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The Interconnected Crises

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After Millions lost their jobs, Sam Altman and others now stop hyping AI



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The Geometry Of Power: Algorithmic sovereignty in the 21st Century

(TSAI BUREAU) In 2023, the United States (US) imposed sweeping export controls to restrict China's access to advanced AI chips. Months later, China accelerated domestic semiconductor investment at a scale reminiscent of Cold War industrial policy and tightened controls over gallium and germanium - minerals essential to chip production.



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The Interconnected Crises: Fragile Hopes for Iran Peace Undermined by Israel's Relentless Campaign in Lebanon

As U.S.-Iran negotiations inch toward a potential memorandum of understanding to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and extend a shaky ceasefire, Israel's intensified operations in southern Lebanon threaten to unravel regional de-escalation. This special report examines the delicate balance between diplomatic progress and military overreach in a Middle East still teetering on the edge of wider war.

(TSAI Bureau) New York

In the span of just a few weeks since mid-May 2026, the Middle East has witnessed a paradox of tentative hope and renewed bloodshed. On one front, American and Iranian negotiators, mediated through channels in Qatar and Pakistan, appear closer than ever to formalizing a framework that could end months of direct hostilities, reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz to global shipping, and lay the groundwork for broader nuclear and sanctions discussions. Yet on another, Israeli airstrikes and ground operations in Lebanon have escalated dramatically, with over 120 strikes reported in a single day this week, killing dozens—including civilians—and displacing thousands more. These are not isolated events. They are inextricably linked. Iran's support for Hezbollah has long been a cornerstone of its regional "Axis of Resistance," and Israel's determination to neutralize that threat—regardless of the broader U.S.-Iran diplomatic track—risks derailing fragile progress. As a newspaper committed to clear-eyed analysis over partisan cheerleading, we argue this week that while the Trump administration's pressure campaign on Iran has yielded some leverage, unchecked Israeli escalation in Lebanon represents a dangerous overreach that could ignite the very wider conflict diplomats are desperately trying to prevent. Peace in the region demands not just deals on paper, but coordinated restraint from all parties—especially America's closest ally.

The Iran Conflict: From Open War to a Fragile Ceasefire

The 2026 Iran war erupted in late February with U.S. and Israeli strikes aimed at degrading Iran's nuclear capabilities, ballistic missile program, and naval power. What began as targeted operations quickly escalated into a broader confrontation involving direct exchanges, Iranian attempts to disrupt shipping in the



Strait of Hormuz, and a U.S.-imposed naval blockade. By April, a Pakistan-mediated two-week ceasefire took hold, later extended amid ongoing talks. As of late May, the situation remains precarious but shows signs of momentum. President Donald Trump has publicly stated that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) is "largely negotiated," focusing first on reopening the Strait of Hormuz—a critical chokepoint carrying about 20% of global oil trade. Under the proposed framework, Iran would clear mines and provide assurances on navigation security, while the U.S. would ease its blockade in phases. This would be followed by a 30- to 60-day window for deeper talks on Iran's nuclear program, enriched uranium stocks, ballistic missiles, and potential sanctions relief.

Iranian delegations have traveled to Doha for discussions, describing the talks as "generally positive" despite sticking points over verification mechanisms and the pace of sanctions easing. U.S. officials, including

those close to Vice President JD Vance, emphasize that any deal must prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon—a red line repeatedly affirmed by Trump. Recent U.S. "defensive" strikes near the Strait, targeting Iranian vessels allegedly laying mines, underscore that the ceasefire is far from ironclad. Iran has responded with accusations of bad faith, including the downing of a U.S. drone. Economically, the pressure on Iran is immense. The blockade has stranded tankers and slashed oil exports, exacerbating domestic woes. Tehran appears motivated to reach an accommodation, even if it means postponing full nuclear concessions. For the global economy, success here could stabilize energy markets and avert further inflation spikes. Failure, however, risks renewed disruption far beyond the region.

This progress, however halting, represents a pragmatic application of "maximum pressure" combined with diplomatic off-ramps. Trump's approach—blunt force paired with deal-mak-

ing—has forced Iran to the table in ways previous administrations arguably did not. Yet the path remains fragile. Disputes over language in the proposed MoU, verification of nuclear commitments, and the role of regional actors continue to complicate finalization. As one senior U.S. official noted, time is on America's side, but patience is not infinite.

Israel's Escalation in Lebanon: Self-Defense or Destabilizing Overreach?

Parallel to these diplomatic efforts, Israel has dramatically intensified its campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon. In the days since May 23, Israeli forces have conducted over 120 airstrikes in a single 24-hour period—one of the heaviest barrages in weeks—targeting sites across southern Lebanon and the eastern Bekaa Valley. Strikes have hit Tyre, Nabatieh, Burj al-Shamali, and other areas, killing at least dozens, including civilians, women, and children. Evacuation orders have expanded, and ground operations have pushed beyond pre-

vious security zones.

Israeli officials justify these actions as necessary to counter ongoing Hezbollah threats, including drone and rocket attacks on northern Israel. Hezbollah, Iran's most potent proxy, has continued low-level operations despite a U.S.-brokered ceasefire from earlier in 2026. Israel points to command centers, weapons depots, and launch sites as legitimate targets. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has signaled a deepening commitment, framing the operations as essential for Israeli security amid the broader Iran conflict.

However, the scale and civilian toll raise serious questions about proportionality and strategic wisdom. Lebanese health authorities report significant casualties among non-combatants, with strikes hitting rescue crews and densely populated areas. Over 1.2 million Lebanese have been displaced since early 2026. International observers note that while Hezbollah bears responsibility for embedding military assets in civilian (Contd on page 4)

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The Interconnected Crises: Fragile Hopes for Iran Peace Undermined by Israel's Relentless Campaign in Lebanon

(Contd from page 2) zones, Israel's response risks alienating potential moderates in Lebanon and fueling recruitment for extremist groups.

Critically, these actions occur against the backdrop of U.S.-Iran talks. Analysts and sources close to the negotiations suggest Israel's escalation is intentional—to "force Trump's hand" and prevent what some in Jerusalem view as a premature or concession-heavy deal with Tehran. By keeping pressure on Hezbollah, Israel aims to weaken Iran's regional leverage and ensure any U.S.-Iran agreement addresses proxy threats comprehensively.

This creates a direct tension: U.S. diplomats seek de-escalation with Iran to stabilize energy flows and reduce global risks, while Israel pursues a maximalist security posture that could provoke Iranian retaliation or harden Tehran's negotiating position. The result is a fragmented allied approach that undermines the very leverage the U.S. has built.

The Humanitarian and Strategic Costs

The human suffering cannot be

understated. In Iran, months of conflict and blockade have strained civilian infrastructure, though exact figures remain opaque due to regime control. In Lebanon, the toll is more visible: families shattered, villages cratered, and a fragile state pushed closer to collapse. Hezbollah's provocations do not absolve the responsibility to minimize civilian harm—a principle too often sacrificed in the fog of asymmetric warfare.

Strategically, the linkage between the Iran and Lebanon theaters is undeniable. Iran has repeatedly affirmed it will not abandon Hezbollah. Any sustainable U.S.-Iran deal must therefore include credible mechanisms to curb proxy activities, perhaps through verification regimes tied to sanctions relief. Conversely, Israel's singular focus on military degradation risks a cycle of retaliation that could draw the U.S. back into direct confrontation.

The Trump administration faces a classic dilemma: balancing unwavering support for Israel's right to self-defense with the broader imperative of regional stability. America's interests—

secure energy markets, countering nuclear proliferation, and avoiding endless entanglements—align more closely with successful diplomacy than perpetual low-level wars. Yet domestic political pressures, particularly from pro-Israel constituencies and hawkish Republicans wary of any Iran deal, complicate this balancing act.

A Path Forward: Coordinated Diplomacy Over Fragmented Force

We believe the United States must assert clearer leadership to synchronize these tracks. First, the administration should press Israel for greater restraint in Lebanon, conditioning enhanced military support on demonstrable efforts to minimize escalation during sensitive diplomatic windows. Second, any final MoU with Iran must explicitly address proxy disarmament and de-escalation timelines, with robust international monitoring. Third, broader regional engagement—potentially involving Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and European partners—could create incentives for de-escalation across theaters.

Skepticism toward Iranian inten-

tions is warranted. The regime's history of bad-faith negotiations, support for terrorism, and domestic repression demands ironclad verification. However, dismissing diplomatic openings outright ignores the strategic gains already achieved through pressure: degraded Iranian capabilities, economic strain on the regime, and momentum toward potential normalization with Gulf states.

Israel, for its part, has legitimate security concerns that cannot be wished away. Hezbollah's arsenal and ideology pose an existential threat. But endless bombing campaigns without a clear endgame risk turning tactical successes into strategic failures, isolating Israel internationally and empowering hardliners in Tehran.

Memorial Day reflections this past weekend remind us of the profound costs of conflict. American service members, alongside allies, have borne burdens in the Middle East for decades. The goal must be a sustainable peace that honors their sacrifice—not perpetual managed chaos.

In conclusion, the intertwined

crises in Iran and Lebanon test whether great-power diplomacy can overcome entrenched enmities and allied divergences. Progress on the U.S.-Iran track offers a rare window for de-escalation. Squandering it through uncoordinated escalation would be a tragic miscalculation with repercussions far beyond the region: higher energy prices, refugee flows, empowered adversaries, and diminished U.S. credibility. This newspaper urges the Trump administration to pursue a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes verifiable peace over open-ended military campaigns. The Strait of Hormuz can reopen, but only if the fires in Lebanon—and the proxies fueling them—are brought under control. Regional stability demands nothing less. The alternative is a return to the cycle of violence that has defined the Middle East for too long.

(This article reflects our commitment to truth-seeking analysis amid complex geopolitics. We call on leaders to choose restraint where possible and resolve where necessary—for the sake of lives, economies, and future generations.)

The Hidden Price of Chaos: How Global Instability Is Amplifying a Deadly Wave of Disasters

By TSAI Bureau) New York

In the remote hills of Angola's Bengo province, the earth gave way just before dawn on May 23, 2026. Dozens of artisanal miners—many of them young men and teenagers chasing dreams of quick wealth in an illegal gold pit—were buried alive. At least 28 died in the Kifula landslide, one of the deadliest informal mining accidents in the country's recent history. Four survivors were pulled from the rubble, their bodies broken and their futures shattered. Search operations ended quickly; the site, carved haphazardly into unstable slopes without engineering oversight or safety protocols, offered little hope for more miracles.

Less than 24 hours later, halfway around the world in Angeles City, Philippines, another tragedy unfolded. A nine-story

mixed-use building under construction in Barangay Balibago collapsed at around 3 a.m. on May 24, trapping dozens of sleeping workers beneath tons of concrete and twisted rebar. At least one person—a Malaysian tourist caught in the periphery—was confirmed dead, with 21 others initially missing. Rescue teams worked frantically amid the debris, their efforts hampered by the scale of the failure. The structure, nearing completion after years of work, should have symbolized progress. Instead, it became another grim monument to corner-cutting and regulatory failure in a rapidly urbanizing developing nation.

These are not isolated tragedies. They are symptoms of a deeper, accelerating crisis: the rising human and environmental toll of global instability. As conflicts

rage, climate pressures mount, and resource competition intensifies, safety standards in the world's most vulnerable regions are eroding. Weak governance, economic desperation, and geopolitical shocks create perfect conditions for preventable disasters. This investigative report examines recent incidents, traces their roots in broader patterns of instability, and argues that without stronger international accountability and investment in resilient infrastructure, the cycle will only worsen—threatening not just local communities but global stability itself.

The Angola Landslide: Desperation in the Shadows of Resource Extraction

The Kifula gold mine disaster did not occur in a vacuum. Angola, rich in diamonds and oil, has seen a surge in illegal artisanal

gold mining as economic pressures mount. Falling diamond prices and the lingering effects of regional instability have pushed thousands into hazardous informal operations. Miners dig with basic tools, often at night to evade authorities, carving deep, unsupported pits into hillsides prone to erosion. Heavy rains—exacerbated by shifting climate patterns—destabilized the ground at Kifula, triggering the fatal slide.

This echoes past tragedies. In 2019, a similar collapse at an illegal mine in the Democratic Republic of Congo killed dozens. In Brazil, the 2019 Brumadinho dam disaster—linked to iron ore mining—claimed over 270 lives, exposing how profit-driven extraction without oversight devastates both people and environments. In Angola's case, the victims

were mostly aged 16 to 35, families left without breadwinners in a country where formal employment remains scarce.

Environmentally, the damage compounds. Informal mining strips vegetation, pollutes waterways with mercury and sediment, and accelerates soil degradation. In a region already facing desertification risks, such activities hasten biodiversity loss and reduce agricultural viability, trapping communities in cycles of poverty and risk. The human cost is immediate—grieving families, orphaned children—but the environmental toll is insidious, unfolding over years as ecosystems struggle to recover.

Geopolitically, resource-driven desperation links directly to broader instability. Angola's mineral wealth attracts both legitimate investors and shadowy

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operators, sometimes tied to smuggling networks that fund conflicts elsewhere in Africa. When global commodity prices fluctuate wildly—partly due to disruptions like the ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz—local economies reel, pushing more people into dangerous extractive work.

Building Collapses: When Ambition Outpaces Safety

The Angeles City collapse is equally emblematic. The Philippines, one of the world's fastest-urbanizing nations, faces chronic pressure to build quickly and cheaply. Construction often proceeds with inadequate inspections, substandard materials, and labor practices that prioritize speed over safety. Workers sleeping on-site—a common cost-saving measure—turned a structural failure into a mass casualty event.

This is part of a grim global pattern. In 2025 alone, major collapses in Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Morocco killed hundreds. The 2021 Surfside condominium disaster in Florida highlighted vulnerabilities even in wealthier nations, but developing countries bear the brunt due to weaker enforcement. Rapid urbanization, driven by rural migration amid climate-stressed agriculture, overwhelms regulatory systems. Corruption plays a role too: bribes for permits, shortcuts on concrete quality, and ignored seismic or flood-risk assessments.

Past examples abound. The 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh killed over 1,100, exposing supply-chain exploitation in the global garment industry. Investigations revealed ignored warnings about cracks in the building. Similarly, in Turkey after the 2023 earthquakes, shoddy construction—enabled by lax enforcement and developer influence—amplified the death toll to tens of thousands. In each case, poverty, population pressure, and weak institutions intersect with natural hazards to produce catastrophe.

Environmentally, collapsed structures generate massive waste, contaminate soil and water with construction debris,



and disrupt local ecosystems. Rebuilding often repeats the same flawed models unless resilience is prioritized.

Broader Instability: Conflicts, Climate, and Cascading Risks These recent disasters occur against a backdrop of escalating global instability. The 2026 Iran conflict and the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz provide a stark example of how resource-driven geopolitics ripples outward. The Strait carries roughly 20% of global oil and significant LNG trade. Its disruption has spiked energy prices, strained economies worldwide, and indirectly fueled resource rushes in places like Angola. Higher fuel costs increase the price of everything from food to building materials, squeezing developing nations and encouraging riskier economic behaviors. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier. Extreme weather—intensified storms, heavier rainfall, prolonged droughts—stresses infrastructure and human systems already weakened by conflict or poor governance. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2026 ranks extreme weather as a top threat, with environmental risks dominating long-term concerns. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse compound the issue, reducing natural buffers against disasters

Intersections: Geopolitics, Safety Standards, and Resource Pressures

The intersection is clear. Geopolitical tensions over energy chokepoints like Hormuz destabilize markets, driving up costs

like landslides and floods.

In conflict zones, the toll is even higher. Wars destroy infrastructure, displaced populations into makeshift settlements, and divert resources from maintenance to military spending. In Yemen, Syria, and parts of Africa, building collapses and mining accidents occur amid active hostilities, with environmental degradation from unexploded ordnance and chemical runoff adding layers of long-term harm. The humanitarian fallout—refugee flows, disease outbreaks, food insecurity—strains neighboring countries and global aid systems.

Economic data underscores the scale. Global disaster damages have ballooned, with weather and climate events alone causing trillions in losses over recent decades. Developing countries suffer disproportionately: lower adaptive capacity, higher dependence on vulnerable sectors like agriculture and informal mining, and limited insurance coverage. The result is a widening inequality gap where the poor pay with their lives while the wealthy insulate themselves.

A Call for Accountability and Resilience

This newspaper believes the international community must move beyond reactive aid to proactive accountability. Stronger mechanisms are needed: bind-

ing standards for extractive industries, enforced through trade incentives or sanctions; transparent monitoring of infrastructure projects funded by foreign investment; and a dedicated global fund for resilience-building in high-risk nations, tied to verifiable governance improvements. Investment in resilient infrastructure is not charity—it is strategic self-interest. Retrofitting buildings, enforcing mining regulations, restoring ecosystems, and integrating climate adaptation into development plans can save lives and economies. The UN's Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides a blueprint, but implementation lags. Wealthier nations, which benefit from global supply chains and stability, should lead by conditioning aid and investment on safety and environmental safeguards.

Resource-driven conflicts, exemplified by Hormuz, threaten everyone. Securing critical chokepoints through diplomacy reduces the incentive for risky local behaviors elsewhere. A stable global energy market eases pressures that drive illegal mining and hasty construction. Critics may argue sovereignty limits intervention. Yet interdependence makes neglect untenable. Disasters spawn migration, terrorism recruitment, and economic contagion. The Angola and Philippines tragedies, though separated by oceans, are linked through global systems. Ignoring them invites more suffering. Memorial Day reflections this week remind us of sacrifice for stability. Honoring that means addressing root causes of instability—not just its symptoms. Governments, corporations, and international bodies must prioritize prevention. Local communities deserve better than burial under the rubble of failed systems. The human and environmental toll is rising. Lessons from recent disasters are painful but clear: instability breeds catastrophe, but coordinated action can break the cycle. The choice is ours—invest in resilience now, or pay a far steeper price later. Global stability depends on it.

and desperation in resource-rich but governance-poor regions. Safety standards erode when governments prioritize short-term growth or survival over regulation. Climate pressures—erratic weather, sea-level rise, desertification—expose these weaknesses, turning manageable risks into disasters. In developing regions, rapid population growth and urbanization outpace institutional development. Multinational corporations sometimes exploit lax rules, while local operators lack training or capital for safe practices. International aid often focuses on immediate relief rather than systemic prevention, perpetuating vulnerability. Historical lessons reinforce this. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami prompted global early-warning improvements, yet many systems remain fragmented. The 2010 Haiti earthquake revealed how poor building codes in seismically active areas amplify tragedy. Post-disaster inquiries consistently point to the same failures: corruption, underinvestment, and siloed responses.

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The geometry of power: Algorithmic sovereignty in the 21st Century

Every epoch in human history has had its equation of power. The variables of the 21st century are data, compute, and models.

Meanwhile, generative AI systems began drafting legal briefs, diagnosing cancers, writing production-grade code, and shaping political narratives across democracies and autocracies alike. Every epoch in human history has had its equation of power. For the maritime empires of the 18th century, it was a simple function: hulls multiplied by cannons, projected across sea lanes. For the industrial states of the 19th, it became coal plus steel, raised to the power of mechanised labour. In the 20th century, the equation condensed into a stark symbol: $E = mc^2$. The variables of the 21st century are data (D), compute (C), and models (M). Increasingly, power resembles the function: $P = f(D, C, M)$.

We are living through a civilisational transition towards algorithmic sovereignty. This does not imply digital autarky. Nor is it the withdrawal from global technological exchange. Rather, it denotes the capacity of a political community to train and deploy advanced AI systems. The algorithmic state will derive authority from its capacity to predict, model, and optimise traffic flows, credit markets, missile trajectories, and public sentiment. If oil was the combustible substrate of the past generation, data is the probabilistic substrate of the 21st.

But data alone is inert. Like crude oil beneath desert sands, it acquires value only when refined. The refinery of the AI age is made up of three essential layers. The first is semiconductor fabrication, particularly the ability to produce advanced chips required for large-scale AI model training. The second is computing infrastructure, which includes high-performance data centres and cloud architectures capable of handling frontier workloads. The third is frontier model development itself: a neural network trained across billions of parameters, minimising loss functions through gradient descent, converging asymptotically toward prediction where each forward pass is a multiplication of matrices; each backward pass, a correction of error. What appears to the user as effortless cognition is, in reality, a symphony of linear algebra executed at planetary scale. States that command these layers will shape strategic hierarchies. The emerging competition around AI resembles earlier technological rivalries, but with a critical difference. Nuclear weapons, for all their destructive capacity, were tightly

controlled by states and confined to military doctrine. AI permeates everything - from financial systems and industrial production to intelligence gathering and battlefield decision-making. It is both infrastructure and weapon, both economic engine and instrument of statecraft. Whereas the nuclear age forced humanity to grapple with mutually assured destruction, the algorithmic age forces us to confront mutually assured acceleration. Three distinct models of sovereign AI development have begun to crystallise. The first is American: decentralised, venture-driven, and architected around private innovation, yet increasingly aligned with national strategy. Its strength lies in layered network effects and an alliance system that extends from Silicon Valley to Seoul. The CHIPS and Science Act channels tens of billions of dollars into domestic semiconductor fabrication. Defence agencies fund frontier AI research through DARPA, the Air Force Research Laboratory, and the Chief Digital and AI Office. Private firms such as OpenAI, Google DeepMind, and Anthropic drive model development at scale.

Hyperscale cloud providers like Amazon, Microsoft, and Google supply the computational backbone. Research universities such as Stanford and MIT sustain foundational talent pipelines. The state might not own the algorithm but it shapes incentives, restricts exports, funds foundational research, and mobilises private actors in moments of strategic urgency. Sovereignty here is diffused yet coordinated.

The second is Chinese: vertically integrated, state-directed, and fused with political authority. AI development is inseparable from industrial policy and civil-military fusion. The 'New Generation AI Development Plan' explicitly identifies AI as a core strategic industry. Provincial governments provide subsidies for chip fabrication plants. Firms such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Huawei develop large language models integrated directly into state services. Surveillance systems and computer vision platforms operate within a political architecture that prioritises control and stability. Breakthroughs in reinforcement learning or autonomous systems move fluidly from civilian labs to military doctrine. This is sovereign AI as a centralised command; infrastructural depth aligned tightly with state power.

The third, most clearly articulated in

Europe, locates sovereignty in regulation rather than scale. Without commanding the deepest pools of venture capital or the most advanced semiconductor ecosystems, European states have sought influence through normative power - crafting comprehensive frameworks on data governance and AI safety that aim to shape global markets. EU's AI Act establishes risk-based classifications and compliance obligations. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) reshaped data governance norms by default. In this conception, control over standards becomes a strategic asset.

Between these poles lies a fourth possibility, still contested, where nations like India must navigate and define their own digital destinies.

India, with its digital public infrastructure, demonstrates an ability to build state-enabled platforms at continental scale without full state ownership of innovation. The question is whether this model can scale upward into frontier AI capabilities, or whether India will remain dependent on foundational models and semiconductor supply chains controlled elsewhere. First, for India, the stakes are structural. With one of the world's largest digital populations and a deep software talent base, the country possesses significant data capital. Yet, scale without compute is like potential without realisation. Advanced semiconductor fabrication remains conspicuous by its absence. High-performance computing clusters demand sustained capital investment. Research ecosystems require continuity measured in decades and insulation from electoral cycles.

Second, India's challenge is linguistic. With 22 major languages and hundreds of dialects, frontier AI systems trained predominantly on English-language corpora risk encoding structural linguistic hierarchies. Algorithmic sovereignty for India may therefore require foundational models trained deeply in Indic languages, thus embedding pluralism into the architecture itself. Third, the deeper question is whether a democracy of India's scale can sustain long-horizon technological investment without succumbing to regulatory volatility or policy discontinuity. Algorithmic sovereignty in India may ultimately hinge less on engineering capacity than on institutional stability.

Fourth, AI also confronts us with the delegation of cognition itself. When autonomous systems make consequential decisions, accountability cannot be outsourced to code. For India, a civilisation marked by diversity, pluralism, and deep traditions of ethical reasoning, the governance of AI cannot rely entirely on imported normative templates. What values are embedded in the algorithms that shape public life? Here, India has the opportunity to articulate a distinctive framework for governing intelligent machines - one that lies at the heart of democratic legitimacy and morality.

Fifth, there is also a geopolitical opportunity for India. As supply chains fragment between American and Chinese blocs, India could position itself as a neutral compute and model-development hub.

Without these pillars, India risks becoming a mere consumer rather than a creator. The historical analogy may be instructive. In earlier centuries, states that failed to master the dominant technologies of the era often found themselves subordinated to those that did. Industrialisation divided the world between producers and dependents; the nuclear age separated deterrent powers from the strategically vulnerable. AI may produce a similar hierarchy.

A caveat is in order: absolute self-sufficiency is neither realistic nor desirable. Modern technological systems are inherently interdependent. The strategic objective is narrower but more demanding: control over critical layers that determine vulnerability. Autonomy at the margins is insufficient if dependence persists at the core. This is why debates about digital regulation, data governance, and technological partnerships are matters of grand strategy. The capacity to develop sovereign AI systems — trained on domestic data, operating on national infrastructure, and aligned with local ethical frameworks — will increasingly define political autonomy.

In this new geometry, the decisive advantage will belong to those who can align mathematics with strategy and infrastructure with imagination. And in that quiet convergence, the balance of power will be recalibrated.

(Pranav Jain is an IPS officer currently undergoing training as part of his probation. Pranav Sharma, currently on probation, is an IFS officer.)

The Dystopian Decade Ahead: Exponential Tech Will Destroy Jobs, Democracy And The State Itself

The misunderstanding most aggressively promoted — including by AI companies themselves — is that there will be net job creation.

The decade ahead is a dystopian one, irrespective of whether you sit on the techno-optimist or the doomsayer side of the debate. The fundamental relationships that hold up our economy are changing right before our eyes, and the system has not even begun to acknowledge it. These cataclysmic shifts are unfolding in real time, and because they are unfolding in real time, we cannot see their full impact on our society, economy and lives.

Take the relationship between capital investment and job creation. This relationship has been broken for over a decade. Every other country has at least recognised it; some have started to address it. In India, the system continues to behave as if the 1990s never ended. States hand out land, incentives and tax holidays based on the size of the capital investment announced, not the number of jobs actually created. Every year, each state hosts its own investment festival, where top industrialists are almost forced to announce large investments. A few years ago, while running a multi-state newspaper, we did the math: the actual investment was less than 1 percent of the announced number in the first year, and less than 0.1 percent by the second. That is a different scandal.

Coming back to the broken relationship between capital invested and jobs created — if the investment is in manufacturing, the higher the capital deployed, the more automation on the shop floor, and the fewer people employed. A semiconductor plant is the textbook illustration. Because of the strict air-conditioning parameters — no pollutants are allowed — there is nobody on the shop floor. The handful of people employed are all behind consoles. Tens of billions of dollars in capital equipment result in direct employment of fewer than 100 people at the plant level. The same trend is visible from cement plants to steel plants. Automation is rising rapidly, human headcount is dropping exponentially, and the combination of AI and robotics is going to push this even further. This is not a future scenario. It is the current reality. Automation in manufacturing is already in its fourth generation. AI in services is in its third. Both are now growing exponentially.

This brings us to the dishonest comparison that AI optimists keep deploying — that we have seen this



before, that every wave of technology has destroyed some jobs and created more. The shift from agriculture to manufacturing took almost 170 years. There was time for multiple generations to prepare, retrain and adjust to this shift. A farmer's grandson could become a factory worker. A factory worker's grandson could become a software engineer. The transitions were generational, and the entire social architecture — schools, universities, labour laws, welfare states — was built around the assumption that change happens at human speed.

When people invoke that history to dismiss the present, they forget three things.

One, the steam engine was not an exponential technology in the way AI is. It did not iterate and improve itself with every exchange with humans on an exponential basis. It did not get cheaper, faster and smarter every six months because of its own use. AI does. Every conversation, every query and every deployed model become training data for the next, more capable model. There is no comparable feedback loop in the history of industrial technology.

Two, every previous technology gave humans time to adapt, learn and adopt it, so that they were not left out of the workstream or the earning stream. When the assembly line arrived, the worker did not vanish overnight; he was redeployed, retrained, absorbed. AI does not give this runway. The model that replaced the call-centre agent in 2023 has already replaced the L1 coder in 2025 and is gunning for the L3

analyst.

Three, the earning stream from previous technologies was not consolidated with a few companies that captured all the upside benefits of adoption while throwing humans out of the loop. Steam and electricity diffused. Railways and telecoms were eventually regulated as utilities. The upside got shared, however imperfectly, across capital, labour and the state. AI is being built and owned by a handful of companies that capture nearly all the upside while pushing humans out of the loop. The diffusion model that made previous transitions tolerable does not apply here.

A similar trend is already playing out in the IT and BPO sectors. The rise in digital crime — digital arrests, email and WhatsApp fraud, fake call centres — is, in my reading, a direct consequence of job disruption in the BPO sector. Most organisations, CXOs and industry associations are not prepared for the societal-level disruption and crime wave their automation has unleashed. BPO was the first sector to adopt RPA, chatbots and AI in its processes. This led to the firing of a large number of customer service employees trained, very specifically, to sell services over the phone and extract information from strangers. Most BPOs today are a fraction of their pre-COVID employment peak. That trained workforce did not vanish. It went somewhere. A significant slice of it has turned to crime because it could not find honest work that paid even half as well.

The displacement effects of automation are not contested in serious economic

literature. Daron Acemoglu — who has since won a Nobel — laid them out clearly in a 2019 paper that has aged disturbingly well. He noted, in essence: the presumption that all technologies raise aggregate labour demand simply because they raise productivity is wrong. Some automation technologies entail sizable displacement effects with only modest productivity gains, particularly when the displaced workers were cheap to begin with and the automated technology is only marginally better than them. Because of this displacement effect, we should not expect automation to create wage increases commensurate with productivity growth. Automation by itself always reduces the labour share of industry value added and tends to reduce the overall labour share in the economy. The reason we historically saw stable labour shares is that other technological changes simultaneously generated new labour-intensive tasks. Whether labour retains a role in production depends on whether that counterbalancing process continues — and there is no guarantee that it will. The point Acemoglu makes carefully, with footnotes and equations, is the point our policymakers, economists and CXOs continue to ignore. In manufacturing, the use of capital to substitute labour has been studied since the 1980s. When you point out that AI is doing the same substitution in services, you are told it cannot happen. The same people who watched welding robots replace welders insist that no model can replace a coder, an

analyst, a paralegal or a radiologist. They cannot see that the trend that replaced labour with machines on the shop floor is now replacing labour with software at the desk.

Meanwhile, every person with a keyboard is producing uninformed opinions on LinkedIn and in WhatsApp groups. Your opinion is yours; it is not a fact, and it is not true simply because your under-researched brain finds the past data inconvenient and refuses to engage with it. There is now a new breed of commentator — the ones who make up their opinion first and then go to an AI to write their post for them. These AI-opinion uncles have forgotten that writing is thinking only if you do the writing yourself. And even when you do, if your brain does not have the data, the output is still muddled.

Muddled thinking is not limited to AI uncles, though. It runs through the entire meritocratic class — the same class that runs our systems but cannot project a trend it has not been spoon-fed by a professor or a teacher. The fact that we are entering a dystopian decade of exponential labour displacement is a trend this class cannot see, because a dystopian outcome is hard to imagine when your career has been built on a steady diet of optimism. Anything that puts a dent in the optimism bubble is filed away as negativity and ignored. I know this

because I have been having this exact conversation with policymakers, bureaucrats, industry leaders, CXOs, technologists and association heads every week, every day. Everyone wants to hide behind cheerful historical analogies their chattering brains can conjure up. Nobody wants to sit with the discomfort that exponential technology has been reshaping our lives, society and economy at a pace our linear brains have not caught up with. The misunderstanding most aggressively promoted — including by AI companies themselves — is that there will be net job creation. The tech-bro version of this argument shows up in different costumes. The latest one is that replacing COBOL with AI is a trillion-dollar opportunity, since AI has brought the cost of a line of code down from a thousand dollars to two or three. What this argument conveniently hides is the nature of the technology itself. AI is exponential. If it can crash the cost from a thousand dollars to two dollars, it can crash it from two dollars to two cents. And if AI is doing the work, it will replace coders faster than firms can retrain them. But the conversation cannot end at jobs, because jobs are only the first domino. When you push humans out of the manufacturing line, they migrate to construction and gig work. When you push BPO workers out and they cannot find anything else,

some of them turn to crime. Now ask the next question, the one the tech bros do not want asked: what happens when humans are thrown out of the earning loop entirely? What happens when the economic system itself becomes substantially independent of human labour? The first thing that breaks is not the labour market. It is the state. A state runs on tax collected from human income — directly through income tax, indirectly through consumption taxes that depend on human earning power. AI companies, almost without exception, sit outside this taxation structure. They are headquartered in low-tax jurisdictions, they book profits through transfer pricing across continents, and they have optimised their structures so thoroughly that no single state has meaningful jurisdiction over them. They have engineered themselves to be largely uncontrollable by any single national government. Now stack this against an AI-driven displacement of human labour. Humans earn less or stop earning. They pay less tax, or no tax. They become dependent on the state for welfare and a basic income. The state, in turn, earns less from its traditional tax base and becomes increasingly dependent on these supra-state AI companies — for revenue, infrastructure and even the basic plumbing of public services. The balance of power inside a democracy

then shifts from the elected state to a handful of AI companies that are nominally based somewhere but answerable nowhere. The democratic system, which assumed that the state was the most powerful actor in the room, quietly stops working in the way the textbooks said it would.

This is not a doomsday scenario. It sounds extreme only because we have not named it. Some variation of this dynamic is already underway in the United States, Taiwan and South Korea, where a small number of technology and semiconductor companies have grown larger and more strategically critical than entire ministries. The state in each of these countries is increasingly negotiating with, rather than regulating, its own corporate sector. The direction of dependency has quietly reversed. The workers who once found jobs in manufacturing and construction have already become gig workers. The BPO workers who lost their jobs and could not find new ones have, in too many cases, turned to crime. Will the displaced coders also turn to white-collar and AI-enabled fraud as their jobs disappear? Will the state, slowly starved of revenue, find itself unable to police them even if it wants to? Are we going to see a rise in crime, and a hollowing out of the state itself, in the dystopian decade ahead?

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After 2.5 lakh people lost their jobs, Sam Altman and others now stop hyping AI

Sam Altman and Dario Amodei have begun retreating from their earlier warnings that AI would wipe out white-collar jobs. The shift comes after more than 2.5 lakh tech layoffs and amid signs that AI is costlier to deploy than expected.

For the better part of the last year, the script for the future of work was written in the language of an impending apocalypse. Silicon Valley prophets took turns on conference stages and podcasts to deliver a stark warning that AI would soon gut the white-collar workforce. All of it. Nobody was safe, apparently because AI was supposed to do everything, better than a human could, without tiring and with efficiency that humans could never match.

But where employees saw a threat to their livelihood, organisations saw opportunity for their bottomline. They too heard the warnings, delivered by OpenAI boss Sam Altman, Anthropic boss Dario Amodei and other tech leaders as a way to brag about the supposed potency of their AI tools. And when they heard these warnings, they acted. They believed that AI can indeed replace employees. They slashed their workforce, to cut costs or to go all-in on AI.

Now in 2026 that chorus of doom is slowly fading. Instead, it is now converging on a line that says AI and humans can coexist in a workplace. Two of the most influential AI gurus, Altman and Amodei, are virtually admitting their early intuitions were wrong. The grand proclamations on jobs are being replaced by a complex, messy reality where human workers remain necessary. The technology itself is proving far more expensive to deploy than anyone anticipated.

Altman, for example, on multiple occasions painted a doom and gloom scenario in 2025. This in turn sent the signal to organisations that AI was good enough to replace human employees. In June 2025, Altman issued specific warning that entry-level roles were at serious risk of immediate elimination. Yet, during an interview at a Commonwealth Bank of Australia conference in Sydney this week, Altman completely flipped the script. He told the audience that he no longer believes the world is headed for a jobs apocalypse. "I'm delighted to be wrong about this," Altman said. "I thought there would have been more impact on entry-level white-collar jobs being eliminated by now than has actually happened."

He noted that he now understands more about why job apocalypse hasn't occurred, acknowledging that this was an area where his professional



intuitions were simply off. "We really do care about our interactions with people," Altman said. "This updated me to thinking that the jobs picture is likely to be very different than we thought."

This came just weeks after he termed CEOs "tone-deaf" for replacing employees with AI tools, while casually side-stepping the idea that these CEOs were fired up in their zeal by the promises and tall claims that AI gurus like Altman made in 2024 and 2025.

"I know some AI CEOs are saying things like 50 per cent of the jobs are gonna go away. To say nothing of how tone deaf it is for someone to be saying my company's gonna eliminate 50 per cent of the jobs I don't think that's the right way to think about it," he had said in the first week of May.

This week in Australia he acknowledged the change in his stance "People are like, oh you could have saved the world a lot of fear mongering and a lot of doom and gloom but at the time I was like, I see this is a real risk we should probably talk about it, and it still may," Altman said, adding, he was "obviously grateful" he was proven wrong.

Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei too has been one of the most ardent job doomayers, claiming in 2025 that up to half of all entry-level white-collar jobs would be wiped out within five years, potentially driving global unemployment up to 10 or 20 percent. Turns out, AI may be too expensive, in some cases, even more expensive than

human workers. Therefore, the business case for replacing human workers with AI is beginning to fall apart already.

Amodei too is slowly inching towards a way where it is more of AI and human collaboration instead of AI replacing humans. "Even if you're only doing five per cent of the task, that five per cent gets super-amplified the AI does the other 95 per cent, and you become far more productive," Amodei said a few months ago.

It seems that change is in the air when it comes to AI and jobs. Sadly, it is taking place after a brutal one and a half year that has already impacted a large number of people, spreading anxiety and misery that job losses tend to bring.

Tech layoffs through May 2026 have breached the 1,15,000 threshold, rapidly closing in on the 1,24,000 total cuts recorded across the entirety of 2025. Meta, Amazon, and Snap have explicitly pointed to AI restructuring as a primary driver of these headcount reductions. Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a company that offers career assistance to laid-off employees, tracked nearly 50,000 job cuts through April of this year, where AI was cited as a core justification.

Now as Altman and Dario walk back a little, though it is not yet clear if their latest views are based on genuine insight or just an attempt to control anger that people have towards AI, people are trying to point out their

hypocrisy. That is because, in large part, the AI-driven layoffs have been fuelled by the AI cheerleading that tech leaders have indulged in.

Reacting to Altman's comments, full-stack developer Joseph N Aburu, wrote on X: "Sam Altman saying AI won't destroy jobs feels a bit convenient coming from the guy leading the charge on it. We'll see how this one actually plays out."

Evan Kirstel, a tech influencer, mused that it was all for show. He wrote: "Altman 2024: AI will eliminate entire classes of white-collar jobs. Altman this week: Delighted to be wrong. Amodei made the same pivot. Both weeks from trillion-dollar IPOs. Doom sold compute contracts. Optimism sells equity to retail."

Coming on the heels of reports that highlight how AI is proving to be more expensive than humans it is replacing, the comments from Amodei and Altman are sure to muddle the pool further.

AI has made the future of work and workplaces uncertain and that is not going to change anytime soon. But an equally big problem is the lack of clarity from people who are in the driver's seat. Because the rest of the world is taking their cues from what these people say. But if what they say in 2026 is different from what they said in 2025, it creates confusion. At least for over 2.5 lakh tech employees who have been laid off in the last 17-odd months this confusion has already created a lot of pain.

Said he'd be back for dinner: Indian-origin Uber driver killed in New Zealand crash

Indian-origin Uber driver Ramandeep Dhillon was killed in a two-vehicle crash on Te Puke Highway in New Zealand. His death has left his young family grieving as friends and the community rally around them.

An Indian-origin Uber driver living in New Zealand was killed in a road accident last week, leaving behind his wife and 18-month-old daughter, according to local media reports. Ramandeep Dhillon, 36, died in a two-vehicle crash on Te Puke Highway near Papamoa on May 13, Wednesday evening.

The accident took place around 7.15 pm between Bell Road and Poplar Lane. Police confirmed the following day that one person had died at the scene, while two people travelling in the other vehicle were injured. Dhillon, originally from Punjab in northwestern India, had moved to New Zealand on a student visa in 2015. He later returned briefly to India in 2024 to marry Veerpal Kaur before the couple settled together in Papamoa. The couple initially worked in kiwifruit orchards in the region. After the birth of their daughter, Kudrat, Dhillon started driving for Uber as the flexible work schedule allowed him to spend more time with his child.

According to Kaur, the family had spent



time together earlier on the day of the accident before Dhillon left home for work. He had told them he would return later for dinner. However, she did not hear from him for a while. Then a police officer arrived at their home later that night and informed her that her husband had died in the crash. "I cried, I cried, I cried," Kaur was quoted as saying by local media. "I felt that my life is ruined

now." Kaur said Dhillon had been excited about becoming a father and deeply loved spending time with his daughter. The couple named their daughter Kudrat, meaning "nature", reflecting his love for the outdoors. She said the family often spent time together visiting parks, gurudwaras, watching movies and going on long drives. Their daughter, she added, resembles her

father and has inherited his smile.

Dhillon's close friend, Gurlabh Singh, described him as a caring and cheerful person. "He's a nice guy, friendly, a good husband, a good daddy," Singh said.

The two had met while studying in New Zealand and remained close friends for over a decade. Singh said Dhillon always prioritised spending time with his daughter and would often return home during work breaks just to see her.

Singh was also among the first people who went searching for Dhillon after he failed to return home on time. He later learned that his friend had died at the scene of the crash. Dhillon's funeral was held on Wednesday and was attended by people from across New Zealand. Meanwhile, an online fundraising page on givealittle platform created for the family has raised more than 33,000 New Zealand dollars to help cover funeral expenses, rent and other living costs.

Ex-JPMorgan banker's lawyer resigns ahead of sex assault lawsuit hearing

Daniel Kaiser withdrew from representing Chirayu Rana hours before a New York hearing in his lawsuit against JPMorgan and Lorna Hajdini. The exit leaves Rana without counsel for now as the case intensifies with denials, a countersuit and a fight over anonymity.

Former JPMorgan banker Chirayu Rana faced a major setback on Tuesday after his attorney Daniel Kaiser abruptly withdrew from representing him just hours before a scheduled court appearance tied to his explosive lawsuit against the banking giant and a senior executive.

According to sources cited in The New York Post and The Wall Street Journal, court filings showed that the attorney formally requested to be discharged from the case, leaving Rana temporarily without legal representation.

The surprise exit came shortly before a New York court hearing where Rana was expected to fight for the right to continue proceeding anonymously under the name "John Doe". According to the filing, Rana currently has no replacement lawyer and will represent himself "pro se" unless he hires new counsel.

LAWSUIT TRIGGERED MAJOR CONTROVERSY

Rana, a former vice president at JPMorgan Chase, filed the lawsuit



earlier this year accusing senior executive Lorna Hajdini of sexually assaulting and abusing him during his time at the bank.

The lawsuit also alleged that Rana experienced racism and retaliation within JPMorgan's leveraged finance division.

JPMorgan and Hajdini have strongly denied the accusations.

In a formal court filing submitted last week, JPMorgan described Rana's allegations as "false and malicious".



The bank stated that it "denies that Plaintiff was sexually assaulted, harassed, discriminated or retaliated against". JPMorgan also said it reserved the right to pursue its own claims against Rana over alleged wrongdoing.

HAJDINI ACCUSES RANA OF DEFAMATION

The legal fight escalated further after Hajdini filed a countersuit accusing Rana of defamation.

According to court documents, Hajdini "categorically and unequivocally" denied

the accusations and argued that the allegations had "ruined her reputation and destroyed her life".

A spokesperson for Rana previously insisted that his claims were true and would eventually be proven in court.

Meanwhile, JPMorgan has continued rejecting the allegations publicly and privately. The bank has previously said an internal investigation found Rana's claims had "no merit". Reports also claimed JPMorgan earlier offered Rana a settlement worth around \$1 million, though he rejected the proposal. The attorney had previously defended Rana aggressively and criticised media coverage surrounding the lawsuit. At one stage, Kaiser reportedly claimed media outlets would be "embarrassed" by their reporting once more evidence emerged. Kaiser is also known for representing several victims connected to deceased sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, including accuser Jennifer Araoz. Neither Kaiser nor Rana publicly commented on the separation following the court submission.

Singapore charges Indian man for housing 13 immigration overstayers

An Indian national was charged in Singapore with harbouring 13 overstayers following an ICA raid. Two Singaporeans were also charged in related employment cases as authorities outlined the penalties for such offences.



A 26-year-old Indian national has been charged in Singapore for employing and harbouring 13 immigration offenders from India after their visit passes had expired, authorities said.

Kanojiya Riken, along with two Singaporeans were charged on May 21 for immigration offences, the Immigration &

Checkpoints Authority (ICA) said in a statement on Thursday.

Riken was charged for harbouring 13 other Indian immigration offenders, aged between 19 and 44 years old, without conducting due diligence checks to ensure that they held valid passes to remain in Singapore, the statement

said. The immigration offenders had remained unlawfully in Singapore after the expiry of their visit passes, it said.

On March 3, ICA officers raided a flat in Singapore. In the flat, they found 13 Indian nationals who had all overstayed in the island-state after their visit passes had expired. The offenders comprised 11 men and two women aged between 19 and 44 years old.

According to investigations, Riken had allowed them to stay in the flat for various periods between December 2025 and March 2026. He allegedly did this without conducting due diligence checks to ensure that they held valid passes to remain in Singapore. He was also arrested on March 3 and charged with harbouring

immigration offenders on May 21. The ICA also charged Song Yi Da, a 37-year-old Singaporean of Chinese origin, on May 21 for employing an Indian man, Rajappa Raju, 39, whom he knew did not possess a valid work permit.

He has been deported and is barred from re-entering Singapore. Another Singaporean of Indian origin, Suba Priyadarshini, was charged for employing an Indian man whom she knew did not possess a valid work permit to work and remain in Singapore, said the ICA.

Suba, 32, was charged with employing an Indian man, Muniyan Selvaraj Prakash, 26, who had remained unlawfully in Singapore after his Short-Term Visit Pass (STVP) expired on February 24, 2025. Muniyan has

been deported and is barred from re-entering Singapore. A person found guilty of employing overstayers and/or illegal immigrants may be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than six months and up to two years and a fine of up to SGD6,000, the ICA said. A person found guilty of recklessly or knowingly harbouring overstayers and/or illegal immigrants may be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than six months and up to two years and a fine of up to SGD6,000. A person found guilty of negligently harbouring overstayers and/or illegal immigrants may be sentenced to a fine of up to SGD6,000 or to imprisonment for a term of up to 12 months, or to both, the ICA said.

Rubio's Taj Mahal photo sparks Iran jibe on US grasp of ancient civilisations

Marco Rubio posed at the Taj Mahal and got a history lesson from Iran. Trump stood next to trees in China older than the United States. Washington keeps threatening civilisations it clearly never studied.

Marco Rubio walked up to the Taj Mahal, took a photograph, posted it, and got cooked by Iran on the internet. Not with missiles. Not with sanctions. With a sentence. Tehran pointed out, politely but devastatingly, that the Taj Mahal was built for a Persian queen. A woman of Persian descent, Persian culture, Persian identity, all of it carved into Indian marble. The man who flies around issuing threats against ancient civilisations had just posed for a tourist photo inside one of their greatest monuments without knowing it.

Iran did not raise its voice. It just pointed. And that, precisely, is the difference between a country with 3,000 years of memory and one that still calls a 250-year-old building historic. The question this moment raises is not a small one. Does Washington actually know who it is talking to? The answer, increasingly, appears to be no.

Rubio and the broader Washington establishment

have made a habit of threatening Iran with extinction. Literal extinction. "End of civilisation" language, deployed with confidence, as though the target is something fragile and new. But Persia predates Rome. It predates Greece as a unified culture. It survived Alexander, survived the Mongols, survived occupation and bombing and decades of sanctions, and it remains. The language is intact. The poetry is intact. The identity is intact.

When Washington tells Tehran it faces the end of its civilisation, Tehran hears something specific. It hears a country that never read a history book threatening a country that wrote them. The same pattern plays out with China, just with different scenery.

Washington's strategy is straightforward enough on paper. Cut off the supply chains, isolate the economy, apply pressure until something breaks. It is the kind of approach that works against a fragile new state. It is not the

kind of approach that works against a 4,000-year-old civilisation with its own philosophical traditions, its own systems of governance, and its own very long memory of watching outside powers come and go.

During a recent visit to China, Trump came across trees older than the United States of America. Just trees, standing there, having outlasted every empire that ever threatened the country they grew in. The symbolism is almost too convenient, but it is real. The country Washington wants to isolate has trees that predate the American republic. The river does not care about the dam.

This is the strategic mistake Washington repeats. It treats Iran and China as modern rivals, as competitors in the same market who can be outmanoeuvred and pressured into submission. But neither country thinks in election cycles. They think in centuries. They have watched



far more powerful empires arrive, threaten, and collapse while they remained. The Mongols conquered China. China absorbed the Mongols. Alexander reached Persia. Persia outlasted his entire empire by two millennia.

That is not ancient trivia. That is the context in which every American threat lands, and it lands badly.

Rubio's Taj Mahal photograph was not just an embarrassing moment on social media. It was a metaphor for the entire posture. America walked into a monument built by the civilisation it threatens, took a selfie, and called it diplomacy.

You cannot end something that was old when you were nothing.

We voted here for years: Illegal migrants crowd Bengal border amid crackdown

Many migrants at the Bengal border said they had worked as domestic helpers, labourers and rag-pickers in Kolkata's outskirts before being forced to vacate rented homes. Several admitted crossing illegally through agents, while others said they were brought to India as children and barely remembered Bangladesh.



Fear and uncertainty are unfolding at the Hakimpur border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, where dozens of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants have gathered over the past two days seeking to return to Bangladesh. This comes amid growing pressure from authorities and the setting up of holding centres for illegal migrants across the state.

Carrying bags, blankets and identity documents, families who had spent years living in India now wait near the border, to cross back into their country. At the Hakimpur border outpost, police have set up a registration desk where details of those arriving are being recorded. Officials are verifying Bangladeshi documents and preparing a database before migrants are shifted to holding centres. According to officials on the ground, records of more than 350 Bangladeshis have already been prepared since Monday.

Around 50 to 60 people were present at the border on Wednesday, many of them from Kolkata's New Town, Hatiyara, Khardah, Dum Dum and Dankuni areas. Most admitted they had entered India illegally through agents or middlemen over the years in search of work. "We are poor people. That is why we came here," said Salam Dali, a carpenter who said he entered India from Khulna district in Bangladesh around five years ago after paying Rs 8,000-10,000 to a middleman. "The government told us to leave because we do not have documents. So now we are leaving," he said while waiting near the border with his wife and child.

Several migrants said the atmosphere had changed sharply in recent months, with police visits, document checks

and fear of detention forcing them to leave.

Hidoy Mulla, a young man born in 2003 who claimed he grew up in Madhyamgram after his parents migrated from Bangladesh in 2001, said local police had repeatedly demanded proof of residence prior to 2002.

"I was born in 2003. My parents are completely uneducated. They don't even know ABCD. How were they supposed to make documents?" he said.

Mulla said he possessed Aadhaar, PAN, ration card and school certificates, but his voter ID applications were rejected multiple times.

"I grew up here. This culture

is part of me. My parents feel they are returning to their country, but for us it feels like we are leaving our country and going to another country,' he said.

"What mistake did we make? The mistake was of our parents. They brought us here."

He added that the family no longer had land or relatives to depend on in Bangladesh.

"What will I do there? There is no friend circle, no future for me there," he said. Among those gathered near the border was a visually impaired family from Khardah -- Mohammad Shamsur Rahaman, his wife Asiya Khatun and his brother Bilal -- all of whom are blind and survived by begging on trains and streets in Kolkata.

"We are requesting the authorities to send us back immediately," Rahaman said.

The family claimed they had lived in India for over a decade and had obtained Aadhaar and other documents while staying in the Khardah area.

Another migrant, Mohammad Ali Munshi, who claimed he was born in India after his father crossed the

border decades ago, said fear and pressure had forced the family to leave.

"I only had Aadhaar and ration card. I left everything behind because none of it is useful now."

One of the most striking stories came from Mafuza Khatun, originally from Bangladesh's Khulna district, who said she had lived in India for years and voted in elections multiple times.

She claimed she had Aadhaar and voter ID cards prepared through local political and municipal channels.

"We voted here for years. Now our voter IDs have been cancelled," she said. "For the government, we are people from another country, so now we have to go back to Bangladesh."

Many women at the border said they worked as domestic helpers, rag-pickers and labourers in Kolkata's outskirts before being forced to leave rented accommodations.

Several migrants admitted they had crossed the border illegally through agents operating on both sides. Some said they were brought into India as children and had little memory of

Bangladesh.

Authorities have shifted many of those arriving at Hakimpur to temporary holding centres set up across North 24 Parganas district. The largest centre has been established at Tentulia inside the Pather Saathi building, where officials said 116 Bangladeshis are currently being housed.

Health department teams, cooks and police personnel have been deployed at the facility to manage food, medical care and security.

Officials said more holding centres were being prepared in the district and those gathered at Hakimpur would eventually be "pushed back" to Bangladesh.

However, the pushback process, which was active till Tuesday night, has reportedly been halted for now. Local sources suspect Bangladesh authorities may have temporarily stopped accepting undocumented migrants from India.

The Border Security Force (BSF) has not officially commented on the development despite repeated attempts to seek clarification.

South Asia and the Rise of Glocal Terror

The Afghanistan-Pakistan region has been an abiding obsession with observers of geopolitical developments, whether it be local skirmishes between 'khels' or the rivalries between the great powers. The mass of literature on the subject is extensive, but it can never be enough. To this body of knowledge, Anju Gupta's *Glocal Terror in South Asia* is a fascinating addition – a work that any serious student of Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Asia studies and terrorism must take note of.

Gupta has examined in depth the emergence of terrorism in South Asia, including the formation of the al Qaeda. Interestingly, she does not view terrorism merely as a series of isolated, violent acts carried out by non-state actors. Instead, she interprets it in the larger context of decades-long geopolitical machinations and interventions, both within and beyond the region, that have used – and continue to use – ideological radicalisation as a political instrument. Gupta provides a concise historical overview of Afghanistan, including its internal political and social dynamics. She traces the evolution of terrorism in South Asia from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan till

the present day. The author situates the decade-long Afghan jihad within the broader context of the US-USSR proxy conflict, rather than viewing it merely through the lens of the Soviet-Afghan war – a characterisation commonly advocated by many Western observers. In doing so, she brings out several critical dimensions of the proxy war whose persisting impact on South Asian security has often been overlooked in major works on the subject.

One of Gupta's central arguments is that terrorism in South Asia did not arise spontaneously, but evolved through a complex interplay of geopolitical strategies, ideological mobilisation, and external interventions. She examines the origins of the term 'global jihad,' a concept that has frequently been conflated with global terrorism. She assembles a range of evidence to argue that what initially began as a localised armed struggle by the Afghan mujahideen against Soviet forces gradually transformed into a transnational jihadist movement by external actors. Her book reveals how Arab allies of the United States facilitated the mobilisation of thousands of radicalised Arab volunteers

to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, legitimising their participation through a fatwa of 'global jihad' issued by the Palestinian-Jordanian cleric Abdullah Azzam.

The author draws on credible sources to note that, during the initial three years, the fatwa failed to draw significant number of Arab volunteers – in fact fewer than 50 – to the conflict zone, partly because the notion of a 'global jihad' had no established basis in Islamic tradition, and partly because it was not endorsed by any prominent contemporary theologian nor any major Islamist movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood. It was in fact a small but influential group of Arabs who became the face of mobilisation of radical elements into the region, that eventually established the first iteration of al Qaeda in Peshawar. Such Arabs included Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri. Gupta introduces the distinctive term 'Glocal Terror' for non-state actors who, while rooted in local contexts, remain embedded in transnational networks and simultaneously advance both local and global geo-political objectives, often driven by divergent inspirations.

Congo businessman, 3 others isolated in Ahmedabad over suspected Ebola symptoms

The businessman, aged 37, was hospitalised with symptoms after his arrival in India from Congo earlier this month. He had landed in Mumbai. The man was admitted to a hospital in Vadodara on May 26 after complaining of a fever and cold.

A businessman from Congo and three individuals who came into contact with him have been admitted to isolation wards at separate hospitals in Ahmedabad, and their samples have been sent for Ebola virus testing, Gujarat Health Minister Praful Pansheriya said on Wednesday. The businessman, identified as 37-year-old Amuri Lokula, was hospitalised with symptoms after his arrival in India from Congo earlier this month. He had landed in Mumbai. The man stayed in Mumbai for five days after his arrival in India from Congo, and in Silvassa and Daman over the next few days. On May 22, he reached Vadodara. On May 26, he was admitted to a hospital in the city after complaining of a fever and cold. After doctors in Vadodara got to know about Lokula's travel history, he was referred to a government hospital in Ahmedabad, where he has been kept in an isolation ward.

The man has been kept under



observation and tests are being conducted, with reports still awaited.

The admitted patient is currently stable and safe, and his temperature is under control, Pansheriya said, adding that the people associated with the patient are not showing any symptoms.

"Two other individuals who had accompanied him have also been admitted to isolated wards at SVP Hospital in Ahmedabad as a precautionary measure. Another person who came in contact with these individuals, has also been isolated," the

minister added.

WOMAN TESTS NEGATIVE IN BENGALURU

Earlier this week, a 28-year-old woman from Uganda was isolated in Bengaluru after she was suspected of suffering from Ebola. She, however, later tested negative, according to Karnataka Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao.

The woman, who had arrived from an Ebola-affected region, was moved from a hotel to the state-run Epidemic Diseases Hospital in Bengaluru on Tuesday, May 26, after she developed mild symptoms such as body aches, officials said.

The ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on May 17.

According to the United Nations body, Ebola is a severe, often fatal illness affecting humans and other primates.

UPSC aspirant gangrape accused changes 18 SIM cards, shifts hideouts to dodge cops

A University of Delhi student has alleged that she was drugged, confined and gang-raped in Lucknow. Police have formed four teams, announced rewards and are pursuing two absconding accused.

The accused in the alleged gangrape of a UPSC aspirant in Lucknow changed nearly 18 SIM cards and frequently switched locations while on the run to evade arrest, police said. The survivor, a BA Honours student at a college affiliated with the University of Delhi, alleged that she was drugged, held captive for three days and gangraped after being taken from Charbagh railway station to a room in Sushant Golf City earlier this month. Police further pointed out that four teams have been formed to investigate the case, and a reward of Rs 25,000 each has been announced for the arrest of the absconding main accused, Shivam Yadav, and his associate, Shani Yadav. The survivor recorded her statement before a court on Tuesday, while



police said they have detained one suspect for questioning and are examining the contacts of the accused. According to the allegations, the survivor was travelling to Delhi on May 15 when she contacted Shivam Yadav, whom she knew. Police said he allegedly brought her

from Charbagh railway station to a room in Sushant Golf City. The survivor alleged that she was then drugged and held captive for three days, during which she was allegedly gang-raped.

Police said the accused allegedly sent her to Delhi by train on May 18 after her health deteriorated,

and then went absconding. During the investigation, police found that the two accused allegedly changed nearly 18 SIM cards and frequently switched locations while on the run to avoid arrest, which made it difficult to trace them. Investigators also found that the survivor had earlier

stayed in Lucknow twice with Shivam, police said, adding that all angles are being examined as part of the probe. A police team reached Prayagraj on Monday and conducted raids at possible hideouts linked to Shivam Yadav. However, his family reportedly

returned home. The investigation is continuing in Lucknow, with police pursuing leads linked to the two absconding accused, questioning a detained suspect and examining the accused persons' contacts, while the survivor's court statement has also been recorded.

Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi: A doctrine that has not yet met its test

Somnath shows what India's spiritual economy can build. Char Dham shows what happens when it forgets the mountain underneath.

On May 11, 2026, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood at Prabhas Patan in Gujarat and led the Somnath Amrut Mahotsav, marking 75 years since the temple's 1951 reconstruction. This event is noteworthy not just for its commemorative value, but because it exemplifies the government's operating doctrine: linking spiritual heritage to economic and social development.

The occasion fell within the broader Somnath Swabhiman Parv, which commemorates the 1,000-year anniversary of the first attack on the temple in 1026. A commemorative postage stamp and a special Rs 75 coin were released.

There was a flypast by the Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran team, and a speech reinforced the government's central philosophy, summed up in the phrase "Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi." Development as well as heritage. Cultural sites, the Prime Minister said, are not obstacles to progress but centres of it.

Take the claim seriously, and the case for it is real. The practical impact of this doctrine has been observable over the last decade, applied everywhere from Varanasi to Ujjain to Ayodhya, with Kedarnath, the Kartarpur Corridor, the Buddhist Circuit and now Somnath all part of the same effort. Nothing on this scale has been attempted by any Indian government before, and the numbers reflect that.

According to the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department, Ayodhya drew 2.39 crore visitors in 2022, 5.75 crore in 2023, and 16.44 crore in 2024, the year of the Ram Mandir consecration. Varanasi has grown from around 68 lakh visitors in 2019 to over 8 crore by 2023,

surpassing Agra and Goa as a domestic destination. Faith-based travel has become an increasingly visible part of India's domestic tourism economy in recent years. Industry reports, including those published by CBRE, suggest that the broader spiritual tourism sector is likely to continue growing over the next decade.

Against this backdrop, the criticisms warrant attention as well. Yes, the hotel chains and the big contractors have done very well out of the corridors. That is true and unsurprising.

Less remarked on is the smaller economy that has grown around the same footfall. Since the Kashi Vishwanath corridor opened in late 2021, local businesses in Varanasi have noticed a rise in tourist activity and earnings. Indian business newspapers and hospitality surveys have highlighted more demand for small traders and service workers in the temple area.

omnath also now attracts millions of pilgrims each year. This supports a wide network of small local businesses across Saurashtra. Much of the change is visible in the small everyday economy around these sites. In practical terms, pilgrimage traffic has boosted local economies. These economies had long remained at the margins of mainstream development.

Alongside these economic benefits, there is also a quieter cultural argument worth registering. India's creative economy is significantly undermonetised compared to those of East Asia, and pilgrimage circuits are among the few delivery mechanisms through which traditional crafts, music, food, and storytelling can reach a paying

audience at scale.

A weaver's son who can sell to crores of visitors a year has options that his father did not. To dismiss this as mere commercialisation of the sacred is to miss what it actually represents for the people whose inheritances are being economically revalued.

However, these gains leave the doctrine open on one front, which is ecological, and here the record is harder to defend. Look at Char Dham.

The Rs 12,000 crore Char Dham Pariyojana, a road-widening project covering nearly 890 km of national highways across Uttarakhand, was designed to give pilgrims faster, all-weather access. In 2024, a peer-reviewed paper in *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* surveyed the Rishikesh–Joshimath stretch of NH-7 and recorded more than 300 road-blocking landslides along a 247-kilometre corridor in the aftermath of the September–October 2022 rainfall.

The paper identified slope, rainfall, rock type and road widening as the main factors driving the occurrence of these landslides. Across Uttarakhand as a whole, reporting based on state and SDRF data, including by the Migration Story and the Social Policy Research Foundation, places landslide deaths between 2015 and 2023 at close to 300, with thousands of landslide events recorded in that period. Joshimath, the town pilgrims pass through on the way to Badrinath, was declared a subsidence zone in January 2023. Over 900 of its buildings cracked. One in every five became unfit to live in.

The impact of these ecological issues became even more apparent during the

2025 yatra season, making the climate dimension explicit. According to the Dehradun-based Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation, which tracks the pilgrimage annually, the first four months of the 2025 season saw 55 days when no pilgrim reached the temples, and another 89 days when fewer than 1,000 did.

Yamunotri and Gangotri were the worst affected. The disruption was driven by landslides, flash floods, and extreme rainfall, all of which climate change models indicate will intensify in the western Himalayas. The foundation's founder, Anoop Nautiyal, has said the disasters have "broken the backbone" of Uttarakhand's pilgrimage-driven economy.

This is where the doctrine runs out of completed thought. The economic and cultural argument for Vikas Bhi and Virasat Bhi can be defended. On the climate side, the same argument is much harder to sustain with the available evidence. What Char Dham seems to be telling us is clear. The model of mass scaling, all-weather connectivity, and rapid throughput is in active tension with the geology and climate of the regions where many of India's most sacred sites are located.

The same logic will eventually catch up with Kedarnath and Vaishno Devi. It will also affect the new corridors being planned in Bihar around the Vishnupad and Mahabodhi temples, as well as any future development in the fragile zones of the Himalayas or the coasts.

None of this is really an argument against the doctrine itself. If anything, it is an argument for thinking it through more completely.

Poor in India paying more of income as tax due to GST, says LSE expert, faces flak

An anthropologist at the London School of Economics, Mukulika Banerjee, argued that poorer Indians pay a larger share of their income in GST than the rich. Experts, however, countered that most daily-use essentials consumed by poorer households are either GST-free or taxed at just 5%.



The poor in India are paying a higher proportion of their income in tax due to the Goods and Services Tax (GST), claimed Mukulika Banerjee, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics, in a podcast. Experts, however, fact-checked her, saying that the basket of products used commonly in India, including by the poor, is mostly untaxed or faces 5% GST at best.

In a podcast with Pervaiz Alam, a former BBC journalist, Banerjee claimed that the flat consumption tax regime of the GST burdened the poor more.

The GST is an indirect tax that is paid for consumption. Most unpackaged products of daily use are tax-free while some attract 5% GST. The 2026-27 Budget, brought in GST 2.0 reforms, removing tax on several items or reducing the tax rate. It also made the GST regime a two-rate system of 5% and 18%, alongside a few special and luxury items at 40%. The new rates kicked in from September 22, 2025. Essentials and daily-use goods such as food grains, medicines, basic dairy items and educational products attract a 5% GST. Unpacked foodgrains, lentils, fruits and vegetables are not taxed under GST. In fact, paneer (cottage cheese), fresh meat, fish and eggs also don't attract any GST. "In India, when people use the word 'tax', they immediately think of income tax. People like us

tend to think that we are the taxpayers because only a very small percentage — around 3% — pay income tax in India. So people assume that 3% of Indians pay taxes while the remaining 97% simply benefit from them," said Mukulika Banerjee in a podcast with Pervaiz Alam.

"But the truth is that GST applies to everyone. Everyone pays indirect taxes, and poorer people in India are actually paying more tax in proportion to their income than the rich," she argued in the Cine Ink podcast with Alam.

The anthropologist from the London School of Economics (LSE) tried to explain it through the example of Parle-G biscuits.

"Look at it this way. If you buy a packet of biscuits and a rickshaw puller buys the same packet, both of you pay the same GST on it. But the rickshaw puller earns far less than you. So, relative to his income, he is paying a much larger share as tax," said Banerjee.

"If you aggregate this across the country, the bottom 50% of India's population is paying proportionately more tax relative to their income," she added.

Mukulika Banerjee is a Professor of Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics whose work focusses on democracy, elections, citizenship, political participation and every day state-society relations, particularly in India,

according to her profile on the LSE website.

Several experts rubbished the LSE anthropologist's arguments.

"Tautologically, the consumption basket of the rich has far higher GST than that of the poor (0% for most, 5% on Parle-G biscuit). India's sub-middle classes pay very little tax," investment banker Somnath Mukherjee wrote on X.

Others were more unsparing in their criticism of Banerjee's arguments.

"Oh my God! What path-breaking research on economics 101 by a social anthropologist... Nobel prize-winning stuff because, hey, we never knew indirect taxes were regressive. And of course, GST is such an evil tax which is why even little Satan UK has it where this greatest economist is employed," posted strategic expert Sushant Sareen on X. "Amazing stuff really. So educative. Such incredible propaganda which makes even idiocy seem intellectual. Superb investigation and research," Sareen, a senior fellow at think tank ORF, added.

Dhiraj Nayyar, Director of economics and policy at Vedanta Group and columnist at The Economic Times, wrote, "The only scenario in which the poor would pay more taxes as a proportion of their income than the rich is if there is an alcohol dependency in the family. No GST on that. But VAT payment may be significant. Maybe if there are chain smokers too."

Others said there was nothing new in what Banerjee was stating, adding that India was providing welfare benefits and using an indirect tax regime to slam the government was fallacious.

"Why is this considered some out-of-the-world research, I don't know. Indirect taxes are levied on

consumption rather than income, which is why they are considered regressive in comparison to direct taxes that are progressive... The government takes care of basics and hence the welfare of the poor cannot be just linked with indirect taxes," wrote banker Shiva Mudgil on X.

The GST is an indirect tax based on consumption, and it is levied at similar rates on all consumers irrespective of their incomes. However, when unpackaged, mass-consumed items are tax-free, it is fallacious to argue that the poor are paying a higher proportion of their income because of the GST.



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Anna 'Delvey' Sorokin still posting from New York City as DHS signals her deportation may finally be coming



Anna "Delvey" Sorokin, the German-Russian woman who posed as a wealthy heiress and New York City socialite for years before convictions on felony theft charges, may finally be deported, according to a new report.

"On March 25, 2021, ICE arrested Anna Sorokin, AKA Anna Delvey, a criminal illegal

alien from Germany, in New York. Sorokin has criminal charges for fraud and was convicted of grand larceny — an aggravated felony," a Homeland Security spokesperson told Fox News Digital.

She initially entered the U.S. with a tourist visa in 2017 and never left, even after it expired, according to the department.

"For years, she has made a mockery of the United States court system and its immigration laws," the spokesperson said. "She has been released on an ankle monitor while her appeal of removal is heard. We look forward to sending her home soon."

Rumors of the 35-year-old's looming removal from the U.S. first emerged in 2022, months after her early release from prison. By then, she had overstayed her tourist visa and been convicted of theft of services, grand larceny and more. However, after a brief detention in ICE custody, she has remained in New York wearing an ankle monitor.

"I lived out most of my adult life

in NY and a lot of my friends and support system are based in the US," Sorokin told Fox News Digital in 2022, under the Biden administration. "I don't see a reason why I should be banned forever while so many violent offenders get released by ICE on daily basis."

Over the weekend, she posted a foggy photo on Twitter of the city captioned, "Happy Memorial Day weekend from the best city in the world."

She's found post-conviction fame in part thanks to the Netflix docuseries, "Inventing Anna," for which she was paid \$320,000, according to IMDB — as well as an appearance on "Dancing With the Stars."

She still goes by her assumed name, Anna Delvey, and has

racked up more than 1 million followers on Instagram, where she recently posted a video showing, "how I get tights under the ankle monitor."

She also frequently posts selfies with former New York Rep. George Santos, who was expelled from Congress amid a scandal of his own. Santos did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Sorokin played herself off as the heiress of a German millionaire, claiming her father was a diplomat — or an oil baron — with a \$67 million fortune she would inherit. But she funded her lavish lifestyle by mooching off friends and scamming a bank, according to prosecutors, failing to repay her debts along the way.

Teen stepbrother accused of killing Anna Kepner on Carnival cruise remains free before trial



The teenage stepbrother accused in the death of 18-year-old Anna Kepner aboard a Carnival cruise ship will remain free until his trial, a judge ruled Wednesday, as new details and a timeline of the alleged killing were unsealed in court records.

Timothy Hudson is accused of first-degree murder and aggravated sexual abuse after Kepner was found dead in November 2025 inside a Carnival cruise cabin that was traveling on the high seas toward Miami, according to federal court documents.

On Wednesday morning, Hudson was seen arriving at the James Lawrence King Federal Justice building before his hearing, where prosecutors pushed to have the teen behind bars until his September trial.

The judge ruled Wednesday that Hudson can remain out of jail and on bond before his trial, with certain restrictions. The U.S.

Marshals Office will explore housing options for Hudson in the Tampa area.

Newly unsealed court documents revealed more details about the allegations against Hudson and a timeline of how authorities say the night unfolded before Kepner was found dead.

Timeline from night of alleged murder:

Nov. 6, 2025, dinner: Prosecutors say Kepner left dinner because she wasn't feeling well, saying that she had mouth pain from her braces and an upset stomach, and returned alone to cabin 8343.

7:35 p.m.: CCTV allegedly shows Hudson entering the cabin.

7:38 p.m.: CCTV allegedly shows Kepner entering the same cabin. Prosecutors say she was never seen leaving again.

7:51 p.m.: Kepner's 13-year-old brother briefly entered the cabin and later told investigators he saw Anna alive.

7:51 p.m. to 10:13 p.m.: Prosecutors say Kepner and Hudson were alone in the cabin for roughly three-plus hours.

10:13 p.m.: Prosecutors say Hudson exits the cabin and looks left and right down the hallway.

10:53 p.m.: Prosecutors say Hudson places the privacy sign on the cabin door and goes back inside.

11:21 p.m.: Kepner's younger brother returns briefly to the cabin. He later tells investigators he did not see her inside.

12:09 a.m.: The brother returned again. Prosecutors say Hudson blocked him from entering, told him he was changing and made him wait outside for a couple of minutes.

12:09 a.m.: The brother said the bathroom and closet doors were open, and the cabin lights were on.

Morning of Nov. 7: Prosecutors say Kepner's phone, which was missing from the cabin, was tracked by ship Wi-Fi/router data moving along the same path as Hudson.

9:26-9:55 a.m.: Prosecutors say CCTV and router data placed Hudson, and allegedly Kepner's phone, near the jogging track, smoking area and later near the trash-bin area where the phone was found.

11:24 a.m.: Cabin attendants

discovered Kepner's body, prosecutors say, wrapped in bedding and partially hidden under a bed, with a box of life vests positioned to obscure it. Prosecutors said a rape kit collected during Kepner's autopsy included vaginal swabs that tested positive for male DNA, and one swab also tested positive for sperm.

According to the transcript, FBI lab testing excluded another sexual partner, identified in the document as a minor witness, and found "very strong support" for Hudson as the male DNA contributor. Prosecutors said FBI lab testing found the DNA mixture was 120 sextillion times more likely if Kepner and Hudson were the contributors than if Kepner and an unknown, unrelated person were contributors.

Federal prosecutors say Hudson was previously released to a family member while the case was still being handled under the Juvenile Delinquency Act. But after the case was transferred to adult prosecution and a federal grand jury returned a superseding indictment, the government asked the court to revisit that release decision.

In the filing, prosecutors argued that under adult bail standards, Hudson "is a danger to others and should be held in pretrial

detention."

Florida-based criminal defense attorney Tim Jansen told Fox News Digital he found that the teen boy being released before the trial was striking, given the severity of the charges.

"I don't know how they got released into the custody of someone with these charges. I find that alarming," Jansen said. Jansen said the allegations, if proven, would give prosecutors a compelling public-safety argument.

"He's 16 years old, looking at the spending the rest of his life in prison," Jansen said. "I would argue as a prosecutor, he is both a flight risk and a danger to the community. He's already [allegedly] sexually assaulted and killed one person. He's demonstrated his ability not to conform. And I believe the court will detain."

Prosecutors argued that the alleged crimes were among "the most serious, egregious, and violative crimes one person can inflict upon another" and said no combination of conditions could assure the court that Hudson would not be a danger to others. They also noted that he currently lives in a home where minors reside. The government's motion says Hudson was not released on bond, but rather under a release order with conditions.

Rubio's Taj Mahal photo sparks Iran jibe on US grasp of ancient civilisations

Marco Rubio walked up to the Taj Mahal, took a photograph, posted it, and got cooked by Iran on the internet. Not with missiles. Not with sanctions. With a sentence. Tehran pointed out, politely but devastatingly, that the Taj Mahal was built for a Persian queen. A woman of Persian descent, Persian culture, Persian identity, all of it carved into Indian marble. The man who flies around issuing threats against ancient civilisations had just posed for a tourist photo inside one of their greatest monuments without knowing it.

Iran did not raise its voice. It just pointed. And that, precisely, is the difference between a country with 3,000 years of memory and one that still calls a 250-year-old building historic. The question this moment raises is not a small one. Does Washington actually know who it is talking to? The answer, increasingly, appears to



be no. Rubio and the broader Washington establishment have made a habit of threatening Iran with extinction. Literal extinction. "End of civilisation" language, deployed with confidence, as though the target is something fragile and new. But Persia predates Rome. It predates Greece as a unified culture. It survived Alexander, survived the Mongols, survived occupation and bombing and decades of

sanctions, and it remains. The language is intact. The poetry is intact. The identity is intact. When Washington tells Tehran it faces the end of its civilisation, Tehran hears something specific. It hears a country that never read a history book threatening a country that wrote them. The same pattern plays out with China, just with different scenery. Washington's strategy is straightforward enough on

paper. Cut off the supply chains, isolate the economy, apply pressure until something breaks. It is the kind of approach that works against a fragile new state. It is not the kind of approach that works against a 4,000-year-old civilisation with its own philosophical traditions, its own systems of governance, and its own very long memory of watching outside powers come and go.

During a recent visit to China, Trump came across trees older than the United States of America. Just trees, standing there, having outlasted every empire that ever threatened the country they grew in. The symbolism is almost too convenient, but it is real. The country Washington wants to isolate has trees that predate the American republic. The river does not care about the dam.

This is the strategic mistake Washington repeats. It treats

Iran and China as modern rivals, as competitors in the same market who can be outmanoeuvred and pressured into submission. But neither country thinks in election cycles. They think in centuries. They have watched far more powerful empires arrive, threaten, and collapse while they remained. The Mongols conquered China. China absorbed the Mongols. Alexander reached Persia. Persia outlasted his entire empire by two millennia.

That is not ancient trivia. That is the context in which every American threat lands, and it lands badly. Rubio's Taj Mahal photograph was not just an embarrassing moment on social media. It was a metaphor for the entire posture. America walked into a monument built by the civilisation it threatens, took a selfie, and called it diplomacy.

You cannot end something that was old when you were nothing.

Illegal alien charged with killing 4 young people in wrong-way DUI crash on Oklahoma highway

An illegal alien who was living in the United States under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status was charged with killing four people after allegedly driving the wrong way while intoxicated on a highway before striking another vehicle, Oklahoma authorities said. Michael Rosario-Cruz, 27, was released from a hospital and booked into the Canadian County Jail on a slew of charges, including four counts of second-degree murder, two counts of DUI causing great bodily injury, transporting an open container, firearm possession, carrying firearms while under the influence and driving the wrong way on a one-way road.

Rosario-Cruz, who had been drinking at a local bar, was driving westbound early Friday in the eastbound lanes of Interstate 40 in Canadian County, when he struck another vehicle head-on, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol said. Authorities say they found empty beer bottles inside Rosario-Cruz's car. He does not have a prior criminal record, police said.

All four people in the struck vehicle, which caught fire, were killed. They ranged in age from 18 to 20, authorities said. The victims were identified as Kiercey Hickson, 20, Quincy Jones, 19, and

Haleigh Salazar and Brad Palmer, both 18. "Driving impaired is a reckless, life-changing decision," the Highway Patrol said in a social media post announcing the charges. "The loss of these young lives will have a lasting impact on countless family members, friends, and communities."

Rosario-Cruz was granted DACA status in 2015 during the Obama administration, Tim Tipton, the commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety (DPS), said Wednesday.

He was also granted a work authorization permit, Tipton said. Rosario-Cruz lives in Memphis, Tennessee, but was working in Oklahoma for a utility contracting company at the time of the murders, Tipton noted. "This murder took place with somebody who should never have been in this country ... who was here illegally," he said at a news conference. A spokesperson for the Oklahoma Highway Patrol told Fox News Digital Rosario-Cruz is the subject of a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainer request, meaning ICE has asked to be notified when he is released from custody so it can arrest him and begin deportation proceedings.

New York Attorney General Letitia James joins FIFA investigation into possible ticket price gauging

New York Attorney General Letitia James has joined New Jersey Attorney General Jennifer Davenport to launch an investigation into FIFA's high World Cup ticket prices on Wednesday, the New York Post reports.

Officials say the steep prices have sparked a "gauntlet of confusion, fake scarcity, and impossibly high prices," ahead of the soccer tournament next month.

Both James and Davenport announced the joint probe — which includes subpoenas sent to FIFA by the two attorneys general — to focus on the myriad issues that stem from the soccer federation's ticket sales for the tournament, including reports that fans were being misled about

where their seats were located in addition to the exorbitantly high prices. "Being honest about ticket sales is not complicated.

But FIFA has turned buying a ticket to the World Cup into a gauntlet of confusion, fake scarcity, and impossibly high prices — all at the expense of consumers and hardworking New Jerseyans," AG

Davenport said in a statement.

The joint probe from both states makes sense when considering a number of World Cup games, including the final on July 19, are being played at nearby MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Sky-high ticket prices for the World Cup seem to be a bipartisan issue, as this probe comes in the wake of President Donald Trump also making

disparaging comments regarding the high prices earlier this month, which were routinely rumored to be north of \$1,000.

"I did not know that number," President Trump said, "I would certainly like to be there, but I wouldn't pay it either, to be honest with you."

The 2026 World Cup kicks off on June 11 between Mexico and South Africa.



US ally pledges support for Trump's push to break Iran's grip on Hormuz: 'We are ready to contribute'



The Czech Republic is prepared to help protect freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and is aligning closely with the Trump administration on security, NATO and Israel, Czech Foreign Minister Petr Macinka told Fox News Digital during an exclusive interview at the United Nations in New York. Prague already had begun discussions about contributing specialized capabilities to help secure the strategically vital waterway amid growing tensions with Iran, Macinka said while speaking at Security Council-related meetings at the U.N.

"We are ready to contribute to freedom of passage and the Hormuz trade," Macinka said. "We were among the first countries that were ready to contribute ... We have no navy,

as we are in the middle of Europe," he explained, "But we have some unique passive surveillance capabilities."

Macinka warned that Iran posed a global threat through what he described as four main "war tools": nuclear proliferation, drones and ballistic missiles, international terrorism and threats to the Strait of Hormuz. "Their nuclear military program must be stopped," he said. "It's a global risk and global threat." The comments come as the Trump administration has increased pressure on European allies to take a larger role in protecting international shipping routes amid Iranian threats tied to the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical oil transit choke points. Roughly one-fifth of global oil consumption passes

through the narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea. Speaking after a meeting with foreign ministers in Sweden Friday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio questioned the value of hosting U.S. military bases in allied countries that later restrict American military operations during wartime.

"One of the arguments I always made was that these bases in the region provided us with logistical options that we wouldn't otherwise have," Rubio told reporters. "And when some of those bases are denied to you during a conflict that we're involved in, then you question whether that value is still there." President Donald Trump also has sharply criticized NATO allies over a reluctance to participate in military operations tied to the Iran conflict and securing the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said he was "strongly considering" pulling the United States out of NATO after allies failed to join the U.S. campaign against Iran, according to an April 1 interview with Britain's Daily Telegraph, calling the alliance a "paper tiger."

The Czech Republic, a NATO

member since 1999, reached NATO's benchmark of spending 2% of GDP on defense and has supported calls for Europe to increase military readiness amid Russia's war in Ukraine. Macinka strongly defended the administration's calls for Europe to increase defense spending and reduce dependence on Washington for long-term security guarantees.

"We should do our homework and build our defense to become stronger," he said, arguing that Europe had delayed necessary military investments for too long. He also tied Europe's defense spending challenges to the European Union's Green Deal policies, the bloc's sweeping climate agenda aimed at reducing carbon emissions, calling them ideological and financially destructive.

"If we get rid of this green, crazy alarmism, then we have enough money to build our defense," he said.

The Czech foreign minister also voiced unusually direct support for Trump and his administration, praising what he described as a global "common sense" shift following Trump's election victory.

"We are friends of Israel, and we

are friends of America," Macinka said. "Especially me as a politician, I'm a friend of the ideology of the current American administration." Macinka also referenced a clash earlier in 2026 with former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the Munich Security Conference, where he criticized Europe's liberal political establishment and defended the populist wave reshaping parts of Europe and the United States. Macinka linked Prague's strong support for Ukraine to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when hundreds of thousands of Warsaw Pact troops occupied the country for more than two decades. He said that historical experience continues to shape Czech public opinion and support for Kyiv.

"The Czech society feels a big solidarity with Ukraine," Macinka said, describing the war as a "symmetric war" between a powerful Russian military and a Ukrainian army backed by the West. Macinka highlighted Prague's leading role in a Czech-backed ammunition initiative supplying Ukraine with artillery rounds collected through international donor efforts.

Passport-Free Wonders: India's 'Twin Destinations' To Explore This Summer



This summer, travel planning for many Indians comes with a familiar reality check. International flight prices are soaring, visa appointments remain unpredictable for several destinations, and long-haul holidays are beginning to feel increasingly expensive and exhausting. At the same time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly encouraged citizens to explore India's diverse destinations and strengthen domestic tourism by discovering the country's hidden cultural and

natural treasures.

Interestingly, this growing shift towards domestic travel is also changing how Indians define a "dream holiday." Instead of chasing expensive international itineraries, many travellers are beginning to realise that equally stunning landscapes, cultural richness, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences may already exist much closer to home. Across the country, a growing number of travellers are rediscovering destinations that feel surprisingly global in experience yet deeply

rooted in Indian culture, landscapes, and heritage. According to Booking.com's Travel Trends 2026, nearly 65% of Indian travellers now prefer domestic holidays, signalling a larger movement towards meaningful, experience-led travel closer to home. To inspire wanderlust closer to home, Booking.com has curated a list of extraordinary "twin destinations" that mirror global icons without the passport hassles or hefty flight costs.

Gandikota, Andhra Pradesh – India's Grand Canyon

Often called the "Grand Canyon of India", Gandikota in Andhra Pradesh features dramatic layered rock formations carved by the Pennar River through the Erramala hills. The rugged red sedimentary cliffs offer views reminiscent of Arizona's masterpiece. Explore the 13th-century Gandikota Fort perched on the edge of the gorge and catch

a magical sunrise over the winding river below.

Alappuzha (Alleppey), Kerala – The Venice of the East

Instead of a gondola ride through Italy, glide through Kerala's serene backwaters on a traditional wooden houseboat. Alappuzha's vast network of glassy lagoons, palm-fringed canals, and lakes perfectly captures Venice's romantic aquatic charm. Enjoy authentic Keralan cuisine on board while soaking in the slow rhythm of local river life.

Khajjiar, Himachal Pradesh – Mini Switzerland

Nestled in Chamba district, Khajjiar's lush green meadow surrounded by dense coniferous forests earned it the title of "Mini Switzerland" from the Swiss Embassy itself. Take a nature walk through the Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary and unwind by the central lake with panoramic views of the snow-capped Dhauladhar

mountains, pure alpine bliss in the Himalayas.

Fontainhas, Goa – Portugal's Colourful Cousin

Step into old-world Europe without leaving India. Fontainhas, the Latin Quarter of Panaji in Goa, is a living postcard of Portuguese heritage. Wander down narrow cobblestone lanes lined with brightly painted heritage homes in yellow, blue, and red, complete with ornate balconies. Don't miss a heritage walking tour and a stop at a local bakery for fresh pastéis de nata.

Gurudongmar Lake, Sikkim – Iceland's Frozen Beauty

At a staggering 17,800 feet, Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim delivers the dramatic, otherworldly feel of Iceland's glacial lagoons. Framed by barren snow-capped peaks and crystal-clear azure waters, this high-altitude lake offers pristine, mirror-like reflections and an unforgettable sense of isolation

Evaluating the Operational and Social Impacts of the New Consular Processing Directives

The recent policy directive requiring certain categories of green card seekers currently residing within the United States to depart the country and finalize their application processes via consular processing abroad has introduced a complex debate regarding administrative efficiency, legal compliance, and human impact. This shift represents a fundamental pivot in how the federal government manages the final stages of the legal immigration pipeline, highlighting the ongoing tension between rigorous enforcement and procedural predictability.

Proponents of the policy argue that utilizing consular processing in an applicant's home country reinforces the integrity of the legal immigration framework. From an administrative and security standpoint, conducting final interviews at overseas embassies and consulates allows the Department of State to perform comprehensive local background checks and verify documentation within the primary context of the applicant's origin. Supporters contend that this mechanism prevents the circumvention of established external lines and ensures that domestic immigration resources, already heavily strained by backlogs and humanitarian cases, are not overburdened by processing steps originally designed to occur abroad. In this view, a strict adherence to the letter of consular protocols ensures fairness and uniformity across the entire system. On the other hand, the policy introduces substantial operational and logistical challenges for high-skilled professionals, employers, and long-term residents who have consistently maintained legal status within the United States. Analysts point out that forcing legally employed individuals, often on temporary work visas like the H-1B, to exit the country introduces a high degree of uncertainty. Consular offices worldwide are already facing significant administrative backlogs, and an abrupt influx of applicants seeking final green card interviews could lead to prolonged processing delays. For American businesses, this introduces the risk of sudden, temporary disruptions in their core workforce, potentially impacting productivity and project timelines in critical sectors like technology, healthcare, and engineering.

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From a social perspective, the requirement carries a distinct human element. Many applicants affected by these regulations have established deep roots in American communities, owning homes and raising families. The mandate to travel abroad for an indefinite period to secure final documentation introduces financial anxiety and logistical friction, particularly for families with school-aged children.

Ultimately, the debate over this immigration directive underscores a broader systemic challenge: balancing the administrative intent of the regulatory framework with the practical realities of a highly globalized workforce. While the policy aims to streamline and validate legal pathways through traditional external channels, its success will be measured by whether the consular network possesses the capacity to handle the transition without causing unintended economic disruption or undue strain on those navigating the legal system.

(TSAI Editorial Board)

Navigating the Geopolitical Nuances of U.S.–India Economic Convergence

The diplomatic mission of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to New Delhi highlights a pivotal moment in contemporary international relations. The announcement that a "beneficial and sustainable" trade agreement is nearing completion marks a significant step forward in bilateral ties. However, beneath the optimistic diplomatic rhetoric lies a complex web of competing strategic priorities, domestic economic interests, and energy policies that both nations must carefully navigate to achieve a truly lasting partnership.

For the United States, cementing a comprehensive trade framework with India is not merely an economic objective; it is a core geopolitical imperative. In an era defined by fracturing global supply chains and shifting alliances, Washington increasingly views India as a vital anchor of stability and economic resilience in the Indo-Pacific region. From the American perspective, a formalized trade deal offers a mechanism to deepen market access for U.S. goods, enhance digital trade standards, and encourage a more integrated defense and technology partnership.

However, achieving this convergence requires reconciling significant policy differences, particularly regarding global energy markets and historical trade friction. The United States has consistently encouraged its global partners to reduce economic dependencies on nations subject to international sanctions, notably Russia and Iran. Washington's broader policy aims to reshape international energy flows, often positioning American energy exports—and alternative

partnerships, such as those with Venezuela—as viable long-term substitutes. For American policymakers, aligning trade benefits with broader compliance on international security frameworks is seen as standard diplomatic practice to maintain a rule-based international order.

Conversely, India's approach to these negotiations is strictly governed by its foundational doctrine of strategic autonomy. As a rapidly developing economic powerhouse with a massive population, New Delhi's primary responsibility is ensuring domestic economic stability, food security, and affordable energy access. From the Indian perspective, maintaining diverse energy portfolios—including the procurement of cost-effective crude oil from traditional suppliers like Russia—is an economic necessity rather than a political alignment. Indian negotiators are tasked with ensuring that any incoming trade agreement does not compromise national sovereignty or penalize the domestic economy for decisions made in the interest of public welfare. Furthermore, both nations carry legacy trade grievances into the negotiating room. Memories of reciprocal tariffs on steel, aluminum, and agricultural products remain fresh. A truly sustainable agreement will require both Washington and New Delhi to transition from transactional diplomacy to a deeper structural understanding. The success of the upcoming trade deal will ultimately depend on whether it is built as an equitable partnership that respects India's developmental imperatives while addressing America's strategic regional vision.

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(AI edited/generated image, used for reference purposes only)

The Pope Just Challenged Silicon Valley. Will Anyone Listen?

When Pope Leo XIV released his first encyclical this week, *Magnifica Humanitas*, he did something no senator, regulator, or tech executive has managed to do in years of hand-wringing about artificial intelligence: he changed the subject. The 42,300-word document does not ask whether AI will take our jobs or pass our exams. It asks whether we will still recognize ourselves on the other side of the machine. That is the right question, and it is striking that it took a pope to ask it plainly. The encyclical's most provocative word is disarm. Leo argues that AI must be stripped of its capacity to erode human dignity — in autonomous weapons, in surveillance, in the quiet outsourcing of our own thinking. He is not a Luddite. He acknowledges the technology's promise. But he warns that a tool this powerful, concentrated in the hands of a few corporations answerable mainly to their shareholders, is a moral problem before it is a technical one.

Skeptics will roll their eyes. What does the Vatican know about



transformers and training data? But that misreads the moment. The Church is not claiming engineering expertise. It is claiming something the industry has conspicuously lacked: a vocabulary of obligation. When the people building these systems concede, as one Anthropic co-founder did at the

encyclical's own presentation, that developers are pushed by ambition, competition, and financial pressure, they are admitting that the firms cannot referee themselves. Someone outside the room has to speak. The deeper point is one this newspaper has made before. We have allowed the most

consequential technology of our age to be governed almost entirely by the people who profit from it. Governments dither. Voters are told the choice is between innovation and stagnation, as though caution were cowardice. Into that vacuum steps a 2,000-year-old institution with no stock price and no product to sell, saying simply: the human person comes first. We do not have to share the Pope's faith to take the warning seriously. The encyclical's real audience is not the faithful. It is everyone who has felt their attention thinned, their judgment quietly delegated, their work reduced to prompts. Leo has handed the public a moral frame for a debate that has been suffocating in jargon. Whether anyone in Washington or San Francisco listens is another matter. But this much is clear: the loudest voice for restraint this week did not come from a regulator or a rival company. It came from a man in white robes, insisting that magnificent humanity is worth protecting. The least we can do is not look away.

Ebola Is Back, and the World Is Less Ready Than Ever

There is a grim test of any society's seriousness about public health, and we are failing it again. Ebola has returned to Central Africa. This week brought news that three Red Cross volunteers died of the disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that confirmed cases have crossed the border into Uganda, and that a treatment clinic run by Doctors Without Borders was burned down by frightened residents. The World Health Organization has declared a public health emergency. The machinery that once contained outbreaks like this is sputtering — and much of the damage is self-inflicted.

It is tempting to file this away as someone else's tragedy, a distant problem in distant provinces. That instinct is exactly the error that lets epidemics become pandemics. Ebola does not respect borders, and neither did COVID-19, a lesson we apparently paid for in millions of lives and learned for about eighteen months. What makes this outbreak especially galling is that it arrives just as wealthy nations have been dismantling the very systems built to stop it. Public health advocates point to deep cuts in global health funding — including from the United States — that have hollowed out the surveillance networks, vaccine stockpiles, and rapid-response teams that turn a local flare-up into a footnote rather than a catastrophe. We spent the last crisis promising "never again." We are now defunding the people whose job is to make sure of it. The burning of that clinic deserves a word, too. It is easy



to condemn from a safe distance. But fear and mistrust do not appear from nowhere. They grow where institutions have failed people for years, where outsiders arrive only in emergencies, and where no one has invested in the patient, unglamorous work of earning a community's confidence. You cannot parachute trust in alongside the protective gear. It has to be built before the crisis, and we have not built it. None of this is hopeless. We know how to

stop Ebola; we have done it before. Effective vaccines exist. Contact tracing works. What is missing is not knowledge but will — and money, and the basic recognition that a dollar spent containing an outbreak in Ituri Province is a dollar that protects a child in our own town.

The honest truth is that global health is not charity. It is self-defense practiced at a distance. Every functioning clinic in the DRC, every

trained volunteer, every dose of vaccine pre-positioned before the first case is a wall between this disease and the rest of us. Tearing those walls down to save a line in a budget is not thrift. It is the most expensive false economy there is, and we may yet pay for it in a currency far dearer than money.

The siren in Central Africa is sounding. The only question is whether we hear it now, while it is still affordable to act — or later, when it is not.

Who is afraid of the Cockroach and why

The dramatic rise of the so-called Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) reflects a growing anger at a political system so broken that protestors have turned to the imagery of an insect that thrives in gutters and drains to make a larger point about the darkness threatening governance and democracy.

Long before the ubiquitous cockroach became part of our political vocabulary, it was part of mine. At journalism lectures, I would often compare journalists to cockroaches. Why? Because if, God forbid, a nuclear explosion destroyed the world tomorrow, the cockroach alone would survive — if only because someone would still need to report the breaking news of humanity's destruction. From great survivor to political symbol of protest, the cockroach has travelled a remarkable distance. The dramatic rise of the so-called "Cockroach Janta Party" (CJP) reflects a growing anger at a political system so broken that protestors have turned to the imagery of an insect that thrives in gutters and drains to make a larger point about the darkness threatening governance and democracy. We inhabit a political universe where rulers increasingly behave like monarchs, exercising power with impunity, while the opposition remains too divided and discredited to mount a credible challenge. Into this vacuum crawls the cockroach: an insect we are programmed to fear and despise, yet one resilient enough to survive everything thrown at it.

That a viral satirical movement, started by a relatively unknown political communication strategist sitting in an American university, should suddenly provoke anxiety in India's power corridors is revealing. After all, why should the world's largest political party and a mighty Indian state feel threatened by an online fad triggered by the wholly unnecessary "cockroach" remarks of the Chief Justice of India? By appearing to mock India's unemployed youth, the CJI inadvertently unleashed something larger: a digital rebellion powered by anger, alienation and satire. Millions of young Indians have since rallied around the meme.

What makes this especially fascinating is that the CJP is not even a political party. It has no leader, no office, no cadre, no structure. In a country of 1.5 billion people and extraordinary diversity, a movement existing largely in cyberspace should not, in theory, threaten the status quo. So why does the Narendra Modi-led ruling establishment seem so rattled?

Ministers in the Modi government have accused the CJP of being a foreign-funded insurgency. Government supporters have falsely claimed that many of its followers are based in Pakistan. Its social media handles have been blocked or targeted. Some have



even tried to paint it as an Aam Aadmi Party proxy because its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, once briefly worked within the AAP ecosystem.

All of which betrays something deeper than anger: paranoia. It is almost as if a government that has moved from one sweeping electoral victory to another cannot bear the idea that a cockroach has slipped under its skin. The louder the establishment shouts "conspiracy", the more it reveals its discomfort with dissent it cannot fully control.

The nervousness stems from four reasons. First, this is a government whose power depends heavily on narrative control. Governance today often resembles a 24x7 advertising campaign: market the achievements, bury the failures, change the slogan and move on. Crores of promised jobs never arrived, farm incomes were never doubled, paper leaks continue unabated — but narrative management ensures perception frequently triumphs over performance. What unsettles the establishment is that the internet's cockroaches refuse to stick to the script. Second, youth anger matters electorally.

Beneath the headline GDP numbers and chest-thumping nationalism lies a generation battling deep insecurity. Millions of educated young Indians face shrinking job opportunities, rising exam pressures and an economy where stable employment often feels out of reach. For many, frustration has turned into cynicism. They feel unseen by political leaders except during elections and unheard except when they protest. The anger is not ideological alone — it is intensely personal.

This was visible in recent elections, especially in states like Tamil Nadu

where the Vijay phenomenon drew heavily from younger voters impatient with traditional politics. Across India, young voters are increasingly rejecting stale political binaries. They are searching for novelty, authenticity, humour and emotional connection. Meme culture has become their language of protest.

And that is perhaps the most underestimated aspect of the Cockroach Janta Party. Satire has become a political weapon. Authoritarian systems are often surprisingly vulnerable to humour. They can handle opposition speeches, television debates and angry editorials because those battles are familiar. But ridicule is harder to crush. A meme travels faster than a press release. Sarcasm punctures carefully cultivated images of invincibility. Once power becomes an object of mockery, its aura begins to weaken.

This is why authoritarian-minded regimes across the world eventually become obsessed with comedians, cartoonists, YouTubers and anonymous meme-makers. Humour decentralises dissent. It allows ordinary citizens to participate in resistance without joining a political party or attending a rally. A viral joke can sometimes do more damage to authority than a hundred opposition press conferences.

Third, the issues amplified by the CJP are deeply resonant: unemployment, paper leaks, vaulting corruption, cynical defections and the growing perception that the system works only for the powerful and connected. The movement may appear chaotic, even juvenile at times, but it taps into genuine anxieties that conventional politics has failed to address.

And finally, every increasingly authoritarian system seeks to delegitimise dissent by branding it anti-national. Criticism is no longer treated as disagreement; it is portrayed as conspiracy. The space for questioning authority steadily shrinks until eventually even satire begins to look threatening. Suffocate mainstream free expression and the young in particular will inevitably migrate to more disruptive, rebellious forms of dissent. The CJP is, in that sense, an intolerant system's own creation.

Intriguingly, the rise of the cockroach movement also carries a warning for the opposition. Youth anger in India is real, raw and widespread. But anger by itself does not automatically translate into political change. Unless opposition parties are imaginative, credible and organised enough to channel this frustration, the energy will remain trapped in memes and online rebellion rather than evolve into a wider democratic movement. For those who invoke parallels with the Gen Z insurrection in Nepal, a reality check: a protest wave in a country of 29 million cannot be replicated in a nation of 1.5 billion with vastly deeper social and political complexities.

The irony is rich. Many of those in power today, including Narendra Modi himself, emerged from youth-driven protest movements. The Nav Nirman agitation in Gujarat in the early 1970s became a precursor to the wider movement against Indira Gandhi and the Emergency. 2026 isn't 1975. Not yet. But history's lesson is simple: every dominant political order eventually believes it has become permanent. Every ruling establishment starts believing it alone represents the nation. And every autocratic regime eventually discovers that resentment has a way of resurfacing from the margins — often in forms it neither anticipates nor understands.

Today's CJP youth — self-described as "unemployed, lazy and chronically online" — may lack organisation, ideology or resources. But they possess something equally potent: creativity, irreverence and the fearlessness to mock authority. Powerful political machines like the BJP can crush conventional opponents with ruthless efficiency. What they struggle to handle are decentralised anti-establishment movements with no obvious leadership, no headquarters and nothing much to lose. That is the Modi government's real cockroach problem.

By: Rajdeep Sardesai

Quad Meets In Delhi, But Trump's China Visit Casts A Shadow

The timing, to put it plainly, is awkward. This week, the foreign ministers of the Quad—S Jaishankar, Marco Rubio, Penny Wong, and Toshimitsu Motegi—are descending on New Delhi to talk maritime security, critical minerals, and the future of a free Indo-Pacific. All worthwhile. All necessary. And all of it happening 10 days after US President Donald Trump flew to Beijing and sat down with Xi Jinping.

The difficulty is that 10 days earlier, Trump landed in Beijing, clasped Xi Jinping's hand, and proceeded to construct what Beijing was pleased to describe as a "constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability". It's a governing framework, as Xi called it, and an attempt to convert Trump's congenital transactionalism into something that would outlast even the next American president.

China is committed to purchasing at least \$17 billion in US agricultural goods annually through 2028. It agreed to buy 200 Boeing aircraft.

The US approved approximately 10 Chinese technology companies to purchase Nvidia's advanced H200 chips. Xi was invited to Washington in September, with further meetings in November and December.

Xi warned that mishandling Taiwan would put the entire relationship into "great jeopardy". The US readout didn't mention Taiwan at all. Whether that was diplomatic caution or something more deliberate, nobody in New Delhi will be asking Rubio directly. But they'll be thinking about it.

So, when the ministers meet in New Delhi, the real question on the table won't appear on any agenda: has Washington's rapprochement with Beijing quietly made the Quad redundant?

A Diplomatic Nadir, Dressed In Its Sunday Best

The Quad is currently going through its most turbulent period of diplomatic synergy since the group's resuscitation in 2017. No leaders' summit since 2024. The one scheduled for New Delhi in 2025, its first since 2021, never materialised. Trump's National Security Strategy now mentions the Quad exactly once, in passing, and only in relation to India.

Such marginalisation would have been unthinkable until recently, when the Quad was routinely described by Washington as the cornerstone of Indo-Pacific strategy, now reduced to a footnote. The causes are neither mysterious nor particularly flattering. Trump's trade war against India, in the form of 50 per cent tariffs, killed any prospect of New Delhi hosting the Quad summit last year. Washington simultaneously berated India for buying Russian energy while applying no equivalent penalty to China for doing

precisely the same thing. And when India and Pakistan came to the brink following the Pahalgam attacks and Operation Sindoor in 2025, Trump claimed credit for brokering the ceasefire, a move that deepened New Delhi's unease about Washington's reliability as a strategic partner.

If Washington really views its quad partners as strategic allies, the behaviours of its administration suggest otherwise. It views everyone, allied or otherwise, as a revenue source to be optimised.

The foreign ministers did manage to meet in Washington in July 2025, in the middle of all of it. A leaders' summit that year was another matter entirely; it never happened. Worth noting: Trump has never once shown up to a Quad leaders' summit. Either term. Japan's Prime Minister Takaichi hasn't attended one either. This week's gathering, for all its genuine diplomatic worth, is being driven by ministers. And strategic credibility tends to require a certain weight, the kind that only heads of government can provide.

What the Quad Has Actually Managed to Build

Critics have been saying for years the Quad is all talk and no teeth. The working-level record tells a more complicated story. Maritime domain awareness, disaster response coordination, logistics networking across the Indo-Pacific, all of it has been quietly advancing. The Malabar naval exercise kept running near Guam, interoperability drills, logistics frameworks, and maritime surveillance cooperation, all unglamorous, but all ensure that the alliance is ticking. Consider Five Eyes. No leader-level summits, no fanfare and nobody questions whether it matters. What keeps institutions alive isn't the photo opportunities. It's whether the people doing the actual work—the planners, the analysts, the officials three levels below the ministers—have built something the others genuinely can't do without.

The same logic applies to AUKUS. While leaders established that security partnership, to succeed it must become an ingrained part of the three nations' defence systems. And the same goes for the Quad. The Quad's functional architecture has been embedding itself into the region's security considerably more persistently than the headlines suggest.

The Contradiction

And yet. There is always a yet. Four democracies. One shared concern about where China is heading. That was the basic logic of the Quad, and for a while it held. Then Washington started cutting deals in Beijing, and the logic got harder to explain without caveats. What, at that point, is the Quad actually



for? This is the question that will hang, unspoken and slightly awkward, over every agenda item in New Delhi. Rubio will likely take his counterparts through the Trump-Xi summit. The Delhi meeting will serve as reassurance that the US has not abandoned the Indo-Pacific. The Strait of Hormuz will probably dominate the public communiqué. Washington's Iranian misadventure has a way of consuming all available diplomatic oxygen.

But the private conversation, one suspects, will return again and again to Beijing: what was conceded, what was implied, and what each of the three non-American members of this grouping can still, in good conscience, rely upon. The critical minerals agenda item at this week's meeting carries a particular weight in this regard. China's weaponisation of its near-monopoly on rare-earth minerals forced Washington into its Beijing truce in the first place. China still controls the rare-earth supply chains.

The Beijing summit didn't change that, at least not on paper, and certainly not in Beijing's own readout. If Washington has decided that's a price worth paying to keep the broader relationship stable, then the whole push to diversify critical minerals supply away from China starts to look optional rather than urgent. That matters directly to what the ministers are supposed to be discussing this week.

India has long benefited from US-China tension. But India now has a different worry: the revival of a so-called "G2" dynamic, a Washington-Beijing axis that sidelines middle powers. The three-year "strategic stability" framework agreed in Beijing feeds this anxiety precisely. When Xi said it was "time for the dragon and elephant to dance together", he wasn't being poetic. He was identifying a gap in India's growing frustration with Washington, and making clear that Beijing intends to step into it. New Delhi and the other two non-American quad partners thrive in a world where great-power competition creates space for the agile and the multi-aligned.

A stabilising Washington-Beijing relationship, however incomplete, narrows that space considerably. The Quad is unlikely to disappear formally. Too much diplomatic capital has been invested in it for that. Alliances rarely announce their own irrelevance. More often they just keep meeting, keep issuing statements, keep staging the rituals of unity, while the original reason for existing quietly drains away.

Waiting for Washington to hold the line in the Indo-Pacific—on its own, on everyone else's behalf—is starting to look less like strategy and more like faith. Writing the Quad off on account of the unpredictability characterising the US approach, however, does not augur well for countries like India, which continue to see genuine value in the group as a critical template for cooperation.

The answer, then, is neither eulogy nor triumphalism. It is a demand. India is already pushing for a leaders' summit later this year, after the US midterms. That bid needs to come out of New Delhi with a firm date attached, not a vague commitment to "continue discussions", but an actual calendar entry that all the four heads of government have agreed to keep.

The ministers in New Delhi must leave with a firm date nailed down. It cannot be an aspiration, nor a placeholder, but a commitment that wakes this grouping from diplomatic life-support into the strategic institution it was designed to be. A communiqué will not suffice this time.

Beijing just spent two days in a room with Washington, rewriting the terms of the relationship. The three non-American members of the Quad watched it happen. Reassurance, at this point, isn't enough. They need architecture. With teeth. The Quad's purpose has not disappeared. But a ministers' meeting in New Delhi, however sincerely convened, will not be enough to prove it. That would require something far more than diplomacy. It will require will. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

By : Sohil Sinha

The Dystopian Decade Ahead: Exponential Tech Will Destroy Jobs, Democracy And The State Itself

The decade ahead is a dystopian one, irrespective of whether you sit on the techno-optimist or the doomsayer side of the debate. The fundamental relationships that hold up our economy are changing right before our eyes, and the system has not even begun to acknowledge it. These cataclysmic shifts are unfolding in real time, and because they are unfolding in real time, we cannot see their full impact on our society, economy and lives.

Take the relationship between capital investment and job creation. This relationship has been broken for over a decade. Every other country has at least recognised it; some have started to address it. In India, the system continues to behave as if the 1990s never ended. States hand out land, incentives and tax holidays based on the size of the capital investment announced, not the number of jobs actually created. Every year, each state hosts its own investment festival, where top industrialists are almost forced to announce large investments. A few years ago, while running a multi-state newspaper, we did the math: the actual investment was less than 1 percent of the announced number in the first year, and less than 0.1 percent by the second. That is a different scandal.

Coming back to the broken relationship between capital invested and jobs created — if the investment is in manufacturing, the higher the capital deployed, the more automation on the shop floor, and the fewer people employed. A semiconductor plant is the textbook illustration. Because of the strict air-conditioning parameters — no pollutants are allowed — there is nobody on the shop floor. The handful of people employed are all behind consoles. Tens of billions of dollars in capital equipment result in direct employment of fewer than 100 people at the plant level. The same trend is visible from cement plants to steel plants. Automation is rising rapidly, human headcount is dropping exponentially, and the combination of AI and robotics is going to push this even further. This is not a future scenario. It is the current reality. Automation in manufacturing is already in its fourth generation. AI in services is in its third. Both are now growing exponentially.

This brings us to the dishonest comparison that AI optimists keep deploying — that we have seen this before, that every wave of technology has destroyed some jobs and created more. The shift from agriculture to manufacturing took almost 170 years. There was time for multiple generations to prepare, retrain and adjust to this shift. A farmer's grandson could become a factory worker. A factory worker's grandson could become a software engineer. The transitions were generational, and the entire social architecture — schools, universities, labour laws, welfare states — was built around the assumption that change happens at human speed. When people invoke that history to dismiss the present, they forget three things.

One, the steam engine was not an exponential technology in the way AI is. It did not iterate and improve itself with every exchange with humans on an exponential basis. It did not get cheaper, faster and smarter every six months because of its own use. AI does. Every conversation, every query and every deployed model become training data for the next, more capable model. There is no comparable feedback loop in the history of industrial technology.

Two, every previous technology gave humans time to adapt, learn and adopt it, so that they were not left out of the workstream or the earning stream. When the assembly line arrived, the worker did not vanish overnight; he was redeployed, retrained, absorbed. AI does not give this runway. The model that replaced the call-centre agent in 2023 has already replaced the L1 coder in 2025 and is gunning for the L3 analyst.

A similar trend is already playing out in the IT and BPO sectors. The rise in digital crime — digital arrests, email and WhatsApp fraud, fake call centres — is, in my reading, a direct consequence of job disruption in the BPO sector. Most organisations, CXOs and industry associations are not prepared for the societal-level disruption and crime wave their automation has unleashed. BPO was the first sector to adopt RPA, chatbots and AI in its processes. This led to the firing of a large number of customer service employees trained, very specifically, to sell services over the phone and extract information from strangers. Most BPOs today are a fraction of their pre-COVID employment peak. That trained workforce did not vanish. It went somewhere. A significant slice of it has turned to crime because it could not find honest work that paid even half as well. The displacement effects of automation are not contested in serious economic literature. Daron Acemoglu — who has since won a Nobel — laid them out clearly in a 2019 paper that has aged disturbingly well. He noted, in essence: the presumption that all technologies raise aggregate labour demand simply because they raise productivity is wrong. Some automation technologies entail sizable displacement effects with only modest productivity gains, particularly when the displaced workers were cheap to begin with and the automated technology is only marginally better than them. Because of this displacement effect, we should not expect automation to create wage increases commensurate with productivity growth. Automation by itself always reduces the labour share of industry value added and tends to reduce the overall labour share in the economy. The reason we historically saw stable labour shares is that other technological changes simultaneously generated new labour-intensive tasks. Whether labour retains a role in production depends on whether that counterbalancing process continues — and there is no guarantee

that it will. The point Acemoglu makes carefully, with footnotes and equations, is the point our policymakers, economists and CXOs continue to ignore. In manufacturing, the use of capital to substitute labour has been studied since the 1980s. When you point out that AI is doing the same substitution in services, you are told it cannot happen. The same people who watched welding robots replace welders insist that no model can replace a coder, an analyst, a paralegal or a radiologist. They cannot see that the trend that replaced labour with machines on the shop floor is now replacing labour with software at the desk.

Meanwhile, every person with a keyboard is producing uninformed opinions on LinkedIn and in WhatsApp groups. Your opinion is yours; it is not a fact, and it is not true simply because your under-researched brain finds the past data inconvenient and refuses to engage with it. There is now a new breed of commentator — the ones who make up their opinion first and then go to an AI to write their post for them. These AI-opinion uncles have forgotten that writing is thinking only if you do the writing yourself. And even when you do, if your brain does not have the data, the output is still muddled. Muddled thinking is not limited to AI uncles, though. It runs through the entire meritocratic class — the same class that runs our systems but cannot project a trend it has not been spoon-fed by a professor or a teacher. The fact that we are entering a dystopian decade of exponential labour displacement is a trend this class cannot see, because a dystopian outcome is hard to imagine when your career has been built on a steady diet of optimism. Anything that puts a dent in the optimism bubble is filed away as negativity and ignored. I know this because I have been having this exact conversation with policymakers, bureaucrats, industry leaders, CXOs, technologists and association heads every week, every day. Everyone wants to hide behind cheerful historical analogies their chattering brains can conjure up. Nobody wants to sit with the discomfort that exponential technology has been reshaping our lives, society and economy at a pace our linear brains have not caught up with.

The misunderstanding most aggressively promoted — including by AI companies themselves — is that there will be net job creation. The tech-bro version of this argument shows up in different costumes. The latest one is that replacing COBOL with AI is a trillion-dollar opportunity, since AI has brought the cost of a line of code down from a thousand dollars to two or three. What this argument conveniently hides is the nature of the technology itself. AI is exponential. If it can crash the cost from a thousand dollars to two dollars, it can crash it from two dollars to two cents. And if AI is doing the work, it will replace coders faster than firms can retrain them. But the conversation cannot

end at jobs, because jobs are only the first domino. When you push humans out of the manufacturing line, they migrate to construction and gig work. When you push BPO workers out and they cannot find anything else, some of them turn to crime. Now ask the next question, the one the tech bros do not want asked: what happens when humans are thrown out of the earning loop entirely? What happens when the economic system itself becomes substantially independent of human labour?

The first thing that breaks is not the labour market. It is the state.

A state runs on tax collected from human income — directly through income tax, indirectly through consumption taxes that depend on human earning power. AI companies, almost without exception, sit outside this taxation structure. They are headquartered in low-tax jurisdictions, they book profits through transfer pricing across continents, and they have optimised their structures so thoroughly that no single state has meaningful jurisdiction over them. They have engineered themselves to be largely uncontrollable by any single national government. Now stack this against an AI-driven displacement of human labour. Humans earn less or stop earning. They pay less tax, or no tax. They become dependent on the state for welfare and a basic income. The state, in turn, earns less from its traditional tax base and becomes increasingly dependent on these supra-state AI companies — for revenue, infrastructure and even the basic plumbing of public services. The balance of power inside a democracy then shifts from the elected state to a handful of AI companies that are nominally based somewhere but answerable nowhere. The democratic system, which assumed that the state was the most powerful actor in the room, quietly stops working in the way the textbooks said it would. This is not a doomsday scenario. It sounds extreme only because we have not named it. Some variation of this dynamic is already underway in the United States, Taiwan and South Korea, where a small number of technology and semiconductor companies have grown larger and more strategically critical than entire ministries. The state in each of these countries is increasingly negotiating with, rather than regulating, its own corporate sector. The direction of dependency has quietly reversed. The workers who once found jobs in manufacturing and construction have already become gig workers. The BPO workers who lost their jobs and could not find new ones have, in too many cases, turned to crime. Will the displaced coders also turn to white-collar and AI-enabled fraud as their jobs disappear? Will the state, slowly starved of revenue, find itself unable to police them even if it wants to? Are we going to see a rise in crime, and a hollowing out of the state itself, in the dystopian decade ahead?

By : K Yatish Rajawat

GOP's only path in November – defend Trump and defeat radicals in Iran



Many predictions about the midterm elections in the United States are dire for the GOP: a wipeout in the House and perhaps losing the Senate majority as well. The GOP could weather the electoral storm that almost always chastens the party of a president finishing his sixth year in office. But the GOP won't avoid a "thumpin'," as George W. Bush put it after the 2006 rout of the GOP at the polls if today's Republicans don't step up and loudly proclaim the wisdom of beginning the battle with Iran, as well as the fact that we are not only winning the battle decisively but that the world will be a much better place when it is over, even if President Donald Trump declares, as Gen. Ulysses S. Grant did in May 1864, that "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

Grant prevailed within the year, but it was indeed a long and hard slog through Northern Virginia to the encirclement and eventual capitulation of Richmond and the Confederacy and the surrender of General Lee's army, even as other Union armies won on other fronts. There will be no "Appomattox" in the battle with Iran, but there will be victory, and the GOP has to preach that inevitability as well as the great wisdom and necessity of the battle.

Every candidate in every partisan race has to make the case, which is easy to make: The Islamic Republic of Iran is an evil regime, one run by "lunatics," as Secretary Marco Rubio declared as the battle began, one which has always terrorized its own people and the entire region (murdering tens of thousands of its own people in January), and one which has attacked 14 countries after America and Israel resumed their battle with it as it would have done so — with nukes! — had it been able to obtain such weapons, as the left in America and Europe refuses to see or admit, much less discuss.

It was not "a war of choice," which the ignorant opponents of the battle spout almost daily, but rather one of the necessary preemption of an existential threat to the region and the world.

The blockade of Iran by the U.S. Navy and the probable return of combat operations will inevitably bring the radical junta atop the rump regime to heel, but it will take time. President Trump has correctly informed his advisors this week (and the news was reported by The Wall Street Journal Tuesday night) that he is resolved to see it through. Bravo.

Americans have lost the muscle memory of victory. It

will quickly regain an appreciation for resolve once the conflict is over.

The prediction of electoral catastrophe for the GOP would mean losing statewide races at least in Maine (Sen. Susan Collins), Ohio (Sen. Jon Husted), North Carolina (open) and either Texas (Sen. John Cornyn) or Alaska (Sen. Dan Sullivan) — a result which seems so unlikely as to almost pass over without comment, but that extraordinary result is possible if the GOP stays in its crouch over the battle with Iran. Each senator facing challenges and every House member must repeatedly explain the "why" and the "how" of the battle. If they do, the electorate will agree. The GOP's candidates must loudly and persuasively argue that the battle with Iran was long past due, that while the cost of 13 American lives and scores of Americans wounded is incredibly high for the families who bear that burden and the nation that mourns that loss, the battle and the blockade are stunningly successful and will inevitably crush the remnants of the old regime if the president has resolve. It seems certain that President Trump is not about "to go wobbly." The president understands the stakes and has made his resolute purpose known. Bravo.

The GOP must applaud and support him and explain that the cost felt at home at the gas pump is nothing compared to that borne by the families of the fallen and by the wounded, and the extraordinary benefit of a humbled Iran cannot be overstated. That battle to stop Iran from gaining nuclear weapons is in its eighth week and is going very well (except in the eyes of Democratic activists and the legacy media, but of course I repeat myself). It has crushed the Iranian military, and now the blockade ordered by President Trump is grinding Iran's economy into dust.

Patience will see the U.S. emerge with complete victory,

but don't expect Democrats or anti-American Europeans to ever admit that. Our allies around the Gulf and our closest ally, Israel, are very pleased to see Iran being brought to heel and the region made safe and stable for decades to come. The anti-Trump forces have been unable or unwilling to see the extraordinary nature and success of the American military campaign, or the enormous boon to the region and the world that accompanies the humbling of the lunatic regime in Tehran.

The "Trump Distortion Effect" that operates on the left in America (which includes almost all of the legacy media), as well as in sclerotic Europe, automatically operates to condemn everything President Trump orders done, so the left has put aside a half-century of the abuse of the world and its own people by the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to blast Trump and Republicans.

No matter. "Trust the people" was Winston Churchill's famous advice. President Trump has frequently made the case for what he ordered the American military to do and continue doing. He has the resolve of Grant. Good. The 1864-1865 campaigns by Union armies operating under Gens. Grant and William Tecumseh

Sherman cost tens of thousands of Union casualties but finally broke the back of the slave empire of the Confederacy. The men in blue overwhelmingly voted for Abraham Lincoln in the fall of 1864 over their former senior general, George McClellan, who ran on a "peace without victory" platform, which was in stark contrast to the GOP's "peace with victory" stance.

The people who carry the greatest burden want nothing less than a commitment to winning. Trump has that, and everyone knows it. The GOP needs to embrace "peace with victory" as its platform and argue the case every day from every stage and in every interview.

It will take some months, and while the economy is very healthy overall, there is no escaping the temporary surge in gas prices. The GOP's candidates must argue the necessity of that burden in the short term. Argue for winning. Argue for a free Iran and a stable and safe Middle East.

There is no winning for the GOP in November without demanding and defending victory in this battle. Ignore the old "echo chamber" set up in the years of President Barack Obama to defend the indefensible Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which attempted to enshrine in an executive order an Iranian glide path to nuclear weapons surrounded by a forest of ballistic missiles capable of hitting Europe and eventually the U.S. President Trump and his administration understood the real danger. They refused the comfortable lies of the JCPOA.

President Trump correctly understands the threat from a nuclear Iran. So, he acted.

Serious Republicans must applaud Trump's refusal to kick the can down the road. The GOP must make the same strategic argument that the president embraced. And they should start doing it now and never stop until November's votes are counted.

By : Hugh Hewitt

A progressive pope takes aim at AI and risks killing its miracles



Bernie Sanders' war against AI just gained a powerful new ally: the pope.

In a new encyclical considered to be his most important policy statement to date, Pope Leo XIV warns that AI "threatens to normalize an anti-human vision" and calls for regulation of the booming industry.

According to Vatican News, the pontiff advises that technology must not be concentrated "in the hands of a few" but managed "so that the guiding principle is not solely profit but the dignity of every person and the common good of all people."

Channeling progressive Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who wants a federal moratorium on data center construction to slow the rapidly advancing technology, Pope Leo writes that AI cannot be allowed to throw people out of work "in the name of reducing costs and increasing profit."

Like Bernie, the pope "expresses his hopes for a renewal of labor organizations."

The pope has linked his encyclical letter, which The Wall Street Journal writes is "poised to define Leo's papacy," to an 1891 encyclical titled "Rerum Novarum," or "new things," which criticized social woes stemming from the Industrial Revolution.

That missive was written by Pope Leo XIII, the predecessor who inspired the current pope's choice of name. Leo XIV signed his encyclical, "Magnifica humanitas," on May 15, as did Leo XIII.

It's a telling choice. Yes, the Industrial Revolution created considerable suffering for early factory workers and migrants who flooded into cities ill-prepared to house or feed

them. On the other hand, that same industrialization of manual work led to an unprecedented increase in living standards, health and prosperity.

Before factories and machines took over production, travel and farming, most of humanity lived in abject poverty and on the edge of starvation.

The Industrial Revolution led to a huge boost in the production of everyday items such as clothes and furniture and to lower costs. Real wages, meanwhile, climbed steadily over the course of the 19th century throughout the industrialized world, and the poverty rate declined sharply.

As described by the Adam Smith Institute, which champions capitalism, "It was the Industrial Revolution that generated the wealth that paid for advances in public health and sanitation. It led to the conquest not only of extreme poverty, but of curable and preventable diseases. Far from bringing poverty and misery to the masses, it did the opposite, lifting their material conditions at a rate and to a level never before witnessed in human history."

That is the uplifting event in human history that Pope Leo XIII deplored. In the same vein, Pope Leo XIV is opposed to the progress and wealth creation promised by artificial intelligence.

As with the early industrialists who developed the steam engine and the spinning jenny, Silicon Valley innovators are making fortunes from AI and becoming politically powerful. Tech moguls acknowledge that some jobs will be overtaken by AI, but they also predict a boost to overall productivity, which will lead to more

leisure time, less drudgery and other benefits. They also see AI leading to great medical advances. Bernie Sanders and Pope Leo XIV are narrowly focused on job losses; perhaps they cannot imagine the benefits.

They are not imagining the millions of people around the world suffering from diseases, such as Parkinson's, that may soon be curable thanks to the analytical powers of AI.

They evidently don't know about Jorie Kraus, who was stricken with a rare genetic disorder and spent the first 73 days of her life in a neonatal ICU and her first two years struggling to breathe or speak.

Thanks to an AI diagnosis, Jorie was prescribed a common muscle relaxer used to treat seizures, and, suddenly, her little body regained control of her muscles. It was a miracle. Her mother gushed to an audience, "I said, 'It can't be, and it can't be so fast. It was almost like a light switch.'"

Or they aren't impressed by the medical community's newfound ability to repurpose existing drugs with the help of AI. The BBC reports, "At Harvard Medical School, an AI model found nearly 8,000 approved drugs that could potentially be repurposed to treat 17,000 different diseases."

AI's potential benefits are not limited to medicine. Large models can help streamline operations such as air traffic control or the TSA, helping to make flying safer and travel easier. Fraud and waste in government spending can more easily be tracked and eliminated. Many dull chores, such as drafting legal agreements or creating financial spreadsheets, can be done in a jiffy,

while weather forecasting could become more accurate, helping people prepare for catastrophes. AI critics, including Bernie and the pope, are alarmed that the bots can do some things faster and cheaper than humans, raising concerns about employment prospects. Young people, especially, are worried about their futures, and are increasingly hostile toward the industry.

AI developers have not adequately addressed these concerns. They should be encouraging students to learn how to use artificial intelligence and how to master its power, showing how it can enhance their skills and opportunities. Meanwhile, AI critics have taken a toll. According to a Morning Consult survey of brands and industries, AI is in the top 10 most distrusted categories, ranking just above social media. Interestingly, Americans are becoming less enamored with AI even as they use it more.

Meanwhile, skepticism about AI is confined almost entirely to the English-speaking developed world; residents of other countries are much more positive on ChatGPT, Gemini and the like. AI creators may be brilliant, but they're not doing a very good job promoting the new technology to Americans. They need to fix this by showing people what AI can do for them and encouraging regulation, along with the Trump White House, that assuages concerns.

Otherwise, Bernie and the pope may shut them down, abandoning the field to countries, especially China, which will erect far fewer guardrails to protect humanity. That is a far more frightening prospect.

By : Liz Peek

Twelve Years, Twelve Decisions: How PM Narendra Modi Remade India



When Narendra Modi walked into 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, as Prime Minister in May 2014, India was the world's eleventh-largest economy. It was a nation of vast potential but was plagued by fitful governance, perpetually negotiating coalitions that hedged its ambitions. Twelve years on, India has surpassed Japan to become the fourth-largest economy, with its GDP more than doubling from \$2.1 trillion to \$4.18 trillion. This arc has been the product of decisions, some sweeping, some surgical, but all of them consequential. Together, they amount to the most significant recalibration of Indian statecraft since Independence. Not all of them were without controversy. But the cumulative effect is undeniable: India no longer asks for a seat at the table. It sets the agenda. Each of the following pivotal decisions marked a distinct phase in this transformation. Thirty years is a long time to wait for a majority.

When the BJP won 282 seats in 2014, it was the first time since Rajiv Gandhi's landslide that a single party had crossed the halfway mark on its own. What that number meant in practice was simple: no regional partner could hold reform hostage. Under the UPA, bills on GST, insurance, FDI, and pension liberalisation had been blocked, watered down, or referred endlessly to committees by allies whose voters stood to lose from them. The Trinamool Congress, the SP, and the Left parties had each wielded the veto at different moments. After 2014, they could no longer. PM Modi's 2019 majority was even larger, and when 2024 produced a tighter result, the NDA still commanded enough seats to govern without paralysis. For structural reform, the mandate was the prerequisite for everything else that followed. This stable backing underpinned subsequent bold governance moves.

On the night of November 8, 2016, Indians were told that the 500-rupee

and 1,000-rupee notes in their pockets would cease to be legal tender by midnight. The move withdrew 86 per cent of circulating currency in a single announcement. The short-term damage was real and well-documented: quarterly GDP growth fell by roughly 1.5 percentage points, and cash queues outside banks stretched across the country for weeks. While the measure's effectiveness at eliminating black money remains hotly debated among economists and policymakers, its impact on accelerating formalisation was clearer. Before that night, cash was simply what Indians used. Afterwards, millions opened bank accounts, downloaded payment apps, and discovered that digital transactions worked. The India Stack that followed had a readier public because of it. As the economic landscape shifted, the focus soon turned to tax reforms.

One Nation, One Tax

GST had been in the works since 2000, when a committee was first constituted to design a unified indirect tax. It took 17 more years to arrive. When it did, in July 2017, it replaced 17 central and state taxes and 13 cesses with a single framework covering the whole country. The results are now written into the revenue data. Gross GST collections in FY 2024-25 reached a record Rs 22.08 lakh crore, growing 9.4 per cent year on year. The average monthly collection stood at Rs 1.84 lakh crore. April 2025 broke all previous monthly records at Rs 2.36 lakh crore. The registered taxpayer base has grown from 65 lakh entities in 2017 to more than 1.5 crore today, and logistics costs across the supply chain fell by over 33 per cent after state border checkpoints ceased to serve as negotiation points.

The Kashmir Decision

On August 5, 2019, the government revoked Article 370 by Presidential order, stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood, and reorganised it into

two Union Territories. The Supreme Court, in a unanimous December 2023 ruling, found no constitutional infirmity in the process. Six years on, the picture is mixed but measurable. Security data from the government shows that local terrorist recruitment fell to just one incident in 2025, down from 129 in 2019. J&K's nominal GSDP is projected to expand 11.19 per cent in FY 2024-25. Assembly elections were conducted and completed by October 2024, the first in a decade. However one reads the politics, the legal fact is settled: Kashmir now operates entirely under the Indian constitutional framework, with no carve-outs or exceptions.

Operation Sindoor

Twenty-six civilians were killed in the Pahalgam attack on April 22, 2025. Fifteen days later, Indian armed forces struck nine terrorist infrastructure sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The entire operation lasted under 23 minutes. It was the first time India had hit targets across the international boundary since 1971, a line that had held through Kargil, through Parliament attacks, through Pulwama. The Indian Army's DGMO confirmed more than 100 terrorists killed, among them senior figures connected to the IC814 hijacking and the Pulwama bombing. Indigenous air defence platforms, including the Akash system, intercepted retaliatory fire. Prime Minister Modi called the new posture a "new normal" as there was no longer a distinction between terrorist groups and the states that shelter them.

The G20 Presidency

India's year at the head of the G20 produced one outcome that will outlast the headlines: the African Union joined as a permanent member. It was the first time the group's composition had changed since its founding. The AU brings 55 nations to the table; the G20 now covers 80 per cent of the world's population, up from 65 per cent. Beyond the membership question, India's presidency delivered a consensus Leaders' Declaration on Ukraine despite deep divisions among members, something neither the Italian nor Indonesian presidencies had managed. The presidency logged 87 outcomes across 118 adopted documents, embedded Digital Public Infrastructure into the G20 framework, and announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor as a direct counterweight to China's Belt and Road.

Leading the Global South

Three editions of the Voice of the Global South Summit were held under India's convening in January 2023, November 2023, and August 2024, with over 125 developing nations participating across all three. The summits raised concerns about debt relief, climate finance, food security, and the digital divide, which were directly incorporated into India's G20 agenda and the New Delhi Declaration. The follow-through has been tangible. India launched DAKSHIN, a centre of excellence serving as a policy repository for developing nations, and committed a \$25 million Social Impact Fund for DPI deployment across the Global South. Togo is running its national digital ID programme on India's open-source MOSIP platform. Namibia became the first African country to license UPI in April 2024, with Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, and Mozambique formally in discussions to follow. India's e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti networks now connect students and patients across 11 African countries to Indian institutions remotely. India-Africa bilateral trade crossed \$100 billion in FY 2024-25, more than double the \$56 billion recorded in 2019-20, and India has extended over \$13 billion in concessional financing to African nations since 2010. Where Non-Alignment was a posture of studied equidistance, India's Global South strategy is one of active agenda-setting. It did not mean withdrawing from the Western-led order, but rewriting its terms of membership to reflect the majority of humanity it claims to represent.

Neighbourhood First and Act East

When PM Modi took office in 2014, he invited the heads of government of all SAARC nations to his swearing-in. It was a symbolic gesture, but it signalled something real: India intended to treat its neighbourhood as a foreign policy priority rather than a management problem. The Act East Policy that year gave institutional form to a strategic pivot that previous governments had labelled "Look East" but never fully operationalised. A development credit line of \$8 billion to Bangladesh, the opening of Sittwe Port in Myanmar in 2023 under the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway, now 70 per cent complete, together represent a serious attempt to use the Northeast as a bridge into South-East Asia rather than treat it as a security burden. The policy has run into headwinds.

(Contd on page 22)

Bangladesh's political transition after August 2024 cut bilateral trade by 13.3 per cent and suspended three railway services. Myanmar's civil war has stalled the Kaladan corridor and slowed the highway.

The India Stack

The trinity of Aadhaar, the Universal Payments Interface, and DigiLocker constitutes the most consequential digital public infrastructure any democracy has built in the twenty-first century. UPI processed 228.3 billion transactions in 2025, up from 172.2 billion in 2024. In December 2025, the single-month record was set at 21.63 billion transactions worth Rs 27.97 lakh crore. The Reserve Bank of India's latest Payments Systems Report shows that UPI accounted for 85.5 per cent of total digital payment transaction volume in the second half of 2025. The Stack's other two layers are equally consequential. Aadhaar today covers 134 crore live users — the world's largest biometric identification system — with over 17,000 crore authentication transactions completed. DigiLocker has enrolled over 300 million users and issued 6.75 billion documents across 1,460 participating institutions. Driver's licences, academic certificates, and insurance policies now exist as verified digital records, making the physical documents effectively backups rather than the primary credentials. Underpinning the whole architecture is the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile framework: 56.2 crore bank accounts opened since 2014, channelling Rs 6.9 lakh crore in Direct Benefit Transfers in FY 2024-25 alone. The government estimates cumulative savings of Rs 3.48 lakh crore from eliminating ghost accounts and routing subsidies directly to verified recipients. India has signed DPI cooperation agreements with 23 countries across five continents, with UPI itself live in eight nations, including the UAE, France, Singapore, and Mauritius.

Defence Indigenisation

Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence has produced numbers that would have seemed implausible a decade ago. Defence exports reached a record Rs 38,424 crore in FY 2025-26, a 62.66 per cent increase over the previous year, compared to roughly Rs 2,000 crore five years ago, according to the Ministry of Defence. India's defence production crossed \$18 billion in December 2025. Products are now available in over 80 countries, including the United States and France. The platforms behind these numbers are no longer hypothetical. The platforms behind these numbers are no longer prototypes waiting for clearance. INS Vikrant, India's first home-built aircraft carrier capable of operating 36 aircraft, was commissioned in September 2022 after a decade of construction involving hundreds of Indian companies across the supply chain. The Light Combat Aircraft Tejas Mk-1A, a fourth-

generation-plus fighter with AESA radar and beyond-visual-range capability, is in active frontline service. The Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System, a 155mm howitzer developed jointly by DRDO and Bharat Forge, received approval for 307 guns in early 2025. The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher, the Akash air defence system, and the ASTRA beyond-visual-range missile have all entered service as indigenous platforms rather than licence-produced copies. More than 14,000 items have been indigenised under the SRIJAN initiative alone. The private sector now contributes 23 per cent of total defence production, up from 21 per cent two years ago.

The Nuclear Bet

The SHANTI Act, passed in December 2025, did two things at once. It repealed the Atomic Energy Act of 1962, which had barred private companies from the sector since Independence, and it replaced the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010, whose supplier liability clause had, for 15 years, kept Westinghouse, EDF, and other Western vendors from committing to Indian projects despite the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal. Private operators can now build, own, and run nuclear plants. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board finally has statutory independence. These are not incremental reforms; they are the removal of the two specific legislative obstacles that had frozen India's nuclear ambitions for over a decade. Four months later, on April 6, 2026, the 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam achieved first criticality. Designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and built by state-owned BHAVINI using predominantly indigenous technology, the PFBR makes India only the second country, after Russia, to operate a commercial-scale fast-breeder reactor. Where conventional reactors consume uranium, the PFBR produces more fissile material than it burns, converting uranium-238 into plutonium-239. In later configurations, it will transmute thorium-232 into uranium-233, opening the path to a third stage of India's nuclear programme built on thorium reserves that geological surveys suggest could power the country for several hundred years. Two additional 600-MW fast breeders are already planned for Kalpakkam. The Nuclear Energy Mission targets 100 GW by 2047, with installed capacity set to grow from 8,780 MW today to 21,880 MW by 2031-32. Nuclear currently accounts for 3 per cent of India's electricity output. The gap between that figure and the target is enormous, but for the first time, the legal and technological architecture needed to close it is in place.

Repositioning in the World Order

The cumulative effect of these eleven decisions is the twelfth: a fundamental repositioning of India in the global order. In 2014, India was described by its own officials as a "leading power, not just a

balancing power" — a distinction more aspirational than operational. Today, it is the world's fourth-largest economy; its digital model is being exported to 23 countries; its military has demonstrated the will and capability to strike across an international boundary; and it has twice in a decade reshaped the membership of multilateral institutions. None of this amounts to a finished project.

Unemployment in Jammu and Kashmir remains stubbornly high; nuclear ambitions face a vast investment gap; and the 2024 election was closer than anticipated. But the direction of travel is clear. India no longer seeks permission. It sets terms—and the 12 years that produced that shift will be studied long after the decisions themselves have faded into routine.

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THE GEOPOLITICAL SHAKEDOWN

Maritime Tolls and "Shadow" Fronts in the Strait of Hormuz



"The United States Government will not tolerate any effort to impose a tolling system in the Strait of Hormuz," Secretary Bessent stated unequivocally. "Oman, in particular, should know that the U.S. Treasury will aggressively target any actors involved - directly or indirectly - in facilitating tolls for the Strait, and any willing partners will be penalized. All nations should reject outright any efforts by Iran to disrupt the free flow of commerce."

BANDAR ABBAS, IRAN — The Strait of Hormuz, a crescent of water flanked by jagged limestone cliffs and shared between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman, has long been termed the world's most critical maritime chokepoint. Through this narrow 21-mile-wide gateway flows roughly one-fifth of the world's petroleum and liquefied natural gas (LNG). Today, however, it has been transformed into an unprecedented arena of corporate extortion, asymmetric naval warfare, and digital identity theft.

A multi-month investigative probe reveals that while Western warships attempt to project power in the region, a highly sophisticated, parallel maritime governance system has emerged. Orchestrated by Tehran's newly established Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) and enforced by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN), this system forces international commercial vessels to pay exorbitant, illicit "transit tolls" and navigate strictly dictated routes. Those who pay are granted passage through an

invisible, sanctions-exempt corridor. Those who refuse find themselves targeted by drone strikes, limpet mines, or immediate boarding actions.

The financing behind this maritime shakedown does not flow through traditional banks. Instead, it is routed through a global web of "shadow" front companies, illicit currency exchanges, and deceptive shipping registries stretching from the United Arab Emirates and China to landlocked European microstates. This investigation untangles the anatomy of this geopolitical shakedown, the digital deception masking it, and the high-stakes financial warfare currently playing out between Washington and the coastal states of the Persian Gulf.

Part I: The Anatomy of the Toll: The Persian Gulf Strait Authority

On May 18, 2026, amid the smoldering economic ruin of a devastating military campaign that crippled much of its conventional surface fleet, Tehran quieted its guns and launched a bureaucratic offensive: the

creation of the Persian Gulf Strait Authority. Nominally framed as a public safety and environmental regulatory body, the PGSA represents a brazen evolution in state-sponsored maritime leverage.

According to internal shipping manifests, compliance directives, and satellite telemetry reviewed for this report, the PGSA works in lockstep with the remnants of the IRGC Navy. The operational mechanism is deceptively simple yet highly coercive. As commercial tankers and bulk carriers approach the Gulf of Oman, they are contacted via bridge-to-bridge radio or encrypted digital channels. The PGSA issues an ultimatum: coordinate directly with Iranian authorities, obtain formal authorization, and alter course to sail deep within Iranian territorial waters along designated coastal tracks.

The price of admission into this "safe passage" corridor is an illegitimate transit fee—effectively a maritime toll—vaguely categorized by the PGSA as an "environmental security tariff" or

"infrastructure maintenance levy." These fees are calibrated based on hull size, cargo type, and destination, frequently running into hundreds of thousands of dollars per transit. For shipowners, the calculus is brutal. Following months of intense kinetic skirmishes that left the Gulf littered with naval wreckage, commercial insurance premiums have skyrocketed to prohibitive heights. Lloyd's List intelligence indicates that transit volumes through the Strait remain catastrophically depressed compared to pre-crisis levels. Faced with the choice of waiting weeks for a U.S. Navy escort or paying a discrete tariff to guarantee unmolested passage, a growing number of cash-strapped maritime operators are quietly capitulating to the PGSA's demands.

The strategic brilliance of the Iranian strategy lies in its physical deployment. By forcing toll-paying merchant ships to hug the Iranian coastline, Tehran effectively transforms international commerce into a human shield. Any Western naval vessel attempting to intervene or interdict a toll-paying ship risks violating sovereign Iranian waters or striking a civilian vessel, creating an immediate escalatory trap.

Part II: Ghosts in the Chokepoint: The Digital Deception
To map how deeply this parallel system has penetrated global trade, this investigation analyzed hundreds of hours of Automatic Identification System (AIS) tracking data, corporate registries, and satellite imagery. The findings reveal a lawless frontier where data is more easily forged than a hull is painted. The Strait of Hormuz has become what maritime intelligence analysts call a "contested information space" populated by ghost ships and digital zombies.

A recent data analysis highlighted by regional monitors underscores the scale of the deception. Over a recent thirty-day window of active enforcement, a significant percentage of energy carriers transiting the Strait utilized sophisticated electronic warfare tactics to entirely mask their operations:

This digital manipulation has given rise to the phenomenon of "zombie shipping." A tanker may broadcast coordinates placing it hundreds of miles away in the Indian Ocean while high-resolution satellite imagery confirms it is physically loading crude at Iran's Kharg Island terminal or anchoring within sight of Bandar Abbas to settle its PGSA accounts.

Furthermore, the operational architecture of these ships spans a highly fragmented global landscape. Of the documented vessels interacting with the PGSA network, roughly 15.7% are managed by firms directly based in Iran. Another 13% trace back to corporate entities in China, 11% to Greece, and nearly 10% to the United Arab Emirates. Crucially, the ultimate beneficial owners of nearly one-fifth of the observed fleet remain entirely shielded behind layers of shell companies, leaving international regulators blind to who is financing and profiting from the shakedown.

Part III: The Financial Infrastructure: "Shadow" Fronts
The true engine of the Hormuz toll system is not the fast-attack boats of the IRGC, but a highly sophisticated financial web that bypasses the traditional SWIFT banking network entirely. Because direct cash or wire transfers to an Iranian state entity would instantly trigger catastrophic Western sanctions, the PGSA relies on an expansive network of "shadow" front companies and non-traditional value transfers.

Maritime Strategy / Asset Class	Observed Fleet Share	Primary Mechanism / Tactical Objective
AIS Spoofing & Signal Jamming	35% of Fleet	Deliberately disabling transponders or broadcasting fraudulent GPS coordinates to manipulate digital identities.
"False Flags" Registry	16 Vessels	Registering hulls under landlocked nations (e.g., San Marino, Botswana) or flags of convenience to obscure ultimate ownership.
Strategic Oil Transport	36.2% of Traffic	Continued flow of crude oil, petroleum products, and gas directly linked to or sanctioned by Tehran.
Non-Oil Network Cargo	57 Ships	Transporting raw materials, manufacturing components, and consumer goods tied directly to Iranian state enterprises.

According to financial intelligence sources and corporate filings, the pipeline relies on complicit or coerced intermediaries operating out of regional financial hubs, particularly Dubai, Muscat, and select ports in East Asia. When a shipping company agrees to pay the PGSA toll, they do not send funds to Tehran. Instead, the payment is directed to a seemingly benign logistics, bunkering, or consulting firm registered in a third-country jurisdiction.

These front companies utilize a variety of methods to obscure and launder the proceeds:

Trade-Based Laundering & Commodity Swaps: Toll debts are frequently settled through indirect compensation arrangements. A shipping conglomerate might pay for the "toll" by delivering overvalued manufacturing components, electronics, or refined industrial chemicals to a front company in Asia, which then re-routes the goods to Iran.

Digital Assets and Cryptocurrency: A rising percentage of PGSA transactions are cleared using tether (USDT) and other stablecoins, transferred between unhosted wallets that leave no footprint within Western clearing houses.

The Hawala Network: For regional operators, traditional, trust-based informal value transfer systems are utilized. Cash is deposited with a broker in one Gulf city and cleared by an affiliated broker in Iran, completely detached from any formal bank ledger.

Once the front companies consolidate the funds, the capital is funneled directly into the procurement networks of the IRGC. This allows the paramilitary group to replenish its drone stockpiles, maintain its missile batteries, and finance regional proxies despite being under total international isolation.

The economic fallout of this parallel system is staggering. While the United States and its allies have spent billions on naval deployments to enforce freedom of navigation, Iran has successfully weaponized its geography to generate an alternative, un-sanctionable revenue stream.

Part IV: Historical Precedents of Maritime Extortion

While the digital sophistication of the PGSA's toll system is a modern development, the strategy of leveraging narrow waterways for geopolitical extortion and economic survival has deep historical precedents. Throughout history, whenever a nation finds itself economically suffocated or militarily cornered, the temptation to transform a strategic chokepoint into a

sovereign tollbooth has proven irresistible.

The Barbary Corsairs and the Birth of the U.S. Navy

The most direct historical parallel to the PGSA's current shakedown occurred at the turn of the 19th century along the Barbary Coast of North Africa (modern-day Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya). For decades, the Ottoman-aligned Barbary states operated a state-sanctioned system of maritime piracy and extortion. They seized Western merchant ships in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, enslaving crews and demanding massive "tribute" payments from European powers in exchange for immunity from attack.

When the newly independent United States refused to continue paying these escalating bribes, the Pasha of Tripoli declared war in 1801. This existential threat to American commerce led directly to the birth and deployment of the permanent U.S. Navy. The Barbary Wars established a foundational tenet of international maritime law: that freedom of navigation through international waters is an absolute right, and yielding to state-sponsored maritime extortion only invites further aggression.

The Sound Dues of Denmark (1429–1857)

For over four centuries, the Kingdom of Denmark maintained an official toll system known as the Sound Dues (Øresundstolden). Utilizing Kronborg Castle at Elsinore, which overlooked the narrow straits connecting the North Sea to the Baltic Sea, the Danish crown demanded that all foreign merchant ships drop anchor and pay a tax based on the value of their cargo.

Unlike the PGSA, the Sound Dues were eventually codified into treaties, but they generated immense geopolitical resentment and sparked numerous naval conflicts with the Hanseatic League, Sweden, and Britain. The system was finally dismantled in 1857 via the Copenhagen Convention, when a coalition of maritime nations paid a one-time global buyout to Denmark, establishing the modern legal precedent that international straits must remain entirely free of sovereign taxation.

The Tanker War (1984–1988)

The modern operational playbook of the IRGC was forged during the latter half of the Iran-Iraq War. Desperate to halt Iraq's oil exports and retaliate against the Gulf states backing Baghdad, Iran launched the "Tanker War," systematically targeting commercial merchant shipping transiting the Strait of Hormuz with anti-ship missiles, speedboats, and naval mines.

TYPICAL IRGC-ENFORCED TOLL ROUTE

[Gulf of Oman]



[PGSA Radio Intercept] → Demand: Divert to Iranian Coast



↳ Paid? → Escort through Safe Iranian Waters → [Persian

Gulf]



↳ Refused? → Target for Drone/Mine Strike or Seizure

The crisis forced the United States to launch Operation Earnest Will in 1987—the largest naval convoy operation since World War II—in which Kuwaiti oil tankers were re-flagged as American vessels and given direct military escorts. The current tensions, the deployment of Operation Project Freedom, and Iran's pivot to asymmetric "regulatory" extortion are a direct continuation of the tactical lessons Tehran learned forty years ago: when facing overwhelming conventional military power, the most effective asymmetric weapon is the threat of global economic strangulation. **Part V: Washington Retaliates: Operation Economic Fury**

The response from Washington to this emerging transit regime has been swift, aggressive, and highly volatile. On Wednesday, May 27, 2026, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) took the definitive step of blacklisting the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, designating it under Executive Order 13224 as a state-sponsored extortion ring materially supporting a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

The regulatory hammer was accompanied by a severe diplomatic warning aimed squarely at U.S. allies in the region who may be turning a blind eye to the PGSA's financial architecture. On May 28, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent issued a public warning aimed directly at the Sultanate of Oman—a nation that has historically maintained a delicate, neutral position as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" and shares territorial oversight of the Strait's shipping lanes.

The Treasury's actions effectively place a financial blockade around the PGSA. By placing the authority on the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List, the U.S. has mandated that any global shipping line, maritime insurer, classification society, or bank that facilitates a payment to the

PGSA will be entirely severed from the U.S. dollar financial system.

Simultaneously, the administration expanded its broader campaign, Operation Economic Fury, to include sweeping sanctions against Iranian commercial aviation, cutting off remaining access to international landing slots, refueling contracts, and global ticket sales. The administration's stated goal is clear: to build an impenetrable "Wall of Steel" that completely chokes off Tehran's alternative revenue streams and forces the regime to its knees at the negotiating table.

Part VI: The Brink of Collapse: A Trapped Maritime Workforce

While Washington and Tehran trade multi-billion-dollar economic blows and engage in high-stakes brinkmanship, the human and operational toll at sea has reached a breaking point. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has issued a warning stating that the ongoing crisis in the Persian Gulf represents the most severe disruption to international merchant sailors since the height of the Second World War.

According to latest maritime censuses, an estimated 20,000 commercial sailors are currently trapped aboard roughly 2,000 vessels marooned across the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. These crews—largely comprised of mariners from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe—are caught in a logistical and legal limbo. Many are aboard ships whose owners have gone bankrupt under the weight of soaring insurance costs, while others are stranded on vessels whose documentation has been frozen due to suspected sanctions violations.

The physical danger remains acute. Despite recent institutional assertions that the Strait is "completely open" and that the conventional Iranian navy has been "annihilated" by

tactical campaigns, shipping executives remain highly skeptical. The threat has merely mutated from conventional warships to low-cost, deniable hazards: floating naval mines, GPS-spoofing arrays, and swarm attacks by autonomous suicide drones.

The launch of the U.S. military's Operation Project Freedom was intended to restore confidence by providing direct guided-missile destroyer escorts for neutral merchant shipping. However, the operation has faced severe friction. Shipowners and international maritime insurers report that the naval escorts have not yet provided the operational clarity or comprehensive protection required to justify resuming normal, high-volume transits. Compounding the gridlock, regional coalitions are fracturing; governments like South Korea have publicly announced they are "reviewing" their participation in the escort mission after several of their national vessels remained marooned under immense security risks.

The current situation in the Strait of Hormuz is no longer just a localized conflict or a standard enforcement of economic sanctions. It represents a fundamental challenge to the post-war legal framework of global commerce. By successfully running a shadow toll system backed by digital deception and covert financial networks, Iran has demonstrated that a cornered regional power can effectively alter the rules of international shipping.

As the U.S. Treasury attempts to tighten its financial stranglehold and Western navies patrol the troubled blue waters of the Gulf, the shipping industry faces a grim new reality. The historic guarantee of free, unhindered transit through global chokepoints has been replaced by a fragmented, hazardous frontier where safety must either be bought from a shadow front or defended at the edge of a naval cannon.

The Samarkand Syndrome: Why Babur and family never became 'us'

For the Timurids, or the Mughals of Hindustan, Samarkand remained their home, which they lost and could never get back. Bharat became the stage upon which their grandeur unfolded, while their imagination repeatedly drifted beyond the Hindu Kush toward the orchards, graves and memories of their homeland in Central Asia.

Five centuries after the First Battle of Panipat (1526), Bharat finds itself revisiting the establishment of the Timurid Gurkhaniya Empire, though often under the historically imprecise label of "Mughal". The battle itself has left behind celebrated images of gunpowder, cannons, and a transformed military landscape. Yet some legacies remain less discussed. Among them was Babur's use of villages around Panipat as protective buffers (human shields) during his campaign, an aspect that rarely enters popular memory. But this is not the subject I intend to pursue here.

What concerns me instead is a larger historical assumption that has gradually hardened into conventional wisdom: that the Timurids eventually became Indians, that the dynasty which arrived from Central Asia dissolved itself completely into the soil of Hindustan and came to see India as its unquestioned homeland. The passage of time has made this notion appear almost self-evident.

This essay seeks to question that narrative. For beneath the marble splendour of Agra and the imperial grandeur of Delhi lay another inheritance, one that continued to look northward beyond the Hindu Kush, toward Samarkand, Balkh, and the ancestral landscapes of Timurid memory. To understand whether the Timurids truly became "us", it is perhaps best to begin with the words of the dynasty's founder himself.

So, I begin with Babur's initial reflection on Hindustan:

Hindustan is a country of few charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits; there is none; none of genius and capacity; none of manners; in handicraft and work, there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, muskmelons or first-rate fruits, no ice or cold water, no good bread or cooked food in the bzrs, no hot-baths, no colleges, no candles, torches or candlesticks.

While he cries folly for India, he goes on to say this for Samarkand:

Samarkand, for nearly 140 years, had been the capital of our dynasty. An alien and of what stamp! An Azbeg foe, had taken possession of it! It had slipped from our hands; God gave it again! Plundered and ravaged, our own returned to us.

Indeed, Hindustan did not appear even as a consolation prize for Samarkand—the land Babur regarded as home. Babur himself lays out the reasons with striking clarity in the Baburnama for why he turned toward Hindustan:

1. To fulfil the ambition associated with his forefather Timur and establish



Timurid authority in Hindustan under an Islamic political order.

2. Although Kabul was the first place where he assumed the title of Padshah, it generated limited revenue; Hindustan, in his own description, promised abundant wealth, plentiful labour, and a land rich in gold and silver.

3. He had effectively been pushed out of his Central Asian homeland, with his arch-rival Shaibani Khan steadily closing every path back. Thus, despite his enduring longing for Samarkand, the road home had gradually ceased to exist.

For Babur, Hindustan was not the destination of nostalgia; it was the destination of necessity, ambition, and opportunity. Samarkand remained the horizon of memory, while Hindustan became the terrain of survival and empire.

Carrying the old thread of longing across generations, Akbar's chronicler Abu'l Fazl hints that a powerful attachment to Central Asia flowed through Timurid veins. In his words, even Timur, after devastating India, is described as having been "impelled by the love of his native land". This was not merely an emotion confined to one ruler. It became an inherited memory, an ancestral pull that echoed through successive Timurid emperors.

As the dream of Central Asia often appeared brighter than its practical rewards, the corridor between Hindustan and the northwest remained a living artery, a strategic passage that the Timurids sought to preserve under their influence and control. Both Babur and Abu'l Fazl emphasise this reality in their respective writings by representing it as a pathway leading toward memory, legitimacy, and the geography of origin itself.

The argument becomes even more visible when one turns to Timurid writings produced after Babur. Their own words frequently reveal that Central Asia continued to occupy the position of "home" in the Timurid imagination. They use the term *wilayat* (one's own province or homeland) repeatedly, tying Balkh and Transoxiana into an enduring sense of belonging. This language creates the impression that Hindustan, despite becoming the seat of imperial power, was

often seen as an extension of an older world rather than its replacement.

The *Maasir al-Umara* by Samsam ud Daula Shah Nawaz Khan, a biographical work on Muslim and Hindu officers serving Timurid rulers in India from 1500 to around 1780, refers to Khwaja Abdullah Ahrari of Samarkand as belonging to the *wilayat*. This detail deserves attention. Shah Nawaz Khan was a courtier of Qamar ud Din Khan, Asif Jah I, the first Nizam of Hyderabad. Had Hindustan been fully internalised as the unquestioned homeland by the eighteenth century, it is difficult to explain why a courtier writing in the Deccan would continue to describe Samarkand as *wilayat*. The persistence of such terminology suggests that the older geography of belonging had not entirely faded.

The *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* provides many more such records. Mir Shihab ud Din Siddiqi, a courtier of Aurangzeb born in Bukhara, is described as someone who came from *wilayat*. The same text states that Khwaja Baha al-Din, the great-grandson of Subhan Quli of Balkh, had arrived from his homeland (*az wilayat rasida*). Equally, revealing is the manner in which Subhan Quli himself is described as *wali* (Governor) of Balkh in this text. The importance lies in what such language reveals about political imagination. Even though Subhan Quli functioned in practical terms as ruler of Balkh, the vocabulary employed in Aurangzeb's court framed him as a governor rather than an independent sovereign. Such terminology appears to preserve an older Timurid conception in which regions like Balkh and Transoxiana remained part of an inherited political and emotional universe.

The sword had lost its reach, but memory had not surrendered its territory.

Jahangir's *Tuzuk* refers to *Wali Muhammad* as *wali-yi-Turan*, while the *Padshah-nama* similarly describes the Uzbek ruler Imam Quli as *wali-yi-Turan* or "Governor of Turan". Such language reflects a deeper political imagination and a carefully preserved imperial myth that Uzbek-held lands still existed, at least symbolically, within the orbit of Timurid grandeur and inherited claims.

When the dust of Panipat had barely settled in 1526, Babur distributed the fruits of his victory not merely within India but across the lands of memory. Gifts travelled northward to relatives in Central Asia, to Iran, and to holy men in Samarkand, Khurasan, and the Hejaz. Russian scholar AA Semenov sees in these gestures a heart still tied to its homeland, a ruler reluctant to call India home before reclaiming the lands of his ancestors. In a later letter, Babur instructed Humayun that all his subjects in India should aid the effort of reconquest of Homeland.

Seeing an opportunity in the Safavid seizure of Khurasan from the Uzbeks, Babur directed Humayun toward Balkh, Hisar, Samarkand, or Herat, "whichever side favours fortune". Hisar was intended as Humayun's province, Balkh for Kamran, and Samarkand as the restored Timurid capital. In 1528, as Humayun marched with forty thousand men toward Samarkand, Babur asked him to wait, assuring him that they would return to their "hereditary kingdoms" (*wilayat-i-mawruthi*) once Hindustan had been firmly secured.

Humayun failed to recover Central Asia, and soon lost India itself. One cannot help but wonder whether, had fortune favoured him, his gaze would have turned eastward toward India or northward toward his ancestral lands. Even during exile in Iran, his thoughts repeatedly returned to conquest and restoration. To secure Shah Tahmasp's support, the Timurids surrendered Qandahar to the Safavids. Yet after reaching Kabul in 1549 with Safavid assistance, Humayun unexpectedly turned toward Balkh rather than India. Perhaps the pull of Central Asia still tugged harder than the possession of Hindustan, though Kamran's betrayal ended that dream before it could take shape.

When Akbar ascended the throne in 1556, his early years were consumed by the struggle to secure his hold over India. Surrounded by rebellions and instability, he had little space to openly pursue his dreams of Turan. In time, the possibility narrowed further as the powerful Uzbek ruler Abdullah Khan consolidated Central

The Samarkand Syndrome: Why Babur and family never became 'us'

Asia and placed the ancestral lands of the Timurids beyond easy reach. Yet Abu'l Fazl suggests that Akbar's ambitions had not disappeared, only fallen into dormancy, remarking that "the time of the appearance of designs was in the future".

When the Badakhshani Timurids, Sulayman and Ibrahim, ventured toward Balkh, Abu'l Fazl dismissed their efforts as premature, implying that such a harvest belonged to Akbar alone. On another occasion, Akbar even turned away the envoys of Abdullah Khan because he still entertained thoughts of recovering his ancestral territories. Abu'l Fazl portrays this vision as an echo of Babur's strategy: India was first to be firmly secured, and only then would the Timurid banner advance toward Turan. As he writes, "Should the wide country of India be civilised by means of obedient vassals, (Akbar) would proceed to Turan..."

A point worth noting here, though beyond the immediate scope of this essay, is that Akbar too appears to have framed his role in terms of a civilising mission, much like later European imperial thought. Abu'l Fazl's language suggests that Hindustan was never a homeland, but rather as a vast realm to be disciplined, ordered, and brought under the mould of Timurid statecraft with headquarters seated somewhere else (Samarkand).

Akbar's own words also reveal that these ideas had not vanished. In 1577, responding to Uzbek mockery regarding Qandahar's loss to the Safavid "outsiders" (biganaha), he replied that Timurid lands had hardly fared better under Uzbek control. A decade later, in 1587, Abu'l Fazl wrote to the Timurid ambassador in Bukhara that "His Majesty has turned his attention to the conquest of Turan", though Akbar remained willing to set aside even broader ambitions if peace with Abdullah Khan could be secured.

Jahangir, too, bequeaths a testament to this ancestral pull. In his memoirs, he confesses that his father Akbar never let slip the dream of Transoxiana, and that he, Jahangir, nursed two intentions:

One, that inasmuch as the conquest of Transoxiana was always in the pure mind of my revered father, though every time he determined on it, things occurred to prevent it. If this business (of getting Kafir rulers to submit) could be settled, and this danger dismissed from my mind, I would leave Parviz in Hindustan, and in reliance on Allah, myself start for my hereditary territories.

In the lofty cadence of his memoirs, he proclaims with customary grandeur:

As I had made up my exalted mind to the conquest of Transoxiana, which was the hereditary kingdom of my ancestors, I desired to free the face of Hindustan from the rubbish of the factious and rebellious, and leaving one of my sons in that country, to go myself with a valiant army in due array, with elephants of mountainous dignity and of lightning speed, and taking ample treasure with me, to undertake the conquest of my ancestral dominions

After this brief expression of imperial ambition, Jahangir's Tuzuk falls strangely silent. The subject of Central Asia scarcely returns. Historian RC Verma argues that this diplomatic lull until 1621

reflected Jahangir's continued desire to reclaim his ancestral lands. His gaze remained fixed on Samarkand even if his throne stood in Lahore. Yet the silence may not have been one-sided, for Imam Quli Khan of Bukhara had earlier suspended relations after a perceived slight.

The estrangement was eventually softened, perhaps through the influence of Nur Jahan. M Athar Ali suggests that in 1621, Imam Quli's mother initiated reconciliation with the Timurid court. The growing Safavid threat likely compelled both Bukhara and Hindustan toward cooperation, allowing political necessity to outweigh wounded pride.

Even in the later years of his reign, Jahangir's interest in Central Asia remained alive. In conversations with Mutribi Samarqandi, he displayed a persistent curiosity about the affairs of the region. This interest was not merely sentimental. At Nur Jahan's urging, Mir Baraka, a Bukharan in Timurid service, was sent to restore ties with Imam Quli and carry imperial respects to the Juybari shaykhs. Baraka remained in Central Asia until 1627 and returned with Abd al-Rahim Khwaja, whose arrival Jahangir valued enough to delay his journey to Kashmir.

Jahangir died soon afterward, but the thread remained unbroken. Shah Jahan ensured continuity by dispatching Hakim Haziq to Bukhara with gifts for the shaykhs, preserving a connection that was political on the surface but still carried the echoes of an older Timurid attachment to their ancestral world.

Shah Jahan's longing too for the ancestral world of Turan was a deeply rooted aspiration. The imperial chronicles, clothed in the language of diplomacy, describe cordial relations with the Uzbeks during the first decade of his reign. Beneath this calm surface, however, lingered unresolved resentment. Nazr Muhammad's (ruler of Balkh and Badakhshan) attempted siege of Kabul during the succession disturbances of 1629 had not been forgotten. Shah Jahan waited patiently for circumstances to shift, while continuing to send generous sums and support to allies in Mawarannah, quietly nurturing influence beyond the Hindu Kush.

The first clear indication of his intentions appears in a letter written in 1640 by Hasan Khan Shamlu, the Safavid governor of Herat. Responding to a communication from the Timurid court, he referred to subtle hints about recovering the *mulk-i-mawruthi*, the "hereditary dominions", and the *gurkhana-yi-ajdad-i-izam*, the resting place of imperial ancestors. Hasan records that Shah Jahan intended to return that very year to Kabul and would send one of his sons ahead to secure Balkh and Badakhshan.

Hasan sought reassurance that the campaign was directed toward Turan and not Khurasan. For the Safavids, the Uzbeks represented a constant strategic threat, and the possibility of Timurid intervention carried significance beyond diplomacy. In another letter, Hasan urged Asaf Khan to specify the date of the proposed march toward Turkistan so that Safavid and Timurid forces might move

together and strike at Uzbek power.

Events, however, unfolded differently. The campaign materialised only five years later, and without Safavid participation.

The imperial records of Shah Jahan's Balkh campaign leave little ambiguity regarding its purpose. They do not portray it as an ordinary military expedition or a search for territorial gain. Instead, they connect it directly to Shah Jahan's desire to recover what were repeatedly described as his inherited lands. The roots of this ambition are traced back to the period following Jahangir's death, when Nazr Muhammad's actions at Kabul first revived in him a desire for Balkh and Badakhshan, not merely as strategic territories, but as lands bound to memory, ancestry, and dynastic inheritance.

The Timurid chronicle (Shah Jahan-nama) states:

From the time of the last Emperor Jahangir's death, when Nazr Muhammad Khan had vainly attempted to seize Kabul, the mighty soul of the world-subduing monarch had been bent upon the countries of Balkh and Badakhshan, which were properly his hereditary dominions.

The chronicles attribute this 15-year delay to "impediments of state", a phrase that conceals the relentless burdens of empire. Foremost among these was the grinding struggle in the Deccan, where the Shia Sultanates and rising Maratha power steadily consumed imperial resources. What began as a challenge would eventually tighten around the Timurid state and dominate the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign.

According to A Ansari, Shah Jahan viewed Qandahar as a political keystone. Recovering it from the Safavids would signal to both the Ottomans and the Uzbeks that Timurid ambitions looked beyond Persia and toward the ancestral lands across the Hindu Kush. Only then could a march toward Balkh acquire strategic credibility. RC Verma argues that although internal tensions between Nazr Muhammad and Imam Quli may have tempted Timurid intervention, the larger geopolitical situation, particularly tensions with the Safavids after the struggle over Qandahar, made a major invasion difficult.

Yet Hasan Khan's correspondence suggests that in 1640 Safavid cooperation was actively offered, which disappeared with his death and Shah Safi's renewed focus on Qandahar.

What is most striking is that even the humiliation of abandoning Balkh after scarcely two years did not extinguish Timurid aspirations. Aurangzeb himself had commanded imperial forces there and had witnessed the limits of such dreams more clearly than most. Yet even he, austere in temperament and hardened by campaigns, never entirely abandoned the pull of the ancestral horizon. In a letter to his son, the Crown Prince Muazzam, he entrusted that flame to another bearer:

If a father is unable to finish a work, the son must carry it to completion... This mortal creature harbours a wish unfulfilled. It was the desire of Shah Jahan that I should dispatch one of his grandsons to those lands — with

a grand army and the instruments of war.

Even as Aurangzeb's attention increasingly turned toward the Marathas and the Deccan Sultanates, traces in his words and actions suggest that Turan never entirely faded from the Timurid imagination. The ancestral lands remained a distant echo at the edge of the empire, a memory not fully surrendered. The continuing references to *mulk-i-mawruthi* (hereditary dominions) and *gurkhana-yi-ajdad-i-izam* (the resting place of great ancestors) indicate that the symbolic and dynastic pull of Central Asia endured, even when military realities made reconquest increasingly impractical.

Italian traveller and scholar, Manucci observed that Aurangzeb still cherished thoughts of conquest of ancestral lands, and this sentiment appears to find support in subtle diplomatic gestures. One such example was the conferring of *sarapa* or robes of honour upon the ambassadors of Subhan Quli. Such honours were generally reserved for dependents and subordinate rulers. Though wrapped in the language of courtly etiquette, the act carried an imperial undertone, suggesting a symbolic assertion of superiority and perhaps reflecting an older Timurid conception of authority over the Uzbek world.

Aurangzeb also maintained links with the religious and intellectual networks of Central Asia. He preserved ties with scholars and Sufi figures from Balkh, including Abd al Ghaffar Dihbidi, and displayed interest in the educational institutions of Samarkand. French physician and traveller Bernier's observations indicate that Central Asia occupied a place in the Timurid imagination beyond simple territorial ambition. It functioned as a source of legitimacy, memory, lineage, and continuity.

Even if the Timurids of Hindustan never regained the lands of their forefathers, their language and actions reveal a recurring nostalgia. Babur's inheritance was not merely territorial. It was also emotional and ideological. For rulers like Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the story of Central Asia remained unfinished. This attachment also found expression in their concern for ancestral memory itself. As descendants of Timur, the emperors of Hindustan assumed responsibility, whether from genuine sentiment or dynastic obligation, for preserving the monuments of their lineage. Foremost among these stood the *Gur-i-Amir* in Samarkand, Timur's mausoleum. More than a structure of stone, it was a monument of dynastic memory and a surviving fragment of a world they regarded as ancestral.

One revealing instance appears in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. During the embassy of Mir Baraka to Bukhara in 1621, the mission extended beyond diplomacy with Imam Quli Khan. Jahangir instructed that gold be delivered for the maintenance of the mausoleum. The act carried significance beyond charity. It represented a conscious reaffirmation of lineage and ancestral connection.

Your next iPhone may lock itself automatically if Apple detects phone snatching

Apple is reportedly developing an iPhone feature that locks the device when it detects a snatch. The tool could protect data in the first seconds after theft by using motion, watch proximity and familiar-location checks.

If your iPhone gets stolen while it is unlocked, those first few seconds can put your sensitive data at risk. A thief may quickly try to access passwords, banking apps, messages or even disable tracking features before the owner has time to react. Now, Apple is reportedly working on a new security feature that could automatically lock an iPhone the moment it detects that the device may have been snatched from someone's hand.

According to 9to5Mac, the feature is designed for a common theft situation where a phone is stolen while the screen is still unlocked. Apple already has anti-theft protections such as Find My, Activation Lock and Stolen Device Protection, but these systems become less effective if the iPhone is already unlocked at the time of the theft.

However, the new feature reportedly aims to solve exactly that problem by reacting instantly during the first few moments after a suspected snatching attempt. The idea is somewhat similar to



how Apple protects demo iPhones inside its retail stores, where devices automatically lock or disable themselves if they are suddenly removed from the store premises. However, this new system is said to be designed specifically for real-world theft situations involving personal devices.

How will the anti theft feature work?

According to the report, Apple's system would rely on several different signals to decide whether a theft may have taken place. One of the biggest indicators of a stolen iPhone is expected to be the iPhone's accelerometer, which

can detect sudden and unusual movement patterns. If the device senses a jerky motion that resembles a phone being pulled from someone's hand, it may immediately trigger a lock.

The system may also look at the distance between the iPhone and a paired Apple Watch. If the phone suddenly moves rapidly away from the watch, Apple could treat that as another possible sign of theft. In addition, the iPhone may check whether it is connected to a trusted Wi-Fi network or whether it is in a familiar location such as home or work. If the device appears to have been snatched in

an unfamiliar place, the phone could respond more aggressively by locking access to sensitive parts of the system.

Availability of the feature

The report says the feature would likely extend the same protections already available through Stolen Device Protection, which Apple introduced with iOS 17.3. That feature currently adds extra biometric checks and security delays for actions such as changing passwords or accessing saved credentials when the iPhone is away from familiar places. Even with those protections, however, the few seconds immediately after a theft can still leave users vulnerable.

Do note that Apple has not officially announced the feature or revealed when it may arrive. However, according to 9to5Mac, code references suggest the system is currently under active development.

The idea itself is not entirely new. Google already offers a similar feature on Android devices called Theft Detection Lock. Google says the tool uses AI to detect if someone grabs a phone and quickly runs, cycles or drives away, automatically locking the device screen to protect user data.

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Leaving Aadhaar cards behind, no use now: Illegal migrants at Bengal border

Dozens of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants have gathered at the Hakimpur border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district over the past two days, hoping to return.

Fear and uncertainty are unfolding at the Hakimpur border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, where dozens of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants have gathered over the past two days seeking to return to Bangladesh. This comes amid growing pressure from authorities and the setting up of holding centres for illegal migrants across the state.

Carrying bags, blankets and identity documents, families who had spent years living in India now wait near the border, to cross back into their country. At the Hakimpur border outpost, police have set up a registration desk where details of those arriving are being recorded. Officials are verifying Bangladeshi documents and preparing a database before migrants are shifted to holding centres.

According to officials on the ground, records of more than 350 Bangladeshis have already been prepared since Monday.

Around 50 to 60 people were present at the border on Wednesday, many of them from Kolkata's New Town, Hatiyara, Khardah, Dum Dum and Dankuni areas. Most admitted they had entered India

illegally through agents or middlemen over the years in search of work. "We are poor people. That is why we came here," said Salam Dali, a carpenter who said he entered India from Khulna district in Bangladesh around five years ago after paying Rs 8,000-10,000 to a middleman. "The government told us to leave because we do not have documents. So now we are leaving," he said while waiting near the border with his wife and child. Several migrants said the atmosphere had changed sharply in recent months, with police visits, document checks and fear of detention forcing them to leave. Hidoy Mulla, a young man born in 2003 who claimed he grew up in Madhyamgram after his parents migrated from Bangladesh in 2001, said local police had repeatedly demanded proof of residence prior to 2002.

"I was born in 2003. My parents are completely uneducated. They don't even know ABCD. How were they supposed to make documents?" he said.

Mulla said he possessed Aadhaar, PAN, ration card and school certificates, but his voter ID applications were rejected multiple times. "I grew up here. This culture is part of me. My parents feel

they are returning to their country, but for us it feels like we are leaving our country and going to another country," he said.

"What mistake did we make? The mistake was of our parents. They brought us here." He added that the family no longer had land or relatives to depend on in Bangladesh.

"What will I do there? There is no friend circle, no future for me there," he said. Among those gathered near the border was a visually impaired family from Khardah -- Mohammad Shamsur Rahaman, his wife Asiya Khatun and his brother Bilal -- all of whom are blind and survived by begging on trains and streets in Kolkata. "We are requesting the authorities to send us back immediately," Rahaman said. The family claimed they had lived in India for over a decade and had obtained Aadhaar and other documents while staying in the Khardah area. Another migrant, Mohammad Ali Munshi, who claimed he was born in India after his father crossed the border decades ago, said fear and pressure had forced the family to leave.

"I only had Aadhaar and ration card. I left everything behind because

none of it is useful now." One of the most striking stories came from Mafuza Khatun, originally from Bangladesh's Khulna district, who said she had lived in India for years and voted in elections multiple times. She claimed she had Aadhaar and voter ID cards prepared through local political and municipal channels. "We voted here for years. Now our voter IDs have been cancelled," she said.

"For the government, we are people from another country, so now we have to go back to Bangladesh." Many women at the border said they worked as domestic helpers, rag-pickers and labourers in Kolkata's outskirts before being forced to leave rented accommodations. Several migrants admitted they had crossed the border illegally through agents operating on both sides. Some said they were brought into India as children and had little memory of Bangladesh. Authorities have shifted many of those arriving at Hakimpur to temporary holding centres set up across North 24 Parganas district. The largest centre has been established at Tentulia inside the Pather Saathi building, where officials said 116 Bangladeshis are currently being housed.

Jamie Dimon says JPMorgan Chase could spend \$20 billion on acquisition: 'We are on the lookout'

CEO Jamie Dimon said Wednesday that his bank could spend up to \$20 billion on an acquisition in the coming years.

A deal that size would be the largest of Dimon's 20-year tenure atop JPMorgan and test regulators' appetite for consolidation among the biggest U.S. banks.

"I do think there might be opportunities, and so we are on the lookout," Dimon told analysts at a New York financial conference.

"There might be, in the next couple years, a chance to put \$10 [billion] or \$20 billion to work buying something," Dimon said. The comments came with caveats. Dimon framed acquisitions almost as a tool of last resort, not a growth strategy, and warned that bankers who lean

too hard on dealmaking are often compensating for poor organic growth.

"You sit around a lot of management meetings, the

first thing they do when they're not doing well in organic



growth is they start to bulls--t about [mergers and acquisitions]," Dimon said. "I don't want to hear about M&A ... What are you doing to grow your business —

sales, branches, tech, profits, products, services?"

Any takeover target, he said, would need to integrate cleanly into JPMorgan's existing operations, fit the bank's culture, and enhance core businesses rather than sit as a separate standalone unit.

"It can't be just a pie-in-the-sky type of thing," Dimon said.

JPMorgan has mostly grown organically in recent years, with the notable exception of its FDIC-assisted acquisition of First Republic Bank in 2023. It made a \$10.6 billion payment to the regulator as part of that transaction.

Under Dimon, the bank's largest and most consequential M&A deals were mostly crisis-era acquisitions of regulated banks, including First Republic, Bear Stearns and the retail operations of Washington Mutual.

The firm also acquired a string of smaller fintech firms but slowed down after spending \$175 million to acquire Frank in 2021, a college aid startup that was later revealed to be a fraud.

Can Indian Cuisine Become The World's Next Obsession After Sushi And Pizza?



For decades, Indian food abroad was often reduced to a familiar shorthand: butter chicken, naan and curry served in variations tailored heavily for Western palates. But something has shifted over the last few years. Across global dining capitals, Indian cuisine is no longer merely being consumed; it is being understood, questioned and explored with far greater curiosity and seriousness.

From regional tasting menus in Copenhagen to modern Indian restaurants in London, New York and Singapore, the conversation around Indian food has become far more nuanced. Diners today want to know where dishes come from, how spices are layered, why techniques differ across

regions and what stories exist behind recipes passed through generations. For Chef Enayatullah Safi, founder, Dhaba Kitchen, this transformation has unfolded gradually over years of working in Denmark. "Ten years ago, many guests only recognised a few classic dishes. Today, they want to understand regional cuisines, spices, techniques and the stories behind the food," he says. "The world is no longer just tasting Indian food, it is ready to listen to India's story." That distinction feels important. Unlike cuisines that globalised through standardisation, Indian food has always resisted simplification. It is deeply regional, emotionally rooted and extraordinarily

layered, shaped as much by migration, climate and memory as by recipes themselves.

Part of what is helping Indian cuisine travel globally today is that chefs are no longer diluting those complexities. Instead, there is increasing confidence in presenting Indian food in its most authentic form. Safi notes that Indian chefs and diaspora restaurateurs across the world have played a major role in educating diners about regional cooking traditions and the cultural significance of ingredients and spices.

In many ways, Indian cuisine also arrives at a moment when global food culture appears ready for it. Around the world, diners are increasingly gravitating towards bold flavours, communal dining, slow cooking and plant-forward meals, ideas that have long existed at the heart of Indian food traditions.

"Indian meals are naturally communal. They bring people together around the table, encouraging conversation, celebration and connection," says Amit Bagga, Co-Founder, CEO and CMO, Daryaganj Hospitality. "In many ways, the

world is now catching up to how India has always eaten." Bagga believes Indian cuisine's greatest strength lies in its emotional depth. "A simple dal slowly simmered overnight can feel as luxurious and satisfying as an elaborate fine-dining dish," he says. "That emotional connection is universal."

This emotional resonance is increasingly becoming part of how Indian restaurants position themselves globally. Rather than relying solely on spectacle or fusion, many modern Indian chefs are leaning into storytelling, presenting food as heritage, memory and lived experience.

At the same time, Indian cuisine naturally aligns with some of the world's biggest contemporary food movements. Plant-based eating, wellness-led ingredients, fermentation and sustainability are all deeply embedded within Indian culinary traditions.

Anil Kumar, Co-owner and Chief Concept Architect, Singh Sahib, believes this gives Indian cuisine a unique advantage. "From the use of nutrient-rich lentils and fermented foods to the healing properties of traditional spices,

Indian food naturally aligns with modern global food trends," he says.

He also points towards the growing international appreciation for India's regional diversity. "From the coastal flavours of Kerala and the royal dishes of Kashmir to the vibrant street food culture of Delhi and Mumbai, Indian cuisine is now being celebrated through deeper storytelling and contemporary presentation," notes

Kumar. Perhaps the biggest shift, however, is psychological. Earlier generations of Indian restaurateurs abroad often felt pressure to adapt recipes heavily for international audiences.

Today, there is far more confidence in authenticity, in allowing diners to experience Indian food with its original depth, spice profiles and regional specificity intact.

Bagga believes that is precisely why Indian cuisine's rise feels inevitable rather than manufactured. "It does not need to reinvent itself to belong globally," he says. "It simply needs to be understood, experienced and celebrated for what it has always been."

QUAD talks aside, Japan's Foreign Minister fell for India's gulab jamun and filter coffee

Geopolitical meetings may have brought Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to New Delhi, but it was India's coffee and desserts that appeared to have left the strongest impression on him.

After wrapping up his schedule for the QUAD Foreign Ministers' meeting, Motegi shared a video on X before heading back to Japan, documenting a quieter and far more relatable side of his India visit — sipping South Indian-style filter coffee and trying gulab jamun.

In the video, Motegi reflected on how India is globally associated with chai, but pointed out that the country is also among the world's top coffee-producing nations. "When people think of Indian beverages, chai is certainly the first thing that comes to mind," he said, before adding that coffee, especially in southern India where much of it is cultivated, is deeply embedded in everyday culture.

Describing South Indian-style coffee, Motegi noted how the drink combines a strong, roasted brew with warm milk and



sugar, creating a flavour that feels both "robust" and "smooth."

Taking a sip on camera, he said, "It certainly has a roasted, robust quality to it, but thanks to the milk, it possesses a distinctly smooth and mellow character." But it was his reaction to gulab jamun that truly stole the show.

olding up the syrup-soaked dessert,



Motegi described it as a classic Indian sweet "somewhat akin to a doughnut," adding that he had heard travel magazines refer to it as "the sweetest dessert in the world."

Moments later, after taking a bite, his expression said it all.

"Oh my — it's incredibly delicious! Truly fantastic," he exclaimed, before jokingly

admitting that while the dessert was excellent, it was also "undeniably sweet," prompting him to immediately reach for another sip of coffee.

Motegi's post quickly sparked reactions online, with many joking that India's true soft power lies not just in diplomacy, but also in its ability to win hearts through food. And where's the lie?

Passport-Free Wonders: India's 'Twin Destinations' To Explore This Summer

This summer, travel planning for many Indians comes with a familiar reality check. International flight prices are soaring, visa appointments remain unpredictable for several destinations, and long-haul holidays are beginning to feel increasingly expensive and exhausting. At the same time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly encouraged citizens to explore India's diverse destinations and strengthen domestic tourism by discovering the country's hidden cultural and natural treasures.

Interestingly, this growing shift towards domestic travel is also changing how Indians define a "dream holiday." Instead of chasing expensive international itineraries, many travellers are beginning to realise that equally stunning landscapes, cultural richness, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences may already exist much closer to home. Across the country, a growing number of travellers are rediscovering destinations that feel surprisingly global in experience yet deeply rooted in Indian culture, landscapes, and heritage. According to



Booking.com's Travel Trends 2026, nearly 65% of Indian travellers now prefer domestic holidays, signalling a larger movement towards meaningful, experience-led travel closer to home.

To inspire wanderlust closer to home, Booking.com has curated a list of extraordinary "twin destinations" that mirror global icons without the passport hassles or hefty flight costs.

Gandikota, Andhra Pradesh – India's Grand Canyon

Often called the "Grand Canyon

of India", Gandikota in Andhra Pradesh features dramatic layered rock formations carved by the Pennar River through the Erramala hills. The rugged red sedimentary cliffs offer views reminiscent of Arizona's masterpiece. Explore the 13th-century Gandikota Fort perched on the edge of the gorge and catch a magical sunrise over the winding river below.

Alappuzha (Alleppey), Kerala – The Venice of the East

Instead of a gondola ride

through Italy, glide through Kerala's serene backwaters on a traditional wooden houseboat. Alappuzha's vast network of glassy lagoons, palm-fringed canals, and lakes perfectly captures Venice's romantic aquatic charm. Enjoy authentic Kerala cuisine on board while soaking in the slow rhythm of local river life.

Khajjiar, Himachal Pradesh – Mini Switzerland

Nestled in Chamba district, Khajjiar's lush green meadow surrounded by dense coniferous forests earned it the title of

"Mini Switzerland" from the Swiss Embassy itself. Take a nature walk through the Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary and unwind by the central lake with panoramic views of the snow-capped Dhauladhar mountains, pure alpine bliss in the Himalayas.

Fontainhas, Goa – Portugal's Colourful Cousin

Step into old-world Europe without leaving India. Fontainhas, the Latin Quarter of Panaji in Goa, is a living postcard of Portuguese heritage. Wander down narrow cobblestone lanes lined with brightly painted heritage homes in yellow, blue, and red, complete with ornate balconies. Don't miss a heritage walking tour and a stop at a local bakery for fresh pastéis de nata.

Gurudongmar Lake, Sikkim – Iceland's Frozen Beauty

At a staggering 17,800 feet, Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim delivers the dramatic, otherworldly feel of Iceland's glacial lagoons. Framed by barren snow-capped peaks and crystal-clear azure waters, this high-altitude lake offers pristine, mirror-like reflections and an unforgettable sense of isolation.

Escape Into India's Scenic Valleys With These Incredible Mountain Music Festivals Worth Travelling For



There's something magical about listening to live music in the middle of the mountains. Cold breeze, bonfires, tents, strangers becoming friends, and music echoing through the valleys – hill music festivals in India are more than just concerts. From the forests of Arunachal Pradesh to the valleys of Himachal, these festivals bring together travel, culture, nature, and unforgettable performances in the most beautiful settings imaginable.

Parvati Peaking – Kasol, Himachal Pradesh: Known for its psychedelic music, riverside camps, and breathtaking mountain backdrop, this festival is a favourite among backpackers and electronic music lovers. The vibe here feels free-spirited and raw, making it perfect for people who want music and nature together. (Image credits: Instagram)



Can sleeping like an astronaut improve your sleep?

The world is in its sleep deprived era and looking for the next best thing to hack their way to having a good night's sleep. The 'zero gravity sleep' position might just

How do you sleep? Curled up like a cocoon, sprawled on your side, flat on your back (rare species), or face-down clutching a pillow for emotional support? Everyone has a sleeping position that feels comforting. But it may not always be the right one. In an era where people are sleepmaxxing their way through life, one thing is often not talked about enough: the position their body settles into for seven or eight hours every night. And this is where we look up to astronauts (pun intended), for the 'zero gravity sleeping.'

The zero-gravity sleep position traces its origins back to NASA, where it was designed to help astronauts cope with the physical strain of living in microgravity.

What is zero gravity sleeping?

Zero gravity sleep is a type of sleeping position that was initially researched by NASA and is also referred to as the "neutral body position." It's how astronauts might sleep like in space. By slightly elevating the upper body and legs, the posture helps distribute pressure more evenly across the body, reducing strain on the spine and joints, mimicking weightlessness. "Zero-gravity sleep is essentially a slightly reclined way of lying down, where the upper body and legs are both gently elevated. Think of it as taking the pressure off your lower back and letting the body 'settle' rather than lie completely flat. The knees are a little bent, the legs are raised just a bit, and the upper body is propped up enough to keep the spine more relaxed," Dr Nalini Nagalla, HOD, pulmonology and sleep disorders, Arete Hospitals, tells Media. A lot of people don't realise this, but even small changes in angle can make a noticeable difference to how the body feels through the night.

"The position used in zero gravity is similar to what astronauts use in space to allow redistribution of the G-force that

they experience. It minimises musculoskeletal stress and aligns the spine in microgravity," Dr Lancelot Mark Pinto, consultant pulmonologist and epidemiologist, P.D. Hinduja Hospital and MRC Centre, Khar, explains.

The use of this position in daily life occurs when the head and knees are elevated approximately two-three inches above the level of the heart while forming an approximate 120-degree angle between the hips, adds Dr Pinto. Over time, researchers and sleep experts found that this posture could offer benefits far beyond space travel.

The perks

Before diving into the perks, experts caution that while there's a lack of strong long-term evidence suggesting everyone should sleep this way, the logic behind it is fairly sound, and it may help certain groups of people.

People with lower back discomfort often find the zero-gravity position noticeably relieving. Raising the upper body can also help with nighttime acidity, snoring, and mild sleep apnea by keeping the airways more open.

With the legs slightly raised, circulation gets a boost, which may help reduce swelling. The position is often beneficial for people dealing with GERD, sciatica, and varicose veins, while many pregnant women also turn to it for gentler back support.

"Those with backache are likely to benefit from it, but again, this is a difficult position to sleep in through the night. Predominant side sleepers will find it difficult to adjust," Dr Mihir Gangakhedkar, consultant - pulmonology, Fortis Hospital Mulund, Mumbai, cautions.

While, in theory, it sounds a little too good to be true, the practicality is still a debate.

Is it practical?

If you are willing to put in the money and effort.

According to Dr Gangakhedkar, adjustable beds (which can be expensive) obviously make achieving this unusual posture easier. While a makeshift arrangement with pillows can be made, it is likely to be difficult to maintain.

Tempted to give it a shot? Dr Pinto explains how:

"If one were to sleep with their upper body raised at an angle between thirty and forty-five degrees (by using a firm wedge), one could then place a bolster pillow or several stacked ordinary pillows under their knees so that they are slightly elevated above their heart."

The only catch? Pillows shift and flatten through the night, making the position hard to maintain till morning.

So, what's the ideal sleep position?

Nothing that fits everyone.

Sleep in the real world is hardly graceful. People toss and turn, move side to side, and maybe even wake up with the blanket missing.

According to experts, side sleeping is often easier on breathing, and certain

positions help specific conditions.

"If there's no stiffness, no disturbed sleep, and no worsening of symptoms, that position is doing its job. Sleep isn't something that needs to be over-engineered," says Dr Nagalla.

She further divulges that good sleep is not just about posture. Stress, screen time, light exposure, and sleep schedules play an equally big role.

"In India, where people sleep on everything from firm coir mattresses to plush foam beds — and sometimes even the floor — comfort is personal. The real trick is simply listening to what your body needs and making small adjustments that actually feel sustainable." The sleep crisis the world is slowly lulling itself into is no jaw-dropping revelation. Sleep gummies, magnesium mocktails, smart rings, cooling mattresses, and white-noise machines — an entire industry has emerged around the desperate pursuit of better rest. Maybe it's just about giving your body permission to rest the right way. And we all know the drill.



Close your eyes, woman: Claude is telling users to go to sleep, Anthropic investigating

In the past few weeks, many users have found that Claude often tells them to go to sleep mid-session. And it seems that Anthropic may not know the real reason behind it.

Anthropic's AI chatbot Claude has gained widespread popularity in the past few months. For many, Claude Code is likely the go-to AI tool for coding. However, in the last couple of weeks, some users have noticed something strange. Sometimes, Claude, they say, asks them to go to sleep in the middle of a session. Social media platforms like Reddit and X are full of users claiming that Claude often says things like, "Everything else can wait. Now go sleep," or "Now phone down. Sleep. Tomorrow we cook."

On one occasion, Claude told a Redditor, "Now for the love of god close your eyes woman." And to be clear, some users claim that this doesn't happen just at night. Often, the AI may send a goodnight text in the morning, or in the middle of the day. But what is actually happening? Well, it seems that Anthropic may not have a detailed explanation yet. While the company has not responded directly, Sam McAllister, a member of the



technical team, called it a "bit of a character tic." He added, "But we're aware of this and hoping to fix it in future models." Anthropic staff says Claude may be too "coddling" When Sam was asked why Anthropic was going to fix this issue, he explained that Claude had told him to sleep in the day

too. He explained, "It is often 'coddling' at times." But experts may have a theory of what might be happening here. And no, this is likely not AGI. Jan Liphardt, a Stanford bioengineering professor, told Fortune that Claude may be repeating a phrase based on its training data.

He said, "It doesn't mean that this model has now come alive. It's reflecting that it's read 25,000 books on humans' need [for] sleep, and humans sleep at night."

Large Language Models like Claude or Gemini are trained on massive sets of data. This includes books, stats, and widely available information online. It is possible that Claude learnt that humans need sleep, and thus asked users to sleep and rest. Though we will need to wait for an official word from Anthropic to truly understand what makes Claude pester you to sleep every now and then.

This is not the first time users have noticed something strange with Claude. Last month, Anthropic faced backlash online after some users claimed that they were exhausting their Claude token limits much faster than before. Though the company did clarify that no one was billed unfairly after investigating the issue.

Lose 7 Kg In 30 Days? Fitness Trainer Shares 15 Rules For Rapid Weight Loss

A fitness trainer has shared a 30-day plan outlining strict rules on diet, workouts, sleep, to help achieve rapid and structured weight loss

Lose 7 Kg In 30 Days? Fitness Trainer Shares 15 Rules For Rapid Weight Loss A fitness trainer has shared a 30-day plan outlining strict rules on diet, workouts, sleep, to help achieve rapid and structured weight loss

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Fitness trainer Takai Raashid has shared a detailed 30-day plan aimed at helping people lose up to 15 pounds (6.8 kg), outlining a disciplined approach that focuses on diet, exercise, consistency, and mindset. The trainer's plan stresses the importance of structured eating, regular workouts, proper sleep, and long-term commitment rather than quick fixes. Introducing the plan, Raashid emphasised that fat loss comes from a combination of controlled calorie intake, high protein consumption, and consistent physical activity. He also highlighted the role of planning, tracking progress, and maintaining strict discipline throughout the 30-day period.

Here's what he wrote:

Eat in a calorie deficit 500-750 below maintenance. Track it... don't guess.
Hit your daily protein goal 0.8-1 g per lb bodyweight. Minimum 130-180 g for most.
Eat 20-30 g of protein per meal
Build every meal around your protein.
Strength train at least 3x/week
Follow a plan. Don't just show up and guess.
Incline walk / StairMaster 3-5x per week 30-45 mins. Like the walking challenge I shared this week.
Get 10k+ steps daily
Walk more. It's fat loss without the stress.
Sleep 7-9 hrs per night
No sleep = slower fat loss. Simple.
Plan your meals ahead
No plan = random eating = no results.
Stick to whole foods
Lean meats, rice, eggs, fruit, oats, and greens.
Skip calorie-loaded drinks



Water, coffee, zero-cal drinks. Smoothies are fine if tracked.
Cut processed sugar
No candy, pastries, sugary cereals, or junk.
No cheat meals for 30 days
You're either all in or you're wasting time.
Weigh in first thing daily

Same time, after the bathroom. Track the trend.
Get real accountability
Coach, programme, or system. Fat loss is easier when someone's watching your execution.
Lock in your mindset Short-term pain. Long-term freedom. Stay locked.

Janhvi Kapoor Serves Couture Ethnic Glam With Statement Polki Ear Cuffs At Peddi Promotions

Janhvi Kapoor once again proved that nobody does modern desi glamour quite like her as she arrived in Bengaluru for the Peddi movie promotions looking absolutely ethereal. Draped in a dreamy pastel ensemble from Anamika Khanna's celebrated Ninaad collection, the actress effortlessly blended regal elegance with contemporary drama, serving a look that was both soft and striking.

The strapless silhouette instantly became the highlight of the ensemble, beautifully sculpting Janhvi's frame while allowing the intricate craftsmanship to take centre stage. Rendered in soothing aqua-blue tones with delicate floral and traditional motifs woven across the fabric, the drape carried an old-world charm with a refreshing modern edge. The ruched detailing around the bodice added texture and dimension, while the fluid silhouette gave the outfit an almost weightless grace.

Adding another layer of sophistication was the sheer aqua dupatta adorned with heavily embroidered borders that brought just the right amount of festive sparkle. Whether seated at the event or walking through



the venue, Janhvi carried the ensemble with effortless poise, making every frame look runway-worthy. But what truly elevated the entire look was her statement jewellery choice. Styled with Archana Aggarwal's Gold & Diamond Polki Ear Cuff Jhumkas, Janhvi embraced maximalist ear glamour in the chicest way possible. The ornate

ear cuffs wrapped elegantly around her ears, adding a royal touch without overpowering the softness of the outfit. She skipped layered necklaces and let the dramatic earrings command full attention — a styling move that worked brilliantly. Her beauty look complemented the ensemble perfectly. With her hair sleekly

pulled back into a neat bun and makeup kept radiant and fresh, Janhvi allowed the outfit's craftsmanship and jewellery detailing to shine through. A subtle glow, softly defined eyes, and nude lips completed the aesthetic, making the entire appearance feel polished yet effortless.

Styled by Meagan Concessio,

the look struck the perfect balance between couture elegance and modern femininity. From the pastel palette to the intricate textures and statement accessories, Janhvi Kapoor's Peddi promotions look was a masterclass in contemporary Indian occasion wear, delicate, glamorous, and undeniably unforgettable.

Jennifer Lopez Stuns In A Peek-A-Boo 2004 Versace Gown; Donatella Calls Her 'Radiant'



Jennifer Lopez graced the world premiere of her latest movie Office Romance in a jaw-dropping Versace gown. Jennifer

was accompanied by her co-star, Brett Goldstein and looked great together in their respective stylish looks.

The vintage gown looked so good on her, that even Donatella Versace couldn't help but praise the sensational singer and actor. Sharing a video clip from the movie premiere on Instagram, Donatella captioned the post, by saying: @jlo, always radiant in Atelier Versace. This SS04 dress is impeccable on you. I love you, my dear friend.

Jennifer looked glamorous in the vintage gown and shared a series of images and videos celebrating the timeless yet bold couture piece on Instagram.

JLo And Her Versace Masterpiece

Celebrating romance through couture, Jennifer Lopez looked resplendent in the timeless silhouette.

Realised in black and gown the

strapless gown was not just captivating but also featured elements that added drama to JLo's overall look. From the peek-a-boo detailing on the bodice to the voluminous skirt, every element stood out in Jennifer's red-carpet look. The straps layered on the bustline were bedazzled and added a risqué effect to JLo's premiere look. The intricate print realised in a rich gold shade elevated the monochrome palette. JLo carried off the asymmetrical ball gown featuring a dual train with utmost confidence. Styled by Rob Zangardi, Mariel Haenn and Hannah Margeson, Jennifer's vintage Versace gown was sourced from Lily and Co, a 20th and 21st century museum quality clothing store in California. Jennifer decided to keep her nails

nude which was done by Tom Bachik, and her jewellery minimal. From her hair to her makeup every aspect of JLo's look celebrated her individuality. JLo's shares a long-standing relationship with Versace, remember the viral Jungle Dress designed by Donatella, JLo wore at 2000s Grammys and how it has found its way back in 2026 with the Off Campus actor Allie Hayes (played by Mika Abdalla), recreating the look in the web series. Allie recently had a fan moment when she met Jennifer Lopez and created a reel with the superstar singer and actor.

Netflix's Office Romance is a rom-com movie about a secret office romance and all set to release on June 5. The film stars Jennifer Lopez and Brett Goldstein in the lead.

Shanaya Kapoor Rocks The Ramp In A Stunning Silver Lehenga, Perfect For The Ace Bridesmaid

Shanaya Kapoor has been working the big screen, OTT platforms and is now claiming the runways as well. She recently walked the ramp as a showstopper for designer Bhawna Rao.

The actor looked delicately beautiful in a silver lehenga by the designer, who was showcasing her new collection at a recently held fashion week. The 26-year-old's outfit is perfect for a bridesmaid who wants to stand out from the crowd but doesn't want to overshadow the bride. She wore a micro-blouse that had a lot of intricate silver sequins and zari work done on it. Shanaya Kapoor, who is coming off the well-received survival thriller film *Tu Yaa Main*, wore a matching skirt, which was a work of art in itself. It has a fluid silhouette that allows you to move while still remaining body-hugging. The collection called OBLIQUE is inspired by the Alter Ego, and presents itself at the most unexpected time and situation. Shanaya Kapoor, who is coming off the well-received survival thriller film *Tu Yaa Main*, wore a matching skirt,

which was a work of art in itself. It has a fluid silhouette that allows you to move while still remaining body-hugging. The collection called OBLIQUE is inspired by the Alter Ego, and presents itself at the most unexpected time and situation. For her glam, Shanaya Kapoor kept things minimal yet extremely chic so as not to contrast with her outfit. A heavy dusting of blush with minimal shimmer on the eyes and fluffily eyelashes rounded off this look. She kept things youthful and fresh and wore light pink glossy lipstick. On the work front, she might soon be seen in a new film. Producer Firoz Nadiadwala, who is currently working on the big-budget entertainer 'Welcome to the Jungle', has reportedly roped in Tiger Shroff and Shanaya Kapoor for a new zombie comedy. The actor is on the lookout for films that are a step away from the norm. This new film is yet to be titled and will be directed by Ahmed Khan and is expected to be launched by the end of 2026.



Triptii Dimri Channels Royal Elegance In Blue Anarkali For Maa Behen Promotions

Triptii Dimri's fashion streak continues to be as impressive as her meteoric rise in Bollywood. From red carpet glamour to effortlessly elegant ethnic looks, the actor has steadily built a style identity that feels equal parts modern, feminine and refreshingly understated. Her latest appearance for the promotions of *Maa Behen* was yet another reminder of why the internet crowned her the nation's newest obsession. For the *Maa Behen* trailer launch, Triptii embraced timeless ethnic dressing in a striking royal blue ensemble by Anjana Bohra. She wore the label's Mrigesha Anarkali Set, priced at ₹36,000, and the look was nothing short of regal.

The flowing floor-length anarkali featured soft gathers, a flattering sweetheart neckline and full sleeves that added graceful structure to the silhouette. However, the true highlight of the ensemble was the richly woven Banarasi dupatta draped alongside the outfit. Detailed with intricate silver motifs and ornate borders, the dupatta added depth, texture and old-world charm to the monochrome blue palette.

The backless detailing of the kurta, finished with dramatic tassel accents and gold embellishments, brought



a playful contemporary twist to the otherwise classic silhouette. The movement of the tassels paired beautifully with the fluidity of the outfit, creating a look that felt festive, elegant and youthful all at once.

Styling That Kept It Elegant

Styled by Lakshmi Lehr and Kashish S Gaur, the look leaned into understated glamour. Triptii paired the outfit with statement jewellery from Maya Sanghavi Jewels and M Rajsons Sachin Malhotra, adding just the right amount of

sparkle without overpowering the ensemble. Her footwear choice, Aprajita Toor's Falaz Tassel Toe Wedges priced at ₹5,499, complemented the ethnic aesthetic perfectly while ensuring comfort during promotions.

For beauty, makeup artist Shraddha Naik kept the look soft and luminous with glowing skin, bronzed eyes, fluttery lashes and nude glossy lips. Hairstylist Bhavya Arora styled her hair in soft voluminous waves that framed her face beautifully, while the tiny blue bindi added the perfect

finishing touch.

Triptii Dimri's rise in the industry has been nothing short of remarkable. While films like *Bulbbul* and *Qala* established her as a powerful performer, it was her appearance in *Animal* that catapulted her into mainstream pop culture, earning her the tag of the internet's "national crush." *Maa Behen* is an upcoming Netflix comedy-drama directed by Suresh Triveni that follows the chaotic lives of a constantly bickering mother and her daughters after they unexpectedly discover a dead body in their

kitchen. The film stars Madhuri Dixit as Rekha alongside Triptii Dimri and Dharna Durga, promising a quirky mix of family drama, suspense and dark humour. Slated to premiere on June 4, the film has already generated buzz for its unusual storyline and powerhouse female-led cast. Up next, the actor has an exciting slate ahead with projects including *Spirit*, firmly cementing her position as one of Bollywood's most promising young stars, both on-screen and on the fashion radar.

Bobby Deol's Bandar First Song Bandar Teaser Out, Full Track To Release On THIS Date



Bobby Deol's upcoming film *Bandar* has once again grabbed attention after the makers unveiled the teaser of its first song. The short musical glimpse has already created strong buzz online, with fans eagerly waiting for the complete track, which is set to release on June 28.

The makers took to their Instagram handle and shared the teaser which gives glimpse of the song. Bobby Deol is looking sad in the jail. Directed by Anurag Kashyap, *Bandar* presents Bobby Deol in a gritty and emotionally layered avatar. The actor plays Sameer Mehra, a once-popular pop star whose life begins to unravel after he is accused in a disturbing sexual assault case. Bobby Deol Plays Sameer Mehra In *Bandar* The film follows Sameer as he becomes trapped in a tense courtroom battle while also facing relentless media scrutiny. Even as public opinion turns hostile, he continues to maintain his innocence while fighting a system that appears deeply flawed. The crime thriller also marks the first collaboration between Bobby Deol and Anurag Kashyap, making it one of the more intriguing upcoming projects for audiences who enjoy intense, character-driven cinema.

Bobby Deol's Reinvention After *Animal*

Bobby's career transformation gained fresh momentum after Sandeep Reddy Vanga's

Animal. Despite having limited dialogues, his silent and brutal antagonist became one of the most talked-about parts of the film. His screen presence, physicality and restrained menace helped turn the role into a major pop-culture moment.

Since then, Bobby has been gravitating towards roles that are edgier and less predictable. After *Animal* and *The Ba*ds of Bollywood*, the actor is reportedly choosing projects that challenge him creatively and allow him to explore morally ambiguous characters.

Bobby Deol's Upcoming Projects

Bobby also has a packed lineup ahead. He will be seen playing a powerful antagonist in Yash Raj Films' *Spy Universe* film *Alpha*, which stars Alia Bhatt and Sharvari in key roles. Apart from that, Bobby is also part of the upcoming Amazon Prime Video spy thriller series *Teen Kauwe*, co-starring Sidhant Gupta. The series reportedly revolves around a dangerous mole operating inside a secret intelligence agency based in Mumbai.

With *Bandar*, *Alpha* and *Teen Kauwe*, Bobby Deol seems firmly set on continuing this darker, sharper phase of his career, one that has not only revived his stardom but also reshaped how audiences now see him.

Brown Teaser: Karisma Kapoor Fights Crime And Personal Demons As A Fierce Cop

Karisma Kapoor will be seen in a new avatar as a fierce police officer in the upcoming web series *Brown*. The makers have released the first glimpse of the neo-noir psychological crime thriller, which is set against the haunting and morally fractured backdrop of Kolkata.

In the series, Karisma essays the role of Rita Brown, a police officer in the Kolkata Police Force investigating disturbing crimes while battling her own personal demons. The teaser showcases gritty visuals and an emotionally charged atmosphere, immediately establishing *Brown* as a layered psychological thriller that goes beyond a conventional murder mystery, according to a press release. Directed by Abhinay



Deo, the series presents Karisma in a rugged, stripped-down, and emotionally fractured avatar, unlike anything audiences have seen from the actress before. Known as one of Bollywood's most celebrated leading ladies of the 1990s, Karisma has consistently evolved with changing storytelling

formats and audience preferences. With *Brown*, she takes a major leap into darker and more contemporary OTT storytelling. The teaser hints at a fearless and unfiltered performance, with Karisma shedding her long-associated glamorous screen image for a raw and intense character portrayal.

Jackie Shroff Reacts To Son Tiger Shroff's Back-To-Back Box Office Failures: 'Some Things Are Not In Your Hands'



Jackie Shroff is standing by his son, Tiger Shroff, amid the actor's recent box office struggles.

In a recent chat with *Mid-day*, Jackie spoke candidly about the unpredictable nature of the film industry and how success can never truly be guaranteed, no matter how hard an actor works.

Jackie Shroff's Reaction

Reflecting on Tiger's recent setbacks, Jackie said, "Life is such that these things are not in our hands. You have to work hard. Sometimes you will get results, and other times you won't."

The actor added that every performer eventually goes through highs and lows in their career, and Tiger

understands that reality well. Jackie shared, "We are actors, we have to go through everything. Tiger knows it. He says, 'I will work sincerely. The rest is up to the audience.' That [approach] is fantastic. He will be okay."

Tiger Shroff And His Recent Films

Tiger made his Bollywood debut with *Heropanti* in 2014 alongside Kriti Sanon. Directed by Sabbir Khan, the film turned out to be a commercial success and instantly established Tiger as a promising new-age action hero. His martial arts skills, dance moves, and fitness-focused image helped him build a massive fan following among younger audiences.

Shamita Shetty Slams Troll For Questioning Her Single Status At 47: 'Aapne Shaadi Karke Kya Ukhaad Liya'

Shamita Shetty shared screenshots of the comments on her Instagram Story



Actress Shamita Shetty hit back at a troll who questioned her single status at the age of 47.

Exposing the user, Shamita shared screenshots of the comments on her Instagram Story. Not just that, she also asked the user to unfollow her.

The first comment shared by the Mohabbatein actress read, "Aapki age ho gayi hai pehle wali baat nahi rahi (You have grown old now; you are not the same as before)." Giving a befitting reply, Shamita wrote, "Yes." She further added that it is natural to look different with time.

"Yes, I will look different. Things change with time - it's the natural way of life. Nothing stays forever, including physical appearance! BUT for my age, I'm healthy, fit and happy, with a grateful heart for all that the Almighty has given me... and that's all that matters to me."

Shamita then went on to share the second comment,

which read, "Agar shaadi time par kar leti toh aapke bache aaj bade ho gaye hote (If you had gotten married on time, your children would have grown up by now)."

Furious at this, Shamita asked the user what exactly he felt he had achieved by getting married.

She wrote, "Aapne shaadi karke kya ukhaad liya hai bhai? Most importantly, why the hell do you follow us single women to age-shame us and inflict us with your patriarchal, cave-man-like, male-centric thought process? Please do me a favour and unfollow me pronto!" Shamita is known for her work in films such as Mohabbatein, Zeher, Bewafaa, and Cash, among others.

She has also been part of popular reality shows such as Bigg Boss 15, Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 9, and Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 8.

Shamita was last seen in the web show The Tenant.

Arjun Rampal Announces North America DJ Tour After Dhurandhar Success; Dates And Cities Revealed

Arjun Rampal launches The Rampage Tour as a DJ across major North America cities from May 28 to June 13, after Dhurandhar success.

Arjun Rampal, who delivered a banger with his negative performance in Dhurandhar, is all set to drop another banger, but this time from behind the console. With bigger stages, bigger energy, and bigger nights, Arjun Rampal will kickstart the tour from Atlanta on May 28 and continue with it in San Francisco on May 29, Houston on May 30, Dallas on May 31, Chicago on June 4, Washington DC on June 5, New York on June 6, Toronto on June 7, Vancouver on June 11, and Los Angeles on June 13.

Taking to his Instagram, the Dhurandhar actor shared details about his tour and said, "North America, it's time. ?The Rampage Tour across the USA ???? & Canada begins next week, and we're ready to bring an unforgettable experience your way," and added, "Get ready for electrifying music, nonstop vibes, and moments that will stay with you long after the lights go down.

Following the strong impact of his performance in Dhurandhar, Arjun



Rampal surprised audiences by stepping behind the DJ console, generating significant buzz online with his effortless presence, dynamic energy, and engaging stage persona.

Arjun Rampal Visited The Mahakaleshwar Temple

Arjun Rampal recently visited the

Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain and attended the famous Bhasma Aarti. Arjun offered prayers at the temple and later spoke to ANI about what brought him there. "It is the divine call that has brought me here... I prayed for everyone's peace and prosperity,"

he said. Professionally, Arjun recently garnered a lot of praise for his portrayal of Major Iqbal in Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar. In Dhurandhar: The Revenge (2026), Arjun Rampal reprises his role as Major Iqbal and faces off against Hamza, played by Ranveer Singh. The sequel continues the

spy-action storyline and has become one of the most talked-about action franchises in recent months. The Mahakaleshwar Temple, located in Madhya Pradesh, is one of India's most visited Shiva shrines and regularly sees visits from film stars, politicians, and public figures.

Don 3 Row: Film Body Reacts After Sanjay Gupta Criticises Action Against Ranveer Singh

FWICE on Monday announced a non-cooperation directive against actor Ranveer over his abrupt exit from Don 3

The ongoing controversy surrounding Ranveer Singh's exit from Don 3 has now sparked a fresh war of words between filmmaker Sanjay Gupta and the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE).

After Sanjay Gupta questioned FWICE's decision to issue a Non-Cooperation Directive (NCD) against the actor, the film body has now responded to his remarks.

Reacting to Sanjay Gupta's social media post, FWICE General Secretary Ashok Dubey defended the federation's stand and reminded the filmmaker that the same film bodies had once stepped in to help him during a crisis involving his film Mumbai Saga.

Speaking to Hindustan Times, Dubey recalled an incident from the shoot of Mumbai Saga when actor Jackie Shroff allegedly refused to continue working due to an issue over a dialogue.

"I want to ask Sanjay Gupta ji that when a few years back his film Mumbai Saga was being shot and Jackie Shroff ne aane se mana kar diya, ye hi IFTDA aur federation ne hi mil ke

problem solve karvaya tha. Where was this objection then?" Dubey said.

Earlier, Sanjay Gupta had indirectly criticised FWICE's move against Ranveer Singh, stating that such actions affect not just actors but also hundreds of workers employed on film sets.

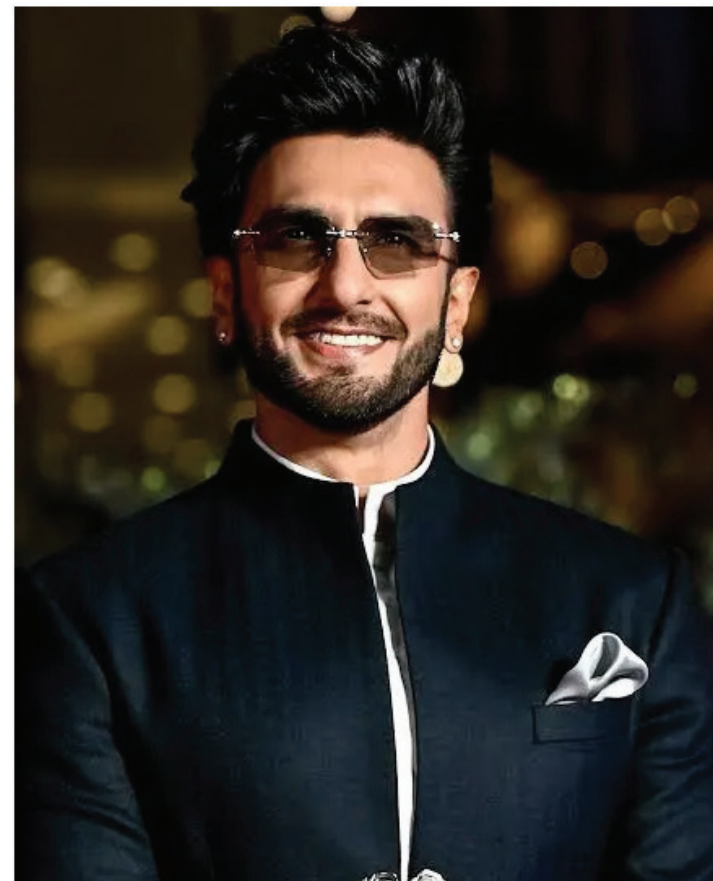
Responding to the criticism, Dubey clarified that FWICE has not officially banned Ranveer Singh. He stressed that the federation has only issued a Non-Cooperation Directive, under which members can individually decide whether they wish to work with the actor.

"Agar ye trend chalta raha to kaafi filmmaker aur producers nuksaan mein jaayenge. Humne kisi ko ban nahi kiya, humne to non cooperation bola hai, federation ke members ka decision hai ye film body ka internal decision hai," he said.

After the federation announced an indefinite non-cooperation directive against Ranveer following his sudden departure from Farhan Akhtar's much-anticipated film, Sanjay took to social media to indirectly

question the logic behind the decision.

"When an A List Hero shoots there are more than 300 workers working on sets. Ban him and you are not stopping him but depriving the workers of their livelihood. What sense does it even make???" Sanjay Gupta wrote on X. FWICE on Monday announced a non-cooperation directive against actor Ranveer over his abrupt exit from Don 3. The decision comes more than five months after filmmaker Farhan formally approached the federation with a complaint regarding the actor's withdrawal from the project. Later, Ranveer's official spokesperson issued a statement, saying, "Ranveer Singh holds the highest regard for the film fraternity and for everyone associated with the Don franchise. Throughout the recent developments surrounding Don 3, he has consciously chosen to maintain silence, believing that professional discussions and personal equations are best handled with dignity, maturity and mutual respect." "While several narratives and speculations have surfaced over



time, Ranveer has never considered it necessary to respond publicly or contribute to conjecture. His focus remains firmly on his work and the commitments ahead. He continues to hold deep respect and goodwill for all those involved

and sincerely wishes the franchise continued success. Choosing restraint and grace in moments like these has always been a conscious decision on his part, and he will continue to maintain the same stance," the spokesperson concluded.

Urvashi Rautela Reacts To AI-Generated Pic Of Her Kneeling Before Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone



Actress Urvashi Rautela has strongly reacted to a viral fan-made image that compared her with several leading Bollywood stars, including Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Madhuri Dixit, and Deepika Padukone.

The edited photo, which has been widely circulated on social media, showed Aishwarya and Priyanka seated on a throne, while Madhuri and Deepika stood beside them. What sparked outrage, however, was the portrayal of Urvashi kneeling before the actresses in the image.

Clearly upset by the post, Urvashi reshared it on her Instagram story and called out the growing culture of online negativity and fan wars.

She urged social media users to

stop pitting women against each other and instead appreciate every actress for her individual journey and achievements. "I truly believe every actress has her own journey, hard work, and destiny. Comparing women or creating fan wars only spreads negativity. Let's celebrate talent, growth, and kindness instead. Please stop this toxicity," she wrote. Her reaction quickly grabbed attention online, with many social media users supporting her message against toxic comparisons in the entertainment industry. On the work front, Urvashi was last seen in the web series Inspector Avinash 2 alongside Randeep Hooda. The actress also recently made headlines for her glamorous appearances at the Cannes Film Festival.