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The Discretionary Door

In Delhi, Vught, Guayaquil and São Paulo, the same institution fails in opposite directions at once. Incarceration has stopped meaning incapacitation — and the remedies carry a price the public has never been asked to approve.

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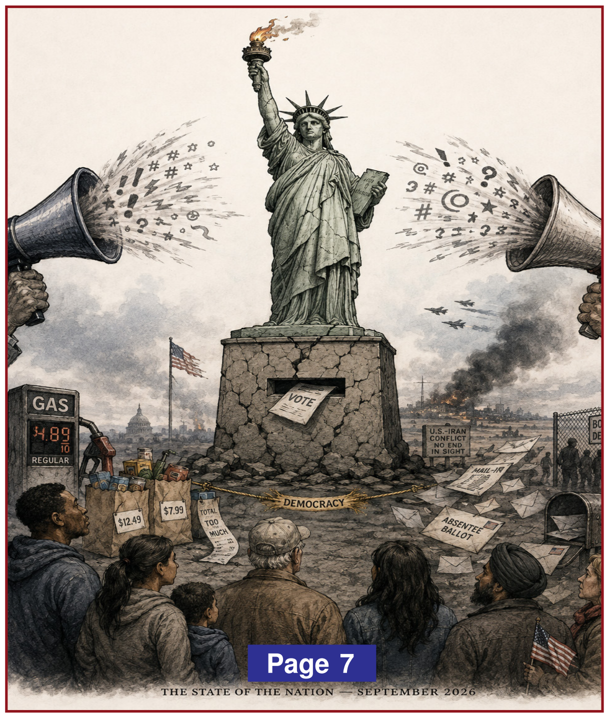

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The Discretionary Door

In Delhi, Vught, Guayaquil and São Paulo, the same institution fails in opposite directions at once. Incarceration has stopped meaning incapacitation — and the remedies carry a price the public has never been asked to approve.

(TSAI INVESTIGATION · CRIMINAL JUSTICE)

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The call that arrived in Thousand Oaks, California, in the last days of December 2025 did not sound like it came from a prison cell, because in every way that mattered it did not. The voice on the line wanted five million dollars. According to a federal indictment returned by a grand jury in the United States in July of this year, the demand originated with a man who has been in Indian custody for years, and who is alleged to have directed murders, extortion and trafficking from inside a prison using smuggled cellphones and voice-over-internet devices. The resulting enforcement sweep, which American authorities named Operation Hard Ball, produced twenty-four arrests across the United States, Canada and Europe.

Set aside, for a moment, the question of guilt, which no court has yet resolved. Consider only the geometry. A man locked in a cell on one continent is accused of frightening a family on another, and the instrument was a device that costs less than a night in a mid-range hotel. Whatever else the walls were doing, they were not doing the one thing they exist to do.

This is not an Indian story, though India supplies its most vivid recent chapter. It is a condition of the global carceral system in 2026, visible in a maximum-security wing in the Dutch province of North Brabant, in a Guayaquil prison that a gang leader simply walked out of, in a São Paulo penitentiary where the country's largest criminal organisation was founded by eight inmates, and in the state prisons of South Carolina, where corrections officials count contraband phones by the thousand. The pattern is consistent enough to be called a pattern. What it is not — and this distinction is the whole argument of this article — is a conspiracy. The tempting frame is collusion: that states open prison doors for those who can pay and bolt them shut for those who cannot. The evidence does not support it, and in several jurisdictions it points the other way. What the evidence supports is something less lurid and, in the end, more troubling. Custody has become discretionary. Who gets out, who gets a phone, who gets a trial date, who gets moved two thousand kilometres from home — these outcomes are governed less by rule than by leverage. Money is one form of leverage. Political weight is another. A lawyer willing to carry a message is a third. The door is not controlled by the state so much as by whoever can reach the person holding the key. A purchasable system is worse than a conspiratorial one. In a conspiracy there is someone to indict.

THE PURCHASE

The Indian case that has drawn the most attention concerns Sukesh Chandrashekhar, a man the Indian press has for years called a conman, and whose alleged operation is now the subject of a prosecution under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act. On May 30 of this year, a Delhi court framed charges against him, his wife Leena Paulose and nineteen others — twenty-one accused in total — in an extortion case that prosecutors value at 217 crore rupees. He has challenged that order before the Delhi High Court, where the matter is listed for September 23. The prosecution's contention is that the scheme was run from inside prison, with the assistance of associates outside and officials within.

Charges framed are not a conviction, and it is worth being precise about that, particularly because the most explosive allegations in the affair come from Chandrashekhar himself. He has claimed that he paid protection money to secure his comfort inside — ten crore rupees, he says, to a former Delhi prisons minister. India's home ministry has approved a central investigation into that claim, and a former director general of Tihar and other staff have been named. The minister denies the allegation, and his party has publicly argued that a man facing charges of professional deception is not a reliable narrator of anything, least of all of the crimes of his jailers. That objection is not frivolous. It is, in fact, the correct instinct, and any reader should hold it.

But hold it alongside a second document that is not written by an accused man. India's own Model Prisons Act of 2023 — a template statute drafted by the central government — states plainly that criminal networks have been found operating from inside prisons in several states. Legislatures do not usually write that sentence about themselves unless the problem has become impossible to describe any other way. And the Act's central weakness is instructive: prisons in India are a state subject under the constitution, so the model law binds no one. It is advice.

THE PROFESSIONAL

If the Indian version of the problem involves money changing hands in a corridor, the Dutch version involves a professional in a suit, and it is the more disquieting of the two.

Ridouan Taghi has been held in the Extra Beveiligde Inrichting at Vught, the most secure facility in the Netherlands, since December 2019. In February 2024 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Marengo trial for ordering murders in the long war among Dutch-Moroccan drug networks. The trial itself had already extracted an extraordinary toll: a lawyer for the state's key witness and the journalist Peter R. de Vries were both killed.

What has emerged since is that the sealed cell was not sealed. In May of this year, a Rotterdam court convicted Taghi's own defence lawyer, Inez Weski, of participating in the criminal organisation her client ran from prison. The judges found that she had carried messages in and out of Vught, and that the material she relayed included a ledger recording drug shipments, payments and debts. Prosecutors had asked for four and a half years; the court imposed forty-two days, equal to the time she had already spent in pre-trial detention, and she walked out. She has denied the charges throughout, invoking privilege.

She was not the only channel. An earlier lawyer, a relative of Taghi's, was convicted of relaying messages and sentenced to five and a half years. Another was arrested in April 2025 on suspicion of leaking information, leaving Taghi without counsel for his appeal. In January of this year, his son accepted a six-year sentence in a plea agreement; the court found that he had acted principally as an intermediary, passing on instructions smuggled out of the EBI, and that those instructions had included discussion of a violent escape.

Then comes the part that belongs in this story more than any indictment. This month, Dutch lawyers' associations went public with a complaint about the countermeasures. Under the rules now in force at Vught, a lawyer and client may not exchange documents or turn a laptop screen toward one another. The associations argue this makes effective legal assistance impossible and constitutes a disproportionate interference with the right to counsel. The responsible state secretary has defended the restriction, saying that turning a screen is, as she put it, “too vulnerable and risky,” and alluding to past incidents without detailing them.

Both positions are defensible. That is precisely the difficulty. A state that cannot keep a message from leaving a cell will eventually build a cell from which nothing can leave, including a defence. The Netherlands is not an outlier in its failure; it is a leading indicator of the cost of the cure. Seal the prison completely and you break the defence. Leave it porous and you export the crime. No jurisdiction has found the third answer.

THE BUILDING

In Ecuador, the door did not have to be bought or talked through. It opened.

On January 7, 2024, José Adolfo Macías Villamar — universally known as Fito, the leader of Los Choneros — vanished from the Regional-8 prison in Guayaquil, where he had been serving a thirty-four-year sentence imposed in 2011. He had, by then, earned a law degree behind bars. His disappearance triggered riots, bombings, kidnappings and an armed takeover of a television station during a live broadcast. President Daniel Noboa declared













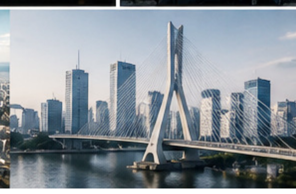


the country to be in a state of internal armed conflict and sent the military into the streets.

It took eighteen months to find him. He was recaptured in June 2025 in a bunker beneath a house in the coastal city of Manta, roughly 160 miles from the capital, after the government had posted a one-million-dollar reward. In July he accepted extradition and was flown to Brooklyn, the first Ecuadorian sent directly from Ecuador into United States custody. He pleaded not guilty to a seven-count indictment charging international cocaine distribution, firearms offences and the smuggling of American guns southward. His successor at the head of the organisation was extradited on the same underlying indictment in April of this year.

The Ecuadorian episode is usually filed under state weakness, and the filing is not wrong: government figures indicate that a very large share of the world's cocaine now transits Ecuadorian ports. But the mechanism deserves attention, because it is the same mechanism, only faster. Someone with enough leverage reached the person holding the key. In Delhi it is alleged to have taken months and a great deal of money. In Guayaquil it took one night.

THE INCUBATOR

Brazil offers the oldest and most complete version of the problem, and the one that should most trouble anyone drafting a policy response, because Brazil has already tried the obvious remedies and watched them backfire.

The Primeiro Comando da Capital was founded on August 31, 1993, by eight inmates in an annexe of the house of custody at Taubaté. It was not a street gang that later infiltrated prisons; it was a prison organisation that later took the streets. Brazilian authorities describe its principal leader, Marcos Camacho, known as Marcola, as still directing the organisation from prison alongside other senior commanders, its structure divided into functional divisions for drug sales, robbery and money laundering. The group now operates in more than twenty countries. On June 5 of this year, the United States designated both the PCC and its Rio-based rival, Comando Vermelho, as terrorist organisations.

The instructive failure came earlier. Beginning in 2006, Brazil pursued a strategy of transferring the leaders of criminal organisations away from their home territories into distant federal prisons, on the theory that separation would weaken them. One consequence was that a senior Comando Vermelho figure was moved to São Paulo, where he encountered the PCC. The two organisations did not fight. They reached a non-aggression understanding, and the resulting alliance extended both groups' reach across the country. The state had, in effect, convened the meeting.

The cost of the current approach is measured in bodies. In October 2025, a police operation in Rio de Janeiro against Comando Vermelho left, by the police's own count, 117 people dead; the public defender's office counted 128. Five officers were killed. Whatever one concludes about the necessity of that operation, it is not a demonstration of a system in control of its own prisons. It is what happens years after a system loses them.

THE ORDINARY VERSION

It would be convenient for wealthy democracies if this were a problem of poor states and weak institutions. It is not.

In the United States, the South Carolina Department of Corrections has confiscated contraband phones in the thousands — more than 2,600 from state prisons in a single recent year, including roughly 300 in one month. A state grand jury issued a rare public report last year warning that inmate organisations operating on smuggled phones were trafficking narcotics, defrauding government benefit programmes and extorting people outside, and that their reach extended well beyond the state's borders. In an earlier federal racketeering case built around four inmates who ran an enterprise by phone from their cells, forty people were indicted on 147 counts including murder, kidnapping and drive-by shootings. The United States Attorney's summary was blunt: "Neither pandemic nor prison walls will provide refuge."

The structural obstacle in the American case is a piece of regulatory architecture. Federal prisons may jam cellphone signals; state prisons may not, under Federal Communications Commission rules. Corrections officials in more than one state have spent years asking Congress to change this. In the meantime, they have resorted to obtaining court orders directing carriers to disable specific handsets by their unique equipment identifiers — turning them, as one corrections secretary put it, into bricks.

In England and Wales, the estate has its own version. Greater Manchester Police and the prison service destroyed more than 500 phones, devices and SIM cards seized at a single prison, HMP Manchester, as part of a continuing multi-agency operation; investigators describe such devices as the standard instrument for coordinating drug supply, weapons movement and serious violence outside. Drones now deliver payloads directly to cell windows, and a 2024 law criminalised flying them within 400 metres of a prison wall. And the insider problem is documented there too: in April of this year, a serving officer at HMP Isis in south-east London and a network of associates were sentenced to a combined twenty-five years after the officer facilitated eighteen contraband deliveries over a six-month period, having been recruited by an organised crime group and run on a burner phone. In Scotland, a prisoner at HMP Grampian was found to have directed a drug distribution operation from his cell using a mobile phone and SIM cards — some of which, the High Court in Edinburgh heard, had been issued by the prison service itself.

That last detail is worth sitting with. It is not corruption, and it is not a smuggling failure. It is a system handing over the instrument through the front door, for entirely legitimate reasons, and lacking any means to distinguish the call home from the call that isn't.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SAME DOOR

Everything above concerns people whom the system cannot hold. The larger population is the one it cannot let go.

India's most recent national prison statistics show 1,333 institutions holding roughly 5.11 lakh people against a sanctioned capacity of 4.53 lakh — an occupancy rate of 112.7 per cent. Delhi's jails ran at 194 per cent. Around 73 per cent of the national prison population were undertrials, people awaiting or undergoing trial rather than serving a sentence; in Delhi and Bihar the figure exceeded 87 per cent. The proportions vary by country, but the shape does not: the modal prisoner in much of the world has not been convicted of anything.

These two facts are usually reported separately, in different sections of a newspaper, by different reporters. They are the same fact. A process slow enough to leave a majority untried is a process slow enough to give an organised defendant years of stable residence, a known address, a predictable routine and a captive labour pool. Delay is not merely unjust to the poor; it is operationally useful to the powerful. The syndicate and the forgotten remand prisoner are produced by the same broken clock.

Delay is not only unjust to the poor. It is operationally useful to the powerful. Both are outputs of the same broken clock.

WHAT IS WORKING

An honest account has to record the corrections as well as the failures, and there are some.

Indian occupancy, for all that 112.7 per cent describes a crowded system, represents a decade low rather than a deterioration. In April of this year a Delhi court granted Chandrashekhar bail in a money-laundering matter on the explicit ground that prolonged incarceration without trial offends Article 21 of the constitution, which guarantees life and personal liberty — the same reasoning that, applied consistently, would empty a great deal of the country's remand population. He remains in custody on other charges, so the ruling changed his address not at all; what it changed was the doctrine, and doctrine is how the untried majority eventually gets out.

Enforcement has also become genuinely transnational in a way it was not a decade ago. Ecuador extradited its most powerful gang leader and then his successor. American prosecutors have indicted a man they say has never left Indian custody. Dutch courts have prosecuted lawyers — an extraordinary step for a legal system that guards professional privilege as fiercely as any in Europe — and secured convictions.

And the countermeasures have limits worth defending. The Dutch bar's objection to the document rules at Vught is not obstruction; it is the immune response of a legal order noticing that a security measure has begun to consume a right. Somebody has to make that argument, and the fact that it is being made in public, in the country with the tightest cell in Western Europe, is the healthiest development in this entire account.

THE QUESTION

The policy menu on offer is short and mostly consists of intensification. Jam the signals. Seal the visits. Extradite the leadership. Designate the organisations as terrorist entities. Move the men further away. Each of these has been tried somewhere in the preceding pages, and each has a documented cost: a defence that cannot be conducted, an alliance the state itself brokered, a raid with 117 dead.

None of them addresses the mechanism. Every case in this article — Delhi, Vught, Guayaquil, São Paulo, Columbia, Manchester, Peterhead — required the same three ingredients. A channel to the outside: a phone, a drone, a relative, a lawyer, or a SIM card issued by the prison itself. A human being on the inside who could be bought, frightened, seduced or simply outmanoeuvred. And a legal process slow enough that the arrangement had time to mature. Remove any one and the others become far less useful. No jurisdiction reviewed here has seriously attacked the third.

Which returns us to the word the evidence does not permit. This is not a compact between governments and criminals. It is something more ordinary and harder to prosecute: a system in which the exercise of custodial power has drifted away from rule and toward discretion, and in which discretion, having no principle to follow, follows leverage instead. That is why the same institution can produce a prisoner allegedly extorting a family in California and a man in Bihar who has been waiting years for a trial that has not begun. Neither outcome was decided by law. Both were decided by who could reach the door.

The public has never been asked whether it wants a system like this, because no one has ever put it that way on a ballot. It is the accumulated residue of ten thousand small decisions taken by underpaid officers, overloaded magistrates and legislatures that write model statutes they lack the authority to enforce. It can be changed the same way — but only by a public that has been told, plainly, that the door swings both ways, and that both swings have the same hinge.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Indian court proceedings and prison data: reporting on the Delhi MCOCA proceedings of May 30, 2026 and the pending Delhi High Court challenge listed for September 23, 2026; the April 2026 bail order under Article 21; National Crime Records Bureau prison statistics; the Model Prisons Act, 2023. The transnational extortion allegations are drawn from the United States federal indictment returned in July 2026 and the associated enforcement action. All are allegations; no finding of guilt has been made against any Indian accused named here, and the former prisons minister denies the protection-money claim.

Netherlands: Rotterdam district court judgment of May 2026 in the Weski matter, prosecution submissions of April 2026, the January 2026 plea judgment concerning Taghi's son, the February 2024 Marengo verdict, and the August 2026 statement by Dutch lawyers' associations regarding EBI document restrictions.

Ecuador: Ecuadorian court and Ministry of Interior announcements, United States Department of Justice releases for the Eastern District of New York, and contemporaneous wire reporting on the January 2024 escape, June 2025 recapture and July 2025 extradition.

Brazil: United States Department of State designation notice effective June 5, 2026; Brazilian federal police and prosecutorial descriptions of PCC structure and leadership; official and public-defender casualty counts from the October 2025 Rio operation.

United States and United Kingdom: South Carolina Department of Corrections figures and the state grand jury report of 2025; federal racketeering indictment and prosecution statements; Greater Manchester Police and HM Prison and Probation Service seizure announcements; Metropolitan Police case concluded at Snaresbrook Crown Court, April 2026; High Court of Justiciary proceedings in the HMP Grampian matter. Where figures are contested — notably the Rio casualty count — both are given. Where an allegation rests on the word of an accused person, that is stated in the text.

Sameer Agarwal, RS 500 Crore ponzi scheme accused to be extradited to India

Named as the mastermind of a multi-state Ponzi scheme that trapped roughly ?500 crore of Madhya Pradesh investors' money, Sameer Agarwal is reportedly hiding in Saint Kitts and Nevis. A lookout notice has been issued, and MP Police are preparing an extradition request.

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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The case involves the SAGA Group and the Loni Urban Multi-State Credit & Thrift Co-operative Society (LUCC). Agarwal, a Mumbai resident, is identified as the alleged mastermind behind LUCC's operations and is said to have taken control of its management in 2016.

- MP officials said this week that about 2.10 lakh investors in the state put in over ?492 crore, and that cases have been filed against 16 operators including Agarwal. CID Special DG Pankaj Srivastava put the national footprint at 17 states. money moved through cash chests, shell companies and hawala channels into assets in India and abroad. In raids across Mumbai and Bhopal from Aug 13–16, the ED froze over Rs30 crore in shares, mutual funds and bank balances, plus nine high-end vehicles, Rs 1.53 crore cash, about ?35 lakh in foreign currency, and Rs 5.25 crore in gold and silver. The agency described Agarwal as absconding and suspected to have left the country. Saint Kitts and Nevis runs one of the Caribbean's best-known citizenship-by-investment programmes, and India has no bilateral extradition treaty with it — which is likely why "preparing to seek extradition" is doing heavy lifting in that sentence. Any request would probably have to go through Interpol channels or an ad hoc arrangement. The St Kitts location claim itself I couldn't independently confirm in reporting, so it's worth sourcing before you run it.

The number is the tell.**Rs 500 crore is Madhya Pradesh's slice. The ED puts the national figure above Rs 10,000 crore across 17 states. Every state police force reports its own jurisdiction's loss, so the scam gets covered twenty times at 1/20th its size. Nobody owns the whole number, which is exactly how it stayed alive for 16 years.

The real story is the registration, not the fugitive. MP's CID said the societies weren't registered with the state government — they registered at the national level. That's the mechanism. A multi-state cooperative society answers to the Central Registrar in Delhi, not to any state registrar, and isn't supervised by the RBI as a deposit-taker. It's a regulatory blind spot: state officials lack authority, the central office lacks staff, and the society collects deposits from villagers in Uttarakhand and MP with neither watching. Agarwal didn't find a loophole; he found a structural vacancy.

He didn't flee — he left.** You don't obtain Caribbean citizenship in a hurry. St Kitts processing runs four to six months minimum, through a licensed agent, with source-of-funds documentation. If he's there lawfully, the paperwork was filed while the schemes were still paying out. The ED already alleges funds moved abroad through shell companies and hawala. The passport and the money left together, on a plan.

Extradition is the wrong lever, and the right one is going unreported.** India has no extradition treaty with St Kitts. But the programme restructured under the Citizenship by Investment Unit Act 2024 and now runs a Continuing International Due Diligence framework that monitors citizens after issuance. Citizenship obtained on false source-of-funds declarations is revocable. A revocation petition to the CIU is slower news but far likelier to work than a treaty India doesn't have. No Indian outlet seems to be asking whether MHA has filed one. Where the victims actually are.** These societies run on commissioned local agents — retired teachers, shopkeepers, people's neighbours. Depositors were recruited by someone they trusted, which is why 2.10 lakh MP families signed up and why almost none will testify against the agent. Meanwhile ?30 crore is frozen against ?10,000 crore collected. The PACL/Lodha precedent says recovery takes a decade and returns cents.

The angle with teeth.** The Ministry of Cooperation was created in 2021 with cooperatives positioned as a national growth engine, and the Multi-State Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Act came in 2023. A ?10,000-crore fraud that ran inside that exact structure is an uncomfortable policy story. Whether the amendment closed this gap or missed it is a real, checkable question — and it's a lot more useful to your readers than a Caribbean island.

THE CORRIDOR

An American who made a career out of other people's wars is in a Delhi prison cell. The case against him is not really about him.

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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On the night of March 13, 2026, three teams from India's National Investigation Agency moved simultaneously on three airports. At Kolkata, they took an American. At Delhi, three Ukrainians. At Lucknow, three more.

The American was Matthew Aaron VanDyke — Baltimore-born, Georgetown-educated, a former prisoner of war in Muammar Gaddafi's cells, the subject of a documentary, the founder of a non-profit that trains people to shoot back. He has since been held in Tihar Jail under Section 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, India's principal anti-terror statute, which carries a maximum of life imprisonment.

Nearly six months later, no chargesheet has been filed. The statutory clock runs out in the second week of September.

Two rulings on Monday, August 31, defined the endgame. The Delhi High Court dismissed a petition by the Ukrainian accused challenging the extension of the investigation period from ninety days to a hundred and eighty — the order that keeps them in custody and forecloses default bail. Hours later, a special court at Rouse Avenue permitted the NIA to interrogate VanDyke and Ukrainian national Viktor Kaminskyi inside Tihar on September 2 and 3, between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., with a Ukrainian translator present. The agency told the court it needed to identify what it called the masterminds sitting in Myanmar.

That phrase is the whole case. Everything else is scaffolding.

WHAT THE AGENCY SAYS HAPPENED

The NIA's account, as placed before the courts in stages since March, runs as follows.

Fourteen Ukrainian nationals entered India on tourist visas on separate dates. They flew to Guwahati and travelled onward into Mizoram without a Protected Area Permit or Restricted Area Permit — mandatory documents for foreigners entering that stretch of frontier. From Mizoram they crossed into Myanmar's Chin State illegally.

There, the agency alleges, they delivered pre-scheduled instruction to Myanmar-based ethnic armed groups in drone warfare, drone operation, assembly and jamming technology, directed against the Myanmar military. The agency further alleges the network imported large consignments of drones from Europe into Myanmar via Indian territory, and that the ethnic armed groups receiving this training maintain supply and support relationships with insurgent outfits operating inside India's northeast.

That last link — Myanmar rebels to Indian insurgents — is the hinge on which the entire prosecution turns. Without it, this is a visa and border offence. With it, it is terrorism.

The case was registered on March 13 on direction from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Investigators have told courts the group had been making repeated trips since 2024, supplying drones and signal-jamming equipment alongside the training. Of the fourteen Ukrainians said to have entered, eight remain untraced.

The seven in custody are VanDyke and Hurba Petro, Slyviak Taras, Ivan Sukmanovskyi, Stefankiv Marian, Honcharuk Maksim and Kaminskyi Viktor.

THE MAN IN CELL 8/9

Matthew VanDyke is not a conventional defendant, and the file on him is unusually public because he built it himself.

He holds a master's in security studies from Georgetown and a second in war studies from King's College London. In 2011 he went to Libya, was captured, and spent roughly six months in Gaddafi's prisons, much of it in solitary confinement, before escaping during the collapse of the regime. He then returned to the fighting. The episode produced a documentary and a public persona: the American graduate student who picked up a rifle.

In 2014, after the Islamic State executed the journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff — both friends — he founded Sons of Liberty International, registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Its stated model is to supply training, advice and equipment at no charge to populations fighting authoritarian regimes and terrorist organisations, rather than to field foreign combatants. Its first deployment trained the Nineveh Plain Protection Units, an Assyrian Christian militia raised against ISIS in Iraq. From 2022, SOLI worked with Ukrainian forces against Russia. The operational footprint SOLI itself advertises spans Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Philippines and Venezuela.

Indian investigators are reported to have recovered recordings in which VanDyke calls for volunteers to support insurgencies — including in Myanmar. An unnamed NIA official has been quoted suggesting he was operating at the behest of Western intelligence. No evidence for that characterisation has been produced in open court.

VanDyke denies all allegations. SOLI's position is that he was engaged in nothing illegal and nothing aimed at India or Indian interests, and that Russian pressure explains his continued detention.

His custody has generated its own litigation. He went on hunger strike from May 6, and his lawyers told the court he had lost fourteen kilograms and was surviving on liquids, unable to tolerate the prison diet. On July 21 the court granted partial relief: a customised vegetarian diet, a cook, an electric kettle, mosquito protection, and monitoring by the jail superintendent and medical officer. It refused red meat, chicken, fish and shrimp. His family says he is in solitary in Tihar's 8/9 block with an injured leg and deteriorating eyesight, and that a request to move him to a private hospital was declined.

There is a discrepancy worth flagging for the record. His family's own statement gives March 11 as the date of detention at Kolkata airport; the NIA and the court record say March 13. Several wire reports have repeatedly dated the arrests to April 2026, which appears to be an error carried forward — the first remand hearing was on March 16. Two days is not a rounding error in a UAPA case, where every clock is statutory.

THE OTHER END OF THE PIPE

To understand why New Delhi treats this as a national security matter rather than an immigration one, the story has to leave India. Chin State is the poorest region of Myanmar and among the most Christian, a legacy of American Baptist missionary work dating to the nineteenth century. Since the 2021 coup, Chin resistance forces have driven the military out of most of the countryside and more than half the townships. The two principal armed factions — the Chin National Army and the Chin National Defence Force — sit under a common umbrella, the Chin Brotherhood, and are funded through entirely different channels.

Reporting by *The Quint* in March named Peter Thang, vice-president of the CNDF, as the organiser of the drone procurement operation in which VanDyke and the Ukrainians are alleged to have participated. Citing sources familiar with the investigation, that account described Thang as simultaneously the CNDF's arms procurer and the manager of narcotics operations financing its war, with the drug route running from Chin State through Manipur into India. It also reported that CNDF funding flows in part through American evangelical congregations, and that the outfit's defence secretary is married to an American national.

Thang denies this categorically. In a written statement to that publication he said he had never met or contacted the seven arrested, and rejected the drug-lord characterisation as false and damaging to the organisations he leads.

The military logic is not in dispute, whoever supplied the hardware. The CNDF launched an offensive in late 2024 to take Falam, Chin State's former capital, and lost heavily to airstrikes flown with Russian and Chinese aircraft. Drones are the asymmetric answer to air superiority. In February 2026, Kachin rebels used drones to badly damage an aircraft at Myitkyina airport. Sources cited in the same investigation claimed a drone from the Chin consignments brought down a Myanmar military fighter — unverified, but if true, it explains a great deal about the timing of everything that followed.

THE TIP-OFF

Multiple Indian outlets, citing unnamed officials, have reported that Russian intelligence supplied the information that enabled the March arrests. The specifics of what Moscow shared remain classified.

Read plainly, the arrests sit at the intersection of two entirely separate interests that happen to point the same way.

India's interest is genuine and does not require prompting. Drones transiting its territory to armed groups on a disputed frontier, and narcotics moving the other way into Manipur — a state that has been in ethnic crisis since 2023 — are threats on their own terms, regardless of who is flying what at whom inside Myanmar.

Russia's interest is the Myanmar junta, which it arms. Dismantling the rebel drone supply chain protects a client. Doing it through Indian law enforcement costs

Moscow nothing and exposes it to nothing.

The overlap is the story. It is also the defence's best argument, and SOLI has made it explicitly.

THE CORRIDOR WAS ALREADY OPEN

The most uncomfortable fact in this case is that nobody can claim surprise.

In March 2025, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma — himself a former IPS officer with a career in intelligence — told his state assembly that he had specific information about Ukraine war veterans transiting Mizoram to train rebel outfits in Chin State. He said this on the floor of the house, a full year before the arrests.

Between June and December 2024, close to two thousand foreigners entered Mizoram. A significant number, according to reporting on the corridor, were not tourists in any meaningful sense. The region has acquired a local vocabulary for the phenomenon.

The precedents were also documented. British national Daniel Newey was arrested at Aizawl airport in June 2024 with ammunition, on his way out from Chin rebel territory. Belgian national Simon Clemente was arrested at the same airport in March 2025, again with ammunition, again outbound. In April 2025 a Belgian photojournalist was arrested in Mizoram for entering without valid documents and crossing into Myanmar.

Every one of them was caught leaving. Not one was stopped going in.

The structural reason is not incompetence. The Chin, Zomi and Mizo communities share language, kinship and clan structures that predate the colonial boundary running five hundred and ten kilometres through jungle. The people moving across it are, quite literally, family. Lalduhoma once brokered a peace agreement between warring Chin factions in Aizawl and was reprimanded by the Centre for not seeking clearance first — a chief minister mediating a foreign civil war from his own capital because the combatants were his constituents' relatives.

No fence solves that. The arrests at three airports on a March night did not solve it either.

WHISPERS

What follows is not established fact. It is what is being said in security establishments, diplomatic missions and the corridor itself — attributed to nobody, confirmed by nobody, and set down here because the gap between what is charged and what is believed is itself the story. Readers should treat every line in this section as unverified.

That the arrests were a message, not a prosecution. The whisper in Delhi is that the operation was authorised at a moment when several bilateral files were open at once, and that a foreign national in Tihar is a more articulate signal than a démarche. Under this reading the chargesheet matters less than the calendar, and the case was always meant to be resolved diplomatically rather than judicially.

That the drones were the least of it. Investigators are said to be less interested in the hardware than in the money — specifically, in whether funds routed through faith-based charitable structures in the United States reached an armed group. If that link can be documented, the case stops being about seven men and becomes about a financing architecture, with implications for institutions far larger than SOLI.

That there is a Manipur file that has not been opened. The persistent murmur, and the most explosive, is that the real object of the investigation is not Chin State at all but whether any of this touched the Kuki-Zo–Meitei conflict. Nothing in the public record supports it. The theory is loudly pushed by commentators with an interest in a foreign-hand narrative, and treated with visible caution by officials who would benefit from it if it were true. That caution is itself informative.

That Kyiv is managing, not fighting. Ukraine protested early and demanded consular access, then went quiet. The reading in diplomatic circles is that Kyiv has calculated that six veterans in an Indian prison is a smaller problem than a public fight with New Delhi during a war, and is waiting for the Americans to move first.

That Washington is doing more than it is saying. The family has said the US ambassador raised the case with the Indian foreign secretary and with the Secretary of State during a May visit to Delhi. Nothing has surfaced publicly since. The whisper is that a quiet-exit framework exists — plead, be convicted of the immigration offences, be deported — and that the obstacle is not principle but sequencing: nobody wants to be seen to move first.

That the eight missing Ukrainians are the reason for the delay. They have never been accounted for. One version has them still inside Myanmar. Another has them out of the region entirely, months ago. The NIA's application to re-interrogate two men in jail this week, six months in, is consistent with an agency that has hardware, devices and travel records but does not yet have the top of the chain.

MOTIVE: FIVE READINGS, WEIGHED

1. The ideological freelancer. VanDyke has done exactly this, openly, for a decade — Iraq, Ukraine, and publicly soliciting support for insurgencies elsewhere. Chin State fits the pattern precisely: a Christian minority under aerial bombardment by a junta. On this reading he did what he always does, and made the ordinary error of the true believer, which is to assume that a border he considers illegitimate is one he can ignore. *Most consistent with the public record.*

2. The proxy. The suggestion, made by an unnamed official and amplified since, that he acted for Western intelligence. Nothing has been produced in court. It is also the least parsimonious explanation: an agency wanting deniable trainers in Chin State would not use the most photographed private trainer on earth. *Weak, but politically useful to several parties.*

3. The commercial motive. Private training and equipment supply in a live conflict is a market. Drones from Europe, veterans from a war winding toward stalemate, a client with narcotics revenue: that is a business, whatever the letterhead says. Whether SOLI's non-profit status accurately describes the flow of money is a legitimate question, and the one the NIA's financial forensics appear aimed at. *Plausible, unproven, and the most legally dangerous of the five.*

4. The reputational motive. The Libya prisoner, the documentary, the friends beheaded by ISIS. There is a version of this in which the man's own legend is the operating system, and the question is not why Myanmar but why not. *Unfalsifiable, which is why it belongs in this section rather than a chargesheet.*

5. Nobody's motive: drift. The corridor was open. Two thousand foreigners went through it in six months. Some were trainers, some were suppliers, some were tourists with a taste for proximity to violence, and the category boundaries were policed by nobody. On this reading, seven men were selected from a much larger flow, at a moment when a foreign intelligence service made selection convenient. *The most probable description of how the corridor worked, and the least useful in court.*

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The immediate. Interrogation inside Tihar on September 2 and 3. Then the deadline. The hundred and eighty days from March 13 expire in the second week of September. The Delhi High Court has now closed the route by which the accused hoped to reach default bail, so the NIA has its full extension — but it has no further one. It files, or the case begins to collapse.

Most likely: a chargesheet lands, and it is larger than seven names. Everything about the agency's conduct — voice samples, digital forensics, financial tracing, a jail interrogation aimed at figures outside the jurisdiction — points to a document that names absconders, foreign entities and Indian facilitators. Expect the eight untraced Ukrainians as proclaimed offenders, and expect at least one Indian national in the supply chain. The agency has said since March that it was hunting the local network that moved the group into Mizoram. Six months is a long time to look and find nobody.

Then: a long, slow trial that nobody entirely wants. Bail under Section 43D(5) of the UAPA is close to unavailable once a chargesheet discloses a prima facie case. Foreign nationals with no local ties and a documented history of crossing borders without permission are, on paper, the worst bail candidates imaginable. A contested UAPA trial in Delhi can run for years.

The likelier exit: attrition and a deal. The evidence for the border and visa offences is essentially unanswerable and carries modest punishment. The evidence for the terrorism charge depends on proving the Myanmar-to-India insurgent link — the hardest element, and the one most dependent on witnesses and intercepts from a jurisdiction India cannot police. That asymmetry creates the obvious landing zone: convictions on the immigration and Foreigners Act counts, time served, deportation, no admission on terrorism. It gives every government something to show its own public. Watch for it to become visible not as an announcement but as a series of adjournments that stop being contested.

The wild card: escalation. VanDyke's health is the variable outside anyone's control. He is on record as having lost significant weight, and his family alleges denial of medication and solitary confinement. A medical emergency in Tihar would convert a technical case into a political one overnight, in a US news cycle already primed by the man's own biography. Every actor in this file has an interest in that not happening, which is not the same as it not happening.

What will not change. The corridor. Nothing in this prosecution closes a five-hundred-kilometre border through jungle terrain across which the communities on either side are kin. Chin State's war continues. The drones will continue to arrive, by some route, because the alternative for the people receiving them is to be bombed without reply. India's problem in the northeast is not seven foreigners. It is that its frontier is the logistical rear of somebody else's civil war, and that the people who live on both sides of it do not experience the line as real.

THE OPEN QUESTIONS

- How did consignments of European drones move through Indian territory undetected until a foreign intelligence service pointed them out?
- Who inside the logistics chain — customs, freight, transport, local facilitation — enabled the movement, and why has nobody been named in six months?
- Where are the eight untraced Ukrainians?
- Can the alleged Myanmar-rebel-to-Indian-insurgent link be proven to a criminal standard, or does the terrorism charge rest on inference?
- What is the actual institutional relationship between a US-registered non-profit, evangelical funding networks, and an armed group at war with a recognised government?
- And the question no chargesheet will answer: how many people went through the Mizoram corridor between 2024 and 2026, and why was the first serious enforcement action taken only after a foreign government asked for it?

America is still standing, but the institutions and public trust that hold the country together are badly strained. America remains powerful, wealthy and resilient—but the machinery of democracy is being asked to withstand an extraordinary amount of political hostility, economic anxiety, international conflict and public distrust

The Order That Froze Subhash Chandra's Assets Did What Twenty Years of Covenants Could Not

A five-member NCLT bench stayed a repayment plan offering creditors less than three paise in the rupee. The arithmetic will be argued for months. The asset freeze is what changes the game.

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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On Tuesday a newly constituted five-member bench of the National Company Law Tribunal, headed by its president, Justice (retd) Anupinder Singh Grewal, stayed the operation of an August 25 order that had approved a personal repayment plan for Zee Group founder Subhash Chandra. The bench issued notices to all parties, including Chandra, sought replies, made clear that the August 25 judgment cannot be given effect at this stage, and said all parties would be heard at length before the matter proceeds.

It also directed that the guarantor shall not sell, transfer, alienate, encumber or otherwise deal with his properties, directly or indirectly, while the proceedings remain pending.

That last direction is the story. Everything else is procedure.

The arithmetic first, because it is remarkable on its own terms. The plan approved on August 25 offered ?6.25 crore to creditors, plus ?25 lakh towards insolvency resolution process costs, against admitted claims of ?22,006.57 crore. That is a recovery of roughly 2.8 paise for every hundred rupees owed — a haircut of about 99.97 percent. Several lenders opposed it strenuously, questioning not only the recovery but the conduct of the voting process and the participation of entities they alleged were linked to Chandra himself.

The procedural history explains why a five-member bench exists at all. A two-member bench comprising Judicial Member Ashok Kumar Bhardwaj and Technical Member Reena Sinha Puri delivered a split verdict in September 2025, one member approving the plan and the other rejecting it on grounds of irregularity in the admission of claims and in voting. The matter went to a third member, Nilesh Sharma, who approved the plan on August 25 subject to the exclusion of certain disputed claims. The original two members then held that no majority opinion had emerged — that Sharma had passed an independent order rather than resolving the specific points on which they differed. The case moved to the president's bench, and the litigation has now run inconclusively for a year on dissenting orders alone.

None of which is what makes Tuesday significant.

Consider what the personal guarantee was supposed to do. When Indian lenders extended credit to leveraged promoter groups through the 2000s and 2010s, the personal guarantee of the promoter was the instrument that was meant to make the borrowing real — the mechanism by which a promoter's own wealth stood behind the company's obligations. Essel Group's 2020 default on ?616 crore of secured non-convertible debentures, backed by Chandra's personal guarantee, affected some three hundred thousand investors.

In practice, across two decades and a long list of stressed Indian corporate groups, the guarantee frequently proved close to unenforceable. Promoters facing default had time, and time was the whole game. Assets moved between family members, into trusts, across holding structures, offshore, and into entities whose beneficial ownership took years to establish. By the time a lender obtained a decree, the wealth the guarantee was supposed to reach had been restructured beyond practical recovery. Covenants restricting disposal existed in the loan documents; enforcing them required litigation that moved slower than the assets did.

An interim direction from a tribunal barring any dealing in property, directly or indirectly, during the pendency of proceedings, does in a single paragraph what those covenants did not. It does not require proof of wrongdoing. It does not wait for a final determination on the repayment plan. It simply removes, for now, the promoter's ability to move anything while the substantive question is decided. That is a different kind of leverage, and lenders across the Indian market will have read it as such.

There are two cautions worth stating plainly. The first is that this is an interim order in a contested proceeding, and it may be modified, vacated or appealed. Chandra has not been found to have done anything improper; the bench has stayed an order and preserved a position. The second is that the personal insolvency framework under India's insolvency code, as it applies to personal guarantors of corporate debtors, remains among the least settled areas of the law — which is precisely why this case has produced a split verdict, a third-member opinion, a dispute about whether that opinion resolved anything, and now a five-member bench. The wider context is what gives the case its weight. Personal guarantee enforcement against promoters of large defaulted groups has been tested repeatedly since the code came into force, with mixed results and considerable delay. A tribunal willing to freeze assets at the interim stage changes the negotiating position of every creditor facing a similar guarantor, because the promoter's principal advantage in these disputes has always been the passage of time. The recovery number will be litigated for months and may end up somewhere different. Whether a guarantor can quietly rearrange his holdings while that happens is the question this order actually answered.

A Court Struck Down the 75-Country Visa Ban. India Was Never on the List.

The ruling is a significant defeat for the administration and a real reprieve for Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali and Bhutanese applicants. For Indian nationals, a separate and quieter measure matters far more.

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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On August 21, Judge Jeannette A. Vargas of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York vacated a State Department policy that had suspended the issuance of immigrant visas to nationals of 75 countries. She held the policy “contrary to law and in excess of statutory authority”, finding that Secretary of State Marco Rubio had exceeded his authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act and that the measure violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

The reasoning is worth understanding, because it is narrower and more durable than a political ruling would have been. Congress, the court held, gave consular officers exclusive authority to decide whether an individual applicant is eligible for a visa, on the basis of specific statutory criteria — financial resources, age, health, skills, family circumstances. A policy that directs officers to refuse otherwise eligible applicants solely on the basis of nationality removes that judgement, and Congress did not authorise its removal. The court also set aside refusals issued purely on the basis of the policy, returning those applications to consular officers for adjudication under ordinary law.

The case was brought by the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and African Communities Together, joined by six American citizens who had filed family-based petitions for relatives and five intending immigrants with employment-based petitions.

Now the part that most coverage aimed at Indian readers has handled badly.

India was not among the 75 countries. The list, announced on January 14 and effective January 21, covered nationals of countries the State Department characterised as drawing public assistance at unacceptable rates. In South Asia it captured Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. It did not capture India. Indian nationals were therefore never subject to this suspension, and the ruling does not restore anything to them that had been taken away.

That correction matters for a reason beyond accuracy. Immigration anxiety in this community is high and well founded, and headlines that fold every restriction into a single undifferentiated threat make it harder, not easier, for families to work out what actually applies to them.

What does apply to Indian applicants is a separate measure that has attracted far less attention. Following the ruling, the State Department imposed a temporary pause on immigrant visa adjudications at consular posts worldwide, stated to be for the purpose of training consular officers on new public charge policies. No timeline has been given for resumption, and nothing has been said about what happens to applicants whose appointments were cancelled as a result.

That pause is worldwide. It reaches India. A family in Hyderabad or Ahmedabad waiting on an employment-based or family-based immigrant visa interview is affected by it directly, in a way they were not affected by the 75-country policy at all.

The public charge doctrine underneath both measures is the more consequential development. It is a long-standing provision of American immigration law permitting refusal of an applicant likely to become primarily dependent on government support. What is changing is how expansively it is being applied, and the direction of travel is visible in the accompanying machinery — including a pilot programme requiring immigrant visa applicants to post a financial bond, currently being run in the Dominican Republic. For Indian applicants, several distinctions are worth holding clearly. The 75-country suspension applied only to immigrant visas — those leading to permanent residence — and never to non-immigrant categories such as H-1B, F-1 student or B-1/B-2 visitor visas. Dual nationals travelling on a passport from a non-listed country were exempt throughout. The court's ruling remains subject to appeal or to a stay, and the government has not said whether it will seek one. And the decision touches only this specific suspension: separate travel bans, public charge requirements and other grounds of inadmissibility are untouched and continue to operate.

The practical advice for anyone with a pending case is to monitor communications from the relevant consulate rather than from news coverage, and to be prepared for requests for updated financial, employment and sponsorship documentation when processing resumes. Under a more expansively applied public charge standard, the sponsor's financial position is likely to receive scrutiny it did not previously attract. For this newspaper's readers, the summary is straightforward. Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali and Bhutanese families — and there are many in this community — have won something real, subject to appeal. Indian families have won nothing from this ruling and are contending with a worldwide processing pause that nobody has explained. Both facts belong in the same story, and only one of them has been reported.

Kabul Offers Washington a Trillion Dollars in Rock

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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The Taliban has pitched American investors on Afghanistan's mineral wealth in exchange for sanctions relief and the return of frozen assets. The obstacle is not American reluctance. It is that the minerals are not extractable.

Afghanistan's Taliban government is offering the United States access to the country's mineral resources in exchange for relief from sanctions and the release of frozen Afghan assets, according to a Financial Times report published on August 31.

Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the paper that Afghanistan is open to American investment in mining, infrastructure, agriculture and trade, and argued that relations should be assessed on the prospect of future cooperation rather than through the previous two decades of war. He said sanctions had failed to achieve their objectives, called for frozen funds to be returned, and urged Washington to reopen its embassy in Kabul, saying security at the site had been arranged. He did not say whether the proposal had been put to the White House directly.

The sums at stake are large and frequently misunderstood. Geological assessments conducted by the United States and the former Afghan government indicate untapped mineral reserves worth at least a trillion dollars — copper, iron ore, niobium, cobalt, gold, lithium and rare earth elements, alongside natural gas and crude oil. Afghanistan's central bank estimates that \$9.5 billion of its reserves remain outside the country, including roughly \$7 billion in the United States. In 2022 Washington transferred \$3.5 billion to a Switzerland-based Afghan Fund, now worth more than \$4 billion with accumulated interest, structured to support financial stability without benefiting the Taliban directly.

Two things are worth separating here: whether the offer will be accepted, and whether it could be delivered if it were.

On the first, the political obstacles are formidable. President Trump has shown little appetite for relations with the Taliban and has demanded the return of Bagram air base, which Muttaqi has rejected on the grounds that all military and civilian facilities are national assets. United Nations experts have warned that normalisation should not proceed without tangible progress on human rights, particularly for women and girls — and the restrictions imposed on Afghan women's education, employment and movement since 2021 are among the most severe anywhere in the world. Any American administration engaging commercially with Kabul would be doing so against that record.

But the second question is the one that determines whether any of this is real, and it receives far less attention.

The trillion-dollar figure is a resource estimate, not a reserve. It describes what geologists believe is in the ground. It says nothing about what can be extracted at a profit, which depends on infrastructure, security, law and access to markets — and Afghanistan is short of all four.

Consider what a large copper mine actually requires. Electricity at industrial scale, which Afghanistan does not generate. Rail capable of moving millions of tonnes of ore, which does not exist. Roads to the railhead. Water at volume. A port, which a landlocked country reaches only through a neighbour — in this case Pakistan or Iran, both of which introduce their own political risk. A mining code and a court system capable of enforcing a concession over the thirty-year horizon such investments require. Security across the extraction site, the transport corridor and the workforce, in a country where the Islamic State's regional affiliate remains active.

The demonstration case is already available. The Mes Aynak copper deposit, among the largest undeveloped copper resources in the world, was leased to a Chinese state consortium in 2007. Nearly two decades later it has produced essentially nothing, defeated by exactly these constraints under two different governments.

The realistic assessment is that Afghanistan's minerals are a long-term prospect requiring tens of billions in prior infrastructure investment, a stable legal framework, and a security environment that no party currently guarantees. What the offer actually seeks in the near term is not a mine. It is the sanctions relief and the frozen reserves, which would arrive as cash into an economy in genuine distress. For South Asian readers the regional dimension is the part to watch. India has cautiously expanded engagement with Kabul, driven by connectivity interests through Chabahar and by a longstanding concern not to cede Afghan influence entirely to Pakistan and China. Beijing has pursued Afghan mineral access for two decades with little to show. Pakistan controls the shortest route to a port and has its own difficult relationship with the Taliban government. Central Asian states are negotiating over transit and power. An American commercial presence in Afghan mining would rearrange all of those calculations. That is why the offer was made publicly, and why the more interesting question is not what Washington decides but who else is now obliged to respond.

Your Child's Passport Application May Soon Become a Review of You

(The South Asian Insider Weekly Investigations Desk)

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Draft State Department guidance would require every parent to document their own citizenship or immigration status before a child's passport is issued. For families on temporary visas, the implications are severe.

The State Department has drafted guidance that would require parents applying for a passport for their child to submit documentary proof of their own citizenship or immigration status, according to a Reuters report published on September 1 based on a review of the draft. It is the first detailed indication of how the department intends to implement the executive orders President Trump signed on August 6 targeting what the administration describes as birth tourism and expanding the historical exceptions to birthright citizenship.

The change from current practice is substantial and easy to underestimate. At present, a parent applying for a passport for a child born in the United States must establish parentage and present government-issued photo identification. Citizenship status is declared on the application form. Documentary proof of a parent's own immigration status is not generally required.

Under the draft, every parent or legal guardian would have to provide it. Citizen parents could submit a valid United States passport or a birth certificate. Non-citizen parents would submit immigration records — an I-94 arrival record, or a permanent resident card. The department's stated purpose is to determine whether the child falls within the scope of Executive Order 14418. A State Department spokesman, Tommy Pigott, said the administration would “protect the meaning and value of American citizenship, full stop”, and that this extends to passport adjudication.

The legal background is essential to reading this correctly. On June 30 the Supreme Court, by six votes to three, invalidated the administration's earlier attempt to deny automatic citizenship to children born in the United States to parents unlawfully or temporarily present. That was a decisive defeat. The August 6 orders and the draft passport guidance represent the administration proceeding by another route, and the constitutional question underlying them — the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment's citizenship clause — has not been resolved in the administration's favour by any court.

Which means what is being described here is a documentation requirement, applied at the point where a family seeks proof of a child's citizenship, built to implement an executive order whose legal foundation remains contested. For South Asian families in the United States, the exposure is direct and worth stating precisely. A very large number of children in this community were born in the United States to parents who were, at the time of birth, lawfully present on temporary visas — H-1B, L-1, F-1, J-1, H-4. Those parents are not unlawfully present. Many have been in the country for a decade or more, paying taxes, employed by American companies, waiting in employment-based green card backlogs that for Indian nationals now extend beyond any reasonable planning horizon. Under the proposal, each of them would need to document their status when applying for a passport for a child who was born on American soil.

The practical questions the draft raises have no published answers yet. What happens when a parent's status has changed since the child's birth — from student to worker, from temporary to permanent, or lapsed entirely? What happens to families who no longer hold the documents from a decade ago? What happens if a passport application is refused: is that a denial of a travel document, or an administrative determination that the child is not a citizen? And what is the position of a child whose passport was issued under the previous rules and now comes up for renewal?

That last question is the one families should watch most closely, because renewal is where an existing document meets a new standard.

There is also a second-order effect that this newspaper considers the more serious one. A passport is the document by which a citizen proves citizenship. If obtaining it requires a parent to submit to a review of their own status, then the child's citizenship is being treated as conditional on the parent's — which is precisely the proposition the Supreme Court rejected in June. Applied at scale, that converts a settled constitutional status into an administrative determination made at a counter.

This is draft guidance. It has not been implemented, it may change, and it will be litigated if it is issued — the Supreme Court's June judgment gives challengers a strong starting position, and the plaintiffs who won that case remain organised.

What families should do now is narrow and unglamorous. Locate and secure the documents establishing your own status at the time of each child's birth — the I-94 record, the visa stamp, the approval notice, the green card — and keep them together with the child's birth certificate. Anyone whose circumstances are complicated should take advice from an immigration attorney rather than from a community WhatsApp group, where this story is already circulating in versions considerably more alarming than the facts support. The facts are serious enough. A child born a citizen should not need their parent vetted to prove it.

A Guilty Plea in Prospect Park-and the Questions a Community Still Owes Itself

Anand Shah admitted converting gambling debts into campaign contributions. He is one of 42 people charged in an enterprise prosecutors tied to the Lucchese crime family.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Anand U. Shah, 44, a two-term councilman in the Borough of Prospect Park, New Jersey, pleaded guilty on August 28 to first-degree racketeering, first-degree money laundering and second-degree official misconduct. He entered the plea before Superior Court Judge Ralph E. Amirata in Morris County. Under the agreement, the state will recommend a ten-year prison sentence, of which Shah must serve at least 85 percent before he becomes eligible for parole. He resigned his council seat the same week and is permanently barred from holding public office in New Jersey. Sentencing is scheduled for December 4.

The admissions are specific, and they are worse than the headline suggests. Shah acknowledged working as a sportsbook agent with subagents beneath him, managing and hosting illegal poker games in Morris, Passaic and Bergen counties, and collecting a share of each pot. Investigators attributed $900,084 in criminal proceeds to him between January 2017 and August 2023. He further admitted directing portions of that money into his campaign for the borough council — and, in a detail that deserves to be read twice, converting private gambling debts into political donations. People who owed him money were told to contribute to his campaign, and their debts were forgiven in exchange.

That is not a technical violation of campaign finance rules. It is the purchase of a public office with the proceeds of a criminal enterprise, financed by the leverage its operator held over his own neighbours.

Shah's case sits inside a much larger file. He is one of 42 people indicted since the first arrests in April 2025, following a two-year investigation by the Division of Criminal Justice and the New Jersey State Police into illegal gambling, loansharking, extortion and money laundering run by a New Jersey faction of the Lucchese crime family. Investigators identified roughly $4.79 million in suspected criminal proceeds moved through shell corporations and functioning businesses. By the end of August, the great majority of those charged had pleaded guilty.

Announcing the plea, Attorney General Jennifer Davenport said that "public officials have a special duty to ensure that they follow the law", adding that Shah had not merely broken it but had used the proceeds to fund his campaign. The Division of Criminal Justice framed the case as evidence that traditional organised crime continues to operate through backroom and online gambling despite the spread of legal alternatives. Prospect Park's mayor, Mohamed Khairullah, called it a difficult week for the borough and said the town was larger than any individual.

For readers of this paper, the harder question is not what the state proved. It is what the community failed to ask. Shah ran twice and won twice. He was a familiar local businessman in a small, densely settled borough. The money moving through his campaign was not invisible; it was simply unexamined, because nobody with standing in the community had any incentive to examine it. This is the recurring structural weakness of immigrant-origin political networks everywhere — in New Jersey, in Leicester, in Brampton, in Sydney's western suburbs. Candidates are vetted by proximity rather than by scrutiny. Endorsements travel through temples, gurdwaras, mosques, business associations and language-media outlets that are themselves financially entangled with the candidate. Local newspapers that might otherwise ask where the money came from are often carrying the candidate's advertisement on page three. None of that is criminal. All of it is the environment in which a scheme like this survives for six years. The corrective is unglamorous and entirely available: community organisations that publish their donor lists, endorsement processes that require a candidate to answer questions on the record, and outlets willing to lose an advertiser. Prospect Park will fill the seat. Whether anything else changes is a separate matter.

The Caregiving Squeeze Arrives

The first large cohort of South Asian migrants to the West is now in its seventies and eighties. Their children are discovering what the family model does not cover.

(Our Staff Reporter)- The migration waves that reshaped South Asian communities abroad — Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, North America after 1965 and again in the 1990s, the Gulf continuously — are now producing their arithmetic consequence. The people who arrived young are old. Their children, most of them in their forties and fifties, are absorbing the care.

The expectation, in nearly every family, is that this happens at home. Institutional care is understood as abandonment. Parents were cared for in the family home in Ludhiana or Chennai or Sylhet, often by an extended household of siblings, in-laws and neighbours, and the assumption travels intact even when none of the supporting conditions do.

What has not travelled is the household. The second generation typically has one or two children, two working parents, and siblings scattered across three cities or three countries. The care that once distributed across a dozen adults now falls, in practice, on one — usually a daughter or daughter-in-law, frequently while she is still raising children of her own and holding a full-time job. That is the squeeze, and it is arriving in tens of thousands of households at once.

The costs show up in predictable places. Careers stall, disproportionately for women. Retirement savings are diverted. The caregiver's own health deteriorates. And because seeking outside help is read as failure, families reach the point of crisis before they reach the point of asking.

There are practical obstacles too, and they are not imaginary. Residential care in most Western countries is expensive, and much of it is poorly equipped for elderly South Asians — no familiar food, no shared language, no accommodation of religious practice, staff who cannot communicate with a resident whose English has receded with dementia. For a family, placing a parent into that environment genuinely is a form of harm, and the reluctance is rational.

But the alternative being defended is often not the traditional model at all. It is one exhausted adult doing the work of a village, indefinitely, without training or relief. There is middle ground that most families never explore, largely because nobody in the community talks about it. Adult day programmes with culturally appropriate food and language exist in several major diaspora cities and are chronically under-used. Respite care allows a primary caregiver to take a week without dismantling anything. Home care agencies staffed by workers from the same background are increasingly available. Some communities have begun building their own facilities, which is expensive but proven.

What is missing is not the option. It is permission. As long as a family that uses day care is understood to have failed its parents, the only families using it will be the ones already past crisis. The generation that made the journey deserves better than a caregiver too depleted to be present. So does the generation providing the care.

Hindu American Advisory Board of Suffolk County Recognized for Cultural Leadership and Community Service

(Our Staff Reporter)- Suffolk County, NY – The Hindu American Advisory Board of Suffolk County (HAB SC) proudly announces its continued growth, expanding community impact, and recent recognition by **County Executive Edward Romaine** in honor of **India's 80th Independence Day**. The ceremony, held at the County Executive's office, celebrated the cultural contributions, civic engagement, and public service of the Hindu American community across Suffolk County.

Establishment and Mission

The Hindu American Advisory Board was officially **established and elected on September 21, 2023**, by **County Executive Steve Bellone**, marking a historic milestone for Hindu American representation in Suffolk County. Since its formation, the Board has been dedicated to celebrating Indian heritage, promoting Hindu values, and strengthening multicultural harmony through civic participation, cultural programming, and educational outreach.

The Board's mission includes promoting awareness of Hindu philosophy and festivals, showcasing Indian arts and traditions, encouraging interfaith dialogue and fostering unity across Suffolk County's diverse communities. **Major Community Events and Public Engagement**

Since its inception, HAB SC has organized multiple **free, public events** that have brought together thousands of residents, families, youth, seniors, and community leaders.

Summer Picnics – 2024, 2025 & 2026

The Board hosted **free community picnics** in **July 2024** and **July 2025**, offering food, games, cultural activities, and family entertainment at no cost to the public.

The **2025 picnic**, held on **July 19**, featured **free lunch, gifts, games**, and community activities. It drew **over 300 Suffolk County residents** and was honored by the presence of **County Comptroller Kennedy** and other officials. In **July 2026**, HAB SC continued this tradition with another successful **free community picnic**, further strengthening unity and engagement among Suffolk County residents.

Garba Celebrations – 2024, 2025 & Upcoming 2026

The Board's Garba celebrations have become one of Suffolk County's most anticipated cultural events.

· **Garba 2024** and **Garba 2025** each welcomed **more than 500 attendees**, held at the **beautiful Suffolk County Community College auditorium**.

· Both events offered **free entrance and free snacks**, making them accessible to all and showcasing vibrant Indian dance, music, and cultural unity.

Looking ahead, **Garba 2026** is scheduled for **October 23, 2026**, with an **expected attendance of over 1,000 people**. This upcoming celebration is poised to be the Board's largest cultural event to date.

County Executive Recognition – 2026

The Board's achievements were formally recognized by **County Executive Edward Romaine** during a ceremony honoring India's 80th Independence Day. The event highlighted the Board's contributions to cultural enrichment, civic engagement, and community service.

This meaningful ceremony was organized and led by **Chairperson Gobind Bathija**, whose leadership, dedication, and personal commitment have been central to the Board's growth and impact. His efforts continue to elevate the Board's presence and strengthen its mission throughout Suffolk County.

Board Membership and Appreciation During the recognition ceremony, HAB SC welcomed three new members: **Unati Shah, Jyoti Kothapali, and Archana**, whose enthusiasm and service will further enhance the Board's outreach and programming.

The Board also extends heartfelt appreciation to its dedicated members: **Nayan Rawal, Kiran Reddy, Namrata Pahuja, Beena Khotari, Apurva Khatri, and Shree Veer Mukhi**, each of whom has played an important role in advancing the Board's initiatives.

Looking Ahead

This recognition stands as a proud milestone for the Hindu American community in Suffolk County. It reflects a shared commitment to cultural harmony, civic involvement, and strengthening the county's diverse social fabric.

The Hindu American Advisory Board looks forward to continuing its work with unity, purpose, and dedication—celebrating heritage, promoting understanding, and serving the community with pride.

Goodwill Is Not a Crisis Service

Community-run helplines are proliferating across the diaspora. Most are staffed by untrained volunteers with no supervision, no protocol and no insurance.

(Our Staff Reporter)- A pattern repeats across diaspora communities. A tragedy occurs — a suicide, a death in a domestic violence case, a family destroyed by debt. The community is shaken. Within weeks somebody announces a helpline: a number, a WhatsApp group, a roster of volunteers, a launch event with photographs. The impulse is decent and the need is real. The execution is frequently dangerous.

Consider what a helpline actually is. It is a service that receives people at the worst moment of their lives and makes decisions that affect whether they survive it. Professional crisis lines are staffed by people trained over weeks, supervised in real time, working to written protocols for risk assessment and escalation, with a defined relationship to emergency services and clinical backup. Volunteers are debriefed after difficult calls because absorbing them without support causes measurable harm to the volunteer.

Community helplines usually have none of this. The volunteers are respected community members with no clinical training. There is no supervision, because there is no supervisor. There is no protocol, so each volunteer improvises according to temperament — which in these communities often means advising reconciliation, discouraging police involvement, and keeping the matter inside the family. There is no escalation pathway, so a caller disclosing an immediate risk reaches someone with no idea what to do next. There is no confidentiality policy, and in a community where everyone is two introductions apart, that is not a technicality. And there is no insurance, which means the organisation and often the individual volunteer are personally exposed if something goes wrong.

The failure mode is not that the helpline does nothing. It is that it occupies the space a functioning service would otherwise fill. A woman who calls the community number, receives advice to be patient with her husband, and is told that involving the authorities would shame her family, has now had her one attempt at seeking help — and has learned that seeking help does not work.

The alternative is not to abandon the effort. It is to change what the effort is for. The highest-value thing a community organisation can build is not a counselling service; it is a competent referral function. That means knowing which local services exist, which of them have interpreters, which are free, which will and will not involve immigration authorities, and what the actual intake process looks like. It means one or two people who have visited those services and can walk someone through the door rather than handing over a phone number. That is a genuinely useful role, it is achievable by volunteers, and it does not require anyone to make clinical judgements they are not qualified to make. Where a community wants to go further, the route is professionalisation: partnership with an existing crisis organisation, formal training, supervision, insurance, and a written protocol. Several diaspora organisations have done exactly this and are now credible providers.

Funded for Weddings, Unprepared for Emergencies

Temples, gurdwaras, mosques and churches are the diaspora's most capitalised institutions. Almost none of them are structured to respond to a crisis.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Ask where the money is in any established diaspora community and the answer is the same on every continent: it is in the buildings. Congregations that arrived with nothing have, within two generations, raised eight and nine figures for land, construction, kitchens, halls and parking. These are the wealthiest institutions most South Asian communities abroad have ever built.

They are also, in most cases, structurally incapable of handling an emergency.

The mismatch is worth stating plainly. A large gurdwara or temple can feed a thousand people at a few hours' notice, host a wedding for six hundred, and mobilise volunteers for a fundraising drive with a single announcement. Ask the same institution to respond to a domestic violence disclosure, a suicide attempt, an immigration raid on a member's business, or a suspicious death in the congregation, and the machinery that works so well for catering has nothing to offer. There is no protocol, no trained point of contact, no relationship with local services, and frequently no one on the management committee who would know whom to call.

This is not a criticism of faith. It is a criticism of governance. Committees are typically elected on the strength of donations and community standing, and their agendas are dominated by construction, festivals and internal politics. Crisis response is nobody's portfolio because it is nobody's route to influence.

What that produces is a predictable failure pattern. Families in trouble go to the institution because it is the only community body they trust. The institution, having no protocol, improvises — usually through a well-meaning elder who mediates privately, keeps the matter quiet to protect the family's standing, and discourages any involvement of outside authorities. In the best case this is inadequate. In the worst it is actively harmful, because the same instinct that protects a family's reputation also protects the person causing the harm. Institutions elsewhere have solved this without much difficulty. Some large mosques in Britain and Canada now retain trained safeguarding officers, publish the referral pathway, and keep a standing relationship with local police liaison and domestic violence services. Several North American gurdwaras have adopted written child protection policies. The Catholic Church, whatever else is true of its record, was forced into safeguarding structures that are now professionally staffed and externally audited.

The template is available. It requires three things that cost very little: a named person with a defined responsibility, written procedures that do not depend on who happens to be on the committee this year, and a standing relationship with the local services that actually have statutory powers. The objection usually raised is that these matters are private and best handled within the family. That has been the position for decades, and its results are visible in every community that has since had to explain a preventable death. An institution capable of raising twelve million dollars for a building can afford a safeguarding policy. What it has generally lacked is anyone willing to put it on the agenda.

Lost in the Interpreter: Language Access Failures in Courts and Hospitals

Statutory rights to interpretation exist in most Western countries. What exists in practice is a relative, a phone line, or nothing.

(Our Staff Reporter)- On paper, the position is strong. Most Western jurisdictions guarantee interpretation in criminal proceedings and, to varying degrees, in healthcare, immigration and welfare settings. Courts are generally obliged to provide it. Hospitals receiving public funds usually are too. The right is not seriously contested.

The delivery is a different matter, and the gap between the two falls hardest on exactly the people the guarantee was written for. The recurring failures are consistent across countries. Interpreters are booked for the wrong language — Punjabi for a Sylheti speaker, Hindi for a Tamil speaker, Urdu for a Pashto speaker — on the assumption that regional proximity implies mutual intelligibility. Quality varies enormously, because in many systems the qualification requirements for community-language interpreters are thin and the pay is low enough to deter serious practitioners. Telephone interpretation, which is cheap and now dominant in healthcare, strips out everything conveyed visually and performs badly in emotionally charged consultations. And in the most common failure of all, no interpreter is booked and a family member is used instead. That last practice deserves particular attention, because it is widespread, it is convenient, and it is unsafe. A child interpreting a cancer diagnosis for a parent is a documented harm. A husband interpreting for a wife in a consultation about injuries is a safeguarding failure with an obvious mechanism. A relative interpreting in an immigration interview may have interests directly opposed to the applicant's. Professional standards prohibit all of it. It happens daily. The consequences are not evenly distributed. In healthcare, poor interpretation produces missed diagnoses, medication errors, and consent that is not informed in any meaningful sense. In courts, it produces defendants who cannot follow the case against them and witnesses whose evidence is degraded in transmission — grounds for appeal in principle, and rarely raised in practice because the person affected is the last to know it went wrong. In welfare and immigration systems it produces refused claims that were never properly heard. There is also a quieter cost: people stop attending. A patient who has twice sat through consultations she could not follow will manage her condition at home. That decision looks, in the data, like non-compliance. The fixes are known and mostly a matter of procurement and enforcement. Book by specific language and dialect rather than by region. Pay enough to retain qualified interpreters and require a real qualification.

Use video rather than telephone where in-person is impractical. Record in the file whether an interpreter was offered, provided and used, so the failure is visible to someone. Enforce the prohibition on family members with actual consequences. For diaspora organisations, there is a role that requires no funding at all: telling people the right exists. A large proportion of those affected do not know they are entitled to an interpreter, do not know they can refuse a bad one, and do not know they can object to a relative being used. A right nobody has been told about is not much of a right.

Whose Money Is It? Diaspora Fundraising and the Disclosure Gap

(Our Staff Reporter)- South Asian communities abroad have become significant political donors. The reporting rules that govern that money vary wildly, and the community's own scrutiny barely exists.

Political money moving through diaspora communities has grown from a curiosity into a category. Candidates in Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia and East Africa now court South Asian donor networks with dedicated fundraising operations. Diaspora giving shapes selection contests, municipal races and, in tight constituencies, national outcomes.

The legal frameworks governing that money are neither uniform nor especially demanding. Some jurisdictions require itemised disclosure of donors above a modest threshold and publish the data promptly. Others require disclosure only after the election, in formats that make analysis difficult. Rules on foreign-source contributions differ sharply between countries, and in several the treatment of money routed through domestic entities with overseas parentage is unresolved. Community organisations that endorse candidates are frequently registered as charities, which in most jurisdictions restricts partisan activity — a restriction observed with varying enthusiasm.

But the legal frameworks are the smaller half of the problem. The larger half is that within these communities, almost nobody looks.

Consider how endorsements actually travel. A candidate appears at a religious institution, at a business association dinner, at a language-media studio. The institution's leadership signals approval. Members give. The money is aggregated quickly, often through a handful of well-connected intermediaries, and the candidate's campaign reports a healthy quarter. At no point in that sequence does anyone independent ask what the intermediaries do for a living, what business they have before the office the candidate is seeking, or what they expect in return.

The Prospect Park case reported elsewhere in this issue is an extreme illustration — a councilman who admitted converting gambling debts into campaign contributions — but the underlying vulnerability is ordinary. Where donations are gathered by trusted brokers rather than given directly, and where the community press depends on candidate advertising, the ordinary checks simply do not operate.

There is a version of this problem that becomes a bigoted story about foreign influence, and it is worth being clear that this is not that. Diaspora political participation is legitimate, valuable and long overdue in most of these countries. The point is the opposite: communities that have fought for a seat at the table have a direct interest in that seat not being purchased on their behalf by people whose interests are their own.

The remedies are modest. Community organisations that endorse candidates could publish their own funding sources. Associations could adopt a rule that no officer solicits political donations while holding office in the association. Diaspora outlets could commit to reporting on candidates they also carry advertising for, or declining the advertising. Where public disclosure data exists, someone in the community should be reading it — which, at present, is very rarely the case.

None of this requires new legislation. It requires an appetite for asking uncomfortable questions of people who are, in most of these communities, also one's neighbours. That is precisely why it does not happen, and precisely why it should.

The Day After Onam: Two Malayali Women Killed in California, a Friend in Custody

(Our Staff Reporter)- Anjana Hari, 35, and Ann Mary Mathew, 40, died minutes apart in Milpitas. A third woman from the same apartment complex has been arrested. No motive has been established.

On the afternoon of August 28, police in Milpitas, California, responded to a report of a hit-and-run collision in the parking area of the Mill Creek Apartments on Dixon Landing Road. They found a woman gravely injured. Witnesses described a blue SUV leaving the scene. The woman was Anjana Hari, 35, a school teacher originally from Mudikkode, near Mannuthy in Thrissur district, who had moved to the United States with her family in 2021.

Within minutes, and a short distance away, a second woman was dead. Ann Mary Mathew, 40, of Kesavadasapuram in Thiruvananthapuram, was found with stab wounds inside an apartment. Her husband, Jacob, discovered her after being told that Anjana had been struck by a car.

A third woman from the same complex — Anila, 32, a native of Kottayam district — has been arrested by the Milpitas Police Department in connection with both deaths. She has not been convicted of anything. The sequence of events, the relationship between the two killings, and any motive remain under investigation, and police have released little beyond the basic facts.

What is not in dispute is that the three women were close friends. Their families in Kerala say all three had celebrated Onam together the previous day and had gone to a film. All three lived in the same complex with their husbands and children. Anjana is survived by her husband Vijeesh, a software engineer, and their six-year-old daughter. Ann Mary, who worked as a computer teacher, had travelled to Kerala in June for her father's seventieth birthday; she leaves two daughters. Relatives interviewed in Kerala have said repeatedly that they cannot account for what happened — that even the husbands do not know.

Union Minister Suresh Gopi has said steps are being taken to repatriate the bodies. Kerala's chief minister has spoken to both families.

There is a version of this story that reaches for a theme, and this newspaper is going to decline it. Two women are dead and a third is in custody, and every explanation currently circulating — in WhatsApp groups, in comment sections, in the more excitable stretches of the Malayalam press — is speculation dressed as insight. The families deserve better than to read invented motives attributed to unnamed sources. The accused is entitled to a trial. Anyone reporting this story has an obligation to say what is known, which is not much, and to stop there.

What can be said responsibly is narrower and still worth saying. Communities of recent migrants abroad are built on exactly the kind of relationship these three women had: neighbours from home, in the same building, holding one another's spare keys, sharing festivals in the absence of extended family. That density is a genuine strength. It is also, for people far from any other support, the entirety of the network — there is often no wider circle to notice when something inside it goes badly wrong.

That is not an explanation for what happened in Milpitas. It is an argument for the thing this community consistently under-resources: accessible mental health care in the languages people actually think in, and a habit of treating it as ordinary. Kerala will bury two of its daughters this month. The least the diaspora can do is refuse to turn them into a lesson before the facts are in.

The Nurses and Teachers Nobody Checks On

Kerala's education and healthcare workers staff hospitals and schools on four continents. The recruitment pipeline is sophisticated. The support structure at the other end is not.

(Our Staff Reporter)-
There is no country in the developed world whose health system does not now depend, somewhere in its staffing tables, on nurses trained in South Asia. The Gulf states built their hospitals on them. Britain's National Health Service recruits them by the thousand. Ireland, Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States all run active pipelines. Kerala alone has exported nursing labour for six decades, long enough that the profession has shaped the state's household economics, its marriage market and its migration patterns. The recruitment machinery is highly developed. Agencies handle credentialing, language testing, visa filing, airport pickup and the first month's accommodation. What almost none of them handle is the second year. That is where the structural problem sits. A migrant health worker arrives into a system engineered to place her efficiently and then to leave her alone. She works shifts that make community participation difficult. Her professional licence is often tied to a single employer, which raises the cost of complaining about anything — a rota, a manager, a colleague, a landlord. Her family is eight time zones away and hears from her when she is composed enough to call. Her friendships are frequently with three or four other women in the same situation, which means her entire support network shares her vulnerabilities rather than offsetting them. None of this is exotic or new. It is the standard profile of the internationally recruited care worker, and it is documented in every jurisdiction that recruits at scale. What varies is whether anybody does anything about it.
A few places have tried. Some British trusts assign pastoral leads to internationally recruited staff for the first two years rather than the first two months. Some Irish hospitals fund community liaison posts staffed by people from the same countries as the recruits. The Philippines, which exports care labour more systematically than any other nation, maintains welfare officers attached to its missions with a specific brief to intervene in employment and personal crises. These are cheap interventions relative to the cost of recruitment, and they work.
India's arrangements are thinner. Consular welfare capacity is stretched, concentrated in the Gulf where the abuses have historically been most visible, and largely reactive. In the West, the assumption is that a professional on a skilled visa does not need welfare support — an assumption that confuses income with security.
The diaspora's own institutions could close part of that gap and mostly do not. Malayali associations, nurses' guilds, church and temple networks and alumni groups exist in almost every city where recruitment lands. They organise festivals capably. They rarely maintain a simple register of who arrived this year, where they are working, and whether anyone has spoken to them recently. That register is not a solution to anything dramatic. It is the difference between a person having one bad month and a person having one bad month unobserved. For a community that measures its success abroad in professional placements, keeping track of the people placed is not a heavy lift.

What the Domestic Violence Numbers Do Not Show

(Our Staff Reporter)- Reported rates in South Asian households abroad often look unremarkable. Practitioners in every major diaspora city say the reporting itself is the problem.
Official statistics on domestic violence in South Asian communities abroad are, depending on the jurisdiction, either unremarkable or unavailable. Neither should be reassuring. Both are functions of who reports, and the barriers to reporting in these households are specific, well documented, and largely unaddressed.
Start with immigration status, which is the most powerful of them. Where a spouse's right to remain in the country is tied to the marriage or to the partner's visa, reporting abuse carries a plausible risk of deportation. Abusers know this and say it out loud. Most countries maintain some form of protective provision for victims in this position, but the provisions are technical, poorly publicised, and frequently unknown to the frontline officer who takes the call. A woman weighing whether to report is weighing a certain risk against a legal remedy she has never heard of.
Then there is the extended-family dimension, which mainstream services are consistently slow to grasp. Abuse in these households is often not confined to a partner. It can involve in-laws, be organised around dowry demands, and be enforced collectively. A safety plan built on separating two people can leave the actual structure of coercion untouched.
Add the practical layers. Financial control, where one spouse holds all accounts and documents. Isolation, where the victim's entire social network consists of the abuser's relatives and their friends. Language, where the only available interpreter is a family member. Community standing, where leaving is understood to damage not only the woman but her parents, her siblings and her children's marriage prospects. And the near-certainty that a disclosure to any community figure will be relayed to the family within days.
Against that, the two most common institutional responses are inadequate. Mainstream services frequently lack interpreters, cultural competence and any understanding of in-law dynamics. Community mediation, offered by a respected elder, prioritises the marriage over the safety of the person in it, and its usual outcome is a promise of better behaviour and a woman returned to the same house.
What works is documented and unevenly implemented. Specialist services staffed by women from the same communities, operating independently of community leadership. Trained interpreters, never relatives. Refuges that can accommodate dietary and religious needs, so leaving does not mean losing everything at once. Clear, actively publicised information about the immigration protections that exist. Frontline police and health staff trained to recognise coercion organised through an extended household rather than only through a partner.
And, from institutions, a decision that most have not made: that when a disclosure reaches them, the response is a referral to a specialist service, not a mediation. The under-reporting is not evidence that these households are safer. It is evidence that the cost of speaking has been set higher than the cost of staying. Lowering that cost is the entire task, and it is not primarily a policing problem. It is an institutional one.

The Association Problem: When Trust Becomes the Attack Surface

Business associations are how diaspora entrepreneurs find suppliers, staff and capital. They are also, increasingly, how fraud finds its victims.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Every substantial diaspora business community has its associations — chambers of commerce, trade bodies, professional networks, regional and caste and language groupings that overlap and compete. They exist because the mainstream commercial infrastructure was, for a long time, closed. Banks would not lend, landlords would not rent, and suppliers would not extend credit. The associations substituted trust for paperwork, and for two generations that substitution built enormous value.

The same mechanism is now the community's principal fraud vulnerability.

Affinity fraud — schemes that exploit membership of a shared group — is among the most persistent categories of financial crime, and it works because it inverts the normal burden of proof. A stranger offering an investment must demonstrate credibility. A co-religionist introduced by a respected association member arrives with credibility already granted, and asking for documentation feels like an insult to the person who made the introduction. That inversion is the entire mechanism, and it is why these schemes routinely run for years.

The forms are familiar to anyone who reads court filings. Property investment funds promising returns that no legitimate vehicle produces. Pandemic-era relief and lending programmes exploited at scale through networks of connected businesses. Payroll and tax schemes marketed as clever rather than criminal. Insurance and licensing intermediaries who collect premiums for policies that do not exist. Immigration-adjacent advisory services sold by people with no standing to give the advice.

The victims are rarely naive. They are usually well-informed people who applied ordinary commercial caution to everything except the thing recommended by someone they knew.

Associations are structurally poor at policing this, and it is worth being honest about why. Membership fees fund the organisation. Prominent members underwrite the annual dinner. Raising concerns about a member means confronting someone who may sit on the board, sponsor the newsletter, or hold considerable standing in the wider community. The path of least resistance is to say nothing, and it is usually taken. What would help is not complicated. Associations could stop allowing members to use the organisation's name in solicitation materials without a written agreement. They could decline to host investment presentations to members. They could publish the regulatory registration numbers of any member offering financial, insurance, legal or immigration services, and make it routine to check them — a search that takes under a minute in most jurisdictions. They could establish that a member subject to regulatory action is suspended pending resolution, rather than quietly retained. And members could adopt one habit that costs nothing: treating an introduction as an introduction, not as due diligence. The person who vouched for the opportunity is, in almost every documented case, another victim rather than a conspirator.

The Deal Nobody Has Read

Sixty-five billion barrels, twenty-five years, and not one page of published text.

The White House announced over the weekend what the President called the largest oil deal in the history of the world. A new venture will take the rights to seventeen Venezuelan oil fields for at least twenty-five years — some sixty-five billion barrels of proven reserves. The United States takes a fifty-five percent stake, including the right to buy at cost. Republicans in Congress applauded it as a strategic win, arguing that barrels once destined for Beijing, moving on Russian hulls, will now flow west instead.

That may all be true. We have no way of knowing, because no text of the agreement has been released.

That single fact should trouble anyone who cares about how the modern state does business, regardless of what they think of the deal's merits. An arrangement of this scale and duration is not a purchase order. It is a quarter-century commitment involving a foreign government's principal national asset, a sovereign revenue stream, a security guarantee implied if not written, and an American equity position that ties Washington's fortunes to Caracas until the middle of the century. In an earlier constitutional era, an instrument of that weight would have been negotiated as a treaty, debated in the open, and ratified by the Senate. It is now announced on a weekend and defended on Sunday programs.

The pattern is not confined to Washington, which is precisely why it deserves comment beyond it. Across the world, the resource agreement has become the preferred vehicle for statecraft that governments would rather not submit to legislatures. China's long-term extraction and infrastructure contracts across Africa and Central Asia are famously unpublished, their collateral clauses discovered years later by researchers combing loan registries. Gulf sovereign funds sign minerals memoranda with governments that never table them in parliament. India's own strategic petroleum arrangements and its overseas equity oil ventures are disclosed in fragments, at ministerial discretion. The Venezuela deal is not an American aberration. It is an American instance of a global habit: the migration of the most consequential decisions out of the ratifiable and into the announceable.

The costs of that migration are not abstract. Contracts nobody can read cannot be priced by markets, audited by legislatures, or challenged in courts. They cannot be enforced by the weaker party with any confidence, which is why the citizens of resource-rich countries so often discover, a decade later, that the terms were worse than they were told. Venezuelans have lived that story before, under governments of every ideological description.

If this venture is genuinely favorable to both sides — and it may well be — publication is the cheapest possible way to prove it.

There is also the small matter of the claim being made for it at home. The deal was sold, in part, as relief at the pump. Yet the American Automobile Association confirms that the national average price of gasoline stayed above four dollars a gallon through all of August, the first time that has happened for a full month. Crude is a global commodity; a stake in Venezuelan fields does not create a domestic discount, and the refining capacity configured for heavy sour crude is not idle waiting to be filled. Fields that have gone years without capital investment do not return to volume on the timeline of a political news cycle. Whatever the strategic case, the price argument is the weakest limb of it, and offering it invites the disappointment that will follow.

The stronger case — that Western Hemisphere supply is more secure than supply routed through contested straits and sanctioned shipping — is a serious one. It deserves to be argued on its own terms, in front of a legislature, with the document on the table. It is not served by secrecy, and secrecy is what will define this agreement in the public mind until it ends.

There is a further point that publications serving diaspora communities have particular reason to press. Energy deals of this kind reshape migration, remittances, and currency stability in the countries they touch. Venezuela's collapse displaced roughly eight million people across South America and beyond, one of the largest displacements in the modern world, and the recovery or further deterioration of its oil economy will determine whether that outflow reverses or resumes. Families in Bogotá, Lima, Santiago and Madrid have a direct stake in the fine print. So do the governments now hosting them. None of them will be shown it. We do not argue here that the agreement is bad. We argue that nobody outside a very small room is currently in a position to say. Congress should demand the text, and should attach the demand to something the administration wants. Caracas should publish its own copy; a government confident it has struck a fair bargain loses nothing by proving it. And the wider world should take note of what is being normalized. A deal that cannot be read is a deal that cannot be defended, and eventually, one that cannot be honored.

A War Without a Name

Six months of strikes in the Strait of Hormuz, and still no declaration, no debate, no end state.

American forces struck Iranian military targets in the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday, the first known U.S. attack on Iran since late July. Iran retaliated against American military positions in the region. Both governments continue to insist that they, and not the other, control the strait. Friday marked six months since the United States and Israel opened the joint operation that began this sequence, an action the President justified at the time as the elimination of imminent threats from Iran's nuclear program.

Six months is long enough to stop calling this an incident. It is a war. It has simply not been given the name, and the absence of the name has done real work: it has kept the conflict out of the chamber where wars are supposed to be authorized, out of the budget line where their costs are supposed to be counted, and out of the sustained public argument that eventually forces governments to define what winning would look like.

Sunny Sharanjit Thind

Ask that question plainly and the silence is instructive. What is the objective? If it is the destruction of Iran's nuclear capability, six months of strikes have not produced a verification regime, an inspection agreement, or a negotiated ceiling — and the intelligence assessments that would tell the public whether the program has been set back by years or by months remain classified and contested. If the objective is freedom of navigation, the strait has been intermittently unusable for two seasons, insurance rates for hulls transiting it have made the route a luxury, and the shipping lines have rerouted where rerouting is possible. If the objective is regime change, no one will say so, because saying so would require a debate about the two decades of evidence on how that ends.

The world outside the two combatants has been reduced to spectator and casualty. Roughly a fifth of the world's traded oil and a comparable share of liquefied natural gas move through that channel. The countries most exposed are not the ones firing. India, which draws a substantial share of its crude through the Gulf; Japan and South Korea, whose energy security depends almost entirely on the passage; the East African and South Asian economies that import refined product at margins that vanish when freight costs double. None of them has a vote in when the next strike happens. All of them will pay for it in fuel subsidies, fiscal deficits and food prices, because diesel prices are transport prices and transport prices are the price of everything.

And then there are the people who actually crew the ships. The merchant marine that keeps the strait working is drawn overwhelmingly from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Ukraine. They are the ones sailing through a contested waterway between two nuclear-armed-or-nuclear-adjacent adversaries, on vessels flying flags of convenience, insured by syndicates that have quietly begun to exclude the risk. When a tanker is hit, the casualty list will be a list of migrant workers from countries with no seat at any negotiation.

(Contd on page 16)

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By TSAI Editorial Board

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

Eighty Years, Nine Men

The race to lead the United Nations is the most consequential election almost nobody is voting in.

On the eighth of September the eighty-first session of the General Assembly opens in New York, presided over by Khalilur Rahman of Bangladesh, under the theme of restoring trust and managing transformation. Before the session ends, the same body is expected to appoint the tenth Secretary-General of the United Nations. António Guterres leaves office on the thirty-first of December. Eight candidates remain in the field. Not one of the nine people who will have held the post since 1945 has been a woman.

The candidates are drawn entirely from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, in keeping with the informal rotation that has governed the office since the 1950s. Michelle Bachelet of Chile, twice her country's president and formerly the UN's human rights chief. Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica, who led the first straw poll. María Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador, a former president of this very Assembly. Rafael Grossi of Argentina, whose tenure at the atomic energy agency has placed him at the center of the Iran file. Macky Sall of Senegal. Olara Otunnu of Uganda, who posted the second-largest gain in the August poll. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett of Guyana. Ivonne A-Baki of Ecuador, a late entrant with unusually warm ties in Washington.

The process has been better than its predecessors, and that deserves acknowledgment. Until 2015 the selection was conducted almost entirely inside the Security Council, through opaque straw polls and veto bargaining that the wider membership learned about after the fact. Reform opened it: public vision statements, televised dialogues with member states and civil society, a formal role for the President of the General Assembly. A further resolution adopted last year tightened the ethics requirements and pushed candidates to disclose campaign financing. This July, the candidates faced a town hall in the General Assembly Hall itself. Two rounds of straw polls have already been held, in July and August.

And yet the arithmetic at the end remains unchanged. Nine votes in the Security Council and the assent of five permanent members. The Assembly's role is to confirm what fifteen states, and in practice five, have decided. Transparency has been added to the front of the process without being added to the point where it binds. A candidate can win the public argument comprehensively and still be extinguished in a closed room by a single hand, with no reason given and no record kept. This matters more than it did a decade ago, because the organization the winner inherits is in worse condition than the one Guterres took over. Its finances are strained by arrears and by the withdrawal or reduction of major contributions. Its peacekeeping footprint has contracted. Its authority has been visibly ignored in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Sudan and now in the Gulf, where a shooting conflict between a permanent member and a member state has run for six months without the Council producing a binding word. The reflexive response in wealthy capitals is that this proves the institution is obsolete. The response from most of the world's population is different, and truer: the states that most need a functioning multilateral order are the ones least able to build a substitute for it. That is the diaspora's stake, and it is not sentimental. It is the agency that certifies refugee status. It is the body that runs the vaccine procurement pool, the food pipeline into famine zones, the maritime and aviation rulebooks that make migration and remittance and trade possible for countries without navies. When multilateral machinery fails, the failure is not distributed evenly. It lands on the Nepali worker in a Gulf labor camp, the Rohingya family in a Cox's Bazar shelter, the Sudanese household waiting on a convoy that the parties have agreed to let through and then not let through. Three things should be asked of the fifteen states now deliberating. First, that the Council publish the results of its straw polls rather than allowing them to leak selectively — the membership funding this organization is entitled to know how its candidates fared. Second, that any permanent member exercising a veto in this selection state its reason in writing. A veto is a legitimate power; anonymity is not part of it. Third, that the Assembly use the leverage it actually possesses. It appoints. It can, if it chooses, decline to appoint on the terms offered, and it can set conditions on the appointment regarding reform, budget discipline and the independence of the office. None of this will happen if the membership treats the selection as a spectator sport with a foregone conclusion. Eighty years in, with the world's institutions under more strain than at any point since they were built, the question of who leads them and how that person is chosen is not a procedural footnote. It is the test itself.

TSAI Editorial Board

A War Without a Name

Their governments should be demanding one now, loudly, through the International Maritime Organization and the United Nations alike, rather than issuing condolences later. There is a serious argument for the American position, and it should be stated fairly. A state that has enriched uranium to levels with no civilian justification, that has armed proxies across four countries, and that has threatened to close an international waterway is not a status quo actor, and the case that deterrence failed under earlier restraint is not frivolous. But that argument justifies a strategy. It does not justify the absence of one. Attrition without an articulated end state is not deterrence; it is a habit, and habits of this kind have a way of continuing until an accident makes them a catastrophe.

What should happen now is not complicated, only unwelcome. The American Congress should compel a vote on authorization, which is its constitutional job and which it has been avoiding for a quarter-century across administrations of both parties. The Security Council, whatever its paralysis, should be forced onto the record — the states that use the strait have every right to demand a session and a resolution, and to make their abstentions and vetoes visible. And the governments of the shipping and importing nations, several of which maintain working relations with both Washington and Tehran, should stop treating mediation as someone else's role. Oman and Qatar have carried that burden before. Delhi, Tokyo and Seoul have more leverage than they have been willing to spend.

A war that no one declares is a war that no one has to end. That is its convenience, and its danger. Six months in, the least the world can ask is that the men ordering the strikes be made to say, in public, what they intend to achieve and when they will know they have achieved it.

The Visa as a Muzzle

A federal court has said what should not have needed saying: immigration status is not a license to speak that governments may revoke.

A federal judge has ruled that the administration violated the rights of international students it sought to deport over their pro-Palestinian activism. The ruling is a rebuke, and a narrow one — it concerns the conduct of a particular campaign against particular people. Its significance is much wider, because the practice it examined is spreading, and it is not confined to one country.

The mechanism is elegant and, for that reason, dangerous. A government that would face immediate constitutional obstacles if it prosecuted a citizen for a protest speech faces almost none if it revokes a visa instead. No charge is filed. No jury is empaneled. The action is characterized as an ordinary exercise of immigration discretion, an area where courts have historically deferred heavily to the executive. The person subject to it is, by definition, not a member of the domestic political community and has no constituency to defend them. The penalty — removal from the country where their degree, their laboratory, their family and their future are located — is more severe than most fines a court would impose, and it arrives without most of the process a fine would require.

Because the tool works, it is being copied. Britain has expanded the discretionary grounds on which student and work visas may be curtailed for conduct deemed non-conducive to the public good. Australia has revoked visas over speech at demonstrations. India has for years used visa denial and the cancellation of overseas citizenship registrations against academics and journalists whose published work displeased the government of the day, and has done so under more than one party. Gulf states deport foreign workers for social media posts as a matter of routine administration. The Chinese state manages the political conduct of hundreds of thousands of its own students abroad through the leverage of family, funding and re-entry. This is a global technology of control, and the American case is significant less because it is unique than because it is being litigated in public with a written judgment at the end.

There are two arguments made in defense of the practice, and both deserve a straight answer. The first is that a visa is a privilege and not a right. That is legally accurate and morally beside the point. A driver's license is a privilege too; a state that revoked licenses on the basis of the holder's political opinions would still be doing something recognizably tyrannical. The question is never whether a benefit may be withdrawn but whether it may be withdrawn as punishment for protected expression, and the answer that free societies have historically given is no. The second argument is that some of the speech at issue crossed from advocacy into support for a designated terrorist organization, harassment, or intimidation of other students. Where that is genuinely true, it is a serious matter and there are serious instruments for it: criminal law, campus discipline, and yes, immigration consequences that follow a finding of fact. What distinguishes lawful enforcement from a purge is the finding. Evidence, notice, a hearing, a decision on the record that can be appealed. The cases that reached the courts were notable precisely for how little of that was present — for detentions executed before any adjudication, for revocations traced to database sweeps and op-ed bylines rather than to conduct, for the retroactive search for a justification after the decision had already been made.

For readers of this newspaper the stakes are direct and generational. Roughly a million international students study in the United States in a given year, and more than a quarter of them come from India alone, with substantial numbers from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Their families have made the largest financial bet of their lives on the proposition that the bargain is honest: obey the law, do the work, and your position is secure. If that bargain is understood to include a silent codicil — and hold no opinion that the government of the day finds objectionable — then the bargain has changed, and every family weighing an American education against a Canadian, British, German or Australian one will price the change in. Enrollment data already suggest they have begun to. There is also the matter of what the fear does before any deportation occurs. The student who does not attend the vigil, does not sign the letter, does not ask the question in seminar, does not publish the paper — that student is not in any docket, and the chilling of that student is the point of the policy rather than a side effect of it. Universities that accept this quietly should understand what they are accepting: not a personnel problem, but the conversion of their campuses into places where a substantial fraction of the people present have been taught that thinking out loud is unsafe. The court has done its part. Whether the ruling becomes a limit or a speed bump depends on whether it is appealed into oblivion, and on whether the institutions that benefit most from international students — the universities, the research funders, the technology firms that hire the graduates — are willing to say anything at all while it is being decided.

TSAI Editorial Board

Censorship by Credential

The modern way to silence a newsroom is not to ban it. It is to stop returning its calls.

Two small items from the past week, easily lost among the wars. The Treasury Department barred certain journalists from covering a finance meeting of the world's largest economies. And the President threatened to report a network correspondent, NBC's Kristen Welker, to the Federal Communications Commission over her questioning.

Neither is a raid. No presses were seized, no reporter jailed. That is exactly why they are worth an editorial. The methods that now suppress journalism in most of the world do not look like the methods in the textbooks, and a press corps waiting for the textbook version to arrive will find itself hollowed out before it recognizes what happened.

Consider the architecture. Access is the first instrument: the credential withheld, the briefing restricted to friendly outlets, the pool reorganized so that the questions come from people with something to lose. Licensing is the second: a broadcast license is a renewable government permission, and a regulator that can be invoked by a head of state against a specific journalist has been converted from a technical body into a threat, whether or not it ever acts. Litigation is the third — defamation suits filed not to win but to cost money, in jurisdictions where the defendant pays regardless. Advertising is the fourth, and in much of the world the most decisive: state advertising budgets and the commercial spending of politically exposed conglomerates are simply steered away from outlets that misbehave.

Every element of that architecture is deniable. Nobody is censored; some people are merely not invited. Nobody is punished; a regulator merely receives a complaint. Nobody is bankrupted by the state; advertisers merely revise their media plans. The result is a press that formally remains free and functionally learns what it costs to be difficult.

We write this as a small newspaper, and the view from a small newspaper is worth stating plainly. Large networks can absorb an excluded reporter, an FCC complaint, a nuisance suit. Community and independent outlets cannot. When access narrows, we are the first cut. When advertisers are nudged, we feel it in the same quarter. When a lawsuit arrives, there is no in-house counsel to hand it to. The predictable consequence — visible now across South Asia, across Eastern Europe, across much of Latin America and increasingly in the Anglophone democracies — is a media landscape of a few large outlets that have made their peace and a long tail of publications that have quietly stopped asking certain questions.

This is not a partisan complaint, and it should not be made as one. The exclusion of disfavored reporters from briefings has been practiced by administrations of both American parties. India's press freedom ranking has fallen under a government that inherited a machinery of pressure built and used by its predecessors. Britain has seen ministers boycott programs; the European Union's institutions have their own habits of selective briefing. Governments of every ideology discover the same tool and find the same reasons to use it. The discipline required of a newspaper is to name the practice regardless of who is practicing it — which is the discipline most newspapers, ours included, have to keep relearning.

What can actually be done is more than nothing. Press associations can adopt the rule that if one outlet is excluded from a briefing, the rest walk out; this has worked when it has been tried, and has failed only when solidarity broke. Legislatures can insulate broadcast regulators by making their proceedings public and their referrals matters of record, so that a threat made in a social media post has to become a document with a signature on it. Courts in several countries have shown that anti-SLAPP statutes materially reduce nuisance litigation. And readers, in the end, are the only funding base that cannot be steered by a ministry — which is the strongest practical case for paid subscription there has ever been. There is a fair objection to be made, and we should make it against ourselves. Journalists are not a protected caste, and complaints about hostile questioning being answered with hostile answers are not persecution. A politician has every right to say a report was wrong, to say so rudely, and to keep saying it. The line is not rudeness. The line is the use of state power — a credential, a license, a subpoena, a public budget — to make a specific journalist's work impossible. Threatening to refer a correspondent to a regulator is over that line. Deciding which reporters may watch a meeting of finance ministers is over that line. The reason to say so about small incidents is that the large ones are built out of small ones. No country loses its free press in a single afternoon. It loses it in a series of individually survivable episodes, each of which seemed too minor to be worth a fight.

TSAI Editorial Board

The Warning That Came Too Late

More than nine hundred dead in the Himalayan floods. The failure was not of prediction. It was of governance.

The death toll from the floods across Nepal and Tibet has passed nine hundred. Along the Trishuli in Nuwakot district, a freshwater surge tore through settlements that had a matter of minutes of notice. Among the dead and missing are workers trapped in hydropower tunnels; the country's private power producers now say that authorities lost critical time in reaching them. In the same week, flash flooding through the Grand Canyon killed a visitor in one of the most intensively monitored parks on earth.

Later this month, world leaders will convene in New York for a climate summit called by the Secretary-General, a decade after the Paris Agreement. The speeches will be about emissions. They should be, in part. But the nine hundred did not die of emissions in any sense that a mitigation target addresses. They died of a warning that did not reach them, an evacuation that had not been rehearsed, a tunnel with one exit, and a rescue that began too late. Those are governance failures, and governance failures have names, offices and budgets attached to them.

This distinction has been the great evasion of climate politics for twenty years. Mitigation is a global collective action problem in which no single government can be held responsible for the outcome, which makes it a comfortable subject for a leader's podium. Adaptation is local, specific and auditable. Was there a siren in that valley? Did it work? Who was responsible for maintaining it? Was there a route out of the gorge, and had anyone walked it? Did the hydropower concession require an emergency plan, and did any inspector ever check? Every one of those questions has an answer, and every answer identifies a person. That is precisely why they are asked so rarely at summits.

The Himalayan case is a warning to more than the Himalayas. Glacial and landslide-dammed lakes across the range are multiplying and are inadequately surveyed. The same watersheds are being developed at speed for run-of-river hydropower, an infrastructure whose entire logic is to put tunnels, penstocks and worker camps in the narrowest, steepest parts of exactly the valleys that flash floods scour. The engineering was designed against a hydrological record that no longer describes the climate. And the political geography is the worst possible: the upper catchments lie in China, the middle in Nepal and India, the lower in India and Bangladesh, and the sharing of real-time hydrological data across those borders remains a matter of bilateral negotiation rather than obligation. A surge does not wait for a diplomatic note.

The absurdity is that the technology is cheap and proven. Automated upstream gauges cost a rounding error against the capital budget of a single dam. Cell broadcast alerts reach every handset in a valley in seconds and require no subscription, no app and no literacy in a second language. Bangladesh built a cyclone warning and shelter system that cut mortality from hundreds of thousands to hundreds within a generation, and it did so as one of the poorest countries in the world. This is not a frontier of science. It is a question of whether anyone is made responsible for it.

Three things ought to come out of this month's summit if it is to be worth the airfare. First, a binding norm on transboundary real-time hydrological data: upstream states should be obliged to share gauge readings across borders in real time, on the same principle by which aviation and maritime hazard reporting already operate. There is no defensible reason for a river's flow to be a state secret. Second, an adaptation finance instrument that pays for warning systems and evacuation infrastructure directly and quickly, rather than through the multi-year project cycles that have made adaptation funding notorious. Third, and least likely, liability. A hydropower concession that puts workers underground in a flood corridor without a rehearsed evacuation plan should carry consequences for the concessionaire and for the regulator who signed it off, and those consequences should be written into the license. The counterargument will be that poor countries cannot afford gold-plated safety regimes and that development requires accepting risk. Nepal needs the electricity and the export revenue; the villages in these valleys want the roads and the jobs the projects bring. That is all true, and it is why the demand here is for the cheap measures rather than the expensive ones. A gauge, a siren, a text message and a second exit from a tunnel are not gold plating. They are the difference between a flood and a massacre. When the leaders gather, the reflex will be to fold these deaths into the general argument about the climate crisis, where responsibility is universal and therefore nobody's. Resist it. Nine hundred people died in a week in valleys where the water was already rising and where somebody, somewhere, had the information in hand. The question worth asking in New York is not only how much the world is warming. It is who was supposed to make the call, and why they didn't.

TSAI Editorial Board

SPIDER-MAN IS NOT JUST WINNING THE WEEKEND. HE'S CHANGING THE DEFINITION OF A MOVIE HIT.

For years, Hollywood executives worried that the theatrical movie business had fundamentally changed.

Streaming had trained audiences to wait. The pandemic had accelerated the habit. Ticket prices had risen. Younger audiences had more entertainment choices than ever. The old assumption that people would simply go to the movies because a new movie had opened no longer seemed safe.

Then came Spider-Man: Brand New Day.

Five weekends into its theatrical run, the film is still No. 1 at the North American box office. The latest estimates put its weekend at approximately $22.2 million, bringing its worldwide total to about $2.33 billion and placing it at No. 4 on the all-time global box-office list.

Those are extraordinary numbers.

But the most interesting part is not the size of the opening weekend.

It is the longevity.

A huge opening can be generated by anticipation. Fans rush out immediately. Marketing dominates the conversation. Social media creates a sense that everybody needs to see the film.

The real test comes later.

Week three.

Week four.

Week five.

That is when the casual audience decides whether a movie is worth the ticket.

Spider-Man has continued to attract that audience.

And that tells Hollywood something important: people have not stopped wanting theatrical movies.

They have become selective.

That distinction should change how studios think about the future.

The industry should not interpret the success of Spider-Man as proof that every movie needs to be a $200 million superhero spectacle. That would be precisely the wrong lesson.

The lesson is that audiences will leave their homes when the theatrical experience feels worth the effort.

That can happen because of spectacle.

It can happen because of a great story.

It can happen because people want to laugh together, be frightened together or experience something visually impossible to reproduce on a television screen.

This weekend offers an interesting contrast.

Coyote vs. Acme, a film that Warner Bros. once shelved before being rescued by independent distributor Ketchup Entertainment, opened to approximately $15.5 million. It finished behind Spider-Man, but its reception was unusually strong, earning an A CinemaScore and a 95% Rotten Tomatoes rating.

Meanwhile, The Odyssey continues to demonstrate that audiences can sustain interest in a very different kind of theatrical event, with approximately $1.55 billion worldwide after seven weekends.

That is the encouraging part of the 2026 box office.

The recovery is not coming from one genre alone.

But there is still a warning.

Reuters has reported that the U.S. box office is on pace for its strongest year since the pandemic even though fewer people are attending theaters than before COVID.

That means Hollywood has recovered revenue faster than it has recovered the old moviegoing habit.

The next challenge is therefore not finding another Spider-Man. It is creating a release calendar that gives audiences reasons to go out regularly.

A healthy theatrical business needs blockbusters, certainly. But it also needs comedies, dramas, horror films, family movies, original stories and smaller productions that can surprise audiences.

Spider-Man has proved that the theater can still become a cultural event.

Now Hollywood needs to prove that moviegoing can become a habit again.

The superhero has done his job. The rest of Hollywood has to do theirs.These are deliberately written as standalone newspaper-style opinion pieces, rather than as news reports with an artificial “AI” structure. The underlying current facts have been checked against recent reporting, including the latest Venezuela agreement, Niger mutiny, Iran escalation, G20 discussions and Spider-Man box-office figures.

TSAI Editorial Board

For decades, Venezuela has possessed one of the world's greatest energy assets and one of its greatest political problems. The country has enormous proven oil reserves, yet years of underinvestment, mismanagement, political turmoil and sanctions have left its petroleum industry producing far below its potential.

Now Washington and Caracas are attempting something extraordinary: rebuilding Venezuela's oil industry through a long-term U.S.-Venezuela energy partnership.

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodríguez says the agreement will remain in force for 25 years and involves development of 17 strategic oilfields, with a target of raising production to more than 1.5 million barrels per day. She says the arrangement will preserve Venezuelan sovereignty over its natural resources while attracting major investment.

President Donald Trump has also said Venezuelan oil will be used to replenish the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which has been drawn down substantially in recent years during periods of supply disruption and high energy prices.

On paper, the logic is compelling.

America has just experienced another demonstration of how vulnerable global energy markets can become when a major chokepoint is disrupted. The Strait of Hormuz has been severely affected by the U.S.-Iran conflict, and the latest exchange of attacks around the strait has again pushed oil prices higher.

Venezuela cannot replace Middle Eastern oil overnight. Nor should anyone pretend that increasing Venezuelan production to 1.5 million barrels per day will happen simply because an agreement has been signed.

Oil infrastructure takes years to repair, capital takes time to mobilize, workers and equipment must be available, and political and legal uncertainties have to be resolved. Venezuela's industry has suffered from precisely those problems for years.

There is another issue Washington should not ignore: transparency.

The details of the agreement remain limited, and questions have already been raised over the role of Venezuela's state oil company, PDVSA, the legal structure of the investment and the extent of American control over particular projects.

That makes oversight essential.

America needs energy security, but energy security should not mean replacing one form of dependence with another. Nor should Venezuelan sovereignty become an afterthought simply because Washington has greater financial and technological leverage.

The ideal outcome is actually quite straightforward.

Venezuela gets investment, technology and a functioning oil industry. Americans gain another reliable source of crude and a larger strategic reserve. The Western Hemisphere becomes somewhat less vulnerable to disruptions in distant energy chokepoints. And Venezuela's people—not simply governments and corporations—benefit from increased economic activity.

That is a worthwhile objective.

But Washington should remember that an energy partnership is not automatically an energy solution.

The agreement will ultimately be judged not by the size of the announcement, but by how many barrels actually reach the market, how much infrastructure is restored, how transparently the money is handled and whether the arrangement survives political change. Venezuela could become an important energy insurance policy for the United States.

But insurance only works when the policy is real, enforceable and dependable.

Washington should build this one carefully.

TSAI Editorial Board

NIGER'S MUTINY IS A WARNING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SECURITY FAILS

The attempted mutiny in Niger should concern far more people than those following West African politics.

It is not simply another episode in the region's long list of coups and military power struggles. It is a warning about what happens when a government that seized power promising security and national sovereignty begins facing serious pressure from within its own armed forces.

Mutinous soldiers attacked key positions in Niger's capital, Niamey, including a military airbase and areas around the presidency. The fighting lasted for hours before government forces said they had regained control of the airbase. By Sunday, authorities said the capital had largely returned to normal.

But normality on the streets does not necessarily mean the underlying problem has disappeared.

Niger's military government came to power in 2023 after overthrowing the elected government. Since then, the country has broken with important Western security partners and strengthened relations with Russia. Niger has also joined Mali and Burkina Faso in the Alliance of Sahel States.

The justification for that strategic shift was powerful: Western-backed security arrangements had failed to stop jihadist violence, and Niger's military leaders argued that the country needed greater independence in determining its security policy.

That argument deserves to be taken seriously.

But changing partners does not automatically solve the security problem.

Niger continues to face attacks from al Qaeda- and Islamic State-linked armed groups. Reuters has reported that Niger's armed forces have suffered repeated battlefield losses. Those pressures appear to have contributed to tensions within the military itself.

That is the deeper lesson.

A government can control the presidential palace and still fail to control the insecurity that caused the political crisis in the first place.

If soldiers are being asked to fight a seemingly endless insurgency without adequate resources, leadership or confidence in their political direction, frustration can eventually become a threat from within.

The involvement of Russia's Africa Corps in helping the government suppress the mutiny makes the situation even more complicated. Niger has increasingly tied its security strategy to Moscow, yet the very fact that the government needed outside assistance to confront a rebellion within its own military illustrates how fragile the security environment has become.

The answer cannot simply be another change of foreign partner.

Niger needs functioning institutions, accountable military leadership, effective intelligence, competent counterinsurgency operations and a political system capable of addressing legitimate grievances.

None of those objectives is easy.

But without them, the cycle continues: insecurity produces political frustration; political frustration produces military intervention; military intervention produces international isolation; and isolation makes the security problem harder to solve.

The attempted mutiny may have failed. That does not mean the warning has failed. For Niger's leaders, the message should be unmistakable: defeating a mutiny is not the same thing as fixing the conditions that produced it.

And for the international community, the lesson is equally important.

Africa's Sahel does not need another headline about who controls the palace. It needs governments capable of protecting the people outside it.

TSAI Editorial Board

AMERICA CANNOT LEAD THE GLOBAL ECONOMY BY SURPRISE

American economic power is enormous. The United States remains the world's largest financial center, controls the world's most important reserve currency and possesses economic and technological capabilities that few other nations can match.

But power and leadership are not exactly the same thing.

Leadership requires something else: predictability.

That principle is being tested as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent heads into a G20 meeting where Washington is pressing other major economies on tariffs, China, Iran sanctions and global trade imbalances.

Bessent has said he wants G20 members to consider additional trade barriers against China in an effort to reduce global imbalances and push Beijing toward greater domestic consumption. At the same time, Washington is preparing additional secondary sanctions against Iran and its economic partners. Bessent has indicated that new measures could be announced regularly, beginning with financial institutions. None of these objectives is inherently unreasonable.

The United States has legitimate concerns about China's trade practices, industrial overcapacity and the financing of Iran's economy.

The problem is how American policy looks from the other side of the negotiating table. If allies and trading partners cannot predict whether tomorrow will bring a tariff, a sanction, a new exemption, a new demand or a new negotiating position, they will begin protecting themselves against American policy rather than cooperating with it.

That is not an ideological argument. It is basic economics. Businesses make investments over years, not days. Governments negotiate trade agreements expecting them to survive political cycles. Central banks manage reserves on the assumption that major financial arrangements will remain reasonably stable.

When those assumptions weaken, countries begin diversifying. They seek alternative suppliers. They build alternative payment arrangements. They reconsider where to invest.

They reduce exposure to policies they cannot predict. The United States has enormous leverage because the world still wants access to American markets and financial institutions. Washington should use that leverage when the national interest requires it. But leverage is most effective when others still want to remain inside the system. There is also a domestic cost to economic unpredictability. American businesses facing sudden tariff changes cannot simply absorb every increase. Costs can move through supply chains and eventually reach consumers.

Companies may delay investment because they cannot determine what their imported components will cost six months from now. That does not mean tariffs are always wrong. It means tariffs should have clearly defined objectives, measurable targets and a credible path toward resolution. The same principle applies to sanctions. If sanctions are intended to change behavior, Washington should identify what behavior would lead to their removal. Otherwise, economic pressure becomes permanent policy rather than a negotiating tool. America's greatest economic advantage has never been simply the size of its economy. It has been the confidence other countries place in American markets, institutions and rules.

That confidence should not be treated as unlimited. The United States can remain tough without becoming unpredictable. It can defend its industries without abandoning open markets entirely. It can confront China without demanding that every ally adopt every American policy. And it can impose sanctions while still leaving a diplomatic exit. American leadership should mean setting the rules others understand—not changing the rules so quickly that nobody knows what the rules are. Washington does not need to surrender its leverage. It needs to use it intelligently. The strongest economic power in the world should not have to surprise its partners to prove that it is powerful.

TSAI Editorial Board

7.8 Percent, With a War On

(Our Staff Reporter)- India's economy grew faster in the June quarter than the Reserve Bank expected, and faster than almost anyone else in the world. The composition of that growth is where the questions sit.

India's real gross domestic product grew 7.8 percent in the first quarter of financial year 2026-27, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reported on August 31. Real GDP for the April–June quarter came in at ?81.36 lakh crore against ?75.46 lakh crore a year earlier. Gross value added grew 8.2 percent. Nominal GDP rose 10.3 percent to ?88.27 lakh crore, a notably faster nominal pace than the 8.1 percent recorded in the same quarter last year.

The figure beat expectations comfortably. The Reserve Bank had projected 7 percent for the quarter and market forecasts clustered around 7.1. Growth moderated from the revised 8.6 percent of the preceding March quarter, but ran well ahead of the revised 6.9 percent of the corresponding quarter a year ago.

What makes the number remarkable is the quarter it covers. April to June was the period in which the West Asian conflict pushed crude sharply higher, disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, drove foreign portfolio outflows and put the rupee under sustained pressure. An oil-importing economy of India's size absorbing that and still expanding at this rate is a genuine result, and the finance ministry has been entitled to say so.

The sectoral detail is more mixed than the headline. Mining contracted by roughly 2.4 percent. Agriculture grew about 3.6 percent — respectable, but the monsoon's late behaviour and the flooding across the north will show up in the next quarter rather than this one. The finance ministry's own monthly review, published before the release, noted that steady domestic demand was carrying growth while several high-frequency indicators had softened.

That last observation deserves more weight than it usually gets. India's growth in this cycle has leaned heavily on public capital expenditure and on services, with private consumption improving but unevenly distributed. Investment and consumption are both cited as drivers, which is accurate and also somewhat circular. The harder question — whether private corporate investment has broadened beyond a handful of large groups and sectors — is not answered by a quarterly print.

There is also a measurement caveat worth stating plainly for readers abroad who follow these numbers. These estimates use the new GDP series with 2022-23 as the base year, introduced in February. Series revisions are routine and legitimate, and India's statistical system has upgraded its base periodically for decades. But comparisons across the transition should be made carefully, and independent forecasters continue to project a slower FY27 than the government's own trajectory implies — one international agency has the year at 6.6 percent on trade shocks and soft consumption. None of this diminishes what the quarter shows. India remains the fastest-growing large economy, and it achieved that while the price of the single commodity it imports most rose sharply. The test is the rest of the year: whether the oil bill, the tariff settlement with Washington and a currency near record lows begin to bite in the second half, or whether domestic demand carries through them as it has so far. The next quarter will be the more informative one.

The Barrel Problem India Cannot Diversify Away From

(Our Staff Reporter)- India agreed to stop buying Russian crude as the price of a tariff settlement. Six months later, with Brent near $90 and Hormuz contested, that trade has become considerably more expensive.

India imports the overwhelming majority of the crude it consumes, which makes the oil price the single most important external variable in its economy. Every dollar on the barrel widens the trade deficit, raises the demand for dollars from refiners, pressures the rupee and feeds through to transport and food costs within weeks.

The current position is uncomfortable on every axis. Brent is near $90. The Strait of Hormuz, through which a large share of India's Gulf crude moves, has been contested for six months, with American and Iranian forces exchanging strikes as recently as this week and war-risk insurance premiums for Gulf transits elevated across the board. And under the February trade settlement with Washington, India committed to ending purchases of Russian crude in exchange for the removal of the 25 percent penalty tariff that had been imposed on that basis.

That commitment was a reasonable trade at the time and it is worth being clear about the arithmetic behind it. Discounted Russian barrels had become a substantial share of Indian imports after 2022 and delivered real savings to refiners and, partially, to consumers. Giving that up in return for halving the tariff on $58 billion of net exports to the United States was defensible. But it removed a shock absorber precisely before the shock arrived, and the alternative barrels are Gulf barrels moving through the contested waterway. The structural response has been under way for years and is slower than the crisis. India has diversified suppliers toward West Africa, Latin America and the United States, expanded strategic petroleum reserves, built refining capacity that earns export margins on refined product, and pursued long-term supply arrangements. It has also pushed hard on the demand side: renewable capacity has grown faster than most forecasts anticipated, and the electrification of two- and three-wheelers has proceeded more quickly than passenger cars. None of that changes the import share meaningfully within a single fiscal year.

Two consequences follow for the coming months. The first is fiscal. When crude rises sharply, the government faces a choice between passing the cost to consumers, absorbing it through excise reductions, or pressing state refiners to hold prices and absorb losses. Each option has a cost, and in a year with state elections approaching, the political calculation rarely favours the pass-through. The second is diplomatic. India has spent two decades constructing an energy policy that deliberately avoided dependence on any single supplier or bloc.

The Russian purchases were an expression of that policy. So was the willingness to trade them away. What the last six months have demonstrated is that a diversified supplier list offers limited protection when the vulnerability is a chokepoint rather than a country — most of the alternatives still have to sail through the same twenty-one miles of water. That is not a problem procurement strategy can solve.

GST Collections Cross Rs 2 Lakh Crore Territory, Up 14.8 Percent

August receipts came in at Rs 1,99,853 crore. The number is strong, and it is the clearest single indicator that formalisation is holding.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Goods and services tax collections for August 2026 rose 14.8 percent year on year to Rs 1,99,853 crore, brushing the ?2 lakh crore mark that has become the informal benchmark for a strong month.

Read against the quarter's other data, the figure is consistent rather than surprising. Nominal GDP grew 10.3 percent in the June quarter, and GST receipts are a nominal measure — they capture price increases as well as volume. A 14.8 percent rise against 10.3 percent nominal growth still implies real gains in compliance and in the formal share of transactions, which is what the tax was designed to deliver.

That is the case for taking the number seriously. GST replaced a fractured system of state and central levies that made the country a collection of markets rather than one market, and it forced transaction trails into the formal system through input tax credit matching. Nine years on, the monthly receipt has become the most timely read available on Indian economic activity — faster than GDP, broader than industrial production, and harder to argue with than sentiment surveys.

The case for reading it carefully is equally real. Monthly GST is volatile and seasonally sensitive; a single strong month around festival-season stocking says less than a trend. Receipts also reflect enforcement intensity, not only activity — anti-evasion action against fraudulent input tax credit claims has been sustained, and the recovery of previously evaded revenue registers as growth. And a headline collection figure tells the reader nothing about incidence: who is actually bearing the tax, and how the burden falls across income levels. A consumption tax is regressive by construction, softened in India's case by exemptions and lower rates on essentials, but regressive nonetheless.

The structural debates remain where they have been for years. The rate structure has multiple slabs where the original design case argued for fewer, and each simplification runs into the revenue interests of states. Petroleum products and alcohol sit outside GST entirely, which preserves a significant distortion and a significant state revenue base at the same time. Compensation arrangements for states after the transition remain a live source of centre–state friction, and that friction has intensified as several states argue more broadly about the terms of fiscal federalism.

For businesses trading with India from abroad, the practical significance is narrower and worth stating: compliance requirements under GST are demanding, refund timelines for exporters have been a persistent complaint, and the input credit system rewards counterparties who file properly and punishes those who do not. Choosing an Indian supplier on price alone, without checking their filing record, is a well-documented way to lose the credit.

Eighteen Percent, and the Next Tariff Already Drafted

February's interim deal cut American tariffs on Indian goods from fifty percent to eighteen. A separate investigation in Washington now proposes adding twelve and a half percent back.

(Our Staff Reporter)- The India–United States trade relationship has spent two years oscillating between crisis and settlement, and the current position is a partial settlement with a new threat attached. The sequence is worth recalling. In August 2025 Washington imposed a 25 percent reciprocal tariff on Indian goods, then doubled it to 50 percent with an additional penalty tied to India's purchases of Russian crude — among the highest rates applied to any trading partner. The interim agreement announced on February 2 this year removed that penalty in exchange for an Indian commitment on Russian oil, and lowered the reciprocal rate from 25 percent to 18. India, for its part, agreed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on all American industrial goods and a range of agricultural products. Indian spices, tea, coffee, cashews and several fruits enter the United States at zero duty. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal noted that the resulting rate leaves India better placed than China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Vietnam. The relationship it governs is substantial: about $149.4 billion in bilateral goods trade in 2025, with an Indian surplus of $58.2 billion. Engineering goods lead Indian exports at roughly $116 billion, with electronics the fastest-growing category on the strength of smartphone assembly, and pharmaceuticals a durable pillar. The complication is that the tariff architecture underneath all of this is legally unstable. The reciprocal tariff regime has faced adverse court rulings in the United States, and the statutory basis for several measures is in litigation. Separately, in March the US Trade Representative opened two investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act — one concerning structural excess capacity in manufacturing, another concerning goods produced with forced labour in a set of economies including India. The second has produced a proposed additional 12.5 percent tariff on Indian imports.

Negotiators in New Delhi are therefore bargaining against a tariff structure that may be struck down, replaced, or supplemented from an entirely different legal direction while they are still at the table. A full bilateral agreement remains unsigned after more than a year of talks. India's response has been to diversify rather than concede. The United Kingdom–India free trade agreement entered into force on July 15. The European Union–India agreement, concluded in January, secures preferential access across 97 percent of tariff lines and is the more consequential of the two by volume. Neither replaces the American market, which remains India's largest export destination, but together they change the negotiating arithmetic. For diaspora businesses trading in both directions, the practical lesson of the past two years is that headline rates are now political instruments that move on political timelines rather than commercial ones. Contracts written on the assumption of a stable duty have repeatedly been overtaken. Eighteen percent is the current number. It is not obviously the settled one.

Bishkek, Delhi, Washington: India's Month of Multi-Alignment

The prime minister attended the SCO summit alongside Putin and Xi, hosts BRICS leaders in Delhi on September 12, and is expected in Washington after that. The itinerary is the policy.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Narendra Modi spent August 31 and September 1 in Bishkek at the twenty-sixth summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, marking the bloc's twenty-fifth anniversary, alongside Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Iran's Masoud Pezeshkian, Pakistan's Shehbaz Sharif and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He held bilateral meetings on the sidelines, including with the Iranian president. Kyrgyzstan hands the SCO chair to Pakistan, which leads the organisation through 2027. India hosts BRICS leaders in New Delhi on September 12 and 13. A summit meeting with President Trump in the United States is expected after that.

Three weeks, three rooms, and in each of them a different set of partners with incompatible views of the others. That is not an accident of scheduling. It is the clearest available statement of what Indian foreign policy currently is. The doctrine has been described variously as strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, or issue-based partnership. The practical content is consistent: India declines to make its relationships exclusive, and treats each as a separate account. It buys Russian defence equipment while conducting naval exercises with the United States, Japan and Australia. It sits in the SCO with China while disputing the frontier with it. It joined a trade settlement with Washington that required abandoning Russian oil purchases, then continued to deepen commercial and payments cooperation with Moscow in other areas.

Critics in every capital find this frustrating, which is roughly the point. Washington reads it as unreliability. Moscow reads it as drift. Beijing reads it as hedging. New Delhi reads it as the only sensible position for a country of India's size that is not, and does not intend to become, anyone's junior partner.

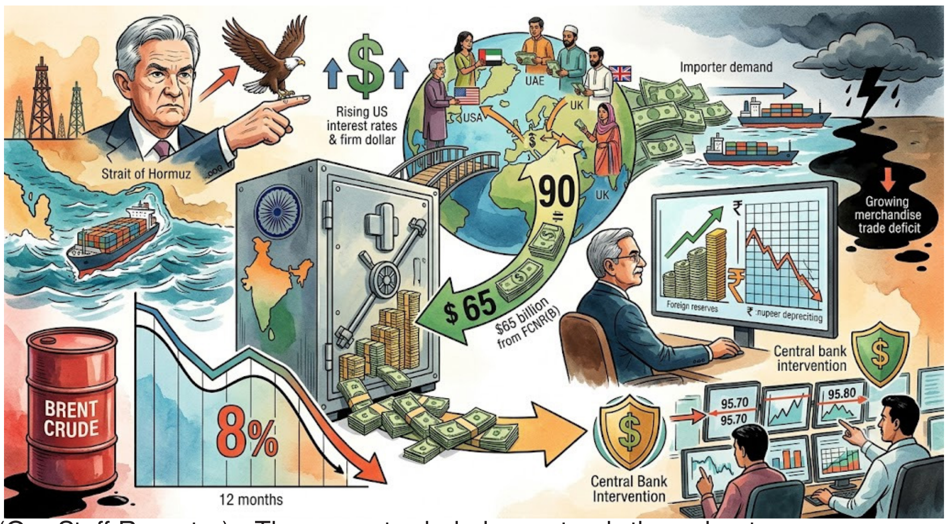
The approach has costs, and they are becoming more visible as the world's blocs harden. Multi-alignment works best when the major powers are competing but not confronting. With the United States at war with Iran, Russia at war in Ukraine, and Chinese–American competition structural rather than cyclical, the space between positions narrows. India has already discovered the limits: the Russian oil commitment was extracted under tariff pressure, which is what leverage looks like when it is applied.

There is also a credibility question that the diaspora press should ask more directly than it usually does. A policy of maintaining every relationship simultaneously requires that none of them be tested at the same moment. India's ability to be in Bishkek on Monday and Washington in three weeks depends on both parties accepting that the other visit does not signify very much. That acceptance is not guaranteed indefinitely.

What is not in doubt is that India is being courted rather than instructed, by every bloc, at once. That is a substantially better position than the one the country occupied in any previous decade, and it was achieved deliberately. The test is not whether the itinerary can be maintained. It is what happens the first time two of these partners require India to choose.

The Rupee's Managed Retreat

The currency is near 95.5 to the dollar and roughly eight percent weaker over twelve months. The Reserve Bank has built a wall of non-resident deposits to slow the fall rather than stop it.



(Our Staff Reporter)- The rupee traded around 95.5 to the dollar at the close of August, having touched a record low near 96.8 earlier in the year. Over twelve months the currency is down roughly eight percent. The immediate pressures are familiar: Brent near $90 on renewed tension around the Strait of Hormuz, a firm dollar, and expectations of a further US rate increase after hawkish remarks from the Federal Reserve chairman at Jackson Hole. Importer demand for dollars has been steady throughout.

What is genuinely new is the instrument the Reserve Bank has used to hold the line.

Rather than spending reserves defending a level, the central bank opened a special swap window aimed at pulling non-resident money back into the country. By August 21 it had mobilised close to $73 billion, of which roughly $65 billion came through FCNR(B) deposits — foreign currency accounts held by non-resident Indians. India's foreign exchange reserves reached a record $729.33 billion in that week, rising for an eighth consecutive week. The RBI has since given banks greater flexibility to swap dollars raised through those deposits, permitting transactions above $100 million outside the designated weekly window to handle the volume.

The mechanism deserves explaining because it is widely misunderstood. Foreign currency enters a bank; the bank swaps the dollars with the RBI and receives rupees; the dollars move onto the central bank's balance sheet. Most of that inflow therefore never reaches the spot market as additional dollar supply. It builds the reserve buffer and the RBI's capacity to smooth volatility, without directly lifting the exchange rate. That is why the rupee can be weak while reserves hit records — a combination that has confused a good deal of commentary.

Governor Sanjay Malhotra has repeated that the Reserve Bank targets no particular level and intervenes only to limit volatility. Traders, however, consistently report central bank dollar selling as the currency approaches the mid-95s, and the 95.70–95.80 zone is treated in the market as well defended. The repo rate has been held at 5.25 percent with a neutral stance, with FY27 inflation revised up on higher energy costs.

For the diaspora, the practical consequences run in both directions. Remittances sent home buy materially more rupees than a year ago, and FCNR(B) rates have been attractive enough to draw tens of billions in a matter of weeks. Anyone holding rupee assets or planning to repatriate money out of India is on the other side of that trade.

The strategic assessment is that this is managed depreciation, not a defence. The structural drivers — a large oil import bill, a persistent merchandise trade deficit and a firm dollar — have not changed, and the rupee has drifted lower against the dollar by three to four percent a year for decades. The FCNR(B) window buys time and a floor. It does not remove the cause, and the oil risk outlasts the window.

India Sends Rescuers North, and Confronts a Shared Hazard

(Our Staff Reporter)- Indian tunnel specialists are working alongside Chinese teams in Nepal after a glacial collapse killed more than a thousand. The same hazard runs along India's own Himalayan frontier.

India dispatched tunnel rescue specialists to Nepal within days of the August 26 glacial collapse that sent a wall of ice, rock and mud down the river valleys of the Nepal–Tibet border. More than a thousand people are confirmed dead across Nepal and Tibet, with several thousand missing and 933 hydropower workers unaccounted for, most believed trapped in tunnels buried under debris. Chinese specialists arrived on the same weekend. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited the Nepali embassy in New Delhi to convey condolences.

The cooperation is unremarkable in humanitarian terms and quietly notable in diplomatic ones. India and China dispute a long Himalayan frontier and have spent this year in disagreement over Chinese dam construction upstream on rivers that flow into India. Their rescue teams are working the same tunnels. The response is the right story for one week. The hazard is the story for the next decade, and it is India's as much as Nepal's.

Glacial lake outburst flooding is a documented and increasing risk across the entire Himalayan arc — through Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, and along the Karakoram in the west. Warming is proceeding faster at altitude than at sea level. Glacial retreat produces meltwater lakes held back by unconsolidated moraine, and those dams fail. India has already had its demonstrations: the Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand in 2021, which destroyed two hydropower projects and killed around two hundred people, and the South Lhonak lake outburst in Sikkim in 2023, which took out the Teesta-III dam. The mechanism is not disputed by anyone who studies it.

What Nepal's catastrophe adds is a specific and transferable lesson about labour. The people missing under the mountain are shift workers in run-of-river tunnels — the same construction pattern, often the same contractors and frequently the same migrant workforce, that operates on the Indian side of the range. India's Himalayan hydropower programme is substantial and expanding, and it is justified by real needs: power, grid stability, and a lower-carbon supply. The question is not whether to build. It is whether the hazard modelling behind siting decisions and worker safety protocols reflects the current rate of glacial change or the rate assumed when these projects were designed.

There is also a governance dimension that neither country has addressed adequately. These river systems are transboundary. The flood began in Tibet and killed people in Nepal. India sits downstream of both on several basins and upstream of Bangladesh on others. Early warning for glacial hazards requires monitoring data to cross borders quickly, and at present the sharing arrangements between China, Nepal, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh are partial, politicised and slow. Rescue teams crossing a border in a week is genuinely creditable. Data crossing the same border in an hour, before the water arrives, is what would actually save lives — and it does not yet exist.

A First From Geosynchronous Orbit, Launching Friday

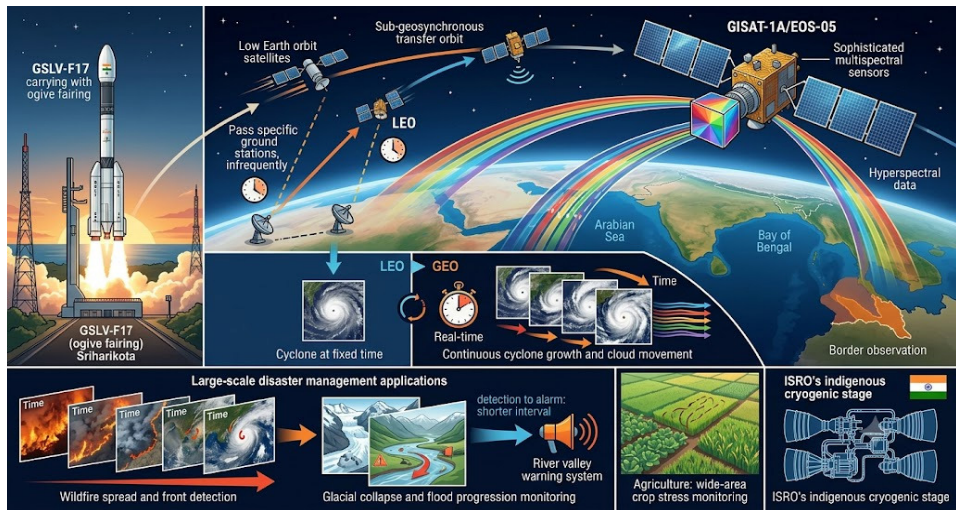
(Our Staff Reporter)- ISRO flies GSLV-F17 on September 4 carrying EOS-05, described by the agency as India's first imaging satellite in geosynchronous orbit. The capability matters more than the milestone.

The Indian Space Research Organisation is scheduled to launch GSLV-F17 in the early hours of September 4 from the Second Launch Pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. Its payload is EOS-05, also designated GISAT-1A, which ISRO describes as India's first ever imaging satellite operating from geosynchronous orbit. The vehicle will place the spacecraft into a sub-geosynchronous transfer orbit. It is the nineteenth flight of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle, using the four-metre ogive composite payload fairing.

The distinction being claimed here is technical and worth unpacking, because it is the whole point of the mission.

Most Earth observation satellites operate in low, sun-synchronous polar orbits. They circle the planet every ninety-odd minutes and pass over any given location at fixed intervals — excellent resolution, but you see a place only when the satellite comes around. A satellite in geosynchronous orbit holds position relative to the ground, which means it can look at the same large region continuously. For monitoring things that change quickly, that difference is fundamental. Cyclone development in the Bay of Bengal, flood progression down a river system, a wildfire front, crop stress across a growing season, movement along a frontier: all of these are better served by repeated observation of a broad area than by an excellent photograph twice a week. The GISAT design images in multispectral and hyperspectral bands to provide near-real-time coverage of large areas under cloud-free conditions.

The launcher carries its own history. The GSLV was the vehicle India built to reach geosynchronous transfer orbits with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage, and its early record was the most difficult in the Indian programme — a long sequence of failures and delays while cryogenic engine technology was developed domestically after external supply was blocked. That the vehicle is now flying routine operational missions is the outcome of that effort, and it is the reason



India can put a satellite of this class up without asking anyone's permission.

The timing gives the mission an unplanned relevance. The launch comes nine days after a glacial collapse on the Nepal–Tibet border killed more than a thousand people, a disaster whose progression down the river valleys was faster than any ground-based warning system could handle. Continuous wide-area observation from geosynchronous orbit is precisely the capability that improves early warning for events of that kind — not by preventing them, but by shortening the interval between detection and alarm. India's space programme has been characterised abroad mainly through its landmark missions: the lunar landings, the Mars orbiter, the human spaceflight programme still working toward its first crewed launch. Those attract attention. The operational Earth observation fleet, which is what actually returns value week by week to agriculture, disaster management, fisheries and defence, attracts very little. Friday's launch belongs to the second category, which is the more consequential one.

Semicon 2.0: From Building Fabs to Building Capability

(Our Staff Reporter)- The government has notified a ?1,27,500-crore semiconductor programme covering design, equipment, materials, packaging, research and talent. The ambition is larger than the first phase, and so is the difficulty.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology formally notified Semicon 2.0 on August 31, activating a ?1,27,500-crore programme approved by the Union Cabinet on July 15. Notifications for all six pillars were issued together, covering chip design, manufacturing equipment and materials, fabrication, advanced packaging, research and development, and talent. Ten categories of incentive sit beneath those pillars.

The design is deliberately broader than the first phase. Semicon 1.0 was a ?76,000-crore programme aimed principally at getting fabrication and packaging plants built. It largely succeeded on its own terms: twelve manufacturing projects approved with cumulative investment above ?1.64 lakh crore, commercial production begun at three units this year with more expected, and a first advanced 3D packaging facility broken ground in Odisha. Semicon 2.0 shifts the emphasis from capacity to capability — from assembling other people's designs to owning intellectual property.

The specifics are demanding. For silicon wafer fabs the government will fund 40 percent of eligible capital expenditure, but applicants must propose a 300-millimetre facility with capacity of at least 40,000 wafer starts per month, hold production-grade licensed technology, and invest at least ?20,000 crore. On the design side, eligibility extends to companies owned or controlled by Indian citizens or Overseas Citizens of India, including startups and small enterprises, with seed funding, equity co-investment and royalty financing available. Industry projects the scheme could attract around ?4 lakh crore in investment and enable roughly ?2 lakh crore of production over its life. A separate ?62,500-crore mobile phone production incentive was cleared alongside it. India's largest semiconductor event follows in New Delhi from September 17.

The case for the programme is straightforward and increasingly bipartisan worldwide. Semiconductor supply chains are concentrated in a small number of jurisdictions, several of them exposed to serious geopolitical risk, and every major economy has responded with industrial subsidy — the United States, the European Union, Japan and China all run comparable schemes. India's electronics exports have grown sharply on the back of the earlier incentive programmes, which is evidence that this instrument can work.

The honest counter-arguments are three. Subsidy at this scale competes with the same money spent on power reliability, water supply, logistics and technical education, all of which the industry also requires and none of which arrives with a ribbon-cutting. Global subsidy competition risks producing more capacity than demand supports, and the industry's history of gluts is long. And moving from assembly to owned intellectual property is the step that most late entrants have failed at, because it depends on accumulated engineering depth rather than capital.

India has committed the capital and set out the framework. Design ownership is the harder half, and it will be judged over a decade rather than a quarter.

Uttar Pradesh Is Rehearsing the First Synthetic Election

With the 2027 assembly contest opening, the state's two largest parties have begun trading AI-generated videos and songs. Nobody has settled what the rules are.

(Our Staff Reporter)- Campaigning for Uttar Pradesh's 2027 assembly election has effectively begun, and its opening exchange was not a rally or a manifesto. It was a fight over synthetic media.

The Samajwadi Party's president, Akhilesh Yadav, circulated an AI-generated video targeting Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, prompting an immediate counterattack from the Bharatiya Janata Party. That followed an earlier round in which a BJP-backed song mocked Yadav with a nickname, and he replied with an AI-generated song aimed at the chief minister. Party strategists on both sides now describe artificial intelligence as a central component of the campaign apparatus rather than a novelty, and state-level analysts expect the technology to be deployed at scale alongside conventional rallies and processions. Yadav has separately launched booth-level organising across the state's constituencies.

The stakes explain the intensity. The Uttar Pradesh assembly has 403 seats and a majority threshold of 202. State-level assessments describe the contest as concentrating on roughly 150 seats on each side where the BJP and the Samajwadi Party–Congress alliance are either strong or plausibly competitive, with the remainder largely settled. In a contest of that shape, marginal persuasion in a limited number of constituencies decides the outcome, and cheap, fast, targeted content is precisely the tool for marginal persuasion.

Uttar Pradesh is not unique here. Synthetic campaign media has appeared in elections in the United States, Indonesia, Argentina, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and in local contests across Europe. What makes the Indian case globally significant is scale and infrastructure: an electorate larger than that of any other democracy, more than twenty languages in serious political use, near-universal smartphone penetration, and WhatsApp forwarding as the primary distribution channel for political content in many households. A synthetic clip does not need to survive scrutiny. It needs to survive one forward.

The regulatory position is thin everywhere and thin here. India's rules on election advertising were written for print, broadcast and physical campaigning. Labelling requirements for AI-generated political content are not comprehensively enforced, the Election Commission's model code was not drafted with generated video in mind, and the practical remedy for a defamatory synthetic clip — a complaint, an inquiry, a takedown — operates on a timescale that matters less than the news cycle it was made for. The European Union has moved on transparency obligations for AI-generated content this year. India, which hosted a major international AI summit in February, has not adopted comparable election-specific rules.

There is a version of this that is harmless: satire has always been part of Indian campaigning, and a caricature in a song is no different in kind from a cartoon in a newspaper. There is another version, already visible elsewhere, in which fabricated video of a candidate saying something inflammatory circulates in a communally sensitive district on polling eve. Uttar Pradesh votes in 2027. The rules governing what can be manufactured and circulated in that campaign are being set now, by default, through whatever the parties get away with in the next eighteen months.

The Treaty That Stopped Working

A court in The Hague ruled this week that the Indus Waters Treaty remains in force. India rejected the ruling. What happens next is a template for every shared river on earth.

On August 31 the Court of Arbitration constituted under the Indus Waters Treaty held unanimously that the treaty remains fully in force, that India must observe its obligations under it, and that those obligations include the design and operation of hydropower projects on rivers flowing into Pakistan. The court issued interim measures concerning the Ratle project on the Chenab. India rejected the decision, as it has rejected every previous ruling in this arbitration, on the grounds that the court was constituted contrary to the treaty and lacks jurisdiction. India did not participate in the hearings, held at the Peace Palace in April with only Pakistan present.

The underlying dispute is now three years old in its acute phase. After the Pahalgam attack of April 2025, India announced that the 1960 treaty would be held in abeyance until Pakistan, in New Delhi's formulation, credibly and irreversibly ends support for cross-border terrorism. Pakistan denies the allegation and denies that any party may unilaterally suspend the agreement. The treaty text contains no abeyance provision; Article XII provides that it continues until terminated by a duly ratified successor. In May 2026 the court issued an award on maximum pondage — how much water India may store behind run-of-river projects on the Western Rivers — which India declared null and void. This newspaper takes no position on the merits, and the security grievance underlying India's decision is real and was answered with violence. What deserves attention is the precedent, because it reaches well beyond South Asia.

The Indus Waters Treaty was for six decades the most-cited success in transboundary water diplomacy. It survived three wars. It was the standing answer to the argument that water disputes inevitably become security crises. Its distinguishing feature was that it took water out of the general relationship and put it in a technical box, administered by a permanent commission of engineers who continued meeting when nothing else was meeting.

What is being tested now is whether that separation can hold when one party decides it should not. And the question is arriving everywhere at once.

China is building substantial hydropower capacity on the upper Brahmaputra, with no comprehensive treaty governing flows to India and Bangladesh and only limited seasonal data sharing. The Mekong's upstream dams have reshaped flows for four downstream countries with a river commission that has no enforcement power. Ethiopia's dam on the Blue Nile was filled over Egyptian objection, with negotiations producing nothing binding. In Central Asia the Soviet-era water-for-energy arrangements have been decaying for thirty years.

Each of these disputes has been analysed as a regional problem. Together they constitute a category. Roughly two-fifths of the world's population lives in a river basin shared between states, most of those basins are governed by agreements with weak or absent enforcement, and climate change is altering the flows those agreements were written to divide — glacier-fed rivers in particular, as the Himalaya has demonstrated brutally this past week. An arbitral ruling that one party simply declines to accept is not a resolution. It is a demonstration that the mechanism has no teeth. Every state that shares a river is reading this week's ruling with that in mind.

TSAI BUREAU

The Students Who Stopped Coming

Indian departures for study abroad have fallen by nearly a third in three years. The money and the talent have not disappeared. They have moved, and the receiving countries have noticed.

Ministry of External Affairs figures tabled in the Rajya Sabha record that Indian students leaving to study abroad fell from 9.08 lakh in 2023 to 7.70 lakh in 2024 and 6.26 lakh in 2025 — a decline of about 31 percent in three years, drawn from Bureau of Immigration counts. The fall is not evenly distributed. Canada dropped roughly 41 percent following study permit caps; the United Kingdom fell about 27 percent after the ban on dependants took effect in January 2024; the United States and Australia both posted double-digit declines.

The money involved is not small. India remained the largest source of international students in the United States, with 363,019 students in 2024-25, and international students contributed an estimated $41.8 billion to the American economy in 2025-26. New enrolments in the United States dropped 17 percent in the autumn of 2025. An analysis by NAFSA and JB International projects a further 9.5 percent decline this autumn — roughly 111,000 students — with an estimated $3.4 billion in economic activity and around 39,000 jobs at risk. Institutional surveys show a majority of American universities reporting lower application volumes, with declining Indian demand identified as the principal driver.

The reasons given by students are consistent across surveys: visa refusal rates, appointment availability, cost, and unpredictability. That last item is the one policymakers consistently underweight. A family committing two or three years of savings to a foreign degree is making a long-horizon investment, and the thing that kills such an investment is not a high price but an unquantifiable risk of losing everything at the visa counter.

The redirection is already visible. Germany, whose public universities charge no tuition for most master's programmes, recorded a jump of roughly 68 percent; Ireland, which retained a two-year post-study work stay for master's graduates, rose about 49 percent. Nearly 120,000 Indian students are now studying across the European Union, and Indian enrolment in Europe grew 45 percent between 2015 and 2023. One Indian education-finance platform recorded the American share of its applicants falling from 54 percent in 2023 to 26 percent in 2024 and 20 percent in 2025. Three consequences follow, and they run on different timescales. In the immediate term, universities in the traditional destination countries face a revenue problem, concentrated in the graduate programmes that international fees have quietly cross-subsidised for two decades. In the medium term, those countries lose the recruitment pipeline that international study has always been — the students who stay, work, found companies and pay taxes. In the long term, the professional and personal networks that education migration builds between countries simply form somewhere else.

Student flows are usually discussed as a matter of campus revenue. They are more accurately understood as the earliest and most reversible stage of a talent pipeline. The countries currently gaining share understand this. The ones losing it are still debating visa processing times.

TSAI BUREAU

MIGRATION ECONOMIC

The Nine-Hundred-Billion-Dollar Lifeline Nobody Manages

Migrant workers send home more money than foreign investment and aid combined. The cost of moving it remains double the target the world set, and the difference is paid by the poorest senders.

Migrant workers sent roughly $857 billion to their home countries in 2025, a figure projected to exceed $900 billion this year. Officially recorded flows to low- and middle-income countries reached about $685 billion, which is more than foreign direct investment to those countries and roughly four times official development assistance. Including money moved through informal channels, the true total may exceed a trillion dollars.

India is the largest recipient by a wide margin and is projected to receive an all-time high near $145 billion this year. For twenty-five or more countries, remittances exceed a tenth of national output. For Nepal, Tajikistan, Lebanon, Tonga and Samoa they exceed a quarter.

These are not marginal flows. They are the largest and most reliable source of external finance in the developing world, and unlike investment or aid they arrive directly in households, are spent on food, school fees, medicine and housing, and are counter-cyclical: they rise when the receiving country is in trouble.

They are also the least well-governed large financial flow in the world economy.

The most visible failure is price. The World Bank's index tracks the cost of sending $200 across hundreds of country corridors, and the global average sits around 6.4 percent against a Sustainable Development Goal target of 3 percent. That gap is not a rounding error. A UN estimate puts the value of closing it at roughly $20 billion a year in additional money reaching recipient households — a transfer larger than most bilateral aid programmes, requiring no donor and no appropriation.

The cost is unevenly distributed in ways that compound existing disadvantage. Banks remain the most expensive channel by a considerable margin. Digital transfers are consistently cheaper than cash. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most expensive region to send money to; the Gulf-to-South-Asia corridors are among the cheapest, because they carry enormous volume and are fiercely competitive. The result is that the poorest and most isolated recipients pay the highest rate — the family in a village without a mobile agent pays several times what the family in a connected city pays.

Two structural forces are worth watching. The first is de-risking: banks withdrawing correspondent relationships from jurisdictions perceived as high compliance risk, which has repeatedly cut off entire corridors for reasons unrelated to any individual sender. The second is exchange-rate margin, the spread between the official rate and the rate offered, which is where a good deal of the real cost hides and which headline fee comparisons routinely miss.

There is a diaspora angle that community organisations almost never address. Senders overwhelmingly use the provider they have always used, often introduced by family. Comparison takes minutes and, on a corridor where the cheapest realistic option runs around 3.3 percent against a 6.4 percent average, saves a working household several hundred dollars a year. That is not a policy reform. It is information, and it is the highest-return advice most community institutions could give and generally do not.

TSAI BUREAU

Conditional Citizens

The United States is pursuing citizenship revocation at a scale without modern precedent. The legal standard is narrow; the enforcement posture is not, and the effect on naturalised communities is being underestimated.

Denaturalisation was, for decades, a rare instrument in American law — used against Nazi collaborators, war criminals, and a small number of proven fraud cases. It is now being deployed at volume. The Justice Department has filed complaints in batches, announced through press releases naming defendants and their countries of origin. Reporting indicates an initial litigation wave targeting several hundred individuals, coordination across dozens of regional US Attorney offices, and an intention at USCIS to refer in the range of 100 to 200 cases a month.

The cases the government publicises are, on their face, unsympathetic: concealed criminal convictions, sham marriages, assumed identities, undisclosed involvement in atrocities abroad. Nobody has a serious argument that citizenship obtained by concealing a homicide should stand. That is not where the difficulty lies.

The difficulty is structural, and it has three parts.

First, the standard. Under Supreme Court precedent, a misrepresentation must be material — it must have had a natural tendency to influence the naturalisation decision. An immaterial error does not support revocation. That is a real protection, and it is also a protection that must be asserted by a defendant, in litigation, at their own expense. Which brings the second problem: civil denaturalisation carries no right to a jury and no right to appointed counsel. A naturalised citizen sued by the federal government must fund their own defence or lose their citizenship by default. The criminal route carries full protections; the civil route, which is the one being used at scale, does not.

Third, the consequences extend beyond the defendant. Children who derived citizenship solely through a denaturalised parent can lose it. Children born on American soil are unaffected, but that distinction will be cold comfort to families where it cuts across siblings.

The wider effect is the one this newspaper considers most important and least measured. When revocation moves from rare to routine, naturalised citizens begin to behave as though their status is provisional — because functionally it now is. That changes how people engage with government, whether they contest an official error, whether they participate politically, whether they speak publicly on contested issues. A tiered citizenship does not require formal legal creation. It can be produced by enforcement posture alone. None of this is uniquely American. The United Kingdom has expanded deprivation powers over two decades and used them against citizens with a claim to another nationality, a category that in practice falls heavily on people of South Asian descent. Several Gulf states have revoked nationality from critics, creating statelessness outright. India's own citizenship determination exercises in Assam left large numbers in prolonged legal limbo. The common thread is that citizenship is being reconceived, in several democracies at once, as a licence rather than a status — granted conditionally, revocable administratively, and secure mainly for those who were born to it.

TSAI BUREAU

The Economics of Silence

Press freedom worldwide is at its lowest level in twenty-five years of measurement. The sharpest deterioration is not censorship. It is that news organisations can no longer pay for themselves.

Reporters Without Borders reported this year that global press freedom has fallen to its lowest point in the twenty-five-year history of its index. The proportion of countries classed as facing a difficult or very serious situation has risen from about 13.7 percent in 2002 to 52.2 percent in 2026 — most of the world. Fewer than one percent of people now live in a country the index rates as good. Norway leads for a tenth consecutive year; Eritrea, North Korea and China occupy the bottom.

Two national results stand out for this newspaper's readers. The United States fell seven places to 64th, with the index citing concentrated media ownership, litigation against news outlets, funding cuts to public broadcasters, and politically directed investigations of disfavoured journalists. India fell six places to 157th with a score of 31.96, remaining in the very serious category, with concentration of ownership among the factors cited.

But the finding that ought to command most attention is economic, and it is where the index recorded one of its sharpest declines. In 160 of 180 countries, news

organisations reported achieving financial stability only with difficulty or not at all. In a third of all countries, significant outlets closed. RSF's editorial leadership has put the proposition plainly: without economic independence there is no editorial independence, and financially strained newsrooms are pulled toward whatever attracts an audience.

This is the mechanism that matters, and it operates without anyone banning anything.

A newspaper that cannot fund a reporter for six months does not publish investigations. A newspaper dependent on a handful of advertisers does not investigate those advertisers. A newspaper whose owner has interests in construction, mining or politics does not need to be instructed. None of that appears in any legal index of censorship, and all of it determines what the public learns.

The pattern is visible at every scale. Local news deserts have become normal across large parts of the United States, and the shutdown of publicly funded international broadcasting removed access to reliable information for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Aid reductions eliminated funding for independent journalism in a range of countries where it had no domestic commercial base.

Diaspora media sits at the sharpest end of this. It is small, it depends on community advertising, it covers communities where the advertisers and the subjects of scrutiny are frequently the same people, and it has almost no philanthropic or institutional support anywhere in the world. The result is a sector that performs an irreplaceable function — reporting in community languages on matters the mainstream press never covers — while being structurally least able to afford independence.

The remedies are unglamorous: transparent ownership disclosure, diversified revenue, subscription and membership models that shift dependence from advertisers to readers, and legal protection against strategic litigation designed to exhaust rather than to win. The alternative is what the index is already recording: not a press that is silenced, but one that cannot afford to speak.

TSAI BUREAU

Pharmacy of the World, Under Notice

India supplies a large share of the generic medicine consumed in the West at prices no domestic industry can match. Washington has announced tariffs designed to end that arrangement by 2029.

India's pharmaceutical exports reached about $30.5 billion in FY25 and roughly $31 billion in FY26, shipped to more than 190 countries with about half going to strictly regulated markets. The country is the world's third-largest drug producer by volume and hosts more than fifty manufacturing facilities approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. A substantial share of the generic medicine dispensed in American pharmacies is made in Indian plants, and the reason is straightforward: nobody else makes it as cheaply at that quality standard.

That arrangement is now under formal notice.

In April the American administration imposed a 100 percent tariff on patented pharmaceutical products and their ingredients, with tiered lower rates for the European Union, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland, and a preferential arrangement for the United Kingdom. Generic medicines — India's core export — were exempted. In July that exemption was given an expiry date: imported generics

remain duty-free until August 1, 2028, then face a 100 percent tariff for one year, and 200 percent from August 2029, unless manufacturers establish production inside the United States.

The stated objective is relocation of manufacturing. Whether it can work is a question the pharmaceutical economics answer fairly clearly.

Generic medicines run on margins measured in low single digits. That is the entire point of the category — it is what makes a month's supply of a common drug cost a few dollars rather than a few hundred. Building an American generic manufacturing base would require substantial capital against those margins, and it would still depend on active pharmaceutical ingredients, most of which come from India and China. Several large Indian firms already operate American plants and some are expanding them; others have said their existing footprint is sufficient. A fully domestic supply chain would take years and would almost certainly raise the price of medicines to American patients, which is the outcome the policy is not designed to produce.

India's response has been to move up the value chain and to reduce its own dependencies. A ?60,000-crore push announced in December 2025 targets domestic production of active ingredients, addressing a genuine vulnerability — Indian manufacturers import a large share of their raw materials, predominantly from China, which is a strategic exposure the industry has been aware of since the pandemic. A separate ?10,000-crore programme over five years targets biologics and biosimilars. Export data already shows geographic rebalancing away from the American corridor.

For the world outside these two countries, the stakes are larger than the bilateral dispute. Low- and middle-income health systems, multilateral procurement agencies and humanitarian programmes are built on Indian generics being cheap and available. A policy that raises the cost structure of that industry to relocate a portion of it will be paid for, in part, by patients in countries that are not party to the argument. Three years is not long to restructure a global supply chain. The clock started in July.

TSAI BUREAU

The Patient Money is Coming for Infrastructure

Sovereign wealth funds and pension funds are moving into roads, ports, grids and data centres. It is a sensible match of liability to asset, and it changes who owns essential systems.

A structural shift is under way in global capital allocation, and it is being conducted almost entirely out of public view. The institutions with the longest liabilities in the world — sovereign wealth funds, national pension schemes, insurance reserves — are moving substantial capital into infrastructure.

The logic is sound and almost boring. A pension fund owes money to retirees over decades. It needs assets that generate predictable, inflation-linked cash flows over the same horizon. Government bonds do that with low return. Equities offer return with volatility. Infrastructure — a toll road, a port terminal, a regulated electricity network, a water utility, increasingly a data centre — offers contracted or regulated revenue over twenty to forty years, often indexed to inflation. It is close to a perfect match for the liability.

On the other side, governments everywhere need infrastructure investment they cannot fund from taxation, and are correspondingly willing to structure concessions, availability payments and regulated returns to attract private capital.

India has been among the more active destinations for this money. Gulf sovereign funds, Canadian pension plans, Singaporean investors and global infrastructure managers have taken positions in Indian roads, renewable generation, transmission, ports, warehousing and digital infrastructure. The country's asset monetisation programmes and investment trust structures were designed substantially to make these assets accessible to exactly this class of investor.

There is a great deal to be said for it. This is genuinely patient capital, unlike the private equity model that requires an exit within five years. It funds assets that would otherwise be delayed. It brings operational discipline and international standards to sectors that often lacked both.

But the transaction deserves more public scrutiny than it receives, on three counts.

The first is pricing. A concession that runs forty years is a very long bet, and the party with better modelling capacity generally wins it. Governments negotiating these agreements are frequently under fiscal pressure and time constraint; the counterparty is not.

The second is control. Ports, power networks, airports and telecommunications backbones are strategic assets. Ownership by a foreign state's investment vehicle is a different proposition from ownership by a domestic pension fund, and the difference is political rather than financial.

The third is the user. A regulated return has to come from somewhere, and it comes from tolls, tariffs and charges paid by households and businesses over decades. That is not inherently wrong — the asset has to be paid for — but the incidence of the payment is a public decision being made inside private contracts.

The capital is welcome and the need is real. The terms deserve to be published.

The Small Business Credit Gap Nobody Closes

Small firms generate most employment in most economies and receive a fraction of formal lending. The reasons are structural, and the workarounds are expensive.

Small and medium enterprises account for the majority of employment in most economies and a disproportionately small share of formal bank credit. The gap has been documented for decades, in developed and developing markets alike, and it has resisted every generation of policy aimed at it. The reason is not malice. It is unit economics. Assessing a loan costs a bank roughly the same whether the loan is for fifty thousand or fifty million, and the smaller loan generates a fraction of the revenue. Small firms typically lack audited accounts, have thin or absent credit histories, cannot offer the collateral banks prefer, and operate in sectors with high failure rates. A rational lending officer, assessed on portfolio quality, declines. So small firms fund themselves from the alternatives: personal savings, family, credit cards, supplier credit, informal lenders, and increasingly a range of financial technology providers offering fast decisions at high effective rates. Each of these carries a cost, and the costs compound. Funding a business on personal credit cards means the founder's home is effectively the collateral. Supplier credit constrains negotiating power on price. Informal lending at community rates carries the additional hazard that default damages relationships as well as finances.

Several developments have genuinely improved matters. Digital payments create a transaction record where none existed, and lenders can now underwrite against observed cash flow rather than against a balance sheet. Invoice financing and receivables platforms let a firm borrow against money it is already owed. In India, the payments infrastructure and account aggregator frameworks have made this data portable in a way that few other countries have achieved. Government credit guarantee schemes shift part of the loss to the state and do measurably increase lending volumes.

But two persistent problems remain, and both fall hardest on migrant and minority-owned firms.

The first is that alternative underwriting still requires a formal transaction trail. A business that operates substantially in cash — common in food service, retail, construction and personal services — is invisible to it. Formalising is the answer, and formalising has tax and compliance costs that are precisely why the business stayed informal.

The second is that the cheapest capital continues to flow through relationships. A founder who went to school with a banker gets a meeting. A founder whose network is entirely within their own community does not, and instead pays the community rate.

The practical guidance for owners is narrow but useful. Separate business and personal accounts from day one, because the transaction record is now the credit file. Build a relationship with a lender before you need one. Take the smallest facility you qualify for and repay it, because the record is the asset. And treat guarantee-backed schemes as worth the paperwork, because the rate difference over a few years exceeds the cost of the accountant.

TSAI BUREAU

The Warning That Came Too Late

More than nine hundred dead in the Himalayan floods. The failure was not of prediction. It was of governance.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : The death toll from the floods across Nepal and Tibet has passed nine hundred. Along the Trishuli in Nuwakot district, a freshwater surge tore through settlements that had a matter of minutes of notice. Among the dead and missing are workers trapped in hydropower tunnels; the country's private power producers now say that authorities lost critical time in reaching them. In the same week, flash flooding through the Grand Canyon killed a visitor in one of the most intensively monitored parks on earth.

Later this month, world leaders will convene in New York for a climate summit called by the Secretary-General, a decade after the Paris Agreement. The speeches will be about emissions. They should be, in part. But the nine hundred did not die of emissions in any sense that a mitigation target addresses. They died of a warning that did not reach them, an evacuation that had not been rehearsed, a tunnel with one exit, and a rescue that began too late. Those are governance failures, and governance failures have names, offices and budgets attached to them.

This distinction has been the great evasion of climate politics for twenty years. Mitigation is a global collective action problem in which no single government can be held responsible for the outcome, which makes it a comfortable subject for a leader's podium. Adaptation is local, specific and auditable. Was there a siren in that valley? Did it work? Who was responsible for maintaining it? Was there a route out of the gorge, and had anyone walked it? Did the hydropower concession require an emergency plan, and did any inspector ever check? Every one of those questions has an answer, and every answer identifies a person. That is precisely why they are asked so rarely at summits.

The Himalayan case is a warning to more than the Himalayas. Glacial and landslide-dammed lakes across the range are multiplying and are inadequately surveyed. The same watersheds are being developed at speed for run-of-river hydropower, an infrastructure whose entire logic is to put tunnels, penstocks and worker camps in the narrowest, steepest parts of exactly the valleys that flash floods scour. The engineering was designed against a hydrological record that no longer describes the climate. And the political geography is the worst possible: the upper catchments lie in China, the middle in Nepal and India, the lower in India and Bangladesh, and the sharing of real-time hydrological data across those borders remains a matter of bilateral negotiation rather than obligation. A surge does not wait for a diplomatic note.

The absurdity is that the technology is cheap and proven. Automated upstream gauges cost a rounding error against the capital budget of a single dam. Cell broadcast alerts reach every handset in a valley in seconds and require no subscription, no app and no literacy in a second language. Bangladesh built a cyclone warning and shelter system that cut mortality from hundreds of thousands to hundreds within a generation, and it did so as one of the poorest countries in the world. This is not a frontier of science. It is a question of whether anyone is made responsible for it.

Three things ought to come out of this month's summit if it is to be worth the airfare. First, a binding norm on transboundary real-time hydrological data: upstream states should be obliged to share gauge readings across borders in real time, on the same principle by which aviation and maritime hazard reporting already operate. There is no defensible reason for a river's flow to be a state secret. Second, an adaptation finance instrument that pays for warning systems and evacuation infrastructure directly and quickly, rather than through the multi-year project cycles that have made adaptation funding notorious. Third, and least likely, liability. A hydropower concession that puts workers underground in a flood corridor without a rehearsed evacuation plan should carry consequences for the concessionaire and for the regulator who signed it off, and those consequences should be written into the license.

The counterargument will be that poor countries cannot afford gold-plated safety regimes and that development requires accepting risk. Nepal needs the electricity and the export revenue; the villages in these valleys want the roads and the jobs the projects bring. That is all true, and it is why the demand here is for the cheap measures rather than the expensive ones. A gauge, a siren, a text message and a second exit from a tunnel are not gold plating. They are the difference between a flood and a massacre. When the leaders gather, the reflex will be to fold these deaths into the general argument about the climate crisis, where responsibility is universal and therefore nobody's. Resist it. Nine hundred people died in a week in valleys where the water was already rising and where somebody, somewhere, had the information in hand. The question worth asking in New York is not only how much the world is warming. It is who was supposed to make the call, and why they didn't.

The Handover Nobody Planned For

The businesses that migrant entrepreneurs built are reaching the point of transfer. Most have no succession plan, and the second generation frequently does not want them.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : A pattern is playing out simultaneously across diaspora business communities worldwide: the founders are in their seventies, the firms are worth real money, and nobody has decided what happens next.

The businesses in question follow a recognisable shape. They were built by someone who arrived with limited capital and no access to mainstream credit. They grew through relentless hours, family labour, reinvested profit and reputation within a community. They are frequently in wholesale, retail, hospitality, transport, property, healthcare services or professional practice. They employ people. And they are governed almost entirely through the founder's judgement, which was the correct structure while the founder was building and is the wrong one now.

The specific failures repeat with striking regularity. Ownership is undocumented or informally shared among relatives. Personal and business finances are intermingled to a degree that makes valuation difficult. Key relationships — suppliers, landlords, major customers — exist between individuals rather than entities, and do not transfer. Books were kept for tax rather than for sale. And the founder, having built the thing from nothing, is genuinely unable to delegate authority within it.

Then there is the part nobody discusses at family gatherings: the children often do not want it.

The second generation was, in most of these families, educated deliberately and expensively for professions the parents did not have access to. They became doctors, engineers, lawyers, analysts. Asking them to run a wholesale distribution business is asking them to reverse the entire strategy their upbringing was built around. Some do it out of obligation and resent it. Some refuse and carry guilt. Very few of these conversations happen explicitly before the founder's health forces them.

The predictable outcome is value destruction. A business without a documented succession plan, transferable relationships and clean accounts is worth substantially less than the same business with them — and in the worst cases, where the founder dies suddenly, it is worth almost nothing within a year. The remedies are ordinary corporate practice and are available to any firm willing to spend a few thousand on professional advice. Document the ownership. Separate the accounts. Transfer key relationships to the entity through written agreements. Build a second tier of management with real authority, which also makes the business worth more whoever ends up owning it. Get a valuation while the founder is well. And have the conversation with the children early enough that a sale to management or a third party is a considered option rather than a distress outcome. Selling the business is not a betrayal of the founder's work. Losing it in probate is. The generation that built these firms did something remarkable with almost no institutional support. The least the next generation owes them is a plan.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : The most consequential financial development of the past decade in many parts of the world has not been a market crash. It has been insurers deciding, region by region, that certain risks are no longer worth writing at any price a customer will pay.

The mechanism is straightforward. Insurance works by pooling losses that are individually unpredictable but collectively estimable. That model depends on the past being a reasonable guide to the future. When the frequency and severity of wildfires, floods, windstorms and coastal surge shift faster than the models absorb, the pricing basis breaks. Insurers respond by raising premiums, narrowing coverage, adding exclusions and deductibles, and eventually declining to renew.

That sequence is visible now in California, in Florida, in parts of Australia, across southern Europe, and along flood-exposed river systems in South Asia. Reinsurance — the insurance that insurers buy — has repriced sharply, and because reinsurance is a genuinely global market, a hurricane season in one hemisphere raises the cost of covering a warehouse in another.

The consequences run further than premiums. Property without insurance is difficult to mortgage, because lenders require cover. Property that cannot be mortgaged is difficult to sell at anything like its previous value. A neighbourhood that loses insurability can therefore lose a large share of its household wealth without a single storm arriving. Where governments step in as insurer of last resort, the risk has not disappeared; it has been transferred to taxpayers, usually without a public decision to that effect.

For business owners the exposure is more immediate and less understood. Commercial property cover, business interruption cover and supply chain exposure are all repricing at once. Many small firms discover only at claim time that their policy excludes the specific peril that hit them — flood exclusions on a policy sold as comprehensive are the classic example. And a business whose premises become uninsurable faces a landlord who cannot insure the building either.

For the diaspora there is a particular dimension worth naming. Property held in a home country — the plot in Kerala, the house in Punjab, the flat in Lahore, the family land in Sylhet — is frequently uninsured entirely, managed remotely, and exposed to precisely the flood and storm risks that are intensifying. It is also often the largest single asset a family holds outside its country of residence.

The practical advice is unglamorous. Read the exclusions, not the summary. Establish whether flood is covered and at what deductible. Check whether the sum insured reflects current rebuilding cost rather than the figure set a decade ago. And for overseas property, find out whether cover exists at all before finding out the hard way.

Insurance is the mechanism by which a modern economy absorbs disaster. Where it withdraws, households absorb it directly.

The Airline Business Has No Cushion Left

(By Our Staff Reporter) : Commercial aviation is a business that earns thin margins in good years and loses money spectacularly in bad ones, and it is currently being squeezed from both ends.

Fuel is the immediate problem. It is typically the largest or second-largest cost line for a carrier, and the war around the Strait of Hormuz has kept crude elevated for six months with no settled resolution. Airlines hedge, which delays the impact rather than removing it, and hedges written at lower prices roll off. Carriers based in fuel-importing economies with weakening currencies face the cost twice over, since fuel is priced in dollars and revenue is substantially in local currency.

The second squeeze is capacity. The global order backlog for new aircraft stretches years out, delivery schedules have slipped repeatedly since the pandemic disrupted aerospace supply chains, and engine availability problems have grounded aircraft that airlines already own. The result is a strange market in which demand for seats is strong, carriers want to expand, and the physical capacity to do so is unavailable. Older aircraft stay in service longer, which raises maintenance cost and fuel burn simultaneously.

Add the smaller pressures and the picture completes itself: airport charges rising, air traffic control constraints in congested airspace, insurance costs up, and rerouting around conflict zones adding flight time and therefore fuel to a growing share of long-haul sectors. Airspace closures in West Asia have lengthened routes between Europe and Asia for many operators.

The consequences reach passengers in a specific order. Fares rise on routes with limited competition first. Marginal routes are cut, which falls hardest on smaller cities. Ancillary charges — baggage, seat selection, changes — climb, because they are less visible in fare comparison. And the weakest carriers exit, which reduces competition further and locks in the higher fares.

For the diaspora this is not an abstract commercial story. Long-haul routes between South Asia and North America, Europe, the Gulf and Australia carry family travel that is not discretionary in the way tourism is — weddings, funerals, elderly parents, children at university. Demand on those routes is relatively insensitive to price, which is precisely why carriers can raise fares on them, and why a family emergency in monsoon season can cost several times what the same ticket cost in a quiet month. There is one structural bright spot. Gulf and Indian carriers have placed among the largest aircraft orders in commercial history, and Indian domestic aviation has grown into one of the world's larger markets. When those deliveries arrive, capacity on South Asian routes expands substantially. That relief is real and it is several years away. Between now and then, the industry has no cushion, and neither do the people who have to fly.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : NASA's Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope lifted off on August 30 aboard a SpaceX Falcon Heavy, cleared for launch after final preparations earlier in the month. Its mission is to probe cosmic expansion, the history of the universe, and the distribution of matter across it.

The observatory's defining characteristic is field of view. The James Webb Space Telescope, which has dominated astronomy coverage since it began returning images, looks at small patches of sky in extraordinary depth and in the infrared. Roman has comparable sensitivity but a field of view roughly a hundred times larger. That difference in survey speed is what makes its central question tractable: to measure how the expansion of the universe has changed over cosmic time, you need not a beautiful image of one galaxy but the positions, distances and shapes of a very large number of them.

The question itself is the largest open problem in physics. Observations in the late 1990s established that the expansion of the universe is not merely continuing but accelerating. Something is driving that acceleration. Physicists call it dark energy, which is a label rather than an explanation, and it appears to account for roughly seventy percent of the total energy content of the universe. There is no accepted account of what it is.

The debate has become more interesting rather than less over the past two years. Some analyses of large galaxy surveys have suggested that dark energy may not be constant — that its strength may be changing over time, which would rule out the simplest model and require new physics. Other work has pushed back: a major analysis published in late August found that the evidence for cosmic acceleration remains strong and preserves the leading model. That disagreement is precisely the kind of thing a purpose-built survey instrument is meant to resolve.

Roman will approach the problem through several independent methods — the distribution of galaxies across cosmic time, the subtle distortion of galaxy shapes by intervening mass, and supernovae used as distance markers. Agreement across methods that fail in different ways is what constitutes evidence in cosmology.

It is also worth noting what else falls out of a wide, deep, repeated survey of the sky. The same data will find large numbers of exoplanets through gravitational microlensing, catalogue objects in the outer solar system, and capture transient events that appear and fade. Survey instruments generate discoveries their designers did not plan for, which is a strong argument for building them.

Results will take years. Cosmological analysis is slow, cautious and heavily cross-checked, and it should be. But the instrument that may finally constrain what seventy percent of the universe is made of is now above the atmosphere and working.


The Association of Indians in America - New York
39th Deepavali
GRAND LIVE FIREWORKS DISPLAY
FREE ADMISSION • FREE PARKING
Saturday, October 3rd, 2026
12:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Overlook Beach, Long Island, NY 11702
(Near Jones Beach, Ocean Parkway)
EXPERIENCE OUR CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS
Traditional dances & Bollywood performances
Ramayana musical live dance drama
Vibrant Rangoli & Henna Tattoos
Authentic Indian cuisine & Masala Chai
30-minute live fireworks display over beach in evening
Kids' corner with fun activities
Retail & corporate vendor booths
Health & wellness zone
Yoga & Zumba sessions
SPONSORS & MEDIA PARTNERS
Meet & Greet Surprise celebrities
RAFFLE TICKET
We look forward to celebrating with you
Community • Family • Culture • Together
Open to all: Evening of Unity & Celebration
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Contacts: 516-306-3295 516-302-5185
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Zelle Payment: 516-698-9272
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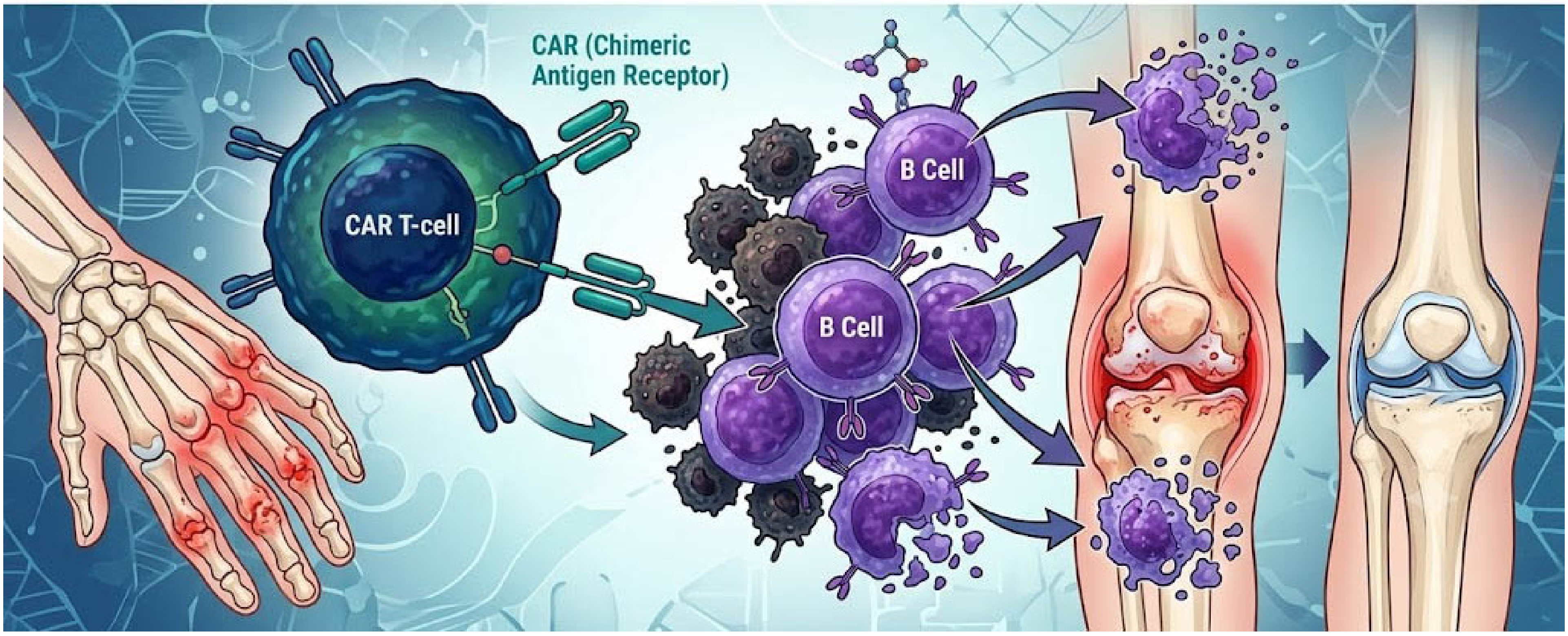
A Cancer Therapy Turns Out to Work on Autoimmune Disease

CAR T-cell treatment, engineered to attack blood cancers, has produced dramatic results in severe rheumatoid arthritis. The implications are large and the caveats are larger.



(By Our Staff Reporter) : Researchers reported in late August that CAR T-cell therapy substantially reduced disease activity in six people with severe rheumatoid arthritis that had failed to respond to existing treatment. Six patients is a very small number. The result is nonetheless one of the more consequential findings in medicine this year, because of what it suggests about a whole category of disease.

CAR T-cell therapy was developed for cancer. The procedure takes a patient's own T cells, engineers them in a laboratory to recognise a specific target on the surface of unwanted cells, multiplies them, and returns them to the body. In blood cancers, the target is a marker on malignant B cells, and the results in patients who had exhausted other options have been genuinely transformative.

The insight now being tested is that several autoimmune diseases are also driven by misbehaving B cells — cells producing antibodies against the body's own tissue. If the same engineered cells can clear that population, the disease should abate. Early work in lupus produced striking results, and this rheumatoid arthritis finding extends the pattern.

What makes it more than an incremental advance is the possibility of a reset rather than a suppression. Existing treatment for autoimmune disease generally means damping the immune system continuously, for life, with the infection risk and cost that implies. If clearing the offending cells allows the immune system to repopulate without the fault, the result would be closer to remission than to management.

That is the hope. The caveats are substantial and should be stated as prominently as the finding.

Six patients cannot establish durability, and durability is the entire question — an effect that fades at eighteen months is a different proposition from one that holds. The procedure is not benign: it involves chemotherapy to deplete existing immune cells before infusion, and CAR T carries known risks of severe inflammatory reactions and neurological effects. Long-term consequences of deliberately eliminating a cell population are not fully characterised. And randomised trials against existing therapy have not been done.

Then there is cost and access, which is where this story becomes a policy question rather than a laboratory one. CAR T therapy is among the most expensive treatments in medicine, priced in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and requires specialised manufacturing and hospital capability. Applying it to autoimmune disease means applying it to conditions affecting a far larger population than the cancers it was developed for. On current cost structures that is not deliverable at scale anywhere, and it is entirely undeliverable in most of the world.

Work on cheaper manufacturing, including approaches that engineer cells inside the body rather than in a laboratory, is the part of this field that will determine whether the finding matters to anyone outside a handful of research hospitals. The science is genuinely exciting. The distribution problem is unsolved.

Reading the Mountain After It Fell

Scientists have reconstructed the sequence behind the glacial collapse on the Nepal–Tibet border. The forensic work is impressive. The monitoring that would have provided warning was not there.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : In the days after the August 26 glacial collapse that killed more than a thousand people along the Nepal–Tibet border, researchers began assembling the sequence of events from satellite imagery, seismic records and elevation data. That work, reported in the scientific press within days, illustrates both how good this science has become and how little of it is deployed where it would save lives.

The forensic method is now well established. Satellite radar and optical imagery from before and after an event reveal what moved and how much. Seismometers hundreds of kilometres away record large mass movements as distinctive signals, allowing the timing and sometimes the sequence to be reconstructed to within seconds. Digital elevation models differenced across the event quantify the volume of ice and rock displaced. Within a week, a reasonably confident account of a catastrophe can be assembled from instruments that were never pointed at it.

The underlying hazard is understood in general terms. Warming at high altitude is proceeding faster than the global average. Glaciers retreat, leaving meltwater lakes impounded behind unconsolidated moraine — loose rock and debris that was never engineered to hold water. Permafrost that cemented steep rock faces thaws, destabilising slopes above. A rock or ice avalanche into a lake displaces water and overtops or breaches the dam, and the resulting flood picks up sediment as it descends, becoming a debris flow with far more destructive energy than water alone.

Similar sequences produced the Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand in 2021 and the South Lhonak outburst in Sikkim in 2023.

What is missing is not scientific understanding. It is instrumentation and the institutional capacity to act on it.

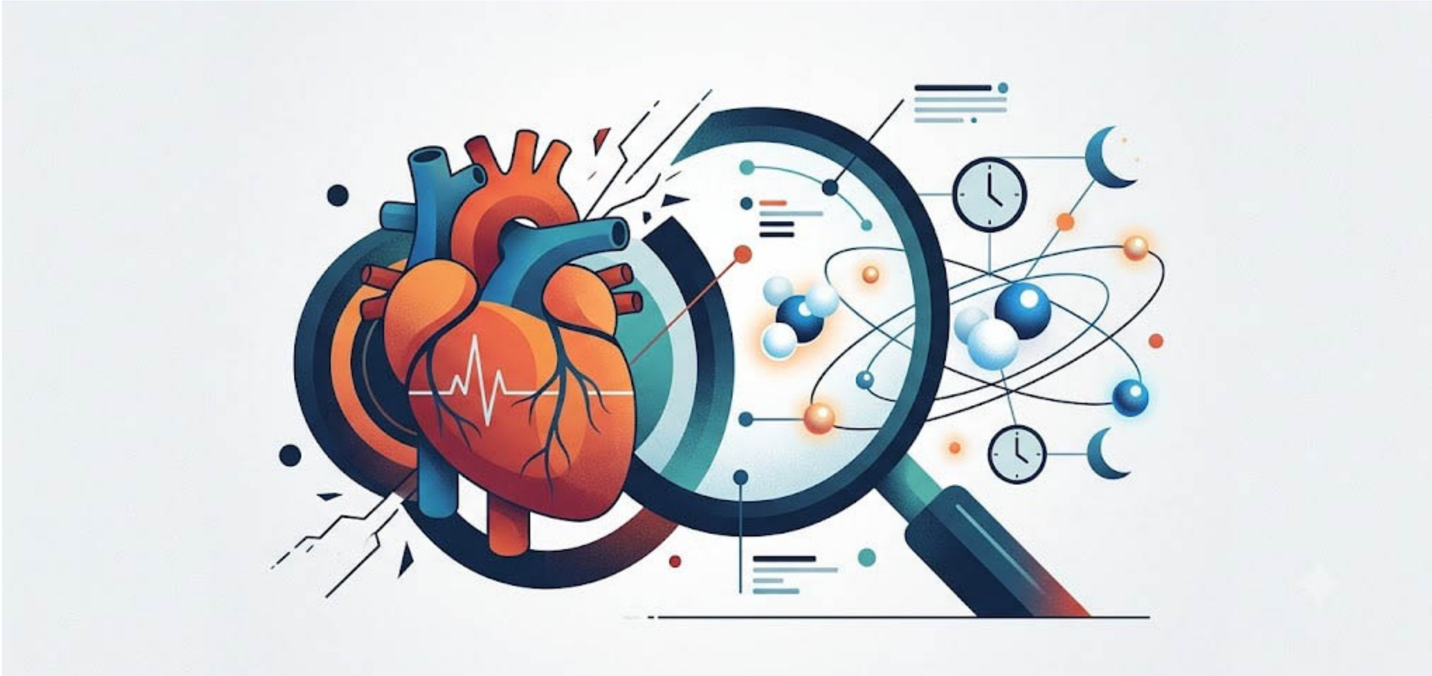
Glacial lakes across the Himalaya have been catalogued and ranked for risk using satellite data. Relatively few of the high-risk ones carry ground instrumentation — water level sensors, seismic monitors, cameras — capable of detecting a breach in progress. Fewer still are connected to a warning system that reaches downstream settlements in the minutes available. These floods travel fast, but they do not travel instantly; the interval between initiation and impact tens of kilometres downstream is enough to move people to higher ground, if anyone knows to tell them.

The obstacles are prosaic. Instruments at altitude are expensive to install and harder to maintain. Power and communications are unreliable. Responsibility is divided among agencies. And the basins are transboundary — this flood began in Tibet and killed people in Nepal, and data crossing that border quickly is a diplomatic question rather than a technical one. The science that explains a disaster within a week is the same science that could warn of one within minutes. The difference between the two is funding and coordination, not knowledge.

The Melatonin Finding, and How to Read It

A large study associated long-term melatonin use with substantially higher heart failure risk. The correct response is neither alarm nor dismissal, and the reasoning is worth following.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : A large preliminary study reported in late August found that people with chronic insomnia who used melatonin over the long term had roughly a ninety percent higher risk of developing heart failure over five years than comparable non-users. The finding circulated quickly, as findings with a large number and a common product always do. It is worth walking through how to read a result like this, because the reasoning applies far beyond this one supplement.



Start with what the study can and cannot show. This is observational: researchers compared people who took melatonin with people who did not. It does not establish that melatonin causes heart failure. The most important alternative explanation is confounding by indication — the people taking melatonin long term have chronic insomnia, and chronic insomnia is itself independently associated with cardiovascular disease. Untangling the effect of the drug from the effect of the condition it treats is genuinely difficult, and good studies attempt it statistically while acknowledging they cannot do it perfectly.

Next, the number. A ninety percent increase sounds enormous, and relative risk usually does. What matters to an individual is absolute risk: if the baseline five-year risk in this population is small, a ninety percent increase on a small number remains a small number. Reporting that gives the relative figure without the absolute one is, in the strict sense, accurate and, in practice, misleading.

Third, the word preliminary. This was presented as early findings, which means it has not completed the full peer review process that catches methodological problems. Preliminary results are frequently confirmed. They are also frequently revised downward.

None of which makes the study worthless. It is a signal, and signals are how safety questions get identified. Melatonin is regulated as a dietary supplement in many countries rather than as a medicine, which means it faces far lighter requirements for long-term safety data than a prescription drug would, and is sold in doses that vary widely and often far exceed what physiology would suggest. That regulatory gap is the real story here, and it applies to a very large category of products people take daily for years.

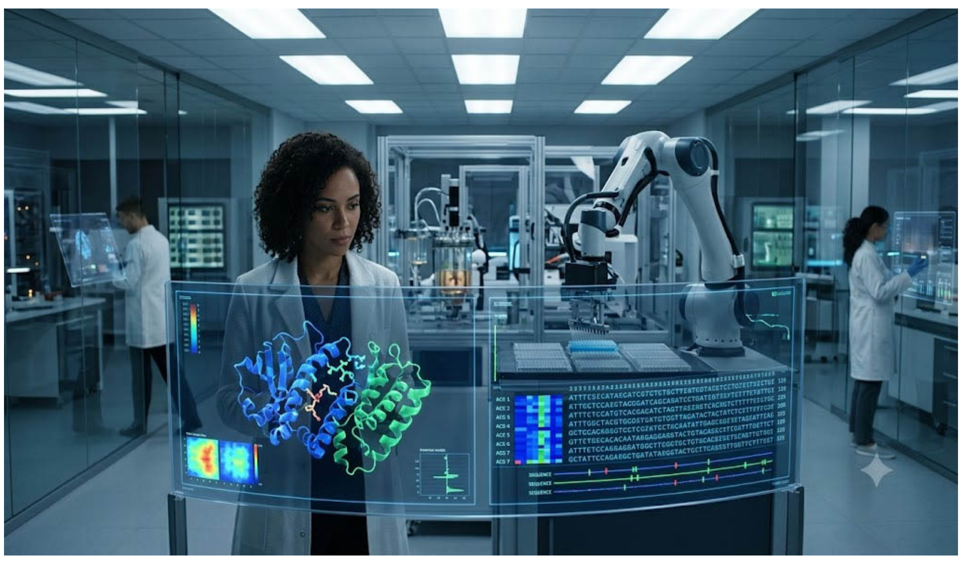
The sensible response for an individual taking melatonin long term is not to stop abruptly or to panic, but to raise it at the next appointment with a doctor — particularly if there is existing cardiovascular risk — and to ask whether the underlying sleep problem has ever been properly assessed. Chronic insomnia has effective non-pharmacological treatments that are consistently under-prescribed relative to their evidence.

The broader lesson is the transferable one. A single observational study is a reason to ask a question. It is not a reason to make a decision.

This is a general discussion rather than medical advice; anyone taking any medication long term should discuss changes with their own doctor.

The Machine Is Now Doing the Searching

(By Our Staff Reporter) : Two results reported in the past fortnight illustrate what artificial intelligence is actually contributing to laboratory science, as distinct from what it is claimed to contribute.



In the first, researchers used machine learning to search more than a hundred million possible parameter combinations for three-dimensional printing of a high-performance alloy developed for rocket applications. Rather than testing combinations sequentially, the system proposed experiments, learned from the outcomes, and proposed better ones. It identified six successful configurations after around forty physical experiments.

In the second, a model trained on roughly half a million DNA sequences identified the signature of a genetic switch involved in turning genes on, locating it in about sixty percent of human genes — a structural feature that had resisted decades of conventional analysis.

Neither of these is a machine having an idea. Both are a machine doing something humans do badly: searching an enormous combinatorial space efficiently, and detecting statistical regularities across data volumes too large to inspect. That distinction matters because it explains where the technique works and where it does not. It works where the space of possibilities is vast, where a clear measure of success exists, and where each test is expensive enough that reducing the number of tests is genuinely valuable. Alloy processing parameters, catalyst formulations, protein structures, drug candidate screening and genomic pattern detection all fit that description. It works far less well where the problem is deciding what question to ask, where success is not cleanly measurable, or where the available data is systematically biased.

The interesting consequence is what happens to the bottleneck. Historically the limiting factor in materials and chemistry research was the cost of exploring possibilities. If that cost collapses, the constraint moves to physical experimentation — you still have to print the alloy and test it — and then to the slowest step of all, which is validating a result well enough to build something on it. Automated laboratories are being built specifically to address the middle constraint.

There is also a quieter change in the shape of scientific work. A field where the search is automated rewards different skills than one where it is not: designing the objective function well, knowing which candidates are physically plausible, and recognising when the model has found an artefact of the training data rather than a fact about the world. That last skill is the one currently in shortest supply.

The reasonable expectation is neither the transformation of science nor a passing fashion. It is a substantial speed-up in a specific and valuable class of problem — searching large spaces of possible materials, molecules and sequences — with the harder parts of research, deciding what matters and confirming it is true, unchanged and still done by people.

THE UNIVERSE IS STILL ACCELERATING, FOR NOW

Recent surveys hinted that dark energy might be weakening, which would break the standard model of cosmology. A major new analysis says the evidence does not support that yet.

(By Our Staff Reporter) : For two years cosmology has been unsettled by a genuinely interesting possibility: that dark energy, the thing driving the accelerating expansion of the universe, might not be constant after all.

The standard model of cosmology treats it as constant — a fixed property of space itself, unchanging over time. That assumption is not decorative. It is load-bearing. Nearly everything in the model rests on it, and it has fitted the data well for twenty-five years.

Then large galaxy surveys mapping the distribution of matter across cosmic time produced results that hinted at something else: a dark energy whose strength has changed, weakening in the recent universe. Some analyses went further and suggested the acceleration itself might be slowing. If confirmed, that would be the most significant development in fundamental physics in decades, requiring genuinely new theory.

A major analysis published in late August pushes back. Reassessing the evidence, it finds that the case for cosmic acceleration remains strong and that the leading model retains its position. The hints of evolving dark energy, on this assessment, are not yet strong enough to overturn it.

This is not a disappointing outcome. It is what a functioning field looks like. The reasoning behind the caution is worth understanding, because it recurs across science. Cosmological results depend on chaining together several independent measurements — the cosmic microwave background, the distribution of galaxies, supernova distances, the bending of light by mass. Each carries its own systematic uncertainties: calibration errors, selection effects, assumptions in the modelling. A small unrecognised systematic in one dataset can produce an apparent deviation that looks like new physics. The history of the subject includes several such episodes, and the discipline has learned to demand a great deal before declaring the model broken.

So the correct position is genuine suspension of judgement. The hints may be real, in which case they will strengthen as data accumulates and the field will have a revolution on its hands. They may be systematics, in which case they will fade. Either outcome is informative, and neither is yet established. This is where the new generation of survey instruments becomes decisive. The Roman Space Telescope, launched on August 30, was designed specifically to measure the expansion history with independent methods and far larger samples. Ground-based surveys are mapping galaxies in numbers that were impossible a decade ago. The public discussion of science tends to treat a contested result as a failure of the enterprise, and a settled one as boring. The reverse is closer to the truth. A field with an open question, competing analyses of the same data, and a purpose-built instrument on the way to settle it is a field working exactly as intended.

The Case for Arriving Slowly

Long-distance rail is expanding again across Europe and Asia while short-haul flying comes under pressure. The journey stops being the cost of the holiday and becomes part of it.

Something unexpected has happened to long-distance rail. After decades of decline against aviation, night trains and long-distance services are being reintroduced across Europe, high-speed networks continue to expand across Asia, and a generation of travellers is choosing to spend twelve hours getting somewhere it could have flown to in two.

The drivers are partly environmental. Rail emits a small fraction of the carbon per passenger-kilometre that short-haul flying does, and in several countries policy has begun to reflect that through taxation or through outright restriction of short domestic flights where a rail alternative exists.

But the honest case for slow travel is experiential rather than moral, and it holds up better when made that way.

Consider what flying between two cities a few hundred kilometres apart actually involves: travel to a peripheral airport, security, waiting, a short flight, waiting again, travel from another peripheral airport. Total door to door, four to six hours, of which the flight is a fraction and almost none of it is pleasant. The equivalent train leaves a city centre, arrives in a city centre, permits movement, work, conversation and sleep, and passes through landscape at a scale a human being can register.

The great long-distance journeys are worth planning a trip around. Europe's revived night trains connect cities across the continent while you sleep. Japan's network makes the entire country accessible without a car. India's railways remain among the most extensive on earth and among the most rewarding to travel — the long-distance routes through Konkan, across Rajasthan, or up into the hills on the narrow-gauge mountain lines are experiences in themselves rather than transfers between experiences. Switzerland, Norway, Canada and Peru each have routes on which the train is the destination.

There are practical considerations worth knowing before committing.

Booking systems vary enormously in quality, and the cheapest fares on most networks open months ahead and rise steeply as departure approaches — the opposite of the last-minute flight bargain. Cross-border ticketing in Europe remains fragmented, and a journey crossing three countries may require three bookings with no protection if a delay breaks the chain. Sleeper accommodation ranges from genuinely comfortable to endurance, and the difference is not always clear from the booking page. And overnight rail is only cheaper than flying once the saved hotel night is counted, which for a solo traveller it usually is and for a family often is not.

The deeper argument is about what travel is for. Flying treats distance as an obstacle to be eliminated. Rail treats it as territory to be crossed, which is a more accurate description of what is actually happening when you go somewhere far away. Arriving somewhere having watched the landscape change into it is a different kind of arrival.

TSAI BUREAU

The Oldest Form of Travel

Pilgrimage routes are among the busiest long-distance walking networks on earth, and an increasing share of those walking them do not describe themselves as religious.

Pilgrimage is the original organised travel. Long before leisure tourism existed, ordinary people made long, difficult journeys to particular places, and the infrastructure that grew along those routes — lodging, food, guides, maps, roadside shrines — is recognisably the ancestor of the modern travel industry.

Those routes are busier now than they have been in centuries, and their composition has changed.

The Camino de Santiago across northern Spain is the most-cited example, drawing hundreds of thousands of walkers annually, a substantial and growing proportion of whom describe their motivation as something other than religious faith — a break, a bereavement, a decision, a want of clarity. Japan's Kumano Kodo and the Shikoku temple circuit have seen similar patterns. In South Asia, the great pilgrimage networks operate at a scale that dwarfs all of these: the Char Dham circuits in the Himalaya, the Vaishno Devi ascent, Sabarimala, Ajmer Sharif, the Sikh routes through Punjab and into Pakistan, and above all the Kumbh, which periodically produces the largest gathering of human beings anywhere on earth.

What draws the non-religious walker to a religious route is worth taking seriously rather than dismissing as tourism in fancy dress. A pilgrimage route offers something ordinary travel does not: a fixed destination, a defined path, a daily rhythm, physical difficulty, and the company of strangers doing the same thing for their own reasons. Those constraints are precisely what a person seeking to think clearly tends to need, and they are difficult to construct deliberately.

There is a tension in this that deserves acknowledgement. Routes that become popular change. Accommodation prices rise, local character gives way to services aimed at visitors, and the people for whom the site is genuinely sacred find themselves sharing it with photographers. Several major pilgrimage sites have introduced permit systems and daily caps for exactly this reason, and some of that management has been driven by safety — the Himalayan circuits in particular have struggled with visitor numbers exceeding what mountain roads and high-altitude infrastructure can carry.

For the traveller, the obligations are simple and frequently ignored. Learn what the place means to the people who come to it for faith. Dress and behave accordingly, particularly around ritual. Ask before photographing people at prayer. Use local accommodation and eat local food, which is how the route sustains the communities along it. Book permits where required, and treat caps as protection rather than obstruction. For the diaspora traveller there is an additional dimension. These routes are frequently the most direct available connection to a family's religious and geographic origins — a grandparent's village on the way, a shrine a great-grandmother spoke about. Walking them with an older relative, while that is still possible, is a different journey from walking them alone.

TSAI BUREAU

‘THE DESTINATIONS THAT ARE PLANNING FOR THEIR OWN DISAPPEARANCE’

Small island states depend on tourism for survival and are among the most exposed places on earth to rising seas. **Several are adapting in ways worth understanding before you visit.**

Small island developing states occupy an unenviable position. Tourism is frequently the largest sector of their economies, and the aviation that delivers it is a meaningful contributor to the warming that threatens their existence. They are among the least responsible for the problem and among the first to face its consequences.

The exposure is not distant. Rising seas contaminate freshwater aquifers with salt before they inundate anything, which constrains agriculture and drinking water years ahead of any land loss. Warming and acidifying oceans bleach the coral reefs that support fisheries, protect coastlines from storm surge, and are frequently the reason visitors come at all. Storm intensity is increasing in several island regions, and a single severe cyclone can remove a year's tourism revenue and much of the infrastructure that generates it.

The responses being attempted are more varied and more interesting than the coverage suggests.

The Maldives has pursued land reclamation and elevated development, building higher ground where none existed. Several Pacific states have negotiated migration arrangements with larger neighbours, which is adaptation of a starker kind — a managed retreat conducted decades in advance. Others have invested in reef restoration, mangrove replanting and natural coastal defences, which are cheaper and frequently more effective than engineered barriers. Many have moved aggressively on renewable generation, partly for emissions and substantially because importing diesel to a remote island is ruinously expensive.

Tourism policy has shifted too. Several destinations have moved deliberately toward lower-volume, higher-value visitors, on the reasoning that the same revenue from fewer people imposes less strain on water, waste and reef systems. Bhutan applies a comparable logic on land. The approach is defensible and it has an obvious equity consequence: it prices out precisely the travellers for whom such a trip was already ambitious.

For the visitor, the meaningful choices are narrower than marketing suggests but not trivial. Where you stay determines whether money reaches the local economy or an overseas owner, and locally owned guesthouses retain far more of it than international resorts. Water is frequently the binding constraint on small islands, and a resort pool and daily linen change consume what the surrounding community also needs. Reef etiquette — no touching, no standing, reef-safe sunscreen where required — is not decorative. Fewer, longer trips reduce the flying per day of holiday, which is the single largest emissions variable a traveller controls.

None of that resolves the underlying contradiction, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. A visitor flying long-haul to a threatened island is part of the mechanism threatening it. What can be said is that these economies need the revenue now, that the emissions decision that matters is made in energy and transport policy rather than in individual holiday choices, and that visitors who understand what they are looking at tend to become the constituency that argues for it.

TSAI BUREAU

Everyone Is Moving Back In Together

Multigenerational living has been rising for two decades across countries that had spent the previous century moving away from it. The drivers are unromantic: housing costs that put independent ownership beyond younger adults, childcare costs that make a resident grandparent economically decisive, and eldercare costs that make a resident adult child equally so.

South Asian families, along with many others, largely never made the transition to the isolated nuclear household in the first place, which puts them in the unusual position of having practical knowledge that the surrounding society is now rediscovering.

That knowledge is worth stating explicitly, because the version usually presented — extended families are warm and supportive — omits everything that makes the arrangement actually work.

The first requirement is defensible private space. Multigenerational households that function well are not households where everyone shares everything; they are households where each unit has somewhere to close a door. Where housing stock does not permit that, tension is close to guaranteed regardless of goodwill. This is why the arrangement often works better in a larger house in a cheaper area than in a more prestigious flat.

The second is explicit agreement about money. Who pays what, whether contributions are rent or pooled income, what happens to the property eventually, and what a grandparent's childcare is worth in the arrangement. These conversations are avoided because they feel transactional between family members, and their avoidance is the single most common source of serious conflict — particularly at inheritance, when unstated assumptions held for thirty years turn out to have differed.

The third is authority over domestic decisions. Two adult women running one kitchen with different standards is a genuine structural problem, not a failure of character, and households that survive it have usually made a clear decision about whose domain is whose.

The fourth is a realistic view of caregiving. A resident grandparent who provides childcare is working, and will eventually need care themselves. Both facts are usually understood and neither is usually planned for.

Housing design is beginning to respond. Homes with separate entrances, secondary kitchens, ground-floor bedrooms with adjacent bathrooms, and self-contained annexes are being built and adapted specifically for these arrangements. Planning rules in several countries have been relaxed to permit secondary dwellings on residential plots. The market has noticed the demand. The financial logic is strong and rarely calculated properly. A household pooling accommodation costs, sharing childcare, and avoiding residential care fees is retaining sums that dwarf most household financial decisions.

The arrangement works when it is chosen and structured. It fails when it is assumed and improvised — which is how a great many families end up in it.

TSAI BUREAU

The Case for Putting It Down

Deliberate periods offline have moved from religious practice to mainstream advice. The religious version was always better designed, and it is worth understanding why.

The advice to spend regular periods away from screens has become ubiquitous, generally framed as a productivity technique or a wellness practice. Both framings miss what makes the older versions of it effective.

Observant Jewish practice sets aside a day each week on which work and electricity-dependent activity stop. Islamic prayer punctuates the day at fixed times that cannot be rescheduled around a meeting. Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist practice each involve daily periods with a defined form. Christian sabbath observance did the same thing across much of the world for centuries.

What these have in common, and what the modern digital detox generally lacks, is three features: the interval is fixed rather than discretionary, it is collective rather than individual, and it is filled with something rather than merely emptied of something.

Those three features do most of the work. A rule that applies whether or not you feel like it removes the daily negotiation that willpower loses. A practice observed by everyone around you removes the social cost of being unavailable — the reason most attempts fail is not craving but the expectation that a message will be answered. And a period with defined content, whether that is a meal, a service, a walk or a text read aloud, does not collapse back into the phone the way an unstructured hour does.

The problem the advice addresses is real enough. Attention is now the object of substantial commercial engineering. Applications are designed by people whose professional success is measured in time spent, using techniques developed to be difficult to resist. Treating an inability to put the phone down as a personal weakness misdescribes the situation: it is the intended outcome of considerable investment.

Which suggests the response should be structural rather than a matter of resolve. The measures that work are mostly environmental. Charging the phone in another room overnight. Removing specific applications from the device rather than promising to use them less. Agreeing a household rule about meals rather than an individual one. Setting a time after which messages are not answered and telling people about it, which converts an individual discipline into a shared expectation. For families with religious practice already in place, the observation worth making is that the existing structure is doing this work and can be leaned on rather than reinvented. A household that already keeps a fixed weekly or daily observance has the hardest part solved. For those without one, the useful lesson from the religious versions is that the arbitrary and the collective are features rather than defects. A rule that is negotiable is not a rule, and a discipline that only you observe will be broken by everyone else's expectations.

The point is not virtue. It is that sustained attention is a prerequisite for most things worth doing, and it is currently being competed for by parties with more resources than the individual holding the phone.

TSAI BUREAU

What the Second Generation Was Never Taught

Migrant parents built wealth through saving, property and business. Their children inherit the assets and frequently not the reasoning, which is the more valuable part.

There is a recognisable gap in many migrant families. The first generation developed strong financial instincts under difficult conditions — save aggressively, avoid debt, buy property, do not trust institutions further than necessary, keep gold. The second generation grew up materially secure, was educated into professional careers, and often received none of the reasoning behind any of it.

What passed down instead were the conclusions without their premises, which is how you get a generation that is either reflexively debt-averse in ways that cost them, or has no financial framework at all.

Take property, which occupies a near-sacred position in most of these families. The instinct was sound in context: property was a hedge against currency instability, a store of value in countries where financial systems were untrustworthy, collateral where credit was otherwise unavailable, and a physical asset that could not be expropriated by an administrative decision. Whether it remains the optimal allocation for someone earning a professional salary in a country with functioning capital markets, deep pension provision and tax-advantaged investment accounts is a separate question, and it is rarely asked because the conclusion was inherited as a principle.

Or debt. An absolute aversion to borrowing made sense where credit was informal, expensive and socially entangling. It makes considerably less sense where a mortgage is the cheapest money a household will ever access, and where a young adult who never uses credit builds no credit history and is then refused it when they need it.

The reverse failure is at least as common. Adults in their thirties with good incomes, no pension contributions beyond the default, no understanding of how their employer's scheme works, no will, no insurance, and a vague plan involving property purchased at some future point.

The specific gaps worth closing are unglamorous and finite. Understand the tax-advantaged accounts available in your country of residence, because using them is close to free money and the allowances do not carry forward indefinitely. Understand your pension: what is contributed, what it is invested in, and what the employer will match, which is the highest-return decision most people ever make. Hold emergency savings in cash, separately. Insure against the events that would be catastrophic rather than the ones that would be annoying. Write a will, particularly where assets sit in more than one country, because cross-border estates without documentation are where family relationships go to die. And have the conversation with parents, which is the difficult one. Where are the assets. Is there a will. Is property abroad documented and in whose name. What debts exist. Families that avoid that conversation out of delicacy generally have a far worse version of it later, in a lawyer's office, with less information and more at stake.

TSAI BUREAU

The Third Generation Stops Speaking

Heritage languages are typically lost within three generations. The pattern is well documented, the causes are unsentimental, and the interventions that work are specific. Linguists describe a three-generation pattern that repeats across migration histories with remarkable consistency. The first generation speaks the heritage language and acquires the local one to varying degrees. The second is bilingual, often with the heritage language dominant at home and the local language dominant everywhere else. The third understands the heritage language and does not speak it. The fourth does not understand it. South Asian families abroad frequently believe they are exempt from this because the language remains present in the home. They are generally not exempt; they are at a different point in the sequence than they think.

The mechanism is not lack of love for the language. It is arithmetic. A child acquires a language from the volume and variety of input received and, critically, from the need to produce it. A child who hears Punjabi or Urdu or Tamil at home but answers in English is receiving input without producing output, and comprehension without production is exactly the third-generation profile. Once school begins, the local language dominates hours, peers, media and identity, and the balance rarely recovers.

What is lost is more than a communication tool. It is direct access to grandparents, particularly once age erodes their second language. It is the ability to read a family's own literature, correspondence and religious texts without mediation. And it is a set of concepts that do not translate cleanly — the terms of address that encode exact relationships, the registers of politeness, the humour.

The interventions with evidence behind them are specific rather than general.

Consistency of domain works better than volume: one parent, or one setting, in which the heritage language is the only option. Children are efficient and will use the language that works; if English works everywhere, it will be used everywhere. Requiring production matters more than providing exposure. Media in the language is useful but passive; the child must have to speak it to someone who will not switch. Grandparents are the most effective mechanism available, and time with monolingual relatives, in person or by video call, does more than any class. Literacy is the durable form. A child who can read the script retains access after the household stops speaking it, and script learning is the single most commonly skipped step. And community schools, weekend classes and religious instruction all help, primarily by supplying peers — a child who has friends who speak the language has a reason to speak it that no parent can manufacture. None of this is a moral obligation, and families who lose a language have not failed at anything. But the loss is usually described afterwards as something that happened rather than something that was decided, and that is not accurate.

It is decided, in a thousand small moments, by which language the answer comes back in.

TSAI BUREAU

Diaspora communities staff their religious institutions generously and their civic ones barely at all. The imbalance has consequences that show up decades later.

Ask a diaspora community to build a temple, gurdwara, mosque or church and it will raise millions and supply thousands of volunteer hours. Ask the same community to staff a school board, a residents' association, a hospital trust, a library committee or a local political party branch, and the response is thin.

The imbalance is understandable in origin. Religious institutions were built first because they were needed first — they provided community, continuity, a place for weddings and funerals, and a defence against isolation at a point when the surrounding society offered none of it. Civic institutions, meanwhile, were unfamiliar, conducted in a second language, and frequently unwelcoming.

But the reasons have largely lapsed, and the pattern has not.

The consequences accumulate quietly. Civic institutions make decisions that affect these communities constantly: how schools handle religious observance, whether planning permission is granted, how policing operates in a neighbourhood, what a hospital provides in the way of interpretation and dietary accommodation, how a council allocates a community facilities budget. These decisions are made in rooms with empty seats, by whoever turned up.

There is also a representation problem that follows directly. Political parties select candidates from people already active in local structures. A community absent from those structures produces no candidates, and then observes that it is unrepresented — a sequence frequently attributed to discrimination when a substantial part of it is non-participation. Where communities have entered local civic life systematically, representation has followed within a decade.

And there is a quieter benefit that is easy to miss. Serving on a school governing body or a hospital committee alongside people from entirely different backgrounds does something that no amount of cultural festival programming achieves: it produces working relationships around a shared task. That is where the durable version of integration actually happens, in both directions.

The obstacles are real and worth naming rather than dismissing. Meetings are scheduled at times that assume a particular working pattern. Procedures are opaque to anyone not raised with them. Existing members can be unwelcoming in ways that are difficult to prove and easy to feel. And people running businesses or working shifts have less discretionary time than professionals with salaried hours. The practical starting points are smaller than people assume. School governing bodies actively recruit and rarely fill their places. Local party branches will accept anyone who attends twice. Hospital and health service patient panels want exactly the perspectives these communities have and cannot obtain them. Serving as a magistrate or on a local advisory board requires application rather than connection in most countries. The generation that built the religious institutions did something remarkable with no help. The civic institutions are already built, they are chronically understaffed, and they are currently making decisions about your neighbourhood without you in the room.

TSAI BUREAU

The Pull of Somewhere Quieter

Interest in rural property, smallholdings and some degree of self-sufficiency has broadened considerably over the past decade, extending well past the people who traditionally pursued it. Remote work made location less binding for a segment of professionals. Housing costs made rural land look cheap by comparison. And a general sense that systems are fragile — supply chains, power grids, institutions — has pushed people toward wanting a degree of independence from them.

The appeal is not difficult to understand, and for many South Asian families it carries an additional resonance. A generation or two back, most of these families were on land. The connection to a village, a plot, a set of crops is recent enough to be remembered, and the professional urban life that replaced it was a deliberate trade rather than a preference.

What deserves attention is the gap between the idea and the execution, because it is wide and it is expensive. Land is the cheap part. Everything after it is not. Water is usually the binding constraint — a well, a pump, testing, treatment, and storage, before anything else works. Power off-grid means generation, storage and inverters, sized for winter rather than for the day you calculated it. Access matters more than buyers expect: a track that is fine in June is a different proposition in February, and emergency services need to reach you. Waste management, internet, heating and structural work all cost more in rural settings than urban equivalents, because trades are further away and there are fewer of them.

Then there is the labour. Land does not maintain itself. A smallholding is a set of ongoing obligations — animals that need daily attention, vegetation that grows back, systems that fail at inconvenient moments — and the honest accounts from people who have done it emphasise how much of it is unglamorous work rather than pastoral calm.

And there is the social question, which people from urban minority communities should consider explicitly rather than discover. Rural areas vary enormously in how welcoming they are. Distance from a religious institution, from familiar food shopping, from a community that shares your references, and from medical specialists is a real cost that tends to weigh more heavily over time, particularly as parents age.

None of which is an argument against it. People do this successfully, and the ones who do generally share a pattern: they started smaller than they wanted, spent time in the area before buying, prioritised water and access over acreage and views, and kept a source of income that did not depend on the land. The version that fails is usually the one bought quickly, on a good weekend, at the end of a difficult year in a city. The land will still be there after a winter's consideration. That is rather the point of it.

TSAI BUREAU

JioHotstar Launches in Canada, Bringing The Big Bang of Entertainment and Infinite Possibilities

Combines one of the most comprehensive entertainment catalogues with an all-new streaming experience, interactive features, personalised recommendations and flexible subscription options
Bigg Boss offers LIVE voting across every edition and 24x7 LIVE Feeds for the first time ever

Marking a monumental leap in global streaming, JioHotstar, India's premier entertainment destination officially launches in Canada on 2 nd September. As the inaugural milestone in its ambitious international expansion, this launch introduces a revolutionary entertainment experience defined by product innovation, interactive viewing and new ways for audiences to discover, watch and participate. With more than 500 million active users, JioHotstar has built one of the world's largest entertainment ecosystems, spanning content across languages, genres and formats. As the streaming category has evolved from bigger content libraries to changing expectations around how audiences discover and engage with entertainment, JioHotstar has been building towards this shift in India, combining its scale with technology and product experiences that enable audiences to do more with entertainment. Home to 160K+ hours of premium content and supplemented by an impressive addition of 30K hours of fresh content every year, JioHotstar arrives not merely as a streaming platform, but as a cultural bridge. It delivers a powerful symbiosis enriching the daily lives of Canada's diverse local communities, especially its substantial South Asian diaspora with authentic connections to home, while simultaneously projecting the finest global South Asian content onto a prominent international pedestal for audiences who are increasingly seeking diverse stories, languages and cultures. The library spans across blockbuster films, originals, non-fiction, a vast television programming, and more, with a strong line-up of new entertainment, including:

- Genre-Defining New Originals: The originals line-up brings together an exciting mix of stories and genres, across languages such as The Court, Ali Baba Aur Chaalis Bhoot, Prince of Mollywood, Part Timers, and more. From drama and thrillers to comedy and stories rooted in local cultures, the library brings a fresh mix of original storytelling to audiences in Canada.
- Content from JioStar TV Channels and Before-TV Access: Audiences can access content from JioStar television channels, including Star Plus, Colors, Star Vijay, Asianet, Star Jalsha, Colors Gujarati, Star Pravah, etc. with Before-TV access to popular shows such as Anupama, Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, Seher Hone Ko Hai, Azhagae Azhagu, Siragadikka Aasai, Cooku with Comali, alongside other entertaining shows.
- Bigg Boss, Now Interactive: Starting 6th September, Bigg Boss Tamil, hosted by Vijay Sethupathi, Bigg Boss Malayalam with Mohanlal, Bigg Boss Telugu with Nagarjuna, Bigg Boss Kannada with Kichcha Sudeepa and Bigg Boss Hindi with Salman Khan will premiere together on JioHotstar, with Bigg Boss Bangla already live. For the first time ever, Canada audiences can have their say in the game with LIVE voting across every edition, and 24x7 LIVE Feeds that lets them stay closer to the action, drama and entertainment around the clock.
- Bigg Boss Hindi, 7 Days Before Its TV Premiere: Audiences in Canada can catch all the drama, entertainment and action of Bigg Boss Hindi with Salman Khan, seven days before its TV premiere, bringing them closer to the game and contestants ahead of the television broadcast.
- A New Game Format: Audiences can witness the magic of Anil Kapoor hosting India Ka Top 1 Percent, an all-new format, premiering on 5th September, putting contestants' logic and reasoning to the test.

This new line-up sits alongside the breadth that JioHotstar is already known for, with one of the most expansive entertainment libraries that brings together entertainment across genres and generations. The library includes award-winning and critically acclaimed originals such as Criminal Justice, Special Ops, Chiraiya, Pritam & Pedro, Asur, Aarya, Heartbeat, Vikram on Duty, Kerala Crime Files, Resort, Muthu Alias Kaattaan; blockbuster reality franchises including Koffee with Karan, Bhojpuri Bawaal, Khatron Ke Khiladi, MTV Hustle, Splitsvilla, Laughter Chefs - Unlimited Entertainment, Roadies, Cooku with Comali; popular and critically acclaimed movies including Welcome to The Jungle, Vaazha, Dhurandhar, Chhichhore, Kesari Chapter 2: The Untold Story of Jallianwala Bagh; Kill, 12th Fail, Jatt & Juliet 1 & 2, , Carry On Jatta 3, Shadaa, Sardar Saab; offering thousands of hours of entertainment for younger audiences and families. Designed to make discovering entertainment as seamless as watching it, the platform combines an intuitive, modern interface with ultra-personalised recommendation engines, helping audiences discover stories and shows that are relevant to their interests and languages. The experience is built for Canada's multilingual audience, with high-quality subtitles and dubs across 12+ Asian languages, including English, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, and more; making content more accessible across communities and generations.

Commenting on JioHotstar's international expansion, Amit Malhotra, Head – International Business, JioStar, "JioHotstar has been built in one of the world's most diverse entertainment markets, where audiences move seamlessly between languages, genres and formats. That scale and diversity have shaped how we think about entertainment, and what it takes to create a platform that can serve millions of viewers every day. As we launch in Canada, we are bringing the experience JioHotstar is known for to a market with a strong connection to South Asian culture and content, connecting audiences to the entertainment they love while also inviting everyone to discover new cultures, stories and perspectives."

Built around evolving viewing habits, JioHotstar offers flexible subscription options in Canada - a quarterly plan at CAD 19.99 and an annual plan at CAD 49.99. Existing Hotstar subscribers transition seamlessly without any service disruption using their current credentials, while new users can easily sign up directly via the App Store and Google Play Store across mobile and connected TV devices. From AI-powered personalisation and conversational discovery to interactive entertainment and in-app commerce, JioHotstar has been building experiences that extend streaming beyond simply watching content.

With its launch in Canada, JioHotstar is taking not only its entertainment catalogue, but its product and technology capabilities and its vision for the future of streaming, to audiences around the world.

TSAI BUREAU

"Not Handled Elegantly": Gal Gadot on the End of Wonder Woman

By Our Staff Reporter Gal Gadot has given her most direct account yet of how her tenure as Wonder Woman ended, and the verdict is polite, pointed, and unmistakably critical of the studio.

Speaking on Josh Horowitz's Happy Sad Confused podcast on 31 August while promoting her new film The Runner, Gadot was asked whether James Gunn and Peter Safran ever told her DC Studios was moving in a different direction. Her answer was immediate. "No, they told me the opposite," she said. "They were like, 'We're going to develop it with you, the third,' la la la. But I saw the way everybody else were handled."

That last clause carries the weight. "The Henry situation was not handled elegantly, to say the least," she said, referring to Henry Cavill's abortive return as Superman — announced in a post-credits scene, then reversed within weeks of Gunn and Safran taking over DC Studios in 2022. "Same with Patty. It was not handled elegantly." She then defused it in the same breath: "We're all adults, and it's all good."

The history is contested. Patty Jenkins, who directed both Wonder Woman and Wonder Woman 1984, had been developing a third film with Gadot when news broke in December 2022 that Warner Bros. had passed on her treatment. Jenkins publicly stated she had never walked away, that she had been open to considering anything asked of her, and that she understood there was nothing she could do to move the project forward. Gadot said as recently as 2023 that Gunn and Safran had told her directly she was in the best hands and that a third film would be developed with her. Sources close to the studio told Variety at the time that Wonder Woman 3 was not in development, that nothing had been promised, and that no definitive discussion of Gadot's continuation had taken place.

Two accounts, irreconcilable, both from people with reason to believe their own version.

Gadot's more revealing admission may have been about her own appetite. "For me to go to do another Wonder Woman, I am not sure I would at this point in my life with four children and different schools and all of that," she said. "To check out from all of them for such a long period of time, it doesn't—" The sentence trails, but the meaning does not. She originated the role in Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice, led two solo films, appeared in Justice League and cameoed in Shazam! Fury of the Gods. The 2017 Wonder Woman remains one of the more genuinely significant superhero releases of the last decade — a film whose commercial success made a specific argument to studios worldwide that female-led action could carry a global tentpole, an argument that had been resisted for years. DC Studios has since rebooted around David Corenswet's Superman. A Wonder Woman prequel, Paradise Lost, is no longer in active development.

HBO Max Repeats at the Top: 122 Emmy Nominations, and a Question About Scale

For the second consecutive year, HBO Max leads the Emmy field, taking 122 nominations for the 78th Primetime Emmy Awards against Netflix's 111 and Apple TV's 87.

The engine was two shows. The Pitt led all programmes with 25 nominations in a dominant second season, including Outstanding Drama Series and a lead actor nod for Noah Wyle, who was also recognised for directing and producing.

Hacks took 24 in its fifth and final season — a record for a comedy series, breaking the mark set only a year earlier by The Studio — including Outstanding Comedy Series and a lead actress nomination for Jean Smart, who has won the category all four previous times. Between them, the two shows accounted for roughly 40 percent of HBO Max's total. DTF St. Louis added 13.

HBO Max also placed three shows in the drama series race — The Pitt, The Gilded Age and A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms.

Netflix's 111, down from 120 last year, came largely from Beef season two (16), The Beast in Me (nine), and seven apiece for Black Rabbit, The Diplomat, Monster: The Ed Gein Story and Stranger Things. It landed a double in Outstanding Limited Series. Apple TV posted its best-ever showing for a second consecutive year, driven by Widow's Bay (19) and Pluribus (18).

Among broadcasters, ABC led with roughly 38 to 40, followed by CBS at 32 — nine of which came from the cancelled Late Show with Stephen Colbert — and NBC at 30. Prime Video took 28, FX 23, Hulu 22, Peacock 18. At the conglomerate level, Warner Bros. Discovery topped the field with 150 nominations across all its properties.

The number worth sitting with is a different one. Warner Bros. Discovery's streaming operation accounts for roughly 1.5 percent of monthly television viewing in the United States by Nielsen's measure. Apple has never reached 1 percent. Between them they hold 209 Emmy nominations. Netflix and YouTube, which dominate actual viewing time by enormous margins, are nowhere near proportionally represented — YouTube took six.

That gap describes something real about how prestige is allocated. The Emmys reward a particular kind of production: writer-driven, limited in episode count, expensive per hour, aimed at a critical constituency rather than a mass one. It is a legitimate thing to reward. It is also increasingly disconnected from what people watch, and the industry it guides is one in which the shows that win are frequently the shows that cannot sustain themselves.

The 78th Emmy Awards air 14 September from the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles on NBC, hosted by Mariska Hargitay, with Creative Arts ceremonies on 5 and 6 September.

Bombay High Court Orders CBI Probe Into Disha Salian Case, Six Years On

The Bombay High Court on 2 September directed the Central Bureau of Investigation to register an FIR and take over the investigation into the 2020 death of Disha Salian, the celebrity manager whose case has been entangled with that of the actor Sushant Singh Rajput for six years. The court also ordered that the statement of her father, Satish Salian, be recorded.

Salian died in Mumbai on 8 June 2020. She was 28, worked as a talent and celebrity manager, and had briefly been associated with Rajput. Six days later, on 14 June, Rajput was found dead at his home in Bandra. He was 34, with credits including Kai Po Che, M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story, Kedarnath and Chhichhore. The proximity of the two deaths, occurring during the pandemic lockdown, made them inseparable in public discussion almost immediately.

Mumbai Police found no connection between the cases. The Bandra police registered an accidental death report in Rajput's case; after an FIR filed by his father in Bihar and a Supreme Court order, the CBI took over that investigation and subsequently found no evidence of foul play. Salian's case was closed on similar grounds. Satish Salian petitioned the High Court seeking a fresh investigation, alleging lapses in the police inquiry and asserting that his daughter did not die by her own hand. Speaking to reporters after the order, he described a long wait ending — saying he had told the judge he was grateful, and that he had not shed a tear until now. The case has never been purely a legal matter. It became a political one almost from the start, as the deaths coincided with the collapse of the three-decade BJP–Shiv Sena alliance and the formation of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government under Uddhav Thackeray. Several BJP figures asserted publicly that the two cases were linked. A Special Investigation Team was constituted after the 2022 change of government. Rajput's father has said he believes the deaths are connected. Members of Salian's family said the opposite in 2020, telling interviewers there was no link.

"Jailer 2" Holds Its Ground: Sun Pictures Kills Delay Rumours Ahead of Dussehra Clash

(By Our Staff Reporter) : Sun Pictures has moved to shut down weeks of speculation about Jailer 2, reconfirming that Rajinikanth's sequel will open on 15 October and releasing a fresh poster to make the point.

The image shows the 75-year-old superstar holding a gun above the line "Alappara Kelapparom" — a phrase lifted from "Hukum," the Anirudh Ravichander track that became the first film's calling card. The date gives the picture a Dussehra release and sets up a direct collision with Vijay Deverakonda's period action drama Ranabaali, which opens 16 October.

The rumours had been building for a reason. Jailer 2 was originally planned for April 2026, then moved to June, then finally locked to October. Promotional activity had been thin, the first single failed to make much impact, and reports circulated that Rajinikanth was unhappy with certain portions and that reshoots might push the film to November. Venkatesh and Trivikram's Aadarsha Kutumbam was reportedly circling the 15 October slot in case it opened up.

Sun Pictures says post-production is proceeding without interruption and Anirudh is currently completing the background score.

Nelson Dilipkumar returns to write and direct, with Rajinikanth reprising Tiger Muthuvel Pandian, the retired prison chief whose pursuit of his son's killers drove the 2023 original. Ramya Krishnan is back as Viji Pandian, alongside Yogi Babu, Mirnaa and S. J. Suryah. Vijay Kartik Kannan handles cinematography, R. Nirmal edits, and Kalanithi Maran produces.

What makes the sequel worth watching from a distance is its casting strategy, which reads less like a film and more like a summit. The first Jailer deployed cameos from Mohanlal, Jackie Shroff and Shivarajkumar — figures who are themselves enormous stars in Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada cinema respectively — and used them as a mechanism for pulling audiences across India's linguistic film markets. Reports for the sequel suggest an even wider net, with Shah Rukh Khan, Vijay Sethupathi, Mithun Chakraborty, Nandamuri Balakrishna, Shivarajkumar, Mohanlal and Vidya Balan all attached in some capacity. The commercial logic is sound. Jailer grossed roughly $76.6 million worldwide, making it the third highest-grossing Indian film of 2023 and Rajinikanth's biggest hit in years. A meaningful share of that came from overseas markets — Malaysia, Singapore, the Gulf, North America — where Tamil diaspora audiences turn a Rajinikanth opening into an event. Adding stars from four other industries multiplies the number of communities for whom the film becomes appointment viewing. There is a risk in it, too. Films assembled as star showcases can lose the thing that made the original work, which in Jailer's case was a surprisingly mean streak beneath the crowd-pleasing surface. Whether Nelson can hold that tone while accommodating a guest list this large is the open question the poster does not answer.

Badshah and Isha Rikhi Announce Separation Five Months After Marriage

(By Our Staff Reporter) : Aditya Prateek Singh Sisodia — better known to a global audience as Badshah — announced on 31 August that he and the Punjabi actress Isha Rikhi are separating, five months after a wedding that was never formally announced in the first place.

The statement was brief and jointly issued through Instagram Stories. "I and Isha Rikhi have mutually decided to part ways and move forward on our separate paths," it read. "This decision has been made with mutual respect, and we request everyone to kindly respect our privacy during this time." A second line made the couple's intentions plain: this would be their only statement, and they asked that there be no further speculation.

The request arrived after weeks in which speculation had been the only thing available. The marriage itself became public in March through the back door, when Rikhi's mother, Poonam Rikhi, posted photographs and video from what appeared to be a private ceremony — the couple in traditional attire, exchanging garlands before a small gathering, captioned simply with a blessing. Neither party confirmed anything at the time.

The separation was preceded by a since-deleted post from Rikhi that did not name her husband but was widely read as addressing the marriage. She wrote about battles that leave no visible scars, about having stayed silent out of fear rather than acceptance, and about feeling overwhelmed by what she perceived as her husband's influence, power and resources. Silence, she wrote, had been survival rather than agreement, and she was choosing courage over fear — while making clear she was not ready to tell a fuller story.

No specific allegation has been made, no complaint has been filed publicly, and Badshah has not responded to the post beyond the joint statement. The distinction matters: what exists in the record is one party's account of how she experienced a relationship, not a claim of particular conduct. This is the second marriage of Badshah's to end. He married Jasmine Masih in 2012; the couple separated in 2020 and have a daughter, Jessemy Grace Masih Singh, who lives with her mother in London. Badshah has spoken publicly about that split with unusual candour, saying both had tried and that they separated because the marriage was not healthy for their child, and acknowledging he does not see his daughter often.

Netflix's "The Decoy Plane" Turns a Catering Truck Into a Press Freedom Story

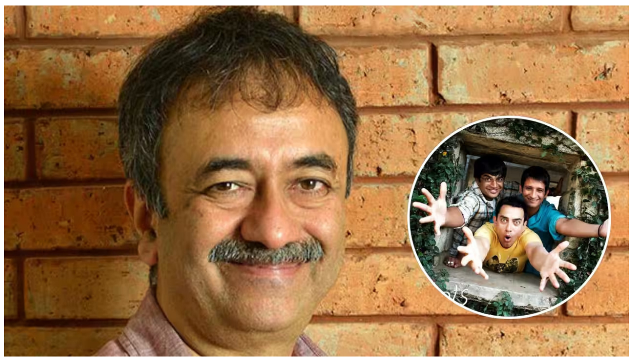
(By Our Staff Reporter) : Netflix premieres Instadocs: The Decoy Plane on 4 September, a quick-turnaround documentary about an incident that took place in July and was reported publicly in August — a compression of the documentary production cycle that is arguably as newsworthy as the events it covers.

The incident: on 8 July, leaving a NATO summit in Ankara, President Donald Trump was photographed boarding Air Force One. He did not fly home on it. According to reporting from The Washington Post and ABC News, he exited the far side of the aircraft, was transported in a catering vehicle, and boarded a smaller Air Force C-32A. The press corps and some White House staff took their seats on the original plane and flew on, unaware the president was no longer aboard. On a stop in Britain, Trump was moved back onto the aircraft carrying the reporters.

The film reconstructs this through the traveling press corps. Associated Press chief White House photographer Alex Brandon describes the moment the setup registered: catering vehicles positioned against both ends of Air Force One, something he says he had never seen in forty years of covering presidents. Reuters White House reporter Gram Slattery recalls being told by White House staff to lower the window shades. Also interviewed are Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Carol Leonnig of MS NOW, The Washington Post's Dan Lamothe, who was part of the team that broke the story, former Secret Service agent Robert McDonald, and former Air Force One crew member Wanda Joell.

The White House has defended the move on security grounds, citing threats connected to Iran. Communications director Steven Cheung told NewsNation last month that many enemies of America have the president in their sights and that every available tool is used to address those threats. Trump had publicly stated he would depart Turkey on an older Air Force One rather than the 747-8 he arrived on.

Twenty Years Later: Rajkumar Hirani Confirms the "3 Idiots" Sequel Is Being Written



(By Our Staff Reporter) : Rajkumar Hirani has confirmed that a sequel to 3 Idiots is in active development, that the original cast will return, and that it will find its characters two decades on from where the 2009 film left them. Speaking to ANI, Hirani was careful to frame it as a work in progress rather than a done deal. "We are writing, the story is being written," he said. "So once it reaches the right point, then we'll talk about it. Right now, we're still writing." Casting, he confirmed, would be the same. The most interesting detail is how the project came about. Hirani revealed that he and his longtime collaborator Abhijat Joshi had been developing an entirely separate story when they realised it fit their existing characters. "This story is not from their student phase," he said. "It's a story from 20 years later — what is happening in their lives now." Speaking separately to The Hollywood Reporter India, Hirani was more expansive about the emotional territory. The original film ended with Rancho settled in Ladakh as a grassroots educator, Farhan established as a wildlife photographer, and Raju contented in his job. The sequel picks them up middle-aged, married, with children, and — the word Hirani used — in midlife crisis. Asked whether the film would carry a message the way the first one did, he laughed and said it would carry a big one. Aamir Khan confirmed his involvement in an April interview, saying he had heard the story and found it wonderful, unusual, and possessed of the same humour as the original, though the script still needed work.

The RS2 Crore Film That Refused to Die: How "Hanuman Ansh" Became 2026's Strangest Success Story

(By Our Staff Reporter) : On 7 August, a devotional drama called Hanuman Ansh opened in Indian theatres and collected roughly ten lakh rupees. Ten lakh. For a film industry that measures opening days in tens of crores, that is not a debut so much as a rounding error. By any conventional reading, the film was finished before the weekend was out. Three weeks later it had crossed Rs 27 crore net.

The turnaround is one of the more remarkable box office reversals in recent memory, and it happened without a star, without a marketing budget worth the name, and against a production cost of around ?2 crore. The film added barely ?1.5 crore across its first fourteen days. Then something shifted. Week three alone brought in more than ?10 crore, with a single Saturday delivering ?9.25 crore — nearly five times the entire cost of making the picture.

What changed was word of mouth, and the reason word of mouth had somewhere to travel is the subject of the film itself.

Hanuman Ansh is about Neem Karoli Baba, the Uttar Pradesh mystic known to followers as Maharaj-ji, who died in 1973. The title translates roughly as "essence of Hanuman," a name earned through his lifelong devotion to the deity. Directed by Vishal Chaturvedi, who also wrote it, the film casts Shobhinaw Satyaa in the central role, with Chandan Anand, Purnima Tiwari and Vihaan Shedge in support. It runs two and a half hours and takes a deliberately unconventional approach to the biopic form — rather than marching through a chronology, it follows a grieving boy's search for the divine and the life of service that search produces.

The global dimension is what makes the film's slow burn legible. Neem Karoli Baba is arguably the most internationally recognised Indian spiritual figure of the twentieth century after the Beatles-era gurus, and his following is disproportionately Western. Richard Alpert became Ram Dass at his ashram and wrote Be Here Now, one of the best-selling spiritual books ever published in English. Steve Jobs travelled to India seeking him. Mark Zuckerberg has spoken about visiting Kainchi Dham. There is a Neem Karoli Baba Hanuman temple in Taos, New Mexico, that serves free vegetarian lunch on Sundays to a congregation of American and Indian devotees alike.

That constituency does not read trade papers or respond to opening-weekend marketing. It moves on its own timeline, through temple networks, WhatsApp groups and diaspora communities across North America, Britain and the Gulf. The film's poster was unveiled at Kainchi Dham itself, and principal photography took place in Chitrakoot in November 2025 — including a Hanuman idol installation sequence and the construction of Baba's cave.

Chaturvedi has said the film is the first of a planned trilogy drawn from his book Divine Detour. Overseas box office remains negligible so far, which may be the most interesting number of all: the audience most likely to want this film has not yet been offered it.

"Mirzapur" Goes to the Cinema — And Reverses the Direction of Streaming's One-Way Street

(By Our Staff Reporter) : For roughly a decade, the traffic between streaming and theatrical has run in a single direction. Films opened in cinemas and eventually landed on a platform. Franchises born on television stayed on television. On 4 September, Mirzapur: The Movie attempts to reverse that flow, and a great deal more than one film's fortunes is riding on whether it works.

The picture arrives after three seasons on Prime Video, produced by Excel Entertainment and Amazon MGM Studios, directed by Gurmmeet Singh — who helmed episodes of the original series — and written by Puneet Krishna. It is the first theatrical outing for a franchise that became one of the defining properties of Indian streaming's boom years, generating catchphrases, memes and a distinctive strain of Uttar Pradesh gangster vernacular that migrated well beyond its audience.

The cast returns largely intact. Pankaj Tripathi plays Akhandanand "Kaleen Bhaiya" Tripathi. Ali Fazal is back as Guddu Pandit. Most anticipated is the return of Divyenndu as Munna Tripathi, a character whose fate in the series made his reappearance a matter of considerable speculation. Rasika Dugal, Shweta Tripathi Sharma, Shriya Pilgaonkar, Abhishek Banerjee and Sheeba Chaddha all return, joined by newcomers Jitendra Kumar and Ravi Kishan.

The production leaned hard into scale. Filming ran across Mumbai, Varanasi, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, wrapping in January 2026. The runtime is three hours and seventeen minutes — an unusually long sit even by the standards of a market comfortable with intervals — and the film carries an A certificate. It releases in Hindi and Telugu. The strategic question is whether streaming franchises can be monetised twice. Globally, the record is mixed. Television-to-film transitions have historically worked when the property offers something the small screen structurally cannot — spectacle, scale, an ending. They have failed when the film is simply a longer episode. Amazon is betting that Mirzapur's appeal was never really about episode counts but about a world audiences want to spend time inside, and that they will pay for a bigger version of it.

There is a second bet buried inside the first. Prime Video's Indian originals have been among its most-watched titles in emerging markets, and a successful theatrical conversion would give the company a template it could apply anywhere it has built a local hit. Studios in South Korea, Spain, Nigeria and Brazil will be watching the numbers. The trailer, released 11 August, teased another round of the battle for control that has driven the series from the beginning, retaining the dark humour and abrupt violence that defined it.