

The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

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THE CANNABIS BUS

A plant that was a felony in most of the Western world a decade ago is now a \$30 billion American industry, a Canadian export business, a European pharmacy line and a line item in state budgets from Albany to Shimla. Everybody has climbed aboard. Almost nobody agrees on who is driving - or what it is doing to the liquor aisle.

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(TSAI EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW)

“Complementary, Not Competitive”

India's Consul General in New York, Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan, on the road to \$500 billion, a new portal built for small exporters, campuses moving in both directions — and a blunt warning about callers claiming to be his office.



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THE CANNABIS BUS

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

THE BUS HAS ALREADY LEFT

On a Tuesday afternoon, in a small town somewhere in New York, a man walks into a state-licensed dispensary, shows a driver's licence to a security guard, buys two pre-rolls and a tin of five-milligram gummies, and is back in his truck in under four minutes. Nothing about the transaction is remarkable. That is the story.

Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia now permit adult-use cannabis. Around forty have comprehensive medical programmes. The Pew Research Center estimates that nearly eight in ten Americans live in a county with at least one dispensary. Only a handful of states — Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska — hold the line with no access of any kind.

And this year the ground shifted underneath all of it. In April, the Justice Department moved part of the cannabis supply into Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act, the first federal concession in fifty-six years that the plant has an accepted medical use. In November, a different piece of federal law is scheduled to erase most of the hemp-derived THC market that grew up in gas stations and liquor stores. In Ottawa, an eight-year-old legal market has hit a tax ceiling and gone looking for customers abroad. In Berlin, a conservative chancellor who campaigned against legalisation has quietly declined to repeal it. And in Shimla, the Himachal Pradesh government spent yesterday cutting cannabis licence fees by two-thirds because, at the old prices, not a single farmer had applied.

Meanwhile, Americans are drinking less than at any point since Gallup began asking the question in 1939.

THE AMERICAN NUMBER, AND WHY IT IS MISLEADING

Start with the figure everyone quotes. Regulated U.S. cannabis retail generated roughly \$30.1 billion in 2024. In 2025 it fell — to somewhere between \$29.1 billion and \$29.6 billion by Whitney Economics' count — the first annual decline the legal industry has ever recorded. Whitney had originally

forecast a 14 per cent increase. For 2026 the firm projects a rebound to about \$30.5 billion; state-by-state tallies put the first half of the year near \$14 billion, with roughly \$2.5 billion in June alone.

Read that as a demand collapse and you will misread the entire industry.

Headset, which computes its figures from register transactions at licensed dispensaries rather than surveys, tracked \$24.3 billion across sixteen state markets in the twelve months to June 2026. Dollar sales rose 0.8 per cent. Unit sales rose 5.5 per cent. The average dispensary basket fell from \$50.04 to \$47.29. Consumers are buying more and paying less. What the industry is living through is not a demand problem. It is deflation — the ordinary consequence of licence expansion, oversupply and a maturing product mix.

The state-level spread is violent. New York grew 34.2 per cent to \$1.82 billion, the fastest of any tracked market. Ohio grew 26 per cent. Nevada fell 12.3 per cent. California remains the largest market in the country at \$3.88 billion and is shrinking. Employment estimates for early 2026 range from roughly 412,500 to 445,800 full-time equivalents depending on methodology — either way, a workforce larger than that of the U.S. coal, steel and airline pilot professions combined.

Flower still leads the category at roughly 45 per cent of sales, but vapes, edibles, pre-rolls and beverages have taken share steadily. Pre-roll sales rose 271 per cent between 2020 and 2024. Convenience, discretion and dosing precision are winning.

WASHINGTON MOVES — HALFWAY

On 18 December 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14370, directing the Attorney General to complete the long-stalled rulemaking on moving marijuana to Schedule III "in the most expeditious manner" permitted by law. The proposal itself dated to May 2024 and had drawn more than 42,000 public comments before collapsing into procedural limbo; the DEA's only administrative law judge



retired in July 2025 with the hearing still stayed.

On 22 April 2026, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche signed a final order. Effective 28 April, two categories of marijuana moved from Schedule I to Schedule III: cannabis contained in an FDA-approved drug product, and cannabis subject to a qualifying state medical marijuana licence. Cannabis extracts and naturally derived delta-9 THC follow to the extent they fall inside those two boxes.

Everything else — including every gram of adult-use cannabis sold in twenty-four states — remains Schedule I, alongside heroin. Synthetically derived THC is untouched.

The mechanics are strange enough to deserve description. To satisfy U.S. obligations under the Single Convention, the order requires the DEA to "purchase"

each licensed medical harvest at a nominal price and immediately resell it back to the producer at the same price plus an administrative fee, with the crop stored in a facility to which the agency retains access until the transaction closes. Import and export of covered products now require a permit. It is a legal fiction borrowed from the research-cannabis regime, and it works.

The commercial consequence arrived within twenty-four hours. On 23 April, Treasury and the IRS announced they would issue guidance on the tax effects of the order. Section 280E of the Internal Revenue Code — which since the 1980s has barred businesses trafficking in Schedule I or II substances from deducting ordinary expenses — no longer applies to covered medical cannabis activity, and Treasury signalled a transition

rule reaching the full taxable year that includes the effective date. The order encourages Treasury to consider retrospective relief; whether amended returns are available for prior years is unresolved, and advisers are telling operators not to file until formal guidance lands. Analysts have put the industry-wide value of full 280E repeal at roughly \$2.3 billion a year.

Adult-use operators got nothing. A New Jersey accountant summarised the split for us in a sentence: a Bergen County client called in May to ask whether he could finally deduct his rent, and the answer depended entirely on which licence hung on his wall.

The broader question went to a hearing. It opened at the DEA's facility on Army Navy Drive in Arlington on 29 June and closed on 15 July after eleven days of

testimony. The government called two witnesses on day one. Seven prohibitionist organisations — among them Smart Approaches to Marijuana, the states of Nebraska, Idaho and Indiana, and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation — held the floor for most of the remainder. Proponents of rescheduling were not selected to participate at all, an omission the cannabis bar has criticised sharply; one practitioner described the resulting record as lopsided, built almost entirely by the side opposing the reform the agency was there to defend. DEA nonetheless argued its own case. In its final brief, filed 18 August, the agency contended that marijuana no longer meets the statutory test for Schedule I because it has a currently accepted medical use and an accepted safety profile under medical supervision, and that most people who use it do so without danger to themselves or their communities. Opponents replied that the agency had failed to carry its burden, that its analytical framework was engineered toward a predetermined outcome, and that its comparator methodology — which set marijuana against alcohol, a substance not scheduled at all — was fundamentally flawed.

Chief Administrative Law Judge Derek Julius ordered dozens of corrections to the transcript. The corrected record — 2,533 pages across eleven hearing days — was released publicly yesterday. Julius will now issue a recommendation. A final rule, if one comes, is unlikely before late 2026 and could slip well into 2027. Litigation could stretch it further.

THE HEMP COUNTERSTRIKE While Washington was loosening one lever, it had already pulled another in the opposite direction.

The 2018 Farm Bill defined hemp by delta-9 THC content alone — not more than 0.3 per cent by dry weight. That single drafting choice accidentally legalised an entire universe of other cannabinoids: delta-8, delta-10, THCA flower, HHC, THC-O. Gas stations and vape shops in prohibition states became functional dispensaries. By 2025 the intoxicating hemp trade was variously estimated at \$28 billion to \$30 billion and operating with almost no federal oversight.

Congress closed it inside the spending package that ended

the longest government shutdown in U.S. history. Section 781 of H.R. 5371, signed 12 November 2025, redefines hemp on a total-THC basis — counting THCA and the isomers — and caps finished products at 0.4 milligrams of total THC per container, while excluding synthetic and “unnatural” cannabinoids outright. Because the Controlled Substances Act excludes hemp by cross-reference, products falling outside the new definition revert to Schedule I.

Lawyers estimate the provision renders roughly 95 per cent of hemp-derived cannabinoid products federally unlawful. It also sweeps in collateral targets: the 0.4 milligram cap does not distinguish a hundred-milligram delta-8 gummy from a full-spectrum CBD tincture, so much of the wellness aisle goes with it. Between 65 and 75 per cent of American hemp acreage is grown for cannabinoid extraction.

The effective date was 12 November 2026. On 8 August the Senate passed a stopgap funding bill 90–6 that would push most of the restrictions to 11 December, after tabling an amendment to strip the hemp language 61–32; products containing cannabinoids the plant cannot naturally produce would still lose hemp status on the original date. The House has not acted. Representative Andy Barr's Lawful Hemp Protection Act would regulate and tax the category rather than ban it, and a Senate Agriculture draft circulated in June left the ban untouched; a mark-up on 6 August failed 10–11 over an unrelated food-assistance dispute and the committee recessed with no date to resume.

That is not a rhetorical flourish. Target ran a pilot of hemp-derived THC drinks in ten Minnesota stores in October 2025, expanded to all seventy-two Minnesota stores in April 2026, and pushed into more than three hundred stores across Florida, Texas and Illinois in May. The products carry five milligrams of THC per serving and are stocked exclusively in the liquor sections, sold only to customers twenty-one and over. Sprouts Farmers Market began stocking hemp-THC drinks in roughly 115 Texas and Florida stores in January.

Whitney Economics put total legal U.S. THC beverage sales at \$1.0 billion to \$1.3 billion in



2024 — about eleven per cent of the category's estimated potential — with 500 to 750 brands operating nationally and the leaders clearing \$10 million a year. Hemp-derived THC drinks alone grew from roughly \$400,000 in sales in 2020 to an estimated \$382 million in 2024.

MEANWHILE, AT THE BAR

On 20 August, Gallup published its annual consumption survey. Fifty-four per cent of American adults say they drink alcohol — tying last year's record low, and the lowest reading since the firm began asking in 1939. The trend line is steep: 62 per cent in 2023, 58 per cent in 2024, 54 per cent in 2025, 54 per cent now. Drinkers reported an average of 3.2 drinks in the previous week, against 3.9 three years ago. Only 13 per cent say they sometimes drink too much, another record low. And for the first time, a slim majority of Americans — around 53 per cent — say even one or two drinks a day is bad for health. Volume tells the same story. IWSR put total U.S. beverage alcohol volume down 5 per cent in 2025, with 49 of 50 states declining.

The corporate wreckage is public. Diageo closed its financial year on 30 June 2026 with net sales of \$19.6 billion, down 3 per cent as reported and 2 per cent organically. North America — 37 per cent of the group — fell 8.4 per cent to \$7.2 billion; U.S. spirits fell 11.5 per cent with volumes down 9 per cent. Chief executive Dave Lewis, ten months into a turnaround, told reporters the U.S. spirits market had contracted around 5 per cent in twelve months and would take two years to return to flat. The

company announced a \$1.2 billion restructuring, booking roughly seventy per cent of the cost in 2026. Its dividend has been rebased.

Constellation Brands has ridden Modelo Especial to a fifteenth consecutive year of beer volume growth while its wine and spirits division has collapsed. Jim Beam has halted whiskey production at one of its main distilleries for all of 2026. Brown-Forman has sold a cooperage, closed a Scotch distillery and cut its global workforce. Industry analysts have put the glut of unsold aged spirits at roughly \$22 billion.

And in the risk-factor section of Brown-Forman's own filings sits a line that reads, in part, like a confession: among the changes in consumer preference that could hurt the business, the company lists “further legalization of marijuana.” The distillers wrote cannabis into their disclosures years ago. They were not guessing.

IS IT CONNECTED? A CAREFUL ANSWER

Correlation here is overwhelming. Causation is partial, and the honest reporting of it requires resisting the tidy headline.

Begin with the crossover. Federal National Survey on Drug Use and Health figures reported in July 2026 counted 21.4 million daily or near-daily marijuana users aged twelve and over, against 17.2 million daily or near-daily alcohol users. Daily cannabis use now exceeds both daily drinking and daily cigarette smoking. Carnegie Mellon's Jonathan Caulkins first documented the crossing in the journal *Addiction* in 2024, working from twenty-

seven surveys and more than 1.6 million respondents. It is not a blip.

Direct substitution evidence is accumulating, and it is strongest precisely where the two categories share a shelf. A 2026 study in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* surveyed 438 adults who had used cannabis in the prior year. Among those consuming cannabis beverages, 58.6 per cent reported substituting cannabis for alcohol; respondents reported weekly drinks falling from roughly 7.0 to 3.4 after taking up the format. CoBank's analysis finds 41 per cent of U.S. consumers actively moderating their drinking, and 26 per cent — rising to 38 per cent of Gen Z and 37 per cent of millennials — saying they intend to try a cannabis beverage.

Now the counterweights, which are substantial.

First, cannabis beverages appear to recruit mostly from people already using cannabis; interest correlates strongly with existing consumption. Second, 92 per cent of buyers of non-alcoholic analogues still buy alcohol, and only 17 per cent of U.S. adults report having used one in place of a drink in the past year. Most of the volume that left the alcohol market was not transferred to another category at all. It simply stopped.

Third, at least three other forces are pulling in the same direction. Affordability: more than a third of consumers drinking less cite higher prices. Health perception: the majority now believing moderate drinking is harmful is a genuinely new fact in American life. Demography: IWSR now finds baby boomers, not Gen Z, the lowest-participating cohort,

The Marihuana Regulation and Taxation Act passed on 31 March 2021. Five years on, Governor Hochul's office counts \$3.3 billion in cumulative sales and more than 600 dispensaries. Retail sales hit \$1.69 billion in 2025; the state had issued 2,110 active adult-use licences by January. New York is the fastest-growing tracked market in the country. Two facts from the state's own

The fastest-growing cannabis retail channel in America is not a dispensary. It is a liquor aisle — and Congress has scheduled it for deletion.

data deserve more attention than they have received. The first is concentration: through November 2025, the top ten stores accounted for 29 per cent of statewide sales, and the top-performing half of stores generated roughly 80 per cent of revenue. The second is geographic: Long Island alone accounted for 47 per cent of annualised adult-use sales across New York's ten regions. Enforcement has been relentless and, by the state's own arithmetic, insufficient. The Office of Cannabis Management completed 2,017 enforcement actions in 2025 and seized more than \$20 million in product; it had padlocked 579 illicit storefronts by March and its 600th in Middletown in May. Across 2023 to 2025 it completed 8,055 actions and seized \$143.8 million. Measured against an illicit market estimated above \$9 billion a year, that is under 1.6 per cent of a single year's supply. Enforcement actions themselves fell from 5,215 in 2024 to 2,017 in 2025 after a court injunction narrowed inspection authority.

The reason is price, not policing. Legal flower in New York runs around \$10.61 per gram out the door. In Maine, where prices have been compressed to \$7.57, the legal market captures essentially all demand. Colorado, Oregon and Massachusetts crossed the same threshold when density forced prices below roughly \$5 a gram. New York has multiplied its store count — from 1.7 dispensaries per 100,000 adults at the end of 2024 to 3.4 — without the price compression that makes density work, and it sits next door to New Jersey's legal market. You cannot padlock your way to a competitive price.

On equity, the record is genuinely distinctive: social and economic equity licensees hold 55 per cent of all licences and 77 per cent of adult-use retail dispensaries — a share no other state approaches. A \$6 million Equity Business Development Grant Program, with awards up to \$30,000 per licensee, is expected to open in the autumn. Whether those licensees survive the price compression now arriving is the open question of the next

two years, and it is one this newspaper intends to keep asking.

THE VIEW FROM SOUTH ASIA

India's Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 is stricter than most Western statutes and older than several of them. Consumption is an offence under Section 27, punishable by up to six months or a ₹10,000 fine; Section 37 makes bail exceptionally difficult in commercial-quantity cases. No national legalisation or decriminalisation bill is advancing as of this month.

But the Act contains two openings that are now doing considerable work. Because it defines cannabis by reference to the flowering tops and resin, excluding leaves and seeds, bhang has remained lawful — which is why licensed bhang shops still operate in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. And Section 10 empowers state governments to permit cultivation for medical and scientific purposes. Every state hemp programme in India rests on that clause.

Uttarakhand licensed industrial hemp first, in 2018. Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh followed. Himachal Pradesh — where cannabis grows wild across Kullu, Manali, Mandi, Chamba, Shimla and Sirmour, and where the informal charas economy has been an open secret for fifty years — has taken the longest and most deliberate route. A 2024 assembly resolution led to a pilot study approved in January 2025, run jointly by CSK Agriculture University at Palampur and Dr Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry at Nauni, with the Agriculture Department as nodal agency. In July 2026 the state notified amendments to its NDPS Rules of 1989, establishing a full framework for cultivation, storage, transport, processing and manufacture: single entry and exit points, mandatory CCTV, incident reporting to the district excise officer, seed and documentation filings twenty-one days before planting, and a 0.3 per cent THC ceiling on industrial hemp seed.

Then nothing happened. At a cultivation licence fee of ₹3 lakh per bigha and ₹2 crore

a year for a processing unit, not one farmer or entrepreneur applied.

On 25 August — yesterday — the State Taxes and Excise Department notified the Second Amendment Rules 2026, cutting the medicinal cultivation licence to ₹1 lakh per bigha and halving the processing and manufacturing licence to ₹1 crore. On the industrial side the per-bigha fee falls from ₹2,000 to ₹500 and the annual manufacturing licence from ₹10 lakh to ₹5 lakh. Himachal would become the third Indian state permitting industrial cannabis cultivation, alongside Uttarakhand and Assam. State projections have ranged from about ₹500 crore in additional annual revenue to considerably more ambitious figures floated in earlier budget speeches. That is precisely the layer Himachal is now pricing itself into. Whether the state can build the certification laboratories and excise capacity the rules assume — and whether farmers trust a licence regime administered by the same department that has policed them — is the question the fee cut does not answer.

WHO IS DRIVING?

Five things will decide the next eighteen months.

One. Judge Julius's recommendation, and whether the DEA issues a final rule extending Schedule III to all marijuana. If it does, Section 280E falls away for the entire industry and the economics of every operator in America change overnight. If it does not, the split-level system — medical in Schedule III, adult-use in Schedule I — hardens into permanence. Litigation is likely either way.

Two. The hemp deadline. Whether the operative date is 12 November or 11 December, and whether Barr's bill or a farm bill vehicle carries a regulatory framework instead of a prohibition, determines the fate of a market of comparable size to the licensed one — and of the THC beverage category

now sitting in liquor aisles from Minneapolis to Miami.

Three. The 3 November elections, which are less consequential than expected. Legalisation initiatives in Florida, Idaho and Nebraska all failed to qualify; the surviving statewide measures include a repeal effort and an Idaho constitutional amendment that would strip citizens of the power to legalise by initiative at all. The governors' races in Pennsylvania, Texas, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Florida matter more. Pennsylvania's legislature has until its 30 November adjournment; Virginia, where possession has been legal since 2021 without a retail market, is widely expected to open one.

Four. Europe's timetables. Germany's final evaluation lands in 2028 and the commercial pilot is shelved for this parliament. The Dutch decide on national rollout at the end of 2029. Switzerland's draft statute is the one to watch, because it would be the continent's first genuine commercial market.

Five. Whether the alcohol industry stops treating this as a cyclical downturn. Diageo's own chief executive has told investors the U.S. market stays negative next year and takes two years to reach flat. That is a forecast of recovery. The Gallup series, the volume data, the health-perception shift, the GLP-1 curve and the daily-use crossover are not describing a cycle.

The bus has left the terminal. The passengers are governments that need the revenue, farmers who need the crop, pharmaceutical importers, telemedicine platforms, listed multi-state operators, liquor retailers hedging their own decline, and tens of millions of ordinary consumers who stopped asking permission some time ago. The arguments about the route are now happening on board, at speed, with the doors closed.

HOW WE REPORTED THIS

Market data: Whitney Economics; Headset point-of-sale data (16 tracked state

markets, 12 months to June 2026); Statistics Canada monthly retail trade; Canada Revenue Agency excise filings; Prohibition Partners (UK Medical Cannabis Market Update 2026; Global Medical Cannabis Market Review 2026).

Federal record: Executive Order 14370 (18 December 2025); DOJ/DEA final order of 22 April 2026, effective 28 April; Federal Register notices of 28 April 2026 (Docket DEA-1362; AG Order 6753-2026); DEA hearing transcript released 25 August 2026; final briefs filed 18 August 2026; U.S. Treasury press release of 23 April 2026; Section 781 of H.R. 5371, enacted 12 November 2025; Senate stopgap vote of 8 August 2026; Congressional Research Service legal sidebar LSB11424.

Alcohol: Gallup Consumption Habits survey, released 20 August 2026; IWSR volume data; Diageo preliminary results for the year ended 30 June 2026; Constellation Brands first-quarter results reported July 2026; Brown-Forman risk-factor disclosures.

Europe: Ekocan second interim evaluation of the Konsumcannabisgesetz, 1 April 2026; Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security reporting on the closed coffeeshop chain experiment; ARD DeutschlandTrend, January 2026.

Health: EU-GEI multicentre case-control study; JAMA Health Forum, February 2026; Canadian Medical Association Journal review of cannabis and psychosis; Danish national registry data; Colorado statewide potency-labelling audit, October 2025; Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 2026; Klausen et al., The Lancet, spring 2026.

New York and India: New York State Office of Cannabis Management enforcement releases and market data; Office of the Governor, 27 March 2026; Himachal Pradesh Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Rules 2026 and Second Amendment Rules 2026, notified 25 August 2026; NDPS Act 1985, Sections 10, 27 and 37.

Figures from private analytics firms are estimates and vary by methodology; where sources conflict, ranges are given.

The Dark Side of Digital Dating: Fraud, Extortion, and Violence on Online Apps

Romance fraud is no longer a lonely-hearts confidence trick run by an individual with a stolen photograph. It has become an industrial sector — with recruitment pipelines, trafficked labour, scripted training manuals, artificial-intelligence tooling and laundering rails that move billions of dollars a year. An Insider Weekly investigation into how the swipe economy turned into a crime economy, and what the platforms, police and legislatures have failed to do about it.

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

Recently, in seven separate raids across Johannesburg, South African officers arrested 39 people accused of running romance and investment scams aimed at retirees in English-speaking countries. The raids were the largest single component of Operation Jackal IV, an eight-month international action coordinated by INTERPOL from November 2025 through June 2026, which brought together police from 22 countries on six continents. The operation identified 263 suspects and produced 58 arrests, and it was aimed squarely at West African organised-crime networks — Black Axe foremost among them — that INTERPOL says account for a significant share of the world's cyber-enabled financial fraud.

Two details in INTERPOL's account of the operation deserve more attention than they received. The first is that investigators found these networks increasingly outsourcing components of their business — money laundering above all — to specialist providers through dark-web marketplaces, a model the agency describes as crime-as-a-service. The second is that the same networks are now systematically extorting children, with victims identified as young as fourteen, approached on social platforms, drawn into a relationship, persuaded to share intimate images, and then blackmailed under threat of exposure to their families and classmates.

That is the shape of the problem in 2026. What is casually called “romance fraud” is not one crime. It is a supply chain that begins with trafficked or recruited labour, runs through



the same handful of consumer platforms that hundreds of millions of ordinary people use to find companionship, and ends in bank accounts and crypto wallets on four continents. Along the way it produces financial ruin, sexual coercion of minors, and — with growing regularity — physical violence in car parks, apartment blocks and hotel rooms.

This investigation draws on data from the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, United Nations reporting on trafficking into scam operations, blockchain-analytics estimates, INTERPOL operational disclosures, court records in the United Kingdom, Malta, Malaysia and the United States, Indian police case files, and open-source satellite analysis of the compounds along the Myanmar–Thailand border.

What the ledgers show

Start with the money, because the money is the only part of this trade that is systematically counted — and even it is counted badly.

In the first nine months of 2025 alone, American consumers

reported losing roughly \$1.16 billion to romance scams across 55,604 reports filed with the FTC's Consumer Sentinel Network — a 22 per cent increase in report volume over the same period a year earlier. The median individual loss in the third quarter of 2025 was \$2,218. The gap between that median and the average loss per report — nearly ten times larger — tells its own story: a long tail of catastrophic

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individual losses, retirement accounts and home equity, sits behind an unremarkable-looking midpoint.

The FBI's numbers point the same way. The IC3's 2025 annual report, published in April 2026, logged 23,159 complaints of confidence fraud and romance scams with losses of \$929.3 million — a 38 per cent jump in a single year, following \$672 million in 2024 and \$652.5 million in 2023. That report was also the first in the IC3's twenty-five-year history to record more than a million complaints of all types, with total reported losses of \$20.877

billion, up roughly a quarter year on year.

Older victims carry a disproportionate share. Among IC3 complainants aged sixty and over, confidence and romance losses reached \$584 million across 10,188 complaints in 2025, against \$389.3 million across 7,626 complaints the year before — a 50 per cent rise in losses on a 34 per cent rise in complaints. Elder fraud across all internet crime categories jumped 59 per cent in one year. Where cryptocurrency was the vehicle, Americans reported losing \$11.37 billion in 2025, and people aged sixty and above accounted for roughly \$4.35 billion of it.

Every figure in this section is a floor, not a ceiling. Law-enforcement agencies on three continents describe romance fraud as among the most under-reported categories of crime they handle. Shame does most of the work.

Two structural cautions apply to all of these numbers. The first is under-reporting: investigators consistently estimate that only a minority of victims ever file a report, because the crime

attacks a person's judgment as much as their bank balance, and admitting it in a police station is a second humiliation. The second is classification drift. The apparent softening in some U.S. romance-fraud loss figures between 2022 and 2024 did not reflect less criminal activity; it reflected the migration of the same crime into the “investment fraud” column, as operators learned that the most profitable use of a manufactured relationship is not to ask for a plane ticket but to recommend a trading platform.

The factory floor

The industrialisation happened in a specific place, over a specific decade, and it is documented in unusual detail. In August 2023 the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that at least 120,000 people were being held in cyber-fraud compounds in Myanmar, with a further 100,000 across Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines and Thailand. A United Nations report published in February 2026, titled around the phrase “a wicked problem,” raised the working estimate to at least 300,000 people compelled to participate in online fraud across Southeast Asia. Survivors interviewed for that report described being held in multi-storey buildings ringed by walls topped with barbed wire.

The archetype is KK Park, a fortified complex in Myanmar's Myawaddy township on the Thai border, run under the protection of an armed border militia. It has the physical vocabulary of an industrial estate: perimeter walls, internal roads, dormitory blocks, closed-circuit cameras and controlled access points. Inside, workers — many of them trafficked with the promise of translation or customer-service jobs in Bangkok — are

set daily targets for “pig butchering,” the term of art (from the Mandarin sha zhu pan) for cultivating a victim’s trust before liquidating their savings.

Governments have responded, and the response has largely failed. The Myanmar military raided KK Park in October 2025, seized Starlink satellite terminals, released some 2,000 workers and announced a policy of eradicating scam operations at the root. Cambodia mounted its own crackdown in July 2025. Thailand cut power to border compounds. In January 2026, Cambodian authorities extradited Chen Zhi — the alleged principal of the Prince Group network — along with two other Chinese nationals to China, following an October 2025 forfeiture action against roughly \$15 billion in bitcoin. Taken together, these constitute the most sustained enforcement pressure the sector has ever faced.

And yet. Satellite analysis published in July 2026 by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, mapping built-up compound area annually from 2020 to 2026, found the scam-centre footprint along the Myanmar–Thai border growing exponentially rather than contracting. Researchers confirmed that KK Park and the compounds around it remain standing and operational. Investigators from Myanmar Witness geolocated footage showing several hundred people being moved on 23 October 2025 to a site roughly three kilometres from KK Park while clearance operations were still under way — compound managers, survivors reported, had advance warning of the raids. One NGO assessment this month put more than 13,000 people held in a single Myanmar cluster.

The reason the sector survives raids is that it barely needs infrastructure. As the ASPI analysis put it in substance: a rented hotel, computers, electricity, a connection and permissive local policing are enough. Operations have dispersed south into rural Myanmar, across into Cambodia, and outward —



Chinese-run networks displaced by Southeast Asian crackdowns have been documented relocating as far as Colombo, exploiting tourist visas and lax SIM-card registration to target Western victims. Dispersal is cheaper to survive than destruction, and dispersal is what has happened.

The script, and the machine that writes it

The operational playbook is standardised to a degree that surprises victims when they finally see it laid out.

It opens with a low-cost, high-volume approach: a message that appears misdirected — a lunch confirmation sent to a stranger — or a well-built profile on a dating app, a professional network or an encrypted messenger. Operators work from scripts calibrated to the target: one path for a twenty-five-year-old single woman, another for a fifty-five-year-old divorced man. The persona is rarely a celebrity; more often it is simply an attractive, plausibly successful person with a reason never to meet.

The second phase is grooming, conducted over weeks. Nothing is asked for. Rapport is manufactured — daily good-mornings, shared photographs, sympathy about a difficult job, gradual escalation of intimacy. The third phase introduces the investment: a platform the persona uses, a small initial deposit, a screen showing gains, a modest withdrawal

permitted early to establish credibility. Then the deposits scale, and when the victim tries to withdraw, a tax or a compliance fee appears, and then another.

What has changed since 2024 is that generative artificial intelligence has removed the two constraints that used to limit this trade: language and headcount.

Blockchain-analytics estimates put cryptocurrency scam revenue above \$17 billion in 2025. Within that total, impersonation scams grew more than fourteen-fold year on year, driven substantially by AI tooling. Operations using AI generated roughly four and a half times the revenue of conventional ones, and the average scam payment rose to \$2,764 in 2025 from \$782 the previous year — a 253 per cent increase. On throughput, the contrast is starker still: AI-assisted operators were logged at around 35 transactions a day against fewer than four for conventional scammers. Separately, the IC3 attributed \$893 million in losses across 22,364 complaints specifically to AI-enabled schemes.

In practice this means a synthetic profile photograph that survives a reverse-image search, a cloned voice on a phone call, a short deepfake video that clears the “just video-call him and you’ll know” advice that families have been giving each other for a decade, and a large language model holding warm,

contextually appropriate conversations with hundreds of targets at once in fluent English, Punjabi, Hindi or Gujarati. Face-changing services have been advertised on laundering marketplaces for as little as \$200 in cryptocurrency.

The old advice — ask for a video call, check the photograph, watch the grammar — was sound guidance for 2019. In 2026 it is close to useless, and repeating it does harm by implying that vigilance alone is protection.

Extortion: the crime that targets children

The fastest-growing branch of this economy is not aimed at lonely adults at all. It is aimed at teenage boys, and it operates on a timescale of hours.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children began tracking financially motivated sextortion in 2022, when it logged 10,731 reports. In 2023 the figure was 26,718. In 2024 it exceeded 36,000. In 2025 NCMEC received more than 50,000 reports — an average of 137 a day. The first half of 2025 alone produced 23,593 cases against 13,842 in the first half of 2024.

The pattern is consistent across the caseload. A teenager, typically a boy between fourteen and seventeen, is approached on Instagram or Snapchat by an account presenting as a peer. The conversation is flirtatious and

and moves quickly to a private channel. An intimate image is sent by the perpetrator first, then requested in return. Where the target refuses, perpetrators increasingly generate a synthetic explicit image using the child’s face. Then the threats begin, and they are engineered for maximum terror: the images will go to parents, to classmates, to a school; the child will be branded, will lose their family, will never be admitted to a university.

What distinguishes financial sextortion from historical patterns of online exploitation is speed. Grooming that once unfolded over weeks or months now unfolds within minutes and hours. Money is demanded immediately, usually through payment applications or gift cards, and demands continue after payment.

The consequences have been fatal. FinCEN, the U.S. Treasury’s financial-intelligence unit, has cited NCMEC findings that at least 36 teenagers took their own lives in response to these threats since 2021, and investigators consistently describe that count as an undercount, because these deaths often occur within hours of contact and the cause is not always identified. Research analysing NCMEC reports found that among cases describing specific impacts, more than one in six mentioned self-harm. The offenders are, to a significant degree, organised and geographically

concentrated. U.S. and international investigators have traced a large share of financial sextortion against American minors to networks in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The FBI's Operation Artemis, conducted with Canadian, Australian, British and Nigerian counterparts, produced 22 arrests in Nigeria; roughly half of those arrested were connected to victims who had died. INTERPOL's Operation Jackal IV found the same technique spreading through West African crime groups more broadly, and a pan-African operation in September 2025 produced 260 arrests across fourteen countries — including 68 in Ghana and 24 in Côte d'Ivoire tied specifically to romance and sextortion offences.

Perpetrators recruit openly. Reporting has documented young men in Nigeria using short-video platforms to display their earnings, distribute scripts, share stolen photographs of young women, and coach newcomers on evading platform detection.

The car park: when the fraud becomes assault

The least-quantified dimension of this story is the one that puts people in hospital.

In the Australian state of Victoria, police have now made 47 arrests in connection with a campaign of attacks on men lured through gay dating applications — principally Grindr, and also Scruff and Snapchat. Since January 2024, 113 incidents of this type have been reported to Victoria Police. Charges across the cases include kidnapping, armed robbery, sexual assault, false imprisonment and intentionally causing injury. In some incidents the assaults were filmed and posted to social media. What has most disturbed investigators is the age profile: in the most recent tranche of five arrests, made by the Greater Dandenong Crime Investigation Unit after eleven reported incidents, every accused was between sixteen and eighteen. Similar attacks have been

reported in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia. LGBTIQ+ health organisations have characterised the wave as a national-significance threat and as evidence of the online radicalisation of young men.

The pattern is international. In September 2024 five men were convicted at Birmingham Crown Court of conspiracy to commit robbery after using fake Grindr profiles to lure victims to parks in Birmingham, where they were attacked, held and robbed; between April and July 2023 the group took £73,406 from eight victims, in several cases coercing banking PINs and draining accounts. In Malaysia, police in Johor arrested five men in mid-2026 over a scheme in which victims arriving for a meeting arranged on Grindr were confronted by accomplices posing as security personnel, accused of indecency, then threatened, assaulted and robbed — nine complainants, aged twenty-five to forty, reported combined losses of RM315,220. In Malta, a man pleaded not guilty in April 2026 to grievous bodily harm, kidnapping and aggravated robbery after allegedly luring men to his home through the same platform. In Los Angeles, a man was charged with more than thirty counts after prosecutors said he used the app to target over twenty gay men for robberies, some at knifepoint.

These crimes share a design feature with the fraud: the platform is not incidental to the offence. It is the targeting mechanism. It supplies a stranger who has already agreed to meet privately, who has a strong incentive not to report, and whose location the offender controls.

VI. The South Asian front

For readers of this newspaper, three strands converge on the subcontinent and on the diaspora.

The organised honeytrap

Delhi Police have now dismantled multiple gangs that use dating platforms

not for fraud at a distance but for abduction and extortion at close range. On 25 March 2026, a 34-year-old man arrived at Nehru Place in southeast Delhi for a meeting arranged through a dating application with a woman he knew as "Sherry." Two cars intercepted him. Three men forced him into a vehicle, where, according to the police complaint, he was choked into unconsciousness and then coerced into surrendering ₹7 lakh. Five people were arrested within days, including the 20-year-old woman who had operated the profile.

In May 2026 the Delhi Crime Branch broke up a further syndicate that had been working Tinder and QuackQuack. Its method added a layer of state impersonation: victims were called to flats in areas such as Janakpuri, then surrounded by men staging a police raid, one of them in a fake uniform, and threatened with fabricated rape charges unless they paid. In one case the demand was ₹15 lakh; the victim was confined in a car and driven between ATMs. Four men were arrested, two absconded, and several of the accused had prior arrests for the identical offence — one of them going back to 2017. The man who wore the uniform was allegedly paid a fifteen per cent share.

Gurugram police have run comparable cases, in one of which a policewoman was suspended for allegedly assisting a gang that trapped men through Tinder and Bumble.

The matrimonial and NRI vector

The diaspora-specific version of this crime is older than the apps and has migrated onto them intact. Its classic form: a profile on a matrimonial platform presenting as a non-resident Indian — a doctor, a senior official, a businessman in London or Toronto — courts a woman in India, proposes marriage, then announces that a gift has been despatched and is being held by customs, requiring a duty payment. A 2023 Delhi case that remains

representative saw six people arrested, four Nigerian nationals and two women from Manipur, running exactly this script; investigators recovered sixteen phones, twenty-eight SIM cards, four laptops and three passports.

The scale a single operator can reach is now considerable. In April 2026 the Delhi Police cyber cell arrested a 35-year-old man from North 24 Parganas accused of running fake identities as a doctor, a lawyer, a businessman and a film producer across dating and matrimonial platforms, and of defrauding more than 500 women across several states of close to ₹2 crore — an average of roughly ₹40,000 each, an amount low enough that most victims would never pursue it. He had two prior involvements in similar cases.

Indians inside the compounds

The third strand is the one Indian policymakers have been slowest to confront: Indians are not only the targets of this industry but a substantial part of its captive workforce. Between 2022 and May 2025, New Delhi repatriated roughly 2,471 nationals from scam compounds in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, most of them recruited through fraudulent overseas job offers. After the KK Park raid, India moved quickly to bring citizens home through Thailand. Analysts at the Observer Research Foundation have argued that the domestic response needs to shift from episodic repatriation to permanent architecture: oversight of recruitment intermediaries, cyber-forensic capacity, public awareness campaigns aimed at the towns these recruiters work, and rehabilitation systems that recognise how thoroughly the line between victim and perpetrator is blurred inside a compound.

A young man from Punjab or Andhra Pradesh who answers an advertisement for a translation job in Bangkok, and finds himself six weeks later running a romance script against a widow in New Jersey under threat of beating, is simultaneously an offender and a trafficking victim. Almost no legal system on either end of that transaction is built to hold both facts at once.

What the platforms have — and have not — done

Every major operator now publishes safety tooling. Match Group, whose portfolio includes Tinder, Hinge, OkCupid and Plenty of Fish, has extended photo verification across its apps and rolled out identity verification on Tinder in the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand, checking date of birth and likeness against an identity document. Tinder users in the U.S. can run a limited number of free background



checks on matches through an integrated service before agreeing to meet. Grindr displays localised safety warnings in areas where users have recently been targeted.

The gap between that tooling and the outcomes documented above has three causes.

The first is that verification is optional almost everywhere it exists, and criminals are more willing than ordinary users to complete an identity check — using stolen or purchased documents — precisely because verification badges confer the trust they are trying to manufacture.

The second is enforcement persistence. Litigation in the United States has repeatedly alleged that users banned from one Match Group application can return with the same name, date of birth and photographs; one civil claim describes a man reported repeatedly over three years for drugging and assaulting women he met on Hinge whose profile remained live until his arrest. A wrongful-death claim filed in 2025 against Grindr by the estate of a teenager argues that age verification and constraints on location sharing would have prevented her abduction and killing. Whether those claims succeed is unresolved; that they are being litigated at all reflects a shift.

The third is legal immunity. When the FTC sued Match Group in 2019 over fake accounts and deceptive practices, a federal judge in Dallas dismissed the bulk of the case in 2022 — including claims worth \$844 million — on the ground that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act treats the company as a publisher of profiles its users create rather than their author. That ruling still shapes the American liability landscape. Match Group did pay \$14 million in August 2025 to settle FTC charges relating to deceptive subscription practices — a reminder that the enforcement that lands tends to concern billing, not safety. Regulation is moving faster outside the United States. Under the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act, every dating platform operating in the UK market had to satisfy child sexual exploitation and abuse reporting requirements by 7 April 2026, with Ofcom empowered to impose penalties up to £18 million or ten per cent of qualifying worldwide revenue, whichever is greater, and with the prospect of personal criminal liability for executives in cases of persistent non-compliance. Independent readiness assessments published in the run-up found the largest operators

publicly committed but unevenly implemented, and smaller and niche platforms largely unprepared. Australia has pressed the sector into a safety code of conduct covering law-enforcement engagement, support for at-risk users and transparency about harms. The European Commission has separately forced changes at Tinder over undisclosed personalised pricing.

What actually works

Three interventions have demonstrated measurable effect, and they share a common logic: they attack the money and the infrastructure rather than the persona.

The first is rapid payment interdiction. INTERPOL's Global Rapid Intervention of Payments mechanism allows member countries to freeze suspect transfers, in fiat and in virtual assets, within hours rather than weeks. Operation First Light 2026, which ran from 15 January to 30 April 2026 and targeted social-engineering fraud and the laundering behind it, produced more than 5,800 arrests and intercepted \$293 million.

The second is asset forfeiture at the top of the chain. The \$15 billion bitcoin action against the Prince Group network, and the subsequent extradition of its alleged principal, did what a compound raid does not: it removed capital rather than relocating labour.

The third is disclosure infrastructure for victims. Reporting rates rise when reporting is simple and non-humiliating. In the United States that means the FBI's IC3 portal and reportfraud.ftc.gov; in India, the national cybercrime portal and the 1930 helpline, where a report filed within the first hours materially improves the odds of a freeze; in the United Kingdom, Action Fraud. For minors, NCMEC's Take It Down service can support removal of intimate images.

WHAT TO TELL THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE

Treat any move off the platform — to WhatsApp, Telegram or Signal — within the first days as the single most reliable warning sign. It is the point at which platform moderation stops applying. Treat any investment suggestion from someone met online as fraud until proven otherwise, regardless of how long the relationship has run or how modest the first deposit is. A permitted early withdrawal is part of the script, not evidence against it.

Do not rely on a video call to prove identity. Real-time face replacement is cheap and widely sold.

For a first in-person meeting: a public place, your own transport, a friend who knows the address and the time, and a check-in. Never a private residence, never a car park, never an unfamiliar building at night. For parents: tell teenagers, explicitly and before it happens, that if an intimate image is used to threaten them, the answer is to stop responding, keep the messages, block the account and tell an adult — and that they will not be in trouble. Sextortion depends entirely on the victim believing that silence is the only option. It is not, and the threat is almost never carried out against those who refuse to pay and report. If money has already moved: report within hours, not days. Contact the bank, the card network or the exchange, and file with the national fraud authority immediately. Freezes are a race.

The structural point

It is tempting to read this as a story about gullibility, and much of the popular coverage does. That framing is both wrong and useful to the people who profit from it. The consumer platforms at the centre of this trade are engineered to accelerate intimacy between strangers, to reward continued engagement, and to minimise the friction of identification — because friction reduces sign-ups. The criminal networks exploiting them operate at industrial scale, with trafficked labour, capital reserves, laundering vendors and now AI systems that can sustain thousands of simultaneous relationships in idiomatic language. Between those two parties stands an individual person, often older, often isolated, sometimes recently bereaved or divorced, whose only protection is their own judgment. That is not a fair contest, and no amount of advice about checking photographs will make it one.

The remedies are not mysterious. Mandatory rather than optional identity verification at account creation, with meaningful penalties for platforms that permit banned users to re-register. Statutory duties of care with financial consequences, of the sort the United Kingdom has begun to impose and the United States has not. Reimbursement obligations on payment providers that

create commercial incentive to detect the transfer patterns these crimes generate. Sustained forfeiture actions against the capital rather than photogenic raids on the compounds. And, in India specifically, a recruitment-oversight regime that stops treating the trafficking of its own citizens into fraud factories as a consular inconvenience. Until then, the ledger will keep growing, and it will keep being read as a series of individual misfortunes rather than as what it is: the balance sheet of an industry.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Reporting for this investigation draws on: INTERPOL operational disclosures on Operation Jackal IV (August 2026) and Operation First Light 2026 (July 2026); U.S. Federal Trade Commission Consumer Sentinel Network data through 2025 and FTC data spotlights published in 2026; the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center 2025 Annual Report (April 2026); UNODC assessments (2023) and the United Nations report on trafficking into cyber-scam operations (February 2026); Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates; satellite analysis published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (July 2026) and geolocation work by Myanmar Witness / Centre for Information Resilience; National Center for Missing & Exploited Children sextortion data releases (June 2026) and NCMEC–Thorn research; a FinCEN notice on financially motivated sextortion; charging and conviction records from the Crown Prosecution Service (Birmingham), the Malta courts, Johor state police, Victoria Police and the Los Angeles County District Attorney; Delhi Police and Gurugram Police case disclosures; Observer Research Foundation analysis of the KK Park raid; and blockchain-analytics estimates published by Chainalysis. Figures on reported losses reflect reported cases only and understate actual harm.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This report discusses extortion involving minors and its consequences. Anyone in the United States who is struggling can reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by call or text. Young people facing threats over intimate images, and their families, can contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at CyberTipline.org or use its Take It Down service. In India, cyber-fraud and extortion can be reported at cybercrime.gov.in or on the 1930 helpline.

This week's image is meant to invite conversation rather than deliver a verdict. The nation is managing several serious files at the same time; how well those files are handled will be judged at the ballot box in November and by events on the ground in the months ahead.

Rapid H1N1 Surge in New Delhi

Swine flu cases in the capital have run roughly six to eight times ahead of last year, with 114 confirmed in a single day. Thirty-five hospitals are under special surveillance and the Union Health Minister has convened a review. What the numbers do - and do not - tell us.



(By Our Staff Reporter)

New Delhi has recorded 1,777 confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza so far in 2026, according to Delhi health department data reported through 21 August — including 114 confirmed in the single day of Thursday, 20 August. During the corresponding period of 2025, the capital had recorded 229. Depending on which comparison window is used, that is a rise of roughly six to eight times.

The government has confirmed no deaths from H1N1 in Delhi this year. A small number of media reports have cited fatalities; officials have disputed them. That distinction matters, and readers should hold it lightly in both directions — official mortality attribution in influenza is conservative by design, and independent reports are not always verified.

The full influenza picture

H1N1 is not circulating alone, and the wider surveillance data is more informative than the headline number. Delhi has logged 2,602 influenza cases of all types in 2026 to date: 2,392 Influenza-A and 210 Influenza-B. Within the A group, 1,777 are H1N1, 37 are H1, 138 are H3 and 440 are classified as other Influenza-A. The B tally comprises 200 Victoria-lineage cases and 10 others. On 20

August alone, the city recorded 159 influenza cases — 155 Influenza-A, of which 114 were H1N1, and four Influenza-B. In other words, H1N1 is now the dominant subtype in the capital, accounting for the largest share of a broader seasonal influenza wave rather than appearing as an isolated outbreak.

What the government has done

Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda chaired a review meeting on Friday, 21 August, on national preparedness for H1N1 influenza with particular attention to the capital. Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh attended. In a statement afterwards, the Delhi minister said there was no shortage of beds, doctors, medicines or essential equipment in the city, and that hospital arrangements were being scaled to the caseload.

The Delhi health department has since issued a public advisory and set out its clinical architecture. Thirty-five hospitals have been placed under special surveillance. Two referral laboratories have been designated for H1N1 testing — AIIMS and the National Centre for Disease Control. Technical guidelines have been circulated to facilities covering patient categorisation, treatment protocols, ventilatory management, mask use and

home care. Advisories have gone to chief district medical officers, district surveillance officers and hospitals on screening and reporting of influenza-like illness, severe acute respiratory infection, influenza and COVID-19 through the Integrated Health Information Platform. The Delhi State Health

TSAI EXCLUSIVE

Mission is tracking the situation through the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme. An inter-sectoral meeting was convened on 20 August under the Health and Family Welfare secretary, bringing in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the New Delhi Municipal Council, the Cantonment Board, the Education Department and the Delhi Development Authority, with a directive to intensify public information and awareness work — an acknowledgment that behaviour, not hospital capacity, determines the shape of a seasonal wave. The public advisory itself is conventional and worth repeating: cover the mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing; wash hands regularly with soap and water; wear a mask in crowded places; avoid close contact with people who have respiratory illness; avoid touching the eyes and nose; do not spit in public;

DELHI INFLUENZA, 2026 TO DATE

2,602 total influenza cases — 2,392 Influenza-A, 210 Influenza-B.

1,777 confirmed H1N1 cases, against 229 in the same period of 2025.

114 H1N1 cases confirmed on 20 August alone, out of 159 influenza cases that day.

Other Influenza-A: 37 H1, 138 H3, 440 untyped.

Influenza-B: 200 Victoria lineage, 10 other.

No deaths officially confirmed by the Delhi government.

35 hospitals under special surveillance; AIIMS and NCDC designated as referral laboratories.

SOURCES

maintain fluid intake; and — the instruction most often ignored — seek medical advice for fever, cough, sore throat, breathing difficulty, body ache or headache rather than self-medicating. A sharp rise in reported cases is not, by itself, evidence of a new pandemic. The strain that caused the 2009 outbreak has circulated as an ordinary seasonal influenza virus for well over a decade.

Is this a new outbreak?

It is worth being precise, because the phrase “swine flu” still carries the emotional charge of 2009 and is being used loosely.

H1N1 is not a new virus. The strain responsible for the 2009 influenza pandemic subsequently became established as a seasonal influenza virus and has circulated ever since, in India typically with a monsoon peak between July and November and a second winter peak. What is being observed in Delhi is a seasonal subtype behaving unusually strongly, not the emergence of a novel pathogen. There is no single confirmed explanation in the publicly available data for why reported H1N1 cases have risen so steeply this year. Influenza activity fluctuates for reasons that include shifts in population immunity, changes in transmission patterns and environmental conditions — and, critically, changes in how much testing is being done. A surge in confirmed cases always reflects some combination of more infection and more detection, and the two

are difficult to separate without denominator data on testing volume, which has not been published alongside the case counts.

The correct reading, then, is neither dismissal nor alarm. Confirmed cases represent a fraction of actual infections, since most mild influenza is never tested. The absence of confirmed deaths in a wave of this size is a meaningful signal about severity. And the case trajectory is steep enough to warrant the surveillance posture the government has adopted.

Who is actually at risk

For most healthy adults, H1N1 produces an unpleasant but self-limiting illness: fever, cough, sore throat, headache, runny nose, body aches, chills and fatigue, with gastrointestinal symptoms somewhat more common than in other seasonal strains. Not every patient develops every symptom, and fever is not always present.

The groups for whom the calculus differs are well established: pregnant women, children under five, adults over sixty-five, people with chronic respiratory, cardiac, kidney or liver disease, those with diabetes, people who are immunocompromised, and those with significant obesity. One feature that distinguishes H1N1 from typical seasonal influenza is that it has historically caused more serious illness in younger adults and children than the elderly-skewed pattern people expect from flu.

(Contd on page 12)

Why Gurugram Drowns in the Rains

Seventy millimetres of rain in thirty-five minutes was enough to trap three hundred schoolchildren in their buses, collapse three roads and shut down India's corporate showpiece for a second consecutive day. The water is not the problem. The city is.



(By Our Staff Reporter)

It took thirty-five minutes. That was how long the heaviest burst of Tuesday evening's downpour lasted over Gurugram — roughly seventy millimetres of rain — and it was sufficient to submerge major arterials and underpasses across a city that generates more revenue than any other district in Haryana.

At Subhash Chowk, about fifteen vehicles were stranded in standing water, nine of them school buses. More than three hundred children sat inside those buses for close to two hours. The district administration directed schools to shift to online classes; large employers told staff to work from home, reversing a return-to-office posture that had taken two years to establish. Roads caved in at three separate locations, trapping the wheels of heavy vehicles. On the Delhi-Jaipur highway at IFFCO Chowk, a section of service lane collapsed into a pit; a preliminary inquiry found that a leak in a Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority sewer line had washed the soil out from beneath the surface. The stretch was barricaded pending repair, with the National Highways Authority of India to resurface once the leak is fixed.

It was the second day running. Monday's showers had not drained before Tuesday's arrived. Asked about the state of the city's drainage while walking into an event in Panchkula, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini declined to answer; a security

officer moved the reporter's microphone aside. Weeks earlier, the Chief Minister's own convoy had been caught in Gurugram's waterlogged traffic — an image that circulated widely and did more for public understanding of the problem than any official statement has.

Gurugram does not flood because it rains unusually hard. It floods because a natural drainage system that worked for a century was sold, built over and paved during three decades of speculative construction.

The gradient nobody argues about Begin with the geography, which the state government itself invokes and which is genuinely part of the answer. The Aravalli hills lie to the east and south of the city; the Najafgarh drain lies to the northwest. Between them is an elevation difference of roughly seventy-eight metres. That gradient means every monsoon sends a substantial volume of runoff down off the hills and across the city towards the northwest. Much of Gurugram sits low, in a shallow bowl. Water arrives from above and has nowhere to go but through.

For most of the last century, it went somewhere. Late-nineteenth-century engineers laid out sixty-three bunds — check dams at Chakkarpur, Jharsa, Wazirabad, Ghata and elsewhere — that worked with seasonal lakes and natural channels to slow the runoff and steer it into the Najafgarh basin, and from there through what is really the Sahibi river, misnamed as a drain, into

the Yamuna. The system was crude and it functioned, holding up until roughly the 1990s. Four of those sixty-three check dams survive. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs told the Lok Sabha, relaying Haryana's own account, that rapid urbanisation has rendered many of the bunds obsolete and shrunk the pond network that supported them.

Seventy-five per cent of the drains, gone. The scale of what was lost is documented. A 2022 Haryana government survey found that Gurugram had forfeited nearly three-quarters of its natural stormwater drains to the real-estate boom triggered by the last master plan. A TERI assessment reached a compatible conclusion: encroachment and urbanisation had blocked the natural drains and destroyed the water bodies that once absorbed the runoff.

The ponds tell the story most starkly. A geo-tagging survey by the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram's horticulture wing found that 65 of the 181 ponds in civic records have been encroached upon. Only 33 still hold water, and those have shrunk. What sits on the rest is an inventory of ordinary municipal life: shops, a liquor vend, temples, schools, community centres, Ramlila stages, cow shelters, parks, a booster station. In Chakkarpur, a councillor's office reportedly stands on pond land. In Badshahpur and Sarai Alaverdi, housing has been built over it. Most of the encroached ponds lie in areas the corporation itself has flagged as waterlogging-prone — which is not

a coincidence but a definition. Where the channels survive, they have been narrowed and concretised — the Badshahpur drain, the city's principal artery towards Najafgarh, most of all. The Najafgarh jheel, the wetland that once buffered floodwaters before releasing them to the Yamuna, has meanwhile been steadily eaten by sprawl on both the Haryana and Delhi sides.

A master plan stalled behind a Metro. The engineered replacement for all this is Gurugram's master drainage project, and it is unfinished. According to figures presented at a Chief Minister's review, only Legs 1, 2 and 3 — the last being the Badshahpur drain — are operational; the remainder has been held up, officials say, by Metro rail expansion works. Drainage build-out is uneven by geography: sectors 1 to 67 are complete, while sectors 68 to 115 remain under construction or awaiting approval. Those newer sectors along the Southern Peripheral Road are precisely where recent construction has been heaviest. The chronic hotspots are named in official documents: Narsinghpur, Khandsa Chowk, Rajiv Chowk, Bhardwaj Chowk, the Tau Devi Lal Stadium stretch, Jwala Mill Road, Chakkarpur, Laxman Vihar. Narsinghpur, the lowest point on the Delhi-Gurugram Expressway, has no gravity outlet at all; until recently the only way to clear it was to pump water uphill, which officials concede was futile.

(Contd. Page no 12)

Rapid H1N1 Surge in New Delhi

Warning signs that warrant immediate medical attention rather than watchful waiting include difficulty breathing or rapid breathing, chest pain or pressure, persistent high fever that does not respond to medication, bluish discolouration of the lips or face, confusion or unusual drowsiness, inability to keep fluids down, and — in children — laboured breathing, refusal to feed, or a return of fever after apparent recovery.

Antiviral treatment with oseltamivir is most effective when started early in the illness, which is the practical argument against the widespread habit of waiting several days before consulting a doctor. Annual influenza vaccination remains the primary preventive measure for high-risk groups, and current formulations include an H1N1 component.

The wider context The surge is arriving on top of Delhi's ordinary post-monsoon vector-borne burden — dengue, malaria and chikungunya — which is why the inter-sectoral meeting pulled in the municipal bodies and the DDA rather than confining the response to hospitals. Fever in Delhi in late August is a differential diagnosis, not a diagnosis. For readers travelling to India Late summer and autumn are heavy travel months for families visiting Delhi and the NCR. If a trip is planned in the coming weeks, an influenza vaccination taken here before departure is worth arranging — it takes roughly two weeks to reach full effect, so timing matters. Travellers in the higher-risk categories above, and those travelling with infants or elderly parents, should weigh that more heavily than the case-fatality picture

suggests, because the risk that matters on a trip is not death but a hospitalisation two days into a two-week visit. Masks in airports, on flights and in crowded indoor settings are a reasonable precaution during an active wave, and anyone who develops fever with respiratory symptoms in the capital should seek care promptly rather than self-prescribing — both because early antiviral treatment works better, and because the differential includes dengue, where certain over-the-counter medications are actively harmful. For families here supporting elderly parents in Delhi, the most useful contribution is unglamorous: confirming a flu shot has actually been taken, folding a temperature reading into the daily check-in call, and agreeing which hospital to go to before it is needed. Delhi health department

case data as reported through 21–22 August 2026 via PTI and carried by Business Standard, The Pioneer and Medical Dialogues; statements by Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh following the 21 August review meeting chaired by Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda; Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare public guidance on influenza symptoms; National Centre for Disease Control comparative data; and clinical guidance on H1N1 risk groups, warning signs and antiviral treatment. Case counts reflect confirmed, reported cases only and are not an estimate of total infections.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This report is general information and not a substitute for medical advice. Readers with symptoms or specific risk factors should consult a qualified physician.

Why Gurugram Drowns in the Rains

A 750-metre pipeline to connect it to the Badshahpur drain required demolition drives to clear encroachment from land acquired for that purpose two decades ago.

What the authorities say

Officials do not dispute the diagnosis so much as the pace. The state's account is that critical waterlogging points fell from around ninety in 2019 to roughly thirty by 2024, through desilting, new outfall connections, reconstruction of drains, check dams and creek rejuvenation. GMDA and the municipal corporation report desilting 544 kilometres of drains and deploying 141 heavy-duty pumps and 77 suction tankers. A flood control office opens each 1 July with public helplines; 408 rainwater harvesting systems are installed in corporation areas; a Japanese consultancy is preparing a scheme to channel excess rainwater from Nuh into Drain 8; and encroachments along the three principal drains were cleared this year, the GMDA chief executive has said, with smaller drains to follow. Every one of those measures is real. None addresses the gradient. Pumps, tankers and desilting manage symptoms during an event; restoring an outfall network — giving the water somewhere to go — is the only intervention that changes the outcome. Gurugram's Member of Parliament, Rao Inderjit Singh, has said as much publicly, calling encroached water paths the core issue and the rest band-aid.

The sequence that built the problem

The deeper explanation is one of sequence. Gurugram was assembled in an order almost designed to produce this outcome: developers bought land from farmers and built colonies, while the trunk infrastructure — external drains, sewer lines, master roads — was left to development authorities, funded by External Development Charges collected from those same builders. Housing arrived first and drainage later, if at all. That is why Tuesday's cave-in at IFFCO Chowk is more diagnostic than the flooding itself: a sewer line quietly removing the soil beneath a national highway service lane until the surface gives way is what deferred maintenance looks like when it finally becomes visible.

Why this matters from New York For the diaspora, this is not a distant civic story. Gurugram absorbed a very large share of NRI property investment in the National Capital Region over twenty-five years. Flood-prone addresses carry real costs: basement and lift inundation, long power outages when substations flood, insurance exposure, and a resale market that has begun to price the difference between sectors that drain and sectors that do not.

The agenda is not exotic. Restore the natural stormwater paths and surviving ponds rather than only laying pipe. Complete the master drainage legs and the sector 68–

115 build-out on a published timeline. Publish the encroachment inventory with names, and enforce it. Tie occupancy certificates in new sectors to functioning outfall capacity rather than promises. And make the officers named as nodal points for each hotspot answerable in public when their stretch goes under.

Until some version of that happens, the arithmetic will hold: seventy millimetres, thirty-five minutes, three hundred children in nine buses, and a city of glass towers waiting for the water to find its own way out.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND TUESDAY

~70 mm of rain in about 35 minutes during the evening peak.

3 road cave-ins, including a service-lane collapse on the Delhi–Jaipur highway at IFFCO Chowk caused by a sewer-line leak. 15 vehicles stranded at Subhash Chowk, including 9 school buses; 300+ children held inside for nearly two hours. 78 metres — the elevation difference between the Aravallis and the Najafgarh drain that drives runoff across the city. 4 of 63 nineteenth-century check dams still standing. ~75% of natural stormwater drains lost, per a 2022 Haryana government survey.

65 of 181 municipal ponds encroached; only 33 still hold water. Master drainage: only Legs 1–3 operational; sectors 68–115 incomplete.

SOURCES

Reporting draws on PTI and Indian news coverage of the 25 August 2026 rainfall and cave-ins; the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs reply in the Lok Sabha on Gurugram's topography and mitigation measures; Municipal Corporation of Gurugram geo-tagging survey findings on pond encroachment; a 2022 Haryana government survey on stormwater drain loss; TERI assessment of encroachment and urban drainage; GMDA and MCG statements on desilting, pumping and drainage works; statements by Gurugram MP Rao Inderjit Singh; and reporting by The Tribune, The Print, India TV, Down To Earth and Newslandry on the structural causes of the city's annual inundation.



India–U.S. Relations

Trade, Consular Services, Education and Energy Partnership - Exclusive Interview with Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan



The Consulate General of India in New York occupies a peculiar place in the architecture of the bilateral relationship. On paper it is a consular post: passports, visas, OCI cards, attestations, emergency travel. In practice it has become India's commercial and community front door on the American East Coast, covering ten states and a diaspora of roughly 2.3 million people — among the largest jurisdictions of any Indian mission anywhere in the world.

Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan has run that front door since January 15, 2024. A career diplomat of the 2002 batch of the Indian Foreign Service, he has served in Moscow, Ashgabat and Islamabad, handled India's Afghanistan and Iran files at headquarters, spent five years as chief of staff to the Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and arrived in New York from Dar es Salaam, where he was High Commissioner to Tanzania and Permanent Representative to the East African Community.

He sat down with The South Asian Insider Weekly for a wide-ranging conversation on trade, consular reform, education and energy — and on the fraud calls that have been landing on the phones of our readers.

THE POSTING

You have completed twenty-four years in the Foreign Service. What did you carry into New York from Moscow, Ashgabat, Islamabad and Dar es Salaam?

A sense of proportion, I hope. Each of those postings taught something different. Russia taught me the long view — relationships that outlast

governments. Turkmenistan and Pakistan taught patience. Tanzania taught me what India can build abroad when it decides to: we elevated that relationship to a strategic partnership, and the first overseas campus of an Indian Institute of Technology was established in Zanzibar during my tenure there. That experience is directly relevant to what I do here.

New York is not a conventional consular assignment.

It is not. The jurisdiction is enormous and the community is exceptionally accomplished. But I would resist the idea that this office is only about the diaspora. We are equally a commercial mission. Some of the largest American corporations, banks, universities and media houses are within a short walk of this building. A great deal of what determines the India–United States economic relationship is decided within a few square miles of here.

TRADE: THE ROAD TO \$500 BILLION

Let us begin with the number everyone cites. Where does bilateral trade actually stand?

Consider the trajectory rather than any single figure. In the year 2000, two-way trade between India and the United States was in the region of \$15 billion. Today, counting goods and services together, it is in the range of \$220 to \$240 billion. That is a fifteen-fold expansion in a single generation. The leadership on both sides — the Prime Minister and the President — has set a target of \$500 billion by 2030. It is ambitious. It is not fanciful.

And the framework negotiations?

They are at an advanced stage. I will not

negotiate in a newspaper, but I can say that both administrations have invested serious political capital in getting this right, and that the direction of travel is settled even where the detail is not.

INSIDER CONTEXT: Readers should hold the \$220–240 billion figure in its proper frame — it counts goods and services combined. Goods alone are considerably lower: U.S. Census data put American goods imports from India at roughly \$103.8 billion in 2025, with a goods deficit of about \$58.2 billion. On the framework, the record since this conversation began has moved quickly. Washington and New Delhi announced an interim trade framework in early February 2026 lowering the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods from 25 to 18 percent, and a separate executive order removed the additional 25 percent Russian-oil penalty imposed in August 2025. On February 20, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the IEEPA-based reciprocal tariffs altogether; the administration responded within days by invoking Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, first at 10 percent and then at 15. The full Bilateral Trade Agreement remains unsigned. Exporters should price to the duty stack — MFN plus whatever surcharge is operative on the day of entry — not to the headline rate.

Critics argue the two economies are rivals in too many sectors for a target that large.

I would put it differently. The Indian and American economies are largely complementary rather than competitive, and the trade data bears that out. Take diamonds and coloured stones — rough material moves from the United States to India, where it is cut and polished by craftsmen whose skills exist at that

scale almost nowhere else, and much of it returns to the American consumer. Take pharmaceuticals — Indian generic manufacturers supply medicines that are, in many cases, simply not produced domestically here at a price the American patient can bear. Neither side is displacing the other. Each is doing what it does best.

A PORTAL BUILT FOR SMALL EXPORTERS

The India–USA Trade Facilitation Portal has been the Consulate's most visible commercial initiative this year. What problem is it solving?

The problem of the small manufacturer who has a genuinely competitive product and no idea how to reach an American buyer. Large Indian corporates do not need us; they have advisors, bankers and lawyers. The micro, small and medium enterprise in Ludhiana or Tiruppur or Morbi does. The portal was launched on April 8, and this Consulate did a great deal of the groundwork alongside the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Export Promotion Councils.

How does it work in practice?

An exporter registers and is verified through the relevant Export Promotion Council — that verification matters, because the American buyer needs to know the counterparty is real. On the other side we have been bringing in major importers and procurement teams: Walmart, Costco, Amazon, Lockheed Martin among others, through webinars and business sessions where Indian suppliers can hear directly what the specifications, compliance standards and volumes actually are. There is also a digital exhibition function — in effect a

India–U.S. Relations

Trade, Consular Services, Education and Energy Partnership -Exclusive Interview with Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan

virtual trade booth, where an importer can view catalogues, product ranges and specifications in real time without anyone buying an airline ticket.

And the cost to the exporter?

Nothing. It is free, and for verified users it is safe. That was a deliberate decision. If we had charged for it, the very enterprises we built it for would not have used it.

(INSIDER CONTEXT: The portal was formally launched on April 8, 2026 in Washington by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Ambassador Vinay Kwatra, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal addressing the event virtually; the Consulate General in New York anchored the design and much of the groundwork, a role the Embassy publicly acknowledged. By the three-month mark the platform was reported to have drawn roughly 3,000 registered members — about 2,700 verified Indian exporters and some 300 American importers).

BRINGING THE CONSULATE TO THE DOORSTEP

Your jurisdiction is vast. Someone in upstate New York or northern New England is not going to travel to Manhattan for a signature.

That was precisely the diagnosis. We serve somewhere between 2.2 and 2.4 million people, and for many of them this building was simply too far away. So the answer has been to decentralise. Consular application centres have been opened in places like Edison, New Jersey and Columbus, Ohio, and the network has been expanded across the country. Separately, the Government has been standing up new full missions — Boston among them — so that jurisdictions closer to the community can be served locally.

(INSIDER CONTEXT: Eight new Indian Consular Application Centres — Raleigh, Orlando, San Jose, Dallas, Detroit, Columbus, Edison and Boston — were inaugurated on August 1, 2025, taking the national total to 17, all now operating six days a week. On Boston, a distinction worth drawing for readers in New England: consular jurisdiction was formally reassigned effective August 1, 2025, and miscellaneous consular services have been available

through the VFS Global centre on Canal Street since March 2026, but the Consulate General in Boston is still establishing its office. Passport, visa and OCI services for Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont continue to be handled by the Consulate General in New York until that changeover is complete.)

Tell us about “Consulate at Your Doorstep.”

It is what the name says. We take officers out to where the community actually lives — Hicksville on Long Island is a good example — and we sit down informally. Somebody brings a passport problem, somebody an OCI question, somebody a document that has been stuck for months. A great many of these matters can be resolved on the spot, or at least unblocked, once an officer can see the file and the person together. The formality of a counter is often the obstacle.

And weekend coverage?

We operate for two hours every Saturday and every Sunday for emergencies. A death in the family, an urgent travel requirement — these do not observe office hours. Somebody from this Consulate is available.

AN ADVISORY THE COMMUNITY NEEDS TO HEAR

You have raised the issue of impersonation fraud. How serious is it?

Serious, and growing. Cybercriminals are calling members of our community and claiming to be officials of the Consulate or the Embassy. In some cases they are spoofing caller identification so that our number appears on the screen. They tell people there is a problem with a passport, a visa, an OCI card, a parcel, a legal matter — and then they ask for personal information or money.

What is your message to a reader who receives such a call?

Let me be completely clear, because I want this in print. The Consulate General of India does not call citizens to ask for sensitive personal information. We do not call to demand payment. If you receive such a call, do not engage, do not confirm anything, hang up immediately, and report it to the appropriate authorities. If you are genuinely unsure whether a

communication is from us, contact the Consulate directly through the numbers published on our official website. Nobody has ever been harmed by hanging up on a caller and checking.

IF YOU GET THE CALL

☛ The Consulate does not telephone citizens to request personal or financial information.

☛ Caller ID can be spoofed. A familiar number on the screen proves nothing.

☛ Do not confirm a passport number, date of birth, Social Security number or payment detail.

☛ Hang up. Then verify independently, using only the contact numbers published on the official Consulate website.

☛ Report the attempt — to the Consulate, and to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center at ic3.gov.

☛ Tell an elder in the family. This fraud disproportionately targets senior citizens and recent arrivals.

CAMPUSES MOVING IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

The National Education Policy opened the door to Indian institutions abroad and foreign institutions in India. How far has that gone?

Further than most people realise, and in both directions. Under NEP 2020, premier Indian institutions have begun establishing overseas campuses — IIT Madras in Zanzibar, which I watched take shape, and IIT Delhi in Abu Dhabi. These are not satellite offices. They are degree-granting campuses.

And the reverse traffic?

We are actively inviting leading American universities to establish campuses in India, and that invitation is being taken up. The Illinois Institute of Technology is opening in Mumbai. I would encourage American institutions to look seriously at this. The Indian market for high-quality technical education is enormous, the regulatory pathway now exists, and the graduates are already being recruited by the same multinationals that recruit on American campuses.

ENERGY

You spent five years at the Petroleum Ministry. Energy is

the file you know best.

It is, and it is the file where the change has been most dramatic. Before 2016, India imported essentially no hydrocarbons from the United States. None. Today American crude oil, LNG and LPG are a vital component of India’s energy supply mix. That is not an incremental shift; it is the creation of an entirely new trade relationship inside a decade.

Is it only a purchasing relationship?

No, and this is the part that gets least attention. Underneath the cargoes there is deep technological collaboration between American and Indian energy companies — in exploration, in refining technology, in gas infrastructure, in the transition technologies both countries will need. The barrels are visible. The engineering underneath them is what will still be there in twenty years.

(INSIDER CONTEXT: Energy has since become a formal component of the trade architecture rather than a parallel track. Under the February 2026 framework, India committed to ending purchases of Russian crude, with supply shifting toward American and other sources, in exchange for the removal of the 25 percent penalty duty. American energy exports to India are therefore now tied to the tariff settlement itself — a significant change from the purely commercial growth story of the preceding decade.)

A CLOSING WORD

What would you say to a reader of this newspaper — someone who came here thirty years ago, built a business, raised children who are now American?

That the Consulate is theirs. I have said this from my first week here: I want to know what we are doing right, what we are doing wrong, and what this community expects of its own Consulate. That feedback is not a courtesy. It is how the office improves. And I would say that the generation they raised is now, quietly, one of the strongest assets this relationship has. Governments negotiate agreements. Communities make them durable.

BY THE NUMBERS

☛ \$15 billion — India–U.S. two-way trade in 2000.

☛ \$220–240 billion — approximate two-way trade today, goods and services combined.

☛ \$500 billion — the bilateral target for 2030.

☛ 18% ’! 15% — the reciprocal rate under the February 2026 framework, superseded after the Supreme Court ruling of February 20, 2026 by a Section 122 surcharge.

☛ 2.3 million — approximate diaspora population across the New York Consulate’s ten-state jurisdiction.

☛ 17 — Indian Consular Application Centres now operating across the United States, six days a week.

☛ 363,019 — Indian students in the United States in 2024/25, the largest national cohort.

☛ April 8, 2026 — launch of the India–USA Trade Facilitation Portal.

EDITOR’S NOTE

This interview has been condensed and edited. Bracketed context panels are the work of this newspaper’s editorial desk, not of the Consul General, and are provided because several of the underlying figures and policy positions have moved since the conversation was recorded. Where the Ambassador’s figures differ from the most recent official data, we have printed both and identified the source. Trade, tariff and enrolment data cited are drawn from the White House and U.S. Embassy fact sheets of February 2026, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Institute of International Education’s Open Doors 2025 report, and official releases of the Embassy of India in Washington and the Consulate General of India in New York.

(Sunny Sharanjit Thind is Editor-Publisher of The South Asian Insider Weekly. Interview conducted in New York. Edited for length and clarity.)

India Day, Coast to Coast

From Fremont to Harrisburg, the diaspora's civic calendar filled the month of August

(Our Staff Reporter)-The eightieth anniversary produced one of the fullest Independence Day calendars the diaspora has staged. The Festival of Globe held India Day in Fremont on August 15 and 16, with the parade stepping off at eleven on the

campus — a free fair that draws as many as 18,000 visitors, with more than a dozen organizations in the parade, 250 performers across 25 routines, and 15 food stalls. The Hindu Center of Charlotte marked the day on August 15 with a program built around Indian folk arts. The Consulate General of India in Seattle hosted an official flag-hoisting.

Two features of the season are worth noting for organizers planning next year. First, the free-admission community fair, exemplified by Harrisburg, consistently outdraws ticketed events and pulls in



sixteenth. The Indian Association of Greater Boston brought India Day Festival 2026 to the DCR Hatch Memorial Shell on August 15 under the theme "Colors of India."

In central Pennsylvania, the Asian Indian Americans of Central Pennsylvania staged India Day on August 8 at HACC's Harrisburg

state and federal officeholders who want the photograph. Second, the programming has broadened past Bollywood set pieces into robotics exhibitions, art competitions and regional folk forms. The audience has matured, and the stages are catching up.

Gor's First Year in New Delhi

The ambassador arrived in January amid the worst bilateral stretch in twenty years and a trade deal signed within weeks

(Our Staff Reporter)-Sergio Gor assumed office as the twenty-sixth United States ambassador to India on January 14, succeeding Eric Garcetti, while retaining the post of special envoy for

two governments announced a trade framework. Whether that timing reflects the embassy's work or simply the exhaustion of both sides is a fair question, and one the diaspora business community answers differently depending on which sector it sits in.

The consular relationship is the file the diaspora watches most closely, and it is the one under the greatest strain. Visa interview waivers have been narrowed, appointment waits remain long, and the student and skilled-worker rules are being rewritten in Washington rather than negotiated in New Delhi. An



South and Central Asian affairs he has held since August 2025. He arrived at the end of a year-long deterioration in relations driven by punitive tariffs and by sharp differences over the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict.

Within three weeks of his arrival the

ambassador has limited authority over any of this. What the post does confer is voice. The measure of Gor's first year, from the community's vantage, will be whether that voice was used in the interagency arguments that produced the rules now landing on Indian families.

Suozzi Takes India Caucus Post as Long Island's Weight Grows

A Jersey City man is arrested at Toronto airport after allegedly collecting cash and gold from elderly victims across New York and New Jersey

(Our Staff Reporter)-Representative Tom Suozzi has been named Democratic vice-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, announced by caucus chairman Ro Khanna, placing a New York lawmaker in a leadership position on Capitol Hill's India portfolio. Suozzi's district spans Long Island and Queens and includes one of the densest Indian American

populations in the Northeast. He has been a longstanding caucus member, has traveled to India, and last year became the first sitting American member of Congress to visit the Kartarpur Corridor — a gesture with particular resonance for Sikh constituents, and one that few of his colleagues would have thought to make. The appointment matters more than the title suggests.

Enforcement Reaches Beyond Its Stated Target

As ICE operations expand, citizens and lawful residents are being swept up — and the politics are shifting

(Our Staff Reporter)-Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been expanding operations nationwide under new Department of Homeland Security leadership, and the controversies that shadowed the agency's earlier campaigns have returned: disputes over whom agents are targeting, fatal shootings following vehicle stops, and detentions of United States citizens and lawful permanent residents.

Public opinion has moved. Polling through the spring showed approval of the administration's immigration handling falling below disapproval, reversing a position that had been a political asset a year earlier. Surveys have found overwhelming majorities favoring requirements that agents

identify themselves and wear body cameras. Republican members of Congress have publicly urged more balance in enforcement. For South Asian families the practical guidance has not changed and bears repeating. Carry proof of status. Know that a warrant signed by an ICE officer is not a judicial warrant and does not compel entry into a home. Do not sign documents you have not read or do not understand. Have an attorney's number written down rather than stored only on a phone that may be taken. Community organizations across the New York region are running know-your-rights sessions; the ones that fill up are the ones held in the gurdwara, the mandir and the masjid rather than in a hotel conference room.

OPT Is the Next Domino

A separate DHS proposal takes aim at post-graduation work authorization

(Our Staff Reporter)-Alongside the H-1B fee proposal, the Department of Homeland Security is developing a separate rule addressing Optional Practical Training, the authorization that lets F-1 graduates work in their field after completing a degree, with a further extension for STEM graduates.

OPT is the load-bearing wall of the Indian student pipeline. It is what converts a two-year master's program into a viable financial proposition: graduates use the period to repay education loans, to accumulate American work experience, and — for a minority — to reach an employer willing to sponsor an H-1B. Remove or narrow it and the arithmetic of studying in the United

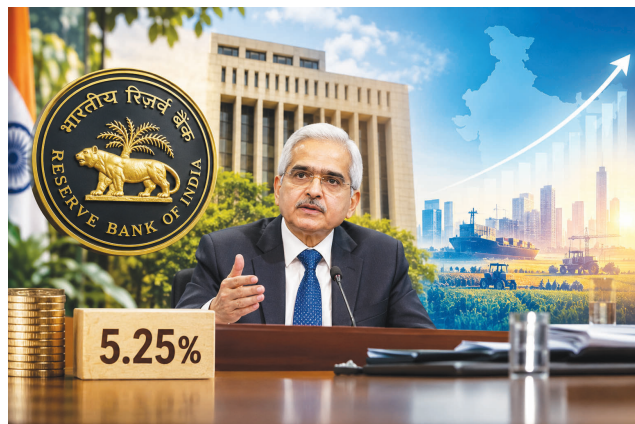
States changes for a very large number of families in Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad.

The department has already ended automatic extensions of certain employment authorization documents, a change that has produced work-authorization gaps for students moving between OPT and STEM OPT. Read together with the September 15 admission rule and the H-1B fee proposal, the direction of travel is unmistakable: each stage of the study-to-work pathway is being individually shortened, priced or made discretionary. No single rule closes the door. Taken together, they narrow it considerably.

RBI Holds at 5.25, and Says Something Larger

A fourth consecutive pause, a higher growth forecast, and a lower inflation projection

(Our Staff Reporter)-The Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Committee voted unanimously on August 5 to hold the repo



rate at 5.25 percent and retain a neutral stance — the fourth consecutive pause. It simultaneously raised the FY27 real GDP growth forecast to 6.7 percent from 6.6 and lowered the FY27 inflation projection to 5.0 percent. On its face an uneventful policy. In substance it was a signal about reaction function. Retail inflation reached 4.38 percent

in June, the highest since December 2024 and above the four percent target for the first time in seventeen months, though still inside the two-to-six percent tolerance band. The committee flagged food and fuel inflation, manufacturing cost pressures, geopolitical tension in West Asia, tariff risk and monsoon uncertainty.

The signal to markets was that the bank will tolerate an inflation print above target rather than choke growth, but that recent communication has raised the possibility of eventual hikes if price pressure proves persistent. Following the announcement the ten-year government security yield eased to roughly 6.78 percent. For borrowers, the practical translation is that the cheap-money window is not closing this quarter, and is not guaranteed to stay open past this financial year.

The Midterms Turn on Enforcement

An issue that was an asset a year ago has become a liability

(Our Staff Reporter)-Immigration has inverted as a political question. In March 2025 approval of the administration's

in Minnesota, produced detentions of citizens and lawful residents alongside the undocumented, and two fatal shootings in January became a national story. Polling has found majorities disapproving of how enforcement agencies are operating in American cities, alongside overwhelming support for identification requirements and body cameras — and, simultaneously, continued majority support for deporting people with criminal convictions. That combination is the actual public opinion: broad support for the stated goal, broad objection to the observed method. Republican members have said so publicly. Election handicappers have shifted more than a dozen House ratings toward the Democrats.



handling ran ahead of disapproval; by March 2026 the position had reversed almost symmetrically. The sharpest movement came among Latino voters, where approval fell from roughly even to a deficit of nearly thirty points. The proximate causes are operational rather than rhetorical. High-profile enforcement operations, most notably

criminal convictions. That combination is the actual public opinion: broad support for the stated goal, broad objection to the observed method. Republican members have said so publicly. Election handicappers have shifted more than a dozen House ratings toward the Democrats.

Trade After the Eighteen Percent Deal Forced-Labour Duties and the Fine Print

The February framework held, then the legal ground moved underneath it

(Our Staff Reporter)-On February 2 President Trump and Prime Minister Modi announced a trade framework reducing the American reciprocal tariff on Indian goods from 25 to 18 percent, with a joint statement following on February 7. The additional 25 percent punitive tariff imposed in August 2025 over Russian crude purchases was removed by executive order.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal presented the outcome as protecting agriculture and dairy, with spices, tea, coffee, cashew, mango and other produce entering the United States at zero duty. Exporters welcomed it: the Federation of Indian Export Organisations called it a milestone for engineering goods, textiles, pharmaceuticals,

chemicals, leather and gems.

Then the legal architecture changed. Following a Supreme Court judgment invalidating the reciprocal tariffs, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal confirmed in March that those tariffs were no longer in force, and that Washington had issued executive orders imposing ten percent tariffs on certain products from all countries. India has continued to negotiate toward a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement. Trade ministry data for the twelve months through July shows the United States still accounting for about twenty percent of Indian exports — which is the number that explains why New Delhi keeps negotiating regardless of what the tariff instrument is called this quarter.

A ten percent tariff, a policy amendment, and safeguard duties on a niche export

(Our Staff Reporter)-The United States has imposed a ten percent tariff on goods from India and sixteen other countries as part of an effort to address forced labour in production. The outcome was better than the alternative: when tariffs were proposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act, India was initially grouped among countries facing 12.5 percent levies, and Washington took account of New Delhi's

amendment to the foreign trade policy prohibiting imports of goods produced with forced labour. The commerce ministry has said negotiations placed India in the lower tier of additional tariffs, with exemptions covering roughly 45 percent of exports. Separately, safeguard tariffs of 25 to 55 percent have been imposed on quartz surface products, a category in which Indian exporters are heavily dependent on the American market.

The pattern deserves attention from anyone advising exporters. The headline reciprocal-tariff fight is over, at least in its original legal form. What has replaced it is a proliferation of narrower instruments — forced-labour duties, Section 301 actions, product-specific safeguards — each individually modest, each applied to a different schedule, and collectively far harder to plan around than a single announced rate. Compliance capacity, not price, is becoming the binding constraint for mid-sized Indian exporters.

The Rupee Breaks 95

Currency weakness is now a structural feature rather than an episode

(Our Staff Reporter)-The rupee has weakened past 95 to the dollar, extending a slide that has run through the year and that the central bank has explicitly cited in its policy framing. The proximate causes are familiar — elevated crude prices during the West Asian conflict, foreign portfolio outflows, and a dollar that has

been alternately soft and strong on geopolitical news.

Currency depreciation is not uniformly bad news. Exporters in textiles, gems and engineering goods gain price competitiveness at exactly the moment American tariff policy has become unpredictable. Remittances from the Gulf and North America convert at better

rates, and August remittance volumes into Kerala, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh reflect that. The costs fall elsewhere. India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude, and a weaker rupee multiplies an already high dollar oil price straight into transport and food costs. Corporate borrowers with unhedged dollar liabilities face

a larger repayment in rupee terms. Families financing American education are paying materially more per semester than they budgeted eighteen months ago — a point worth remembering when reading this week's student-visa coverage. An orderly decline businesses can plan around. A rapid one they cannot.

The Fight Over the Election Itself

Warnings about federal interference have moved from the fringe to the mainstream of election administration



(Our Staff Reporter)- Concerns about federal interference in the November midterms have become a central subject of American election administration rather than a peripheral one. Advocacy organizations have documented an array of tactics they argue are designed to entrench incumbent power, including the prospect of immigration agents near polling places — a presence that, whatever its legal justification, would predictably suppress turnout in immigrant communities.

The President has repeatedly raised doubts about electoral integrity despite the consistent finding that voter fraud is rare, and has made public remarks that critics

read as openness to delaying or cancelling the vote.

Readers should weigh source and motive here: much of the loudest analysis comes from organizations with declared positions. The verifiable facts are narrower and still consequential. Election officials in both parties have raised concerns about federal presence at polling sites. Litigation over ballot access and roll maintenance is under way in multiple states. And a large share of the electorate now enters November with reduced confidence that the count will be accepted by the losing side — which is a problem regardless of which side that turns out to be.

The Surya Kant Court Takes Shape

Appointments continue under the Chief Justice who took office in November



(Our Staff Reporter)-Chief Justice Surya Kant assumed office on November 24, 2025, and the composition of the Supreme Court has continued to shift under his tenure. Among recent elevations, Shree Chandrashekhar, previously Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court and before that a judge of the Rajasthan and Jharkhand High Courts, was appointed to the Supreme Court with effect from June 2.

Judicial appointments rarely lead an Indian news bulletin, and they should. The court's docket over the coming terms includes questions with direct consequences for the diaspora: the

constitutional status of electoral roll revision, the scope of executive power over trade and taxation, citizenship and documentation questions, and the steady stream of matters arising from central-state friction that four new state governments will inevitably generate.

The collegium system that produces these appointments remains contested — criticized for opacity by reformers and defended as the last structural check on executive capture by its supporters. Neither camp has moved much in a decade. What has changed is the volume and political salience of what arrives on the court's list.

West Asia's Bill Arrives in New Delhi

Six months of war have reached India through oil, shipping and evacuation planning

(Our Staff Reporter)- The Cabinet Committee on Security has met repeatedly through the year on the West Asian conflict, reviewing measures across ministries and considering further steps. The Prime Minister has chaired those sessions personally — an indication of how directly the war touches Indian interests.

The exposure runs along three lines. Energy: India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude, and sustained high prices during the conflict have fed directly into the inflation numbers the Reserve Bank is now managing around. Shipping: routes and insurance costs through the region affect a large share of Indian trade with Europe. And people: millions of Indian nationals work across the Gulf, and their remittances are a structural feature of household finance in Kerala, Telangana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

Reports of progress in American-Iranian diplomatic contacts have at moments eased crude prices and lifted the rupee. Those movements have not been durable. New Delhi's posture has been consistent and unromantic: maintain relationships on all sides, decline to choose, and keep the evacuation planning current. It is not an inspiring foreign policy. For a country with this much of its household income denominated in Gulf salaries, it is the correct one.

The Canada Fight Nobody Wanted

Workers on both sides of the border absorb the cost of an escalating tariff dispute



(Our Staff Reporter)-A renewed tariff conflict with Canada has drawn unusually blunt criticism from labour organizations on both sides of the border, with union figures describing it as among the most self-defeating trade fights in memory. The integrated North American manufacturing base — automotive above all — means components cross the border multiple times before a finished vehicle is sold, so a tariff at any crossing is a tax on the whole chain.

The dispute compounds a broader affordability problem. Polling through the year has found voters describing the economy as weak and rejecting the claim that policy has helped, with the

difficulty of reaching middle-class stability registering as a defining grievance even where aggregate growth and employment figures look reasonable.

Canadian and American workers in the affected sectors have limited recourse and no seat at the table. This is worth noting for Indian exporters watching from a distance: the North American case demonstrates that tariff policy applied to a deeply integrated supply chain does not shift production home so much as raise costs at every node. India's exporters, being less integrated into American manufacturing, face a different and in some ways simpler problem.

It also sets a precedent that other capitals will study. The reticence around sharing missile design information has never been chiefly about the recipient; it has been about what happens to that information afterward, and about the signal sent to other states seeking similar transfers. That Britain has judged the calculation worth making, at this point in the war, is itself a data point about how long London expects the conflict to run.

Fourteen Days When Delhi Is the Center of the World

Bishkek, then New Delhi. India is about to find out whether multi-alignment is a strategy or a very good photograph.



Beginning Sunday, India enters the most consequential fortnight of its diplomatic year. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's leaders convene in Bishkek on August 31 and September 1. Twelve days later, on September 12 and 13, Narendra Modi hosts the BRICS summit in New Delhi. The Kremlin has confirmed Vladimir Putin for both. Xi Jinping is widely expected in Delhi, though Beijing has not formally said so. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was in Moscow on August 24 carrying a personal message from the Prime Minister. The choreography is deliberate and it is not subtle.

It is also happening roughly six months after India signed an interim trade agreement with Washington that cut tariffs on Indian exports from a punitive 50 percent to 18 percent, paired with commitments to purchase some 500 billion dollars in American goods over five years. India will therefore stage the largest gathering of the non-Western order of the year while its most important commercial relationship rests on an agreement barely half a year old and negotiated under duress. New Delhi calls this multi-alignment. Its critics call it having it both ways. This month is when the difference becomes measurable. The doctrine has real merit, and this page has defended it before. A country that can host the Russian president, negotiate technology transfer with the Americans, sit in the Quad, buy energy in the Gulf and trade with Beijing has more options than a country locked into a bloc. Exclusive alignment with Washington would cost India its defense and energy relationships with Moscow. Total reliance on Moscow

would cost it capital, semiconductors and markets. Refusing subordination to anyone is not fence-sitting; for a country of India's size and stage, it is the only sane posture.

But multi-alignment works only while every partner needs India more than it fears India's other partners, and that condition is not permanent. It is also not free of contradiction. The expanded BRICS now includes Iran. In September, India will welcome to its own capital a bloc containing the state that has spent six months rationing access to the waterway carrying two-fifths of India's crude. Delhi will be the host, the agenda-setter and the drafter of the communiqué. What it chooses to say about freedom of navigation — in its own city, with Tehran at the table — is the single most revealing thing that will happen in either summit. That is the test readers should apply. Not the handshakes; there will be handshakes, and they will be photographed from angles designed to make Washington flinch. Not the joint statement's language on multipolarity, which is boilerplate in every capital that produces it. The test is narrower and harder: does India use the hosting of BRICS to extract anything concrete — on shipping, on energy pricing, on the terms of the war — or does it spend the fortnight collecting symbolism? A country that can convene everyone has leverage only if it asks for something. Multi-alignment that never converts into a demand is not strategy. It is scheduling.



Sunny Sharanjit Thind

Who Owns a Chokepoint?

Iran did not close the Strait of Hormuz. It converted it into a favor — and half the world accepted.

On Tuesday a projectile knocked out the engine room of an oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz. The crew was unharmed. No one claimed responsibility. Six months ago that sentence would have moved markets and dominated a news cycle; this week it ran as a line item beneath a country singer's obituary. That is the most alarming fact about the Gulf crisis — not its severity, but the speed with which the world has agreed to live inside it.

The scale is worth restating plainly, because familiarity has dulled it. Before the American and Israeli air campaign began on February 28, roughly 130 vessels crossed the Strait on an ordinary day. In the first week of August, ship-tracking data counted between eight and fifteen. Marine insurance is either unavailable or priced beyond reason; crews will not sail.

Analysts have called it the largest supply disruption in the recorded history of the oil market. Brent sits near eighty-four dollars, about sixteen percent above its pre-war level — a strikingly modest number, and precisely the reason the pressure to fix anything has evaporated.

But the closure is not the story. The reopening is. In March, Iran's foreign minister announced that "friendly" nations — India, China, Russia — could move commercial cargo through the waterway after coordinating with Iranian authorities, while vessels tied to Tehran's adversaries could not. India did not reject the arrangement. It built around it, launching naval escorts for Indian-flagged shipping

and shepherding LPG carriers home one convoy at a time.

The reasoning was sound and the arithmetic was brutal. The Strait carried roughly 41 percent of India's crude, 55 percent of its LNG and 88 percent of its LPG in the first nine months of the fiscal year. A government facing that exposure does not deliver a lecture on maritime law; it gets the gas home and counts the cost later. As emergency management, New Delhi's conduct was defensible, even deft.

As doctrine, it is a mortgage. Freedom of navigation is not a courtesy extended to countries in good standing. It is a legal principle that exists precisely so that no state can decide, ship by ship, who eats and who waits. The moment passage is accepted as a concession, the concession has been granted: the waterway belongs to whoever is willing to close it. Tehran has now made the logic explicit, conditioning any reopening on sanctions relief and war reparations, while Washington answers with sanctions on some sixty individuals, companies and vessels tied to Iran's covert oil trade and a presidential assurance that the mines have been cleared, which no outside authority has confirmed. Iran's economy minister says Tehran has a two-year plan to outlast it.

The precedent will not stay in the Gulf. There are other narrow places — Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb, the Taiwan Strait, the canals — and other governments watching a chokepoint operate as a toll booth for six months while the principle goes undefended. India will not always be on the friendly list. That is the bill, and it comes due in someone else's crisis.



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(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.)

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EUROPE'S WAR, WITHOUT AMERICA'S ATTENTION

Three thresholds crossed in a single week,
none of them debated.

This is escalation by drift.



1 UKRAINE STRIKES DEEPER INTO RUSSIA

Long-range weapons,
new permissions.

2 NATO'S EASTERN FLANK ARMING UP

More troops, more bases,
permanent posture.

3 RUSSIA RESPONDS WITH NEW DOCTRINE

Nuclear signaling,
hybrid attacks, threats
without limits.

While Washington concentrated on the Gulf, three things happened in Europe that would each have consumed a month of argument in any calmer year. Britain's new prime minister, Andy Burnham, spent Ukraine's Independence Day in Kyiv, where he announced that the defense manufacturer MBDA would release details of British-made components for the SCALP missile so that Ukraine can assemble the weapon itself. Read that carefully. It is not a shipment of missiles. It is the transfer of the capacity to make them — a category shift

dressed in the language of routine assistance.

Days earlier, a Spanish F/A-18 shot down a Russian drone in Romanian airspace near Galați, after the aircraft crossed in from Moldova. A NATO air force fired on Russian hardware over NATO territory. It was reported as an incident. And Ukraine launched 822 drones at Russia, more than 600 of them toward Moscow, killing at least seven people, injuring thirty-nine and destroying a major warehouse — the largest such assault of the year, aimed at a nuclear-armed capital.

Any one of these, occurring in 2022, would have triggered emergency summits and a week of anxious commentary about red lines. Occurring together in August 2026, they produced a news cycle. The reason is not that the world has grown brave. It is that the world's attention is finite, and it is currently in the Persian Gulf.

This is the mechanism worth naming: escalation by delegation. The United States has not decided to widen the war in Europe; it has simply stopped supervising it. Into that vacuum, European gov-

ernments make individually reasonable choices — help Ukraine build what it can no longer wait to receive, defend allied airspace from an intruding drone, permit strikes that answer strikes. Each step is defensible on its own terms. No one is responsible for the sum. That is precisely how wars widen: not by decision, but by the accumulation of defensible increments while the party that used to count them is looking elsewhere.

There is a reason this belongs on a South Asian editorial page rather than only a European one. The subcontinent has spent the past year absorbing the same lesson in miniature. Drone exchanges permit deniability. Ambiguity about who fired is now a feature of the weapon rather than a flaw in the reporting. The distance between a border incident and a general engagement has been shortened by technology that is cheap, fast and difficult to attribute. What Europe is proving this month is that the international system currently has no functioning mechanism for stopping this sort of drift — no arbiter with the attention span to say enough. India and Pakistan should draw the conclusion that nobody is coming to referee, because the referee has other commitments. The comfortable assumption of the past three decades was that escalation would always be interrupted — by a phone call from Washington, a shuttle diplomat, a superpower with a stake in calm. That assumption has quietly expired. Nothing has replaced it, and this week, no one noticed.

TSAI Editorial Board

The Tariff as an Instrument of Statecraft

Economic coercion has become the default language of American foreign policy. India is the case study for what that costs.

Consider a single week. Canada retaliates in an escalating trade war while the American president taunts it with a proposal to rename Lake Ontario. The Treasury Secretary unveils what he calls the greatest financial offensive ever mounted, striking some sixty people, companies and ships tied to Iran's covert oil trade. And the same administration quietly reopens the border to Mexican beef because domestic supply is tight and prices are climbing. Coercion and concession in the same seven days, both driven by the same domestic arithmetic.

This is no longer a departure from foreign policy. It is the form foreign policy now takes. Tariffs and sanctions have become the instruments of first resort because they are cheap, immediate, require no legislature, risk no soldiers and can be reversed by the same signature that imposed them. That last property is the one nobody discusses honestly, and it is the destructive one.

India has lived the full cycle and should be the world's reference case. A 25 percent tariff arrived on the grounds of a trade deficit. A second 25 percent followed as a penalty for buying Russian crude, bringing the total to 50 percent — among the steepest levied on any partner, imposed while trade talks were still underway. Indian exporters spent a punishing period pricing themselves out of their largest market. Then, in February, an interim agreement brought the

rate down to 18 percent, in exchange for commitments running to some 500 billion dollars in purchases over five years.

That outcome was reported in both capitals as a triumph, and in a narrow sense it was: 18 is better than



50, and predictability is worth paying for. But two things ought to be said plainly on an editorial page. The relief was bought, not won. And the tariff was not repealed — it was repriced. Eighteen percent remains multiples of the average American most-favored-nation rate of roughly 3.3 percent. What was normalized in that negotiation was not the number but the

method: that market access is now a discretionary grant, renewable at will, contingent on conduct assessed elsewhere.

For the business readers of this paper — the importer in Queens, the freight forwarder in Newark, the family firm sourcing from Ludhiana or Tiruppur — the practical lesson has nothing to do with which country is favored this quarter. It is that the planning horizon itself has been withdrawn. Nobody underwrites a five-year distribution agreement, a warehouse lease or a new hire when the landed cost of the goods can double by proclamation and halve by negotiation. Capital does not flee under those conditions; it simply stops committing. That is the invisible tariff, and it is levied on everyone, in every jurisdiction, including the one imposing it.

Sanctions and tariffs have legitimate uses, and there are governments against whom they are the least bad option available. But an instrument used constantly stops functioning as pressure and starts functioning as weather. Countries adapt, reroute, hedge and build alternatives — which is a fair description of what India spent the last twelve months doing, and of what the diplomacy in Bishkek and New Delhi over the next fortnight is partly about. Washington should notice that its favorite tool is teaching the world to need it less.

TSAI Editorial Board

The Bond Market's Turbulent Week Schools the Treasury Secretary

Scott Bessent can change the shape of the national debt. He cannot change its size.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent reached for the biggest lever he has publicly wielded in office. The bond market gave him about one trading day.

On August 19 the Treasury announced it would at least double its liquidity-support buybacks in the 10- to 30-year portion of the curve, lifting the ceiling from \$2 billion per operation to \$4 billion or more, with purchases to begin September 9. Mr. Bessent called it “what I would call a Treasury twist,” a nod to the Federal Reserve’s Operation Twist. Long yields dropped sharply on the news. Then they climbed straight back. The 10-year note, his preferred benchmark, closed the week near 4.73 percent — roughly where it began, and close to the highest reading of his tenure. The 30-year bond had touched 5.27 percent, a level the United States had not seen in 19 years.

It is worth being precise about what this maneuver is and is not. Nothing is retired. Every dollar of long bonds repurchased must be financed by issuing a dollar of bills. The government is not borrowing less; it is borrowing shorter. That is the fiscal equivalent of refinancing a 30-year mortgage into a floating-rate credit line — cheaper if short rates fall, punishing if they don’t, and it hands the taxpayer a far larger rollover to face every few months. There is an awkwardness here, too. Mr. Bessent arrived at Treasury criticizing his predecessor for

exactly this practice — leaning on short-dated issuance to hold down long yields, what his own allies called activist Treasury issuance. He has now executed a



more explicit version of it and given it a name. Markets have long memories for that sort of thing. Credibility is an asset, and it gets priced.

The deeper reason the twist failed to hold, however, is arithmetic. Gross federal debt crossed \$40 trillion on August 19, up from

\$39 trillion in March — more than a trillion dollars of new borrowing in under half a year. Annual interest costs now exceed \$1 trillion. The fiscal 2026 deficit is track-

ing above \$2 trillion, near 6 percent of GDP in an economy that is not in recession. The Supreme Court’s ruling against the reciprocal tariffs has Treasury refunding corporations an estimated \$160 billion in duties the administration had already spent on paper. And private borrow-

ers — above all the artificial-intelligence buildout, issuing corporate debt at remarkable scale — are bidding for the same pool of savings.

Four billion dollars a month cannot move a market absorbing that. What moves it is a credible path on the primary deficit, and nothing else is durable.

Something else sits inside that 5.27 percent, and it is not an inflation forecast. It is an institutional risk premium — investors charging for the possibility that a Treasury doing monetary policy’s job this year is a Treasury that leans on the central bank next year. Federal Reserve independence is worth basis points. Spend it, and the invoice arrives at the long end of the curve. This is not a Washington story alone. The long Treasury is the world’s reference rate. A 30-year above 5 percent reprices mortgages on Long Island and dollar refinancings in Mumbai, Dhaka and Colombo alike; emerging-market sovereigns and Indian corporates rolling over dollar paper pay part of the tab for America’s fiscal arithmetic, and they get no vote on it. Mr. Bessent says yields are out of line with “equilibrium.” The market’s reply last week was that equilibrium includes the deficit. He has, as he put it, a big toolkit. He does not have a printing press — and the institution that does is not supposed to take his calls.

TSAI Editorial Board

What a Cuban Transition Might Look Like

The generals may leave power. Their business empire will not leave with them.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has assembled the most sustained pressure campaign Washington has aimed at Havana in decades. More than two dozen separate actions since January. Sanctions touching roughly 40 entities and nearly as many individuals, including the armed forces minister himself. An oil blockade going on eight months. And, most consequentially, the collapse of Venezuela’s subsidized crude lifeline after Nicolás Maduro’s arrest in Caracas on January 3. For the first time in its post-revolutionary history, Cuba has no external sponsor and Washington’s undivided attention at once. Mr. Rubio predicts the island will be on “an irreversible glide path toward a different future” by the time this administration ends. Suppose he is right. What then? Start with an uncomfortable fact: the Cuban military is not merely the regime’s enforcer. It is its holding company.

GAESA, the armed forces’ conglomerate, is estimated to control something on the order of 40 percent of the economy — hotels, ports, retail, hard-currency stores, remittance processing. “The generals leave power” and “the generals leave the economy” are not the same sentence. Russia in 1991 supplies the cautionary version: the nomenklatura surrendered the ideology and kept the assets, and a decade later was running the country anyway, in better suits.

So the decisive question on day one is not who delivers a speech from the Palacio de la Revolución. It is who holds the keys to GAESA’s balance sheet, and under what legal authority. An asset freeze without a trustee is simply a looting window with international approval. The second problem is that Cuba has almost no opposition infrastructure to inherit anything. Six decades of single-party rule, the mass arrests that followed

the July 2021 protests, and an exodus that has drained the island of an extraordinary share of its working-age population have left civil society atomized — a few churches, some very brave artists and independent journalists, most of them imprisoned or abroad. Elections poured into that vacuum do not produce democracy. They produce whoever already controls the trucks, the transmitters and the ration books.

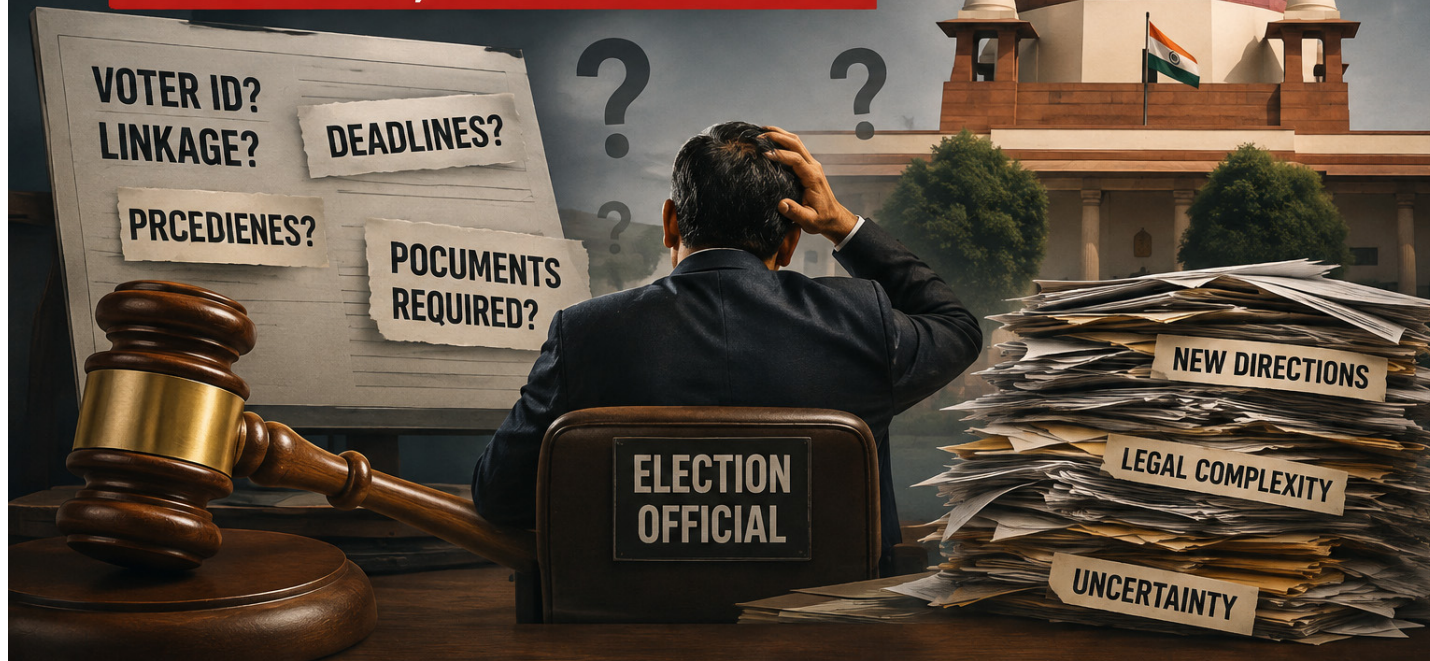
Third is the humanitarian floor. A power grid that fails on a schedule, empty pharmacies, a food system running on imports the state cannot pay for. The opening days of any transition will be about electricity, insulin and flour, not ballots. Get that wrong and the Florida Straits fill with rafts inside a month — an American problem quite as much as a Cuban one.

None of this is an argument against the pressure. It is an argument for doing the

planning now, while planning is still cheap. Three things Washington could commit to paper before it needs them. A sequenced relief ladder, with each tranche of sanctions lifted against verifiable steps: political prisoners released, parties and independent unions legalized, an audited inventory of military-held assets. A standby energy and food package that can move in days rather than quarters. And a decision, unpleasant but unavoidable, about whether safe exit will be offered to the top echelon. Spain in 1975 and Poland in 1989 negotiated their pacts before they held their votes. Amnesty is a bitter thing to hand men who jailed poets. It is also, very often, the price of a door that opens without gunfire. Pressure is a can opener. It is not a meal. Somebody in Washington should be writing the menu.

TSAI Editorial Board

THE SUPREME COURT HAS GIVEN ELECTION OFFICIALS A PROBLEM, NOT AN ANSWER



By Our Editorial Board

Election rules should be among the most predictable rules in American public life. Voters need to know how they can cast their ballots. Election officials need to know how ballots will be processed. Candidates need to know the rules under which they are competing. That is why the Supreme Court's decision allowing the Trump administration's mail-voting restrictions to proceed temporarily deserves careful attention. The ruling does not represent a final Supreme Court endorsement of the administration's election policy. Instead, it allows the rules to take effect while the

underlying legal dispute continues. That distinction matters.

The practical problem is timing.

America is approaching the 2026 midterm elections. Election officials across the country have already spent months preparing ballots, training workers, updating systems and communicating procedures to voters. Military and overseas ballots are particularly time-sensitive. Changing important election procedures close to an election creates administrative complications even when everyone involved is acting in good faith.

That should be the starting point for this debate.

The argument over voting rules has become intensely partisan, but the practical requirements of running an election are not partisan. Ballots still have to be printed. Voters still have to receive them. Election workers still have to determine whether ballots meet legal requirements. Deadlines still have to be followed. If those rules change late in the process, confusion becomes a genuine risk. Supporters of the administration's policy will argue that the federal government has a legitimate interest in election security and preventing fraud. Critics argue that the executive branch is exceeding its authority and interfering with powers tra-

ditionally exercised under federal and state election laws.

Those questions will ultimately be decided through the courts.

But there is a broader principle worth defending regardless of political affiliation: election rules should be established as early, clearly and transparently as possible.

Voters should not have to become constitutional lawyers to understand whether their ballot will count.

Nor should local election officials have to redesign procedures repeatedly because of rapidly changing litigation.

The United States has conducted elections through wars, depressions, pandemics and periods of intense political division. The strength of the system has always depended partly on something less dramatic than political speeches: millions of administrators following established procedures.

That institutional stability matters.

If the administration ultimately prevails in court, election officials will have to implement the policy. If the administration loses, they will have to adjust again. Either way, the public deserves clarity well before Election Day.

The Supreme Court's temporary decision therefore should not be portrayed as the final word. It is a reminder that the legal battle is still underway—and that the administrative clock is ticking.

America's elections do not merely need to be secure. They need to be understandable, predictable and trusted. That responsibility belongs to everyone involved: the administration, Congress, the courts, state officials and the political parties.

The voters should not be left in the middle of their disagreement.

TSAI Editorial Board

By Our Editorial Board

Economic sanctions are among the most powerful tools available to the United States when Washington wants to punish an adversary without immediately expanding military action. They can restrict access to money, technology, trade and international markets. But sanctions are ultimately a means to an end. The difficult question facing Washington now is what that end actually is. The Trump administration has intensified economic pressure on Iran while the crisis surrounding the Strait of Hormuz continues. The United States says it wants to force Tehran to make major concessions, while Iran has warned that it will resist American pressure. Meanwhile, commercial shipping through Hormuz remains far below normal levels. That situation cannot continue indefinitely without consequences for the rest of the world. Hormuz is not simply an Iranian waterway. It is one of the most important arteries of the global energy system. When shipping is disrupted, the consequences spread through oil markets, insurance rates, transportation costs, industrial production and eventually household budgets. Even countries that have no role in the conflict can end up paying part of the bill.



That is why sanctions policy needs to be connected to a clear diplomatic objective. If Washington's goal is to force Iran back to negotiations, then the administration should explain what conditions would make those negotiations possible. If the objective includes reopening Hormuz, ending attacks on commercial shipping and establishing safeguards against another confrontation, those objectives should be clearly defined.

There is nothing wrong with using eco-

nomics pressure to gain leverage. The danger comes when pressure becomes the policy rather than the instrument of policy. History offers plenty of examples of sanctions that imposed enormous economic pain without producing the political outcome originally sought. Sanctions can weaken a government, but they can also strengthen nationalist sentiment and make compromise more difficult if leaders believe negotiations will be interpreted as surrender.

Iran is unlikely to respond simply because Washington wants it to. Tehran has its own political calculations, security concerns and regional relationships. That does not mean diplomacy is easy. It means diplomacy is necessary.

There is another complication. The more Washington attempts to restrict Iranian oil exports, the more directly it encounters China, Iran's most important customer. What begins as a sanctions campaign against Tehran could therefore develop into another confrontation between Washington and Beijing. That would be a strategic mistake if it can be avoided.

The United States has enormous economic power. But the smartest use of that power is not necessarily maximum pressure. It is pressure that creates a pathway toward a result.

Washington should therefore answer a simple question before announcing the next round of sanctions: What happens if they work?

If the answer is a negotiated settlement then the diplomatic channel needs to be ready. If the answer is further escalation Americans deserve to know why.

Sanctions are a weapon. They should be used to open the door to diplomacy, not to replace it.

TSAI Editorial Board

PAKISTAN, OMAN AND THE DIPLOMATS WHO MAY ULTIMATELY REOPEN HORMUZ

By Our Editorial Board

The most important people in the Iran crisis may not be sitting in Washington or Tehran.

They may be in the capitals of countries that can speak to both sides.

As the confrontation between the United States and Iran continues and commercial traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remains severely disrupted, the importance of regional intermediaries is growing. Pakistan has stepped forward with a mediation effort, while Oman has a long history of facilitating communication between Washington and Tehran.

This is diplomacy in its most practical form.

It does not require grand conferences or carefully staged photographs. Sometimes diplomacy begins with a telephone call that neither side wants to make directly.

Pakistan is in an unusual position. It has relationships with Iran, the Gulf states and the United States. Islamabad has its own security interests in avoiding a wider regional conflict, particularly one that could affect energy prices, trade and stability across South Asia. That gives Pakistan an incentive to find common ground.

Oman has played a similar role for



years. Its geographic position and diplomatic relationships have made it a useful intermediary between Iran and Western governments.

Washington should make use of these channels. The objective should not be to outsource American foreign policy to regional powers. Nor should Pakistan or Oman be expected to solve a conflict that ultimately requires decisions by Washington and Tehran.

Their value is different.

They can carry messages.

They can test proposals. They can determine whether either side is willing to make a concession without forcing that side to publicly surrender its position. That becomes particularly important when

emotions and political rhetoric are running high.

The immediate objective should be straightforward: reduce the danger to commercial shipping.

A tanker moving through Hormuz should not become the next trigger for escalation. International shipping companies need predictable rules. Governments need reliable information. Crews need confidence that they will not become collateral damage in a military confrontation.

Once shipping security improves, a broader diplomatic process becomes easier.

There are, of course, enormous disagreements between Washington and Tehran. Nuclear policy, sanctions, regional

security and Iran's relationship with armed groups cannot be resolved through one meeting.

But diplomacy does not require solving everything at once.

The first objective can be limited: establish communication, reduce attacks, create safe conditions for shipping and begin negotiations.

That may sound modest compared with the scale of the conflict.

It is not.

Wars often end through a series of small agreements that eventually make a larger settlement possible. The United States has enormous military power, and Iran has demonstrated that it can impose significant costs despite that imbalance. Continuing to test each other's limits risks making the eventual diplomatic solution more difficult and more expensive. Pakistan and Oman cannot reopen Hormuz by themselves. But they may help create the conditions under which Washington and Tehran can do it. At a time when military threats dominate the headlines, that possibility deserves serious attention. The strongest diplomacy is sometimes the diplomacy that quietly gets ships moving again.

TSAI Editorial Board

HOLLYWOOD HAS RECOVERED THE BLOCKBUSTER. CAN IT RECOVER THE MOVIEGOING CULTURE?

Hollywood has spent years answering the question nobody wanted to ask: Are people still willing to go to movie theaters? The answer, at least for 2026, is becoming increasingly clear. Yes. But there is an important qualification.

They will go when Hollywood gives them a reason. Spider-Man: Brand New Day has become one of the year's defining theatrical phenomena, approaching the upper reaches of the all-time domestic box-office rankings after an extraordinary run. Christopher Nolan's The Odyssey has also become a major worldwide success and the highest-grossing R-rated film ever. The numbers are impressive enough to silence anyone predicting the imminent death of the movie theater.

But they also reveal the industry's central problem.

Hollywood is getting exceptionally good at creating events. It has not yet demonstrated that it has rebuilt the everyday moviegoing habit.

That distinction matters.

Before the pandemic, going to the movies was part of ordinary American entertainment. Families went on weekends. Couples went on dates. Friends met

at theaters. People sometimes bought a ticket simply because something looked interesting.

Streaming changed that behavior.

The pandemic accelerated the change.

A giant franchise can become a cultural event. IMAX and other premium formats can command higher prices. International markets can transform a successful film into a billion-dollar phenomenon. But there is a vulnerability hidden

It needs comedies.

It needs thrillers.

It needs family movies.

It needs adult dramas.

It needs independent films.

It needs original stories that audiences have never heard of before.

The industry should therefore view the current box-office recovery as an opportunity rather than a victory lap.

The blockbuster has proved that audiences are still there.

Now studios need to give those audiences more reasons to return.

That means taking risks again.

Hollywood's most valuable lesson from the current recovery may be that people do not hate theaters. They simply have become more selective about what deserves a theater visit.

The challenge is to turn that selectivity into enthusiasm.

The next great theatrical success story may not be another \$2 billion superhero film.

It could be a \$40 million original movie that nobody expected to become a cultural conversation. That is the future Hollywood should be chasing. Because the movie theater does not need audiences once every few months. It needs them next Friday night.

TSAI Editorial Board



Now Hollywood has developed a new strategy: make the theatrical experience feel special enough that audiences will leave home, pay premium prices and watch a movie on the biggest screen possible.

It works.

inside that success. If the industry depends too heavily on a small number of enormous films, one weak franchise cycle can leave theaters with long stretches of empty seats.

A healthy theatrical business needs more than superheroes.

Mass Visa-Revocation Plan Could Become Largest in U.S. History

(Our Staff Reporter)- The U.S. State Department is preparing what could become the largest mass visa revocation in American history, potentially cancelling the business and tourist visas of as many as 200,000 foreign nationals who later sought asylum in the United States.

According to government documents and officials familiar with the plan, the proposal would revoke B-1 (business) and B-2 (tourist) visas issued between 2016 and 2026 to individuals who subsequently filed asylum claims. The initiative is being coordinated with the

Department of Homeland Security. Administration officials argue that visitors who entered the United States claiming temporary travel but later sought asylum may have misrepresented their intentions during the visa application process.

State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said visa revocations would occur on a rolling basis and emphasized that the total number remains subject to change. Officials also clarified that visa revocation would not automatically result in deportation. Individuals with pending

asylum cases would generally continue through the immigration process, although the loss of visa status could affect future travel, work authorization timelines, and other immigration benefits. The policy relies on extensive data matching between the State Department and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to identify visa holders who later filed asylum claims. Immigration attorneys are expected to challenge the plan in federal court, arguing that broad categorical revocations based solely on asylum applications exceed the

government's authority and improperly penalize individuals for exercising a legal right under U.S. immigration law. The proposal follows a broader tightening of immigration enforcement during the administration's second term, including expanded social-media screening, increased visa scrutiny, and previous large-scale visa revocations. Lawyers representing asylum applicants are advising affected individuals to avoid international travel until the administration formally announces the scope of the policy.

U.S.-Iran Sanctions and the China Connection

(Our Staff Reporter)- Washington's escalating economic campaign against Tehran has collided head-on with Beijing, turning a bilateral confrontation into a test of whether the United States is willing to punish the world's second-largest economy to choke off Iran's revenue.

On August 24, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced the launch of Operation Economic Outcast, a sweeping package of sanctions and enforcement measures designed to sever the remaining financial lifelines sustaining the Iranian government. Bessent compared the initiative to "D-Day" in its scale and strategic ambition. The Treasury Department designated roughly 60 entities based in Hong Kong, mainland China, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and other jurisdictions, accusing them of laundering Iranian oil proceeds, procuring controlled technology, and servicing Iran's shadow tanker fleet. The sanctions expand secondary measures that threaten foreign companies with exclusion from the U.S. financial system and target Iran's digital-asset, technology, gold, aviation, and shipping sectors.

Among those sanctioned was Hong Kong-based Sweet Ocean Industrial Ltd., which U.S. officials say helped procure laser equipment and other controlled technology for Iran's Malek Ashtar University of Technology, an institution linked to Tehran's defense-industrial complex.

What Washington chose not to do was equally significant. The sanctions deliberately avoided major Chinese financial

institutions, sparing the step that would almost certainly trigger a major diplomatic rupture with Beijing. Asked whether Chinese banks could eventually face secondary sanctions, Bessent said the administration preferred quiet diplomacy but stressed that no institution was beyond the reach of U.S. sanctions. He also hinted that another major sanctions announcement targeting a financial institution could come before the end of the week.

China responded within hours. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin

Jian declared that China's cooperation with Iran should not be disrupted and warned that Beijing would take "all necessary measures" to protect its legitimate interests. He reiterated China's opposition to unilateral sanctions, arguing that additional economic pressure risks worsening the conflict instead of encouraging negotiations.

The dispute has been building for more than eighteen months. Since the administration restored its "maximum pressure" campaign in early 2025, the Treasury Department has

repeatedly sanctioned China's independent "teapot" refineries in Shandong Province for purchasing Iranian crude, together with ports and shipping companies involved in transporting it. Until now, every sanctions package has carefully avoided China's state-owned banking system.

That strategy may soon face its greatest test.

Treasury officials say they have mapped the networks Iran uses to evade sanctions and are pursuing what they describe as a "zero-leakage" strategy. Many

analysts argue that such a policy cannot succeed without eventually confronting Chinese state-owned banks that facilitate international energy payments. Should Washington move in that direction, Beijing is widely expected to retaliate by tightening exports of rare-earth elements and other critical minerals—areas where China maintains considerable leverage over global manufacturing. For now, both governments appear to be probing how far they can escalate before the economic costs become politically unacceptable at home.

Judge Blocks Visa Suspension Affecting 75 Countries

(Our Staff Reporter)-A federal judge in New York has struck down the administration's suspension of immigrant visa processing for applicants from 75 countries, ruling that the State Department exceeded its legal authority. U.S. District Judge Jeannette Vargas concluded that Secretary of State Marco Rubio lacked statutory authority to direct consular officers to deny immigrant visas based solely on nationality rather than conducting individualized eligibility assessments. The affected countries included Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, Somalia, and numerous nations across Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

Judge Vargas ruled that Congress specifically assigned visa eligibility determinations to individual consular officers, making blanket nationality-based refusals inconsistent with the Immigration and Nationality Act. Rather than temporarily pausing the policy, the court vacated it entirely, rendering the directive legally void. The administration is expected to appeal the ruling and may instead pursue similar restrictions through a presidential proclamation under Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality

Act, a legal authority previously upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Although the ruling restores visa processing, applicants should not expect immediate approvals, as significant



backlogs remain at many U.S. embassies and consulates. Nvidia Makes \$6 Billion Bet Against China's AI Leaders Nvidia is expanding beyond supplying artificial intelligence chips into developing one of the world's most powerful open-weight AI models. The company has agreed to a \$6 billion technology licensing deal with AI startup Poolside, while also investing an

additional \$1 billion in the company at a reported \$12 billion pre-money valuation. More than 100 Poolside engineers are expected to join Nvidia's Nemotron open-weight AI initiative.

Unlike proprietary systems operated by companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic, open-weight models publicly release their trained parameters, allowing developers to download, modify, and deploy them independently. The strategy positions Nvidia directly against leading Chinese open models such as DeepSeek and Moonshot AI's Kimi, while also increasing competition with major U.S. AI developers. For Nvidia, the business rationale is straightforward. The broader the adoption of open AI models, the greater the demand for Nvidia's graphics processors and AI accelerators. The move also reflects a broader geopolitical debate. Several American technology companies have argued that restricting access to open-weight AI models would ultimately weaken U.S. technological leadership rather than strengthen it. The success of Nvidia's strategy will ultimately depend on whether Nemotron can match or exceed the capabilities of China's rapidly advancing open AI ecosystem.

Washington Puts a Six-Figure Price on Indian Talent

DHS proposes a \$103,265 charge on new H-1B petitions - and says it could stack on top of the fee already in court

(Our Staff Reporter)- The Department of Homeland Security has proposed a fee of \$103,265 on cer-



tain new H-1B petitions, a rule scheduled for Federal Register publication on August 25 that opens a public comment period before any final decision. For a community that supplies roughly seventy percent of H-1B beneficiaries, the number is not an abstraction. It is the difference between a sponsorship offer and a re-

scinded one.

The proposal is legally distinct from the \$100,000 payment requirement the administration created by proclamation in 2025. A federal district court in Massachusetts vacated the guidance implementing that measure in June, and the government's appeal is still pending. DHS says the new rule rests on a different statutory authority — and, critically, the proposal contemplates that an employer subject to both requirements could owe both. That is a theoretical exposure north of \$200,000 per petition.

Nothing changes today for existing H-1B holders or approved petitions. The pressure falls on the next cohort competing for the 65,000 regular slots and the 20,000 advanced-degree exemptions, and on the employers deciding whether a junior engineer is worth a six-figure entry ticket. Immigration attorneys have already called the proposal a repackaging of a measure the courts rejected. Whether it survives is a question for the comment docket and, almost certainly, another courtroom.

The Clock Starts September 15

Nearly fifty years of open-ended student status ends; the grace period is cut in half

(Our Staff Reporter)-On July 16 the Department of Homeland Security announced a final rule ending Duration of Status, the arrangement that since the late 1970s has let F-1 students, J-1 exchange visitors and I-visa journalists remain in the country as long as they maintained a valid program. The rule was published July 17 and takes effect September 15.

In its place comes a fixed admission period: the length of the academic program or four years, whichever is shorter, with English-language study capped at two. The post-completion grace period drops from sixty days to thirty. Students needing more time must file Form I-539 and wait on USCIS approval rather than a designated school official's signature. Transfer rules tighten sharply at the graduate level.

More than 360,000 Indian students were enrolled at American universities in 2024-25, and the transition rules turn ordinary travel into a decision with consequences. Students inside the country on September 15 who hold valid status may qualify for transition protection tied to their I-20 or DS-2019 end date. Those who leave and return on or after that date may be admitted under the new system with a hard expiration on their I-94. Columbia has advised students to return before classes begin September 8. Harvard has told its international community to review travel plans. Families should assume the safest itinerary is the early one, and should confirm it with a DSO before booking.

Wahab Wins, and AIPAC Loses a Round in the East Bay

California's 14th sends the first Afghan American to Congress after a multimillion-dollar outside campaign against her

(Our Staff Reporter)- State Senator Aisha Wahab has won the special election to finish former Representative Eric Swalwell's term in California's 14th Congressional District, becoming the first

runoff was closer, and expensive: United Democracy Project, AIPAC's super PAC, spent roughly \$2.5 million opposing Wahab and supporting Hernandez, with Bold America adding about \$1.8 million and a separate Alameda County committee nearly half a million.

Wahab, who was previously the first Muslim and first Afghan American elected to the California Senate, said the district had made clear it could not be bought. The result lands two weeks after Abdul El-Sayed won a contested Michigan Senate primary against an AIPAC-aligned opponent, and it will be tested again in November, when Wahab and Hernandez meet a third time for the full two-year term. For South Asian and broader Asian American political organizing, the lesson of the East Bay is that outside money now runs into a countervailing force: a district that resents being told what to think.



person of Afghan descent elected to Congress. The Associated Press called the race August 20; Wahab led fellow Democrat Melissa Hernandez, president of the BART board, 53 to 47 percent.

Swalwell resigned in April amid sexual assault and harassment allegations he denies, after abandoning a run for governor. Governor Gavin Newsom called a special election for June 16, where Wahab finished 26 points ahead. The

Crime and Courts: The Elder-Fraud Pipeline Reaches Our Doorstep

A Jersey City man is arrested at Toronto airport after allegedly collecting cash and gold from elderly victims across New York and New Jersey

(Our Staff Reporter)- Jay Sunilbharthi Goswami, 21, a Gujarat native living in Jersey City, was arrested by Canadian authorities at Toronto Pearson International Airport on August 20 under a United States request for provisional arrest pending extradition. He is charged by criminal complaint with wire fraud, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, money laundering and conspiracy to commit money laundering, carrying a maximum penalty of twenty years. According to the complaint announced by United States Attorney Michael DiGiacomo, IRS Criminal Investigation learned in January of a telephone and internet fraud scheme operating in the Western District of New York and elsewhere. Callers allegedly told victims their bank accounts or personal information had been compromised, persuaded them to liquidate assets into cash, gold or gift cards, and then posed as law enforcement officers to advance the scheme. Prosecutors allege Goswami worked as a money mule, collecting cash and gold directly from victims aged 59 to 87 across New York and New Jersey, and that losses reached

\$7.5 million. Financial records reportedly show more than \$90,000 in cash deposited into a Bank of America account between August 2025 and April 2026.

The sequence after his arrest is its own story. Goswami appeared before United States Magistrate Judge Mark Pedersen on August 17 and was released on conditions. The following day he crossed into Canada over the Peace Bridge and booked an evening flight from Toronto to Doha. Canadian officers detained him at Pearson on an immigration matter before executing the extradition arrest. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs is working with Canadian authorities and the US Marshals Service to return him. The charges are allegations, and Goswami is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Separately, a federal court on August 24 sentenced Manish Singh, 48, to forty months in prison for wire fraud and identity theft in a fabric-industry investment scheme, after prosecutors established that roughly \$1.26 million entrusted by two investors was spent almost entirely on personal expenses.

Lawmakers Move Against "Ghost Jobs"

(Our Staff Reporter)- State legislatures across the United States are moving to crack down on so-called ghost job postings—advertisements for positions that employers have little or no intention of filling.

New York has approved legislation requiring employers with 100 or more employees to disclose whether a job posting represents an actual vacancy or simply a future talent pipeline.

Employers would also be required to state the expected hiring timeline, with civil penalties for violations. Similar legislation is advancing in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, California, and Kentucky.

Supporters argue that misleading job advertisements waste applicants' time, distort labor market data, and create false impressions of corporate growth. Employers respond

that some postings are maintained to build future talent pools rather than fill immediate vacancies. If enacted, the new laws would require closer coordination between employers, recruiting firms, and online job platforms to ensure postings remain accurate and current. A DIY Nation Repairs Instead of Replacing

As affordable 3-D printers become increasingly common, many Americans are repairing household items by printing replacement parts rather than purchasing new products. Hobbyists are creating appliance knobs, furniture hinges, door locks, storage accessories, cleaning tools, and numerous other replacement components for just a few cents' worth of plastic filament. Many repairs require no advanced engineering knowledge

because thousands of free digital designs are already available through online repositories.

Entry-level 3-D printers from companies such as Bambu Lab, Creality, and Elegoo now cost around \$200, making home manufacturing accessible to a growing number of consumers. For many users, the appeal extends beyond saving money. Designing and printing customized replacement parts offers both practical value and the satisfaction of extending the life of everyday household products. AI Agents Are Working Around the Clock—So Are Their Human Managers

Artificial intelligence was expected to reduce workloads. Instead, many startup founders report that increasingly capable AI agents have significantly increased the pace of work.

Rather than replacing long hours, AI systems often generate more tasks by continuously producing code, documents, analyses, and recommendations that require human supervision. Several founders report working 90-hour weeks while overseeing fleets of AI agents operating around the clock. Although AI dramatically increases productivity, many practitioners say managing multiple agents requires nearly as much oversight as supervising human employees. Industry experience suggests that AI changes the nature of work more than the quantity of work. As AI systems become more autonomous, founders increasingly describe a new form of productivity pressure—one driven not by human colleagues, but by machines that never stop working.

U.S. and Canada Edge Toward a Trade War

(Our Staff Reporter)- Trade tensions between the United States and Canada have intensified after Washington imposed 50 percent tariffs on approximately \$20 billion worth of Canadian exports.

The duties took effect after negotiations failed to produce a last-minute

agreement. The tariffs were imposed under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930, an authority rarely used in modern trade disputes. Products affected include automobiles, dairy products, alcohol, cement, apparel, sporting goods, honey, candles, and numerous manufactured items.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced immediate retaliation, declaring that Canada would match American tariffs dollar for dollar beginning September 8. The Canadian response targets American steel, dairy products, agricultural equipment, appliances, electronics, pulp and paper, and several

hundred additional goods. Although energy products, potash, critical minerals, and certain strategic commodities remain exempt, businesses on both sides of the border now face mounting uncertainty as North America's largest trading relationship enters one of its most confrontational periods in decades.

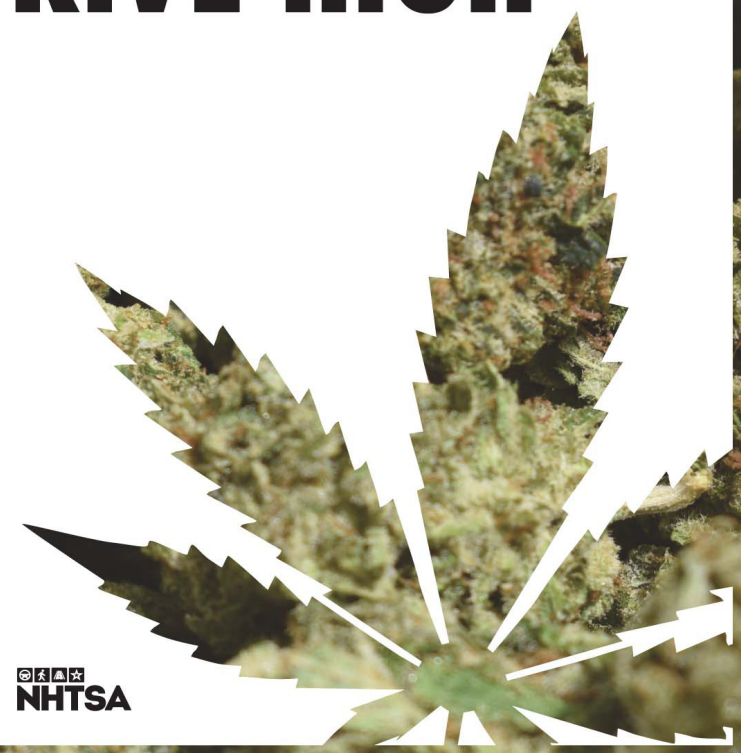
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Six Months of War, and No Off-Ramp in Sight The Midterms Turn on Enforcement

Washington threatens sanctions on countries maintaining economic ties to Tehran

(Our Staff Reporter)- The war between the United States and Iran, which began in February, has passed six months. The administration has threatened sanctions on countries that do not sever economic ties with Tehran, escalating a pressure campaign layered on years of existing restrictions. American naval forces have conducted maritime interdiction against Iranian-flagged shipping. The domestic costs have become political. Gasoline prices reached near-record levels, and the war has entered the midterm campaign as an issue in its own right rather than as a foreign-policy footnote. More

than a thousand dependents of Navy personnel in Bahrain were ordered to evacuate at the war's outset and, six months on, remain in temporary arrangements without a published plan for return. Reports of diplomatic contact have periodically moved oil markets. Nothing in the public record suggests a settlement is close. For readers with family and business interests across the Gulf, the operative facts remain that the shipping lanes are insured at war rates, that the labour markets of the region have contracted, and that a conflict initially discussed in terms of weeks is now being discussed in terms of years.

The Fight Over the Election Itself

Warnings about federal interference have moved from the fringe to the mainstream of election administration

(Our Staff Reporter)- Concerns about federal interference in the November midterms have become a central subject of American election administration rather than a peripheral one. Advocacy organizations have documented an array of tactics they argue are designed to entrench incumbent power, including the prospect of immigration agents near polling places — a presence that, whatever its legal justification, would predictably suppress turnout in immigrant communities. The President has repeatedly raised doubts about electoral integrity despite the consistent finding that voter fraud is rare, and has made public remarks that critics read

as openness to delaying or cancelling the vote.

Readers should weigh source and motive here: much of the loudest analysis comes from organizations with declared positions. The verifiable facts are narrower and still consequential. Election officials in both parties have raised concerns about federal presence at polling sites. Litigation over ballot access and roll maintenance is under way in multiple states. And a large share of the electorate now enters November with reduced confidence that the count will be accepted by the losing side — which is a problem regardless of which side that turns out to be.

An issue that was an asset a year ago has become a liability

(Our Staff Reporter)- Immigration has inverted as a political question. In March 2025 approval of the administration's handling ran ahead of disapproval; by March 2026 the position had reversed almost symmetrically. The sharpest movement came among Latino voters, where approval fell from roughly even to a deficit of nearly thirty points. The proximate causes are operational rather than rhetorical. High-profile enforcement operations, most notably in Minnesota, produced detentions of citizens and lawful residents alongside the undocumented, and two fatal shootings in January became a national story. Polling has found majorities disapproving of how enforcement agencies are operating in American cities, alongside

overwhelming support for identification requirements and body cameras — and, simultaneously, continued majority support for deporting people with criminal convictions. That combination is the actual public opinion: broad support for the stated goal, broad objection to the observed method. Republican members have said so publicly. Election handicappers have shifted more than a dozen House ratings toward the Democrats. Nine sitting House members have already lost primaries this cycle, six Democrats and three Republicans, the most outside a redistricting year since 1970 — a signal that the volatility is not confined to one party.

The Canada Fight Nobody Wanted

Workers on both sides of the border absorb the cost of an escalating tariff dispute

(Our Staff Reporter)- A renewed tariff conflict with Canada has drawn unusually blunt criticism from labour organizations on both sides of the border, with union figures describing it as among the

most self-defeating trade fights in memory. The integrated North American manufacturing base — automotive above all — means components cross the border multiple times before a finished vehicle is sold, so a tariff at any crossing is a tax on the whole chain.

The dispute compounds a broader affordability problem. Polling through the year has found voters describing the economy as weak and rejecting the claim that policy has helped, with the difficulty of reaching middle-class stability registering as a defining grievance even where aggregate growth and employment figures look reasonable.

Canadian and American workers in the affected sectors have limited recourse and no seat at the table. This is worth noting for Indian exporters watching from a distance: the North American case demonstrates that tariff policy applied to a deeply integrated supply chain does not shift production home so much as raise costs at every node. India's exporters, being less integrated into American manufacturing, face a different and in some ways simpler problem.

Tariffs After the Supreme Court

The reciprocal tariff regime fell, the refunds began, and a new architecture replaced it

(Our Staff Reporter)- The Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariffs, and the administration confirmed that those duties were no longer in force. Reported refunds of roughly \$100 billion in "liberation day" tariffs followed. The instrument that had defined American trade policy for a year was struck down. What replaced it is more fragmented and, for exporters, harder to navigate. Executive

orders imposed ten percent tariffs on certain products from all countries. Section 301 actions and forced-labour provisions produced country-group tariffs. Product-specific safeguards, such as those on quartz surface products, hit narrow categories at rates as high as 55 percent. The strategic consequence is that trading partners can no longer negotiate a single number. The February framework with

India, built around an 18 percent reciprocal rate, was overtaken by the ruling within weeks of being announced — leaving both governments to keep negotiating a bilateral agreement while the legal basis for the original bargain evaporated underneath them. Businesses that spent 2025 modelling one tariff rate now model a portfolio of them, each with a different legal foundation and a different expiry risk.

Israel Advances a Settlement Plan Amid Condemnation

Critics say the project would foreclose a contiguous Palestinian state

(Our Staff Reporter)- Israel is moving forward with a settlement plan that has drawn international condemnation, with critics arguing the project would fragment the territory required for a viable Palestinian state and effectively foreclose a two-state outcome. The dispute follows the established pattern. The Israeli government presents settlement construction as an internal planning

matter within territory whose status it regards as unresolved. Most other governments, including many that maintain close relations with Israel, regard it as a violation of international law that alters facts on the ground in ways negotiations cannot easily undo. Neither position has moved in decades; what changes is the pace of construction and the intensity of the objection. The

domestic American politics of this question have shifted in ways that are now measurable, as this issue's coverage of the California special election indicates. Substantial outside spending organized around the issue failed to determine a Democratic contest in a district where it was heavily deployed. That is one race and should not be over-read. It is also the second such result within a month.

Britain Opens Its Missile Books to Kyiv **Starmers Resigns**

MBDA to share details of UK-made SCALP components so Ukraine can assemble the weapons itself

(Our Staff Reporter)- Britain will give Ukraine access to closely held missile technology, with the defence firm MBDA releasing details of United Kingdom-manufactured components for the SCALP missile so that Ukraine can assemble the weapons domestically. The announcement was made in Kyiv, where the British delegation was attending Ukraine's Independence Day.

The significance lies in the category of assistance rather than the quantity. Transferring finished munitions creates dependence on a resupply chain that can be interrupted by a change of government in a

donor capital. Transferring the specifications and component knowledge to build them locally does not. It is a structurally different form of support, and a considerably more difficult one to reverse.

It also sets a precedent that other capitals will study. The reticence around sharing missile design information has never been chiefly about the recipient; it has been about what happens to that information afterward, and about the signal sent to other states seeking similar transfers. That Britain has judged the calculation worth making, at this point in the war, is itself a data point about how long London expects the conflict to run.

Colombia's Runoff Goes to the Right

A Trump-backed populist leads a razor-thin preliminary count

(Our Staff Reporter)- Colombia's presidential runoff has produced a narrow result, with Trump-backed right-wing populist Abelardo de la Espriella celebrating victory on a preliminary count. The margin was small enough that the process of confirmation carries real weight.

The outcome would mark a decisive turn from Colombia's recent political direction and continues a pattern visible across Latin America of insurgent candidacies displacing established party structures. The explicit American endorsement is itself notable; it has become a routine

feature of hemispheric elections in a way that would have been considered a diplomatic irregularity a decade ago. Colombia matters to Washington on counter-narcotics cooperation, on Venezuela policy, and as the largest recipient of American security assistance in the region. A change of government touches all three. Readers following the region should treat preliminary counts in a close runoff with appropriate caution and watch for the formal certification before drawing conclusions about what the next Colombian government will actually do.

The British prime minister steps down, closing a turbulent tenure

(Our Staff Reporter)- Sir Keir Starmer has resigned as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, ending a premiership that began with a commanding parliamentary majority and deteriorated under sustained economic and political pressure. British commentators have devoted the days since to the familiar post-mortem: whether the failure was one of policy, communication, or the simple exhaustion of a governing coalition assembled around opposition to the previous administration rather than around a programme. The succession question is now the operative one, and it will be settled inside the governing party

rather than at a general election. For India, and for the British Indian community in particular, the change carries specific stakes. Britain concluded a trade agreement with India that the Indian government has repeatedly cited as evidence of its widening trade relationships. Immigration policy, student visas and the treatment of skilled-worker routes are all live questions in British politics. The British Indian population is now large enough, and sufficiently distributed across marginal constituencies, that any successor will have to address it directly rather than through intermediaries.

Evergrande's Founder Sentenced to Life

A milestone in the collapse of a developer that failed with more than \$300 billion in liabilities

(Our Staff Reporter)- Chinese property developer Hui Ka Yan, founder of Evergrande, has been sentenced to life in prison — a milestone in the long unwinding

of a company that collapsed with liabilities exceeding \$300 billion. Evergrande was delisted from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in August 2025, and its partially shuttered commercial complexes have become the visual shorthand for China's property crisis. The sentence closes a chapter but not the underlying problem. Evergrande's collapse was a symptom of a growth model in which local government finance, household savings and construction employment were bound together through pre-sold apartments. Presales financed construction; construction financed local government through land sales; land values justified the presales. When the circle broke, the losses landed on households who had paid for homes that were never built.

For Indian readers there is a useful contrast rather than a warning. India's property sector carries its own leverage and delivery problems, but its financing has not been centralized in a handful of national developers to the same degree, and its municipal finance is less dependent on land monetization. That is less a matter of superior policy than of a different constitutional structure — but the effect is that India does not have an Evergrande-shaped hole in its balance sheet.

The Beginning

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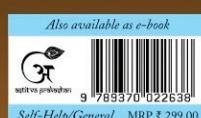
About the Author



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

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MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

After the Duopoly

A film star's party broke Tamil Nadu's fifty-year pattern, the BJP took Bengal, and the arithmetic of 2029 changed on a single day of counting

On May 4, four state governments and one union territory changed hands or were confirmed, and the result reorganized Indian politics more than any set of assembly elections in a decade. The headline numbers: BJP 202 of 294 in West Bengal; BJP 82 of 126 in Assam for a third term; the Congress-led UDF back in Kerala; the NDA holding Puducherry; and in Tamil Nadu, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam as the single largest party in a house of 234.

Take Bengal first. The Trinamool Congress had governed since 2011 and had beaten back the BJP's most serious previous challenge. Its displacement by a margin this size removes one of the largest non-Congress opposition blocs from the board and hands the governing alliance a state whose parliamentary delegation is the fourth largest in the country. Whatever role the electoral roll revision played — and more than nine million ex-

clusions in this state alone guarantee that argument continues — the margin exceeds any plausible accounting of it.

Tamil Nadu is the more interesting result, because it is the one that could not have been forecast from previous cycles. Since the 1960s the state has alternated between two Dravidian parties. TVK displaced both, and its candidate defeated Chief Minister M. K. Stalin in Kolathur. Tamil Nadu has a long tradition of cinema-to-politics transition, so the category is not novel. The compression of the timeline is. A party assembled in this decade beat organizations with generations of cadre, press and union infrastructure behind them.

Kerala went the other way and reminds us that anti-incumbency is not a national wave but a local instrument: the UDF turned out the LDF with the Congress winning 26 seats. Assam confirmed that a well-organized state operation with welfare de-



livery, defections engineered before the campaign, and consolidated women's support can win a third term against a fragmented opposition.

Now the arithmetic. The 2029 general election is the destination all of this points toward. The opposition alliance loses Bengal's Trinamool as a governing party and finds the DMK weakened in a state that has been among its most reliable.

The Congress gains Kerala, which is genuine but modest at the national scale. On a straight seat count that is a substantial net shift toward the governing coalition. Two cautions against over-reading. State elections have repeatedly failed to predict general elections in India; voters have shown themselves entirely capable of splitting their choice between levels. And turnout above 92 percent in

West Bengal and above 84 percent in Tamil Nadu describes an electorate that is engaged rather than settled. High turnout has historically been the signature of volatility, not of consolidation. Whoever governs after 2029 will have been chosen by voters who demonstrably show up — and who, in four of five contests this May, showed up to remove someone.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Six Months, and the Bill Comes Home

The US-Iran war is now the largest single variable in Indian household finance, and nobody in New Delhi can influence it

The war between the United States and Iran began in February. Six months in, Washington is threatening sanctions against countries that maintain economic ties to Tehran, American warships are conducting maritime interdiction, and more than a thousand American Navy dependents evacuated from Bahrain at the war's outset are still living in temporary arrangements.

India is not a participant. It is nonetheless one of the most exposed economies in the world to this particular conflict, through three channels that reach directly into ordinary household budgets.

Energy first. India imports the overwhelming majority of the crude it consumes. Sustained high prices during the conflict have fed into transport costs, food costs and manufacturing input costs, and they are a principal reason retail inflation reached 4.38 percent in June — the highest since December 2024 and above the four percent target for the first time in seventeen months. The Reserve Bank named geopolitical tension in West Asia explicitly when it held the repo rate at

5.25 percent on August 5.

Currency second. The rupee has

channel least discussed and most consequential. Millions of Indian nationals

or two, and it does so without appearing in any headline economic indicator until it shows up as weak rural consumption.

New Delhi's response has been to convene the Cabinet Committee on Security repeatedly under the Prime Minister's chairmanship, to maintain relationships with all parties, to decline to take a side, and to keep evacuation contingencies current. Critics call this fence-sitting. Given that India has neither the leverage to shorten this war nor an alternative source for the energy and the jobs at stake, it is difficult to describe what a braver policy would consist of. The forecast that matters is the one nobody can make. Periodic reports of American-Iranian diplomatic contact have moved oil prices and lifted the rupee, and those moves have not held. Until they do, the single largest variable in Indian household finance is being determined in Washington and Tehran, by people who are not thinking about a family in Malappuram.

(TSAI BUREAU)



weakened past 95 to the dollar. A weaker rupee multiplies a high dollar oil price. It also raises the cost of every dollar-denominated obligation an Indian company or family carries — including, pointedly, tuition at American universities in a year when the visa rules governing those universities are also being rewritten. Labour and remittances third, and this is the

work across the Gulf. Their remittances are not discretionary income supplementing household budgets in Kerala, Telangana, Punjab and eastern Uttar Pradesh; in many districts they are the household budget. A regional conflict that contracts Gulf construction, hospitality and services employment transmits into Indian village economies within a quarter

The Price of a Visa

Three separate rules - an H-1B fee, the end of Duration of Status, and a coming OPT proposal - are quietly dismantling the study-to-work pathway that built Indian America

No single rule announced this year closes the door on Indian professional migration to the United States. Read individually, each is defensible on its own terms and survivable by anyone with resources and good counsel. Read together — which is how they will be experienced by a twenty-three-year-old in Hyderabad deciding where to spend her family's savings — they constitute the most significant contraction of the pathway since it opened. Start with the entry point. From September 15, F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors will be admitted for a fixed period: the length of the program or four years, whichever is shorter. The grace period after completion falls from sixty days to thirty. Extensions move from a designated school official's authority to a USCIS adjudication on Form I-539. Doctoral candidates in five-to-seven-year programs, research scholars and medical trainees are the obvious casualties; the Foundation for

India and Indian Diaspora Studies has argued the rule damages American competitiveness precisely because serious research does not fit in a four-year box. Move to the middle. Optional Practical Training is under separate review, and automatic extensions of certain employment authorization documents have already ended, producing work-authorization gaps between OPT and STEM OPT. OPT is what makes the arithmetic of an American master's degree work for a middle-class Indian family: it is the earning period that services the education loan. Then the exit. The proposed \$103,265 fee on certain new H-1B petitions, published for comment on August 25, would price sponsorship out of reach for exactly the employers who have historically hired new graduates — mid-sized firms, hospitals, universities and startups, not the handful of large technology companies that can absorb a six-figure charge. And DHS's pro-



posal contemplates that this fee could stack with the separate \$100,000 payment requirement currently on appeal, creating theoretical exposure above \$200,000 per petition.

The cumulative effect is not a wall. It is a filter, and the criterion it selects for is capital. A student whose family can fund an extension application, absorb a gap in work authorization, and hold out for an employer wealthy enough to pay six figures will still make it through. A student on a loan with a repayment schedule will not. That is a policy choice, and it is worth naming as one: not a restriction on Indian

immigration, but a restriction on Indian immigration by anyone who is not already affluent. Three practical notes for readers. The comment period on the H-1B proposal is open, and comments from affected employers carry documented weight in rulemaking records and in subsequent litigation. Students abroad should return before September 15 where feasible and consult a DSO before any travel. And employers should be modelling sponsorship costs now, not in March, because the February lottery cycle will not wait for the litigation to resolve.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Long Island's Indian Century

A parade in Hicksville, a caucus post in Washington, and the slow arrival of a suburban community into political adulthood

On Sunday, August 23, hundreds of people gathered on South Broadway in Hicksville to watch floats carrying shrines and an elephant statue pass down a closed county road, accompanied by Bollywood music and by Arshdeep Kaur, crowned National Miss New York eight days earlier. It was India's eightieth Independence Day.

It was also, though nobody said so from a podium, a fairly precise measurement of where Long Island's Indian community now stands.

Consider what the parade required. Municipal permits. Police coordination. Sponsorship from local businesses. Elected officials who wanted to be photographed in it. None of that is available to a community that is merely present; all of it is routine for a community that is organized. Fifty years ago the Indian presence on Long Island was a scattering of physicians and engineers. Today South Broadway is a commercial corridor, and the parade is a fixture on the county calendar.

The political expression of this arrived in March, when Representative Tom Suozzi was named Democratic vice-chair of

Long Island and Queens and holds one of the densest Indian American populations in the Northeast. He has traveled to India, and last year became the first sitting member of Congress to visit the Kartarpur Corridor — a gesture aimed squarely at Sikh constituents, and one that indicates a politician who has read his own district

and the community has historically been better at securing the first than demanding the second. This year the distinction stops being academic. A proposed \$103,265 H-1B fee. The end of Duration of Status on September 15. An OPT rule in preparation. ICE operations that have detained citizens and lawful residents.

Every one of these lands directly on Long Island households, and every one of them is contested in rooms that a caucus vice-chair can enter. The test is not whether officials appear at the parade. They will; they always do, and there is a Hindu temple, a gurdwara and a mosque within a short drive of the parade route, each of which can fill a hall on short notice. The test is whether, between parades, the same organizations that produce a float can produce a delegation, a comment letter on the H-1B docket, a sustained ask with a number attached, and a willingness to make the ask of a friend.

Communities become politically adult at the moment they are prepared to be inconvenient to their allies. Long Island's Indian community has the numbers, the money, the institutions and now the access. What remains untested is the appetite. The

eightieth anniversary was a good day. The ninetieth will be judged on what was done in between.

(TSAI BUREAU)



the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans by chairman Ro Khanna. Suozzi's district spans

carefully.

Here is the uncomfortable part. Descriptive representation and effective representation are not the same thing,

Tariffs Without a Tariff Wall

The Supreme Court struck down the reciprocal tariff regime. What replaced it is harder to negotiate with and harder to plan around

In February, India and the United States announced what both governments described as a historic trade framework. The American reciprocal tariff on Indian goods fell from 25 percent to 18. The additional 25 percent punitive duty imposed in August 2025 over Russian crude purchases was removed by executive order. Piyush Goyal briefed the press that agriculture and dairy were protected and that spices, tea, coffee, cashew and a list of fruit would enter duty-free. Exporters celebrated. Within weeks the legal foundation was gone. The Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariffs, and Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal confirmed in March that they were no longer in force. Reported refunds of roughly \$100 billion followed. The 18 percent rate that India had negotiated for over five rounds of talks ceased to exist as a legal instrument.

What Washington built in its place is not a wall but a lattice. Executive orders imposed ten percent duties on certain products from all countries. A ten percent forced-labour tariff was applied to India and sixteen others — an outcome India improved on by amending its foreign trade policy to prohibit imports of goods made with forced labour, which moved it out of a proposed 12.5 percent

Section 301 bracket. The commerce ministry says ne-

Tiruppur, Surat or Ludhiana that constitutes the bulk of India's export base, it is something worse: the binding constraint has shifted from price to legal capacity. A firm can compete on cost. It cannot easily afford counsel to determine which of four overlapping instruments applies to its product line this quarter, or to file for an exemption it may qualify for. Two conclusions follow. First, negotiation now has to be continuous rather than episodic, because there is no longer a single number to agree on. India has kept negotiating toward a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement precisely because the alternative is renegotiating each instrument separately. Second, the government's most valuable intervention is no longer tariff diplomacy at all — it is compliance infrastructure. Export promotion councils that can tell a member in plain language which duty applies and how to seek relief will do more for



gotiation placed India in the lower additional-tariff tier with exemptions covering roughly 45 percent of exports. Meanwhile safeguard duties of 25 to 55 percent landed on quartz surface products, where Indian exporters depend heavily on the American market. For a large exporter this is an inconvenience handled by a compliance department. For the mid-sized firm in

MSME exports this year than any further reduction in a headline rate. The number that anchors all of this has not moved: the United States still takes roughly twenty percent of India's exports, on trade ministry data for the twelve months through July. That share is why New Delhi absorbs the volatility instead of walking away from it.

(TSAI BUREAU)

The Roll Call

Nine million voters were struck from Bengal's rolls before an election the incumbent lost in a landslide. Both of those facts deserve to be reported



The Election Commission of India conducted a Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls across nearly every state and union territory ahead of this year's assembly elections, postponing only in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh for weather. In West Bengal more than nine million voters were excluded from the revised rolls, though some were later restored. The BJP subsequently won

202 of 294 seats.

Reporting this responsibly requires holding two things at once, and most coverage has held only one.

The case for intensive revision is real. Rolls decay. They accumulate the deceased, the migrated, the duplicated and the fictitious. Every democracy that maintains a permanent electoral register faces this, and Indian law provides intensive revision as the rem-

edy. An electorate of roughly 17 crore across 824 constituencies in this cycle alone, served by two lakh polling stations and 25 lakh officials, is an administrative undertaking without real parallel anywhere in the world. The Commission executes it repeatedly and, by the standards of the task, competently.

The case against the timing is also real. Intensive revision immediately before a consequential election, in a state with large migrant populations, substantial minority populations and uneven documentation, produces exclusions that do not fall evenly across the electorate. The people least able to navigate a re-verification process — the internal migrant, the tenant without papers in her own name, the elderly voter in a district office queue — are systematically the people most likely to be struck and least likely to appeal. This is true whether or not anyone intended it.

What cannot be established from outside is causation. The Bengal margin was large enough that no plausible

reconstruction of nine million exclusions accounts for the outcome. That is the honest finding, and partisans on both sides will find it unsatisfying: the opposition because it declines to attribute the defeat to the roll, and the government because it concedes that a serious problem existed regardless of whether it changed the result.

The reform question is separable from the partisan one and is where attention should go. Intensive revision conducted on a fixed statutory cycle, decoupled from the election calendar, would preserve the administrative benefit and remove the appearance — and possibly the reality — of timing advantage. Publishing exclusion data disaggregated by constituency, with restoration rates, would allow the argument to be conducted with evidence rather than assertion. Neither reform requires anyone to concede bad faith. Both would make the next revision harder to allege bad faith about, which is what an institution operating at this scale should want.

(TSAI BUREAU)

The New Cost of Exporting Is Not the Tariff. It Is the Lawyer

(Our Staff Reporter) Four overlapping instruments have replaced one number, and mid-sized firms are paying for the confusion

The Supreme Court struck down the reciprocal tariffs, refunds of roughly \$100 billion followed, and the 18 percent rate India negotiated in February ceased to exist as a legal instrument. What replaced it is a lattice: ten percent duties on certain products from all countries by executive order, a ten percent forced-labour tariff applied to India and sixteen others, Section 301 actions, and safeguard duties of 25 to 55 percent on narrow categories such as quartz surface products.



A large exporter absorbs this through a compliance department. A mid-sized firm in Tiruppur or Ludhiana cannot. The binding constraint has quietly shifted from price to legal capacity — from what a firm can produce for to whether it can determine which of four instruments applies to its product line this quarter and whether it qualifies for one of the exemptions that the commerce ministry says now cover roughly 45 percent of Indian exports. For advisers on this side of the ocean, the practical opportunity is clear. Firms need someone who can read a Federal Register notice and translate it into a purchase order. That is a service business, and it is currently underserved.

The Rupee at 95: Who Wins and Who Pays

(Our Staff Reporter) A weak currency is not one story. It is at least four, depending on which side of the transfer you sit on

The rupee has weakened past 95 to the dollar, and the Reserve Bank named the pressure explicitly when it held the repo rate at 5.25 percent on August 5. For families with money moving in both directions, the effect is not uniform.

Remitters gain. Dollars sent from New York, New Jersey and the Gulf convert at rates not seen before, and August transfer volumes into Kerala, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh reflect it. Anyone servicing a home loan in India from American income is effectively receiving a discount. Indian exporters in textiles, gems and engineering goods gain price competitiveness at precisely the moment tariff policy has become unpredictable.

The losers are equally identifiable. India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude, so a weak rupee multiplies an already elevated dollar oil price into transport and food costs. Indian corporates with unhedged dollar borrowings owe more in rupee terms. And families financing American tuition are paying materially more per semester than they budgeted eighteen months ago.

One planning note. Currency timing is not an investment strategy, and readers tempted to lump-sum a transfer on a forecast should recall that a rupee view is a bet on oil, on the Federal Reserve and on a war.



Speak to a licensed adviser before acting on any of this.

What a \$103,265 Hire Does to a Mid-Sized Employer

The proposed H-1B fee will not be felt evenly across American businesses

The Department of Homeland Security's proposed fee of \$103,265 on certain new H-1B petitions, published for comment on August 25, has been discussed almost entirely as an immigration story. It is also a straightforward question of business economics, and the answer is not the one the proposal's supporters advertise.

A company with a billion dollars in revenue can absorb a six-figure charge on a critical hire. It will complain, and it will pay. The firms that cannot are hospitals recruiting physicians into underserved special-

ties, universities hiring researchers, regional accounting and engineering practices, and startups — the exact employers who have historically taken a chance on a new graduate rather than poached a senior engineer from a competitor.

The predictable effects are consolidation and offshoring. Sponsorship becomes a privilege of scale, which advantages the largest incumbents in every affected sector. And work that cannot be done here at that price gets done somewhere else — in Bengaluru, in Hyderabad, or in Toronto, where the competing policy has moved in the opposite direction.

Employers should be modelling sponsorship cost now rather than in March. The lottery cycle will not wait for the litigation to conclude.

The Quiet Balance Sheet of Indian American Small Business

Motels, pharmacies, franchises and grocery corridors — the sector that never makes the panel discussions

The conference circuit celebrates the technology founder and the fund manager. The larger and more durable Indian American business story is the one on South Broadway in Hicksville, on Oak Tree Road in Edison, and along the interstate exits of the American South: hospitality, independent pharmacy, franchised quick-service restaurants, gas and convenience, freight, and the grocery corridors that anchor every one of them.

These businesses share a structure. They are family-capitalized rather than venture-funded. They rely on labour drawn from extended kin and community networks. They carry real estate as the actual asset, with the operating business as the vehicle for servicing the mortgage. And they are, for the most part, in the hands of a founding generation now approaching or past retirement. That last fact is the story of the next decade. Succession in this sector is largely unplanned. Children educated into professions frequently do not want the motel. The choices are a sale to a consolidator, a transition to professional management, or a slow decline in asset value while the family postpones the conversation. Owners in this position should be talking to a valuation professional and an estate attorney now, while the operating history still supports a good number.

The Number That Ate Your Life

THE SCORE: How to Stop Playing Somebody Else's Game - C. Thi Nguyen - Penguin Press, January 13, 2026, 368 pp.



Every immigrant family in this country knows the argument in C. Thi Nguyen's book before opening it, because most of us have lived inside it. The SAT score. The class rank. The starting salary. The specialty that pays. The neighborhood ranked by the school district's rating out of ten. We did not invent this habit, but we have been unusually diligent students of it, and Nguyen has written the book that explains what it costs.

Nguyen is a philosopher at the University of Utah and was, before this, known chiefly for an academic study of games. The Score is the popular version of that thinking, and its central idea is one he calls value capture: the process by which a simple, countable measure quietly replaces the complicated thing it was invented to represent. He offers himself as the specimen. He wanted to eat better, so he began counting calories, and found himself abandoning the elaborate stews he loved to cook — too hard to log — for

packaged food that was less healthy but easier to enter into an app. He climbed rock faces for the difficulty ratings rather than the climbing. He counted his journal publications. He tracked his department's ranking.

The argument is not that measurement is bad. Nguyen is careful here, and the carefulness is what makes the book worth your evening. Metrics deliver something genuinely precious: in a game, and only in a game, you know exactly what you are supposed to do and exactly how well you did it. Ordinary life offers no such clarity. The trouble is that we now inhabit institutions — corporations, universities, hospitals, bureaucracies — built to run on numbers, and those institutions hand us their scoring systems as though they were our own purposes. The price of the clarity, as he puts it, is our independence.

The book has been widely and warmly received; the Financial Times

gave it five stars, and the Guardian called it a brilliant warning about the gamification of daily life. It is not flawless. Several reviewers have found it repetitive, circling its thesis in widening loops padded with the author's hobbies — Tetris, bouldering, the yo-yo — and one noted with some justice that a book subtitled How to Stop Playing Somebody Else's Game arrives near its end at the admission that this is incredibly hard and the author does not have a great answer. Readers looking for a program will be disappointed. Read it anyway, and read it as a parent. The community that has built two generations of prosperity on the reliable conversion of test scores into professional degrees is now watching Washington reprice that pathway by six figures. Somewhere in that reckoning is a question about which of our metrics were ever really ours. Nguyen does not answer it. He is very good at making it unavoidable.

(TSAI BUREAU)

The Harvard Professor Reaches for Transcendence

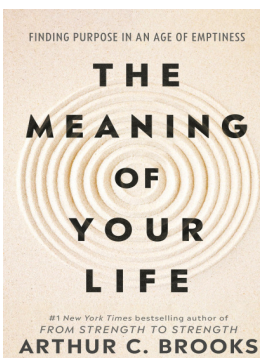
THE MEANING OF YOUR LIFE: Finding Purpose in an Age of Emptiness — Arthur C. Brooks — Portfolio/Penguin, March 31, 2026, hardcover

Arthur Brooks has made a career of the well-timed reassurance. A Harvard Business School and Kennedy School professor, an Atlantic columnist, and the coauthor with Oprah Winfrey of a previous bestseller, he arrives every few years with a book explaining the American professional class to itself in a voice somewhere between social scientist and pastor. The Meaning of Your Life went straight to number one on the Times list, and it is easy to see why.

The thesis is that modern life has rewired us to obsess over the what and the how of our existence at the expense of the why. Rapid cultural, economic and technological change, Brooks argues, has degraded our capacity to perceive depth and purpose, producing an epidemic of emptiness among precisely the people whose lives look most successful from outside. His central illustration is Tolstoy, who possessed money, fame and worldly achievement and was nonetheless dying inside — and who worked the problem out in public through Konstantin Levin in Anna Karenina. It is a good choice, and Brooks handles it with genuine feeling.

Two cautions, offered in the spirit of a reader who finished the book and is glad he did. The first is scientific. Brooks leans on brain-lateralization framing — the analytical, reward-seeking left hemisphere against a more capacious right — and this is territory where popular writing has run considerably ahead of the neuroscience. The hemispheres do not divide the labor of human meaning that neatly, and a reader

should treat those passages as metaphor rather than finding. The second is about the destination. Brooks was raised Evangelical and converted to Catholicism as an adult, and the book's route to meaning bends steadily toward the spiritual and the transcendent. He is not



covert about it, and it is not a defect. But readers should know that a book marketed as evidence-based strategy resolves into something closer to a religious argument, and that its endorsements — the Dalai Lama, Father Mike Schmitz, Jonathan Haidt, Oprah — describe the coalition it is written for. Sceptical reviewers have been harsher, noting that the

underlying counsel is not new, that finding meaning is advice roughly as old as advice, and that the packaging is more sophisticated than the content. For our readers there is a particular resonance and a particular irony. The book's diagnosis — striving without significance, achievement without depth — is one that many families in this community would recognize instantly, having built an entire migration around achievement as its own justification. The irony is that the traditions most of us carry in our own households, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jain, have been making Brooks's argument for a very long time, at considerable length, and generally for free. This is a fine book. It may also be, for some readers here, a somewhat expensive way to be told what a grandmother already said.

(TSAI BUREAU)

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A Fake Boyfriend, a Real Wedding, and the Weight of Family Money

CAN'T HELP FAKING IN LOVE — Swati Hegde — Dell — Bangalore-set contemporary romance



Swati Hegde's second novel does the thing good genre fiction does and gets very little credit for: it takes a premise everyone has seen a hundred times and makes the specific people inside it matter.

Harsha Godbole belongs to a family of Bollywood business moguls. She has never felt loved by them, only funded by them, which is why she went to college in California and why she came back to Bangalore determined to build a photography career without touching their money. That resolve collapses on two fronts at once: the freelance work is not materializing, and the boyfriend she had assembled into an ideal ends the relationship to marry a woman his parents chose. Her cousin Neha's wedding is six weeks out. Rather than arrive single and unemployed in front of the family that predicted exactly this, Harsha dips into the trust fund

she swore off and offers to pay Veer Kannan, the barista at her regular coffee shop, to play her boyfriend through the festivities.

Veer's side of the arrangement is where the book earns its keep. He is a former actor whose sitcom was shelved after a handful of episodes and who now pulls espresso to support his family. His brother's financial aid for business school has fallen through. He takes the money because he needs the money, and because the Godbole family's contacts might reopen a door that closed on him. The novel is honest about the asymmetry this creates. She is buying dignity; he is selling time he cannot afford to give away. That imbalance sits underneath every charming scene, and Hegde does not pretend it away. What the book gets right, and what will land hardest with readers here, is the specific texture of a certain kind of

Indian family: wealth deployed as leverage, the cousin whose achievements are recited at gatherings as a rebuke, the assumption that a woman arriving alone at a wedding is a diagnosis rather than a fact. Publishers Weekly called it a solid sophomore effort, and that is about right — this is not a reinvention of the form. It is a well-built, warm, entirely satisfying example of it, with a fake-dating arrangement that reads like a classic Bollywood setup because it more or less is one. Recommended without reservation for readers who like the genre, and recommended with mild insistence for readers who look down on it. There is more honest observation about class and family obligation in Bangalore in these pages than in a good deal of what gets shelved as literary fiction about the same subject.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Two Men, One Woman, and a Novel That Divided Its Readers

THE NIGHT WE MET — Abby Jimenez — Forever/Hachette, March 24, 2026, 389 pp.

Abby Jimenez is among the most reliably successful romance novelists working in America, and *The Night We Met*, her eighth novel and the second in the *Say You'll Remember Me* series, has produced the most divided response of her career. That division is worth examining, because it is not really about the writing.

Larissa is a gig-economy worker buried in debt her absent father left behind, working several jobs and barely holding the arrangement together. At a concert she accepts a ride home from Mike. Standing next to Mike is his best friend Chris, a pharmacist and a voracious reader, who wanted to offer and did not. Larissa dates Mike. Chris keeps showing up — driving her mother to a scheduled surgery when Mike is incapacitated, co-parenting a rescue dog, covering for his friend's failures with a competence that begins to look less like loyalty and more like enabling. Nobody cheats. That is the engine and the constraint of the entire book. Admirers describe it as the best version of what Jimenez has been attempting for half a decade: a slow burn about what it costs to see a person clearly when your circumstances require you not to act on what you see. The dialogue is sharp, the pacing is economical, the resolution refuses to pretend the damage did not happen, and Mike's alcoholism —



handled largely off the page — is treated as an illness rather than a plot obstacle. The detractors are not wrong either. One prominent romance reviewer rated it two and a half stars and identified the problem precisely: the book settles into a loop in which Mike keeps struggling, Larissa keeps looking past it, and Chris keeps

absorbing the consequences. Another wanted Larissa to be the hero of her own story rather than a woman continually rescued by men. Both objections are fair, and readers who find a heroine's passivity intolerable should be warned rather than sold. Our own view is that the novel is more interesting than either camp allows, because its actual subject is money. Larissa's paralysis is not a character flaw; it is what debt does to a person's capacity to choose. She cannot leave a mediocre relationship for the same reason she cannot leave a bad job, and Jimenez, to her credit, does not resolve this with a windfall. In a year when a great many young people in this country are discovering that the pathways they were promised have been repriced beyond their reach, a romance about a woman who cannot afford her own preferences is timelier than its cover suggests.

Read it for the pining and the dog. Stay for the ledger.

(TSAI BUREAU)

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The Cheapest India Trip in Years

A rupee past 95 makes this autumn unusually favorable for dollar-earning travelers



For readers earning in dollars, the currency story that is squeezing households in India is working in the opposite direction on a trip home. At levels past 95 to the dollar, hotel rates, domestic flights, car hire, restaurants and shopping all convert more favorably than they have in years.

The window has a shape worth planning around. Late September into November is the strongest stretch on the subcontinent: the monsoon has withdrawn across most of the country, the festival calendar runs from Navratri and Durga Puja through Diwali, and the northern winter has not yet set in. That is also, inevitably, when fares from North America peak. The arbitrage favors travelers who can book flights early and spend generously on the ground rather than the reverse.

Two practical notes. Airfare is dollar-denominated and does not benefit from the exchange rate, so the savings sit in the ground costs. And travelers holding student or work visas should read this issue's coverage of the September 15 admission rule before booking anything, because for that group the calculation is not about price at all.

Before You Book That Ticket

For students and visa holders, autumn travel is a legal question, not a leisure one

The end of Duration of Status on September 15 turns ordinary travel into a decision with consequences, and the rules reward the cautious.

Students inside the United States on September 15 holding valid status may qualify for transition protection tied to the end date on their I-20 or DS-2019. Those who depart and return on or after that date may be admitted

under the new fixed-period system, with a hard expiration printed on the I-94. Columbia has advised international students to return before classes begin on September 8, and Harvard has told its international community to review travel plans.

The safest itinerary is therefore the early one. Beyond that, the guidance is unglamorous and worth following exactly: confirm any travel with a designated school official before booking rather than after, carry current documentation rather than copies on a phone, keep the I-20 endorsement current, and build far more margin into a return date than feels necessary. A wedding in Delhi is a poor reason to test an untried admission rule in its first month of operation.

Kerala After the Rain

The state's best season is the one nobody books

Kerala's tourist economy is built around December and January, when the weather is reliable and the rates are highest. The state is arguably better in the weeks immediately after the monsoon withdraws, when the backwaters run full, the hills around Munnar and Wayanad are green rather than dusty, the crowds have not arrived and the pricing has not yet climbed.

The tradeoffs are real and should be stated. Rain lingers, particularly in the hills, and a day can be lost to it. Some smaller operators reopen slowly. Beach conditions on the Malabar coast can remain rough into the early part of the season.

In exchange: houseboats at a fraction of peak rates, Ayurvedic treatment centres in their traditional monsoon-adjacent season, and a ver-

sion of Fort Kochi that still functions as a working town rather than a queue. For diaspora travelers with family in the state, the calendar has an additional advantage — visiting outside the December rush means relatives are not simultaneously hosting four other returning households.

The Corridor at Kartarpur

A visa-free passage that remains, in a difficult region, an actual working arrangement

The Kartarpur Corridor permits Indian pilgrims to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan — where Guru Nanak spent his final years — without the ordinary visa apparatus. In a region where almost every cross-border mechanism has been suspended, downgraded or weaponized in recent years, it remains one of the few that functions. Its symbolic weight for Sikhs worldwide is difficult to overstate, and the diaspora has taken a direct interest. Representative Tom Suozzi, now Democratic vice-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, last year became the first sitting American member of Congress to visit the corridor — a gesture that registered with Sikh constituents on Long Island and in Queens precisely because so few of his colleagues would have thought to make it. Readers planning a pilgrimage should treat operational details as changeable and verify current requirements, registration procedures and fees through official channels close to the date rather than relying on secondhand accounts, including this one. The corridor's continued operation has never been guaranteed by anything more durable than the political weather, which is exactly why those who can go should.

(TSAI BUREAU)



Gaganyaan's Honest Schedule

ISRO is striving for an uncrewed flight by the end of the year, and is refusing to promise it

Speaking on June 27, ISRO Chairman Dr. V. Narayanan said the agency is working toward launching the uncrewed Gaganyaan G1 mission by the end of 2026, while emphasizing that the schedule depends entirely on technical progress and mandatory safety assessments. The programme has already slipped repeatedly — originally targeted for 2022, then 2024, then 2026 — and the crewed flight carrying three Indian astronauts is now aimed at 2027.

Recent milestones are real. On July 3 the agency completed the first ground test of SOLVE, a sub-orbital vehicle designed to carry a mock crew module above 100 kilometres, validating a sequence in which ten parachutes must deploy in succession. Further crew module system tests followed on July 12. Subsystem development was reported at roughly ninety percent late last year, backed by thousands of ground and structural tests. The humanoid Vyommित्रा — the name combines the Sanskrit for space and friend — will fly on G1 to simulate human physiological responses.

The delays deserve praise rather than mockery. Three nations have launched their own citizens into orbit, and each learned the cost of schedule pressure the hard way. An agency that refuses to commit until abort scenarios and recovery protocols are flawless is behaving exactly as a human-rated programme should.

NISAR and the Satellite That Watches the Monsoon

A NASA-ISRO joint mission built to

measure exactly the things India cannot afford to guess about

NISAR, the joint NASA-ISRO earth observation mission, was built to measure changing ecosystems, dynamic land surfaces and ice masses, generating data on biomass, natural hazards and groundwater. For most countries that is valuable science. For India it is close to an actuarial necessity.

Consider what the Reserve Bank listed among its risks when it held rates on August 5: food and fuel inflation, and monsoon uncertainty. A central bank in the world's most populous country is setting the price of money partly on a guess about rainfall. Groundwater depletion across the northwestern plains is among the most serious resource problems on the subcontinent and is measured today with instruments that were not designed for the job.

Satellite radar of this class changes the inputs. It does not make the monsoon behave, and it will not by itself save an aquifer in Punjab. What it does is convert a set of arguments conducted on assertion — how much groundwater is left, how fast a glacier is retreating, how much biomass a district actually holds — into arguments conducted on measurement. In a country where water allocation is a permanent political dispute between states, that is not a small thing.

India's Launch Business Grows Up
454 satellites in a decade, a privately built PSLV, and a commercial market ISRO no longer serves alone

Between January 2004 and December 2013, India launched 54 satellites, 31 of them foreign. Between January 2014 and November 2025, it launched 454, including 398 foreign. That is the arc of a national science programme becoming a commercial launch provider.

The institutional change underneath the numbers matters more than the numbers. New Space India Limited awarded a consortium of Hindustan Aeronautics and Larsen & Toubro a contract to build five Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles, the first of which is among a recent batch of missions; HAL subsequently won a contract to manufacture Small Satellite Launch Vehicles for a decade. ISRO is moving from building rockets to certifying them, which is what NASA did a generation ago and what every mature space economy eventually does. The commercial logic is straightforward: launch-on-demand for small satellites is a growing global market, and India competes on cost with a reliability record that now spans hundreds of payloads. The strategic logic is quieter. A country that can put its own earth observation satellites over the Indian Ocean Region on its own schedule, with its own industry, does not have to ask anyone for the pictures.

The Research Pipeline Nobody Is Costing

American science runs on foreign graduate students. Three rules this year change the terms. From September 15, F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors will be admitted for

a fixed period — the program length or four years, whichever is shorter — with extensions moving from a designated school official's signature to a USCIS adjudication. Doctoral candidates in five-to-seven-year programs, postdoctoral researchers and medical trainees are the population this rule was least designed for and will most affect. Add the pending Optional Practical Training review and the proposed six-figure H-1B fee, and the study-to-research-to-faculty pathway is being repriced at every stage. The Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies has argued the admission rule damages American competitiveness precisely because serious research does not fit inside a four-year administrative box, and the point is difficult to argue with. Nobody finishes a dissertation on schedule. That is not a defect of foreign students; it is the nature of original work. More than 360,000 Indian students were enrolled at American universities in 2024-25. A meaningful share of them staff the laboratories that produce American papers, patents and clinical trials. Whatever one believes about immigration levels, the research consequence is a separate question, and it is not currently being costed by anyone.

(TSAI BUREAU)

What Inflation Did to the Weekly Basket

Retail inflation above target, and the items that moved most are the ones on every Indian shopping list



Retail inflation in India reached 4.38 percent in June, the highest since December 2024 and above the four percent target for the first time in seventeen months, with the Reserve Bank flagging food and fuel pressure when it held rates on August 5. Households experience that number unevenly, because the aggregate hides the basket.

Pulses, edible oils and vegetables move on weather and on fuel, and all three feed a vegetarian kitchen far more heavily than they feed an average consumption basket. A weak rupee raises the cost of imported edible oil directly. Elevated diesel prices raise the cost of every vegetable that travels from a growing region to a city market, which is most of them.

Practical responses, for households on either side of the ocean: buy pulses and grains in larger quantities when prices soften rather than weekly at retail; substitute across dals rather than defaulting to one; and treat the vegetables that are genuinely in season as the base of the week's cooking rather than the accompaniment. None of this is new advice. It is what every grandmother in this community did as a matter of course, and it works for the same reasons it always did.

Late Summer, Cooked Properly

The end of August is the best produce of the American year, and Indian

technique is built for it

Farmers' markets across the Northeast are at their annual peak — tomatoes, eggplant, corn, okra, peppers, summer squash, the last of the stone fruit — and the Indian kitchen is unusually well equipped for exactly this glut.

Eggplant is the obvious case. American markets carry globe, Italian, Chinese and, increasingly, the small purple varieties suited to bharta and bharwa preparations. Roasting a globe eggplant whole over an open flame until the skin blisters and collapses produces a smokiness no oven achieves, and the resulting bharta improves for a day in the refrigerator. Okra, which the American South and the Indian kitchen approach from opposite directions, wants to be dry, hot and undisturbed in the pan — crowding and stirring produce the sliminess people complain about.

Two seasonal notes. Late corn is sweet enough to want almost nothing beyond lime, salt and chilli. And the tomatoes available now are good enough that a simple tamatar sabzi built on them will not taste like the same dish made in February. Cook with what the season is actually giving you; the rest of the year is long.

The Regional Turn on Oak Tree Road

The generic North Indian menu is giving way to something more specific

For decades the Indian restaurant in America meant one menu: butter chicken, saag paneer, naan, a mango lassi, a buffet on weekdays. That template served an important purpose — it introduced Indian food to a country that needed a gentle entry — and it is now steadily giving ground.

What is replacing it is regional and unapologetic. Chettinad and Andhra kitchens that do not moderate the heat. Kerala places built around fish and coconut. Gujarati thali houses. Hyderabad biryani specialists arguing publicly about dum technique. Sindhi and Bohri menus. Indian-Chinese as its own cuisine rather than a novelty section. Bhel and chaat counters that treat the assembly as the point.

Two forces drove the change. The customer base grew large enough to support specificity — a Telugu community of sufficient size sustains a restaurant that does not need to please anyone else. And a second generation raised on the generic menu went looking for what their grandparents actually ate.

The corridors where this is most visible — Oak Tree Road, Hicksville, Jackson Heights, Devon Avenue, Artesia — are worth a deliberate afternoon rather than a takeout order.

Cooking Toward Navratri

The fasting season arrives in weeks, and the planning starts now

Navratri arrives in the autumn calendar within weeks, bringing with it the vrat kitchen — a cuisine defined by what it excludes and, at its best, considerably more interesting than that sounds. The staples are worth stocking before the rush empties the shelves: kuttu and singhara flour, sabudana, samak rice, sendha namak, and good peanuts. The dishes that reward attention are the ones people most often get wrong. Sabudana khichdi fails when the pearls are soaked too long or drained too little; they want just enough water to be absorbed, then a rest, then a hot pan and restraint. Kuttu puris tear when the dough is worked like wheat dough, which it is not. A note offered with care. Fasting practice varies enormously by family, region and tradition, and it is an observance rather than a diet. Readers managing diabetes, pregnancy, blood pressure or any condition affected by eating patterns should speak with their physician about how to observe safely rather than deciding alone or following what a relative does. Every tradition in this community makes accommodation for health. Using it is not a failure of devotion.

(TSAI BUREAU)

The Risk That Arrives Earlier and at a Lower Weight

The Risk That Arrives Earlier and at a Lower

South Asians develop cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes at thresholds that standard screening can miss.

The clinical literature on this is consistent and long-established: people of South Asian ancestry develop insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes and coronary artery disease at younger ages and at lower body mass index thresholds than the populations from which standard screening cutoffs were derived. A number that reads as unremarkable on a chart calibrated to a general population can sit inside a range of genuine concern for a South Asian patient.

Several bodies have accordingly recommended lower BMI thresholds for South Asian populations, and waist circumference and waist-to-height measures are often more informative than weight alone, because the fat distribution associated with this risk is central rather than general.

What to do with that. Ask your physician directly whether your screening is calibrated for South Asian ancestry, and ask specifically about lipid panels including lipoprotein(a), fasting glucose or HbA1c, and blood pressure, beginning earlier than general guidance suggests. Family history matters here more than usual and should be reported in detail — parents and siblings, the ages at which events occurred.

This is general information and not a substitute for medical advice. The single most useful action a reader can take from this page is to book the appointment.

Talking About Mental Health Without the Word

Stigma has not disappeared. It has, in some households, been renegotiated.

Mental health remains a difficult conversation in many South Asian households, where distress has traditionally been described in physical terms, managed within the family, and kept clear of anyone who might repeat it. That pattern has real costs: delayed treatment, isolation, and young people who conclude that their condition is a moral failure.

Something has been shifting, unevenly and mostly among the young. Therapy is discussed openly in second-generation friendship circles. Community organizations, temples and gurdwaras increasingly host sessions on stress, grief and caregiving. Culturally competent South Asian clinicians, once nearly impossible to find, now practice in most metropolitan areas.



The immigration environment is worth naming as a contributing factor rather than a background condition. Prolonged uncertainty about status, family separation, and the fear of enforcement produce sustained stress with documented physiological and psychological effects. That is a reasonable response to a genuinely uncertain situation rather than a personal weakness.

If you or someone in your household is struggling, speaking to a licensed professional is the appropriate step, and a physician can provide a referral. If a family member is in crisis, help is available immediately in the United States by calling or texting 988.

Caring for Elders When the Joint Family Is a Memory

The arrangement everyone assumes will happen is the one nobody has planned.

A widespread assumption in this community holds that elders will be cared for at home, by family, as a matter of course. It reflects a genuine value and it is increasingly colliding with American geography and American working hours.

The specifics are unforgiving. Adult children live in different states. Both spouses work. Homes are not built for multigenerational living. And the elders arriving now often spent their working lives in India, which means Medicare eligibility, Social Security credits and long-term care coverage may not look the way families assume.

Practical steps, in rough order of urgency. Establish healthcare proxies and powers of attorney while everyone is well, not during a hospitalization. Understand precisely what insurance covers, including the treatment of pre-existing conditions for recently arrived parents. Investigate adult day programs, which many families dismiss without looking and which frequently offer exactly the language and food environment they assumed did not exist. And have the conversation about preferences — including end-of-life preferences — in a language the elder is comfortable in.

None of this is disloyalty. Refusing to plan is not devotion; it is simply leaving the decision to whoever happens to be in the hospital corridor.

Vitamin D, Screening, and the Annual Appointment

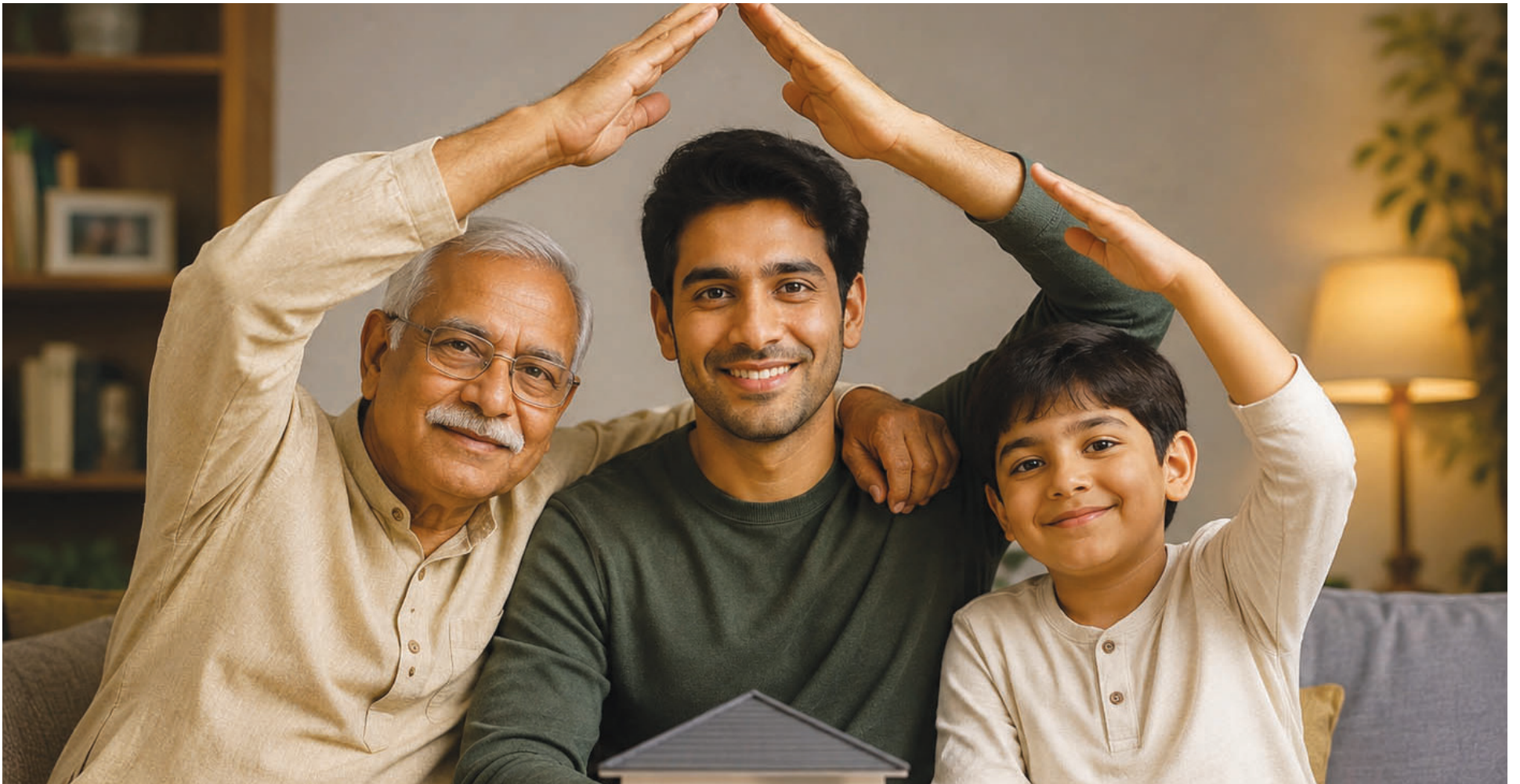
Deficiency is common in this community, and it is one of the easier things to check. Vitamin D deficiency is widespread among South Asian populations in northern latitudes, and the reasons are unremarkable: darker skin synthesizes vitamin D more slowly from the same sun exposure, northeastern American winters provide little usable ultraviolet for months at a time, and dietary sources are limited in largely vegetarian diets. The consequences of prolonged deficiency touch bone health, muscle function and, on some evidence, mood.

The correct response is a blood test rather than a guess. Levels are easily measured, deficiency is straightforwardly treated, and supplementation is neither automatically necessary nor harmless at arbitrary doses — the right amount depends on the measured level and on other conditions and medications. Ask your physician to include it in routine bloodwork.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Three Generations, One Mortgage

Multigenerational living is rising in America. This community never stopped



Multigenerational households have been growing across the United States for two decades, driven by housing costs, childcare costs and eldercare. Indian American families, who largely never abandoned the arrangement, are watching a practice long treated as a quaint import become a mainstream financial strategy.

The advantages are real and rarely tallied honestly. Childcare provided by grandparents, at a market value that would consume a substantial share of a young family's income. Mortgage costs shared across earners. Language and religious transmission that happens through daily contact rather than weekend classes. Elders who are watched without being institutionalized.

The costs are equally real and less often discussed. Privacy is scarce. Marital disagreements acquire an audience. The daughter-in-law frequently absorbs a disproportionate share of the domestic labour, and that inequity does not resolve itself through goodwill. Adult children can find independent decision-making difficult in a house where they remain, structurally, children.

Families making this work de-

liberately tend to do a few things: they define financial contributions explicitly rather than by assumption, they establish physical space that belongs to each couple, and they agree in advance on who decides what. The arrangement fails most often not from affection running out but from nobody having said any of it out loud.

The Arithmetic of Wedding Season

The autumn calendar is filling, and so is the guest's obligation

The autumn and winter wedding season is nearly here, and for many households in this community the season is a significant annual expense — not as hosts, but as guests. Multiple weddings, each running several days, each requiring outfits, gifts, travel and often accommodation, add up to a number most families never actually calculate.

A few observations offered without judgment. Outfit costs are the most elastic item and the one where the most money is wasted; a well-chosen piece worn across three events is not a failure of etiquette, and the resale and rental market for Indian formalwear has become genuinely good. Cash gift norms vary enormously by region

and family, and asking a close relative what is customary is far less awkward than guessing wrong in either direction. Travel booked early for known dates costs a fraction of travel booked late.

For hosts, one thought. The pressure toward scale in diaspora weddings has become substantial, and a great deal of it is directed at families who cannot comfortably absorb it. Nobody remembers the floral budget. They remember whether they were fed well and whether the hosts looked happy.

The Language Conversation
What is actually lost when the grandchildren cannot speak to the grandparents

Language attrition across generations is the ordinary immigrant arc, and this community is following it: fluent first generation, comprehending second generation, third generation that recognizes food words and greetings. What varies is how families respond, and the responses that work look different from the ones people expect.

Guilt does not work. Weekend language classes taught as obligation produce children who can recite an alphabet and will

not speak. What does appear to work is unremarkable and hard: a parent who speaks the language consistently at home rather than switching to English for convenience, media the child actually wants — films, music, serials — in the language, and extended time with grandparents who do not speak English, which converts the language from a chore into the only available route to a person the child loves.

It is also worth being clear about the stakes, which are usually overstated in one direction and understated in the other. A child who loses Punjabi or Telugu or Gujarati is not thereby diminished, and framing it that way burdens children with a loss they did not choose. But a family in which the grandchildren and the grandparents cannot have a real conversation has lost something specific and irreplaceable, and no amount of cultural programming substitutes for it.

Scam-Proofing the People You Love

A practical conversation to have this week, before someone in your family has it the hard way

This issue reports a federal prosecution alleging a nationwide scheme that targeted victims

aged 59 to 87 across New York and New Jersey, persuading them their accounts had been compromised and directing them to liquidate savings into cash, gold or gift cards. That case is not unusual. It is the standard pattern, executed at scale.

The conversation to have with elders in your household is short and specific. No bank, no police department, no federal agency and no court will ever telephone and ask anyone to convert savings into gold, cash or gift cards, or to hand anything to a courier. Anyone who does is committing a crime, regardless of what identification they recite. Caller ID can be faked. A caller who creates urgency and demands secrecy from family is, by that fact alone, a fraud. Establish a household rule that costs nothing: no financial action of any kind on the same day as an unexpected call, and one designated family member is telephoned first, every time. Write that person's number on paper and put it near the phone.

And speak to the young men in the household too. Collecting a package for a stranger, for a fee, is a federal felony with a twenty-year ceiling.

(TSAI BUREAU)



The Handloom Comes Back to the Wedding

Heritage weaves are displacing heavily embellished machine work at the top of the market

A shift has been underway in Indian wedding dressing that the coming season will make plainly visible: the heavily embellished, machine-embroidered lehenga that dominated for roughly fifteen years is losing ground at the top of the market to handloom.

The weaves doing the displacing are the old ones — Banarasi, Kanjeevaram, Paithani, Chanderi, Patola, Jamdani, Bandhani — worn as saris and as separates, and increasingly worn by brides rather than only by mothers and aunts. Several forces converged: a generation that finds the maximalist look dated, a genuine revival in weaving clusters supported by design intervention, resale and heirloom culture, and the simple fact that a good handloom sari holds value while a crystal-encrusted lehenga does not.

The practical case is the strongest one. A Banarasi sari bought this season can be worn for thirty years and given to a daughter. The equivalent spend on embellishment produces a garment worn twice that cannot be altered, cleaned easily or resold. For families managing a season of several weddings, that arithmetic matters more than any trend.

Buy from weavers and reputable

handloom houses, ask what the piece actually is, and be suspicious of powerloom sold at handloom prices.

The Sari at the Office

A garment that has quietly become viable American professional dress

The sari has entered American professional settings more thoroughly than most people in this community have registered — worn to court, to hospital administration, to campus, to the boardroom, and not only on designated cultural days.

What made it work is fabric discipline rather than boldness. A cotton, linen or fine silk sari in a restrained palette, pleated crisply, pinned properly, with a well-tailored blouse in a plain fabric, reads as formal professional dress in almost any American workplace. The failures are predictable: heavy embellishment, tissue and organza that photograph beautifully and move badly, and pinning that requires the wearer's attention all day. A woman adjusting her drape through a meeting is not projecting authority, and that is a mechanical problem rather than a cultural one.

The broader point is worth stating. For most of this community's American history, professional legitimacy was understood to require sartorial assimila-

tion, and a generation of women wore suits they did not particularly like in order to be taken seriously. That trade is no longer obligatory. It is not obligatory in the other direction either — the woman who prefers the suit is not less connected to anything.

Menswear Beyond the Wedding

The bandhgala and the Nehru jacket work in Western settings, if worn as clothing rather than costume

Indian menswear in America has been effectively quarantined into weddings and religious occasions, which is a waste of a genuinely useful wardrobe. The bandhgala — the structured, closed-neck jacket — is among the better formal garments available to men anywhere, and it functions in Western professional and evening settings without explanation. The rules are the same as for any tailoring and are routinely ignored. Fit is everything: shoulder seam on the shoulder, sleeve ending at the wrist bone, length covering the seat. Fabric should be seasonal — wool and wool blends in winter, linen and cotton silk in summer — and the common error is heavy brocade worn in July. Colour should be restrained if the garment is to work more than once; a navy, charcoal or bottle-green bandhgala goes anywhere, while gold

jacquard goes to exactly one place.

The Nehru-collar jacket over Western trousers is the easier entry point and the more versatile piece. Worn with well-made trousers and proper shoes, it is simply a good jacket. Worn with everything else turned up to match it, it becomes a costume, and the difference is entirely in restraint.

The Weaver's Share

Handloom's revival is real. Whether it reaches the loom is a separate question. The renewed appetite for handloom is good news for weaving traditions that came close to disappearing. Whether it is good news for weavers depends on a supply chain that most buyers never examine. The structural problem is old. Weavers frequently work through master weavers and traders who supply yarn on credit and buy the finished piece, an arrangement that leaves the person at the loom with a modest and unpredictable share of a retail price that may be twenty times what they received. Powerloom fabric marketed as handloom depresses prices further and is difficult for a retail buyer to detect. Younger people in weaving families have left for wage work in numbers that threaten the transmission of technique itself.

(TSAI BUREAU)

IIFA Connex Edition 3 Decodes The New Rules of Music- Artists, Algorithms & Audiences: Who Really Decides What Becomes a Hit Today?

Ramprasad Sundar, Mika Singh, Nora Fatehi, Raja Kumari and Tarsame Mittal Come Together for an Dynamic Conversation on The New Rules of Music

By our staff (Mumbai) For over 25 years, the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Weekend & Awards has celebrated the extraordinary power of Indian cinema while building meaningful cultural bridges across continents. Expanding this vision beyond the awards stage, IIFA Connex has emerged as IIFA's premier networking and thought-leadership platform, bringing together influential voices from entertainment, music, film, streaming, media, technology, fashion, publishing, business, arts and culture to spark meaningful dialogue, inspire collaboration and shape the future of the global creative economy.

Continuing this vision, IIFA successfully hosted the third edition of IIFA Connex, themed 'The New Rules of Music: How Artists, Audiences and Technology Are Rewriting the Industry.' Set against an intimate lounge-style setting in Mumbai, the evening brought together an eclectic mix of industry leaders and creative trailblazers including Ramprasad Sundar, Mika Singh, Nora Fatehi, Raja Kumari and Tarsame Mittal for an engaging and thought-provoking conversation exploring the rapidly evolving landscape of music. Far more than a panel discussion, IIFA Connex Edition 3 examined the defining



shifts reshaping the music industry today, from the way talent is discovered and audiences are built, to the changing role of record labels, the growing influence of algorithms, the globalization of Indian music, and the opportunities and challenges facing the next generation of artists. Opening the conversation, Moderator and Panellist Tarsame Mittal set the tone for the evening, reflecting on

the dramatic transformation of the music business noting that while music has always evolved, the pace of change today is unprecedented. As the industry has shifted from albums and record sales to streams, algorithms and instantly connected global audiences, artists now have more opportunities than ever to reach listeners directly. At the same time, platforms, labels, technology and

audiences themselves have emerged as powerful forces shaping success. Setting the stage for the evening's discussion, the conversation explored who truly holds the power in today's music ecosystem, what defines a hit in the modern era, and whether any traditional rules of the music business still apply.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Guru Randhawa Drops Action-Packed Anthem 'Marzi', Reviving the Iconic Punjabi Mantra 'Mitran Di Marji'

(By Our staff reporter) Mumbai-Billion-streamed singer-songwriter Guru Randhawa is set to shake up the charts yet again with his high-octane brand-new track 'Marzi', which releases today across all major streaming platforms. Blending his signature infectious pop sensibilities with an authentic Punjabi attitude flex, the hard-hitting record delivers a hustle anthem rooted in high-achieving mentality and self-earned success.

Randhawa has transformed a foundational cultural mantra into a high-octane musical statement. For generations, the phrase 'mitran di marji' (our wish, our way) has served as a defining ethos of Punjabi identity, an unwritten rule of absolute self-determination. With his latest release, the global hitmaker elevates this cultural cornerstone into a definitive modern anthem, matching its unapologetic attitude with a blockbuster visual spectacle. At the heart of the track lies a single, commanding these 'where to sit, where to stand, which door to walk through mitran di marji'. More than just a hookline, it functions as a rallying cry for a generation that has stopped waiting for institutional permission, celebrating those who live loud, dress sharp, and

back their own hustle. Musically and visually, 'Marzi' marks a radical shift for the artist. Trading glossy backdrops for high-stakes adrenaline, the track introduces a gritty action-star aesthetic from the Punjabi powerhouse. Moving effortlessly from intense push-ups to complex fight sequences, Randhawa fully adopts a fierce, grounded mass-hero persona, turning self-belief into the ultimate power move. Stripping away all external distractions to stand completely alone as the sole headline feature, he commands the screen with a magnetic presence.

The accompanying music video leverages a grand visual scale to chart his trajectory, taking viewers on a cinematic journey from a vintage Maruti Suzuki Gypsy and heavy-duty trucks to an ultra-premium fleet of blacked-out Mercedes-Benz G-Wagons, supersonic fighter jets, and a high-security police entourage. Yet, beneath this spectacle of luxury and

power, the narrative presents a deeply grounded core: Randhawa remains unmoved by material success, acting as an unwavering, Robin Hood-style



messiah for his community. Whether operating without resources at the start of his career or commanding streaming charts a decade later, his allegiance to his roots stays iron-clad.

Lyrically, the track functions as an unapologetic thesis on the alpha winner mindset and the resilient spirit of Punjab, painting a vivid picture of a person who dictates his own destiny without being governed by critics, societal expectations, or industry trends. Randhawa masterfully balances street honour (bai ji) with high-flying corporate prestige (sir ji), making it clear that compromise is never an option (bhulke vi karde ni ghat aalideal ni). Backed by an infectious, slow-burning groove and sharp street slang (easy hoke rayieADI aukhi aw slang), the song captures the exact mental grit required to maintain a sovereign legacy, culminating in a roaring, hypnotic hook where every victory is achieved entirely on one's own terms. Guru Randhawa states, "This song is about ownership - of your choices, your circle, your story. Punjab doesn't ask for a seat at the table. We build our own table. This is for everyone who has forged their own path from the ground up, call their own shots and lives life entirely on their own terms." Serving as both a sonic powerhouse and a massive digital culture statement, 'Marzi' is available to stream worldwide today.

(TSAI BUREAU)

