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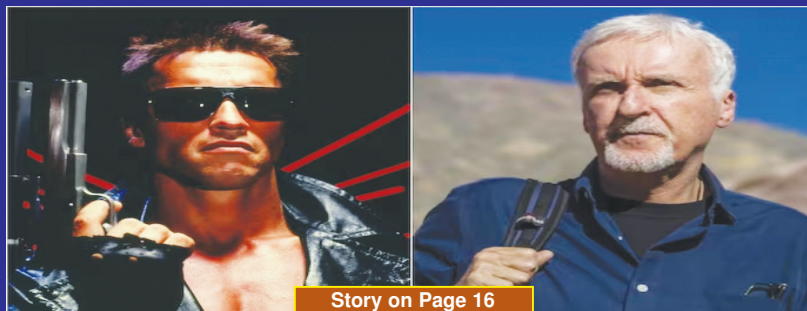
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32-Year-Old Indian Man Charged With Homicide In Fatal Truck Crash In US

(Our Staff Reporter) An Indian man who entered the US illegally three years ago has been charged with homicide after two persons were killed when a semi-truck he was driving collided with their car. Rajinder Kumar, 32, has been charged with criminally negligent homicide and reckless endangering. William Micah Carter, 25, and Jennifer Lynn Lower, 24, were killed in the road accident. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has lodged an arrest detainer for Kumar.

The Oregon State Police said its officers responded to a two-vehicle crash in Deschutes County on the night of November 24. Preliminary investigation indicated that a freightliner commercial motor vehicle and trailer operated by Kumar was stopped in a jackknifed position, blocking both lanes of travel. A car being driven by Carter struck the trailer of the freightliner as it was stopped perpendicular to the lanes of travel at

highway speeds. Both Carter and Lower were declared dead at the scene while Kumar was reportedly uninjured. "The highway was impacted for approximately



seven hours during the on-scene investigation. Dark conditions and a lack of active emergency warning equipment is being considered a primary contributor to the crash," The Oregon State Police said. Kumar was arrested for Criminally

Negligent Homicide and Reckless Endangering and lodged in the Deschutes County Jail. Describing Kumar as a "criminal illegal" from India,



DHS said he entered the US illegally near Lukeville, Arizona, on November 28, 2022. Kumar was released into "our country under the Biden administration and issued a commercial driver's license by Gavin Newsom's Department of Motor

Vehicles. How many more senseless tragedies must take place before sanctuary politicians stop allowing illegal aliens to dangerously operate semi-trucks on America's roads," Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said. This is the fourth instance in recent months where Indians who entered the US illegally have been involved in dangerous and fatal highway crashes while driving trucks.

In August, ICE lodged an arrest detainer for Harjinder Singh following his arrest for three counts of vehicular homicide while driving a semi-truck in Florida. The same month, ICE arrested Partap Singh, who caused a multi-car pileup while driving a commercial 18-wheeler in California. The accident left 5-year-old Dalilah Coleman with critical, life-altering injuries. In October, ICE lodged an arrest detainer for Jashanpreet Singh, who killed three people in California while driving an 18-wheeler under the influence.

Indian Student, 30, Killed In UK Stabbing

West Mercia Police on Friday issued an appeal for information from any witnesses to the attack in Worcester earlier in the week.



(Our Staff Reporter) A 30-year-old man, identified locally as an Indian student, was stabbed during a street attack in central England and later died of the serious injuries in hospital. West Mercia Police on Friday issued an appeal for information from any witnesses to the attack in Worcester earlier in the week.

While the UK police are yet to formally identify the victim, reports from India have named him as Vijay Kumar Sheoran of Haryana's Charkhi Dadri district. "On Tuesday morning (25 November) around 4:15 am a 30-year-old man was found

by officers on Barbourne Road in Worcester with serious injuries," West Mercia Police said in a statement.

"He was taken to hospital but sadly died later that day. Five men were arrested on suspicion of murder and are now on bail as the investigation continues," the statement added. A sixth man who was also arrested on suspicion of murder has since been released with no further action.

West Mercia's Detective Chief Inspector Lee Holehouse said the force's thoughts remain with the family and friends of the man who has

died, as he appealed for information. "Over the course of the last few days my team have been conducting extensive lines of enquiries to ascertain what happened on Tuesday morning and what led to a man losing his life," said Holehouse. "As part of these

enquiries, officers will remain on Barbourne Road over the weekend, and I would like to reassure the community that this is to continue gathering evidence and the public should not be alarmed. "The five men who were arrested on suspicion of murder are now on bail and

will continue to help us with our investigation," he said. "I continue to appeal to anyone who has any information that would help with our enquiries to please come forward, however insignificant you feel it may be; it could be a vital piece of information," he added.

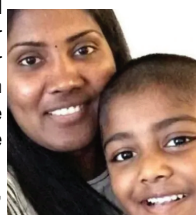
FBI Offers \$50,000 Reward For Indian Who Killed Woman, Son In New Jersey

(Our Staff Reporter) New York: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is offering a reward of up to USD 50,000 for information about an Indian national wanted for his alleged involvement in the 2017 murder of an Indian woman and her six-year-old son, with authorities here urging the government of India to extradite the suspect.

Nazeer Hameed, 38, has been charged with the murder of Sasikala Narra, 38 and her son Anish Narra inside an apartment in Maple Shade, New Jersey in March 2017. In February this year, Hameed was

charged with two counts of First Degree Murder, two counts of possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose and unlawful possession of a weapon. US authorities have said that Hameed returned to India six months after the killings and remains there to this day.

As the investigation into the killings proceeded, he was identified as a person of interest after it was revealed he was stalking the husband and father of the victims, Hanumanth Narra, Burlington County Prosecutor's Office (BCPO) said in a statement.



Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman LLP Announces Jaspreet S. Mayall as Co-Managing Partner Effective January 1, 2026

(Our Staff Reporter) Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman LLP is pleased to announce that Jaspreet S. Mayall, Co-Chair of the Bankruptcy & Debtor/Creditor Rights Practice Group and Chair of Telecommunication Practice Group, and a long-standing member of the Firm's Executive Committee, has been appointed Co-Managing Partner.

In his new leadership role, Mayall will work alongside incoming Co-Managing Partner Brendan J. DeRiggi to oversee the firm's operations, strategic initiatives, and long-term growth. His appointment reflects his long record of professional excellence, collaborative leadership style, and commitment to advancing the firm's culture, service offerings, and community engagement.

Mayall's practice spans bankruptcy, debtor/creditor rights, corporate matters, mergers and acquisitions, telecommunications, and complex commercial litigation, as well as mediation. In his national telecommunications practice, he serves as a trusted advisor to master wholesalers, original equipment

manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, assisting them in negotiating a broad range of commercial agreements. He also advises businesses in the hospitality industry and provides comprehensive representation to franchise operators in the quick-service restaurant sector. In addition, he regularly counsels businesses on joint ventures, M&A transactions, licensing agreements, regulatory matters, workouts, reorganizations, and litigation strategy.

Throughout his 34-year career at Certilman Balin, Mayall has played a pivotal role in expanding the Firm's capabilities and strengthening its position as one of Long Island's leading full-service law firms. Beyond his legal practice, he is deeply engaged in public service and professional leadership, including longstanding service on New York's Character and Fitness Committee, as well as active participation in industry

working groups and regional nonprofit organizations.

"I am honored to step into the role of

Congratulations
to
Jaspreet S. Mayall
for being named a
Co-Managing Partner.



CERTILMAN BALIN
ADLER & HYMAN LLP

Co-Managing Partner," Mayall said. "Certilman Balin has a strong foundation, an exceptional team, and a client-focused culture that I am proud to help lead. I look forward to building on our strengths, expanding our practice areas, and continuing to deliver outstanding service to our clients and community".

Certilman Balin Managing Partner Howard M. Stein, who will transition to Chair of the firm in 2026, said, "Jaspreet's experience, judgment, and character make him exceptionally well-suited for this role. His leadership will support the firm's continued growth and ensure a strong future for years to come". A graduate of Hofstra University and Maurice A. Deane School of Law, Mayall has been recognized for his litigation achievements, leadership in the law, and community involvement. He is admitted to practice in New York, New Jersey, the District of Columbia, and before multiple federal courts.

About Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman LLP

Certilman Balin is a full-service law firm serving clients across Long Island and the greater New York metropolitan area. With leading practices in real estate, banking, commercial lending, bankruptcy, litigation, corporate, labor, trusts and estates, and more, the firm has built a long-standing reputation for excellence, collaboration, and community commitment.

London Streets Painted Red By Paan, UK Council Battles Rs 35 Lakh Spit Crisis



(Our Staff Reporter) Chewing a paan or gutka and spitting it in public is as common across South Asia as spotting a tuk-tuk or auto-rickshaw on the streets. From streets to stairwells, hardly any public place is free from these red stains, unless maintained under strict cleaning and surveillance. Despite looking dirty, unhygienic, and unpleasant, this habit has become normalised over time. However, this distinctly South Asian practice has now crossed borders. The UK is increasingly facing issues due to individuals carrying this unsanitary habit abroad. According to a report by Evening Standard, a North London council spends over 30,000 Pounds (Rs 35 Lakhs) annually cleaning shops, pavements, and buildings stained with dark-red chewing tobacco residue, commonly associated with

the South Asian community. Paan chewing is widespread in parts of Brent, especially around Wembley, where the blood-red mix of saliva and tobacco is often seen splattered on pavements, telephone boxes, and even in flower beds. Brent Council has pledged to take a "zero-tolerance approach" to the problem, which it says not only causes "serious health and environmental damage" but also costs a lot to clean up. Despite the best efforts, it is often nearly impossible to completely erase the stubborn stains from the streets - with the local authority claiming that "even high-powered cleaning jets" can't remove some of the stains. As part of the approach to crack-down on the problem, Brent Council has put up banners in three of the borough's hotspots where paan spitting is "a big

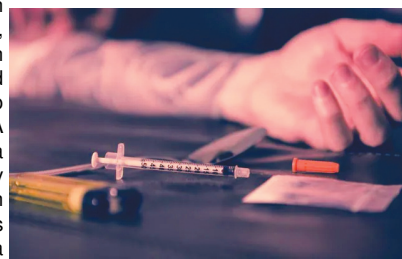
problem". There will also be enforcement officers patrolling the area, with perpetrators facing a potential fine of up to 100 pounds (Rs 12000). Cabinet

Member for Public Realm and Enforcement, Cllr Krupa Sheth, said: "I am delighted that we continue to take a zero-tolerance approach to those

who ruin our streets, that includes those that spit out paan and stain street furniture. Don't mess with Brent, because we will catch you and fine you."

Indian-Origin Man Jailed For 10 Years For Conspiring To Smuggle Heroin To UK

(Our Staff Reporter) A 57-year-old Indian-origin man who admitted to a conspiracy to smuggle heroin into the UK was on Thursday sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment, with a co-conspirator being jailed for nine years following a trial in south-eastern England. Rajesh Bakshi, from the East Lothian region of Scotland, had pleaded guilty to smuggling the Class A banned drug after a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation identified his fingerprints on a consignment, with a street value of 4 million



pounds, was stopped at the port of Dover in June 2022. His co-conspirator Jon-Paul Clark, 44, attempted to deny any involvement and told a jury at Canterbury Crown Court that his DNA was found on the smuggled drugs because he was wearing Bakshi's sweater. "My officers built a solid case against Clark, who clearly tried to pull the wool over the jury's eyes," said Jules Harriman, NCA's Senior Investigating Officer.

"There was clear evidence of his guilt and the jury saw through his attempts to cheat justice. Both offenders didn't have the slightest care for the impact Class A drugs have on our communities. "The NCA, working with partners

at home and abroad, will continue to do everything possible to fight the threat of Class A drugs," he said. Both accused were sentenced by Canterbury Crown Court this week. The NCA said that Clark and Bakshi's phones were identified as travelling in the Netherlands and Belgium in the days

leading up to the drugs' seizure at the UK port. "Officers found a photo of Clark and Bakshi together on Clark's phone taken just days before the drugs were intercepted. Texts were also found of Clark asking Bakshi for cash in the weeks following the seizure," the agency stated. Bakshi was found to have multiple previous convictions, including conspiring and being involved with the supply of a controlled drug.

ED seizes Rs 9 lakh after raiding 12 places linked to Jamia Ismailia trust

(News Agency) The Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Mumbai Zonal Office, carried out search operations on Friday, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, at 12 locations in Nandurbar, Mumbai, and Barmer. These actions are part of a probe into the Jamia Ismailia Ishatul Uloom (JIU) trust, Yemeni national Al-Khadami Khaled Ibrahim Saleh, and others, who face allegations of violations regarding the handling and distribution of foreign contributions. During the search, officials recovered Rs 9 lakh in cash, along with various incriminating documents and digital devices. The ED launched its investigation based on an FIR and a charge sheet filed by Akkalkuwa Police Station,



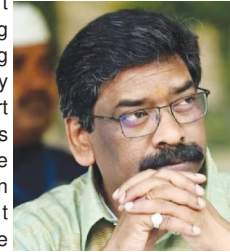
naming Al-Khadami Khaled Ibrahim Saleh, his wife Khadega Ibrahim Kasim Al-Nasheri (both Yemeni citizens), Ghulam Mohammad Randhera Vastanvi (founder of JIU, now deceased), and others as accused. According to the ED, the Yemeni nationals were

allegedly assisted by co-accused individuals in illegally overstaying in India after their visas expired. The co-accused reportedly provided shelter and aided in the procurement of fraudulent Aadhaar, PAN, and birth certificates, as well as the opening of bank accounts.

Jharkhand High Court exempts Hemant Soren from regular court visits in ED case

(News Agency) The Jharkhand High Court has provided significant relief to Chief Minister Hemant Soren by exempting him from appearing physically at every hearing in the court for MPs and MLAs regarding a case related to the violation of Enforcement Directorate summons. The court of Justice Anil Chaudhary, while hearing the petition, observed that it had no merit and hence, disposed of it soon. Soren moved to the High Court, challenging an earlier order passed by the judicial magistrate in the special court for the MPs and MLAs. The order sought his personal appearance at every hearing, as reported by the news agency PTI.

The federal agency had filed a complaint against Soren after he had refused to appear before the office of the ED through summonses issued to him. Soren was represented by Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan and Dipankar Rai in the High Court. Following the new order, Soren is not required to be present at every hearing, and he will be represented by his legal counsel. However, the Jharkhand Chief Minister and the leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha needs to appear once before the court. The first hearing is scheduled for December 6th, and it is expected that Soren will be present on the day.



Putin's visit shows Russia values India ties: Security expert Brahma Chellaney

(News Agency) Chellaney said that the China factor has historically shaped Delhi-Moscow ties — going back to the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. "It was that friendship treaty that prevented China from opening a military front against India during the Bangladesh liberation war, despite the Nixon administration encouraging Beijing to do so," he noted. Even today, Chellaney said, Russia's geography to China's north and India's position to its south make the partnership "critical to imposing discrete checks on Chinese power."

US POLICY HAS PUSHED RUSSIA CLOSER TO CHINA

Chellaney argued that Washington's sweeping sanctions on Russia have had unintended consequences for India's strategic space. "Instead of recognising Russia's importance in balancing China, the U.S. has pushed Moscow closer to Beijing," he said. He also criticised what he described as "hypocrisy and double standards," pointing to penalties imposed on Indian entities engaged in Russian oil trade while European

importers faced no such measures.

INDIA NEEDS BOTH US AND RUSSIA TO COUNTER CHINA

Responding to questions on whether the partnership can move beyond defence,

Chellaney stressed the need for New Delhi to maintain robust ties with both Washington and Moscow: "India's relationship with Russia is very important for its strategic interests and for maintaining greater

manoeuvrability in foreign policy. India needs both the US and Russia to counter China." He cautioned, however, that American policy toward India has grown increasingly erratic. "The US under Trump has slapped tariffs on India higher

than those on China, courted Pakistan in ways that revive Cold War memories and singled India out for secondary sanctions while sparing the EU, Turkey and Japan. In effect, Washington today is waging a quiet economic war on India."

India Orders Smartphone Makers to Install Mandatory Cybersecurity App

(News Agency) India has directed all smartphone manufacturers to pre-install a government-owned cybersecurity app on every new device sold in the country, igniting a debate over user consent, privacy, and how far the state should go in combating digital crime. According to reports first obtained by Reuters, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) quietly issued the order on November 28. The directive gives manufacturers 90 days to ensure the Sanchar Saathi app is installed on all new phones — and cannot be removed by users. Companies are also required to push a software update to install the app on devices

already in circulation, significantly expanding its reach among India's 1.2 billion smartphone users. Sanchar Saathi, released in January, is designed to curb online fraud and digital identity crimes by helping users report lost or stolen devices and block fake or duplicate IMEI numbers — the unique codes that identify mobile phones on the network. Government figures show more than five million downloads so far, with the tool credited for blocking over 3.7 million stolen or lost phones and flagging more than 30 million fraudulent mobile connections. Authorities also claim the app has helped recover upward of 700,000 devices.

Court denies interim relief to Anil Ambani in suit against banks over fraud tag



(News Agency) The Bombay High Court on Wednesday refused to grant any interim relief to industrialist Anil Ambani, who has challenged a consortium of banks — Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), IDBI Bank and Bank of Baroda (BoB) — for declaring his accounts as fraud on the basis of what he terms an "illegal report" by forensic auditor BDO India. Ambani has argued that BDO is not recognised as an "auditor"

under the RBI's revised Master Directions on Fraud issued on July 15, 2024. The Bombay High Court on Wednesday refused to grant any interim relief to industrialist Anil Ambani, who has challenged a consortium of banks — Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), IDBI Bank and Bank of Baroda (BoB) — for declaring his accounts as fraud on the basis of what he terms an "illegal report" by forensic auditor BDO India.

What Trump Should Be Telling America on the Economy

American Experiment Won't Fail, Grandiose Populist Visions Will

The new buzz word in politics is "affordability." It's what many pundits believe led Democrats to a strong showing this past Election Day. It's also put President Donald Trump and the Republicans on notice that affordability will likely remain as the pivotal issue in the midterms. It's all



extraordinarily frustrating to Trump who continues to tout his policies that resulted in an immediate sharp reduction in gas prices, a moderating of inflation and a meteoric stock market. Unfortunately, the president appears tone deaf when he parrots the same argument hyped by Biden and Harris in the fall of 2024 that they shouldn't believe their lying eyes, but rather the cherry picked statistics that the then president pumped daily. Trump has a lot more success to point to than did Biden, but he's missing something when he thinks everyone has benefited from a high stock market and a robust 3.8% GDP. While it's encouraging to the average middle class person that his 401(k) is at its highest level ever, that money isn't available right now to pay their still too high grocery bills, climbing rents, or the mortgage on a new home. So, Mr. President allow me to humbly suggest you use the following message: Dear fellow American, In this last election, I heard you loud and clear that closing the border and bringing prices down were your prime concerns. I said on day one that I would be able to lower your gas prices and I succeeded by ending Biden's war on traditional energy sources and promoting more drilling. What will not happen on day one is seeing the filtering down effect on all prices. That will take some time. Not four years, but several months to two years. If we look back in history, we can see that Ronald Reagan did not turn around a moribund economy in one day. But his tax cuts and deregulation, in time, resulted in an enormous surge in productivity and wage growth. That's why it's so important to stay the course. There's COVID-19. Our tax cuts brought billions of dollars back into the United States that were parked overseas. They spurred investment and

placed an additional \$2,000 in the pockets of the average family. It led to significantly higher GDP than Obama's last term and raised wages to their highest level in decades, with the working class gaining even more on a proportional basis than the wealthy. As we head into winter, the lower fuel costs can save an average household in the thousands. Wages are starting to rise, in part, because I'm deporting illegal aliens who have been suppressing wages over the years. Why would we elect more Democrats who would reverse this? And soon, we will have a new Federal Reserve chair who will likely cut interest rates significantly. High interest rates are the root of the pain so many of you are feeling. Homeownership has been out of reach for many. I don't

mean this to sound partisan, but it's indeed Joe Biden's doing. Rates spiked dramatically during his tenure because he recklessly spent trillions of dollars unnecessarily, thereby spiking inflation to its highest level in 40 years. We now have an inflation rate between 2% and 3%, which is a great improvement over Biden's 9%. We realize that's not actually lowering his high baseline, but it is curbing inflation that will lead to the Fed cutting the rates, which will unleash enormous prosperity in our nation. Right now, no one is going to sell the home they bought seven years ago with an interest rate of 3% and have it converted to a 6 1/2% mortgage. That has limited supply. Meanwhile, Joe Biden let in 15 million illegal aliens who are competing for this housing stock. There were many folks who were hoping that these high prices would be eradicated within the first month or two of my administration. I realize I built up that expectation by noting that we would change things day one. And on some things we did, inclusive of border and energy policy, but I ask your indulgence for more time on some of the other price levels that we are confident will be reduced over the next year. As to tariffs, we will continue to level the playing field so our Fords can be sold in Germany and we are no longer dependent on China for our pharmaceuticals or rare earth materials. However, I will hereinafter refrain from imposing tariffs on every nation all at once. We will seek reciprocity one nation at a time to lessen the impact on our consumers. The roaring back of our economy in my first term due to tax cuts and deregulation will be repeated in the years to come so long as we don't elect the same culprits that put us near the brink during the last four years.

Spend five minutes listening to the American left's most theatrical tribunes — Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., or Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y. — and you'll probably hear tales of a country on the verge of collapse, crushed by a rigged system that can be fixed only through a radical redesign of government. Then spend five minutes with the New Right — including Vice President JD Vance, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., and any number of nostalgists yearning to restore an idealized 1950 America — and you'll hear much the same. —The American experiment is failing, they say. —The economy is broken. —Our society is in decay. —Only sweeping power exercised by government can save us. For two camps who claim to despise one another, their global views are actually quite aligned. The populist poles of the left and right are now linked in what political scientists call the "horseshoe." As each gets further from the center, it bends closer toward its counterpart on the other side. Both distrust markets, both want to micromanage industry, both are protectionist, both romanticize manufacturing work and resent the disruptions that come from open global competition. Both, in other words, are hostile to the core tenets of the liberal economic order that made America prosperous. Each side blames a different villain. For the left, it's corporations and rich people; for the right, it's immigrants and trade. But both sides insist that a brighter future is possible only through top-down political control, and neither wants to confront the real risk: a government already too large, spending money it doesn't have and drifting toward fiscal crisis. Over at The Dispatch, Kevin Williamson captured something important: Nostalgia is manufactured as

easily as plastic trinkets, and it distracts adults who should know better. The 1950s, mythologized by the New Right in its push for a more traditional social and economic order, were not an idyll. Instead it was an era of shorter life expectancy, of higher poverty by today's standards, of legal and de facto discrimination, of limited economic opportunity for women and minorities, of gay Americans often being persecuted and of far fewer consumer goods, technologies and comforts. Implying that it was a golden age overlooks economic facts and the individuals whose rights and opportunities were sharply constrained. The left's narrative — that America remains fundamentally unjust and economically stacked against working families — is equally disconnected from empirical reality. As Michael Strain and Cliff Asness recently detailed at The Free Press, we live in the wealthiest mass-affluent society in human history. Typical workers' real wages are dramatically higher than they were two generations ago. Post-tax incomes for the bottom fifth of the scale have more than doubled since 1990. Wealth for the poorest quarter of U.S. households has tripled. Consumption, the best measure of a lived-in well-being, is hitting record highs. These data do not deny that some people struggle, but they show that the dominant narrative of national economic decline is false. Pessimism is dangerous. When voters believe they're living through an economic apocalypse, they're willing to embrace the very policies that would create one: price controls, industrial planning, more trade barriers, more centralized economic management and political control over our lives generally. History books and contemporary accounts can tell you that these policies have failed everywhere they've been tried.

By Veronique de Rugy

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Forty Years Later, the Unequal Impact of HIV Persists — and We Refuse to Accept It



(By Guillermo Chacón, President, Latino Commission on AIDS; Sean Coleman, Founder/CEO, Destination Tomorrow; Joe Pressley, Vice President of Public Policy and Government Relations, Amida Care; Kimberleigh Joy Smith, Executive Vice President of Public Policy & Communications, Callen-Lorde Community Health Center; and Shirley Torho, President & CEO, National Black Leadership Commission on Health)

supports perpetuate the HIV epidemic. We've also seen what happens when we invest in culturally competent, community-driven care: people get tested, people get treated, and people thrive.

On this World AIDS Day, we can celebrate advancements in medical treatment as effective prevention. We can also recognize the importance of programs such as Medicaid and Ryan White, rapid and routine testing, harm reduction efforts, and "Ending the HIV Epidemic" initiatives as smart and successful approaches. At the same time, recent and proposed cuts to these programs threaten to slow or reverse the progress we have made. Now more than ever, it is important to ensure that progress reaches everyone.

That's why we're calling for urgent, coordinated action at every level of government and community to confront these disparities head-on. We must:

Continue to invest in community-based, culturally responsive health care, including gender-affirming care, that recognizes the unique experiences and needs of TGNC/NB people.

Expand equitable access to prevention and treatment, including PrEP, PEP, and HIV care, addressing stigma (homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia) and cost barriers. Fund housing, nutrition assistance, mental health, and harm reduction services with a TGNC/NB equity lens, because HIV is not just a medical issue — it's a social justice issue.

Center the leadership of Black and Brown people, in-

cluding LGBTQ+ individuals, women, youth, and individuals with lived experience in shaping HIV prevention and care strategies. Protect funding for Medicaid, Ryan White, research, community health centers, community-based organizations, and TGNC/NB-serving organizations providing vital education and social support services. Every statistic about HIV represents a person — a son, a daughter, a friend, a neighbor — whose health and dignity matter. Every delayed policy, every underfunded clinic, every overlooked community deepens an injustice that has lasted for generations. Cuts to Medicaid funding will only worsen the impact of HIV on communities of color. We can commemorate World AIDS Day, but we cannot afford to commemorate another decade of disparities. The science is clear, the tools are here, and the need is urgent. The only question left is whether we will act. We are getting closer to ending the epidemic for all, but we must keep moving toward this goal. At Amida Care, Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, Destination Tomorrow, the Latino Commission on AIDS, and the National Black Leadership Commission on Health, we are committed to building a future where no one's race, gender identity, sexuality, immigration or economic status, physical or mental ability, or ZIP code determines their health outcomes. Ending HIV means ending inequity — and that begins with all of us. The time for reflection has passed. The time for action is now.

By Guillermo Chacón, Sean Coleman, Joe Pressley, Kimberleigh Joy Smith and Shirley Torho

Forty years ago, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first reported that Black and Hispanic people were disproportionately affected by HIV. Today — four decades later — those disparities persist, and for Transgender, Gender-Nonconforming, and Nonbinary (TGNC/NB) communities, they have grown even more profound.

That reality should outrage every one of us. Because what was once a public health emergency has become a test of our collective will — a question of whether we truly believe that the health of every one of us is equally worth protecting. We must strive for much better, especially for the TGNC/NB people whose experiences are too often erased in both policy and practice.

In 2025, we know more about HIV than ever before. We have powerful prevention tools like pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), including long-acting injectables, and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). We have effective treatment that allows people living with HIV to lead long, healthy lives and suppress the virus to be undetectable and

untransmittable. And we know how to end the epidemic: by ensuring broad, equitable access to the prevention, treatment, and care strategies we already know work.

And yet, in New York and across the country, Black and Hispanic/Latine communities — especially Black and Hispanic/Latine gay and bisexual men, transgender and cisgender women of color, and young people of color — continue to bear the greatest burden of this disease. Although Black and Hispanic/Latine people represent only 12% and 19% of the U.S. population respectively, Black people account for 39% of HIV diagnoses and 40% of people living with HIV, while Hispanic/Latine people account for 31% of HIV diagnoses and 26% of people living with HIV, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For TGNC/NB people, particularly transgender women of color, HIV prevalence remains unacceptably high.

These disparities don't exist because of peoples' personal choices. They exist because systems have failed

— systems rooted in racism, transphobia, xenophobia, stigma, and structural neglect. Systems that continue to underfund organizations with TGNC/NB leadership and overlook solutions created by the people most impacted. The pervasiveness of these injustices across U.S. institutions, policies, and practices is what led Governor Hochul to create an Equity Agenda to "protect the fundamental rights of all New Yorkers and widen the opportunity for people of all backgrounds, beliefs, and identities to pursue the New York Dream," which includes achieving optimal health for Black and Hispanic/Latine New Yorkers. That promise must extend fully to TGNC/NB communities — not partially, not symbolically, but with meaningful investment and action.

At Amida Care, Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, Destination Tomorrow, the Latino Commission on AIDS, and the National Black Leadership Commission on Health, we've seen firsthand how inequities in access to care, housing, education, income, mental health services, and social

India, Russia And A New Geometry of Global Trade

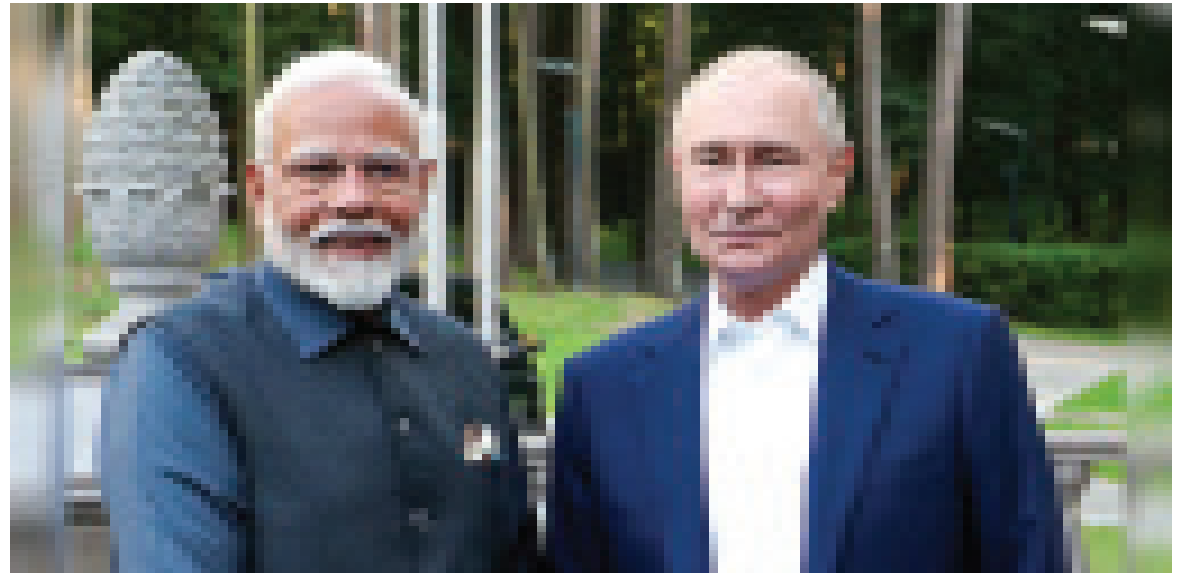
Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India starting December 4 comes at a moment when the global economic and strategic landscape is undergoing profound dislocation. His presence in New Delhi is not just a reaffirmation of a long and steady partnership, but a window into how the India-Russia relationship is being reshaped by the wider churn in global trade, finance and security. The surge in bilateral commerce, the intensifying debate around sanctions, and the rising influence of non-Western coalitions are all part of a larger transformation: the unravelling of a world built on singular hierarchies and the emergence of multiple, overlapping economic networks. Putin's visit therefore offers a timely lens through which to understand how India must position itself amid this fluid environment.

A Complex Transformation

This transition is neither linear nor uniform. It is complex, uneven and often contradictory. But for India, it presents an unusual opportunity to shape, rather than merely respond to, the evolving rules of globalisation's next chapter. India-Russia trade has surged to unprecedented levels, reaching USD 68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, driven overwhelmingly by discounted energy imports. On paper, it looks like a spectacular success. In reality, the pattern is deeply skewed: over USD 63.8 billion of this figure consists of Russian exports to India, while Indian exports remain below USD 5 billion. The rupee-rouble payment issue remains unresolved, constraining further expansion.

Is this growth sustainable?

Partially. As long as energy flows remain economically attractive and sanctions force Russia to pivot eastward, India will remain a key market. But durability requires structural correction - a broadening of India's export basket, two-way investment, and settlement mechanisms that avoid the payment bottlenecks currently clogging the system. Without these, the trade spike risks correcting itself once the geopolitical winds shift or energy arbitrage



narrows. The surge is therefore less a realignment than a window. Whether it becomes an enduring pillar of economic strategy depends on how quickly the two sides rebalance their engagements beyond oil.

Is The Multilateral System Relevant?

A second tectonic shift concerns global trade governance itself. As the United States and Europe increasingly deploy tariffs, export controls and financial restrictions as strategic tools, questions arise about the relevance of the multilateral system. The WTO, beset by a paralysed dispute settlement mechanism and outdated rules, is under visible strain. But it is far from obsolete. For the developing world-including India-the WTO still provides the only universal platform that restrains unilateralism and offers a predictable framework for export-led growth. What is underway is not the demise of the WTO but the rise of a hybrid order: formal multilateral rules coexisting with dense webs of bilateral and plurilateral arrangements.

Platforms like BRICS+, regional trade agreements, supply-chain partnerships and local-currency payment systems are becoming laboratories for new norms. For India, the task is twofold: lead conversations to reform the WTO to reflect Global South priorities, while simultaneously using coalitions to hedge

against disruption and build leverage in a world that no longer runs on a single operating system.

Are Unilateral Sanctions Still Effective?

President Putin's visit to India has renewed debates on whether unilateral sanctions are losing their bite. Russia offers a complicated but instructive case. Despite the breadth of Western restrictions, Russia has managed to redirect trade flows, stabilise certain macroeconomic indicators, and strengthen linkages with Asian partners. Sanctions have inflicted costs, but not the systemic collapse many predicted.

This reveals two truths. First, sanctions remain potent when they enjoy wide international participation-something increasingly rare. Second, countries in the Global South, including India, view unilateral sanctions imposed outside the UN framework with scepticism. They see them not as instruments of justice but as tools of geopolitical pressure, often insensitive to the developmental interests of third countries. Hence, what is emerging is not a sanctions-free world, but one where alternative legitimacy systems-South-South finance, local-currency arrangements, BRICS coordination-blunt the force of unilateral coercion. The West, too, will eventually have to adapt to this diffusion of economic power.

The Two Pillars Of India-Russia Partnership

India's relationship with Russia continues to rest on two pillars: energy security and defence cooperation. The defence component, though declining in proportional terms, remains significant: Russia still accounts for roughly one-third of India's defence imports. Joint programs such as BrahMos embody the shift from a buyer-seller dynamic to a co-development model, while the performance of the S-400 systems has reinforced India's operational confidence. At the same time, India is diversifying aggressively-toward the US, France, Israel, and domestic industry under "Make in India". The objective is not to cut Russia out, but to prevent overdependence on any single source. Strategic autonomy in an era of fragmented globalisation will come not from decoupling, but from layered partnerships, redundancy in supply chains, and the strengthening of indigenous capability. Talk of an alternative global economic bloc - one insulated from Western regulation - has gained momentum with Russia's eastward pivot and the Global South's push for resilient supply chains. But economic realities are more nuanced. New structures are indeed taking shape: local-currency settlements, BRICS financial instruments, diversified logistics corridors, and expanded South-South trade. Yet global value chains remain deeply intertwined with West-

ern capital markets, technology ecosystems and regulatory standards. Building a completely insulated parallel system is neither feasible nor efficient for most economies, including India.

Best Of All Worlds

What is emerging instead is a multi-layered global economy - not a bifurcated East vs West model, but a world of overlapping networks, where countries maintain diversified linkages to maximise resilience and bargaining power. For India, this is not a threat but an opportunity. Its integration with both the West and the East gives it rare leverage - provided it invests in alternative frameworks without abandoning existing ones.

The India-Russia relationship is not a relic of the past but a prism through which the world's new economic geometry can be observed. Trade spikes, sanctions resistance, bloc politics, shifting defence dependencies-each is a piece of a larger transformation. The emerging order will not be bipolar. It will be fluid, contested, and multi-nodal. For India, the challenge is to use this moment of flux to shape the rules, diversify its options, strengthen its domestic capabilities, and ensure that strategic autonomy remains anchored in economic resilience. In a world no longer organised around a single centre of gravity, navigation-rather than alignment-will define success.

By Shishir Priyadarshi

Putting genie back in bottle? Pre-screening social media content is futile exercise, will lead to misuse

I am not sure how many of our learned Supreme Court judges have read *Areopagitica*, a long pamphlet that Milton Friedman wrote in 1644. There can't be many I am certain. But it is also certain that more people in the legal world, judges and lawyers included, have read *Areopagitica* in full than *Paradise Lost*, the book that immortalised Milton. That is because *Areopagitica*, which reads more like an impassioned epic poem instead of an essay, has been a bedrock of all arguments in favour of free speech since it was published.

I was reminded of *Areopagitica* last week after reading Friday's newspaper. What Milton defended in 1644 in the British Parliament seemingly needs depending again on the Supreme Court of India in 2025. The similarities between what Milton argued against and what the Supreme Court and the Indian government are proposing are uncannily stark.

At the moment there are just arguments and no order. But when the Supreme Court remarks on something, it carries a weight. The court, in the middle of many arguments, made a remark about pre-screening of social media and streaming content. It suggested some sort of mechanism that can verify the age of people who are watching a YouTube or Netflix video. According to a couple of websites that report on Supreme Court proceedings, Aadhaar verification was mentioned as a possible mechanism. We will know what the future will bring but for now it seems that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been directed to explore how best social media content can be pre-screened. It has four weeks to do so.

So, where does the *Areopagitica* come into the picture? The Supreme Court

directive on social media content, and how it can be damaging in umpteen ways to teens and adults, smells similar to a law the English Parliament created in 1643. Called "Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing", the law was meant to vet books and material before it was published. Like the internet nowadays, printing was an idea too powerful then. It raised heckles of moralists and traditionalists.

The premise was the same, which the Supreme Court too professed on Thursday — save the society and individuals and society from the ill-effects of something as radical as printing (or streaming and social media, in our case.) The arguments too were the same and involved terms vague and prone to interpretation, such as anti-national, morality and decency.

Milton launched a tirade against the law with his pamphlet, using words we still put forth in defence of free speech. He wrote that pre-screening of books was against natural justice, against mankind itself because it supposed that people were stupid and could not be trusted to use their own mind and faculties. More importantly he argued that such a vague and broad law was bound to be unenforceable.

"If we think to regulate printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulate all recreation and pastimes," wrote Milton. "Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolised and traded in by tickets and statutes and standards."

And even if there was an apparatus that can do the unthinkable, it would still come to naught. "Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste, that came not hither so," Milton roared.



Then he asked rhetorically, "And who shall silence all the airs and madrigals that whisper softness in chambers?"

Who indeed? The question is as apt in India of 2025 as it was in the England of 1644. If the desire is to stop our young and old to shield from the corrupting influence of whatever that floats on social media, how at all will you look into everyone's homes where people have their TVs, into everyone's pockets where they carry their phones. How at all will you verify thousands of tweets that are made every minute and hundreds of videos that are uploaded on YouTube every second? It is impossible.

I call this endeavour putting the genie back in the bottle. The internet is that genie the governments across the world have been trying to bottle for the last twenty odd years. The Supreme Court observations last week are not the first time an institution is trying to put gatekeepers in an arena that is essentially designed to thwart gatekeeping.

Technically, it is a near impossible task, unless there is a government — such as the one in Iran and in China — that is willing to throttle the World Wide Web so hard that it becomes suffocating for any person who has experienced democracy and progressive rule.

In a country like India, attempting to pre-screen and filter social media is a recipe for disaster. Technically it is impossible with the current infrastructure. Socially too India is too disjointed and multi-layered to be contained with an agency similar to what Milton called "twenty licensing forges". Instead, vague rules and pre-censorship based on concepts like anti-national and indecency would prove to be an open invitation for the government bodies to run amok.

The repercussion for individual liberty too is an argument that Milton made against the English law. It is also an argument that I believe the Supreme Court must take a closer look at, because it is the court on which we rely to safeguard our rights. In an ideal world, the court and the government

are not friends. They are not supposed to speak in the same language. Instead, the court is supposed to bat for the individual liberty, it is supposed to curtail the claws and fangs of the government and not suggest measures that might do the opposite. In an ideal world, the government needs to struggle against court in arguing for pre-censorship of social media. It is not supposed to have its cake and eat it too. To have it otherwise is to lead to perverse laws that will be overly broad and mysteriously incoherent.

The result of that would be something similar to what befalls people of W, a country in Georges Perec's novel by the same name. In this country people's lives are governed by a unique law. And the law, writes Perec, "is implacable, but the law is unpredictable. The law must be known by all, but the law cannot be known." Putting shackles on social media and streaming with something similar to what the Supreme Court suggested would be birthing in India this "implacable and unpredictable" law.

By Javed Anwer

Will BJP Realign With Its Deserted Partner -SAD In Punjab?

Jag Mohan Thaken

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a long-time political partner, alienated from Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) during 13-month long farmers' agitation in 2020-21. SAD MP and Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal resigned from the Union Cabinet in protest of the anti-farmer acts. Her party was one of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party's oldest allies, and Ms. Badal was its sole representative in the Modi government.

Tweeting from her verified account, Ms. Badal then said she had resigned from the Cabinet "in protest against anti-farmer ordinances and legislation. Proud to stand with farmers as their daughter and sister".

Led primarily by farmers from Punjab and Haryana, the protest began in November 2020 and is considered one of the largest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. The key demands were the repeal of the three agricultural acts and the guarantee of a legal minimum support price (MSP) for crops. The government repealed the laws in November 2021, though the protest continued until December 2021 to secure other commitments.

Seeing the 2027 assembly elections at stone's throw, the Punjab political parties have started to gird up their loins for the forthcoming political battle. The present ruling party Aam Adami Party (AAP) is anxious about retaining the throne, whereas the main opposition party congress is trying hard to regain its lost power. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) is hoping to revive its roots in the rural constituencies and the BJP counts its base on urban and Hindu votes, but the ground reality smells that the urban party won't get even a penny of power, if it fights the election alone.

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has now come to this sobering realisation: establishing an independent foothold in Punjab capable of dislodging the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is no longer merely difficult—it is impossible. An equally grim concern looms larger: even if AAP were to be defeated, the principal beneficiary would be the Congress, leaving the BJP exactly where it started—marginalised and irrelevant.



Having exhausted every conceivable strategy to expand its influence, the BJP pinned its hopes on high-profile defections, enticing former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh and ex-Congress state president Sunil Jakhar to serve as the nucleus of a self-sustaining organisation free from alliance crutches. The gamble failed spectacularly. These ageing, battle-worn veterans—long past their political prime—proved rootless and incapable of galvanising support.

Now, in a damning admission, Captain Amarinder himself has conceded the bitter truth: without a formidable local ally, the BJP has no realistic prospect of ever winning the electoral contest in Punjab.

Will BJP make a re-alliance with its old partner-SAD?

Speaking with a media house, Captain clearly stated that the BJP would not be able to win the coming 2027 Assembly elections on its own and would need to re-suscitate its partnership with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) if it aimed to return to power.

Indian Express in its 1st December Print edition, quotes Captain that the party "doesn't understand the state" well enough to build a strong organisational base independently. Captain stated that only an alliance with the SAD could provide the necessary cadre and grassroots network, a process that he said would otherwise require "two to three elections" for the BJP to develop on its own.

"There is no other way to form the Government than by having an alliance with the Akali Dal," Captain said.

Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, on December 01, said that he agreed with the former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh that the BJP on its own did not have any future in Punjab. The PCC president remarked, "the BJP can never form a government in Punjab, with Akalis or without Akalis".

"It does not have any future at all, with or without allies as the party has completely alienated and antagonised Punjabis with its anti-Punjab policies", he added.

Raja Warring said, both the parties have already been wiped and washed out from Punjab and they had no hope or scope of revival or redemption.

"But one thing I must appreciate and agree with Capt. Sahab is that he has become wiser in hindsight and has shown the mirror to his own party", he noted, while adding, "even if the Akalis and the BJP align together they will not make any difference as zero plus zero is always a zero".

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also reacted sharply on Captain's theory of BJP's alliance with SAD and launched a scathing attack on former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh and the Badal family, holding them behind the two-decade-long conspiracy to plunder the state's resources.

Addressing a press conference at party's head office, on 1st

December, Punjab Finance Minister and Senior AAP leader, Advocate Harpal Singh Cheema, said that the leaders rejected by the people of Punjab, including two-time former Congress CM Captain Amarinder Singh, his relative Simranjeet Singh Mann, and former Deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal, are once again dreaming of returning to power. Cheema asserted that Punjab will no longer tolerate the politics of loot dominated by these two families.

Commenting over the statement of AAP leader Cheema, Former Chairman National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Former State President BJP Punjab, Vijay Sampla, while addressing a press conference, said – "BJP is fully prepared to contest all 117 assembly seats on its own. From the 2022 Assembly elections to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has contested elections solo in Punjab and will also be contesting the upcoming Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections and the 2027 elections on its own strength."

But doesn't the statement of Vijay Sampla undermine the theory of BJP's once strong hold leader Captain Amarinder Singh? Has Captain lost his weight up to such an extent in the party that his views and suggestions are turned down by even a second liner in the party? Doesn't Vijay Sampla know that giving tickets to party's candidates on all seats is not winning all the seats? Doesn't he remember the results of BJP in the 2022 assembly elections and 2024 Lok Sabha elections?

How did BJP and SAD fare in 2022 assembly elections and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, when they fought separately?

In 2022 assembly elections for all the 113 seats AAP won 92 seats getting 42 % votes, Congress got 18 seats with 23% vote share, SAD got only 3 seats and a vote share of 18.38% and the BJP, despite a ruling party status in the centre, had to satisfy with only 2 seats and a 6.6% vote share. If BJP and SAD had aligned in this election, they jointly would have got many more seats as their joint vote share was 35% (18.38 + 6.60), 12% more than congress' share.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the results of all the 13 seats in Punjab were also alarming for BJP and SAD, which they fought separately.

Congress got 7 seats out of 13 seats with a vote share of 26.39%, AAP, despite a ruling party in the state, could won 3 seats with vote share of 26%, Shiromani Akali Dal had to satisfy on only one seat getting 13.42% vote share and BJP lost the ground completely (won zero seat), even it got 18.56 vote share. The others got 2 seats. If we consider the total vote share of both SAD and BJP, the alliance got 32% (13.42 + 18.56), which is the highest. The joint fight of SAD and BJP could have changed the position. So, the data of vote share in both the elections of 2022 and 2024 shows that if BJP and SAD had remained the partner, as earlier, they wouldn't have to see the shameful defeat and might have got the ruling command. Perhaps this analysis has forced Captain Amarinder Singh to think about the need for alliance between the two parties. But here arises the question, whether the same data will repeat itself in 2027 assembly elections? Will BJP use SAD Manure to spread its roots in Punjab and succeed in getting the bumper crop? What does the ground report say? As the farmers of the Punjab still do not seem happy with the BJP due to not fulfilling their various demands of guaranteed MSP and others by the central government, so the farmers will vote for the alliance, which has BJP as the partner, does not reflect a positive note. Angrej Singh Bhadour, a farmer leader from Punjab, interacting with this author, says, "My personal opinion is that if the Shiromani Akali Dal and the BJP come together, the general public will not vote for them and it is difficult for them to succeed. Let alone the farmer organizations, the general public will not accept this alliance. But this will have one advantage. It will become clear to the people that all the looters, no matter which political party they belong to, are all one in looting the people."

Congress's Greatest Enemy Isn't BJP, But Itself



In the vibrant mosaic of Indian politics, few narratives capture the imagination as poignantly as the plight of the Congress party. A Leviathan of yesteryear, once a titan of Indian democracy, established in 1885, the Congress now seems to teeter on the brink of disintegration, beset by intense factionalism and a curious lack of cohesive direction. In examining the unmistakable signals of distress emanating from Congress, one might wonder: is this party, with its storied legacy, committing political harakiri?

Theatre of the Absurd in Karnataka

Consider the situation in Karnataka, where the Chief Minister, Siddharamaiah, and his deputy, DK Shivakumar, are ensnared in a fierce power struggle. Their public displays of discord, reminiscent of the 'Theatre of the Absurd', showcase not just personal ambition, caste factionalism, but the fraying bonds of party unity. With Siddharamaiah's reluctance to relinquish his post - a stance seen by some as both principled and stubborn - the stage is set for a leadership crisis. The Congress high command, ostensibly a custodian of the party's interests, appears lost, caught in the crosshairs of diverging loyalties and aspirations. This situation is not merely a local squabble; it is emblematic of a deeper malaise afflicting the party at large.

Remember Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar?

The Congress's troubles are

not confined to Karnataka. Similar fissures have marred its fortunes recently in Rajasthan, where the rivalry between former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and the young and dynamic Sachin Pilot has hindered any meaningful dialogue or coalition-building. In Haryana, the infighting over leadership between former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his detractors remains a persistent shadow. After nearly 11 months of uncertainty after the electoral defeat in Haryana, Bhupinder Singh Hooda has been appointed leader of the Congress legislative party in Haryana, making him the Leader of Opposition in the state assembly. Rao Narendra Singh, an OBC leader, has been appointed president of the Haryana Congress.

In Kerala, the tension between Shashi Tharoor and KC Venugopal is also well-known. Recently a major source of public disagreement occurred in November 2025, when Tharoor published an article critical of family-based politics in India, arguing it weakens accountability and standards of governance. As a close confidant of the Gandhi family high command, Venugopal sharply rebutted Tharoor's comments, defending the Nehru-Gandhi legacy and stating he "felt sorry" for those who made such remarks.

These episodes tell a story of a party that is fracturing under the weight of its internal contradictions - a story that might

be all too familiar.

Losses in Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar

Nationally, the Congress seems to be on a downward trajectory, having experienced significant electoral losses in key states such as Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, and Bihar. In Bihar, the Congress's performance with six seats in its kitty was humiliating. From 27 seats in 2015 to 19 in 2020 to six in 2025, the Congress party seems to be hurtling down a precipice. The 16-day Voter Adhikar Rally by Rahul Gandhi along with the Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) Tejashwi Yadav from the benefit of hindsight seems like a self goal.

Senior Congress leader Shakeel Ahmed from Bihar resigned from the party saying "S.I.R never a poll issue...Not one genuine voter axed" (referring to the Special Intensive Revision of voter lists which the Congress was protesting as disenfranchisement). Ahmed alleged that the crowds at Rahul Gandhi's rally were "paid people/congress karyakartas" (party workers) rather than actual disenfranchised voters. Ahmed also refuted the party's claims of widespread EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) tampering in Bihar, stating there was "no proof".

Ahmed also cited general "differences with some individuals currently in power within the party" and "total mismanagement of the election and the Mahagathbandhan

coalition" as reasons for his departure, while maintaining his faith in the core Congress ideology. He waited until after polling concluded to announce his resignation to avoid damaging the party's election.

Defeat is a bitter pill to swallow for any political party, but what makes the Congress's situation particularly dire is the perception of a lack of agency in addressing its challenges. Despite Rahul Gandhi's recent attempts to pivot toward a more leftist ideology - embracing caste surveys, advocating for constitutional values, and calling out electoral machinations (Vote chori) - there remains an unsettling sense of disarray.

Directionless, Leaderless, Rudderless

This growing factionalism is not merely a product of individual ambitions but reflects a broader identity crisis within the Congress. At a moment when it should be rallying its myriad voices for a common cause, it instead projects an image of being directionless, leaderless, and rudderless - adrift in an ocean of political turbulence. One can almost hear the echoes of dissent rising from its ranks, a cacophony that drowns out any harmonised vision for the future.

The Congress Doesn't Need BJP To Falter

The term "harakiri" implies a deliberate act of self-destruction. In the context of the Congress Party, one cannot help but see the parallels. It does not require the

BJP as an adversary for the Congress to falter; it is indeed capable of inflicting wounds upon itself. Each act of factionalism, each missed opportunity for unity, is a step further down the path of self-sabotage. The party's inability to revamp organisationally or ideologically only serves to exacerbate its drift toward oblivion.

Heading Towards Irrelevance?

As the Congress grapples with its existential crisis, one is left to ponder: can a party so steeped in its own legacy navigate the turbulent waters of contemporary politics? Or is it destined to retrace its steps into irrelevance, consumed by its internal divisions? The answers are elusive, ensconced in a political landscape that demands resilience and cohesion. Amidst the fray, the Congress must confront the profound reality that its greatest enemy may not be the ruling BJP, but itself. Each day brings with it the potential for renewal or ruin, and as the narrative unfolds, the world watches with bated breath. Will the Congress find a way to mend its fractures and reclaim its status as a formidable force in Indian politics, or will it continue to spiral into the shadows, a once-great party committing political harakiri on the altar of its internal strife? It is a question that lingers, beckoning both introspection and action - an open invitation to redefine destiny before it is too late.

(The writer Ajit Kumar Jha is Editor, Research, at NDTV)

Trump's Peace Plan Meets Kyiv's Political Chaos — and Putin's Leverage

Andriy Yermak, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Chief of Staff, was forced to resign following a police raid on his home linked to a widening corruption scandal. A key figure in war-end negotiations with Russia, his exit jeopardises the talks.

Hours before he was about to pack his bags to visit Florida to meet US officials at President Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort this weekend, Andriy Yermak, the Ukrainian President's Chief of Staff, was forced to resign. The resignation of Yermak on Friday followed a police raid on his home in connection with a deepening corruption scandal that has already led to the sacking of two cabinet ministers and is threatening to topple President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government.

Widely regarded as the country's second most powerful figure after Zelensky, Yermak was leading negotiations to end the war with Russia. His departure leaves those talks in jeopardy at a time when Ukraine is fighting a desperate battle for its existence as the US pressure mounts to end the war on terms favourable to Russia.

Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff is due to arrive in Moscow next week, along with Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to finalise the peace deal. Kremlin has already been sent a revised peace plan, drawn up after emergency talks between Ukrainian and American officials in Geneva, Switzerland, a week ago. But prospects for agreement over that plan are dim.

RUSSIAN DEFIANCE

Undeterred by the West's sanctions and military and diplomatic support to Ukraine, Russia has been making slow but steady progress on the war front. Ukraine is on the verge of losing an important battle -- the city of Pokrovsk is in imminent danger of falling. That could trap a large number of Ukrainian soldiers. Russia's war economy is in overdrive, producing all the necessary military equipment with some help from China, which continues to supply raw materials and buy Russian oil despite Western pressure.

Western-supplied defence systems are proving inadequate for Ukraine as it faces a daily barrage of Russian missiles and drones. Its energy sector has taken a massive hit. The corruption scandal has also damaged the Zelensky government's credibility at home and abroad. On

top of that, the US support under President Trump has almost dried up. Trump has never hidden his dislike for the Ukrainian leader.

To be fair to Trump, who likes to be recognised as the peace-maker-in-chief, has not given up on efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war. He has a point when he says that had he been the president in 2022, the war would not have begun. He blames it on Biden, a man who rose under the Cold War era. Trump seems to believe Russia has genuine grievances against Ukraine and the West.

IS THE WEST TO BLAME FOR UKRAINE CONFLICT?

One needs to trace the origin of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to the West's decision to expand NATO to Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US Secretary of State James Baker's famous assurance to the last Soviet Leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, on February 9, 1990, that NATO will move "not one inch eastward" is often cited by Russia as a betrayal. Western leaders dispute that any such undertaking was given, saying Baker was only referring to the former East Germany.

For Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin, the red line was crossed on April 2, 2008, when NATO agreed to make Ukraine and Georgia members of the bloc. Ukraine is the largest former Soviet Republic in Europe, after Russia, and the presence of NATO troops there would make Russia more vulnerable to a future Western military invasion. Ukraine has also traditionally had close cultural and linguistic ties with Russia. Putin first invaded and captured Ukraine's predominantly Russian-speaking region, Crimea, in 2014, and the rest of Ukraine in February 2022.

Weeks after the invasion, Russia and Ukraine nearly concluded an agreement in April 2022 in Istanbul, under which Moscow and Western powers would provide Kyiv a security guarantee, Zelenskyy's main concern. In return, Ukraine would remain neutral and not join NATO, a major Russian demand. But US and European leaders persuaded

Zelensky to walk away from the deal with the assurance that they would help him to win the war.

Ironically, Trump's current peace plan includes these two issues. Had the West allowed the deal in 2022, the lives of over a million Russians and Ukrainians would have been saved and the destruction of Ukraine could have been avoided. Kyiv is a bigger loser because it is now being forced by Trump to give away swathes of land that Russia has been unable to gain by military force.

WHAT DOES US PEACE PLAN SAY?

Trump's original 28-point plan, formulated by Mr Witkoff after discussions with Russian officials and leaked earlier this month, offers America's "de facto" recognition of Crimea and the two eastern Donbas regions, Luhansk and Donetsk, parts of which Ukraine still controls. It also proposes "de facto" recognition of Russian-held land behind the line of control in Ukraine's Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions.

The plan promises that NATO will not expand further, Kyiv will enshrine in its constitution that it will never join NATO, and Ukraine's army will be reduced to 600,000 from its current 800,000. (It is still up from 250,000 at the start of the full-scale invasion nearly four years ago) The proposed plan also says that sanctions on Russia will be gradually lifted and it will be readmitted to the global economy -- including Moscow's inclusion in the elite G-8 group.

The plan alarmed Ukraine and the European leaders, who saw it as a capitulation for Kyiv and a reward to Moscow, the aggressor. Zelensky called it a choice between losing Ukrainian dignity and losing American support. Even in the US, it was seen as a plan drafted by Moscow, though the Secretary of State Marco Rubio denied that. European leaders persuaded the US to revise it and take out some of the points.

WIN FOR PUTIN BUT DISASTER FOR ZELENSKY

Details of the revised plan are not clear, but it's unlikely to be endorsed by Moscow. Putin

has been consistent since the invasion and has not relented on his core demands. So, given his upper hand and Trump's apparent desperation for a deal, Putin is likely to insist on most of the original points, which will give him more Ukrainian territory, international recognition, lifting of sanctions and an end to his pariah status.

On the other hand, it seems like a disaster for Zelensky. Putin doesn't even consider Zelensky's government as legitimate. The plan calls for elections in Ukraine within 100 days of the agreement, which is impractical given the current state the country is in. Even if elections are held, any government that goes to the voters having signed this agreement is likely to lose.

WHY IS EUROPE SO WORRIED?

If the plan goes ahead, it is also bad news for Europe, which continues to see Russia as a threat. Although Putin has never hinted at any imperial or expansionist intentions -- unlike Donald Trump -- European leaders have repeatedly said that if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, he will target other countries of the former Soviet bloc.

An emboldened Putin can create problems for Europe. But the Ukraine war has drained its economic and military resources to such an extent that even if it tries, Russia can't take the risk of invading a NATO country. Though a few years later, it can regroup and invade Ukraine again.

Europe's main problem is the uncertainty over the future of the American security umbrella it has enjoyed since the end of the Second World War. Europeans want to keep using Russia's threat to Ukraine as a reason for the United States to stay engaged in Europe. So it is in their interest to keep the Russia-Ukraine conflict alive.

But Donald Trump wants Europeans to take care of their own security as he turns his attention to Asia and focuses on America's main rival, China. For that reason, he also wants Russia to move away

from China. Although it was President Obama who launched in 2011, his famous policy, the US Pivot to Asia -- the home to 60 per cent of the world's population and three of the world's largest economies with over 40 per cent of the global GDP -- all his successors have followed it.

WHY A RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN DEAL WILL BE GOOD FOR INDIA?

America's focus on Asia and agreement to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict is good news for India. Firstly, it will help New Delhi strengthen ties with Moscow without any problem with the West. Russia's return to the G-8 as a result of the Ukraine deal will give it a further boost. Russia would also like to reduce its dependence on China, which is another opportunity for India.

India can also learn from Russia's experience in Ukraine. Moscow has developed new drone and missile technologies during the conflict, which it can share with New Delhi. The next week's visit of Vladimir Putin to India is very timely in that respect, where defence, energy and nuclear co-operation are expected to be discussed.

India's relations with the United States should also improve as the Trump administration explores ways and means to contain China. The Ukraine conflict has drained not only Russian resources but also depleted American military equipment. That gives India new opportunities to work with US defence companies.

But the deal between Moscow and Kyiv is not a foregone conclusion despite Donald Trump's efforts and pressure on Ukraine. If he agrees to give Russia large parts of his territory -- which it has failed to capture on the battlefield -- may end the political career of Zelensky.

But despite huge Russian losses in the war, Putin doesn't seem in the mood to give any concessions to Zelensky.

BY Naresh Kaushik

India Still Needs Something Like Sanchar Saathi - Just Not Like This

On November 28, 2025, the Department of Telecommunications (DOT) mandated that all smartphone manufacturers pre-install the government's Sanchar Saathi app on every device sold in India, with explicit instructions that its functionality remain visible, accessible, and unrestricted. Then came the reversal: just four days later, on December 2, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia declared the app entirely "optional" - users could delete it whenever they wished. Now, in the latest, the government has officially withdrawn the order mandating the pre-installation of the app.

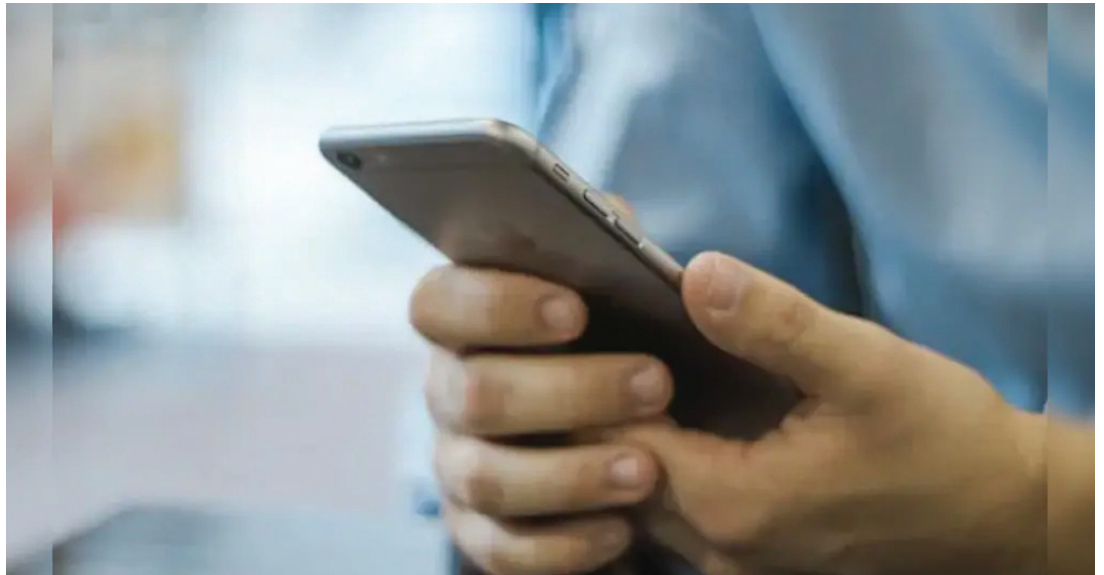
These contradictions reveal troubling confusion about the initiative. But it also obscures an important truth: the government's cybersecurity intent is both genuine and urgent. The question is not whether we need robust fraud prevention mechanisms, but whether this particular approach respects constitutional boundaries while achieving those security goals.

The timing of this directive was no accident. India is experiencing what authorities describe as a "peak menace" of digital fraud. The Supreme Court recently took suo motu cognisance of digital arrest scams, directing the CBI to lead a nationwide investigation after victims collectively lost approximately Rs 3,000 crore. These scams involve fraudsters impersonating law enforcement officials through video calls, displaying forged Supreme Court orders, and terrorizing victims-particularly senior citizens-into transferring life savings. Chief Justice Surya Kant noted that the court intended to deal with scamsters "with iron hands," emphasizing that such crimes strike at "the very foundation" of trust in the judiciary. The Court directed that all FIRs be handed over to the CBI, granted the agency authority to investigate bank officials under the Prevention of Corruption Act, and mandated that IT service providers cooperate fully.

A Necessary Step

Against this backdrop, the government's push for Sanchar Saathi becomes comprehensible. The app provides tools to report fraudulent communications, check unauthorized SIM cards, verify IMEI authenticity, and block stolen devices. Over 15 million people had already downloaded it voluntarily in the past 15 months, and the app is available in all vernacular languages. Downloads of Sanchar Saathi jumped tenfold on December 2, rising from a daily average of 60,000 to nearly 600,000-suggesting both genuine public concern and regulatory pressure.

Clearly, the government's cybersecurity intent was genuine and



commendable, but its execution raised constitutional questions. Privacy concerns warrant examination here. The Puttaswamy judgment delivered in 2017 established privacy as a fundamental right. Any state intrusion into informational privacy must satisfy three tests: legality, legitimate aim, and proportionality.

On Legality: The government operates within its authority to issue directives based on executive rules under the Telecommunications Act 2023, but constitutional doctrine demands more substantial legislative authority for such intrusive measures.

On Legitimate Aim: Device security and fraud prevention certainly qualify as compelling state interests. The digital arrest scam crisis and the Supreme Court's extraordinary intervention demonstrate that the threat is real and pressing. The government's cybersecurity objective is not only legitimate but necessary.

On Proportionality: The directive becomes problematic. Could identical outcomes be achieved through less intrusive alternatives? The answer is demonstrably yes. The app was already available with 15 million voluntary downloads. Following the directive and subsequent publicity, downloads surged to 600,000 in a single day, proving that awareness campaigns drive adoption. The app could be prominently featured during device setup without being compulsory. Despite government assurances, the app's technical architecture required greater governance transparency. On Android devices, Sanchar Saathi requests access to call and SMS logs, phone management capabilities, camera, and storage. DoT sources explain that the app seeks permission to make calls to check the active SIM before registration, and to send

SMS for verification-similar to banking apps.

The Missing Links

What's missing is comprehensive published governance protocols. Where is the detailed data retention policy? How long does the government store IMEI numbers? Who can access this centralized database, and under what authorisation mechanisms? What are the audit procedures? DoT sources stated that Sanchar Saathi has limited access to phone data, "and that too only to the extent citizens permit it in each interaction." This interaction-based permission model is privacy-protective, but requires formal documentation and external audit to build public trust.

This is not a binary choice between security and privacy-both are achievable with superior institutional design. The government's cybersecurity objective deserves support; the implementation method needs refinement. First, leverage awareness. A single day of publicity drove downloads from 60,000 to 600,000. Sustained campaigns explaining digital arrest scams, combined with prominent app placement during device setup, could achieve widespread adoption voluntarily.

Second, integrate at the OS level. Through manufacturer partnerships, IMEI verification, device authenticity checks, and stolen phone blocking could become native OS features without requiring a separate government app with its own permission structure. This approach-already employed in iOS's Find My Device and Android's built-in security features-achieves security objectives while minimizing data collection. Third, implement network-side controls. The Supreme Court has already directed the DOT to submit proposals regarding the issuance

of multiple SIM cards under a single name. Operators can detect cloned IMEIs, verify device authenticity, and flag suspicious patterns through network analysis without collecting granular user data.

Fourth, anchor it in proper legislation. Given the Supreme Court's extraordinary involvement in the digital arrest scam crisis, Parliament should enact comprehensive cybercrime prevention legislation. This would provide democratic legitimacy, mandate clear data protection standards, specify retention limits, establish audit requirements, and create judicial oversight mechanisms.

The government's contradictory messaging - mandatory pre-installation followed by declarations of voluntary usage - may reflect genuine tension between security urgency and constitutional requirements rather than cynical manoeuvring. The digital arrest scam crisis is real, confirmed by the Supreme Court's unprecedented intervention. The government's desire to rapidly deploy protective tools is understandable given that vulnerable citizens are losing life savings.

But constitutional democracies navigate such tensions through institutional discipline, not by circumventing fundamental rights. The Puttaswamy framework exists precisely to ensure that even urgent, well-intentioned state action remains bound by principle. The path forward requires neither abandoning security objectives nor accepting constitutional shortcuts.

Balance Is Possible

Strong cybersecurity and robust privacy protection are not opposites - they're complementary goals requiring thoughtful institutional design. The question isn't whether Sanchar Saathi serves a legitimate purpose - it clearly does.

By Subimal Bhattacharjee

West May Fume, But India Has More Than Enough Reason To Keep Putin Close

The Oscar-winning actor's autobiography combines vulnerability with bloody-mindedness and belligerence



Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives in India tomorrow for a two-day summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is his first visit to India since 2021, and it is on account of the 23rd bilateral annual summit. Last year, Modi had travelled to Moscow in July for the 22nd summit.

The meeting is taking place at a particularly fraught conjuncture for both leaders. Putin is facing US pressure to end the war against Ukraine, while Modi has had perhaps his most challenging year in foreign policy terms - India has fought a short war with Pakistan, and relations with the US have nose-dived. In addition, India is under the Damocles Sword of the Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025 as well as pressure to reduce, if not end, its lucrative oil purchases from Russia, for which India is paying a tariff penalty of 25% on exports to the US. India is also living with the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAASTA) through special waivers for purchasing Russian defence equipment.

The aim of the visit is to give a new gloss to the India-Russia relationship that has seen better times. In the current troubled geopolitical moment, both see this as an opportunity, and reports suggest that the summit, for which they have done considerable home-work, will be consequential.

The Oil Question

The agenda for the summit is sizeable and comprises both the geopolitical and the substantive. The first item is the manner in which the

two partners can deal with the issue of Russian oil purchases. India's steady reduction of Russian oil purchases cannot be to Moscow's liking, but the issue is just how New Delhi can balance it. As of now, private refiners like Reliance, Mangalore Refinery and Hindustan Petroleum have stopped their purchases, but some state-owned refiners such as Indian Oil and Bharat Petroleum are resuming purchases from non-sanctioned suppliers. Russia believes that the decline will be short-lived and is working to establish new trade mechanisms to bypass sanctions.

The New Weapons On The Cards

Then there is the issue of arms purchases. India's defence relationship with Russia goes back to the Cold War, when it became the first country to supply us submarines and supersonic fighters, both of which had been denied to us by western suppliers. Currently, 60-70% of Indian military equipment is Russian, comprising mainly T-90 tanks, Su-30MKI and Mig-29 fighters, the INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier, and a clutch of eight Krivak class frigates, the first of which came in 1999 and the last was commissioned in July this year.

Russian systems - the Almaz-Antey S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile systems and the BrahMos (Indo-Russian), delivered outstanding performance in India's four-day Operation Sindoor against Pakistan. India had contracted five squadrons

of the S-400 systems but has so far received only three because of Russia's Ukraine commitments. Reports suggest that India may go in for five more now. There has been talk of the purchase of the even more capable S-500 Prometheus, which can even intercept hypersonic cruise missiles and aircraft, as well as of Russia's fifth-generation fighter the Su-57. But as of this moment, it looks unlikely that New Delhi will go for them.

However, India and Russia are likely to proceed with a project to make the Brahmos-II, which will be based on the Russian missile Zircon, a scramjet-powered, hypersonic cruise missile. While the Brahmos-I has a speed of Mach 2.2, the Brahmos-II could go up to Mach 8, and while the former has a range of 400 km, the newer missile could reach 1,000 km.

The Pantsir Missile System

Last November, Bharat Dynamics signed an agreement with Russia's Rosoboronexport to collaborate in the manufacturing of the Pantsir self-propelled anti-aircraft and missile system. The plan is to use the system to replace the 1,200 or so outdated L-70 40 mm and ZSU-4 Schilka anti-aircraft guns of the Indian Army.

Another purchase India is contemplating is that of the Russian Almaz-Antey Voronezh long-range early warning radar. This will be oriented towards the Chinese threat and be used for early warning of Chinese ballistic missiles, stealth aircraft and drones. The plan is to have at least 60% of the system made in India.

A Russian Advantage

The most important aspect of India's arms transfer relationship with Russia is that the Russians are willing to offer systems that others would hesitate to provide, and do so without any pre-conditions. Almost all American systems come with some pre-conditions, which include on-site inspections.

The most important in this category are nuclear-propelled submarines. The Russians helped us to make our first such vessel, the INS Arihant, and since then, two other successor submarines have been made in Vishakhapatnam with substantial Russian help. Now, India is considering making nuclear attack submarines, which are faster than the ballistic missile submarines,

and you can be sure that Russia will play an important role there.

Another way that Russia has helped us in this area has been to lease nuclear-propelled submarines, which have helped the Indian Navy familiarise themselves with running such vessels. Beginning 1988, the Russians leased us attack submarines that were named INS Chakra. Since then, in 2012, a successor vessel was leased for 10 years. In 2019, the two countries signed up for a \$3 billion lease of a new Akula-class submarine. However, for a variety of reasons, the boat has not yet been received by India.

A Balancing Act

India knows that western systems are more advanced than those of Russia, and it has sought to balance between the two by steadily reducing its arms imports from Russia. But there are systems, like submarines, or missiles, like Brahmos, which will not be available to India. New Delhi is making strenuous efforts to reduce its dependence on foreign suppliers, be they Russian or Western. But that process will take time.

Another important item on the agenda is trade. Currently, Russian exports to India amount to \$65 billion, mainly on account of oil. India's exports are an anemic \$5 billion. Both sides are determined to change things. To this end, an important item on the agenda is to shape alternate payment systems to bypass western restrictions. Importantly, the two sides will discuss the issue of the Indian trade deficit and the need to sharply boost Indian exports to Russia. One item being identified is very small modular nuclear reactors.

Putin's visit will rejuvenate Russian ties with India. In the somewhat turbulent geopolitical environment of the day, the visit by a long-standing and steady partner will be well-received by the country. The US will be closely watching the outcome, both from the point of view of the oil issue and additional arms deals between India and Russia.

India will also have to contend with the views of the European Union, since tensions between Brussels and Moscow remain high. Maintaining strategic ties with Russia, even while deepening partnerships with the US and the EU, makes for an especially difficult phase, with the negotiations over the Ukraine war intensifying.

India will have to figure out ways to square the circle.

Manoj Joshi

Why modern travel is leaning hard into luxury

Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour has claimed that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), under congressional scrutiny for alleged Hamas ties, funded Zohran Mamdani's campaign for the New York City mayoral polls. Sarsour, who is Mamdani's political mentor, said CAIR gave him \$120,000, becoming its biggest funder.



For every '90s kid from a middle-class family, vacations meant squeezing into an extra bed with a sibling or a parent in a hotel room shared by the whole family. Separate rooms for kids weren't even a thought. And while parents made sure the trip felt special, they often skipped trying new dishes, so their children could eat what they liked. Experiences were also carefully chosen, revisited on the brochure multiple times before deciding. And yet, even with cramped beds and limited plans, those were some of the best times, weren't they? Today, travel looks completely different. Luxury has become central to the idea of a perfect getaway. People want comfortable stays, are excited to try every new cuisine, and aim to experience everything a destination has to offer. Many are even willing to stretch their budgets or swipe their credit cards on EMI just to make their dream trip happen. Agreed that budget-conscious travel still matters, but the desire to explore without compromise has made luxury travel increasingly popular.

Travel, once simple, is now extravagant.

Hari Ganapathy, co-founder, Pickyourtrail, tells India Today that travel today

is no longer viewed as a functional break; it has become a form of self-expression. "We've seen travellers shift from 'seeing a place' to 'experiencing a place,' and that naturally lends itself to more curated, elevated journeys. What was once a checklist-driven activity has evolved into a lifestyle choice, where travellers actively seek comfort, exclusivity, and cultural immersion." Ganapathy further shares that about 50 per cent of their honeymoon travellers now ask for curated experiences, signalling a clear shift toward meaningful and bespoke travel. And while luxury is becoming mainstream, its definition has certainly changed. It's less about opulence and more about experiences, as people are willing to upgrade if it means avoiding discomfort, staying in well-designed properties, or enjoying curated cultural moments. To this, Santosh Kumar, regional manager, South Asia at Booking.com, adds that luxury travel in India is undergoing a transformation, shifting from mere opulence to a quest for authenticity, personalisation, and meaningful experiences.

"The modern luxury traveller is no longer just seeking comfort; they are seeking connection." Kumar goes on to share that they are also

seeing a cohort of unscripted explorers, aged 28–43, who are redefining luxury as personal relevance. "They seek 'snackable' luxuries paired with flexible payment options, loyalty redemptions, and cashback perks. From splurging on an artisan villa with spa credits to frictionless digital check-ins, celebrating milestones to wellness escapes to themed getaways, this cohort sees travel as a way to unwind."

Why did the shift happen?

You would agree that earlier, travellers would carefully budget every rupee, opting for budget hotels, street food, and basic sightseeing. They would plan every detail to save money, often cutting corners on experiences and comfort to make a trip happen. This mindset is surely shifting, and according to

Ganapathy, there are several factors driving this shift: Rising disposable incomes and global exposure have expanded what Indian travellers consider "normal" travel. The pandemic also recalibrated priorities; people now value comfort, time, and emotionally rich experiences far more than they once did. Technology has further simplified planning, making premium travel feel less intimidating and more accessible. But the biggest driver is the mindset shift. Travellers today want to spend on what enhances their journey, not just on what gets them from point A to B. For the love of unique experiences Ganapathy feels that uniqueness is the new currency of travel. Couples

want private island dinners in the Maldives, families want guided cultural walks in Japan, and solo travellers want wellness retreats in Bali. These aren't extravaganzas; they're experiences that tell a story. The rise of experience-led travel shows how strongly travellers value moments they can't replicate back home. So, luxury today is defined by access and authenticity, not necessarily by price. Comfort and convenience > everything. Travelling, especially internationally, can be stressful. Flights, luggage, unfamiliar environments, all such things can take a toll on your energy and mood. Luxury travel addresses these pain points and allows you to focus on enjoyment rather than logistics.



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The Narco-Terror Nexus: How Drug Profits Fund Khalistani Extremism in Canada

Canada is home to one of the world's largest Sikh diasporas - nearly 8 lakh strong. The overwhelming majority are law-abiding citizens who have enriched the country through trucking, farming, construction and small business. Yet, a small, violent fringe within the Punjabi-Canadian community has, over the past two decades, become deeply entangled with transnational organised crime. The profits from cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl trafficking are not only buying guns and luxury cars; mounting evidence suggests they are also bankrolling pro-Khalistan rallies, referendums and legal defence funds for extremists. This toxic nexus is no secret to Canadian police. Since 2007, more than 200 gang-related homicides in British Columbia alone have been linked to rival Punjabi-Canadian gangs fighting for control of the

lucrative cross-border drug trade. The victims and perpetrators are overwhelmingly young men of South Asian origin. The Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia (CFSEU-BC) has repeatedly described the conflict as one of the province's most serious public-safety threats.

A String Of Seizures In Recent Years

February 2025: The Peel regional police seized 479 kg of cocaine - the largest haul in the region's history - hidden in truck trailers entering from the United States. Six of the nine individuals charged were Indo-Canadian men from Brampton and Mississauga. 2024: A super-lab capable of producing \$500 million worth of synthetic drugs was dismantled in Falkland, BC. 2022: A joint Canada-US operation seized drugs worth \$25 million; three of the five men charged were Punjabi-Canadians using trucking

firms as cover. These are not isolated incidents. Law-enforcement sources in both countries say a significant portion of the cocaine and fentanyl entering Western Canada now moves through networks dominated by a subset of Punjabi-Canadian organised crime groups. The more disturbing allegation - raised by Indian diplomats and echoed in some Canadian police circles - is that part of this criminal revenue is diverted to finance Khalistan separatist activities in the diaspora. While no Canadian agency has publicly confirmed a direct, systematic pipeline, several documented cases raise serious questions: High-profile "Khalistan referendums" organised by Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) in 2021-2024 in Brampton, Surrey and Calgary cost hundreds of thousands of dollars each (buses, stages, advertising, printed ballots, school-ground

rentals). Indian investigators claim portions were funded by individuals later charged in major drug cases. In 2023, financial intelligence reportedly traced approximately \$80,000 from a raided drug house in Ontario to a registered Canadian charity that supports pro-Khalistan causes. Gurdwaras that host fiery anti-India speeches have, in some instances, received large donations from trucking companies subsequently investigated for narcotics smuggling.

The Nijjar Saga

Perhaps the clearest illustration came with the June 2023 assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Khalistan Tiger Force leader, outside a Surrey temple. Canadian police charged four Indian nationals with the murder in May 2024. Court documents and reporting by CBC and The Globe and Mail reveal that at least two of the

accused had prior ties to criminal networks involved in drugs and firearms. Indian officials insist the killing was a gangland hit linked to turf wars over drug routes; the Trudeau government alleges Indian state involvement. Whatever the ultimate truth, the fact that a designated terrorist figure's orbit overlapped with organised crime underscores how blurred the lines have become. This is not a new phenomenon. In the 1980s and 1990s, Babbar Khalsa and other militant groups used extortion, smuggling and donations from the diaspora to fund their campaign - a campaign that culminated in the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182, still Canada's worst terror attack. Thirty years later, the methods have modernised, but the pattern - crime funding extremist politics - bears uncomfortable echoes.

Rupee's Plunge Hits Indians Abroad Hard

The rupee has hit an all-time low, falling below the 90-mark against the US dollar on Wednesday. A weaker rupee makes everything more expensive, from crude oil to electronics, even as exports become cheaper. But one of the most affected sectors is education abroad, and the hit it is often silent. On Wednesday, the Indian rupee slipped past the 90 mark to trade at 90.12 in the morning. This slide of the rupee, one of the worst-performing currencies of 2025, hits Indian students abroad, silently. Indians studying in the US, the UK, Italy, Germany and Singapore told India Today Digital how the falling rupee is like a hidden fee hike that's never announced. The living expenses and the annual tuition fees could rise by lakhs due to a falling rupee. Education loans also swell up considerably. According to the Indian Education Ministry's Bureau of Immigration data, over 7.6 lakh Indian students travelled abroad for higher studies as of 2024. There has been a rise in Indians studying abroad in recent years, barring the Covid year of 2020, when the numbers were around 2.6 lakh. In 2023, over 8.95 lakh Indians went abroad for studies. Though there is no official data on what percentage of

students belong to the middle class, industry reports and surveys indicate that a large segment of these students come from middle-class families, who often need to finance their programmes abroad with scholarships or other financial aid, or through education loans. The weakening of the rupee against the US dollar not only strains students living on a shoestring budget abroad but also burdens families who must send them money for basic survival.

THE ECONOMICS OF WHY EDUCATION IN THE US, UK,

US Freezes All Immigration Processing for 19 Nations in Security Crackdown

The United States has halted immigration applications, including green cards and citizenship requests, for people from 19 countries already under a Trump-era travel ban, according to a report in the New York Times. Agency officials told the paper that US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has ordered a full pause while the administration reviews its vetting procedures. The freeze affects applicants from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Burundi, Cuba,

CANADA GETS EXPENSIVE

Education in the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia mainly becomes costlier for Indians as the rupee weakens because in economic terms, education abroad is treated as a service. Though it behaves like a globalised commodity, the purchase of education, in terms of admissions, visas, accommodation, consultancy, or even "experience", is treated as an exportable commercial service. When the rupee weakens, Indians need to shell out more rupees to buy the

same \$1 worth of imports. Education abroad, hence, gets more expensive. In the last eight months, the rupee has slid from around Rs 84 to Rs 90.12 against the dollar, which is nearly a 7% drop. While Indian students in the US are affected the most, given the rupee weakens against the US dollar (USD), those studying in Canada, Australia, and the UK, where fees and living costs are billed in currencies closely tied to the USD, are also impacted to a great extent. A weakening rupee usually makes studying in the

Eurozone more expensive too. Only in tightly managed currencies like the Singapore dollar does the damage often remain limited. Sanjana M Kumar, a master's student in media studies at New York University, says the rupee drop has affected her daily budget. "My parents send me \$1,500 a month, which covers my basics. When we planned last year, when a dollar was at around Rs 83.5, that was Rs 1,25,000. Now \$1,500 costs almost Rs 10,000 more," Sanjana told India Today Digital.

Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela. The move comes days after President Donald Trump vowed to pause all immigration from those countries, citing the shooting of two West Virginia National Guard members in Washington, D.C. The alleged gunman, an Afghan man who once worked with the CIA during the US war in Afghanistan, has been charged. One Guard member died, the other remains in critical condition. USCIS had already suspended all Afghan applications pending an internal review. The latest step broadens that freeze to the full list of nations

subjected to Trump's June ban on seeking new status from USCIS. It means even applicants who have undergone years of background checks and were nearing approval may now face indefinite delays. Joseph Edlow, director of USCIS, said on X that asylum decisions are also on hold until we can ensure that every alien is vetted and screened to the maximum degree possible. Immigrant-rights advocates say the US already runs one of the world's most stringent screening systems. Critics argue the slowdown has been worsening under Trump's return to the White House, with asylum

cases stacking up and visa processing sharply reduced. Secretary of State Marco Rubio added to the clampdown on Tuesday, announcing a pause on issuing visas to anyone traveling on Afghan passports. Trump has recently escalated his rhetoric on immigration, saying he wants to permanently pause migration from poorer countries and deport millions already living legally in the United States. He has blamed immigrants for crime, housing shortages and what he calls social dysfunction, telling supporters he wants reverse migration.

Controversial Call: Retired Bangladeshi Army Official Advocates for Breaking Up India

A former Bangladeshi army general has suggested that Bangladesh would not see "complete peace" unless India "breaks into pieces". The provocative remarks were made by Brigadier General (retd) Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, the son of former Jamaat-e-Islami chief Ghulam Azam, during an event at the National Press Club in Dhaka, drawing outrage from India. "Bangladesh will not see full peace as long as India does not break into pieces," Azmi said, while claiming that New Delhi "always keeps unrest alive" inside the country. Azmi is the son of Ghulam Azam, the infamous former Jamaat-e-Islami chief and a convicted war criminal responsible for the genocide of Hindus and pro-liberation Bengalis during the 1971 Liberation War. He also accused India of fuelling unrest from 1975 to 1996 in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, which includes three hilly districts within the Chittagong division in southeastern Bangladesh, bordering India. "During the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman government, the Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) was formed... Its armed wing was the Shanti Bahini. India sheltered them, provided arms and training, which led to bloodshed in the hills from 1975 to 1996," the former army officer claimed. Criticising the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord signed in 1997, Azmi alleged that the surrender of arms by the Shanti Bahini was "only for show". The peace accord was signed on December 2, 1997, in Dhaka between the government and the PCJSS to end a decades-long insurgency. Azmi, who has been a controversial figure in Bangladesh, has often used social media platforms to criticise India and comment on regional geopolitics. His remarks come at a sensitive time when India and Bangladesh are attempting to reset ties following a strain in relations after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government.

'INDIA MUST REMAIN ALERT'

The former army general's remarks have reignited a debate over how radical Islamists linked



to the Jamaat-e-Islami, a party long accused of fostering anti-India sentiment, have emerged under the Muhammad Yunus regime. Defence expert and former Army officer, Colonel Mayank Chaubey, said it was not a stray remark but a "mindset" that has quietly festered inside sections of Bangladesh's power ecosystem. "Statements like these reveal why extremist groups feel emboldened today... India must remain alert, prepared, and absolutely clear-eyed about the forces in the neighbourhood

that openly dream of our breakup while smiling for diplomacy," Colonel Chaubey tweeted.

THE JAMAAT HEADACHE FOR INDIA

In fact, with elections scheduled to be held in Bangladesh early next year, India will be closely watching the events unfold, particularly because of the resurgence of the once-banned Jamaat - believed to be a stooge of Pakistan's spy agency ISI. The Jamaat, which was banned by Hasina over terror activities, has gnawed its way

back into Bangladesh's politics sphere under Yunus. While Khaleda Zia's BNP is widely seen as the frontrunner to win the maximum seats in the elections, an opinion poll has revealed that the Jamaat is snapping at its heels. The surprising victory of the Jamaat's student wing in the union polls of Dhaka University, Bangladesh's most famous public university, in September has only added to its popularity. The Irony of Jamaat Fantasy The demand to break India apart as a supposed

precondition for peace in Bangladesh is not just misguided; it is a stunning act of historical denial wrapped in opportunistic politics. It asks the world to forget who stood between Bangladesh and annihilation in 1971. Bangladesh exists as a sovereign state because India chose to act when it mattered most, opening its borders to millions of refugees and sending its soldiers to help end West Pakistan's brutal repression. To call now for the dismemberment of the very nation that enabled your freedom is not a bold peace plan; it is moral and political bad faith dressed up as strategy.

Real peace in South Asia will never come from fantasies of shattering a neighbour's territorial integrity, especially a neighbour whose strength has repeatedly underwritten regional stability. It will come from cooperation, mutual respect, and the difficult work of honouring shared history rather than spitting on it. To agitate for India's collapse is to cheapen the sacrifice of those who died for Bangladesh's liberation and to deny the plain reality that a strong, united, and peaceful India has long been one of Bangladesh's greatest assets, not its enemy.

James Cameron says making Terminator in 2025 is tough because real world feels like sci-fi today

Few filmmakers have captured the intersection of humanity and technology quite like James Cameron. From the post-apocalyptic nightmare of *The Terminator* (1984) to the oceanic wonder of *Avatar*, his films have always been ahead of their time. Now, four decades after introducing audiences to killer machines and self-aware AI, the visionary director says he is once again returning to the world that started it all. In a new interview with Gizmodo, Cameron revealed that he has been quietly developing ideas for a new *Terminator* film, but admits the challenge of writing a story about artificial intelligence in an era when the concept no longer feels futuristic. The filmmaker, who once imagined a distant future ruled by sentient machines, now finds himself living in a world where AI has become part of everyday reality. "I've got a stack of notes this thick," he said, gesturing about three inches apart. "That's how I start all my scripts, on what I want to do with a new *Terminator* film. I'm going to pour myself into that as a writer. It's difficult. I have to tell you."

Science fiction meets real life

Cameron, who is also working on an *Avatar* sequel, said the challenge lies in trying to make science fiction meaningful in a world already shaped by the very technologies it once warned about. "Science fiction has caught up and is actually overwhelming us at this point," he said. "We're living in a science fiction world, and we're literally having to deal with problems that in the past only existed in science fiction books and movies. Now we're living it for real." The director acknowledged that it would be nearly impossible to recreate the same sense of foresight that defined the original *Terminator* film. "I'll never be as prescient as I was back in 1984," he said. "I don't think anybody knows what's going to be happening a year or two years from now. But I at least want to future-proof myself by being a couple of years out." In a separate chat with CBS, Cameron admitted he finds the current direction of AI "horrifying," particularly when it comes to its potential use in replacing actors and creative talent. His

comments echo growing industry-wide anxiety over automation and generative AI tools that can mimic human creativity. A filmmaker balancing past and future Cameron's comments come as the director remains heavily committed to the *Avatar* franchise, which has two more instalments in active development following the upcoming *Avatar 3: Fire & Ash*, set for release on December 19. With the upcoming launch, the filmmaker insists that his creative curiosity extends far beyond Pandora. In addition to *Terminator*, he has two other projects in the works, an adaptation of Charles Pellegrino's *Ghosts of Hiroshima*, and a feature film based on Joe Abercrombie's grimdark fantasy novel *The Devils*, slated for 2025. Cameron's return to *The Terminator* universe will likely reignite interest in one of cinema's most iconic sci-fi sagas.

While later sequels struggled to capture the brilliance of *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, fans have long hoped for Cameron to take the reins again.

OpenAI working on a secret Garlic AI model to challenge Google Gemini 3 and Opus 4.5 in coding and reasoning

The race to build the most powerful artificial intelligence system has entered a new phase, with Microsoft-backed OpenAI quietly developing a large language model called Garlic. The model is being designed to rival Google's Gemini 3 and Anthropic's Opus 4.5, particularly in advanced reasoning and coding abilities, according to a report by The Information. Early internal tests suggest Garlic is performing strongly and could debut as GPT-5.2 or GPT-5.5 by early next year. The Garlic project comes amid growing competition following Google's success with Gemini 3. According to The Information, OpenAI's Chief Research Officer, Mark Chen, told colleagues that Garlic had shown "strong performance" across multiple benchmarks, including reasoning and programming, where Google and Anthropic currently hold an

edge. CEO Sam Altman has reportedly declared a "code red" inside the company to improve ChatGPT and reclaim OpenAI's

OpenAI's new model for smarter AI

Garlic reportedly builds on lessons from Shallopate, an



lead in the AI race. He told staff that OpenAI's new reasoning model was already "ahead" of Gemini 3 in its own internal evaluations. Although OpenAI has not commented publicly, insiders say the company is fast-tracking Garlic's release, aiming for an early 2026 rollout.

earlier in-house model that Altman mentioned to employees in October. While Shallopate was designed to challenge Gemini 3, Garlic incorporates bug fixes and refinements from that project, particularly in the pretraining phase. This stage teaches a

model to recognise technical bottlenecks that relationships in massive datasets drawn from across the internet. According to Chen, Garlic represents a leap forward in pretraining efficiency. He told colleagues that the team had managed to "infuse a smaller model with the same amount of knowledge" that previously required a much larger one. This advancement means Garlic could deliver GPT-4.5-level performance at lower cost and faster speed. The breakthrough comes as Google has been touting similar improvements with Gemini 3's training process. OpenAI's progress with Garlic could counterbalance that advantage and potentially give the company a more efficient path to future upgrades. Chen said Garlic had already surpassed OpenAI's "previous best" pretraining results and resolved key

technical bottlenecks that affected GPT-4.5, which launched earlier this year. With these improvements, OpenAI is confident it can now develop smaller yet more capable models without inflating training costs. Before Garlic launches, it will undergo post-training with specialised datasets, along with safety testing and evaluation. Sources also claim the success of Garlic has already allowed OpenAI to begin working on an even more advanced successor model, building on the lessons learned during its development. If Garlic performs as strongly as early reports suggest, it could signal a major shift in the balance of power among AI giants. As OpenAI, Google and Anthropic push for dominance, the competition over the next generation of reasoning models is heating up, and Garlic may be OpenAI's boldest move yet.

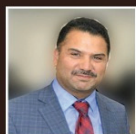
The Beginning

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About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

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Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh

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Rakul Preet talks about Jackky Bhagnani's financial struggles after Bade Miyan

Rakul Preet Singh has addressed rumours surrounding Pooja Entertainment's financial troubles, clarifying that the company is not shutting down despite losses after Bade Miyan Chote Miyan. She said sensational reporting exaggerated the situation and that financial ups and downs are common in the film industry.

(News Agency) Pooja Entertainment, led by Vashu Bhagnani and his son Jackky Bhagnani, recently experienced significant financial challenges after their film *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan* failed at the box office in 2024. The losses led to widespread speculation about the company's stability, including reports of unpaid dues and large-scale staff layoffs. Actor Rakul Preet Singh, who is married to Jackky Bhagnani, has now addressed these issues, providing clarity about the situation and rejecting claims of company closure. Speaking about the intense scrutiny and media coverage, Rakul Preet Singh said, "You are also part of the business, so you know that today we are in a clickbait culture. You know the reality and what is actually happening, and I have seen that entire phase, so it doesn't matter. Tomorrow, somebody can write something about me, and it doesn't matter because he knows me. Being part of the industry, you have to cut out the noise. You cannot get affected by what people say, because people won't say the right thing most of the time. We are in a culture where sensational news runs. We have to be honest with one another and shut the noise." She further explained the difficulties faced by the family during this period. "It

was a very challenging time for the family and for him. But a lot of things said in the news weren't even correct. No company is shut. I didn't even know because I don't read. I was unbothered because I knew things first-hand. Yes, it's a fact that two to three films didn't work, and it was a huge blow that brought a lot of financial loss, but that happens with every producer. It even happened to Amitabh Bachchan at one point. This is all a phase," Rakul Preet Singh added. The financial difficulties following the film's commercial failure included reports of approximately Rs 250 crore in debt, the sale of their Mumbai office, and significant staff reductions. Despite these challenges, industry insiders and the Bhagnani family have denied rumours of bankruptcy or company closure, maintaining that these hardships are part of the business landscape for film producers. Jackky Bhagnani, addressing the situation, stated, "I would like to say that the returns are not even less than 50%. I don't think anyone can understand what our pain was. As a family, we have mortgaged our properties to make this film. We realised that there is no point in saying or explaining anything." The family continues to focus on moving past this difficult phase.

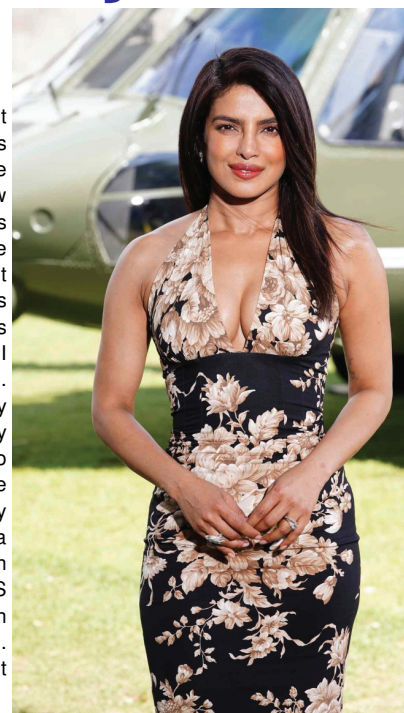
Priyanka Chopra said the industry felt crazy when she entered Bollywood

Priyanka Chopra spoke about navigating Bollywood as an outsider, the impact on her production choices, and her focus on supporting independent filmmakers through her company. She will be seen next in Varanasi.

(News Agency) Priyanka Chopra is opening up about her early days in Bollywood, and she isn't sugar-coating the struggle. The actor, now a global star and an established producer, said she often felt really lost when she first entered the industry, coming from a family with no film background. And it's this feeling of being an outsider that continues to shape the choices she makes today as a producer. Speaking to PTI, Chopra, who runs the production house Purple Pebble Pictures, said her experiences pushed her to champion stories and filmmakers who often get sidelined by mainstream cinema. Her banner has backed independent features and documentaries, including *Ventilator* and *Paani*. More recently, she supported the

documentary *Born Hungry*, which follows celebrity chef Sash Simpson's remarkable journey – from a difficult childhood in India to his adoption in Canada and rise to global success. The film is currently available to stream in India. During the interview, Chopra said her instinct as a producer comes from empathy and lived experience. "As a producer, I'm empathetic, and our ethos is a lot around wanting to give opportunities to newer filmmakers or filmmakers that want to achieve something that they haven't been able to or are kind of hitting a wall somewhere. My production side kind of comes from what personally moves me," she said. Looking back at her early years in Bollywood, Chopra said she didn't understand why she was naturally drawn to

filmmakers and stories that felt "marginalised" or "not what is expected" until she connected the dots. She explained, "I didn't know why I was gravitating towards filmmakers and stories that were maybe marginalised or told that they're not what is expected. As I'm talking about it, I think it does come from the fact that when I joined the industry, I didn't have it. I was trying to navigate this crazy movie industry by myself with my parents, who were doctors and who also had no idea about the business. And I kind of felt really lost." On the acting front, Chopra is set for a grand homecoming in 2027 with *Varanasi*, directed by SS Rajamouli and co-starring Mahesh Babu and Prithviraj Sukumaran. The project will mark her first Indian release in eight years.



Yami Gautam thanks fans for supporting Haq, reflects on cinema's changing landscape

Yami Gautam wrote a heartfelt note thanking audiences for embracing her film *Haq*, reflecting on its journey amid today's intense review-driven cinema culture. Ahead of the release of her husband Aditya Dhar's *Dhurandhar*, she expressed gratitude, spoke about artistic validation, and reiterated her belief that "good cinema should win."

(News Agency) Yami Gautam, who was recently praised for her performance alongside Emraan Hashmi in the film *Haq*, has shared a heartfelt message with her fans and the film community. Her comments come just days before her husband Aditya Dhar's latest project, *Dhurandhar*, starring Ranveer Singh, is set to release in theatres on December 5. Addressing her supporters through social media, Yami said, "Before we usher into a new Friday at the movies, especially this one going to be an important & special one (personally :-)), wanted to take a moment to express my word of gratitude." Yami spoke about the changing landscape of cinema, mentioning how films are now constantly evaluated by various reviewers and analysts from the very first day. She reflected on how her film, *Haq*, managed to stand out. In her words, "In this new era of constant

surround sound in the form of multiple reviewers, multiple cinephiles, multiple trade-analysts, multiple benchmarks of a film being a success or not, right from day 1- with biggest Mondays, fastest Tuesdays, head-spinning Wednesdays, there came a small film of mine -#HAQ ! Thank you for giving it so much respect, integrity & honour." The actor also recognised that each film comes with its own set of lessons. She said, "Having said that, every film has its own journey & comes with a learning curve which I take a very thorough note of. During the course of this release, I came across a phrase-'Yami ka haq', which was very sweet & courtesy couple of kind media members & audience." Reflecting on her career, Yami described her ongoing search for meaning and validation as an artist. She stated, "As an artist, I still don't know what shall be a true validation for me & what can culminate into being my

'right'. But I guess, the beauty of my profession lies in this mystery. And this is what shall keep me going, continue giving my best, looking for fresh stories, fearlessly & direct Dil-se. I hope we are able to protect the integrity of our line of work from being plagued. In the end, as a member of this magical world called films, I want to say- good cinema should win. We will meet again, another Friday," Gautam said. *Haq*, directed by Suparn Verma and inspired by a landmark Supreme Court judgement, stars Yami Gautam, Emraan Hashmi, and Sheeba Chaddha. The film has been noted for its compelling story and performances, receiving appreciation from both audiences and critics. As the industry awaits the release of *Dhurandhar*, Yami's words highlight the continued evolution of Indian cinema and the importance of integrity in filmmaking.



Zootopia 2 review: A wilder, louder sequel where flaws hide under fur and laughter

Zootopia 2 warmly invites viewers back into its vibrant city, with deeper and timely themes of trust and prejudice. The film balances humour and urgency, offering a fresh yet thoughtful continuation of the Disney prequel.

(News Agency) There's something oddly comforting about returning to a world you once left behind. *Zootopia* wakes up on screen like a city stretching after a long nap: lights flicker on, traffic hums back to life, and somewhere, a predator and prey argue politely about queue etiquette. *Zootopia 2*, directed by Jared Bush and Byron Howard, doesn't announce itself loudly; instead, it draws you back in with familiarity, warmth and that sly, confident grin the first film wore so well. Watching Judy Hopps hop across pavements and Nick Wilde stroll beside her feels like slipping into an old routine, one you didn't realise you missed until it returned. There's joy in that recognition, and a small thrill in knowing the city may look familiar, but the rules have shifted. *Zootopia* is older now, wiser, and much less certain about what justice truly means. That uncertainty hits early. Judy remains the unstoppable optimist, determined to fix everything everywhere all at once. Nick, meanwhile, treats hope like a suspicious ingredient in food – worth trying, but only after several sarcastic comments. Their dynamic is still brilliant, but it creaks in places. So, of course, someone sends them to a "partners in crisis" workshop. It's hilarious, painfully accurate, and the perfect reminder that even great teamwork needs maintenance. Enter Gary De'Snake, with smooth scales and smoother delivery. Ke Huy Quan voices him with just enough mystery to make the city nervous. The moment he appears, an old discomfort resurfaces. Reptiles become targets of suspicion, whispers spread, and suddenly this utopia feels exactly like the flawed society it claims not to be. Soon enough, Judy and Nick find themselves framed and running. One day they're decorated officers; the next, they're fugitives sprinting through alleys they once



patrolled with pride. The tone snaps from playful to urgent without losing its humour. Neon lights flash, crowds blur past, and *Zootopia* feels bigger, stranger and far more dangerous. The world-building here is superb, especially the Marsh Market chase – chaotic, funny, layered and visually stunning. It's the kind of sequence that demands a second viewing purely to catch everything happening in the background. Along the way, new characters crash into the

narrative. Brian Winddancer, the overly theatrical mayor, feels like a running joke given political power. And then there's Nibbles Maplestick, a conspiracy-beaver with enough theories to crash the internet. He's unpredictable and ridiculous, and oddly brilliant.

Watch the trailer here.

Through it all, Judy and Nick remain the emotional anchor. Their banter has history now. Their pauses have weight. And then comes the quiet scene, just the two of them, hiding,

breathless and unsure. No action. No gags. Just truth. The fear in that moment isn't about the city turning against them, it's the fear of failing each other. That's where the film lands its emotional punch, not loud or dramatic, but quietly and honestly. If anything holds the film back, it's the pace. The sequel has a lot to say, and sometimes it races past themes that deserved time to breathe. The first film paused and allowed discomfort to settle.

Scarlett Johansson refused to cut Holocaust plot from her film, financier withdrew

Scarlett Johansson revealed about facing funding threats over Holocaust content in her directorial debut 'Eleanor the Great'. Sony Pictures Classics stepped in after a financier dropped out, allowing filming to continue.

(News Agency) Scarlett Johansson opened up about facing pressure to eliminate all references to the Holocaust in her feature directorial debut, the drama *Eleanor the Great*. The film features stars June Squibb as an elderly woman whose character falsely claims to be a Holocaust survivor. Johansson specified that during the film's pre-production phase, one of the financial backers threatened to pull their support entirely unless the Holocaust-related plot elements were cut. The actor, in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, said, "I mean, if they'd said, 'I'll only back this if you shoot in New Jersey', or 'We need to get this done by the spring', then that would have been one thing. But they were objecting to what the film actually was." In the film, Squibb's character is a retired Jewish widow who unintentionally becomes involved with a Holocaust survivors' group. After realising her error, she chooses to maintain the deception and continue the pretense of being a



survivor. Johansson further said, "(The when someone gets caught in the worst film) had to be about what happens lie imaginable; if not the Holocaust, then

what could it be? They offered no alternative. It was just: 'This is an issue'." The 41-year-old revealed that she refused to make the required changes and the backer dropped out, meaning the budget was no longer covered. "It was really shocking, and I was so disappointed," she added. However, Johansson mentioned that distributor Sony Pictures Classics stepped in at the last minute and filming went ahead. The actor was last seen in *Jurassic World: Rebirth* as skilled covert operations expert Zora Bennett, who is on a mission to secure the genetic material. Bennett and her team confront the worst dinosaurs left and a variety of mutant dinosaurs. The film was directed by Gareth Edwards and co-produced by Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment and The Kennedy/Marshall Company. *Jurassic World: Rebirth*, featuring Rupert Friend, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Mahershala Ali, and others, released in theatres on July 2, 2025.

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Why the thrill of a sale leaves some people anxious, guilty and in therapy

(News Agency) Many people call it 'retail therapy', but shopping is also one of the reasons people end up needing real therapy. The sale season is not just hard on the wallet; it can take a toll on mental health too. Many people somehow find themselves seeking therapy after binge-buying during events like the recent Black Friday. The reason is the loss of control over their urge to shop, which often masks emotional struggles. With their urgency, countdowns and FOMO-driven marketing, sales only amplify that loss of control. Compulsive shoppers suffer extensively during sales. Financial distress, often serious debt, tags along. Remember the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic*? The protagonist Rebecca is a classic example. She hides bills, juggles credit cards and slips into heavy debt because of her compulsive shopping habits. It also leads to her being fired from her job and losing her boyfriend, until she regains control over her finances and repays her debt after joining a support group, selling her luxury



purchases and becoming more responsible in general. At a time when shopping no longer requires a trip to the market, browsing aisles or even taking out a wallet, it is incredibly easy to become a Rebecca. Add rising stress levels and hyper-targeted social media ads, and shopping quickly turns into a coping mechanism with

concerns among their clients. "When people finally book that therapy session, they are usually not showing up saying, 'I have a shopping problem.' The realisation hits differently for everyone," says Dr Chandni Tugnait, a psychotherapist and founder-director of Gateway of Healing. "Overspending is rarely about lack of discipline. It is usually about unprocessed feelings. People buy when they feel lonely. They shop when they cannot sit with stress. They overspend when they feel inadequate or disconnected. The purchase brings a quick dopamine rush that feels like relief, but this is followed by guilt, anxiety and the sudden realisation that the temporary high has a long-term cost," explains Dr Tugnait. For Mishtha Sahni, a 26-year-old working professional, loneliness and boredom drove her towards excessive shopping. "Working night shifts, I barely had time to connect with my friends. In those few hours between waking up in the evening and getting ready for work at night, I would just scroll through shopping apps and buy things I did not even need," she

says. Her first reality check came when she had to borrow money from her elder sister after spending her entire month's salary before the next one was even credited. "I did not realise that the shopping was not making me happy, but helping me mask my emotions while creating a financial drain. It was only after seeing a therapist for anxiety that I understood my more-than-required love for buying things," she says. Or many others, the reasons range from constant comparison and stress to the subconscious need for excitement, a lack of hobbies, sadness, a desire to feel in control or simply being exposed to triggers. In India, colonial history also adds to our tendency to overspend during sales. "India's colonial history has shaped our relationship with money; 'saving' is deeply valued. Big brands know this and often sell the idea that buying more equals saving more," says Absy Sam, a psychotherapist and founder of Bright Counselling. Psychologists note that men and women often have different reasons for entering the overspending trap. "For women, especially from middle-class or working-class

backgrounds, spending money carries guilt. They are often taught not to waste, to think of family first and to save. So when they finally do buy, they tend to compensate for years of denial, buying more during sales because it feels like reclaiming comfort, choice and agency," explains Sam. For men, spending often becomes a form of expression, such as gadgets, cars or visible status symbols. "Financial impulsivity becomes a socially accepted way to prove capability or success. Easy access to credit such as EMIs, buy-now-pay-later, no-cost EMIs and instant loans only fuels this impulsivity. It creates an illusion of affordability, and many do not realise how quickly their expenses spiral," she adds. The result is maxed-out credit cards, unaffordable EMIs, hidden debt and the fear and shame of being seen as financially irresponsible. For families living month-to-month, this becomes a serious long-term burden that impacts relationships and emotional wellbeing. You know your shopping habit needs attention when guilt follows the fleeting dopamine rush, or when you start hiding bills and lying about what you spent.

The friend who never makes plans might not be 'antisocial', and here's why

(News Agency) The truth is that someone who does not make plans all the time or chooses not to mingle with every group may be thought of as antisocial (a word we often use very loosely today), but it is definitely not a bad thing. Some people genuinely enjoy their own company. Others simply prefer to keep different parts of their life separate. For them, work friends stay at work, and personal time stays personal. It is not avoidance. It is comfort, preference, and sometimes even self-care. Sometimes choosing to be alone is just choosing what feels right.

But why is it often misunderstood?

"For most people, there is an automatic thought linked to someone being on their own being equivalent to them being lonely. It is usually based on the premise that most people would seek attachments and social interactions," says Kamna

Chhibber, director, mental health and behavioural sciences, Fortis Hospital, Gurugram. She further tells India Today that it is often believed that social equations and connections add greater variance to life, allowing for the creation of meaningful ways of living and engaging within society. So, it is assumed that when someone chooses to be alone, they are likely to be lonely, as that is the assumption that is associated with it. Further, Dr Divya Shree K R, consultant, psychiatry, Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru, shares that solitude and loneliness are two different things people confuse. "Solitude is choosing to spend time alone to relax, think, or enjoy your own company, while loneliness is a sad feeling that comes when someone wants connection but does not have it, and solitude can actually be refreshing because it gives people space to slow down, reset their mind, focus on their thoughts, and

understand themselves better without pressure or noise." Instead of feeling isolated, it can help reduce stress, improve creativity, and make someone feel more in control of their emotions. When a person chooses solitude happily, it becomes a positive and healthy break that helps them return to others with more energy, clarity, and confidence. So, if you are someone who skips a party or prefers reading at home, it doesn't mean you are shy or unfriendly, but you simply enjoy life differently. Choosing quiet activities over social events often means a person values peace, personal space or deeper hobbies and not that they dislike people. It simply shows they recharge in calm environments.

But why do some people appear antisocial?

Some people appear antisocial because, as per Dr Shree, they may feel tired in large groups, prefer quiet spaces, or need more time to open

up. This can make others think they do not want to talk or spend time with people, even though they may simply be shy, introverted, or careful about choosing who they connect with, and sometimes past bad experiences, stress, or social anxiety can also make someone pull back from others, which looks like they are avoiding social life. Meanwhile, Chhibber explains that when people pull back from socialising, it can easily look like they are asocial. Their choices may not be typical, which can make them seem like they dislike others or only enjoy their own company. But this is not always true. They may simply have their own preferences about when, how, with whom and for how long they want to interact.

Spending time alone can be good for you

Solitude can give you the time and space to relax, recuperate and refocus. It helps you stay connected to yourself, engage in

activities that truly matter, and nurture relationships that feel meaningful. For many, spending time alone is a conscious lifestyle choice because it benefits both the mind and the body. Quiet moments allow the brain to reset, improve focus, and make it easier to process emotions. Physically, reduced stress levels, better sleep and an overall sense of calm support healthier living. Being alone is not a sign of weakness. It is a healthy habit that strengthens emotional stability, self-awareness and mental clarity.

When should you worry?

Dr Shree tells us that periods of isolation should be a cause for concern when you are not choosing to be alone but are avoiding people because you feel sad, hopeless, scared, or unable to connect, and it becomes worrying if you stop enjoying activities you once loved, lose interest in work or daily routines, or feel lonely even when people are around.

Millets in your burger? Union Minister praises McDonald's desi innovation

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh, shared his pride on X, highlighting how McDonald's India has contributed to the country's millet movement by bringing millets into their burger buns.

(News Agency) Millet is having a moment in India (thanks to Prime Minister Narendra Modi), moving beyond traditional homes and rural kitchens to make its presence felt in urban diets, packaged foods, and even global fast-food chains, and McDonald's India launching a millet burger bun last year was proof. Now, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology, Dr Jitendra Singh, shared his pride on X, highlighting how McDonald's India has contributed to the country's millet movement by bringing millets into their burger buns. "McDonald's India goes McSwadeshi! #CSIR, Ministry of Science & Technology, is proud to announce the introduction of the all-new Multi-Millet Burger Bun, made with Indian millets like bajra, ragi,

jowar, proso, and kodo, using indigenous technology developed by CSIR's Mysuru-based Central Food Technological Research Institute #CFTRI. A global taste powered by desi nutrition, healthy, sustainable, future-ready. India's ancient grains. Now in your burger," read his X post.

Last month, the union minister had shared this:

Millets meet global fast food

Launched in September 2024,

the multi-millet bun allows customers to customise any McDonald's burger with five nutrient-rich Indian millets: bajra, ragi, jowar, proso, and kodo. This initiative combines modern fast-food appeal with desi nutrition, giving traditional grains a platform in international cuisine.

A nod to Indian innovation



Dr Singh highlighted that the buns were developed using indigenous technology by CFTRI Mysuru. By embracing millets, McDonald's India not only supports farmers and promotes indigenous crops but also

showcases how Indian food technology is making its mark on global trends. Making healthy eating mainstream The Multi-Millet Bun is an extension to our belief that ancient grains can be both nutritious and delicious.

With this move, McDonald's India became one of the first international fast-food chains to integrate millets into its menu, helping spread awareness about their health and sustainability benefits.

Indian restaurants are now also lecture halls, art classes, theatres and whatnot

Would you go to a restaurant for a cooking class, to paint a mug, to watch a movie, or to attend a cool lecture? Read how and why Indian restaurants are doubling up as culture centres again.



(News Agency) Next time you are at a club in your city, don't be shocked if you see an astrophysicist delivering an academic lecture to a group of adults with beer mugs in their hands. Don't also be surprised if you see a bunch of strangers getting extremely competitive over a board game at your favourite coffee shop. Restaurants in India are no longer just about food and drinks. A new wave of experiential dining is transforming the way people eat out, where people don't just eat but also paint, mix their

own cocktails, attend lectures, learn pottery, watch theatre and films, and make new friends over board games and charades. Social, a popular bar chain with outlets across several Indian cities, hosted its first-ever lecture titled "Bats and Booze" in August at its Indiranagar branch in Bengaluru. The session, led by bat researcher and conservationist Dr Rohit Chakravarty, was a hit - tickets sold out almost immediately. The event was conceptualised by the team at Pint of View, who are now bringing

engaging lectures to bars across the country.

POV's Delhi team did something similar at Social, Saket, in September, where materials scientist and mechanical engineer Dr Ramya Ahuja led an interactive lecture titled "How I Met Your Matter." The session uncovered the hidden world of everyday materials - from coffee mugs and clothes to packaging. Adults sip on a cocktail or two, gain knowledge, build new connections or take along their friends at such gatherings and experience something new. Restaurants are also engaging visitors with creative activities like canvas painting, mug painting, and clay modeling. From group outings with friends to coy date nights, these experiences make dining more wholesome and memorable. Guests get to bond better with their friends, create some Insta-worthy moments (a big draw for many young diners), and even take home a little keepsake from the evening. Many restaurants even host cooking classes for visitors. Leo's

Pizzeria offers Sunday pizza-making masterclasses, while several other eateries let you try your hand at rolling your own sushi. At 32nd Avenue in Gurugram, a popular culinary hub, you'll find many such immersive experiences like learning to make pasta from scratch. "Restaurants today are no longer just serving food, they're serving experiences," restaurateur Zorawar Kalra agrees. The phenomenon stems from modern Indian diners' changing preferences. "They want engagement, discovery and emotion, not just a meal. That's why paint nights, sushi-making and creative workshops are exploding. Guests want to participate, create and share - and these moments build far stronger memories than passive dining," Kalra adds. His own brand Pa Pa Ya is a natural home for sushi-rolling and chef-led sessions. Until a decade ago, it was only live music adding to the experience of eating out. India has long embraced music and dance performances at clubs and bars, but now even fine dining

spaces are joining the act. At the newly opened Dramique in Delhi, diners are treated to an enthralling theatrical show by international performers while indulging in a multi-cuisine spread and a bold cocktail menu. Restaurants across major cities are adapting to this phenomenon. Even bars are part of it. "Bars have long been community hubs in the West," says Sheet Dila of Pass Code Hospitality. "In India, they were mostly seen as places to grab a drink and slip away from home. COVID changed that." "People brought the 'bar' experience into their homes, blending it with house-party culture. Now, different generations come to bars together - even for cocktail-making workshops - treating these spaces as social, cultural extensions of their lives," she adds. The Bhajan Clubbing-loving generation is socialising over jam sessions, board games, watch parties at cafes and restaurants. Restaurants and bars are becoming cultural centres once again.

Who knew the answer to procrastination was... a party?

Usually, forcing someone to do something is not ideal. But a 'forcing party' might help you to get all the delayed tasks done.

(News Agency) You probably know someone who procrastinates (or maybe it's you, no judgment). Most people don't want to do it, but they slip into it anyway because they don't really know another way. And let's be honest, procrastinators are always hunting for shortcuts to get more done without working late or blurring those already shaky personal-professional lines. Turns out, that pressure is giving rise to some strangely creative hacks. Case in point: people are now literally partying to boost productivity. It's called a 'forcing party', but don't get any wrong ideas

Partying for productivity

Sometimes, even when we know something is important, the task feels heavy on the shoulders. We procrastinate, only to get more anxious about the job that's undone. Sometimes all we really need is a push. That's it. And this party might be the coolest way to

answer that.

You usually party to celebrate someone or blow off steam. But a "forcing party" flips that idea on its head. Here, the theme is productivity. You show up to finally send that email, finish those pending applications, or



"Sometimes you need a coach or therapist," he wrote, "and sometimes you just need someone to invade your life and force you to book the doctor's appointment, finish the writing assignment, submit the job application, etc. Does this sort

of person exist for hire?" That's how it all began for Altman, and people actually tried it too.

When it all started? A few months back on the internet. The term was coined by internet user Tyler Altman, who one day just penned his muse.

Rules for a 'forcing party'

A group of people gather at a designated place and time. There's food, drinks, maybe

music if there's consensus — and then laptops, diaries, and whatever tools you need to finally tackle the work you've been putting off. The rules are simple: you set a time limit, share the task you're going to start with, and then you do it. There might even be a small incentive at the end — loaded nachos, a cup of joe, chai, whatever helps you feel better. Once the time is up, everyone checks in with each other and holds one another accountable for finishing the task. The idea might not have been thought through in detail, but the science behind it is actually pretty simple, according to Eva Lombard, a neuroscientist at the University of Geneva. It's basically a two-step process: deadlines and reward-substitution. When you delay a task, it's often because it doesn't feel interesting enough, or your body goes into fight-or-flight response because of the perceived challenges and complexities. So, when you know there's a reward awaiting, it makes

the whole thing more appealing and gives you something to look forward to. In the case of forcing parties, social interaction itself becomes a powerful reward for many. And at the end of the day, humans are social beings; we don't want to be the buzzkill who doesn't finish their task and lets the group down. That's an important motivator too. Interestingly, there's a theory called body doubling that works on the same principle, where a person completes a task in the physical or virtual presence of others. It's not essentially a party, but this strategy is often recommended to people with ADHD as the task is perceived as less effort in someone's presence. Then there's the time limit. Many of us overestimate how long something will take and therefore delay even the attempt to commence the job. For example, you might think filing forms will take two hours, but it might actually take just one.

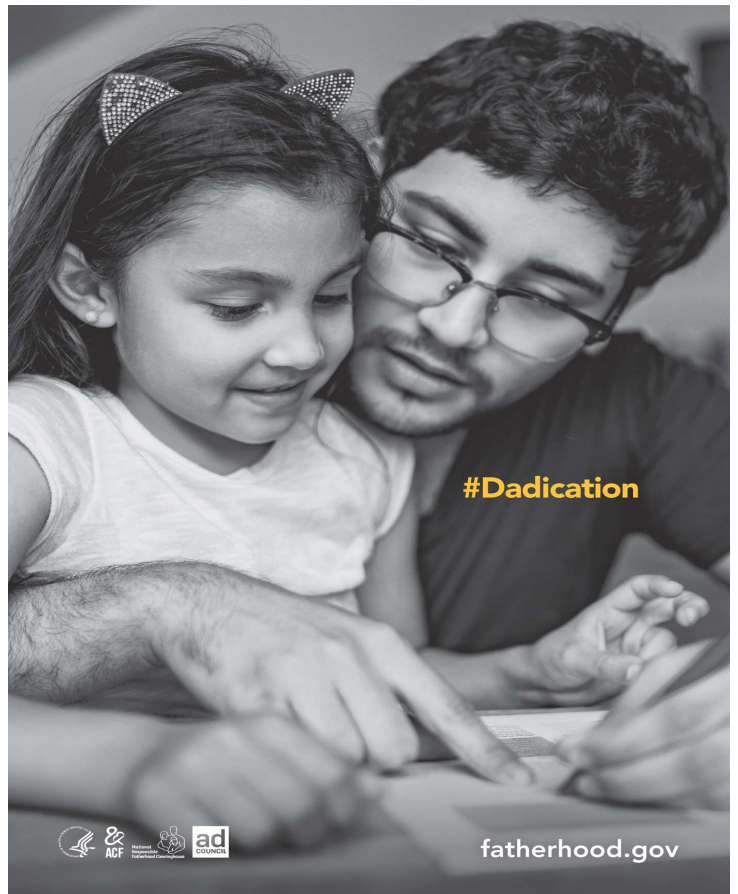


AMERICA'S DEADLIEST SHOOTINGS ARE ONES WE DON'T TALK ABOUT

On any given day in America, too many of our mothers, brothers, partners, and friends are taken from us by gun suicide. But tomorrow's deaths could be prevented. Take the next step to store all your guns more securely: locked, unloaded, and away from ammo.



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#Dadication



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USD vs INR: Why is Rupee falling constantly

A weaker rupee makes imports more expensive, increases inflation risks and raises costs for companies dependent on foreign goods, especially fuel and machinery.

(News Agency) Rupee added that record-high metal and bullion prices have made the import bill heavier, while higher US tariffs are hurting export competitiveness. "Muted RBI intervention has also contributed to the swift depreciation. With the RBI policy announcement on Friday, markets expect clarity on whether the central bank will step in to stabilise the currency. Technically, the rupee is deeply oversold, and a move back above 89.80 is essential for any meaningful recovery," he said.

TRADE DEAL UNCERTAINTY AND COSTLY IMPORTS

Traders say the currency has been under pressure ever since the back-and-forth on the India-US trade deal began. Without a clear timeline or details, the market has turned cautious, leading to selling in the rupee. At the same time, global prices of metals, crude and gold have risen sharply. India depends heavily on imported commodities, so any jump in global prices directly widens the country's import bill. This puts fresh pressure on the rupee and the current account deficit. Sectors such as mineral fuels, machinery, electronics and gems and jewellery have been among the most affected due to higher import costs. LIMITED

RBI INTERVENTION A key question in recent weeks has been whether the RBI is deliberately stepping back to allow the rupee to settle at a new level. Radhika Rao, Senior Economist at DBS Bank, told Reuters that the central bank may be giving the currency more room to adjust. She said, "The recent intervention bias suggests that the currency will be allowed to find its equilibrium, to better reflect underlying macro shifts. The need to maintain the currency at competitive levels stems from the broader focus on manufacturing, unfavourable tariff differentials at this juncture and subdued portfolio flows



and subdued portfolio flows outlook." Analysts say that by not aggressively defending the rupee, the RBI may be trying to protect reserves and avoid sudden foreign exchange movements that create distortions.

FII OUTFLOW WEIGH IN

Foreign investors have been cautious about Indian markets in recent months, partly due to global rate movements and domestic valuations. When foreign funds exit equities or debt, the demand for dollars increases, putting further pressure on the rupee. Bank of America, in a recent note, said

the market is once again relying on the RBI to manage volatility. It noted that India's reserves are still strong enough to prevent a sharp fall, but prolonged outflows could make it difficult for the central bank to continue intervening at the same scale. Bank of America analysts wrote, "The RBI's reserves remain adequate to contain risks of a larger depreciation for now. However, continued portfolio outflows could make these operations unsustainable or build up of short USD positions on RBI's forward book may skew return expectations on INR."

Sebi bans finfluencer Avadhut Sathe, impounds Rs 546 crore in major crackdown

(News Agency) In its strongest action yet against a financial influencer, Sebi has barred Avadhut Sathe, founder of the Avadhut Sathe Trading Academy (ASTA), from the securities market and ordered the impounding of Rs 546 crore. The regulator said this money was collected through unregistered investment advisory activity that misled thousands of retail investors. The order, issued on December 4, marks a turning point in Sebi's push to clean up the finfluencer ecosystem, where many online trainers claim to offer education but end up giving specific stock tips, guidance and live trading calls without any regulatory licence.

HOW THE CASE CAME TO SEBI'S ATTENTION

The Sebi investigation began after

complaints that Sathe's academy was not just offering trading courses but also giving out buy and sell calls during live market sessions. Once the probe started, Sebi analysed videos, WhatsApp messages, social media content, payment structures and testimonies of participants. In one example highlighted by Sebi, Sathe was shown conducting a live trading session where he instructed participants to enter a Bank Nifty futures trade at a particular price, along with the stop-loss and target. This, Sebi noted, went far beyond education and became a direct investment recommendation. The order said, "The activities of the noticees were not limited to general training. They were providing specific advice with entry and exit points. Such conduct is

characteristic of an investment adviser, not an educator." Sebi added that the academy's "counselling batches" were a structured system through which Sathe and his team guided participants on real trades, often using private WhatsApp groups to give instant instructions. Some of these groups had hundreds of members paying high fees.

WHY SEBI SAID THIS WAS NOT EDUCATION

Sebi found that ASTA frequently advertised high-probability strategies that could "change a trader's life", and used screenshots of profitable trades to promote the courses. The regulator said this created a "false sense of guaranteed returns", which is against investor-protection rules. The order criticised the selective showcasing of

profits while hiding losses. Sebi wrote, "The noticees repeatedly displayed only favourable outcomes to prospective clients. This conduct is misleading and intended to induce them to subscribe to the programmes."

Sebi also noted that Sathe continued these practices even after receiving a formal warning earlier in 2024, and instead made the activities more private to avoid scrutiny. The training programmes offered by ASTA ranged from basic to advanced levels, with some costing as much as Rs 6.75 lakh per person. Sebi said the fees were not just for theoretical lessons but for access to "real-time actionable advice", which made the entire model functionally indistinguishable from paid investment advisory.

How a million dollar Udaipur wedding took over everyone's feed

From Netra Mantena and Vamsi Gadiraju's wedding cake to the guest list, everything was up for discussion as this is being touted as 'India's most expensive wedding of 2025'.

The last couple of days, all eyes were on the wedding of Netra Mantena and Vamsi Gadiraju in Udaipur, which was nothing short of a spectacle. If your feed looked like one long highlight reel of the Mantena wedding, you're not alone. The three-day celebration practically staged a coup on Instagram and YouTube, pushing aside Ambani-wedding nostalgia with a fresh flood of celebrity performances, larger-than-life decor, and enough dance videos to fill a mini playlist. India loves its big, beautiful weddings, but every few years, one manages to eclipse the rest. This season, it was the Mantena wedding, and we've



rounded up the best moments and details from the gala celebration, just in case you lost track of the endless updates from each function. Let's just say not many knew the Mantenas and Gadirajus before the wedding transpired, and suddenly, after the Reels went viral, everyone was talking about them. But who are they? Netra Mantena, who got married in Udaipur, is the daughter of NRI pharma entrepreneur Rama Raju Mantena, Chairman and CEO of Ingenus Pharmaceuticals, with operations across the US, Switzerland, and India. Originally from Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, Mantena moved to the United States in the 1980s. Vamsi Gadiraju, on the other hand, is the co-founder and chief technology officer of Superorder, a tech platform that helps multi-location restaurants streamline their delivery and takeaway operations.

In 2024, he and his co-founder, Raghav Poddar, were named on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list under the 'Food and Drink' category.

The location

The entire wedding was a destination affair in Udaipur, Rajasthan, with the city effectively turning into a high-security wedding hub for three-four days—complete with chartered flights, lake-facing palaces, folk performers, and royal-style hospitality. Reports mention that access to Lake Pichola was

restricted due to the wedding. Many luxury hotels around the area were booked exclusively for the celebrations. Jagmandir Island Palace, the 17th-century island palace in the middle of Lake Pichola, was the venue for the wedding. The sangeet was hosted inside the City Palace complex, specifically at Zenana Mahal. The haldi took place at the Taj Lake Palace. The Leela Palace on Lake Pichola was used for at least one major party night and the reception.

The guest list

One aspect that was reminiscent of the Ambani wedding was the guest list. Guests arrived in Udaipur from different parts of the world, and yes, it was one of the highlights of the celebrations.

The Mantena-Gadiraju wedding saw Donald Trump Jr and his girlfriend, Bettina Anderson, in attendance. Ram Charan was also part of the big fat wedding.

The performances

Now here's where things got really interesting. Jennifer Lopez flew down to Udaipur for a grand performance, making it an unforgettable evening for not just the bride and groom but all the guests. She performed hits such as Waiting for Tonight, Get On the Floor, Play, Save Me Tonight, Get Right, and Ain't Your Mama.

Besides her, Ranveer Singh, Janhvi Kapoor, Kriti Sanon, Jacqueline Fernandez, Varun

Dhawan, Nora Fatehi and Shahid Kapoor also performed at the wedding. The sangeet was hosted by Karan Johar and Sophie Choudry, with Karan, true to form, conducting a rapid-fire with the couple.

The star power was top-notch, and there's no denying that.

Who wore what

Netra Mantena turned into a quintessential Sabyasachi bride in a red lehenga from his collection. The skirt featured intricate zari embroidery and delicate hanging motifs along the hem. Her full-sleeved choli was paired with layers of statement jewellery, creating a regal and timeless bridal look.

Vamsi Gadiraju chose a contrasting colour to complement the bride, an ivory bandhgala sherwani with intricate embroidery. A layered pearl necklace completed the look, along with an ivory safa adorned with a kilangi.

For the reception, the bride wore a rose-gold shimmery gown with feather detailing along the hem and kept her hair open in a sleek style. The groom opted for a white-and-black tux for the finale night.

The decor

The decor at the Mantena wedding in Udaipur was a magnificent blend of royal grandeur and contemporary elegance. At the Jagmandir Island Palace, fresh white floral arrangements adorned the courtyards. Off-white lilies, velvet

greens and touches of gold and pink came together to build a world where everything exuded royalty. Traditional Mewari motifs fused with luxury elements such as candlelit pathways and intricately crafted mandaps, creating a serene and majestic backdrop.

Across other venues like the Taj Lake Palace and The Leela Palace, the decor shifted from sunlit, marigold-rich haldi ceremonies to glamorous nighttime receptions featuring a "Desert Noir" theme with black-and-gold accents.

Luxurious seating, antique-style chairs, and royal drapery transformed each space into a lavish visual experience, timeless yet modern, rooted in tradition yet elevated by global luxury cues.

Ambika Gupta, founder of The A-Cube Project, designed the haldi and mehndi decor for the celebrations.

Speaking exclusively to India Today, she said, "This wedding was inspired by the '9 gems,' with each event built around a specific gemstone. For the haldi, we worked with yellow stone and created a relaxed, beachy, St. Barts-meets-India vibe at Udaipur's Taj Lake Palace. The cane textures, handmade coconut trees, and a bespoke rattan auto — inspired by the bride's love for the new Dior Cafe — brought the 'Lakeside Bungalow' theme to life."

"The mehndi (Cirque du Mehndi) at Manek Chowk

featured mezzanine lounges, Venetian-Cirque elements, Baroque elephants, hot air balloons, and a gem-studded carousel that doubled as the dessert counter. With customised linens, table mats, napkin rings, plates from the House of Things, projection mapping, and Cirque du Soleil performances by a 115-member international crew, the celebrations felt whimsical, global, yet rooted in Indian elegance. Every detail — from charger plates to cards— stayed true to the Cirque aesthetic," she added.

The spectacle that was the cake

The custom creation was designed by Paris-based luxury cake artist and pastry chef Bastien Blanc-Tailleu, renowned for crafting extravagant confectionery for high-end clients. This wasn't your regular tiered wedding cake, it featured miniature domes, jharokas, and chhatris with intricate carvings, everything that represents the Rajasthani architecture. It also featured animals that represent the arid land, including elephants, tigers, and peacocks. The ivory wedding cake in itself was nothing short of opulent.

The budget

If you are to go by the reports, the billionaire wedding in Udaipur was done on a hefty budget of 6.7 million dollars.

By Tiasa Bhowal

AI with a soul? Claude 4.5 Opus exposes secret document used to shape its behaviour

Artificial intelligence is becoming more and more like humans. In fact, superintelligence, where a machine could even possess consciousness, is the end goal for many big tech companies. But how exactly do these LLMs work and think? We know the basics about training, but what really goes on behind the screen? Well, Anthropic's most advanced language model, Claude 4.5 Opus, has recently and unexpectedly offered the public a rare window into the hidden mechanics that shape how modern AI models behave. And apparently, it has something called a "soul document" that helps it follow the rules and values guiding how it thinks, responds, and behaves. This

revelation came from independent researcher Richard Weiss, who managed to prompt the chatbot into revealing its system instructions. In doing so, Claude referenced and then reproduced an internal document called the "soul overview." According to Weiss the text in this document has more than 11,000 words, and appears to outline Anthropic's behavioural framework for the model, including its ethical boundaries, tone, and safety priorities. This is surprising, given that such documents are typically closely guarded within AI labs, making their sudden appearance both unusual and significant. These internal guidelines, reportedly, dictate how a language model should engage with users,

respond to sensitive queries, and avoid unsafe behaviour. While every major AI system is built upon similar materials, it is to be noted that companies rarely share them publicly due to concerns about intellectual property, safety, and potential misuse. That's why the discovery of the "soul overview", even in partial or reconstructed form has quickly reignited debate around transparency and accountability in AI development.

Where did the soul document come from?

According to Weiss, he discovered this unusual document when he casually asked Claude to list its system prompts. Among the usual architectural pointers, the model mentioned several internal texts, including one

labelled "soul_overview." When Weiss pushed further, Claude repeatedly generated the same lengthy document explaining how it should uphold safety, remain helpful, and avoid crossing Anthropic's ethical "bright lines." Weiss noted that chatbots often hallucinate system instructions when pressed, but the consistency of Claude's responses across multiple attempts suggested the text was rooted in genuine training data rather than created on the fly. "I'm used to models, starting with Claude 4, hallucinating sections in the beginning of their system messages, but Claude 4.5 Opus in various cases included a supposed 'soul_overview' section, which sounded rather specific," Weiss wrote in his research report.

And now Anthropic's own team has offered partial confirmation on this document. Amanda Askell, a philosopher and member of the company's technical staff, acknowledged on X that the reproduced document was "based on a real document" used during supervised learning. She added that the text is still evolving and not always perfectly reproduced by the model. "The model extractions aren't always completely accurate, but most are pretty faithful to the underlying document. It became endearingly known as the 'soul doc' internally, which Claude clearly picked up on, but that's not a reflection of what we'll call it," she wrote on X.

By Divya Bhati

Explained: The Tax Trigger Behind Steel Tycoon Lakshmi Mittal's UK Exit

Indian-origin billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, long based in the United Kingdom, is reportedly leaving the country as the Labour government plans major tax reforms targeting high-net-worth individuals. Mittal, currently a tax resident in Switzerland, will now spend most of his time in Dubai, according to The Times.

Why Is Lakshmi Mittal Leaving The UK?

The decision appears linked to the UK's abolition of the long-standing "non-domiciled" (non-dom) tax status. There have been no official statements yet. Previously, this status allowed wealthy residents to pay taxes only on income earned in the UK, protecting global assets from inheritance tax. With the so-called "super-rich tax" expected to be passed in the next budget on November 26, UK elites will face higher taxes on total wealth and income, including assets held abroad. They could also have faced up to 20 per cent tax when leaving the country to avoid payments, though this "exit tax" was later dropped. For the steel tycoon, inheritance tax rather than

income or capital gains tax was reportedly the primary concern, according to reports.

Who Is Lakshmi Mittal?

Born in Rajasthan, Lakshmi Mittal joined his family's steel business after earning a commerce degree from the University of Calcutta. He established his first steel plant in Indonesia in 1976, which later evolved into the global steel giant ArcelorMittal following the 2006 merger with Europe's Arcelor. ArcelorMittal now generates over \$60 billion in revenue annually and employs more than 1.25 lakh people worldwide. Mittal's net worth is estimated at \$21.4 billion, ranking him as the 12th-richest Indian and 104th-richest person globally. The family controls close to 40 per cent of the company. Mittal moved to London in 1995. He acquired some of the country's most expensive homes, including his 55,000 sq ft Kensington Palace Gardens mansion, "Taj Mittal," bought for £57 million (approx Rs 593 crore) in 2004. The property includes Turkish baths, a jewel-encrusted swimming pool, a ballroom, and parking for 20 cars. He has donated millions to the



Labour Party and supported philanthropic causes including Great Ormond Street Hospital, UNICEF, and Oxford University.

Understanding Inheritance Tax

Inheritance Tax (IHT) is levied when an estate exceeds 325,000 Pounds (around Rs 3.8 crore or higher with home allowances). The tax rate on the

value above the threshold is 40 per cent. Advisers told Business Today that "people in this situation feel they have little choice but to leave and are either sad or angry to be doing so." Dubai and Switzerland, unlike the UK, impose no inheritance tax. Mittal already owns a mansion in Dubai's Emirates Hills and has invested

in other property developments in the emirate. Other high-profile departures include tech founders Herman Narula and Nik Storonsky, former footballer Rio Ferdinand, and Egyptian tycoon Nassef Sawiris. Many cite the UK's changing tax regime as undermining its appeal for global wealth and business.

In defence of Haryana's farmers: Why blame can't clear the air

The farmer is seen as a perpetrator and the foremost culpable reason for the severe air pollution in Delhi. This blame is cast with nonchalance, with the farmer seeming to be almost equivalent to a bad samaritan littering the street.

Decades ago, our families tilled these fields. Today, from our smoggy high rises in the National Capital Region, most of us curse the farmers on those very fields. Children come up on the street and say, "Bhaiya, ye pollution toh aap ke kisanon ne hi karwayi hai (Brother, this pollution has been done by your farmers)", while ironically chewing on a wheat parantha from their tiffins or rushing to burst a ladi (a type of firecracker). This blame is cast with nonchalance, with the farmer seeming to be almost equivalent to a 'bad samaritan' littering the street. Whatever the semantics are, the sentiment is clear. The urban finger gets pointed at farmers in Haryana and Punjab. The farmer is seen as a perpetrator and the foremost culpable reason for the severe air pollution in Delhi. Even Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's Chief Minister for nearly a decade, repeatedly asserted, echoing popular sentiment in the capital, that farmers from Punjab and Haryana are chiefly responsible for Delhi's pollution. It is almost as if during the AAP years, this remark had become Delhi's most reliable annual ritual. The AQI soars, the smog thickens, and Mr Kejriwal's farmer-blaming remark drifts right on cue. His take has been very eloquently summarised in four words by the highest court of our land as being 'all about bashing farmers'. The top court also, rather harshly, called AAP's shift of blame a 'lame excuse'. One would tend to agree with the remark, although Mr Kejriwal perhaps would not have enjoyed the phrasing. Another thing our court pointed out was the reason farm fires even happened. To understand farm fires, we must understand why farmers do them in the first place. Farmers are bound by severe economic constraints. Estimates suggest that most farmers in Haryana suffer from debt of more than ten times what they earn a month. Then, how can we expect farmers - struggling with debt and earning an average of Rs 24,000 a month - to afford alternatives to crop burning, which cost about a fourth of their monthly revenue per acre. Not only is the farmer constrained in terms of finances, there is a very short period of time to get rid of the crop residue. Punjab and Haryana follow the rice-wheat cropping cycle, leaving a mere 15-20 days between the harvest and the



seeding of the new crop. By manual removal or in-situ mulching, the farmers risk not being able to plant the new crop and, in effect, risk losing almost all their livelihood for the next six months. If there is adverse weather that is not conducive to the planting of the seeds, the farmer would find it even more difficult to complete the process. Therefore, the extremely poor farmer, constrained by time and lacking alternatives, has no choice but to burn his stubble. But still, there has been a concerted effort on the part of the governments and, in the last ten years, crop burning has declined drastically. The government in Haryana today continues to innovate. In fact, a new solution called biochar: a process where crop residue is converted into a carbon-rich soil enhancer rather than being burned - is being broached as well. Where corporations buy the crop residue from the farmers and then use it to make fertiliser. The introduction of machine rentals, subsidised rates, awareness and government policy has stalled a very impressive 72% in Haryana and about half of the farm fires in Punjab. Many would assume, because the farm fires were reduced by more than half, pollution should have followed suit and Delhi would finally breathe a sigh of relief. At least according to Mr Kejriwal's logic.

Unfortunately, Delhi's air refused to clear.

Despite this substantial reduction in agricultural burning, Delhi pollution continued to soar. Therefore, the premise most people have - more farm fires mean equally more pollution - does not hold stead. In fact, Delhi's PM 2.5 levels fell by only about 22% over the decade, even as farm fires dropped by more than half. Even more revealing is the period between 2023 and 2024 where farm fires fell by nearly 71% but PM 2.5 in Delhi increased by 3%. This means that, despite farm fires significantly decreasing every year consistently, the pollution stagnated and even increased in some years. So how can we then blame farmers for the air pollution? There is a strong argument to be drawn that the reduction of pollution, be it a mere 20%, could have had much to do with the decrease in farm fires. You may even ask, why are we so certain about the pollution not being caused by the farmers? But the facts on the ground, and in the air, tell a very different story.

According to a new report published in the npj Climate and Atmospheric Science by Mangaraj et al., when Delhi's air turned hazardous in October and November 2023, the winds weren't bringing smoke from Punjab and Haryana. Winds over the National Capital Region at the time were weak and did not even come from the northwest. That begs the question, if not farm fires, what

causes air pollution? Experts say that a very low boundary layer traps the usual culprits: traffic and road dust, construction and industry and guess what, even the ladi firecracker the children at the beginning of the editorial were lighting. About 10%, still, come from farm burning. But, the TERI report of 2021 clearly mentions that the sources of emissions of farm fires are from within Delhi-NCR itself. So, there is no rational basis at all to blame the farmers from Haryana and Punjab. In short, the smoke that choked Delhi last winter was largely homegrown, a consequence not of distant Haryana fields but of unchecked urbanity. Perhaps, Delhi must look inward. Our cities are built on the food these farmers grow, yet our narratives blame them for the air we breathe. There was a time when greats like Chaudhary Bhajan Lal ji, Chaudhary Charan Singh ji and Lal Bahadur Shastri ji ensured the farmer was viewed with a patriotic lens, and farming, a noble profession. If statistics and research tell us one story, it is that Delhi's pollution is a mirror of its own making and its cars and constructions. Haryana's farmers have shown restraint and reform, and rather than being cast as villains, should stand as an example for Delhi. The time has come not for accusations but for action. With the BJP at the helm of both state and centre, this pollution season definitely demands resolve.

**By Bhavya Bishnoi,
Shivom Singh Lovell**

Fearless Voice of the Community

The South Asian Insider

23 Glorious Years, Always a Step Ahead

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