants to impose its version of Islamic rule on Pakistan.

"As Baloch areas continue to face BLA attacks, TTP is now expanding its presence in Balochistan's Pashtun region," Waziristan-based conflict journalist Ihsanullah Tipu Mehsud wrote on X. This, he said, had forced the state to confront "two ideologically distinct militant fronts: an ethnonationalist and an Islamist" one.

The BLA's coordinated attacks across more than 10 cities in January demonstrated that it could temporarily seize urban spaces and strike police stations, banks, railway infrastructure and security installations.

Recently, an X account, named Mir Yar Baloch, which claims links to the Baloch liberation movement, asserted (without offering verifiable evidence) that Baloch groups, rather than the Pakistani State, controlled 85% of the province.

Pakistani economist R Kakar described the situation as the "gravest security crisis" in Balochistan's modern history, even as its coverage in "Pakistan proper remains negligible".

Security analyst Muhammad Amir Rana, writing in the Pakistani daily Dawn, claimed that the insurgents had remained "geographically dispersed, operationally flexible and strategically deliberate". He added that fewer attacks in a particular month could represent tactical recalibration rather than the weakening of the insurgency.

KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA BLEEDS AS THE TTP ADAPTS

If the BLA is stretching the capabilities of the Pakistani establishment across Balochistan, the TTP is keeping Rawalpindi's forces tied down in adjoining KP, particularly the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Attacks, ambushes and targeted killings have become routine across North and

South Waziristan, Bannu, Bajaur, Khyber and Dera Ismail Khan. On Wednesday, three policemen were killed and at least 20 injured in an ambush in Upper Dir and a suicide attack on a police station in Bannu, reported the Associated Press.

TTP militants have also expanded their use of commercial quadcopters for attacks on police stations and checkpoints. The tactic, first seen frequently around Bannu and North Waziristan, has spread to other districts. "The country is no longer dealing with a single-dimensional terrorist threat," Security analyst Muhammad Amir Rana wrote in Dawn, pointing to a layered contest involving militant drones, cross-border sanctuaries, retaliatory strikes and information warfare.

In May, the US, citing security concerns, announced that it would shut its Peshawar mission.

The Pakistani state refers to the TTP as "Fitna al-Khawarij" and frequently announces large militant casualties in intelligence-based operations. But repeated Pakistani operations have not prevented the TTP from regenerating after the collapse of its ceasefire with Islamabad in November 2022.

The group is also no longer confined to its old tribal strongholds. Its attacks in Ziarat and presence around Quetta show that the KP and Balochistan theatres are beginning to overlap. It appears that the Pakistani military is being forced to divide intelligence, personnel and air assets between distant districts.

POK PROTESTS SURVIVE PAK CRACKDOWN. BUT FOR HOW LONG?

The challenge in POK is different for the establishment. It is not primarily an armed insurgency but a mass political movement that the Pakistani establishment has increasingly treated as a security threat.

For more than a month, the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) has mobilised people over inflation, electricity and flour prices, political rights and the 12 legislative seats reserved for refugees from Jammu and Kashmir settled elsewhere in Pakistan. Protesters argued that these seats allow Islamabad to influence the regional assembly at the expense of local representation.

The movement has survived arrests, internet suspensions and the proscription of JAAC under anti-terrorism laws. At least nine people were killed in clashes on July 14, according to Reuters.

Ahead of a proposed march from Rawalakot to Muzaffarabad, around 4,000 Rangers, police and Frontier Corps personnel were deployed. Cities were

sealed, while journalists were reportedly prevented from entering Rawalakot amid what was described as an undeclared media blackout. JAAC leaders claimed that 40,000 people planned to join the march.

JAAC leader Sardar Aman Khan has accused Pakistan of first arming Kashmiris for its strategic objectives and now branding protesters terrorists. His attack and rhetoric on the establishment has sharpened as the crackdown has intensified, even as the movement's stated demands are centred on representation, resources and rights. The unrest in POK might automatically not be read as a secessionist movement. However, pro-India slogans and the inability of the establishment to settle civic and constitutional grievances without paramilitary force has deepened alienation in an illegally-occupied region it projects as content with Pakistani control.

THE AFGHAN BORDER HAS BECOME A BATTLEFRONT

Pakistan once celebrated the Taliban's return to Kabul as a strategic victory. Remember the visual from the Serena Hotel? Five years later, its border with Afghanistan has become an active military front.

Islamabad has accused the Taliban government of sheltering TTP leaders. Kabul denied this and described the violence as Pakistan's internal problem. The disagreement has moved beyond routine demarches.

After an attack on the Rangers' headquarters in Karachi in June, Pakistan conducted a ground operation near Bajaur and air strikes in Afghanistan's Paktia, Paktika and Kunar provinces. Islamabad said 29 militants were killed. UN figures cited by Reuters said at least 28 civilians were killed and 49 injured.

But, even as the superior Pakistani forces have hit several targets in Pakistan, the Taliban has hit back with whatever resources it has had. Back in February, the Taliban-led Afghan military, dismissed as fragmented and under-equipped, claimed it carried out air and drone strikes on multiple Pakistani military targets, including sites near Islamabad.

As a result, the Durand Line now serves both as a conventional border and a point of repeated armed confrontations. Pakistan bombs suspected "terror sanctuaries", but every strike risks retaliation from the Taliban and further strengthens anti-Pakistan sentiment across the border, and also in the Pathan-dominated KP across the border.

FOUR FIRES IN PAK. IS A NEW NATION LOADING?

Former Afghan vice-president and intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh's suggestion of a new country makes for an arresting question, especially when Baloch rebels are displaying unprecedented operational reach and POK protesters are openly challenging Islamabad. It should not, however, be taken for an intelligence assessment or evidence (on Saleh's part) of an approaching redrawing of borders in South Asia.

It must be noted that the four crises

facing Pakistan do not form a single rebellion. The BLA, TTP, JAAC and Afghan Taliban have different identities, objectives and methods. Some are even hostile to one another. What connects them is their common ability to expose the limits of Pakistani state power and bring things to a standstill.

Even Pakistan Defence Minister

Khawaja Asif has offered an extraordinary diagnosis recently. "I want to warn the powerful quarters... The country has fallen apart. Today, separatist movements are active in two provinces of Pakistan," he said in Pakistan's National Assembly. Indian strategic-affairs analyst Sushant Sareen believes Pakistan's internal pressure could produce

a danger beyond its borders. Pakistani generals, he warned, might resort to external "military adventurism" to divert attention and rally the country.

But Pakistan's current predicament and the challenges confronting its establishment make Saleh's question conceivable and difficult for Islamabad to dismiss.



fatherhood.gov

US Attack On Chabahar, And Why It's Time India Stopped Playing By Others' Whims

As the US destroys Chabahar in Iran, one thing is clear: India cannot wait eternally for the whims of others to do what is vital for its own interests.

By Aditi Bhaduri

The US Central Command on Friday confirmed on a post on X that "on July 16, US forces successfully destroyed the Chah Bahar Shahid Kalantari Port surveillance tower, part of a maritime surveillance network along Iran's Gulf of Oman coastline used for decades by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to track and target commercial vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz". The Ministry of External Affairs immediately assuaged fears about damage to India's interests at the port site. India has invested in developing the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar port. But the reignition of the conflict once again puts India's plans and ambitions under a cloud.

III-Fated From The Beginning

Ever since the Chabahar port project was first mooted, it had been plagued by uncertainties stemming from Western sanctions on Iran. The nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the 'JCPOA') between Iran on one hand and the US, the UK, France, Russia, China, Germany, and the European Union on the other, provided a brief respite. Nonetheless, India went ahead and, in 2016, signed a trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan for the port, earmarking USD 500 million for the development of the Shahid Beheshti terminal. Since 2018, the port's operations have been managed by the New Delhi-backed India Ports Global Limited (IPGL).

However, in his first term, as US President Donald Trump pulled out of the JCPOA, sanctions on Iran came back. Still, given the port's usefulness in sending supplies to Afghanistan from India, bypassing Pakistan, Trump perhaps felt incentivised to waive sanctions on it, and India could continue with its engagement and outreach to Afghanistan. In 2024, India even announced that it was signing a 10-year contract with Iran for the operation of the Chabahar port.

All this alludes to just how critical the port is to India's geo-strategic and geo-economic ambitions. Anodyne analyses, about Chabahar being crucial only because it allows India to bypass Pakistan and access Afghanistan and Central Asia, are lazy at best and ignore the larger picture. Governments change, regimes collapse, wars end, and even borders may change. Geography, however, is a constant. The Chabahar port - and by extension Iran - is important for India because much of India's

Eurasian policy hinges on it.

Why Chabahar Matters So Much

Iran's Chabahar Port on the country's east coast is the nearest node for India to reach not just Afghanistan and Central Asia, but also Russia and Europe. In terms of trade and connectivity, its significance has grown exponentially over the past few years and continues to increase with each geopolitical escalation. Just a few years ago, the frailties of the traditional Suez Canal route had been exposed as a stuck megaship completely stopped all traffic in the canal for six days. In this regard, Chabahar is easily the closest and far more cost-effective alternative.

Beyond Chabahar, Iran is also important for India's access to the Russian Federation as well as to the South Caucasus, the Balkans, and West Europe through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The INSTC is the shortest trade route between India and Russia, 30% cheaper and 40% shorter than the Suez, significantly reducing transit time for Europe-bound shipments. Iran thus becomes a gateway to India's access to the Black Sea and Mediterranean ports via a route that runs through Iran, Armenia, and Georgia.

Chabahar's role is further bolstered by the setback the India-Middle East-Europe Trade Corridor project has received due to the Iran war. Instead of going through Israel, as originally envisaged, the Saudis are re-routing the IMEC through Syria and India's rival, Turkey. Chabahar can provide an alternative route to Mediterranean and Black Sea ports for India, bypassing Turkey. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz similarly strengthens Chabahar's appeal as the port lies outside the route and can be accessed easily.

The Rise Of China

Geopolitically, too, Chabahar serves an important function. It is a counter to the China-developed Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's mediation role notwithstanding, Iran-Pakistan relations have always been complex and complicated, which allows Iran to act as a balancing player on Pakistan's western borders.

Operation Sindoor revealed the Pakistan-Azerbaijan-Turkiye nexus against India. This has automatically translated to India cooperating more closely with Azerbaijan's rival, Armenia. Iran borders Armenia and provides India a land route to it, which India has utilised

to transport defence hardware to the country. India needs to keep this route open, given that with American intervention in the South Caucasus, an overland trade and transport Corridor, the 'Trump Route for Peace and Prosperity' (TRIPP) is being developed, which will give Turkey unfettered access to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia and, consequently, to Pakistan.

Advantage Turkey And Pak

However, Turkey and Pakistan are not the only ones benefiting from the destruction of Chabahar. For instance, the Middle Corridor, or the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, already allows China access to Europe through Eurasia, bypassing the Suez. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) allows China direct access to the Arabian Sea. And China already has a rail route to and from Iran. If India cannot access Chabahar, then she will become just a mute onlooker, unable to exercise any agency in Eurasia and dependent only on longer traditional routes. In geostrategic terms, therefore, Iran is a crucial cog in India's South Caucasian outreach.

Yet, India's options are being constrained while those of its rivals are being enabled. Even when it is not India alone that stands to benefit from Chabahar. Iranians are equally invested in engaging India. This was most recently articulated by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Delhi during the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting, where he pitched Chabahar as a golden gateway. Last year, after the 12-day Iran-Israel war, Iranian strategic thinkers had told this author that Iran did not want to put all its eggs in the Chinese basket. China is majorly involved in Iran's infrastructure development, and Iran would wish to have India's imprint, too, in port and strategic infrastructure development there. India should not cede this strategic space to others.

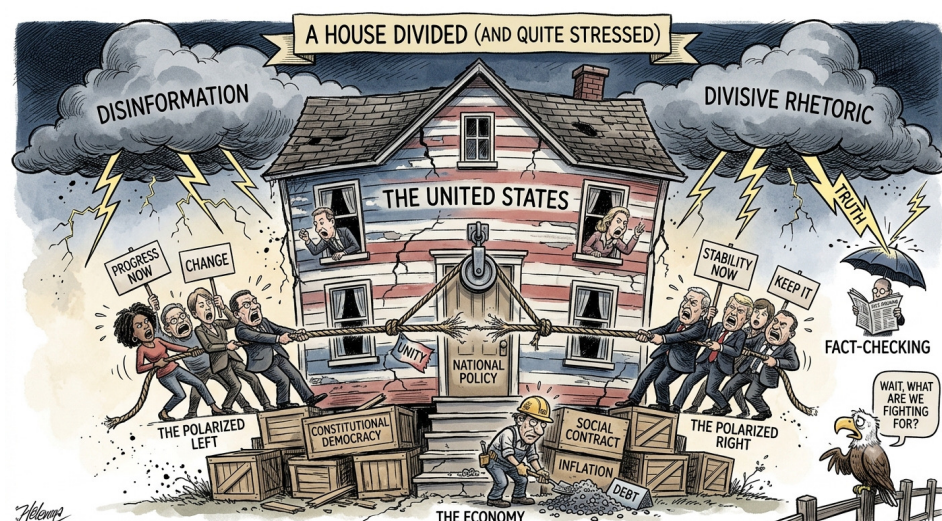
A Costly Waiting Game For India

Chabahar, quite possibly, is ever more important for India's outreach to Afghanistan today, where Pakistan has declared a trade war and blockade against it. In April this year, the US withdrew the sanctions waiver on Chabahar, and India, being risk-averse, had to retreat from it for the time being, having fulfilled its payment obligations.

The spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Randhir Jaiswal, explained at a briefing, "Regarding Chabahar ... there was a waiver granted by the American side, which expired some time ago. Since then, we have been in discussions with relevant stakeholders on how to take this matter forward."

It's not as if policymakers don't understand Chabahar's salience. As soon as the MoU for a peace agreement was signed between the US and Iran, reports appeared of India's plans to revive the 700-km Chabahar-Zahedan railway corridor in Iran, a project that India has committed itself to but has so far been unable to implement. Moreover, a range of Central Asian countries have also become party to the Chabahar port project as it serves their connectivity and trade with South and Southeast Asia.

The recent destruction at Chabahar marks another setback to port development and India's position there. Whatever the state of the US-Iran ceasefire now, one thing is clear: India cannot wait eternally for the whims of others to do what is vital for its own interests. It's taxpayers' money that has gone into the development of the Shahid Beheshti terminal. Sooner or later, India will have to take a call on how far it is willing to engage with the project, irrespective of sanctions, waivers, and other such constraints.



Quitting smoking
was hard.
**Screening for lung
cancer is easy.**



If you smoked, you may still be at risk,
but early detection could save your life.

Get **SavedByTheScan.org**

American
Lung
Association.

ad
COUNCIL

Scrutiny Mounts Over UK Skilled-Worker Visa Sponsorships

Government records reveal small businesses issued thousands of visas under broad eligibility rules

A Freedom of Information request submitted to the UK Home Office revealed that 159 kebab shops and 83 businesses with Halal in their name hold sponsor licenses under the Skilled Worker visa program. A single halal butcher sponsored more than 900 visas since 2021. While critics argue the list of eligible occupations is overly broad, officials maintain that licenses are granted only to legitimate, operational businesses.

UK Cabinet Expansion Includes Kanishka Narayan and Lisa Nandy

New Prime Minister Andy Burnham appoints Britain's first Cabinet-level AI minister

Prime Minister Andy Burnham has named Bihar-born MP Kanishka Narayan as Britain's first Cabinet-level AI minister. Narayan, who represents the Vale of Glamorgan, is also the first ethnic-minority MP elected in Wales. Meanwhile, Manchester-born Lisa Nandy retains her position as Culture Secretary in the restructured Cabinet.

Tourist Sentenced to Prison Following Diamond Theft in Singapore

Perpetrators swapped a high-value gem for a replica before being arrested at the airport

Mangroliya Manojkumar Kurjibhai, a 41-year-old tourist from India, received a prison sentence exceeding two years after pleading guilty to stealing a \$154,000 diamond from a Chinatown jewelry shop. Kurjibhai swapped the real stone with a fake, which was concealed in an accomplice's mouth. Both suspects were detained at Changi Airport later that day; legal proceedings for the accomplice remain ongoing.

India's Skyroot Aerospace Achieves Private Orbital Launch

Launch places India among few nations with private orbital capabilities amid visa policy updates

Skyroot Aerospace successfully launched its Vikram-1 rocket from Sriharikota on July 18, reaching a 450-kilometer orbit and making India the third country with private orbital launch capabilities. The achievement comes as new Department of Homeland Security visa regulations introduce four-year limits on F-1 and J-1 stays, which also impact international STEM researchers associated with commercial space endeavors.

New York City Mayor Acknowledges Limits on ICC Warrant Enforcement

Legal review confirms local authorities lack jurisdiction to arrest visiting foreign leaders

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani stated that an internal legal review concluded municipal authorities lack the legal power to enforce International Criminal Court arrest warrants against foreign leaders, reversing a previous campaign position regarding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Mamdani reiterated his criticism of Netanyahu while requesting federal intervention, while President Trump affirmed that Netanyahu would not face arrest in the United States.



Nirav Shah Suspends Campaign in Maine Senate Race

Public health chief endorses Troy Jackson to unify Democrats against Susan Collins

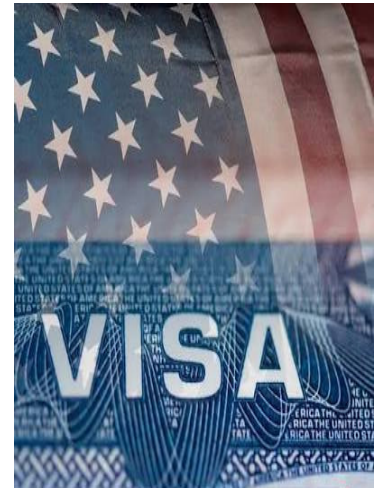
Dr. Nirav Shah, former public health chief for Maine and Illinois, has suspended his Democratic campaign for the U.S. Senate. Shah announced his endorsement of Senate President Troy Jackson, citing the necessity of party unity to challenge Republican Senator Susan Collins. His departure coincided with the withdrawal of fellow candidate Shenna Bellows on the same day.



US Federal Indictment Uncovers Visa Scheme Linked to Crime Syndicate

Scheme allegedly lured minors with promises of foreign visas to commit violent crimes

A 44-page U.S. federal indictment has charged 15 individuals tied to a Punjab-origin crime syndicate, including Jaggu Bhagwanpuria. Authorities allege the organization recruited vulnerable youth by promising U.S. and Canadian visas, paying some individuals as little as \$200 to carry out violent acts, including murders. Defendant Nitish Kaushal was apprehended by the FBI in Vermont.



Second Lady Usha Vance Welcomes Baby Boy



Historic birth marks the first for a sitting Vice President's spouse in over 150 years

Second Lady Usha Vance gave birth to a son, Alec Neel Vance, at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Sunday. Vice President JD Vance confirmed that both mother and child are in good health. The event marks the first time in more than 150 years that the spouse of a sitting Vice President has given birth while in office.

OpenAI Appoints Uday Ruddarraju as CTO of Compute



Former xAI lead promoted to manage infrastructure for upcoming AI models

OpenAI has named Uday Ruddarraju as Chief Technology Officer of Compute, one year after he joined the firm. Ruddarraju, an alumnus of the Chaitanya Bharathi Institute of Technology and former head of infrastructure at xAI, will lead the expansion and management of compute infrastructure required to train next-generation AI models, including GPT-5.6.

DHS Imposes Four-Year Cap on US Student Visas



New restriction replaces duration of status, raising concerns for doctoral and medical candidates

A new Department of Homeland Security regulation effective September 15, 2026, will cap F-1 and J-1 visa stays at a maximum of four years, ending the longstanding duration of status framework. The Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies has appealed to Congress to reinstate previous protections, noting that medical degrees, doctoral programs, and specialized research frequently require more than four years to complete.

Canadian Foreign Minister Makes Historic Visit to Pakistan

Anita Anand becomes first Canadian foreign minister to visit the nation in nearly two decades

Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand traveled to Pakistan for official meetings with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar. The visit focused on expanding bilateral trade, investment opportunities, and educational exchanges. Anand is the first Canadian foreign minister to visit Pakistan in nearly 20 years and the first Canadian cabinet minister of Indian origin to do so.



Federal Reserve Appoints Top Experts to New Economic Task Forces

Chair Kevin Warsh taps prominent figures from finance, academia, and tech to review monetary policy

Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh has established five specialized task forces to review U.S. monetary policy. Former Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan will co-chair the Balance Sheet Policy group, while Harvard economist Raj Chetty co-leads the Data group. Tech leaders including Microsoft Xbox CEO Asha Sharma, Marc Andreessen, and Stanford economist Charles Jones will lead the Productivity and Jobs task force.



Singapore Hosts Inaugural Onam Boat Race at Jurong Lake



Event marks the start of a month-long cultural festival for the local Malayalee community

More than 400 rowers gathered at Jurong Lake for Singapore's first traditional Vallam Kali-style snake-boat race. Organized by the Singapore Kairalee Kala Nilayam, the sporting event launched a month-long Onam celebration scheduled through August 15, serving the city-state's population of approximately 40,000 Malayalees.

Bangladesh After Hasina Is A Warning To India Under PM Modi: Look Who Inherits The Streets

Two leaders built two of the most consequential growth stories in modern Asia. Sheikh Hasina governed Bangladesh for fifteen years and turned it into a garment-export powerhouse with one of the fastest poverty-reduction records anywhere in the world, with countless developments. Narendra Modi has spent over a decade turning India into the fastest-growing major economy on earth, a global manufacturing base, and a digital-public-infrastructure model the rest of the developing world now studies. Both records deserve to be judged on their own terms, and neither leader deserves to be blamed for a mob's decision to burn down what took decades to build.

That is precisely why the two street movements now testing Dhaka's legacy and Delhi's present deserve a harder look than the applause they have received abroad. A distorted sentence, twice

Both uprisings trace back to a single sentence, stripped of its context and set loose online.

In July 2024, at a routine press conference, Sheikh Hasina was not volunteering an attack. She was answering a direct question about the student quota protests, and she answered it with a rhetorical question of her own: if quota benefits meant for the descendants of freedom fighters did not go to them, who should receive them instead, the grandchildren of Razakars, the epithet for wartime collaborators from 1971? It was one line inside a much longer exchange, an answer that only made sense next to the question that had prompted it. Within hours, it no longer existed next to that question. It had been lifted out, captioned, and pushed across social media as though she had turned to the protesters and called them traitors outright. She had not.

Hasina said as much almost as soon as the clip began spreading. "I did not call the students razakars. My comment was distorted," she said. But a head of government correcting the record cannot outrun a fifteen-word clip already circulating without her. By the time her explanation reached anyone, the sentence had already been separated from the question it answered and handed to a movement that needed a villain more than it needed the transcript. A policy dispute over civil service quotas became a movement to remove a government on the strength of a line she never finished being allowed to explain.

Two years and one continent later, the same mechanics played out in New Delhi. In May 2026, Chief Justice Surya Kant, addressing the misuse of fraudulent professional degrees, remarked that some people who cannot find work turn to social media and public activism and compared them to

"cockroaches" and "parasites of society". Kant clarified within days that the remark was aimed specifically at holders of fake degrees, not India's youth, whom he called the pillars of a developed India. It made no difference. A satirical account built on the clipped remark had gathered three million followers within seventy-eight hours, and by July the Cockroach Janta Party was marching on Parliament.

Two places, two manipulations of speeches, two clarifications that arrived too late to stop a movement already in motion. It is worth asking what kind of organising produces a three-million-follower base and a national street movement in ten weeks, out of a sentence a chief justice says was never meant the way it was used.

Whatever the manner of her exit, the record from 2009 to 2024 is not in serious dispute. Bangladesh's garment sector grew into the world's second largest, GDP expanded at roughly six to seven per cent a year for over a decade, extreme poverty was cut by more than half, the Padma Bridge and Dhaka's metro rail were built without the foreign financing strings that constrain so many developing nations, and electricity access reached villages that had never had it. Bangladesh's own graduation from least-developed-country status, now scheduled for November 2026, is the direct result of thresholds her government crossed.

The scramble that followed

What has happened to that inheritance since is worth stating plainly, because it rarely fits into a single headline. In the space of about eighteen months, Bangladesh's unelected interim administration has signed a defence cooperation NDA with the United States in June 2025, accepted a US trade deal in February 2026 carrying a 19 per cent reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi exports, committed the country to a fifteen-year, roughly 8.5 billion dollar LNG purchase agreement with Excelerate Energy, moved to buy 14 Boeing aircraft for the national carrier at a cost of roughly 3 billion dollars, agreed with Islamabad on JF-17 fighter jets, new sea links and eased import restrictions after a December 2024 meeting between Yunus and Pakistan's prime minister, opened a government-to-government drone factory with China while moving toward buying Chinese J-10CE fighters, and begun negotiations for Turkish ATAK helicopters, South Korean submarines and a defence pact with Japan.

None of this scale or pace of dealmaking, across four militaries and as many economic patrons, happened in fifteen years under Sheikh Hasina.

(Contd on page 11)

Iran, China, Canada: A Defense of Trump's Grand Strategy

For a president routinely accused of having no strategy at all, Donald Trump's foreign policy over the past six months reveals something closer to the opposite: a deliberate, if unglamorous, reordering of American priorities that critics in both parties have been too invested in their own theories of decline to notice.

Start with Iran. The strikes on Tehran's nuclear infrastructure were not, as skeptics insisted, another Middle East quagmire in waiting. They were the opposite - a decisive use of force designed to close out a decades-old problem so that Washington could stop treating the region as the center of gravity in American

infinite, and that pretending otherwise for another generation only accelerates the very decline the hawks claim to fear.

Which brings us to Canada. Prime Minister Mark Carney's flirtation with a "middle powers" bloc - nations banding together to hedge against dependence on Washington - has been received in some quarters as evidence that Trump's approach is alienating allies. Read differently, it is proof the strategy is working exactly as intended. For too long, American security guarantees were treated as background weather: permanent, unconditional, requiring nothing in return. A world that assumes Washington will always show up has no incentive to invest in its own defense, its own resolve, or its own alignment with American interests. Ottawa's unease is the sound of a capital recalculating - which is precisely what happens when a great power stops signaling that its commitments are unconditional.

None of this is cost-free. Allies unsettled by unpredictability may hedge in ways that genuinely weaken Western cohesion, and a Pentagon distracted by Iran even briefly is a Pentagon that has, by its own logic, taken its eye off Beijing. Those are legitimate arguments, and Colby's own confirmation hearings were consumed by Republicans making them. But grand strategy is not the art of avoiding all risk. It is the art of choosing which risks are worth running. Trump's approach is a bet that the world will take American power more seriously, not less, once it understands that power will no longer be extended by habit. Whether that bet pays off will be the story of the next several years - but the world would do well not to assume it can simply wait Washington out.

That same logic runs through the administration's approach to China. The new National Defense Strategy names Beijing the "pacing threat" but pairs that designation with a homeland-first, Western Hemisphere-first posture - burden-sharing pushed onto allies, industrial capacity rebuilt at home, and resources no longer spread thin propping up commitments that other nations have been content to let America shoulder alone. Critics on the Hill call this retreat. It is better understood as discipline: a recognition that American power is not



ISSN No. 1554 06X

By TSAI Editorial Board

(Members of The South Asian Insider Weekly's Editorial Board are experienced and respected journalists, who offer reasoned opinions based on hard facts, to encourage informed/constructive debate about the issues facing South Asian community in the United States.)

Editor in Chief

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Tel: 646 875 8495

Managing Editor:

Amaninder Singh Thind

Email: editor@thesouthasianinsider.com

Special Correspondent (New York)

Raaj Raahi

Mailing Address:

NuWay Media Group Inc.

223 W, 38th Street, Suite 4

Manhattan, New York 10018

For General and Advertising Inquiries:

thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Publisher: NuWay Media Group Inc.

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

Bangladesh After Hasina Is A Warning To India Under PM Modi: Look Who Inherits The Streets

A country that once negotiated from the position of a rising exporter is now being introduced to tariffs, tied procurement and defence shopping lists within two years of her removal, and the bill for all of it is only starting to arrive. The 19 per cent tariff will be paid by Bangladeshi garment workers and exporters for years to come. The LNG contract and the aircraft order are locked in for a decade or more, no matter who sits in Dhaka next. And the country's graduation out of least-developed status this November, the very milestone Hasina's growth made possible, will strip away the trade preferences that eased that growth, arriving in the same season as a mountain of new debt and defence procurement. Two years after the streets were cleared, the students who marched can point to a change of faces in government and little else. The contracts, the tariffs, the fighter jets and the LNG terminals belong to Washington, Islamabad, Beijing, Ankara, and Seoul. So far, it is foreign treasuries and foreign defence industries that have collected on what the protest made possible,

and Bangladesh that is left to pay for it, in losses that will only compound as each of these deals comes due.

Who actually inherited the streets

The students who camped in Shahbagh were not organised as a party and did not ask to be governed by one. But somebody had to fill the vacuum they created, and in February 2026's election, the answer arrived. The BNP took the largest bloc of seats, and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, a party whose registration was once cancelled outright and whose senior leadership was executed after war-crimes trials, won 68 seats on the strength of a student wing that had spent the interim years quietly capturing campus union after campus union. Analysts have called it nothing less than a resurrection. The street did not hand power to itself. It handed power to whoever was organised enough to be waiting when the shouting stopped.

That is the question India's own leaderless movement has not yet been forced to answer, because it has not yet won anything. But it is worth asking now, before the answer is written

for it, who exactly is positioned to inherit a march on Parliament that a self-described nobody organised into three million followers in seventy-eight hours. A movement that insists it has no leaders and no funders is also, by definition, a movement that cannot vouch for who is standing beside it.

What toppling a government actually looks like

The romantic version of Dhaka's July uprising leaves out what came after the celebrations. In the weeks following Sheikh Hasina's departure, mobs burned Awami League offices and the homes of party officials across the country; her family residence at Dhanmondi 32 was set on fire and later bulldozed, statues and murals commemorating the 1971 liberation war were vandalised, and rights groups documented a wave of attacks on Hindu temples, businesses and homes belonging to the country's religious minority. None of that violence was ordered by any government. It was the predictable consequence of what happens when a state topples overnight

and no institution is left standing to keep order in the vacuum. It is the scenario India's own protesters should study most closely, because it is the one outcome that a leaderless movement can never control once it starts.

India at its peak has more to lose, not less

India today sits where Bangladesh once did, at the top of its own growth curve, courted by every major power rather than bargaining away assets to them. The grievances driving young Indians into the streets, examination paper leaks, graduate unemployment, and a demand for accountability from an education minister are legitimate and deserve a real answer. None of them require a march that ends in tear gas, baton charges, and a 59-year-old hunger striker hospitalised. None of them are served by a movement that markets itself as spontaneous and leaderless while behaving, in scale and speed, like something considerably more organised.

A better path for India's youth

Bangladesh's students got the regime change they

marched for. Two years on, they are still finding out what it actually cost them: a foreign policy being renegotiated in Washington, Islamabad, Beijing and Ankara rather than Dhaka, a Jamaat-e-Islami revival few of them voted for directly, and a graduation from least-developed status arriving with fewer of the trade privileges that would have made it sweet. India's young protesters still have every option Bangladesh's no longer do: a functioning Parliament to lobby, courts, a free press covering their grievances daily, and an election calendar that will eventually put the very minister they are angry at back before voters. Use those tools. Petition, litigate, vote, organise openly and transparently enough that no one can credibly ask who is really behind the movement. The one thing a nation at the peak of its development can least afford is to discover, the way Bangladesh did, that the crowd that toppled a government was never the same as the hands that caught it. Violence will only destroy their future and the future of India.

By Abu Obaidha Arin

The Beginning

MAD MEN

OF

NU WAY ADVERTISING

About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh

MAD MEN
OF
NU WAY ADVERTISING

The War the Global South Is Paying For

This is not a world war, and it need not become a depression. But the bill for the U.S.-Iran conflict is being delivered to capitals that have no seat at the table — New Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka among them.



On Wednesday morning, American aircraft completed their eleventh consecutive night of strikes on Iran. The Pentagon named an eighteenth American service member killed. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told Congress the war has cost \$37.5 billion, a figure insiders concede is conservative, and President Trump repeated that allies — Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Emirates — should reimburse the United States for the trouble.

It is a revealing demand. Washington is arguing about who reimburses America. Nobody is asking who reimburses everyone else.

Because the true ledger of this war is not kept in Washington or Tehran. It is kept at petrol pumps in Lucknow, in the electricity bills of Karachi, in the garment factories of Dhaka watching freight rates climb. Brent crude touched a six-week high near \$94 a barrel this week, up more than a fifth in a single month, as tanker traffic thinned in not one chokepoint but two — the Strait of Hormuz and, increasingly, the Bab el-Mandeb. India imports roughly 85 percent of its crude; every \$10 added to a barrel adds an estimated \$15 billion to its annual import bill, widens the current account deficit, presses the rupee and feeds inflation. Pakistan and Bangladesh, with thinner reserves and millions of workers in the Gulf whose remittances now sit in the blast radius, absorb the same shock with

far less cushion. South Asia is neither belligerent nor bystander in this war. It is the paymaster.

Let us first dispose of the two fears dominating dinner-table conversation across our community: world war and global depression. Neither is the likely destination, and saying so is not complacency — it is arithmetic.

The defining feature of this conflict is not who is fighting but who is staying out. China and Russia are buying discounted oil and issuing statements; neither has a treaty obligation or an existential stake that would pull it into direct combat with the United States. Iran fights alone, its proxy network degraded, its new Supreme Leader unconsolidated and in hiding. The honest historical parallel is not 1914. It is the Tanker War of the 1980s, fought at higher intensity — a grinding, regionalized attrition over a waterway, punctuated by negotiation. Indeed, even this week, amid the strikes, Secretary Rubio declared Washington willing to negotiate, and Iran's interior minister traveled to Islamabad to keep Pakistan's mediation alive. Wars headed for world war do not send ministers to mediators.

Nor is depression the baseline. Economists calculate that oil would need to average around \$140 a barrel for two months to tip major economies into even mild recession; BlackRock's Larry Fink puts his own red line at a

sustained \$150. At \$94, the world is uncomfortable, not collapsing. The IMF still projects 3 percent global growth this year. A 1930s-style depression would require a financial-system rupture layered atop the energy shock, and credit markets, for now, function.

But here is the second-order truth the front pages miss: the distance between "not a depression" and "no damage" is precisely where South Asia lives. The advanced economies have strategic reserves, domestic shale, and central banks whose credibility can absorb one more inflation overshoot. The developing world has none of these. When the IEA calls this the largest supply disruption in the history of the oil market, the disruption is not distributed equally — it is exported southward and eastward, to energy-importing nations that had no vote in the war's beginning and will have no chair at its end. Inside Iran itself, the province bordering the Strait of Hormuz now reports inflation above 100 percent. That is the extreme edge of a gradient that runs, in softening degrees, straight through Mumbai, Colombo and Chittagong. And the quiet, compounding danger is this: two major inflation shocks within four years risk de-anchoring expectations worldwide, embedding a permanent risk premium into the price of money. The next supply shock — and there will be a

next one — will land on economies made structurally more fragile by this one. For nations still climbing the development ladder, that premium is a tax on the future, levied by a war they did not choose. So what should be demanded? When this conflict ends — and our judgment remains that a second, colder ceasefire by autumn is likelier than escalation to the abyss — the settlement architecture must not be a bilateral arrangement between the combatants over who controls a waterway. Freedom of navigation through Hormuz is not an American interest that South Asians happen to share; it is a South Asian lifeline that America happens to police. New Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka — rivals in most things, co-dependents in this one — should insist, loudly and jointly, that energy-transit guarantees and compensation mechanisms be written into any memorandum that follows. Pakistan has earned its mediator's chair. The rest of the region should be pulling up chairs beside it. For our readers here in America, the stakes are doubled: fuel prices and inflation on this side of the ocean, parents' pensions and cousins' remittances on the other. The ceasefire will come when Washington and Tehran each decide the price is finally right. The question our community should keep asking, in every forum available to it, is simpler and older: who has been paying the price all along?

(TSAI Editorial Board)

The Business of Presidential Pardons

Lobbyists get paid whether their clients get pardoned or not. That asymmetry, not any single case, is the scandal.

Presidential clemency was written into the Constitution as an act of mercy - a corrective for a justice system that sometimes gets it wrong. In 2026, reporting from CBS News, Axios and NPR describes something closer to a service industry. Wealthy petitioners are paying Washington law and lobbying firms six and seven figures for a chance to get their case in front of President Trump. "From a lobbying perspective, pardons have gotten profitable," one lobbyist told Axios. Two people familiar with the market told the outlet they knew of a client's offer of \$5 million for help reaching the president - a figure that dwarfs what Trump allies reportedly received for pardon help in his first term.

The going rate varies, but the pattern is consistent. Mo Strategies, a firm founded by former Trump campaign and administration officials, has already booked \$500,000 from a single client, a Northern Virginia law firm, for "immigration and pardon-related discussions," according to CBS News' review of Senate lobbying disclosures. Political operatives Jack Burkman and Jacob Wohl reportedly billed \$960,000 to represent Joseph Schwartz, a nursing-home operator who pleaded guilty in a nearly \$39 million payroll-tax fraud scheme; Schwartz had served roughly three months of a three-year sentence when the pardon came through. And rapper Tarence "Boosie BadAzz" Hatch reportedly paid a Washington firm \$600,000 to pursue a pardon on a federal firearms conviction. The pardon never arrived. Hatch is now in arbitration trying to claw back half his money.

That last case is the one that should trouble anyone who cares about the integrity of the clemency process - not because it proves wrongdoing, but because it exposes the structure. None of this is illegal. Federal lobbying law does not require a lobbyist to produce results, only to disclose that they were retained and paid. No court has found that any specific



pardon was exchanged for money. But the business model itself is the story: the lobbyist is paid for access and effort, not for outcome. The client bears all the downside risk. The firm bears none. Whether the president ever reads the petition is beside the point - the invoice clears either way.

Set that against what happened on July 10. The Office of the Pardon Attorney, under Ed Martin, quietly posted lists of more than 300 people whose pardon applications had been denied that day, and more than 5,600 people denied commutation of their sentences - on top of roughly 530 who had already been turned down in January. A Department spokesperson said the denials were meant to clear a backlog of more than 20,000 clemency petitions, most filed through the formal Justice Department process by people with no lobbyist and no line to the West Wing. A July 14 letter from Martin to federal prosecutors, reviewed by The New York Times, did not say whether the president personally reviewed the rejected files - only that the law allows denial recommendations to take

effect without his direct sign-off. Most petitioners filing through that channel likely have no idea that mechanism exists.

This is the two-track system the lobbying economy has built, whether or not anyone intended it. One track is the public queue: a petition mailed to the Pardon Attorney's office, reviewed on paper, and, for the overwhelming majority, denied in a mass release that draws little notice. The other track is retained counsel with West Wing relationships, a retainer invoice, and - win or lose - a paycheck. A White House official told reporters there was never a formal plan to issue 250 pardons around the July 4th holiday, despite internal talk to that effect; instead, fewer than 20 pardons went out on July 3, including for Clean Air Act violators and a political donor. The contrast between that trickle and the July 10 denial wave is not a coincidence of timing. It is the clearest available snapshot of how the modern pardon economy actually allocates attention.

None of this requires assuming corruption to be a problem. A system in which paid access outperforms the merits of a case

- even only in probability, even only in the odds of a meeting taking place - corrodes the constitutional premise that clemency corrects injustice rather than rewards means. Congress has real levers here that don't require proving a quid pro quo: requiring lobbying disclosures to specify whether compensation is fee-for-service or outcome-contingent; requiring the Pardon Attorney's office to disclose, in aggregate, how many petitions receive a docketed White House meeting versus a paper review; and requiring public confirmation of whether the president personally reviews the denial batches issued in his name. Sunlight will not stop people from hiring well-connected counsel. It would at least tell the other 20,000 petitioners in the queue what odds they are actually facing. There is a second, quieter question this economy raises, and it deserves scrutiny alongside the fee arrangements already public: who gets paid simply for the introduction? A client seeking clemency does not always walk into a registered lobbying firm on their own. Often, someone in between - a fixer, a

fellow inmate's family friend, a political consultant with a Rolodex - makes the connection and collects a fee for doing so, without ever registering as a lobbyist and without making a single documented contact with a government official. The Lobbying Disclosure Act requires registration once someone makes more than one "lobbying contact" on a client's behalf and devotes a meaningful share of their time to lobbying activity; a pure referral fee, paid before any government contact occurs, may sit outside that threshold entirely. But if the introduction itself is the product being sold - access dressed up as a handshake, with the real influence-peddling happening one phone call downstream - then regulators, and the reporters covering this beat, should be asking whether these middlemen are functioning as unregistered lobbyists in substance, whatever their paperwork says. Congress and the Justice Department have not meaningfully addressed that gap, and until they do, the referral fee may be the least scrutinized line item in the entire pardon economy.

(TSAI Editorial Board)

The Jantar Mantar Formula



Every movement begins with an issue. Most end with a messiah. Television has no patience for administrative reform. Examination reforms are slow, technical, painfully boring. A fasting activist marching towards Parliament, on the other hand, is irresistible television. That perhaps explains why, within days of students gathering at Jantar Mantar to protest examination leaks and the collapse of credibility in India's competitive examinations, the cameras found what they had been looking for all along — not a policy debate, but a protagonist. The students had come to demand accountability from the government after a succession of examination scandals had shattered confidence in the country's recruitment and admission processes. For millions of young Indians, a competitive examination is not merely a test; it is the gateway to economic security and social mobility. Every leaked question paper is therefore not just an administrative failure but a theft of opportunity.

Yet, almost as predictably as the monsoon follows summer, the story changed.

Sonam Wangchuk's arrival transformed the narrative. Television studios discovered a new moral voice. Social media found a fresh icon. The conversation shifted. The cameras had found their face. This is the Jantar Mantar Formula — Delhi's perfected theatre of protest.

We have watched it unfold before. Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement began as a demand for greater accountability in government. Within months, however, the debate was no longer about the Lokpal Bill but about the personalities leading the agitation. One among them, Arvind Kejriwal, emerged as the

embodiment of the movement itself. The muffler, the modest WagonR, the rejection of VIP culture and the image of the incorruptible outsider became political symbols far more powerful than the legislative reforms that had first brought crowds onto the streets.

History, however, has an inconvenient habit of treating symbols less kindly than television does.

The outsider became the establishment. The activist became Chief Minister. Governance replaced agitation, and the moral simplicity of protest encountered the untidy complexities of administration. Protest thrives on slogans; governance survives on files. One demands heroes; the other requires institutions.

Modern politics increasingly prefers the former.

The age of social media has accelerated this transformation. Every movement now requires a compelling visual identity. A crowd without a recognisable face is merely a gathering. A crowd led by a charismatic individual becomes a story. Algorithms reward emotion far more generously than administrative detail. It is therefore hardly surprising that movements today produce public saints almost as quickly as they produce slogans.

None of this diminishes the legitimacy of protest. Democracies require citizens willing to challenge governments, expose failures and demand accountability. But democracies also require scepticism towards the manufacture of heroes. Institutions are strengthened by scrutiny; personalities are often weakened by adulation. The moment a movement begins to treat its leaders as beyond criticism, it ceases to be entirely about the issue that gave it birth. This principle applies as much

to activists as to governments. While Sonam Wangchuk emerged as the public face demanding transparency in India's education system, institutions associated with him have faced regulatory scrutiny over matters including foreign funding compliance, land allotment and statutory requirements. Wangchuk has consistently rejected these allegations as politically motivated. The broader principle, however, remains unchanged: those who demand accountability from the State must uphold the same standards themselves. That is not hypocrisy. It is democracy. Unfortunately, democratic politics increasingly rewards certainty over complexity. Every movement seeks a hero, every hero acquires followers, and every follower begins to confuse criticism with persecution. Somewhere in the process, the original grievance quietly slips into the background. The students who came to protest examination leaks deserve better than becoming supporting characters in someone else's political biography.

Nor is this tendency uniquely Indian. Over the past three decades, political movements across the world have developed an almost universal grammar. Public squares become stages. Protesters occupy symbolic spaces. Carefully chosen imagery dominates headlines. Social media amplifies emotion while compressing complexity. The objective is not merely to persuade governments but to capture public imagination. And imagination, unlike policy, has always preferred stories to systems.

The grammar of modern protest is remarkably consistent. Whether in Belgrade, Tbilisi, Cairo or Hong Kong, successful movements understand that politics is no longer fought only in legislatures but on television screens and smartphone displays. Public squares become theatres, slogans become brands and individuals become symbols. The issue remains important, but the story increasingly revolves around the person carrying it.

Consider Cairo's Tahrir Square. In 2011, the world watched in admiration as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians

demanded an end to Hosni Mubarak's three-decade rule. It was celebrated as the triumph of people power. Yet history, being less sentimental than television, took a different course. Mubarak fell, but Egypt did not become the liberal democracy many imagined. The revolution achieved its immediate objective, but the future it promised never fully arrived.

The lesson is not that popular movements are futile. It is that political change is infinitely more complicated than political theatre. Protest can open the door to reform, but it cannot substitute for the slow and often frustrating work of governance. India has been fortunate in this regard. Our democratic institutions, despite imperfections, have absorbed protest without collapsing under its weight. Governments change through elections, not coups. Movements influence public policy, but they ultimately return to constitutional discipline. That resilience is one of the Republic's greatest strengths. Yet our discourse has acquired a troubling habit. Every movement is framed as a battle between absolute virtue and absolute villainy. Nuance disappears. Accountability becomes selective. This weakens democracy rather than strengthening it.

THE OLD MONK'S WARNING: TIBET, LADAKH AND THE QUIET TRANSFORMATION

While Delhi was engrossed in yet another morality play, another story — far older, far larger and infinitely more consequential — had quietly slipped out of the national conversation. It was about Tibet. I recall a conversation in Lodhi Garden with an elderly Ladakhi monk. We spoke of monasteries, Ladakh and eventually Tibet. His expression changed almost imperceptibly.

"People are forgetting Tibet," he said.

At the time, I thought he was lamenting history. Today, I suspect he was warning us about the present.

For centuries, Tibet was more than a neighbouring territory. It was a civilisational bridge between India and the Himalayas. Buddhism that had travelled from Nalanda and

Vikramashila found its richest expression on the Tibetan plateau before returning to India through monasteries in Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Dharamshala. That world changed dramatically after 1950. The Himalayan buffer disappeared. India suddenly found itself sharing a contested frontier with an ambitious China. The Dalai Lama's flight to India marked not just exile but a new geopolitical reality.

China understood Tibet's strategic importance immediately. Roads, railways, airports, military infrastructure and demographic changes followed with relentless efficiency. India, by contrast, often discusses Ladakh as though it were little more than a spectacular landscape interrupted occasionally by border tensions. Yet Ladakh is one of the last living repositories of a civilisation whose heartland now lies under Chinese control. To discuss Ladakh without Tibet is to discuss Jerusalem without religion, or the Vatican without Christianity.

Meanwhile, Delhi resets itself for the next protest. The placards are folded away. The hashtags stop trending. And the questions that require decades of sustained national attention continue to wait patiently outside the frame. China's consolidation of Tibet continues. The cultural future of Himalayan Buddhism remains uncertain. These stories demand patience and historical memory — qualities that rarely compete successfully with the excitement of political theatre.

CONCLUSION

None of this is an argument against protest. Democracies need dissent. Governments deserve criticism when they fail. But dissent also carries a responsibility: it should illuminate public debate, not narrow it; strengthen institutions, not merely elevate personalities. Above all, it should not allow today's spectacle to erase yesterday's unfinished history.

I often think of that monk in Lodhi Garden. He was asking us to remember.

Every movement begins with an issue. Some end with a messiah. But the stories that endure are the ones we refuse to forget.

The 3 failures that plague Punjab today

If you take a drive through rural Punjab today, you will find three incongruous elements that don't belong in the same frame: a mortgaged field, an electrically powered tubewell for which no payment is made and which cannot be turned off, and a household with barely any young member—the family opted to sell land in order to finance their son's migration to Canada than invest in a tractor.

Three decades ago, the state's economy was destabilised by insurgency. But today, it is threatened by fiscal mismanagement, a transition that has largely gone unnoticed. In 1981, Punjab boasted the highest per capita income among Indian states. Even after two decades of militancy, it maintained a fourth-place ranking in 2001. Currently, it sits closer to the 10th position and bears the largest public debt burden relative to its economic size among the major states. The conventional explanation attributes this decline to armed conflict; however, this rationale does not align with the chronological sequence of events or theoretical analysis.

The timeline the militancy story ignores

Punjab's income, when compared to the national average, remained stable through the insurgency and the subsequent decade. It was 119.6 per cent in 1960-61, reached a peak of 169 per cent during the Green Revolution in 1970-71, and remained at 146.2 per cent in 2000-01. A significant decline is observed only after the cessation of hostilities, with the income ratio decreasing to 106.7 per cent by 2023-24 and projected to be 105 per cent by 2025-26.

A security shock adversely impacts an economy during its occurrence. However, this particular shock manifests two decades later, during peacetime, indicating a failure in policy rather than the work of violence.

This scenario aligns precisely with growth theory. Punjab experienced a one-time productivity surge due to the Green Revolution's high-yield seeds and guaranteed procurement, which increased output before the rest of the country could catch up. Subsequently, this advantage plateaued as the same seeds and irrigation technology became widespread nationally.

According to Robert Solow's framework, further developed by



Robert Barro and Xavier Sala-i-Martin's work on conditional convergence, a region that initially advances due to a windfall will eventually regress toward the mean. This, unless it continues to deepen capital through reinvestment, retraining, and diversification, rather than relying on the initial gain. In essence, a windfall does not constitute wealth until it is reinvested.

Punjab expended its windfall instead of compounding it. In contrast, Haryana, which was formed from the same undivided state in 1966 and faced the same unstable years, pursued a different trajectory. Its income increased from 106.9 per cent in 1960-61 to an estimated 180.2 per cent by 2025-26. Despite having the same origin and instability, the outcomes diverged, with the disparity emerging only after 2000-01, an entire decade after Punjab's militancy had ceased. It is challenging to attribute this divergence to violence alone. It aligns with convergence theory, which predicts such outcomes when one region continues to reinvest while the other does not.

A debt trap built on one crop

The fiscal narrative after 2000 is characterised by the mortgaged field from the earlier example. According to Evsey Domar's 1944 *r*-versus-*g* condition, a state's debt-to-GSDP ratio remains broadly stable only when economic growth surpasses the interest rate on its borrowing. This dynamic is mechanical rather than moral: interest compounds annually regardless of new governmental actions, implying that a debt ratio that does not decrease is being sustained rather than reduced. The only mechanisms to alter this are accelerated growth or a reduced deficit.

Punjab's revenue deficit increased from Rs 544 crore in 1990-91 to Rs 24,588 crore in 2022-23, representing a five-fold increase even when adjusted for inflation. Its debt-to-GSDP ratio

has consistently remained between 45 per cent and 47 per cent in recent estimates and is projected to be 45.1 per cent in the state's 2026-27 budget—the highest among large states.

What transforms this situation from a simple arithmetic issue into a complex trap is the nature of the expenditures financed by borrowing. Public finance differentiates between revenue expenditure—such as salaries, pensions, interest, and subsidies—which do not generate future assets, and capital expenditure, which does. In Punjab's 2026-27 budget, revenue expenditure amounts to Rs 1,48,146 crore, while capital outlay is merely Rs 18,381 crore, indicating approximately eight rupees of consumption for every rupee of investment, despite a genuine 76 per cent increase in capital spending that year. Committed expenditures, including salaries, pensions, and interest, accounted for 72 per cent of revenue receipts in the 2026-27 estimate and 85 per cent in the previous full year of actuals; interest payments alone consume nearly a quarter of the state's total revenue. This represents a mortgaged field on a governmental scale: debt that does not fund capital deepening fails to enhance the growth rate sufficiently to surpass it, instead financing past payrolls with future revenue. The fiscal deficit is projected at 4.1 per cent of GSDP, exceeding the 16th Finance Commission's recommended ceiling of 3 per cent, a limit that Punjab surpasses in its own published figures.

The issue persists due to political economy rather than mere arithmetic, with three distinct failures reinforcing each other in a cycle that warrants explicit identification.

Mancur Olson's theory of distributional coalitions posits that entrenched interest groups resist reallocation because the costs of change are concentrated on them, even when the benefits are broader

and more diffuse. Punjab's MSP- and procurement framework for wheat and paddy has established such a coalition, and with committed expenditure already consuming three-quarters of revenue, the coalition's influence now serves as both a budgetary and political constraint.

A 2024 EAC-PM paper questions whether this situation constitutes Dutch disease, a term coined by Max Corden and Peter Neary in 1982 to describe a dominant, state-favoured sector that hinders diversification, mirroring the coalition's economic impact. The more the budget is skewed towards one crop, the more challenging it becomes to cultivate alternatives. This protectionism explains the tubewell from the initial example.

Free electricity has turned groundwater into a classic example of the tragedy of the commons, a concept introduced by Garrett Hardin to describe a shared resource for which no one bears the true cost of exploitation. With free electricity, no ownership, and no limits, overuse is inevitable. Punjab extracted 163.8 per cent of its replenishable groundwater in 2023, which reduced to 156 per cent by 2025 as canals were restored—a genuine improvement. However, the approximately Rs 15,200 crore spent on power subsidies for 2026-27, with agriculture accounting for nearly Rs 8,800 crore, indicates that the underlying incentive remains unchanged: the reduction is attributed to canal restoration, not a shift in who bears the cost of extraction.

The exodus no one is charting

The third figure in the opening scene, the empty house, completes the narrative. The classic brain-drain theory, as articulated by Jagdish Bhagwati and Koichi Hamada, conceptualises skilled emigration as a net loss for the country of origin. Subsequent research, particularly by Michael Clemens, has demonstrated that remittances can mitigate this loss. This is exemplified by the Kerala model, where financial transfers persist long after the migrant's departure.

Punjab illustrates a more severe interpretation of this theory, as capital often exits prior to the migrant. While migrants from Kerala remit funds to their homeland, those from

Punjab frequently relocate their capital abroad. Despite representing only 2.19 per cent of India's population, Punjab accounted for nearly 60 per cent of new Indian student permits for Canada in 2022, contributing approximately \$3.7 billion of the \$11.7 billion spent by Indian students on Canadian education. This signifies a disproportionate financial outflow, given Punjab's relatively small population size compared to the national total.

Kerala experiences a capital account surplus due to migration, whereas Punjab faces a deficit. In Punjab, families often resort to borrowing or selling land to finance emigration, with the return being a foreign degree rather than capital for local enterprises. Arthur Lewis' model, which posits labour migration from low- to high-productivity sectors, assumed that such movement would remain within the national economy, benefiting urban areas while depleting rural ones. However, in Punjab, this migration increasingly bypasses the state, and frequently, the country as well.

No policy should attempt to directly halt visa issuance, nor is it feasible to do so. The primary objective should be to provide more productive uses for loans and land, through robust industrial policy and business-friendly reforms, making investment in Punjab businesses more attractive than financing emigration. Haryana demonstrates that such a transformation is achievable from a similar starting point, though it does not suggest the process is straightforward.

When evaluated over time, militancy does not account for a decline that commenced a decade after the cessation of violence. Instead, three subtle, cumulative failures provide the explanation: a debt dynamic where borrowing funds consumption rather than growth, a coalition that safeguards a single crop while depleting water resources, and a transformation occurring abroad rather than domestically. This situation did not necessitate any violence; rather, it resulted from 30 years of mundane bureaucratic processes, including loan agreements, subsidy bills, and visa applications. Reversing this trend will require precisely the type of unremarkable, coalition-challenging reforms that governments find difficult to promote.

Hambantota And Gwadar: Dhaka Snubbed PM Modi On Mongla But Will Eventually Pay For It

In the final week of June, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Bangladesh made its confession. It signed away a piece of land that India had waited eleven years to build on. During Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's first state visit to China, the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority signed a memorandum of understanding with China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation to develop the China-Bangladesh Mongla Port Economic Zone, adjacent to the country's second-largest seaport.

The 110-acre plot had been allotted to India under a 2015 agreement, announced during Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka, which was celebrated as a golden era of bilateral ties. Now, the location. Eighty kilometres from the Indian border. A hundred and eighty-eight from Kolkata. On the Pashur River, at the edge of the Sundarbans, where the tigers swim and the water hides everything. A Chinese state contractor will build and operate industrial infrastructure a day's drive from West Bengal, in a delta that Indian admirals have always considered their own drawing room. So, yes, India is concerned, and Dhaka believes it has found a faster, more generous friend. Sri Lanka believed the same thing once. So did Pakistan. Chinese money is a marvellous houseguest—charming, punctual, and bearing gifts. It simply never leaves.

What Dhaka Actually Gave Away

Mongla is not some sleepy fishing village. Since 2018, Indian cargo has moved through it, giving New Delhi a route to its landlocked northeast so that it doesn't depend entirely on the Siliguri Corridor, twenty-two kilometres at its narrowest, which is all that connects mainland India to eight states and fifty million people. Nations have gone to war over less fragile geography. While India did not pick up the gun, it took the port seriously enough to secure operating rights to a Mongla terminal in May 2024, understanding correctly what the harbour was worth and as a direct counter to Chinese

maritime expansion in the Bay of Bengal.

The Chinese offer to replace India is substantial and very generous. \$650 million in manufacturing, warehousing, and storage. But nobody in New Delhi is losing sleep over warehouses. Why would we? Warehouses are just that, used for warehousing. But that's not the real point of it all. According to a CNN-News18 report citing intelligence sources, there is a high risk of Beijing installing advanced maritime surveillance and electronic intelligence infrastructure at the site—a comfortable perch from which to watch Indian naval deployments and coastal radar. Chinese commercial zones have a curious way of growing antennae. Djibouti's logistics hub became a naval base. Hambantota was hosting a Chinese surveillance ship within five years of the lease.

And Mongla didn't travel alone. The Beijing visit produced seventeen bilateral instruments, an upgraded "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership", talk of a 2+2 defence dialogue, a Bangladesh-China-Myanmar corridor, and, most deliciously, the Teesta river management project, sited near the Siliguri Corridor's doorstep.

Look at a map. Chinese engineers on the Teesta to the north of the corridor. A Chinese zone at Mongla to its south. Veena Sikri, who once served as India's High Commissioner in Dhaka and knows the terrain better than most, called it strategic encirclement, placing dual-use infrastructure within striking distance of India's sole land link to the northeast. She was being nice; it's a pincer, and it's already closing.

The Post-Hasina Divorce

Every betrayal has a backstory, and this one begins in August 2024, when Sheikh Hasina fled Dhaka ahead of the mob. The relationship with India has been rotting ever since. New Delhi made its overtures to Rahman after his election in February 2026, but the wound over "push-in" deportations championed with characteristic subtlety by Assam's chief minister has been kept infected by both

sides.

And Mongla is not the first; it's a pattern emerging from Bangladesh. In February, Dhaka cancelled India's allotment for a Chittagong economic zone and gave that to China, too, for a drone factory, technology transfer included. China is its largest trading partner and supplies nearly three-quarters of its arms, according to SIPRI, along with two submarines, a clutch of frigates and a naval base near Chittagong. Trade, weapons, and now the coastline—China holds it all. If Bangladesh were making a case for diversification, the argument would fall flat; all it really did was consolidate the creditor.

India's Fingerprints

In fairness, India didn't have Mongla stolen from under it. India left it on the table, got up, and wandered off. The Hiranandani group was nominated in 2018; its subsidiary signed the papers in 2022; construction never began within the two-year window; and the Yunus administration delisted the project in 2025.

A \$115 million line of credit sat gathering dust. An Adani arrangement went nowhere. A decade of Indian custodianship produced a filing cabinet, whereas Beijing produced a signature within a year. India's slothful pace sent Dhaka wandering, but it does not make the new suitor safe.

The Hambantota Ledger and the Warning from Gwadar

Because we've seen this romance before, and we have the receipts. Colombo borrowed lavishly from Beijing to build a port at Hambantota that its own studies doubted. When the debt could no longer be serviced, Sri Lanka handed the port over on a 99-year lease.

It was a \$1.1 billion deal in July 2017 for a 70 per cent stake. Five years later the whole economy came apart, and Colombo crawled to the IMF for \$2.9 billion. Yes, Sri Lanka's collapse had many fathers: sovereign bonds, tax cuts, and domestic mismanagement. Serious comparative work finds that the Hambantota lease was the product of domestic policy failures as much as Chinese design and that Chinese lending



does not automatically end in asset seizure. Fair enough. But that is precisely the warning for Dhaka: China does not need to plot a trap. It merely needs a borrower whose politics are unstable, whose reserves are thin, and whose appetite for prestige infrastructure exceeds its capacity to pay. Bangladesh in 2026, governed by a party mere months into power atop an economy still convalescing, fits the profile like a bespoke suit. And China just needs to stay patient, for it is the cheapest weapon ever devised.

Pakistan offers the second data point, which reads more like an autopsy. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor promised \$62 billion and delivered a debt burden so grotesque that interest payments now devour roughly 43 per cent of Pakistan's export earnings, among the worst ratios on Earth, sending Islamabad back to the IMF, most recently for another \$7 billion, hat permanently in hand.

The IMF put China's share of Pakistan's foreign debt at 30 per cent as far back as 2022. And at the end of that glittering corridor sits Gwadar, its free-trade zone run by Chinese Overseas Ports on a 43-year lease, business affairs and all. Pakistan built China a door to the Arabian Sea and received, as compensation, a mortgage on its own foreign policy.

Mortgaging the Coast

Dhaka's leaders will insist they are neither Colombo nor Islamabad. They will say it with confidence. The World Bank does not. Bangladesh's external debt stands at \$101.4 billion, and together with Pakistan, it accounts for roughly 71 per cent of everything South Asia owes the world. Every new Chinese corridor and zone and river

scheme adds to a ledger whose terms are written in Beijing.

The regional pattern is remarkably consistent. The projects arrive quickly, the invoices arrive later, the bills keep piling up, and when they can't be paid, the settlement is never in currency. You pay through your sovereignty. A lease here. A concession there. A quiet berth for a ship that's terribly interested in the seabed. The temptation in Dhaka is understandable. Mongla is a message to New Delhi: you are not the only game in town, and as theatre, it has worked. India is rattled, perhaps, and commentators, this one included, are saying so. But grievance is a poor basis for grand strategy.

For all its sins, laziness and condescension, which are both curable, India is the safer bet, if only because its failures can be reversed and China's cannot. A jilted neighbour can be courted again. A ninety-nine-year lease cannot be unsigned.

China's interest in the Bay of Bengal is structural and permanent. Hasina, whatever else one says of her, grasped the oldest rule of small nations wedged between giants: sell access to everyone, surrender control to no one. Her successors played their hand before the cards were even dealt, out of spite, of all things. And as a result, have handed their second port to the one power for whom every harbour is a naval question merely awaiting its answer.

Bangladesh believes it is punishing India. Perhaps. But somewhere in Beijing, a ledger has been opened with Dhaka's name on it. And Hambantota's lease still has ninety years to run, in case anyone wants to check the repayment schedule.

Meta's smartglasses mean any child can be covertly filmed. In the age of AI, how do we tackle that risk?

It took me a while to realise what the man sitting next to me on the train was doing. He was flicking through pictures of a little girl on his phone; zooming in on some, cropping the images.

Hardly unusual, of course, except that on closer inspection the pictures were very clearly of the toddler sitting opposite us, playing with her parents. On a crowded train of people mostly staring obliviously at our own phones, a stranger had been covertly photographing that little girl over and over again. And if it hadn't been for that very visible phone screen giving him away, he wouldn't have been caught.

That encounter was a while ago but my memory was jogged last week listening to a clip of Meta's VP of wearables, Alex Himel, talk fondly to the BBC about using his new smartglasses to film his daughter singing in a talent contest. They let him capture the memory without having to watch her through a screen, he said, freeing him to be "kind of living in the moment, head up and hands free".

So far, so sweet. But what about the risk of creeps potentially using them to film other people's daughters covertly, heads up and hands free? Meta's smartglasses have a tiny flashing warning light on the frame to indicate when the wearer is recording, but the technology is still new enough that many people don't think to look for it. And in the age of AI, stolen images of children matter. Taken in real life or scraped from the internet, they're the raw material for generating realistic-looking child abuse material of the most extreme and disturbing kind. (If that sounds like a grim but



ultimately fairly victimless crime, the Internet Watch Foundation warned in a recent report that AI-generated material risks fuelling sexual interest in children, normalising violence and increasing the risk of real-life offending.) When Google launched the first smartglasses in 2013, they didn't catch on: too nerdy-looking but also potentially too creepy, given the possibilities they afforded stalkers, trolls, criminals gathering intelligence and law enforcement in repressive regimes. But big tech hasn't given up on the dream of connecting humans more seamlessly to the internet, and newer versions learn from past mistakes.

Meta's are cooler, featuring collaborations with Ray-Ban and Kylie Jenner, and are pitched

unashamedly at parents under the wholesome slogan: "never miss a moment". Want to capture your baby's milestones, or do all the things you surreptitiously do when you're with the kids – checking emails, shopping online, listening to podcasts – without taking your eyes off them? It's an appealing sell to busy, guilty, multi-tasking parents. But the safeguarding concerns around covert filming are real enough for many nurseries and schools to have started banning them from the premises.

A twist in the tale, however, is that making them socially unacceptable risks creating casualties of its own: the technology is potentially life-changing for blind people, helping them navigate confidently

around obstacles or instantly translate text to audio.

Meta has argued that it is for individuals to ensure they don't "actively exploit" the technology, which makes you wonder if it learned anything at all from watching humans get to grips with its social media platforms. Regulatory options might include new privacy legislation designed for the digital age, forcing manufacturers to make it far clearer when the glasses are recording – maybe even with an audible warning, like the beep of a reversing lorry – at least until we're all primed to look twice at anyone in specs. But since that would make them insufferably embarrassing to wear, it's unlikely to please tech

companies seeking a lucrative mass market. Another option could be holding manufacturers, not wearers, liable for malicious usage – though that could mean years of painfully slow litigation, concluding long after the damage is done. The nuclear option, meanwhile, would be a before-market regulatory regime for novel technology recognising its capacity for social harm, much as we have for clearing new pharmaceutical drugs or novel foodstuffs.

The best option is arguably the one history suggests is least likely to happen: for a myopic tech industry to start better anticipating, and designing out, potential harms that should be visible from space. There are some things, surely, that nobody needs smartglasses to see.

The 'Great Bend' Gamble: China's Mega-Dam Is Rising Where The Himalayas Are Still Breaking

The Yarlung Tsangpo is one of Asia's most important transboundary rivers. It begins on the Tibetan Plateau, flows across southern Tibet, and then turns sharply around Namcha Barwa before entering India as the Siang. This dramatic bend, commonly known as the Great Bend, gives the river an unusually steep fall over a relatively short distance. That natural gradient has made the area highly attractive for hydropower generation and is the main reason China selected the lower reaches of the river for its largest planned hydropower project. The project is located in one of the Himalayas' most geologically complex areas, marked by steep terrain, deep gorges, and active fault systems. These conditions do not rule out construction, but they demand rigorous geological assessment, continuous monitoring and strong safeguards for dams, tunnels, roads, bridges and power facilities.

Chinese geologists have raised specific concerns about the Paizhen Fault, which crosses the wider project and infrastructure zone. A June 2026 study in *Sedimentary Geology and Tethyan Geology* reported that the fault has remained active since the Pleistocene. Prolonged movement has fractured and weakened local rock formations, which may reduce the stability of dam foundations and associated infrastructure. The study also warned that seismic activity and long-term water infiltration could further destabilise slopes, increasing the risk of landslides, rock collapses and structural damage. The findings are significant because the research involved Chengdu University of Technology, the China Geological Survey's Civil-Military Integration Centre and a natural-resources observation station on the river. They also reinforce a 2022 study by Chinese geological institutions, which identified surface fault rupture, deep-tunnel hazards, unstable mountain masses and cascading regional disasters as major risks and questioned whether conventional site-selection methods were adequate for such terrain.

Beijing approved the project in December 2024, and construction formally began on July 19, 2025. Planned as a five-station cascade, it carries an

estimated investment of about 1.2 trillion yuan and is expected to generate around 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. The site was chosen because the river drops by roughly 2,000 metres over about 50 kilometres, allowing water to be diverted through tunnels to generate power. Most of the electricity is expected to be transmitted beyond Tibet, while part will meet local demand. Beijing presents the project as part of its clean-energy and infrastructure strategy, but its location in a remote, tectonically active, and environmentally sensitive part of the Himalayas has also raised questions about long-term safety, ecological impact, and downstream risks. The same geological forces that created the river's steep hydropower potential have also made the area highly unstable. The Great Bend lies within the eastern Himalayan syntaxis, where the Indian plate pushes into Eurasia and the crust bends, uplifts and fractures. The Paizhen Fault is part of a wider network of active structures. In November 2017, a shallow magnitude-6.4 earthquake, by US Geological Survey measurement, classified as magnitude 6.9 in Chinese studies, struck the Nyingchi-Milin area. Later research found that the earthquake activated slope failures and contributed to an ice-rock avalanche and debris-flow chain in the Sedongpu valley.

The region has already shown how quickly one hazard can become another. In 2018, enormous landslides and debris flows in the Sedongpu-Gyalha area blocked the Yarlung Tsangpo and formed temporary natural dams. When such blockages overtop or fail, water and sediment can be released as sudden downstream floods. A mega-project would add tunnels, spoil dumps, access roads, worker settlements, transmission corridors, and reservoir margins to this unstable system. A strong earthquake would not need to split a dam wall to cause disaster. It could block tunnels, sever roads, damage powerhouses or send a mountainside into a reservoir, producing a destructive impulse wave.

China's earlier dam experience shows why these risks are not theoretical. At the Three Gorges Reservoir, fluctuating water

levels have repeatedly been associated with slope deformation, landslides and collapses. Researchers have documented how reservoir filling and seasonal drawdown alter groundwater pressure inside hillsides, weakening unstable masses. China has invested heavily in monitoring, stabilisation and relocation, but engineering controls have not removed the underlying geological problem.

The Zipingpu Reservoir in Sichuan offers a more controversial warning. It was impounded close to the Longmenshan fault system before the devastating 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Scientists still disagree over whether reservoir loading and water infiltration helped advance the quake. Some studies found that the reservoir could have increased stress or pore pressure on parts of the fault; others concluded that its effect was stabilising or insufficient to trigger the main shock. The responsible conclusion is not that Zipingpu caused the earthquake. It is that filling a large reservoir beside a major fault can introduce stresses whose full consequences may remain uncertain until after impoundment.

At Baihetan on the Jinsha River, researchers have recorded fluid-driven seismicity after reservoir filling and developed dynamic landslide-susceptibility systems for steep reservoir banks. Baihetan is an engineering achievement, but it demonstrates that changing groundwater conditions, local earthquakes, and slope movement require permanent surveillance. The Yarlung Tsangpo scheme is larger, more remote, and located where emergency access may be lost precisely when it is most needed.

Its tunnel-dependent design creates another vulnerability. Deep Himalayan tunnels can face rockbursts, squeezing rock, sudden water inflows, and deformation along fault zones. If prolonged movement on the Paizhen Fault has pulverised rock and altered its strength, tunnel linings and underground caverns may experience uneven loading over decades. Roads and bridges across steep valleys would be exposed to repeated slope movement, not only a single design-basis earthquake. Climate change adds a moving

target. Research published in 2026 compiled thousands of climate-related landslides in the eastern Himalayan syntaxis and found a fivefold increase in annual landslide volumes above 3,000 metres over three decades. A power system designed to operate for generations will therefore face a landscape being altered by warming, glacier retreat, and changing precipitation. Glacial lakes, ice-rock avalanches, and debris flows may emerge from areas considered stable during initial surveys.

Beijing says the project will prioritise ecological protection and disaster prevention. Such promises require transparent evidence. Public official descriptions identify the construction method, investment, and power-distribution goal but do not provide detailed alignments, reservoir operating rules, cumulative environmental assessments, sediment plans, or emergency-release scenarios that downstream countries can independently test. India has formally raised concerns and called for cooperation and the resumption of hydrological-data sharing. There is still no comprehensive, binding basin-wide framework governing the river's development across China, India, and Bangladesh. The environmental stakes extend beyond the construction zone. The Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon contains exceptional vertical ecosystems and is regarded by Chinese researchers as an important storehouse of mountain biodiversity. Tunnelling, blasting, roads, and transmission corridors would fragment habitats even without one giant surface reservoir. Altered sediment movement and seasonal flow could affect river morphology, aquatic habitats, and floodplain renewal downstream. Because detailed operating information remains limited, the scale cannot yet be calculated honestly, but uncertainty is a reason for precaution, not reassurance.

The effects of the project will not be confined to the immediate construction zone. After leaving Tibet, the river passes through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam before entering Bangladesh as the Jamuna, linking the upper basin with one of the world's largest and most densely populated delta systems. Any long-term change in sediment

movement or seasonal flow patterns could therefore travel far beyond the Great Bend. Research on the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta estimates that the Brahmaputra supplied about 52 per cent of its Holocene sediment. This sediment replenishes floodplains, supports river channels, and helps parts of the delta respond to subsidence and rising sea levels. A five-station hydropower cascade may not stop sediment movement entirely, but changes in its volume, timing, or composition could have cumulative consequences downstream.

Seasonal flow patterns are equally important. Agriculture, wetlands, and fisheries across the lower basin have developed around the annual rhythm of floods, which carry nutrients, reconnect rivers with floodplains, and create breeding and migration routes for fish. Significant changes in flood timing, reduced freshwater availability during the dry season, or poorly communicated emergency releases could affect crops, river islands, and fishing communities. In coastal areas already facing saltwater intrusion, lower freshwater discharge during critical months could allow salinity to move farther inland, placing additional pressure on drinking-water supplies, agricultural soils, and fragile ecosystems. The project would not be the sole cause of these challenges, but limited coordination over upstream operations could make existing environmental stresses more difficult to manage.

The Paizhen finding should change the debate. The question is no longer only whether China can build the world's largest hydropower system. China has repeatedly shown that it can construct extraordinary dams in difficult terrain. The real question is whether any country should place such an enormous, interconnected system inside an active tectonic knot without full geological disclosure, independent review, and enforceable downstream safeguards. At the Great Bend, a failure may not remain a Chinese engineering accident. It could become an environmental shock travelling through India to Bangladesh, carrying altered flows, lost sediment, damaged fisheries, deeper salinity and a new level of distrust across one of Asia's most important rivers.

America is winning its battle with Iran. It's only a matter of time



In the four months and three weeks since combat began with Iran, the United States has lost 17 or 18 of its warriors (with three or four killed over last weekend), with more than 420 others wounded.

Sixty Israelis have been killed. More than 100 Iraqis have died as a result of the conflict. Our allies in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have all suffered civilian deaths and every country in the region has taken significant damage to its infrastructure.

Iran has suffered military deaths in the thousands with many hundreds of civilians killed as well. The toll on the country's infrastructure is massive — exponentially larger than that which it has inflicted on its neighbors in the region — with the highest estimates in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Iran's conventional military has been shattered. Its missile and drone forces have been significantly damaged or expended. It is far, however, from being out of ordnance with which to threaten shipping in the Strait of Hormuz or its neighbors.

Iran has avoided striking Israel during the most recent 10 days of combat as it fears the response of the Israeli Defense Forces. That is deterrence restored. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is afraid to strike the Jewish State. Now it must be made afraid to shoot

at Americans or at its Arab neighbors or international shipping.

The rump regime that remains appears to be a military dictatorship led by the 68-year-old commander-in-chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Ahmad Vahidi, who came out of retirement to lead the military dictatorship after the opening strike on Iranian leaders killed scores of leading officials in the country.

The "official" successor to the killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is his son Mostafa Khomeini, who has not been seen in public since the conflict began. Khamenei 2.0 is widely believed to have been seriously wounded in the opening strikes of the battle and has recently been reported to have been moved out of the country.

The economy of Iran is in a shambles with the exchange rate of Iranian rials for U.S. dollars approaching 2 million to one. The United States Navy's blockade of Iranian shipping is completely effective as to shipping, so Iran is again denied the most basic and essential revenue stream from the sale of oil via the oceans. Its imports must come from land or air.

The conflict could extend for months or even years as America's blockade drives the Iranian economy deeper into the hole out of which it will take

decades to climb once combat ends. The country's nuclear program is indeed obliterated, and while the deep tunnels and caverns of Pickaxe Mountain remain a mystery to the U.S. the IRGC's ability to "break out" to a nuclear weapon has been crushed. (The U.S. has not yet targeted Pickaxe, and may not be able to damage its deepest reaches.)

Once measured in weeks, Iran is now years and years away from a nuclear weapon, even if oil exports resumed in the future and the rump regime dedicated all of that revenue from the sale of oil to again pursue nuclear weapons.

The cost of oil hovers above \$80 a barrel across the world, 30% higher than when the battle began but significantly lower than the \$126 a barrel cost reached in April. Workarounds via pipelines and the use of the southern shipping route through the Strait near Oman have kept the cost of oil from skyrocketing, and production worldwide has also stepped up in response to the off-and-on closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Whether President Donald Trump decides to escalate the strikes on Iran to include destruction of power plants and bridges that serve dual uses that include the Iranian military and the IRGC (legitimate targets under the laws of war) will be revealed in the days ahead.

Every lethal attack on Americans elicits from the United States extraordinary punishment on Iran. The cost to the American families bearing those losses of family is immeasurable and the U.S. is extracting a price after every deadly blow delivered by the Iranians in the ongoing effort to deter the fanatics.

That may be an unrealistic goal given the martyrdom ideology of the theocracy, but the original dictator of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, drank "from the cup of poison" in 1988 and accepted what was essentially a defeat in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988.

Vahidi is a veteran of that war. Perhaps the dictator will follow the original supreme leader's example, and the advice of his civilian advisers, and the public faces of Iran who are believed by some to have grasped the scale of the defeat inflicted on Iran. The President of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, and its Foreign Minister, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, have almost no power over the dictator and his legions with the guns who murdered tens of thousands of Iranian citizens in January. But the civilians have hinted at the reality of a shattered country, and the crushed proxy armies in Gaza and Lebanon should also weigh on Vahidi. Does he want the IRGC to go the way of Hamas and Hezbollah?

Iran can have a ceasefire in hours if it stops firing on shipping and agrees to minimal steps like comprehensive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency of its known nuclear weapons development sites plus Pickaxe Mountain.

It is irrational for the regime to continue to take the pounding it is receiving, and the fact that Israel has not been targeted in these past 10 days suggests that Vahidi has grasped the reality of his situation. He has been deterred from ordering strikes on Israel. The nightly pummeling by the United States

presents Vahidi with only terrible choices aimed at deterring him from his current course.

Whatever he calculated about the cost to the world in oil prices or to Trump in political damage in November, he was not just wrong, but very wrong. Does he have the ability to see that as clearly as Khomeini did in 1988? About 7.5 million Americans saw Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" this weekend. The monumental cinematic reflection on the cost of war — the retelling of a story that has resonated down more than 2,700 years — still has the power to remind every viewer of the infinite price of battle for those who lose loved ones in the conflict.

No American should want this combat to continue a day longer than it must. Trump certainly does not. The destruction of Iran's military capabilities and its military-industrial complex is near complete. Its nuclear program is in ruins. The Iranian people will face a much weaker regime when next they rise up to demand freedom from the fanatics.

But as every member of the military will tell you, the enemy gets a say in when the fighting ends. The decisive victory of the American military won't be concluded until Iran stops its aggression on international shipping. It may not do so for a long while yet. The "cup of poison" isn't anything Vahidi wants to accept or the regime mouthpieces want to acknowledge. But President Trump is pursuing the right strategy to make its sipping inevitable.

America must honor its fallen and care for their families as well as the wounded and their families. But we pray for this spring and summer of war to end before the fall arrives. It was a necessary battle, and further devastation of Iran is not something the president or any American should want, but that choice is with Vahidi.

US soldier Michael Swinton killed in Iraq during Iranian drone detonation



A US soldier who was killed in Iraq during the controlled detonation of an Iranian drone has been identified as Sgt Michael Emmanuel Swinton, a 30-year-old father from North Carolina who had served for nearly a decade. The Army said it was investigating the circumstances of his death on Sunday at an air base in Irbil. Swinton will receive a Bronze Star, Purple Heart and

Combat Action Badge, and will be promoted posthumously to staff sergeant. His death comes as fighting between the US and Iran entered its 10th day, with both sides carrying out strikes across the region. According to a military statement issued on Tuesday and his family, Swinton was from Fayetteville and had enlisted in the Army in 2017. He was

assigned to the 55th Air Defence Artillery Regiment, 108th Air Defence Artillery Brigade, out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He is survived by his wife, a 6-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter.

"I will never recover from this, you should be home," his wife, Mia Gonzalez-Swinton, posted on Facebook on Monday. "We had so many plans for when you got back, I'm sick to my stomach." She said she was informed on Sunday that he had been killed.

Swinton's mother, Christel Swinton Andujar, told WRAL-TV on Tuesday that her son's family was "the centre of his world". "Every decision he made and every sacrifice he endured was with them in his heart," she said from her home near Fort Bragg.

Brig Gen John L Dawber, commanding general of the Army Air and Missile Defence Command, said, "Sgt Swinton was an experienced noncommissioned officer who took great pride in his

work and the people around him. He answered the call to duty with courage, honour, and selfless dedication."

Swinton's death followed the killing of two other US Army soldiers in Jordan last week while defending against Iranian ballistic missile and drone attacks. They were identified by the Defence Department as 1st Lt Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and Pvt Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas. They were also with Army Air and Missile Defence Command units. A third service member was reported missing after the attack, and US Central Command said "unidentified remains" had been found and were being examined.

The latest death came as the conflict widened across the region. Iran has attacked US allies in the region, while American troops remain stationed across the Middle East. Iranian authorities have said US strikes in the past three weeks have killed at least 50 people and

wounded more than 500 others. Both sides have also targeted civilian infrastructure used by millions, while workers on ships, foreign workers and others in Gulf nations, Israel and Lebanon have died in the conflict.

The US State Department issued a fresh warning to Americans, saying that "Iran and groups supportive of Iran may target other US interests overseas or at locations associated with the United States and Americans throughout the world". US President Donald Trump has said the war is necessary to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even as he faces political pressure to end the conflict and avoid a prolonged war in the Middle East. Oil prices have also risen in recent weeks.

Swinton's death in Iraq, the killing of two other US soldiers in Jordan and the widening exchange of attacks underlined the growing human and regional cost of the US-Iran conflict.

Guyana ferry disaster toll rises as more passengers feared aboard

At least 27 bodies have been recovered and 69 people rescued after the MV Barima capsized off Guyana's Essequibo coast late on Saturday, with authorities warning that the death toll is likely to rise. Prime Minister Mark Phillips said the ferry's manifest listed 116 passengers and 17 crew, but officials now believe as many as 179 people may have been on board.

One of the survivors, Helena Moonsammy, said she lost four of her grandchildren in the disaster and described how quickly the ferry went down. An investigation is under way into the capsizing of the 87-year-old vessel, which began taking on water while travelling from Georgetown to Port Kaituma in northwestern Guyana, near

Venezuela.

Moonsammy said the scene turned chaotic within moments. "I was fighting for my life. The boat sunk in minutes, seconds," she recalled, adding that boxes fell on her as she tried to save her grandchildren. "I told my grandbabies to cling on to anything as I hollered for them. I prayed all night and was in the water for nine hours."

President Irfaan Ali, in a national address, said, "Brace yourself for the coming days. It is going to be a difficult period for us as a people and as a country. May God watch over Guyana and bring us through this horrible experience."

Moonsammy was among dozens of friends and relatives of the missing gathered at a hospital in

the coastal town of Charity to identify loved ones. Wearing a facemask like many around her, she said, "I have to see the bodies before I go home."

Officials said the rescued captain and at least one other crew member tested positive for marijuana and remain in police custody as part of a criminal investigation. Neighbouring countries have sent boats, spotter planes and rescue personnel, including divers from French Guiana, as officials prepare to shift from a rescue operation to a recovery effort.

Public Works Minister Juan Edghill said all staff linked to the management and loading of the MV Barima had been suspended amid suspicion that extra passengers and cargo may have



been loaded illegally without being added to the manifest. Passengers have complained for years that ticket clerks unofficially sell seats to friends and associates for cash without recording their names, a practice they say has continued for decades at state-run ferry terminals.

The MV Barima had been dry docked and overhauled in 2024 and was due for major repairs in October. With the number of people believed to have been on board now higher than first recorded, authorities are continuing the investigation and recovery work as families wait for news of the missing.

Andy Burnham promises cost-of-living push with VAT cut on electricity bills



At the Cabinet meeting, Burnham told his team: "We need to be a cost-of-living government, getting that cost of living down, looking at all possible ways of doing that." He added: "We are taking immediate action to cut taxes on energy bills, put more money in people's pockets and bring back hope." Downing Street said targeting electricity bills would support more people as all suppliers are expected to pass the VAT reduction on to customers.

John Healey, the newly appointed Chancellor at No. 11 Downing Street, said: "This measure is funded this year from cancelling the Digital ID programme, and it will help bring down inflation while supporting households in every postcode." However, Darren Jones, the former chief secretary to the UK Treasury

who was moved out of the Cabinet in Monday's reshuffle, disputed that claim. "But the Digital ID program was unfunded. The government will have to set out how it will pay for its new policies at the Budget," he posted on social media.

Burnham also told ministers he wanted to give people "breathing space" and "that little extra sense that help is coming so that they can have that bit of hope that things are getting better". He asked departments to look at ways to help deliver that, while saying ministers would need to be ready to "reprioritise" spending and make "difficult decisions" financially. Starmer's leadership came to an end two years after Labour's landslide election win in July 2024, largely after domestic energy bills rose following the Russia-Ukraine conflict and

were worsened by the war in Iran. Burnham replaced him after winning the party leadership uncontested, promising Labour MPs quicker structural reforms set out in the party's general election manifesto.

"Westminster has not been working for people for too long, with families struggling with the cost of living. That needs to change," Burnham said on his first full day as prime minister.

The former mayor of Greater Manchester has also started work on his proposed "No. 10 North" plan to shift political power away from its London-centred base at Downing Street. Louise Haigh, who is effectively his deputy as First Secretary of State at the Cabinet Office, will oversee this devolution push, as Burnham begins his premiership with a focus on living costs, spending choices and structural reform.

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham chaired his first Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday, promising to lead a "cost-of-living government" and announcing a tax cut aimed at reducing household electricity bills. He told ministers the government would take "immediate action" to cut taxes on energy bills and put "more money in people's pockets".

The government said it will

remove value added tax from domestic electricity bills from October 1, with the policy to be funded by cancelling a scheme proposed by Burnham's predecessor, Keir Starmer. But the move was quickly challenged by critics, including within Labour, while the Opposition Conservatives demanded that Parliament return from its summer recess so Burnham could face scrutiny in the House of Commons.

Iran minister meets Sharif, Munir as Pakistan pushes US-Iran de-escalation

Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni, leading a high-level delegation, held talks in Islamabad on Tuesday with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir, as tensions continue to rise between Iran and the US.

The visit comes amid continued US attacks against Iran and Tehran's retaliation against American interests in the region. Alongside discussions on the regional situation, the two sides are also expected to focus on trade, connectivity and other bilateral matters.

Momeni met Sharif at the prime minister's official residence, the Prime Minister's Office said in a post on X, without giving details of the meeting. Before that, he met Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Munir, according to Iranian official media. He is also due to hold talks with his Pakistani counterpart Mohsin Naqvi, who had invited him to



Islamabad.

Pakistan is believed to be among the mediators making behind-the-scenes efforts to secure a halt in the attacks and begin negotiations between Iran and the US. The country, which previously mediated a ceasefire between the two sides, is also trying to prevent the collapse of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding signed last

month between the US and Iran. The Islamabad MoU is a 14-point interim peace deal aimed at ending the war between the two countries. Momeni arrived in Islamabad on Monday evening and was received by Naqvi. Earlier, he laid a floral wreath at Yadgar-e-Shuhda and was briefed about the monument. A contingent of the Federal Constabulary presented a

guard of honour to the visiting dignitary. He also visited the Shakarparian Park area, a small hilltop near Islamabad's Zero-Point, for a view of the city.

The talks are also expected to cover economic cooperation through higher bilateral trade, better connectivity and renewed discussion on the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan gas

pipeline. After arriving in Pakistan, Momeni said Pakistan and Iran should expand cross-border transport capacity to meet a USD 10 billion trade target. He said both countries aim to more than triple annual bilateral trade from USD 3 billion to USD 10 billion and that the visit was aimed at "developing relations and following up on agreements reached during President Masoud Pezeshkian's trip to Pakistan about one month ago". "Creating the necessary conditions on both sides of the border will be a main focus of discussions on this trip," he said, adding that regional developments would also be on the agenda.

Pakistan and Iran share a 900-kilometre border and have been trying to use that proximity to expand trade, connectivity, and cultural and religious links. Momeni's visit has brought together both the regional tensions and the wider push to deepen bilateral ties.

144 refugees dead or missing after maritime incidents off Mauritania coast, says UN

At least 144 refugees and migrants have been reported dead or missing off the coast of Mauritania after a series of maritime incidents linked to attempts to reach Europe, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said on Tuesday.

The deaths were reported following three rescue operations carried out between July 14 and July 18 along the Mauritanian coast. The UN agency renewed its call for greater access to education, jobs and legal pathways for migration, saying such measures are essential to reduce the number of people risking their lives at sea.

143 DEAD ON SINGLE BOAT

The deadliest incident involved a boat that left Bufaloto in Gambia and drifted at sea for 25 days before it was rescued on July 18.



According to UNHCR, the vessel was carrying the bodies of 143 people, while 38 survivors were brought ashore in Nouadhibou, where the agency provided humanitarian assistance.

The survivors included two children who lost every member of their family during the journey. "Among the survivors of all that ship were two children who have

lost all their family members during the journey and they are recovering in hospital," UNHCR spokesperson Matt Saltmarsh told a UN briefing in Geneva. Saltmarsh said he did not immediately have details on whether those who died had drowned or succumbed to hunger, thirst or other causes while stranded at sea. He added

that the victims were from countries in sub-Saharan Africa but did not provide further details.

DANGER REMAINS

In a separate incident, one person was declared dead on arrival after another vessel reached Mauritania on July 14, the agency said.

Overall, the three rescue operations carried out over the five-day period saved 387 people. UNHCR said Mauritania continues to receive boats carrying refugees and migrants attempting the dangerous Atlantic crossing. Since the beginning of 2026, authorities have recorded 17 disembarkations in the cities of Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, with 2,147 people rescued in total.

DEATHS REMAIN HIGH DESPITE FEWER ARRIVALS

The latest tragedy comes even as the number of people reaching Europe by sea has fallen significantly this year. According to UN data, just over 40,000 migrants and refugees arrived in Europe via major maritime routes during the first half of 2026, compared with 65,407 during the same period in 2025. Despite the decline in crossings, UNHCR warned that the number of people dying or disappearing along these routes remains at "alarming levels." The agency said expanding access to education, employment and safer migration pathways is critical to preventing more lives from being lost in desperate attempts to reach Europe.

Nepal approves redesigned Re 1 coin, drops disputed map linked to India border row

The Nepal government has approved the minting of a newly designed one-rupee coin that removes the country's controversial political map featuring the disputed territories of Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani, replacing it with the image of an ancient Buddhist monastery.

The decision marks a significant design change from the coin introduced after Nepal revised its official map in 2020 to include the three disputed areas, a move that had strained ties with India. While Nepal claims Lipulekh and Kalapani as part of its territory, India maintains that both regions belong to it.

NEW DESIGN CLEARED

According to news agency PTI, citing sources, Nepal's Council of Ministers on Thursday approved a proposal from the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) to mint redesigned one-rupee and two-rupee coins.

Under the approved design, the one-rupee coin will no longer carry Nepal's revised political map. Instead, it will feature the Lo Ghyakar Monastery, located in Marang village in the Mustang district. The monastery is regarded as one of Nepal's oldest Buddhist monasteries.

Cabinet sources said the redesigned two-rupee coin,



however, will continue to display the existing map.

The map in question was introduced during the tenure of then Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli in May 2020 after Nepal officially amended its national map to include Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani. The move drew strong objections from India and added to longstanding border tensions between the two neighbours.

OPPOSITION LEADER

SLAMS MOVE

The decision has triggered criticism from senior Nepali Communist Party leader Bhim Rawal, who described the reported removal of the map as a threat to Nepal's territorial claims.

"If the government led by Prime Minister Balen Shah has indeed decided to remove the map of Nepal, including Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani, from the one-rupee coin and replace it

with the image of the Lo Ghyakar Monastery, it will constitute another serious anti-national decision and a blow to Nepal's territorial integrity," Rawal said.

He also demanded that the government and the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party immediately clarify the decision.

COINS TO BECOME LIGHTER

The Nepal Rastra Bank said the redesign is part of a broader

effort to modernise the country's coinage by making the coins smaller, lighter and more economical to produce.

NRB spokesperson Guru Prasad Paudel said the one-rupee coin's weight will be reduced from 4 grams to 3.2 grams, while the two-rupee coin will weigh 3.8 grams instead of 5 grams. Both coins will also be made of steel rather than mixed metal and will have a steel-white finish instead of the current yellow colour.

US-Iran war widens as Bahrain, Kuwait attacked and Hormuz traffic stalls

The United States carried out a fresh round of airstrikes on Iran early Monday, hours after announcing the death of another American service member, as the conflict between the two countries continued to widen. Iran responded by launching attacks targeting Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, and Kuwait, underlining how both sides have moved closer to a wider war.

The latest escalation has also deepened pressure on global energy markets and shipping. Last month's interim deal aimed at permanently ending the fighting has fallen apart, traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has largely stalled, and both sides have struck civilian infrastructure used by millions. Benchmark Brent crude rose above USD 90 a barrel on Monday, while regular petrol in the US climbed to an average of USD 4 a gallon.

The US military said the American service member was killed in Iraq on Saturday during the "controlled detonation" of a downed Iranian drone. "We hit them very hard again tonight," US President Donald Trump said. "And we did that in honour of" the soldiers killed, he said. US Central Command said the latest operation was the ninth straight night of strikes. It said

it targeted "Iranian military command centres, air defence and coastal surveillance sites, maritime capabilities, missile and drone launch sites and communications networks". Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that the American strikes killed at least one person near Tabriz, a northwestern city about 520 km from Tehran. Tabriz is believed to host underground missile bases run by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. IRNA also said strikes likely hit Bandar Imam Khomeini in Khuzestan province, Sirik and Jask in Hormozgan province, and Konarak and Chahbahar in Sistan and Baluchistan province.

As the strikes began, a vessel caught fire early Monday in the Strait of Hormuz after being hit by a projectile near the coast of Oman, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre. The crew abandoned the vessel, which remained adrift and on fire for hours. The route around Oman has been the one the US military has encouraged ships to use to avoid Iran's control, but the Revolutionary Guard later claimed it was targeting tankers in the strait.

Iran has also hit US-allied

countries across the Middle East. Bahrain sounded missile alert sirens on Monday morning, while Kuwait said its air defences were firing at an incoming Iranian barrage.

A fresh pressure point for world energy markets emerged after Yemen's Houthi rebels announced on Monday a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia in response to an attack on Sanaa International Airport last week. With the Strait of Hormuz blocked, Saudi Arabia has been relying on a pipeline to move oil through the Red Sea.

Trump has threatened to target Iran's power stations and bridges in an effort to force Tehran to loosen its grip on the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world's oil supply moved before the war. Recent attacks suggest the US military is carrying out that plan. The US also reimposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports last week to stop crude shipments, and the military said on Saturday that it had redirected six ships and disabled one since then. The conflict has now passed the halfway mark in the 60-day period set by the interim deal to negotiate a permanent end to the war and address other issues, including Iran's nuclear programme. US



Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington remained open to talks, but added that "it has to be real". "We're going to continue to respond. If the door opens to diplomacy - if the guys that want to do something productive for Iran win and take control of that system, or take control of the negotiations - that'll be a very positive development," Rubio said. "That's not where we are tonight, unfortunately."

Hours later, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said that "proposals conveyed through mediators have been communicated to us," but did not give details. In an essay published Monday by Foreign Policy, former Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote that the interim "deal could never survive such dissonance" over the

Strait of Hormuz. "As the current conflict makes clear, Washington cannot eliminate the Iranian government," Zarif wrote. "Only diplomacy, a new peace agreement, and a new security framework produced by regional states and for regional states will allow the United States to turn its attention elsewhere." He also warned that "if Iran repeatedly threatens maritime traffic, it could turn much of the world against it."

Iranian authorities said on Sunday that at least 50 people had been killed and 517 wounded in the latest rounds of US strikes. Since the war began on February 28, 17 US service members have been killed. The latest exchanges showed the fighting spreading further even as both sides continued to speak of possible diplomacy.

Afghanistan floods: 23 dead, 100 missing in Nuristan rescue crisis

At least 23 people have been killed and more than 100 are missing after flash floods hit Afghanistan's eastern Nuristan province, with rescue teams searching through the rubble of destroyed homes for survivors and bodies.

Authorities said 80 people were also injured when the floods struck on Monday, causing an undetermined number of buildings to collapse. The provincial capital, Parun, was among the affected areas. Forecasters have also warned of more extreme weather in 10 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority said the search operation was under way on Tuesday. Video footage from Parun showed widespread destruction, with piles of mud, rocks and rubble



where buildings once stood. Bulldozers were used to clear mud and broken concrete, while local residents dug through debris with shovels.

Parun resident Zubair Ahmad said, "The flood came through here. We saw bodies being swept away in the floodwaters

with our own eyes." He said homes and shops were destroyed, adding, "The flooding caused extensive damage and heavy losses for the local people."

The meteorology department of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation said on Monday

evening that heavy rain, thunderstorms, strong winds with sand, and flash floods were expected in 10 provinces. The ministry warned residents to stay away from riverbanks and other flood-prone areas.

Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to extreme weather, including

snow and heavy rain that trigger flash floods and often kill dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of people at a time. In 2024, more than 300 people died in flash floods during the spring. Earlier this year, at least 110 people were killed in widespread flooding and landslides in several parts of the country. Decades of conflict, poor infrastructure, a struggling economy, deforestation and the worsening effects of climate change have increased the impact of such disasters, especially in remote areas where many homes are built of mud and offer little protection. The latest floods in Nuristan have left at least 23 dead, more than 100 missing and many injured, as authorities continue search and rescue efforts and brace for more bad weather.

Ukraine sends 400 drones towards Moscow as Russia steps up missile strikes

Ukraine launched more than 400 drones towards Moscow in one of its biggest strikes on the Russian capital, according to the city's mayor, hours after Russia hit Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with ballistic missiles. The fresh exchanges underlined the continuing cycle of retaliatory attacks, with any settlement to end Moscow's more than four-year-old full-scale invasion still appearing far away.

At the same time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would hold "key talks" on Monday as he seeks to contain a domestic political crisis following last week's government reshuffle. The changes brought into focus a sharp divide between the military's old guard and younger innovators over how to conduct the war.

Zelenskyy is under pressure to reassure Ukrainians that removing 35-year-old Mykhailo Fedorov from consideration as defence minister and retaining 60-year-old Soviet-trained Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi as armed forces chief will not hurt the war effort against Russia. His decision prompted days of street protests in support of



Fedorov and against Syrskyi. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said more than 400 Ukrainian drones were launched towards the Russian capital from late Sunday to early Monday. He said most were brought down far from the city and 85 were intercepted near Moscow. Andrei Vorobyov, who heads the region around Moscow, said 10 people were wounded and that several residential buildings and civilian infrastructure sites were damaged.

The attack also caused a fire at the Yuzhnye Vrata industrial

park, about 30 kilometres south of Moscow, according to Yevgeniya Khrustaleva, head of the Domodedovo area in the Moscow region. The Astra news outlet reported that the assault also caused a fire at an oil depot in Podolsk, about 20 kilometres south of Moscow, though there was no official confirmation.

Ukraine's long-range drone programme has advanced quickly during the war, creating a challenge for Russia because of the difficulty of protecting its vast territory. Kyiv has particularly targeted

Russian oil facilities, causing fuel shortages and embarrassing Russian President Vladimir Putin. In May, Russia's Defence Ministry said its air defences had shot down 1,054 Ukrainian drones in a 24-hour period.

As Kyiv continues to seek sophisticated interceptors from foreign partners to counter Russian ballistic missiles, which are much harder to stop than drones or cruise missiles, Moscow has tried to exploit gaps in Ukraine's air defences. Russia has in recent weeks increased its use of ballistic

missiles, and Ukrainian officials said a bombardment on Sunday killed at least six people and injured dozens.

"Russian forces have launched more ballistic missiles against Ukraine thus far in July than Russia reportedly produces each month," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said late Sunday. "Russia appears to be dipping into its stockpiles to continue increasing the number of ballistic missiles it launches against Ukraine, as these missiles have a higher success rate than drones and cruise missiles," it said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said on Monday that its forces struck fuel tanks in the southern Ukrainian port of Odesa overnight. Ukraine's air force said Russia fired two missiles and 94 long-range strike drones at Ukrainian territory overnight. It said air defences jammed or intercepted 81 drones, while nine drones and one missile caused damage at nine locations. The latest attacks on both sides came as Ukraine faced political strains at home and both countries continued to press their military campaigns.

India to support fitness and recreation centres on 42 Maldives islands



India and the Maldives on Sunday signed agreements under which New Delhi will provide equipment support for fitness and recreation centres in 42 islands, expanding bilateral development cooperation. The Maldives' foreign ministry said the

move is aimed at improving access to fitness facilities across island communities.

The ministry said the agreements will focus on women, girls and youth, while promoting healthier lifestyles and community well-being. The

project is being implemented with India's grant assistance under the High Impact Community Development Project, whose total outlay has been increased over the years to MVR 355 million (USD 22.9 million).

The Memoranda of Understanding were signed in Male by Maldivian Foreign Minister Iruthisham Adam, Indian High Commissioner G Balasubramanian and Maldives' Youth Empowerment, Sports and Fitness Minister Abdulla Rafiu, according to a press statement issued by the ministry.

Speaking at the ceremony, Adam said the initiative represented "a meaningful investment in the health and well-being of island communities" and would contribute to women's empowerment, equality and social inclusion. She also thanked the Indian government and its people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for their continued

support in strengthening bilateral ties.

Launched in 2019, the High Impact Community Development Project supports community-driven projects implemented by local councils and institutions across the Maldives. The ministry said 56 projects have been approved under the scheme across the country, of which 24 have been completed and inaugurated.

India has been one of the Maldives' principal development partners, supporting projects in healthcare, housing, transport, connectivity, education and infrastructure. Major Indian-assisted initiatives include the Greater Male Connectivity Project, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, the National College for Police and Law Enforcement, water and sanitation projects, airport redevelopment, and the construction of 4,000 social housing units. The new agreements add to that cooperation by backing fitness and recreation facilities in 42 islands.

The Statecraft of Technology

Technology is no longer just about innovation—it's a tool of geopolitical power. From chip wars to UPI, here's how nations are competing to shape the world's digital future

By Aditya Vikram Kashyap

On October 7, 2022, the United States Commerce Department published an export regulation so dense with technical classifications that most of the world ignored it. Trade lawyers filed it under compliance. They were wrong. The rule attempted something no tariff has ever attempted: to slow a rival's progress across an entire field of technology by controlling not products but the ability to make them. It was foreign policy dressed as paperwork, and it has been quietly re-organising the world ever since.

I keep returning to that document because of what it exposed about assumptions we had all been carrying. For most of my career, technology was an economic sector. Governments regulated it the way they regulated any industry: antitrust here, intellectual property there, research grants, spectrum auctions. The arrangement felt permanent because the assumption beneath it felt obvious. Computing was a business. The state's job was to referee it, encourage it, and tax it. The only question a minister asked about technology was how much growth it would produce. It was a comfortable question, and it produced comfortable answers. It also stopped describing the world some time ago, and the institutions asking it were among the last to notice.

Then the sector became the substrate, and nobody sent a memo. Payments, hospitals, ports, power grids, the machinery of government itself, all of it migrated onto digital rails, one unremarkable procurement decision at a time, which is why almost nobody registered the cumulative meaning of the move. Finance showed everyone what that meant.

When the European Union excluded seven Russian banks from SWIFT in March 2022, the instrument of coercion was not an army or an embargo. It was a messaging protocol. Two political scientists, Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, had described this three years earlier as weaponized interdependence: whoever sits atop the central nodes of a global network can watch what flows through them, or stop the flow entirely. Their paper reads today less like theory than like an operating manual. The remarkable thing was not that the tool existed. It was how casually the world learned it had always been there. Plumbing, it turned out, was power.

Governments absorbed that lesson quickly, and the logic ran straight to its conclusion. If networks are power, then the capacity to build them is a national capability, and capabilities are what states have always fought to accumulate. Hence the largest industrial-policy wave since the Cold War. Washington appropriated \$52.7 billion for semiconductors. Brussels set out to mobilise more than €43 billion. New Delhi

committed Rs 76,000 crore. Critics call these programmes inefficient, and as economics they often are. But no finance ministry believes subsidised fabs are the cheapest way to buy chips. They are the only way to buy insurance against a world in which someone else decides whether you get them.

The fashionable line that chips are the new oil misses the harder truth. Oil is fungible; capability is not. A semiconductor ecosystem is people, suppliers, machines and tacit knowledge compounded over decades. You cannot stockpile it, and you cannot buy it during a crisis. Earlier states subsidised things



they could count: tonnage, acreage, track miles. Capability is harder to count and easier to lose, which makes the insurance both more expensive and more necessary. That is why states now treat fabrication the way earlier centuries treated shipyards.

And capability, once held, radiates outward. The American controls of 2022 would have failed on their own, because the machines that make advanced chips come mostly from the Netherlands and Japan. Within months, both had moved. The Hague notified its parliament of licensing requirements for advanced lithography, Tokyo aligned in parallel, and ASML, the only company on earth that builds the most advanced lithography systems, began applying to its own government for permission to ship them. Britain ran the same film in reverse: after American sanctions cut Huawei off from US chip technology in 2020, London ordered every piece of Huawei equipment stripped from its 5G networks by 2027. Read those episodes together and the pattern is hard to unsee. One government's export rule rewired another's national infrastructure. Nobody signed a technology alliance treaty; one assembled itself, licensing regime by licensing regime. Alliances that were once drawn in geography are now drawn in vendor lists.

Sit with all of this long enough and a

structure comes into focus. Technological power now speaks two grammars. The first is the power of denial: control a chokepoint the world must pass through, a lithography machine, a payments network, a cloud region, and you may grant or withhold passage on your terms. The second is the power of provision: build something others voluntarily adopt, and your design choices travel with it, carrying your assumptions about governance into places your diplomats will never visit. Denial belongs to incumbents, because it requires already being indispensable. Provision is open to newcomers. Once

you hold the two grammars in mind, almost any headline in this field parses cleanly. Export controls, sanctions, vendor bans: denial. Open payment rails, identity systems offered to other governments, standards written and given away: provision. The interesting question to ask about any country is which grammar it can afford to speak. That question is the most useful lens I know for reading India.

India will not hold a semiconductor chokepoint this decade, and its policymakers are too serious to pretend otherwise. What India has built instead is the most consequential exercise of the second grammar by any state in recent memory. The Unified Payments Interface processed 22.72 billion transactions in June 2026, roughly 757 million every day, and the IMF now recognises it as the world's largest retail fast-payment system by volume. But the numbers were never the point.

UPI, and the wider India Stack beneath it, was built as public infrastructure on open specifications: interoperable by design, nearly free at the point of use, with private firms competing on shared rails rather than owning them. When India used its G20 presidency to secure a leaders' declaration with the first global framework for digital public infrastructure, and as UPI acceptance went live from Singapore to

France, it was exporting something subtler than software. A country that adopts an Indian-inspired identity and payments stack is adopting Indian answers to how identity, money and data should relate to one another. Those are rules, written in code rather than treaty.

For the first time in the modern era, a meaningful share of them is being drafted in New Delhi rather than merely complied with there. And provision compounds in a way denial does not. Every country that adopts the stack strengthens its pull on the next, while every act of denial teaches its target to route around you. One strategy builds dependence through choice. The other manufactures the incentive to escape.

Honesty requires the other half of the ledger. On denial, India remains a taker. The Semicon India programme has approved ten projects worth about Rs 1.6 lakh crore, but they amount to two fabs and eight packaging units, the foothills of capability rather than its summit. The real contest for India is not out-building TSMC, which no country will manage on any timescale that matters. It is whether platform credibility converts into standing: seats in the standards bodies, payment corridors and technology partnerships where the operating rules of the digital economy get negotiated. Rule-shaper or rule-taker. That question is genuinely open, which is precisely what makes it worth asking. For those of us who sit in boardrooms and steering committees, the implication is uncomfortable and unavoidable. The choice of a cloud provider, a telecom vendor, a chip supplier or a payments rail is no longer a commercial decision with a compliance overlay. It is a declaration of exposure and alignment, and it is read that way in foreign capitals. The questions have changed accordingly. It is no longer only what a vendor costs, but whose jurisdiction it answers to, what happens to operations if a licence is revoked, and which flag our resilience ultimately flies. The file has moved from the commerce ministry to the national security council. Executives have become participants in statecraft whether they applied for the role or not, and the reverse holds too: diplomats now negotiate lithography. Every era has had its measure of power. Territory and population once. Then coal and steel. Then oil, industrial output, command of the sea lanes. None was ever retired; each new instrument amplified those before it. Technology has now joined the succession, not as one more sector to regulate but as the medium through which the older forms of power are exercised. Historians may conclude that the defining turn of the early twenty-first century was not that technology advanced faster than ever before, but that it stopped being merely how nations grew rich and became how they exercised power.

Modi govt unlikely to let CJP protests upstage its big Parliament agenda

The government will have to decide on how it prevents a minister from becoming the face of a political crisis that threatens to consume a parliamentary session it hoped would be remembered for delimitation, women's reservation and other reforms.

By Ritangshu Bhattacharya

Conventional wisdom says the Modi government never gives in to pressure. It has cultivated an image of decisiveness, of never allowing the Opposition or street protests to dictate either policy or personnel. On the face of it, therefore, the demand for Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation appears destined to meet the same fate as countless others before it.

And yet, I wouldn't be surprised if Pradhan's tenure as Education Minister is now under more serious threat than many of us realise. Not because students are protesting or because the Opposition is demanding his head, but because the political costs of retaining him may suddenly have become greater than the costs of letting him go.

The first reason is that this government, contrary to popular perception, does retreat when political necessity demands it. It doesn't do so often, and it rarely admits that it has blinked, but history suggests that realpolitik invariably trumps rhetoric.

The farm laws were infamously withdrawn after months of insistence that they would not be. More recently, the Centre recalibrated its approach to the UGC Bill amid concerns over its political implications in the upcoming Uttar Pradesh polls. Neither decision was presented as a surrender; both were justified on the government's own terms. But they served as reminders that the Modi government is not immune to political arithmetic. If it believes the costs of holding a position outweigh the benefits, it is perfectly capable of changing course.

The second, and perhaps more compelling, reason is that governments are rarely afraid of protests by themselves. They are afraid of what protests can become. This government has weathered demonstrations far larger than the ones we are witnessing now. It has shown little inclination to bend before public outrage, celebrity interventions or middle-class anger on social media. What changes the equation is when a protest begins to alter political alignments. That appeared to happen on Monday.

Rahul Gandhi threw his unequivocal support behind the agitation. Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal, both looking for issues around which to rebuild political momentum, have embraced it enthusiastically. An



Opposition that had looked disorganised after recent electoral setbacks suddenly has a cause capable of uniting disparate parties inside and outside Parliament. Whether that unity lasts is another matter. But from the BJP's perspective, the possibility itself is reason enough for concern.

The timing could scarcely have been worse. Amit Shah and the BJP leadership had spent months, if not years, preparing for a parliamentary session that was expected to be dominated by legislation that could define this government's legacy for decades to come.

Delimitation, women's reservation and other significant constitutional and political reforms were expected to dominate the conversation. Getting to this point had required painstaking political management – from allegedly engineering defections in AAP and TMC to persuading opposition satraps like Sharad Pawar and MK Stalin to at least remain neutral on key pieces of legislation.

Yet, by the end of the first day of the Monsoon Session, the government's legislative agenda had been completely eclipsed. Parliament, television studios and social media were talking about cockroaches, student protests and Dharmendra Pradhan. This is a government that invests enormous effort in narrative management. Losing control of the opening day of a crucial

parliamentary session is not something it would have taken lightly.

That, in turn, creates another problem. The very regional parties whose tacit support the BJP may require for some of its legislative ambitions are now being nudged towards siding with the protesters instead.

The comments made by Supriya Sule and MK Stalin following the police action against students were hardly those of parties preparing to quietly assist the government in Parliament. Public statements do not always translate into parliamentary behaviour, but politics is often about creating room for manoeuvre.

Every day that the issue remains alive makes it harder for these parties to be seen cooperating with the government, and that inevitably complicates the BJP's parliamentary calculations.

It is against this backdrop that Monday's meetings become politically interesting. Amit Shah spent three-and-a-half hours with Dharmendra Pradhan. At almost the same time, Union Health Minister JP Nadda met representatives of the CJP. Nobody outside those rooms knows what was discussed, and it would be irresponsible to pretend otherwise. But long meetings during moments of political crisis usually indicate that the leadership believes there is a political problem requiring careful management. There is no proof that Pradhan has been asked to resign. They are proof that the matter has

reached the highest levels of the BJP. Finally, there is something more intangible but equally significant. I have struggled to find anyone who is actually making a political case for Dharmendra Pradhan anymore. The government's critics want him gone, which is hardly surprising. But more strikingly, even its supporters privately concede that he should probably have been replaced long ago. Their argument is not that he deserves to stay, it is that removing him now would amount to rewarding protests. That is an important distinction. Once conversations within a political ecosystem shift from defending a minister to debating the timing of his exit, it is usually a sign that his political capital has been substantially depleted. The only question that remains is whether the leadership believes retaining him projects strength or whether it has become an unnecessary political burden. I may be wrong. Politics has a habit of humbling anyone who makes predictions with too much confidence. But taken together, the sequence of events over the last 48 hours suggests that this story is no longer just about an Education Minister facing criticism over student unrest. It is about a government trying to prevent one minister from becoming the face of a political crisis that threatens to consume a parliamentary session it had hoped would be remembered for entirely different reasons.

CJP Agitation To Farmers' Rally: A Look At Recent Protests Across India

From Delhi to Punjab and Kerala, protests over education, trade, employment and displacement continue, with fresh demonstrations scheduled this week



A series of protests across India has gathered momentum in recent weeks, with demonstrators raising concerns over issues ranging from the alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and the proposed India-US trade deal to rehabilitation under the Ken-Betwa Link Project and employment demands in Punjab. While some agitations are continuing, others have concluded or are scheduled in the coming days.

CJP-Led NEET Protest Continues In Delhi

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) led protest over the NEET UG 2026 paper leak entered its 24th day on Tuesday, with demonstrators returning to Jantar Mantar after a day of clashes with the Delhi Police during the 'Sansad Chalo' march. On the opening day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, thousands of students and activists attempted to march from Jantar Mantar to Parliament, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination and multiple paper leaks. Ahead of the march, the Delhi Police imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) across the New Delhi district, stating that no permission had been granted for the procession.

As protesters attempted to move towards Parliament, police stopped them at several barricades. According to the police, more than 170 people, including protesters and security personnel, were injured during the clashes.

While the Delhi Police maintained that the protest was handled professionally, protesters and eyewitnesses alleged the use of force, including baton charges.

Rally Against Proposed India-US Trade Deal

Farmers from Punjab, Haryana,

Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan are expected to participate in a rally at Delhi's Kisan Ghat under the banner of the 'Desh Bachao Morcha' to oppose the proposed India-US trade agreement. Farmer organisations have argued that allowing cheaper agricultural imports into India could adversely affect cultivators, agricultural labourers, livestock rearers and small traders. They contend that the proposed agreement may extend beyond agricultural commodities to sectors such as dairy, industry, digital trade, e-commerce, intellectual property rights, government procurement and services. The protesting groups have urged the Centre to abandon the proposed trade pact, saying it could undermine the country's agricultural economy. Several farmers' organisations in Punjab have been holding demonstrations and motorcycle rallies over the issue in recent weeks.

Ken-Betwa Protest Ends After Police Detentions

A two-week protest against the Ken-Betwa Link Project in Madhya Pradesh ended on July 19 after police detained protest leader Amit Bhatnagar and around 150 demonstrators at Kupi village in Chhatarpur district.

The agitation centred on concerns over displacement, rehabilitation and compensation for families affected by the river-linking project. Many protesters belonged to Gond and Kol tribal communities, who argued that the project threatened not only their homes and farmland but also forests, rivers and traditional livelihoods.

The administration said Bhatnagar, who had been on an indefinite fast, was taken to hospital in view of his health condition and denied that he had been formally arrested.

The Rs 44,605-crore Ken-Betwa Link Project, India's first river-linking project,

- NEET-UG protests in Delhi have intensified, while solidarity demonstrations and political reactions continue across several states.
- Farmers, MGNREGA employees and Ken-Betwa project-affected families have mobilised over trade, employment and rehabilitation concerns.
- Fresh protests and a Maharashtra bandh highlight growing mobilisation over education, agriculture, livelihoods and public policy issues.

aims to transfer water from the Ken River to the Betwa basin through the Daudhan Dam and an extensive canal network. The government says the project will improve irrigation, provide drinking water and generate hydroelectric power across parts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. However, project-affected families have continued to seek stronger rehabilitation measures and compensation.

SFI Stages Protest In Kerala

The Students' Federation of India (SFI) organised a protest march towards the Kerala Raj Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram on July 20 over the alleged NEET-UG paper leak.

The protesters demanded the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and attempted to march towards the Raj Bhavan before police stopped them at barricades.

As some demonstrators attempted to breach the barricades, the police used water cannons to disperse the crowd. The demonstration formed part of a wider series of protests organised by student groups over the alleged examination irregularities.

Punjab MGNREGA Employees Continue Indefinite Strike

Contractual employees working under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) in Punjab have continued their indefinite strike, which began on June 1, demanding regularisation of their services.

The employees are also seeking the release of pending salaries, which they claim have not been paid for five months, besides welfare benefits and service conditions similar to those available to regular government employees.

The agitation escalated on July 20 when thousands of employees and workers from across Punjab gathered in Khanna and attempted to march towards the residence of Rural Development and Panchayats Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond. Protesters alleged that police used

lathis and tear gas to stop the march. The confrontation has become a significant political issue in the state, with opposition parties criticising the Aam Aadmi Party government over its handling of the protest.

Tribal Protests In Odisha

Tribal protests against the proposed Sijimali bauxite mining project in Odisha drew political attention in April 2026. The Congress demanded an independent inquiry into the unrest, alleging violations of tribal rights under the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, and the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

The agitation centres on opposition to the construction of infrastructure linked to the mining project in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts. Protesters have alleged that local Gram Sabhas were bypassed and that rehabilitation and legal safeguards for tribal communities were not adequately followed.

The issue escalated on April 7 when tribal protesters clashed with security personnel in Rayagada district's Kashipur block over the construction of a road leading to the proposed mine allotted to a private company. According to officials, around 60 police personnel and more than 10 villagers were injured in the violence.

Maharashtra Bandh On July 23

The Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), led by Prakash Ambedkar, has called for a Maharashtra bandh on July 23 in support of the CJP-led student movement over the alleged NEET-UG paper leak and in protest against the police action on demonstrators in Delhi.

The party has appealed to political organisations, student groups and members of the public to participate in the statewide shutdown. The bandh call comes amid growing political reactions to the continuing student agitation and is expected to add to demonstrations linked to the NEET controversy.

BrahMos Blockade: How India's 'missile ring' in South China Sea Has Beijing On Edge



India's BrahMos and Astra missile deals with Indonesia have triggered sharp debate in China over the South China Sea. Chinese analysts say the expanding BrahMos footprint across ASEAN could complicate PLA Navy operations and sharpen regional calculations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently concluded a historic 3-nation Indo-Pacific tour. Among the key outcomes, India and Indonesia sealing the BrahMos and Astra Missile Deals has attracted much attention among China's strategic community and spurred intense discussions on the Chinese internet about how the development might impact the PLA Navy's choices in the highly contested South China Sea.

The Chinese side noted with concern that this cooperation makes Indonesia the third ASEAN country, after the Philippines and Vietnam, to acquire BrahMos missiles. In 2022, the Philippines signed the procurement agreement and the first batch of BrahMos was officially delivered in April 2024 and reportedly deployed to the areas north of Luzon Island, facing the Taiwan Strait and

Palawan Island facing the South China Sea.

There are reports that the Philippines may purchase improved versions with longer ranges from India in the future. In May, during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Defence Secretary RK Singh announced that India and Vietnam had reached a cooperation agreement to acquire BrahMos missiles.

Given the strategic significance of the South China Sea, connecting multiple important sea lanes for global trade and transportation, and serving as a key node in the Asia-Pacific military competition, the Chinese side is increasingly alarmed by the growing presence of India-made missiles in the region.

WHAT CHANGES FOR CHINA IN THE SCS?

Chinese analysts believe that the subsequent deployment of BrahMos by the three SCS nations will change the nature of the threat to PLA-N. In the past, the shore-to-ship missiles it encountered in the South China Sea were mostly subsonic, such as the YJ and Exocet,

which gave radar ample time to respond. But now with supersonic threats emerging from three directions simultaneously, the Chinese maritime defence system needs to be fully forward-positioned and focused on achieving source interception and forward-positioned countermeasures.

But the contradiction is that for source interception or stopping the launch vehicle on land before the missile leaves the launch pad, PLA-N will get tested for its willingness to strike first and bear the political cost of firing the first shot.

On the other hand, PLA-N has always operated with the principle of freedom of movement in the South China Sea, relying on absolute situational dominance. Once deployments are made in three directions, a single patrol, exercise, or close-in reconnaissance could be interpreted as a provocation by the other side, meaning the threshold for misjudgement will be lowered and the chances of conflict will

A THREE-WAY BLOCKADE?

Post the Indonesia deal, a growing discourse on the Chinese internet is that geographically, the BrahMos deployment sites in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia, when joined together, form a "ring-shaped blockade" around the key geopolitical chokepoints in the South China Sea. Indonesia is located at the southern end of the South China Sea. The Philippines has deployed its missiles in northern Luzon and Palawan, with a range that directly covers the Bashi Channel, the crucial passage to and from the Western Pacific. Meanwhile, Vietnam's long coastline, once equipped with BrahMos missiles, could project them eastward to the main international shipping lanes in the central South China Sea, directly opposite China's Hainan Island and Sanya naval base. This essentially means that of the four traditional entrances and exits to the South China Sea, three are now guarded by this supersonic anti-ship missile, leaving the Taiwan Strait as the only free outlet for the PLA-N, several commentaries on the Chinese internet noted.

increase, the Chinese side assessed.

OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA?

Most Chinese observers believe that India has made a shrewd move – without sending a single soldier or ship, it has doubled the complexity of the South China Sea situation simply by selling weapons and leveraging Russian technology, Indian diplomacy, and the territorial claims of Southeast Asian countries.

This, they argued, essentially means that tensions along the China-India border is increasingly getting linked to the tensions in the South China Sea.

The BrahMos missile's success in the supersonic anti-ship missile market, they noted, is also due to the opportune timing. Europe and the United States have almost no competitive products in this field. France's 'Flying Fish' and the United States' 'Harpoon' are still at the subsonic level.

Russia's 'Onyx' and 'Zircon' production capacity is tight due to the war and sanctions. India is taking advantage of this supply gap to not only build its export profile but to also get deeply involved in the South China Sea affairs.

RUSSIA'S 'DUAL GAME', VIETNAM'S 'LIP SERVICE' IRK CHINA

Given the BrahMos project is a joint venture between India and Russia, Russia's role in the export program, particularly to the SCS countries, came under the scanner.

Questions were raised -- why would Russia, despite its close

strategic cooperation with China, export such highly sensitive military technology to India, which would later on be used to arm China's neighbours?

The inference drawn in Beijing is that Russia might be engaging in a sophisticated 'dual-track game' – deepening Sino-Russian strategic cooperation to deal with the West on one hand, while on the other hand, simultaneously diversifying risks, balancing China and maintaining and expanding its share in the traditional arms market through India.

The Chinese side also criticised the Southeast Asian countries, particularly Vietnam, for paying lip service to "non-partisanship" and "great power balancing", while turning around and signing agreements for such "highly offensive area denial weapons".

HOW MIGHT CHINA RESPOND?

While acknowledging the current challenges posed by the proliferation of BrahMos, Chinese observers asserted that China's dominance in the South China Sea is unlikely to be shaken by a few missiles. Militarily, they argued, China is continuously strengthening its air defence and anti-missile systems in the Hainan and nearby areas, and the South China Sea Fleet's long-range training is also being intensified. On the other hand, consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea between China and ASEAN nations are still progressing, and economic and trade ties are being deepened through formats like RCEP – factors that may restrain the actions of relevant countries.

India Association of Long Island Celebrates a Spectacular Annual Gala Honoring “The Creators of Icons”

Distinguished leaders, community members, and elected officials gather in Hicksville to celebrate women whose support and vision drive extraordinary success.



(By our staff reporter) Hicksville, New York: The India Association of Long Island (IALI), one of the oldest and largest Indian-American organizations on Long Island, hosted a magnificent and memorable Annual Gala on Sunday, July 19, 2026, at the elegant Pearl Banquet in Hicksville. Located just minutes from the IALI Center (India House), the venue welcomed a capacity audience of distinguished guests, elected officials, business leaders, community members, and supporters for an unforgettable evening of celebration, inspiration, and recognition. For nearly five decades, IALI has served as a pillar of the Indian-American community on Long Island. Through cultural celebrations, educational initiatives, charitable programs, youth engagement, senior services, civic participation, and community outreach, IALI has strengthened the bond between Indian heritage and American values while promoting unity, diversity, and service.

The Annual Gala remains the organization's signature event, celebrating individuals whose lives and contributions have enriched the community.

Honoring the Women Behind the Success

This year's inspiring theme, “Creators of Icons – The Women Behind Successful Men,” paid tribute to extraordinary women whose strength, dedication, and unwavering support have played a pivotal role in the success of their families, businesses, and communities.

The four distinguished honorees were:

Shashi Malik: A respected community leader whose years of selfless service, leadership, and dedication have inspired countless families and organizations across Long Island.

Padma Behen Mehta: Admired for her lifelong commitment to philanthropy, spirituality, and humanitarian service, touching the lives of many through

compassion and generosity.

Shalu Suri Chopra: Recognized for her elegance, leadership, and tireless support of numerous cultural and charitable initiatives while standing as a pillar of strength for her family and community.

Geeta Patel: Celebrated for her leadership in managing the bakery and kitchen operations of the Patel Brothers family business, while balancing entrepreneurship, family values, and community service with exceptional grace.

Keynote and Dignitaries

The keynote address was delivered by renowned hotelier, Certified Public Accountant, and entrepreneur Naveen Shah, Chairman of Navika Capital Group. His inspiring remarks encouraged community members to continue investing in leadership, education, entrepreneurship, and service while preserving the values that define the Indian-American community.

India Association of Long Island Celebrates a Spectacular Annual Gala Honoring “The Creators of Icons”



The gala was graced by an impressive gathering of elected officials and dignitaries, including:

Steve Rhoads (New York State Senator)

Jennifer DeSena (Town of North Hempstead Supervisor)

Mike LiPetri (Former New York State Assemblyman)

Bobby Kumar Kalote (Chairman

of the Nassau County Human Rights Commission)
Judge Lillian Wan

They were joined by numerous other elected officials and community representatives who came to congratulate the honorees and support IALI.

Among the distinguished guests were media mogul and renowned physician Padma Shri Dr. Sudhir Parekh, Kamlesh Mehta, Kanak Golia, Nilesh Mehta, Preeti Mehta, Ravi Chopra, Ravi Bhooplapur, Raj Jaggi, Ajay Sondhi, Jaspreet Mayall, Zahid Syed, Dalip Malik, Harry Malhotra, Herman Singh, and many other prominent business and community leaders.

Adding a special touch to the evening, last year's distinguished “Icons” honorees—Harry Bolla, Chintu Patel, Raj Bhayani, and Ambassador Pradhan—extended their heartfelt congratulations through video messages displayed during the program.

Recognizing Leadership and Service

IALI proudly recognized its past presidents for their invaluable leadership and decades of service. Those in attendance included Dr. Narendra Hadpawat, Anila Midha, Gobind Munjal, Dr. Jagdish Gupta, Bina Sabapathy, Dr. Bhavani Srinivasan, and Shashi Malik. Each was presented with floral tributes and acknowledged for helping build the legacy of IALI. Special appreciation was also extended to the Election Committee, whose dedication has ensured successful organizational elections for three consecutive years. Mr. Om Bhambri, Mr. Deepak Sachdev, and Mrs. Rita Bhatija were recognized for their commitment, integrity, and outstanding service to the organization.

IALI President Jasbir Jay Singh proudly introduced the organization's leadership team, including:

Vice President: Ravinder Kumar
Secretary: HarGovind (Govind) Gupta

Treasurer: Sujata Seth

Executive Committee Members: Ashwini Sharma, Abha Bhatnagar, Deepak Bansal, Mohan Sharma, Munish Byala, Shashi Goyal, Vijay Khanna, Vinod Goyal, Amita Karwal, Renu Kapoor, and Sanju Sharma.

President Jay Singh thanked the executive committee, volunteers, sponsors, supporters, and members whose dedication made the gala an overwhelming success. Beginning his speech with “Jai Mata Di” to honor the gala's focus on women, President Singh was also joined on stage for a few moments by his granddaughter, Kiara, presenting her as a future woman achiever.

An Evening of Elegance and Celebration

Guests enjoyed an exceptional culinary experience prepared by Pearl Banquet under the leadership of owner Gary Sikka. The elegant floral décor, beautifully designed by Gala Chair Bhavna Sharma and her talented

team, transformed the ballroom into a vibrant celebration of elegance and grace.

The evening's memories were expertly captured through videography by Kripa Ranjan, with live photography provided by Vaaho Photo under the direction of Tony Arora. During the networking reception, guests were entertained by live music, and the celebration concluded with an energetic dance floor led by DJ Parminder, ensuring the evening ended on a joyous note. In his closing remarks, President Jasbir Jay Singh expressed heartfelt gratitude to every sponsor, volunteer, committee member, elected official, and guest for making the gala a remarkable success. He reaffirmed IALI's commitment to serving the community, promoting cultural heritage, empowering future generations, and continuing its tradition of excellence for many years to come.



Want To Lose Weight? Fitness Coach Reveals 8 Gym Habits That Helped Clients Shed Up To 45 Kg

Calling it one of the most overlooked tools for weight loss, the fitness coach recommended incline walking for 30 minutes

Losing weight is often associated with intense workouts and long hours in the gym. However, fitness coach Devin Physique believes that a few smart training strategies can make the process more effective and sustainable. In an Instagram post shared on July 18, 2026, he revealed the gym habits that helped his clients lose between 20 and 100 pounds (45 kg).

According to the coach, consistency matters more than spending every day in the gym. He shared eight practical techniques that can help improve performance, support fat loss and make workouts more productive.

1. Use Incline Walking For Fat Loss

Calling it one of the most overlooked tools for weight loss, Devin recommended incline walking for 30 minutes at a speed of 3.0 to 3.5 mph and an incline of 11 to 12.

He suggested doing it four to five times a week and claimed it can help burn around 300 to 400 calories. "The most underrated fat loss tool in any gym," he wrote, adding that it is easier on the joints than running and can be followed consistently over a long period.

2. Rest Longer Between Sets

Many people rush through their workouts with short rest periods, but Devin advised taking around 90 seconds between sets.

According to him, this allows the nervous system to recover, breathing to return to normal, and muscles to prepare for the next set. He said longer recovery periods can help people lift heavier weights and avoid training plateaus.

3. Start With Your Heaviest Set

The coach also recommended changing the order of strength training exercises.

Instead of gradually increasing the weight until reaching the heaviest set, he suggested warming up first and then performing the heaviest set while the body is still fresh. Devin said this approach can help people lift more weight overall, build muscle and burn more calories during a session.

4. Track Every Workout

Monitoring progress is another habit he considers essential.

"Most people walk into the gym



and see how they feel," he wrote. He advised keeping a log of exercises, weights, repetitions and sets in a notes app or workout journal. The goal, he said, should be to improve by one repetition or a small increase in weight compared to the previous week.

5. Train Three To Four Days A Week

Devin argued that many beginners train too frequently and struggle to maintain consistency.

He recommended three to four workout sessions per week, lasting about 45 minutes each, with rest days in between. His suggested split includes an upper-body day, a lower-body day, a full-body workout and an optional fourth session.

"You'll recover better, lift heavier, and stay consistent for years," he wrote, adding that less can often be more when it comes to fat loss.

6. Eat Protein Before Training

Nutrition also plays a key role in workout performance. The fitness coach advised consuming around 30g of protein about an hour before exercising. One example he shared was a combination of whey protein, Greek yogurt, and half a banana. According to him, this can support stronger workouts, improve recovery, and help prevent energy crashes.

7. Focus On Muscle Contraction

Another tip was to pay attention to muscle engagement during each repetition.

Whether performing a bicep curl, lat pulldown, or bench press,

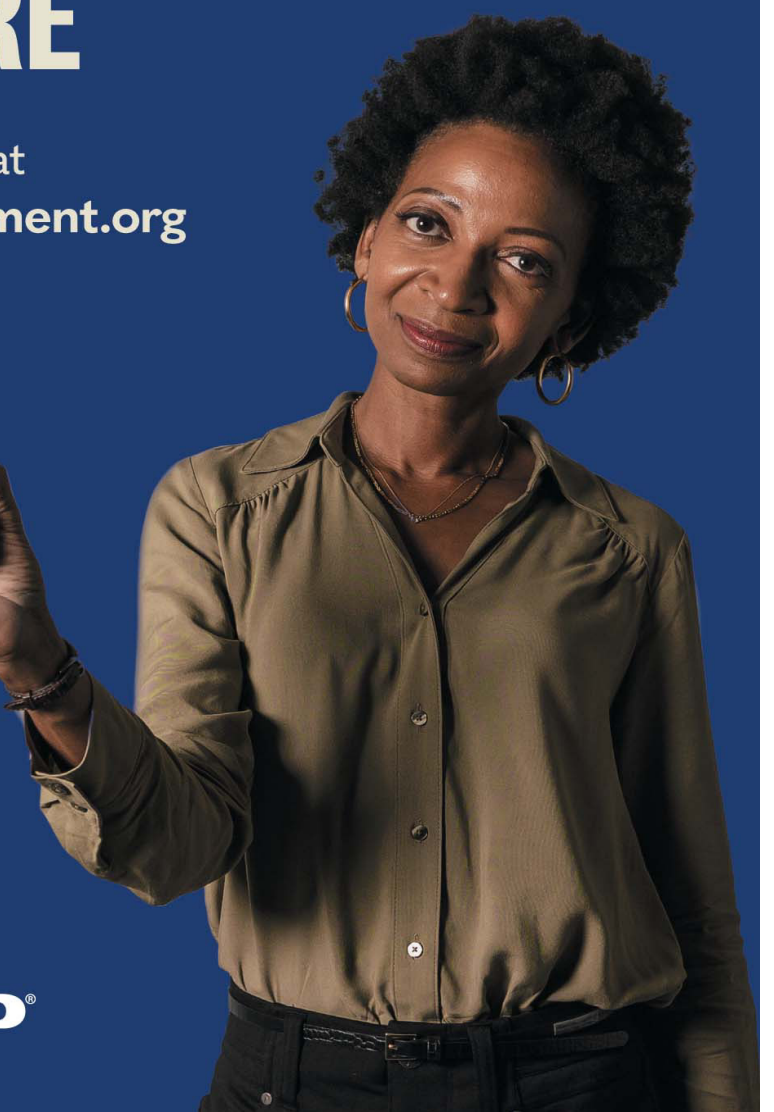
Devin suggested squeezing the target muscle at the peak of the movement for a moment. He believes this increases time under tension and makes strength-training exercises more effective.

8. Add Weight To Daily Walks

For those who already walk regularly, Devin recommended using a weighted vest. He claimed that wearing a 20-pound weighted vest during daily walks can significantly increase calorie burn while also supporting posture, core strength and bone health. Calling it "the most underrated fat loss accessory you can buy," he said it offers benefits without requiring additional workout time.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Start planning at
[ThisIsPretirement.org](https://thisispretirement.org)



How High Humidity Affects Your Body And Increases Dehydration Risk

One of the more obscure impacts of high humidity is that dehydration can set in even before a person activates their thirst response.

It is often noted that high temperatures contribute to heat-related illnesses, but excessive humidity should also be taken seriously as a health risk. In the hot and humid month of summer, with the arrival of monsoons, we deal with more cases of dehydration and heat exhaustion. What many people do not realise is that the body can become dehydrated not only due to excessive heat but also due to the inability to cool off properly because of too much humidity in the air.

The human body relies primarily on sweating, which helps regulate its temperature. The process of sweating relies greatly upon evaporation, and although heat is removed from the body due to sweating, high humidity keeps sweat from evaporating properly as air is already saturated with moisture. Thus, the body starts having problems with maintaining its body temperature as well as with pumping blood to the skin, which



follows cooling down the body.

One of the more obscure impacts of high humidity is that dehydration can set in even before a person activates their thirst response. This means that people in high-risk groups such as children, senior citizens, people with diabetes, heart disease and kidney problems are more susceptible to dehydration

than other people because their normal body functions may already be impaired. In addition, outdoor workers, sports people and individuals who have to commute for long distances face an increased risk of dehydration because of prolonged exposure to heat. However, it is crucial to pay attention to the early signs of dehydration. Typical signs of

dehydration are feeling thirsty, feeling dizzy, having a headache, fatigue, muscle cramps, dry mouth, decreased frequency of urination and inability to concentrate. You should pay great attention to those symptoms because if a person experiences confusion, rapid heartbeat, fainting or prolonged vomiting, they may be suffering

from heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

Just satisfying your thirst with water is not sufficient to stay hydrated. You should be drinking fluids throughout the day and especially before and after outdoor activities. Fresh fruits like watermelon, oranges, cucumber and musk melon are great water and electrolyte sources. The use of oral rehydration solution may be helpful in cases of excessive sweating or fluid loss. Additionally, limit the consumption of sugary, caffeinated, and alcoholic drinks that contribute to dehydration.

Necessary steps like wearing loose lightweight garments, refraining from heavy outdoor activities in the hottest hours and making sure that ventilation indoors is adequate can bring down the risks of heat-related illnesses. Remember that high humidity is not just an uncomfortable weather condition; it is a serious health risk.

Malaria Vs Chikungunya Vs Dengue: Causes, Symptoms And Prevention Explained

The monsoon season brings welcome relief from the heat—but it also creates ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes that spread diseases like malaria, dengue, and chikungunya. While these illnesses often begin with fever and body aches, they are caused by different pathogens, spread by different mosquitoes, and require different approaches to diagnosis and treatment.

Here's how to tell them apart and when it's time to seek medical attention.

What Causes These Diseases?

Malaria: Malaria is caused by Plasmodium parasites, which are transmitted through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito. Unlike dengue and chikungunya, malaria is a parasitic infection and can become life-threatening if treatment is delayed.

Dengue: Dengue is a viral infection caused by the dengue virus. It spreads through infected Aedes mosquitoes, which

typically bite during the daytime. While many cases are mild, some can progress to severe dengue, a medical emergency that requires prompt treatment.

Chikungunya: Chikungunya is also caused by a virus transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes. It is best known for causing intense joint pain, which may persist for weeks or even months after the fever has subsided.

Malaria Vs Dengue Vs Chikungunya: What's The Difference?

Although all three illnesses can cause fever, some symptoms are more characteristic of each disease.

Malaria Symptoms

High fever that may come in cycles
Chills and excessive sweating
Headache
Fatigue and weakness
Nausea or vomiting
Muscle aches
Dengue Symptoms
Sudden high fever

Severe headache
Pain behind the eyes
Muscle and joint pain ("breakbone fever")
Nausea or vomiting
Skin rash

Warning signs of severe dengue include:

Severe abdominal pain
Persistent vomiting
Bleeding from the gums or nose
Blood in vomit or stool
Difficulty breathing
Extreme weakness
These symptoms require immediate medical care.

Chikungunya Symptoms

Sudden fever
Severe joint pain, especially in the hands, wrists, ankles, and feet
Muscle pain
Headache
Rash, Fatigue
Unlike dengue, the joint pain associated with chikungunya can linger long after the infection has cleared.

Key Differences At A Glance

Malaria is caused by a parasite,

while dengue and chikungunya are caused by viruses.

Anopheles mosquitoes spread malaria, whereas Aedes mosquitoes spread dengue and chikungunya.

Severe joint pain is more commonly associated with chikungunya.

Pain behind the eyes and the risk of bleeding are hallmark features of dengue.

Chills and recurring fever with sweating are more typical of malaria.

How To Protect Yourself

Since all three diseases are spread through mosquito bites, prevention focuses on avoiding mosquito exposure and reducing breeding sites.

Use an EPA-approved or government-recommended mosquito repellent.

Wear long-sleeved clothing and full-length trousers, especially during peak mosquito activity.

Sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets where appropriate.

Install window and door screens or use air conditioning when possible.

Remove stagnant water from coolers, flower pots, buckets, tyres, and other containers where mosquitoes breed.

Keep overhead tanks and water storage containers tightly covered. Participate in community mosquito-control efforts by eliminating breeding sites around homes and neighbourhoods.

When Should You See A Doctor?

Seek medical attention immediately if you have: A high fever lasting more than two days
Severe body or joint pain

Persistent vomiting
Difficulty breathing

Bleeding from the nose or gums
Confusion, drowsiness, or seizures

Doctors may recommend blood tests to identify the exact cause of the fever, as malaria, dengue, and chikungunya can have similar early symptoms but require different medical management.

Step-By-Step Guide To Make Traditional Chicken Yakni Pulao



Ingredients: 500 grams chicken, 6 cups water, 1 onion halved, 1-inch ginger, 6 garlic cloves, 1 bay leaf, 1 cinnamon stick, 4 green cardamom pods, 5 black peppercorns, 4 cloves, salt to taste, 2 cups basmati rice (soaked for 30 minutes), 2 tablespoon ghee or oil, 1 onion (thinly sliced), 2 green chillies (slit), 1 teaspoon garam masala, fresh coriander leaves, fresh mint leaves, 1 tablespoon lemon juice. (Image: AI-Generated)



Firstly, boil the chicken with some onion, ginger, garlic, whole spices and salt. Let this simmer until the chicken turns soft, then drain and reserve the stock. (Image: Pinterest)



In a heavy-bottomed pan, heat ghee and fry the sliced onion until they turn golden brown. Now, add cumin seeds and slit green chillies to this. (Image: AI-Generated)



Add cooked chicken, soaked rice, garam masala, and some pepper. Pour in the reserved stock so that the rice is fully covered with the broth. (Image: Pinterest)



Allow everything to boil for a minute or two, then cover the pot and cook on a low flame until the rice soaks up the stock and turns fluffy. (Image: Pinterest)



Let the pulao rest for at least 5 to 10 minutes before fluffing gently. Garnish with chopped coriander, mint, and lemon juice. Serve with raita or salad. (Image: Pinterest)

6 Antioxidant-Rich Herbs You Can Easily Grow In Your Kitchen Garden



Rosemary: Packed with rosmarinic acid, rosemary provides powerful cell protection and supports cognitive function. This fragrant perennial thrives in well drained soil, offering a hearty evergreen aroma along with culinary versatility that elevates roasted vegetables, meats, and savoury homemade bread dishes. (Image: Pexels)



Basil: Rich in antioxidants like eugenol, fresh basil actively combats free radicals while reducing inflammation. Extremely simple to cultivate from seeds or cuttings, it flourishes in sunny spots, bringing vibrant flavour, fresh aroma, and wholesome nutrition to homemade pesto and salads. (Image: Pexels)



Mint: Menthol and carnosic acid make mint a stellar antioxidant herb for aiding digestion and cooling inflammation. Fast growing and resilient, it spreads easily in containers, providing a continuous supply of refreshing leaves for brewing herbal teas, summer drinks, and salads. (Image: Pexels)



Thyme: Thyme is loaded with thymol and potent flavonoids that naturally strengthen immunity and support respiratory health. This low maintenance herb requires minimal watering, making it an effortless addition to sunny kitchen counters, dried spice mixes, stews, and savoury marinades. (Image: Pexels)



Sage: Loaded with polyphenols, sage is renowned for boosting brain health and lowering oxidative stress. This hardy herb prefers sunny windowsills with moderate watering, rewarding home gardeners with soft velvety leaves that bring rich, earthy flavour to comforting savoury meals. (Image: Pexels)

This Indian city ranks sixth in world's happiest cities 2026 list

One heritage city from India has secured a place on Time Out's world's happiest cities 2026 list and no, it's probably not the one you're thinking about.



Your city could be a party animal's ultimate paradise, home to some of the best food stories, and probably have some of the best landmarks for capturing those aesthetic memories. But does the city make you happy? The latest world's happiest cities 2026 ranking by Time Out, has featured 20 such cities. For its annual global survey, around 24,000 locals were asked to rate their cities not just for nightlife and food, but also respond to questions about the sense of community, how easy it is to find love, and whether their city makes them happy. The answers have now shaped the list of the world's happiest cities for 2026. And one

heritage city from India ranks in the top 10.

Indian city ranks in World's Happiest Cities

This city is famous for its rich desi food, iconic landmarks, and is often one of the most sought-after weekend getaways for people in North India. It's the Pink City! Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, has been ranked sixth on the Time Out world's happiest cities 2026 list.

As the Gen Z lingo goes, "This was not on anyone's bingo card!" Well, the Pink City has always been easy to love. Anyone who has visited Jaipur knows how it offers an unusual balance.

It has those green parks, walkable neighbourhoods, and a hustle that isn't overwhelmingly chaotic. It also has a slow-living charm. You can spend the morning exploring a palace, the afternoon shopping in colourful bazaars, and the evening over pyaaz kachoris, laal maas or pasta, if that's your thing.

So, in a way, this royal city definitely has something for everyone.

As far as specific parameters are concerned, to compile the list of the world's happiest cities in 2026, researchers asked locals to respond to the following statements:

My city makes me happy

I feel happier in my city than in other places I've lived or visited

The people in my city seem positive

I find joy in the everyday experiences my city offers

The sense of happiness in my city has grown a lot recently

The rankings were then based on the share of positive responses, with only the highest-ranked city from each country making it to the final top 20. Topping the list this year is Bath in the United Kingdom, followed by Panama City in Panama, Guadalajara in Mexico, Medelln in Colombia, and KrakÅ³w in Poland.

Spain Could Be Next! 6 Countries Where Indians Can Pay Using UPI

Spain may soon join the growing list of countries accepting UPI. Here's where Indian travellers can already enjoy seamless scan-and-pay transactions abroad.

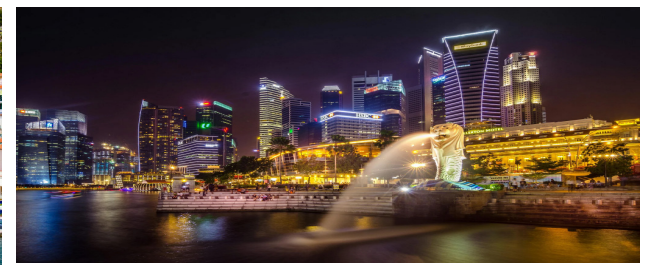


Spain Could Soon Join The UPI Club

Indian travellers may soon be able to make seamless UPI payments in Spain, adding another popular European destination to the growing list of countries embracing India's digital payment system. If the rollout goes ahead, tourists could pay at participating merchants by simply scanning a QR code using their

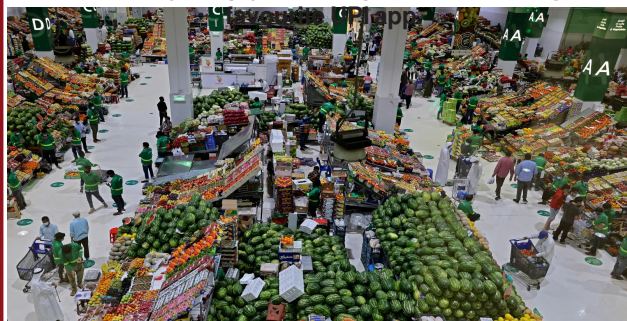


Greece – The Newest Addition Greece recently became the 10th country to roll out UPI acceptance. Whether you're exploring Athens or island-hopping through Santorini and Mykonos, eligible Indian travellers can make digital payments at participating merchants without relying solely on cash or international cards.



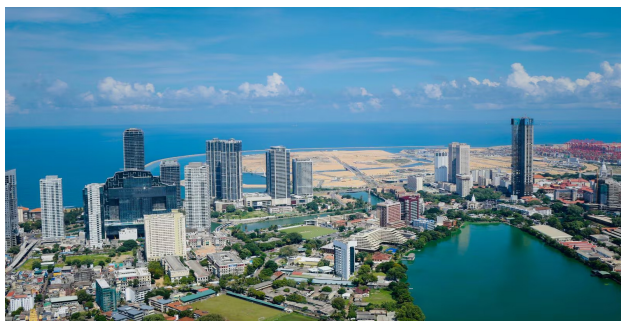
Singapore – A Favourite Gets Even Easier:

Singapore was among the earliest countries to integrate UPI, thanks to its payment linkage with India's digital payment network. Indian visitors can enjoy smoother transactions while dining, shopping and exploring the city.



UAE – Shopping Just Got Simpler

Whether you're visiting Dubai or Abu Dhabi, UPI acceptance has made payments more convenient at participating stores, restaurants and attractions, reducing the need to carry large amounts of cash.



Sri Lanka – Easy Payments Across The Island Sri Lanka introduced UPI to make travel easier for Indian tourists. From Colombo to Galle and popular beach destinations, participating merchants now accept digital payments via UPI.



Mauritius – A Seamless Holiday Experience

Mauritius officially launched UPI in 2024, allowing Indian visitors to make convenient digital payments while enjoying the island nation's beaches, resorts and local markets.

From Philadelphia To Tokyo: 6 Cities That Truly Come Alive After Sunset

For years, travel itineraries revolved around what to see during the day, landmarks, museums and guided tours packed into sunlit hours. Today, that's changing. Increasingly, travellers are planning their evenings as carefully as their mornings, fuelling the rise of night tourism, a trend that celebrates destinations after sunset through culture, cuisine, sports, live entertainment and neighbourhood experiences.

Instead of ending the day after dinner, modern travellers are seeking authentic ways to experience a city's personality at night. Whether it's attending a theatre performance, catching a local sporting event, discovering hidden cocktail bars or exploring vibrant food districts, evenings are becoming the highlight of many trips.

Here are some of the cities leading the way.

Philadelphia, USA: Where Every Evening Offers A Different Experience

As daylight fades, Philadelphia transforms into one of America's most dynamic after-dark destinations. The city blends professional sports, performing arts, live music and a thriving culinary scene, ensuring that no two evenings feel the same.

Cheer Alongside Passionate Sports Fans: Philadelphia's sporting culture is legendary, and nowhere is it more evident than at the South Philadelphia Sports Complex, home to the city's four professional sports teams. Even visitors without match tickets can soak up the atmosphere at iconic sports bars such as Cavanaugh's Rittenhouse or McGillin's Olde Ale House, where game nights become community celebrations.

The city also embraces collegiate athletics, with nearly 100 higher education institutions contributing to an active sporting calendar. During spring and summer, rowing races along the Schuylkill River offer another distinctly Philadelphia evening experience.

Beyond Bars: Gaming And Interactive Entertainment: Philadelphia's nightlife extends far beyond traditional pubs. Visitors can enjoy



friendly competition at bowling venues like Lucky Strike and South Bowl or test their driving skills at the Formula 1-inspired F1 Arcade, where state-of-the-art racing simulators are paired with food and drinks.

Golf lovers can head to Five Iron Golf, while Liberte Grounds and Puttshack offer imaginative mini-golf experiences that blend technology, local themes and social entertainment.

For those looking to continue the evening, Rivers Casino near Fishtown and Live! Casino & Hotel in the Stadium District remain open around the clock, combining gaming with multiple restaurants, sports lounges and live entertainment.

A City That Performs After Dark: Philadelphia's evenings are equally rewarding for lovers of the performing arts. Ensemble Arts Philly brings together world-renowned institutions including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Philadelphia Ballet and Opera Philadelphia, while the historic Walnut Street Theatre, America's oldest continuously operating theatre continues to stage acclaimed productions throughout the year.

Music lovers are equally spoilt for choice. Intimate neighbourhood venues such as

Johnny Brenda's in Fishtown and Solar Myth regularly host emerging artists, while major concerts fill venues like the Xfinity Mobile Arena and Lincoln Financial Field.

Explore Philadelphia Through Its Food: The city's diverse culinary landscape is another reason travellers are extending their evenings.

Guided experiences with City Food Tours introduce visitors to Philadelphia's neighbourhood food culture, while interactive cooking sessions at La Cucina at the Market allow travellers to learn local recipes and techniques, turning dinner into an experience rather than simply a meal.

End The Night Like A Local: Some of Philadelphia's most memorable moments happen inside neighbourhood institutions.

Bob and Barbara's in South Philadelphia is famous for introducing the city's iconic "Citywide Special", a shot of Jim Beam paired with a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon and for hosting Philadelphia's longest-running drag show.

Meanwhile, Monk's Café in Rittenhouse Square has become a favourite among beer enthusiasts thanks to its extensive Belgian beer selection. Cocktail lovers gravitate towards R&D

Cocktail Bar in Fishtown before heading next door to Frankford Hall, a lively German-style biergarten known for communal tables, outdoor games and oversized steins.

Tokyo, Japan: Neon Nights And Midnight Dining

From late-night ramen counters and karaoke bars to 24-hour convenience stores and dazzling entertainment districts such as Shinjuku and Shibuya, Tokyo proves that some cities never truly sleep. Visitors can spend an entire evening hopping between izakayas, arcades and rooftop bars.

Seoul, South Korea: Cafés, Markets And Midnight Culture

Seoul's after-dark appeal extends well beyond nightlife. The city's night markets, Han River parks, themed cafés and late-night shopping districts attract locals and visitors alike, making evenings an integral part of the travel experience.

Bangkok, Thailand: Street Food After Sunset

Bangkok's streets come alive once temperatures drop. From bustling night markets and riverside dining to rooftop bars overlooking the Chao Phraya River, the Thai capital has become synonymous with unforgettable evenings.

New Orleans, USA: Music Around Every Corner

Whether it's live jazz on Frenchmen Street, historic bars in the French Quarter or intimate neighbourhood venues, New Orleans offers one of the world's richest night-time cultural experiences.

Madrid, Spain: A City That Eats Late And Lives Later

In Madrid, dinner often begins when many cities are preparing for bed. Evening strolls through plazas, tapas bars, flamenco performances and lively terraces make Spain's capital one of Europe's great night-time destinations.

Why Night Tourism Is Here To Stay

The rise of night tourism reflects a broader shift in how people travel. Increasingly, visitors are prioritising meaningful experiences over packed sightseeing schedules, choosing destinations where evenings offer as much excitement as the daytime. For cities, this trend is creating new opportunities to showcase local culture, support restaurants and entertainment venues, and encourage visitors to stay out longer and spend more within local communities. As travellers continue searching for authentic experiences beyond traditional attractions, one thing is becoming clear: the most memorable moments of a trip often begin after the sun goes down.

Jamie Dimon says he wouldn't buy stocks or Treasuries at current prices

JPMorgan Chase CEO also said he wouldn't buy 10-year Treasuries and expressed caution about stock market valuations



JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon said in an interview on Monday that he wouldn't buy stocks or long-term Treasury bonds at their current prices as he thinks investors aren't accounting fully for risks that could cause turmoil in equity and debt markets. Dimon said in an interview with CNBC that he thinks geopolitical and fiscal

risks are "probably bigger than other people think" amid the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as looming tensions between the U.S. and China. He also said that growing budget deficits by governments around the world pose a fiscal risk during a period of rising defense spending, which could lead to

interest rates on government bonds remaining higher.

Dimon said he wouldn't buy long-term Treasuries given the current conditions of the bond market, saying that he thinks interest rates on U.S. bonds will likely remain elevated even if inflation subsides. The JPMorgan Chase CEO said he believes "the 10-year bond should probably be at 4% to 4.5%" even if inflation returns to the Federal Reserve's long-run target of 2%, and said that he personally wouldn't buy long-term Treasuries and sees little upside for bond prices.

The 10-year Treasury yield is currently about 4.6% and has remained above 4.2% since March after they had trended closer to 4% late last year. The most recent consumer price index (CPI)

data showed inflation was up 3.5% from a year ago – well above the Fed's 2% target – despite declining month-over-month as gas prices declined as the energy market stabilized during a period of reduced hostilities between the U.S. and Iran. Stubbornly high inflation prompted the Fed to leave interest rates unchanged at the central bank's June meeting and Fed Chair Kevin Warsh has signaled that policymakers won't tolerate elevated inflation. That has caused the market's view of the probability of rate cuts to plunge, as the CME FedWatch tool suggests that the federal funds rate will either remain steady or rise before the end of this year. Dimon also struck a cautious

note on the stock market in the interview, saying he wouldn't invest in the broader market at the high valuations that can currently be found at many leading companies and would instead look at individual companies to find "a great investment." He also likened the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the market as it reshapes the tech sector and the broader economy to what happened during the initial internet boom, saying that companies are spending a "huge" amount of money that may not quickly lead to the desired results. "Will it in total pay off? Probably, just like the internet did," Dimon told CNBC. "Will it pay off the way you expect and the timetable you expect? Definitely not."

White House teases new trade action 'soon' as it works to re-create global tariff regime

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on Tuesday signaled another round of President Donald Trump's tariffs is on the way, the latest sign that the White House is working to re-create the protectionist trade agenda that suffered a major blow earlier this year.

"We expect to see some action soon," Greer told CNBC's "Squawk Box" when asked if new tariffs are forthcoming, in light of a Financial Times report Tuesday that more duties could be announced as soon as this week.

"I can't really specify a timeline right now. I have responsibility to brief Congress and other stakeholders before I really reveal that kind of thing," Greer noted, the day after the administration slapped tariffs on Canada. "But we do expect action soon." The comments bolster trade experts' views that the Trump administration, after failing to keep its global "reciprocal" tariff regime intact, is poised to try to re-create its aggressive trade policy using the remaining tools at its disposal and pivoting to legal justifications for new duties that it expects to hold up to court challenges.

The apparently forthcoming duties, brought under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, have emerged as a key tool for that project — and they may prove more resilient than the 2025 tariffs that didn't withstand the U.S. legal system. "The expectation is continuity," Blake Harden, a trade policy expert and

managing director of Washington Council Ernst & Young, told CNBC. "We're really seeing a re-creation of that global tariff, and 301 being used as a way to lock that in."

Trump's temporary import levies that he imposed hours after the Supreme Court struck down his sweeping reciprocal tariff regime in February are set to lapse Friday.

Trump in February imposed a blanket 10% tariff under Section 122 of the 1974 trade law. The Section 122 tariffs will expire at 12:01 a.m. ET on Friday unless Congress intervenes, which it appears unlikely to do.

But the Trump administration has already taken steps to shore up its tariff regime once the 122 duties end.

In early June, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, or USTR, proposed more tariffs of up to 12.5% on imports from 60 economies. The new 301 duties would be imposed in response to alleged forced labor issues.

The U.S. has laws to prohibit trading goods with forced labor," Greer said in Tuesday's interview. "Other countries, most don't have a law. Those that do don't really enforce it."

Greer said those proposed 301 tariffs would cover "about 99% of our trade." The USTR telegraphed its new approach when it announced its investigation into the 60 economies in mid-March, one day after unveiling a spate of separate 301

probes centered on possible excess manufacturing capacity concerns.

The economies involved in those trade investigations are: China, the European Union, Singapore, Switzerland, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Japan and India.

Any additional tariffs would come on top of other recent trade actions, including slapping 25% tariffs on most imports from Brazil, which were also brought under Section 301 and are set to take effect Wednesday.

On Monday, Trump signed proclamations to impose staggering new 50% tariffs in 30 days on a range of goods from Canada, citing alleged trade discrimination against multiple U.S. industries.

Those tariffs — on Canadian wine and beer, hockey sticks, cement, dog leashes and many other products — fall under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930, a near-century-old authority that has rarely been invoked. Canada, the U.S.'s second-largest trading partner after Mexico, did not take the news well. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said in a statement Monday that Trump's 50% tariffs directly violate the North American trade pact known as the USMCA.

Carney said Tuesday that he and Trump spoke and agreed to intensify trade negotiations, while adding that all options

are on the table if the U.S. follows through on the latest tariffs threat, Reuters reported.

A slow-motion trade 'liberation day'? Trump, a longtime advocate for using tariffs to bring in revenue and protect U.S. economic interests, last year implemented an array of import duties that drove U.S. tariff rates to new modern highs and stoked tit-for-tat trade disputes with other countries, including Canada and China. The crown jewel of his protectionist agenda was "liberation day," a plan to unilaterally impose individualized tariff rates on nearly every other country all at once. Trump did just that in early April 2025 — and triggered a sudden market panic, forcing him to put the tariffs on pause days later.

Over the following months, the administration repeatedly tweaked, reimposed and re-delayed those tariffs. Then, on Feb. 20, the Supreme Court struck them down entirely, ruling that the law Trump invoked to implement the duties — the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA — did not actually authorize them. The ruling was a colossal blow to Trump's trade agenda: IEEPA-related duties accounted for the majority of U.S. tariff revenue collected last year. But while the president raged against the ruling, he also suggested that it left the door open for him to impose more durable tariffs using established authorities.

DeepSeek, Moonshot, GigaAI: Why China's AI Startups Are Rushing For IPO

China's leading AI startups appear to view IPOs not merely as fundraising exercises but as strategic milestones in the race to compete with global technology leaders

Chinese AI startups including GigaAI, Moonshot AI and DeepSeek are accelerating IPO plans

Strong investor appetite, breakthroughs in AI models, and supportive government policies are driving the rush to public markets

The startups aim to raise capital for AI research, computing infrastructure and global expansion amid intensifying competition

China's leading artificial intelligence (AI) startups are accelerating plans to go public, signalling the beginning of what could become the country's biggest AI listing cycle. Companies including GigaAI, Moonshot AI and DeepSeek are moving towards initial public offerings (IPOs) as they seek fresh capital to expand computing infrastructure, fund research and strengthen their position in an increasingly competitive global AI market.

The developments come as AI companies worldwide race to commercialise increasingly powerful models while competing for investors, talent and computing capacity. US-based rivals OpenAI and Anthropic are also preparing for eventual public market debuts. Capital Becoming Critical For Next Phase The rush towards public markets reflects the

enormous financial demands of developing frontier AI systems. Training advanced models requires significant investments in data centres, specialised chips and engineering talent. The company is also expanding its computing capacity as it pursues more ambitious AI research.

Similarly, Moonshot AI is wrapping up a funding round that could value it at more than \$30 billion before its proposed Hong Kong listing, while GigaAI is nearing a fresh funding round that would value the startup at around \$3 billion, as per BBG.

Startups Leading China's IPO Race

Among the companies moving towards public listings, GigaAI appears to be the closest to launching an IPO. The Beijing-based startup, which focuses on AI "world models", is discussing a Hong Kong listing as early as this year.

Founder Huang Guan believes the company could become the first world model startup globally to go public. "Globally, we'll be the first to IPO among world model startups," Guan said, as per BBG. Moonshot AI has reportedly begun the shareholder approval process for a Hong Kong listing that could take place within six months.

The company accelerated its plans after the strong reception to its latest Kimi K3 model and rapid growth in annual recurring revenue, per BBG.

DeepSeek, meanwhile, is preparing for a mainland China listing, with an IPO filing expected as early as this year, although its market debut is targeted for 2027, Bloomberg reported.

AI IPOs Becoming A Global Trend

The race to public markets is no longer confined to China. Across the US, some of the world's most valuable artificial intelligence companies are also preparing to list as investor appetite for AI-driven businesses continues to grow. Anthropic confidentially filed for a US IPO in June 2026, becoming one of the first frontier AI companies to formally begin the listing process.

Days later, OpenAI also confirmed it had confidentially filed for an initial public offering, although the ChatGPT-maker said it had not yet decided on the timing of its debut.

OpenAI is targeting a valuation of up to \$1 trillion, underscoring the scale of investor interest in AI companies, as per BBG. AI Breakthroughs Strengthening Investor Confidence The planned listings also reflect growing confidence in China's AI capabilities.

Moonshot's latest AI model

challenged established industry perceptions, while DeepSeek attracted global attention after demonstrating that advanced AI systems could be built more efficiently despite US export restrictions on advanced hardware. GigaAI, meanwhile, is focusing on world models for robotics, autonomous driving and humanoid robots, positioning itself in an emerging segment of AI applications. Beijing's Policy Support Adding Momentum

China's leading AI startups appear to view IPOs not merely as fundraising exercises but as strategic milestones in the race to compete with global technology leaders.

The proposed listings of OpenAI, Anthropic and China's leading AI startups suggest that public markets are becoming the next battleground for companies seeking capital. Hence, government backing is another factor encouraging Chinese AI firms to scale rapidly. Beijing has reportedly identified embodied AI and humanoid robotics as national priorities, while President Xi Jinping has publicly supported the country's advances in AI and called for a more open global technological order. Such policy support is providing companies with greater confidence to pursue expansion and public listings.

After IBM's epic stock crash, Wall Street chatter is Big Blue should break up

After IBM's (IBM) recent earth-shattering stock crash, some on the Street are speculating that Big Blue should orchestrate a Big Breakup.

Quick insight: "There is renewed speculation about breaking-up the company," Stifel analyst David Grossman said in a note on Monday.

Grossman conducted a sum-of-the-parts (SOTP) analysis of IBM and arrived at an enterprise value of \$257 billion. The largest chunk of the valuation was hybrid cloud business Red Hat at \$62.9 billion. IBM's current market cap is about \$205 billion. Grossman conceded the difficulty in valuing a business like IBM.

"We acknowledge the imprecision of our analysis; however, it suggests this may be a lower probability outcome given it does not appear to add immediate value," Grossman said.

Over the years, IBM has made several transformative acquisitions, including PwC Consulting in 2002, Cognos in 2008, and the Weather Company's data assets in 2016. Its most significant deal came in 2019 with the \$34 billion acquisition of Red Hat, a move



that accelerated IBM's push into hybrid cloud computing and artificial intelligence and remains central to its growth strategy today.

The backstory: On July 14, IBM announced preliminary second quarter results with revenue of \$17.2 billion, missing analyst estimates of \$17.85 billion. Non-GAAP earnings are expected

to be \$2.93 compared to estimates of \$3.02. IBM stock crashed 25% on Tuesday, its worst day since 1961. The stock lost 23% in a single session in October 1987. IBM CEO Arvind Krishna and his executive team will not get a pass from Wall Street analysts and investors for the disappointing second quarter. When IBM releases earnings on

Wednesday, expect execs to get peppered hard on the earnings call about what happened and how long the underperformance will persist. IBM would be wise to signal that the company is at least open to exploring the value from a breakup as opposed to the value of staying the course. Run the numbers, guys, and get back to the market.

Zendaya Continues To Stun, Seen In Bold Gold Gown For The Odyssey Promotions



Zendaya continues on her promotional tour for her new film, *The Odyssey*. The actor has been in New York for a few days, where she attended a few movie premieres with the cast of the historical fiction film.



This time she was seen heading out to a taping session with the host of *The Tonight Show*, Jimmy Fallon. The actor wore a gold skin-tight dress from the brand Jitrois in the brand's signature bustier corset silhouette, featuring a maxi-length skirt with a thigh-high split.



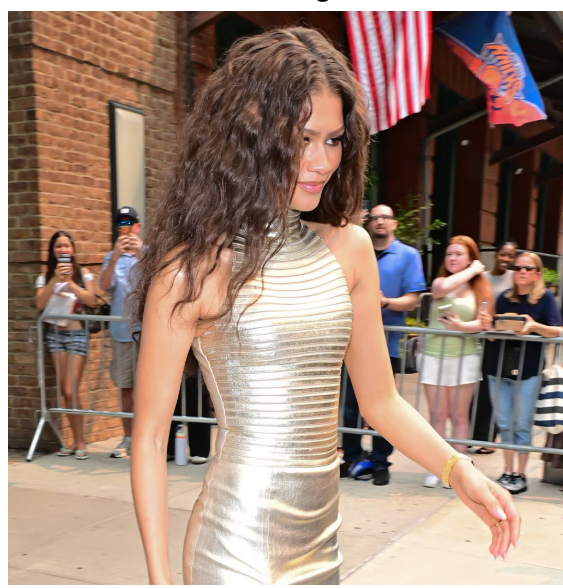
She was styled by her longtime fashion collaborator Law Roach. Zendaya accessorised her commanding gold look with a gold watch and pointed-toe gold heels. She skipped her bixie natural haircut and instead opted for a long auburn wig with soft waves.



Zendaya wore an extravagant dress for an event recently. It featured realistic feathery wings which spread out and were part of an outfit designed by Matières Fécales, an avant-garde brand based in Paris. It featured a long train with a distressed look that gave off 'Goddess returning from battle' vibe.



In this film, Zendaya takes on the role of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare. Throughout the epic, Athena serves as Odysseus' greatest divine ally, guiding both him and his son Telemachus through some of their most difficult challenges.



This time she was seen heading out to a taping session with the host of *The Tonight Show*, Jimmy Fallon. The actor wore a gold skin-tight dress from the brand Jitrois in the brand's signature bustier corset silhouette, featuring a maxi-length skirt with a thigh-high split.

Kriti Sanon Pairs Rs 36,395 Power Suit With Corset, Gives Boss Girl Vibes

Kriti Sanon, who was recently seen in the film *Cocktail 2*, has been receiving rave reviews alongside her co-stars Shahid Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna. The actor was recently seen attending an event in Mumbai, and this time, Kriti Sanon chose to exude boss girl vibes, a step away from the carefree and party girl style of her character Ally.

The actor chose to wear a grey blazer by the brand Rebecca Vallance. It featured shoulder pads for a structured silhouette and was designed for the modern woman. Usually, blazers look big, bulky and oversized. However, Kriti Sanon's look is

snatched at the waist and tapers out beautifully. She paired it with the matching grey suit pants from the same brand and added a textured grey corset underneath by the brand Polite Society. Layered with delicate black lace, the corset is not so ordinary styling option for a suit, but it can add a lot of visual interest to a look. The actor, who recently stated she would love to step away from safe roles and explore something unconventional in her films, added on a few accessories. Styled by Sukriti Groer, Kriti Sanon wore two diamond necklaces that were layered together, a few rings and even chunky

earrings. In an interview with *Humans of Bombay*, the actor revealed that watching the latest psychological drama 'Obsession' inspired her to rethink her approach towards choosing scripts. Kriti Sanon said, "When I watched 'Obsession', I was like, 'Oh my God, we need to stop going safe. We need to do something out of the box.' It really excited me."

For her glam, the actor chose to keep things bold yet chic. The emphasis of her makeup was placed on her eyes, with her fully eyebrows and a black smoky eye. A pinky-brown glossy lipstick and minimal blush rounded off the look.



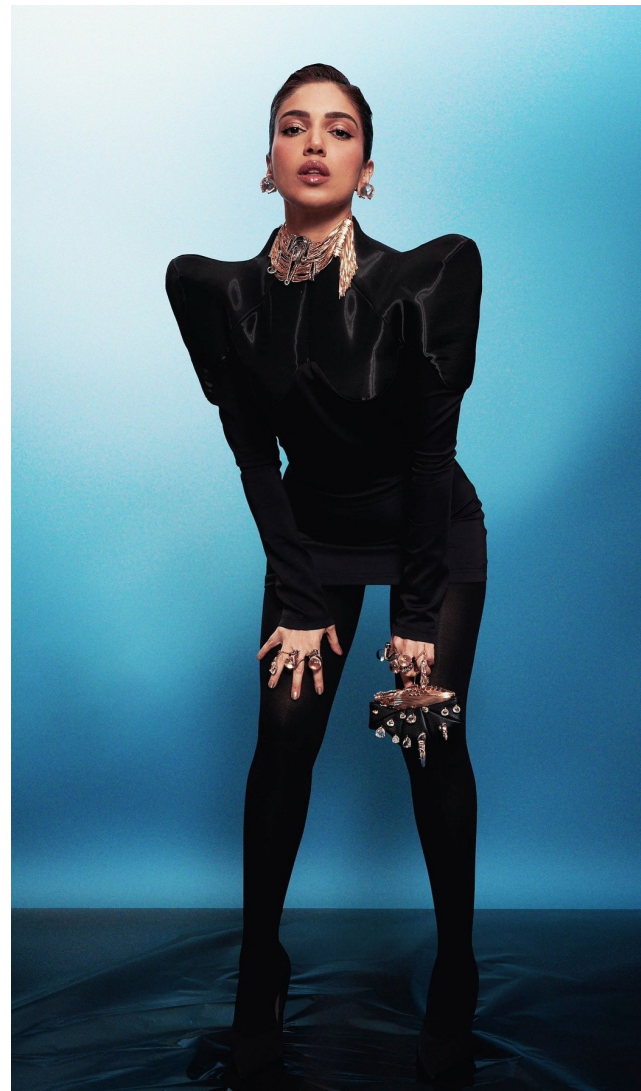
Bhumi Pednekkar's Birthday Style Is A Balance Between Minimal And Maximalist



Black has always been beyond a bold, confident colour. It screams confidence, daring and power at the same time, facets that Bhumi Satish Pednekkar likes to imbibe in her wardrobe! The actress has always made cases of minimal and maximalist fashion. As the actor has just turned 37 on July 18th, here is a look at 5 outfits where she defined fashion attitude in black.



Bhumi keeps it rich and refined in a striking black outfit featuring flared pants paired with a strapless top with starry detailed patterns, a stunning creation by Maison Amali. While the ensemble stands out on its own, Pednekkar brings a catchy contrast to her look with diamond jewellery and sums it all up with a sleek bun.



Bhumi stuns in a sculpted black attire featuring pulled-up shoulders and a body-fit silhouette that highlights her off-beat fashion sense. The *Badhaai Do* star accessorises her look with contemporary, maximalist jewellery and a mini bag that carries a charm of its own!

Anne Hathaway Is Giving Mother Energy In Ethereal Prada Gown For The Odyssey

Actor Anne Hathaway is glowing with her third pregnancy as she is busy promoting her new film The Odyssey.



Anne Hathaway is in New York for the premiere of her new film The Odyssey, that is written and directed by Christopher Nolan. For the New York premiere, the pregnant actor was glowing as she gave ethereal vibes in a white gown.



Actor Anne Hathaway plays Penelope, the devoted Queen of Ithaca and wife of Odysseus. While her husband is believed lost, she cleverly delays remarriage by weaving and secretly unravelling a burial shroud each night, making her one of Greek mythology's most admired symbols of loyalty and wisdom.



The lower half of the gown flowed down into a beautiful cascade. It had a pleated detailing that accentuated the actor's bump. She added Bvlgari jewellery to round off the look and add some extra sparkle.



For the premiere that took place in the Big Apple, actor Anne Hathaway wore a gown by the Milan-based luxury fashion brand Prada.



It featured a heavily bedazzled top with gemstones that was crisscrossed in the front and came together in a thick and supportive halter neck at the back. Her hair was styled in an elegant updo.



Despite being heavily pregnant, Anne Hathaway has been coming out with one stunning maternity look after the other. On July 13, in New York, the actor stepped out in a floor-grazing asymmetrical gown that showed off just a hint of her baby bump while looking chic and cool.



Matt Damon, who plays the titular role, was joined by his wife Luciana and their 20-year-old daughter Isabella while attending the NYC premiere of his new movie The Odyssey.



The semi-sheer gown was supposed to give the illusion of water as she walked. It was a custom GapStudio design by Zac Posen. The actor rounded off the look with a voluminous blowout, dangling earrings and clear Aquazzura heels.

People only saw me with a cigarette and saree: Mahie Gill on being stereotyped

Actor Mahie Gill, in an interview, said how OTT gave her space to move beyond stereotyped glamorous roles. She said the shift has created stronger parts for women and more work across the industry.

Actor Mahie Gill believes the rise of OTT has not only changed the way audiences consume content but has also opened up new opportunities for actors, particularly women. In an exclusive conversation with India Today while promoting Raktanchal 3, the actor reflected on her journey of experimenting with OTT, breaking free from years of being stereotyped in glamorous roles, the four-year break that cost her several projects, and why playing Saraswati Devi has been one of the most refreshing experiences of her career.

The 50-year-old actor spoke about the same and said, "Until Ritam came and narrated Raktanchal 3, I was mostly being offered glamorous roles. In almost every film, I was playing a woman who was drinking, wearing a saree, and looking glamorous. I had done that so many times that I wanted to break out of that image."

Adding, "People would come to me and say, 'Ma'am, you'll have a cigarette in your hand, and you'll do all this.' I would say, 'I want to do something else as an actor too.' It's not that I regret doing those roles;

I would love to do them again, but I wanted a break from them."

And that's precisely why the actor believes Raktanchal 3 offered the kind of challenge she had been waiting for. "So when this role came, I felt it was very challenging for me. Playing Saraswati Devi wasn't easy. The language and the dialect were difficult, and I really had to concentrate on getting them right. The body language wasn't a problem, but the dialect definitely took effort," she explained. Gill believes the rise of OTT has significantly widened the scope for female actors, offering stronger roles and more meaningful opportunities than ever before. While she admitted missing out on several promising projects after taking a four-year break from acting, she feels the

industry has evolved in a positive direction. "For women, definitely, a lot of good work is happening now. I lost some

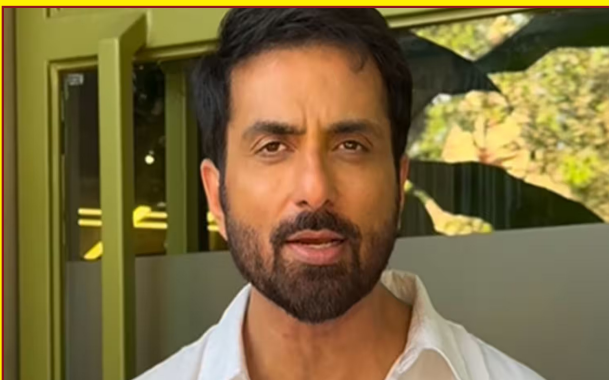
now you're getting much better opportunities," she shared. Reflecting on the changing landscape of the entertainment industry, she added that the biggest shift has been in the way women are written on screen. "I think the roles have definitely evolved. When I was offered my first OTT show, people were like, 'No, Mahie won't do it.' I just wanted to experience and experiment the difference between cinema and OTT. But honestly, I didn't feel any. The process of shooting is the same, the performances are good, and even the scripts for OTT shows are really good," she said. Crediting OTT platforms for creating more work across the industry, Gill concluded, "Things are really changing. Thanks to OTT, a lot of people are getting work. I've seen so many of my friends, such fabulous actors, sitting at home without work. OTT has opened up opportunities, and I think everyone is getting a lot more work now." Mahie Gill was recently seen in Raktanchal 3, alongside Nikitin Dheer, Karan Patel and Kranti Prakash Jha. The series is streaming on MX Player.



6 Bollywood Actors Who Are Backing CJP Protests



The Cockroach Janta Party's protest in the National Capital has gained widespread attention. Several actors, including Shabana Azmi, Sonu Sood, Prakash Raj and Riteish Deshmukh have also come out, expressing their support and condemning the violence that took place during the Jantar Mantar march on July 20th. Here are 10 celebrities who are backing CJP protests.



Sonu Sood has publicly backed the CJP-led student protests, urging authorities to treat students with empathy rather than force. The actor said young people deserve to be heard and called for a fair resolution to concerns surrounding alleged NEET irregularities.



Veteran actress Shabana Azmi visited Jantar Mantar ahead of the CJP's Chalo Sansad march and addressed the gathering. She stressed that peaceful protest is a constitutional right and urged authorities to listen to the concerns of students. Visuals of her interacting with protesters also went viral.



Dia Mirza criticised the reported use of force against student protesters and appealed for peaceful dialogue. She maintained that students raising concerns should be listened to rather than suppressed, adding that compassion must guide the response to the protests.



Prakash Raj spent time with protesters at Jantar Mantar and was among the most vocal film personalities backing the movement. Carrying the Constitution and addressing the crowd, he said speaking the truth should never be feared and called for accountability from those in power.



Swara Bhasker also visited the protest site during Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike and met both Wangchuk and CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke. She later shared her support online, thanking the organisers for "fighting for the future of all our children."

Christopher Nolan's The Odyssey Reignites the Global Box Office

\$125 Million Opening Weekend Signals a New Era for Theatrical Cinema



By Raaj Raahi | Special Correspondent | South Asian Insider

New York: Hollywood has its biggest success story of the summer. Academy Award-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan has delivered yet another theatrical phenomenon with The Odyssey, which opened to an estimated \$125 million in North America and more than \$260 million worldwide over its debut weekend. The number is not just impressive, it is decisive. The Odyssey has reportedly recovered its estimated \$250 million production budget

within its opening frame alone, instantly turning it into one of the defining box-office moments of the year.

A WAKE-UP CALL FOR HOLLYWOOD

The timing could not be more pointed. Just a week earlier, Disney's Moana opened to roughly \$43 million despite carrying a comparable production budget of about \$250 million, reviving anxious questions about whether theatrical moviegoing was losing its pull. Nolan's latest epic has flipped that conversation almost overnight. Industry analysts are now pointing out that the problem was never audience fatigue. It was the absence of films ambitious enough to demand the big screen in the first place.

Speaking to BBC News, film industry analyst Stephen Follows put it plainly: "The box office is back, and Nolan is leading the charge." That line is now being repeated across Hollywood trade desks. **AN ALL-STAR CAST, A LANDMARK FORMAT** Matt Damon leads the film as

Odysseus, backed by a sprawling ensemble that includes Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Charlize Theron, and several other acclaimed names. The cast alone had generated significant buzz months ahead of release. The film also marks a genuine technical milestone: it is the first major feature shot entirely on IMAX film cameras, giving audiences another reason, beyond star power, to return to a theatre rather than wait for streaming.

SOLD-OUT SCREENS, RESTORED CONFIDENCE Premium large-format screens, IMAX in particular, reported sold-out showings across North America all weekend, underscoring that audiences still place real value on the premium theatrical experience when the film justifies it. For theatre owners, distributors, and filmmakers, The Odyssey is more than a blockbuster. It is a vote of confidence in the theatrical business model itself, at a

moment when that confidence was in short supply.

WHY IT MATTERS

Original Story Wins: Unlike franchise-driven releases, The Odyssey proves audiences still turn out for original, director-led storytelling.

Premium Cinema Experience: IMAX and other large-format screens generated exceptional demand, reaffirming the value of theatrical exhibition.

Hollywood Confidence Returns: The film's performance has renewed optimism among studios, exhibitors, and investors after a slow start to the summer. As Hollywood heads into the back half of the summer season, Nolan has once again proven that visionary filmmaking, original storytelling, and premium theatrical presentation are still powerful drivers of global box-office success. For the global film industry, studios, exhibitors, and independent filmmakers alike, The Odyssey may end up being the film that reminds everyone why cinemas still matter.

THE NUMBERS THAT CHANGED HOLLYWOOD'S SUMMER

FILM	OPENING WEEKEND	ESTIMATED BUDGET
The Odyssey	\$125 Million	\$250 Million
Moana	\$43 Million	\$250 Million

THE ODYSSEY AT A GLANCE	
Opening Weekend (North America)	\$125 Million
Worldwide Opening	\$264 Million+
Estimated Production Budget	\$250 Million
Director	Christopher Nolan
Lead Actor	Matt Damon
Format	First feature shot entirely on IMAX film cameras
Audience Response	Sold-out IMAX screenings across North America

Avengers Doomsday trailer X review

Poor VFX faces flak, fans compare it to Ramayana

Marvel has released the first full trailer for Avengers: Doomsday, unveiling Robert Downey Jr as Doctor Doom and a crossover of MCU, Fantastic Four and X-Men characters. The footage has prompted sharp fan reactions over its CGI, missing heroes and the surprise return of a young Steve Rogers. Marvel may have assembled some of its biggest superheroes for Avengers: Doomsday, but the first trailer has left X users debating something else entirely: the visual effects. Soon after the trailer dropped, several viewers began comparing its visuals to the much-discussed Ramayana glimpse, with some even claiming that the Indian epic looked better. While the scale of the crossover excited fans, the trailer's CGI quickly became a talking point. Some viewers felt that several shots appeared unfinished, while others described the visuals as resembling a pre-rendered video game cutscene. One X user wrote, "#Ramayana glimpse visuals dominating #Doomsday's trailer visuals after being criticised so much is insane. Imagine the reviews of official



trailer are already promising so much... what will be scenario 3 days later (sic)." Another user compared the trailer to an older video game, writing, "Looks like a pre-rendered CG trailer for a video game from 2012 (sic)." The Russo Brothers' visual style also came under criticism. One viewer wrote, "You know you're watching a Russo brothers Avengers movie when the characters fight in the ugliest environments possible.

Genuinely embarrassing that these are 'adaptations' of a medium as colourful as comics. However, the trailer was not met with criticism alone. Robert Downey Jr.'s Doctor Doom emerged as one of its biggest talking points. The actor uses a distinct Eastern European accent for the role, helping differentiate the villain from Tony Stark, the character he played across several MCU films. The return of familiar characters also

fuelled excitement. Fans welcomed glimpses of Thor, Loki, Wolverine, Shang-Chi and Sue Storm, while longtime comic book readers were particularly excited by references to Xavier's School and the collision of different Marvel universes. The trailer, released on Monday, features a massive crossover involving characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), the Fantastic Four and 20th Century Fox's X-Men

franchise. It also marks Robert Downey Jr.'s return to the MCU, this time as the villain Doctor Doom. The trailer's final moments, however, proved to be among its most divisive. A young Steve Rogers appears as the "miracle" who could save everyone and is seen wielding Mjolnir. While the moment thrilled some fans, others felt that bringing the character back risked undermining the emotional conclusion of his story in Avengers: Endgame. The absence of some fan favourites, including Captain Marvel and Wanda Maximoff, was also questioned by viewers. One X user criticised Marvel for sidelining the characters despite their importance to the MCU's larger narrative.

Directed by the Russo Brothers, Avengers: Doomsday is scheduled to release in theatres worldwide on December 18, 2026. The film stars Robert Downey Jr., Chris Hemsworth, Florence Pugh, Chris Evans, Vanessa Kirby, Tom Hiddleston, Simu Liu, Paul Rudd, Natalie Portman and Channing Tatum, among others.

Akshay Kumar was not Priyadarshan's first choice for Haiwaan. Bobby and Akshaye were

Priyadarshan said Bobby Deol and Akshaye Khanna were considered before Akshay Kumar joined Haiwaan as the antagonist. The casting turn highlights the film's shift into a cat-and-mouse action thriller.

Filmmaker Priyadarshan has revealed that Akshay Kumar was not his original

would approach Suniel Shetty," he added.

the film to Kumar, who immediately showed interest in playing the

initially considered Kumar for the part because it was unlike the actor's recent on-screen image. "I thought the role was completely against his current image of a humorous, happy-go-lucky man. But Akshay loved the character," he said.

Priyadarshan also shared that Saif Ali Khan appreciated Kumar's decision to take on the role. "While we were shooting, Saif told me, 'By doing this role against me, Akshay has given me the best gift,'" he said.

The filmmaker further clarified that Haiwaan is not a comedy, despite assumptions surrounding the project. Describing it as an action thriller, he said the film revolves around a "cat-and-mouse game between the hunter and the hunted". He added that the film marks his return to the action-thriller genre after 16 years.

Last week, the makers unveiled the first look of Haiwaan, featuring Akshay Kumar and Saif Ali Khan in intense avatars. The film reunites the two actors on screen after Tashan (2008).

choice to play the antagonist in Haiwaan. According to the director, Bobby Deol and later Akshaye Khanna were considered for the role before Kumar came on board.

Speaking to Mid-day, Priyadarshan said he first narrated the script to Saif Ali Khan, who then asked him who would be cast as the villain. "I approached Bobby Deol, who wasn't happy with his role, but I cannot blame him for that," the filmmaker said.

After Bobby declined, Priyadarshan planned to narrate the script to Akshaye Khanna. "I told Akshaye I wanted to narrate a story to him and he invited me over. I had even thought that if he refused, I



However, things took a different turn while he was shooting Bhooth Bangla with Akshay Kumar. According to Priyadarshan, he casually mentioned

antagonist. "Akshay told me, 'Why can't I do the movie?'" the filmmaker recalled.

The director admitted he had not