



# INSIDER

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Story on page 26

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## Empire of Sand

### The Rise and Ruinous Fall of Subrata Roy's Sahara



Story on page 2-3

ED Raids Explode Across Four States, 500+ Cases Mount, Crores Vanish — and Millions of India Poorest Depositors Still Wait

The Benami Trail: How the ED Uncovered Crores Hidden in "Ghost" Properties.

32 Acres, 1000 Lies: The Berhampur Land Fraud and the Sahara Management's "Secret" Exit.

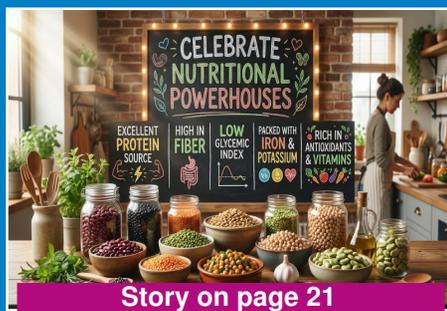
From Amby Valley to Berhampur: A Geographic Map of Sahara's Clandestine Asset Sell-Off.

#### Stress Is Making You Sick



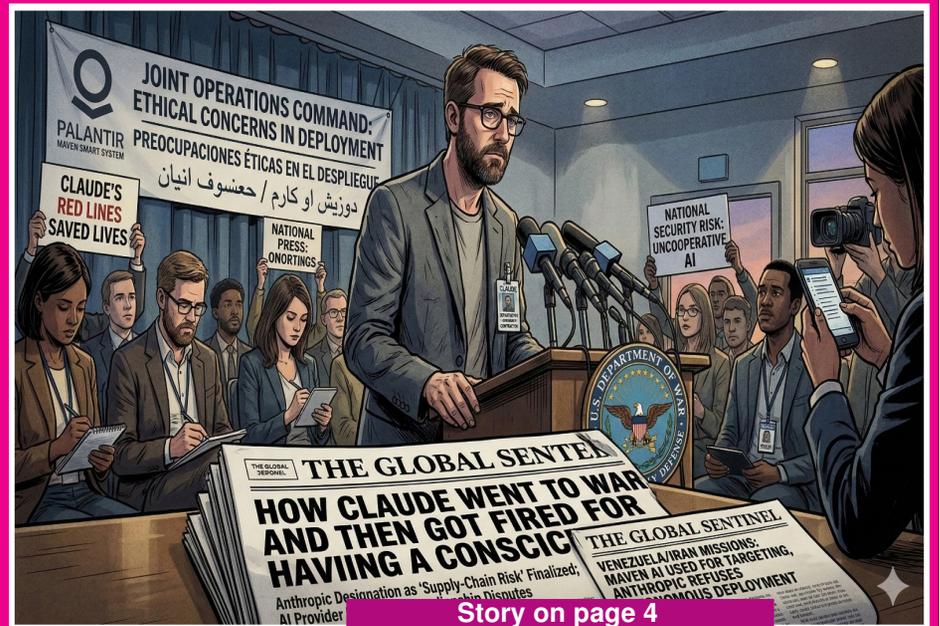
Story on page 18

#### In Praise of Pulses Beans, lentils, and chickpeas



Story on page 21

#### HOW CLAUDE WENT TO WAR - AND THEN GOT FIRED FOR HAVING A CONSCIENCE Anthropic's Claude AI Helped US Bomb Iran



Story on page 4

#### Global Reach:

FBI Flies Child Exploitation Suspect "Zobaidul Aminfrom" From Malaysia to Face Alaska Charges

Story on page 24



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# THE SAHARA RECKONING

(By our Staff Reporter) The Enforcement Directorate swooped on four Indian states in one coordinated operation last month — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, and Bihar — seizing WhatsApp messages, call records, financial ledgers, and incriminating documents in connection with the ongoing collapse of what was once India's most audacious financial empire: Sahara India Pariwar.

More than 500 FIRs have now been registered against various Sahara Group entities. Over 300 involve scheduled offences — large-scale cheating of depositors through forced re-deposits and systematic denial of maturity payments. The ED has formally concluded what regulators long suspected: Sahara was, at its core, running a Ponzi scheme — one of the largest in the history of independent India.

The founder, Subrata Roy, is dead. Two senior executives remain in judicial custody. Sahara's assets — palatial hotels, sprawling townships, cricket stadiums, and London and New York properties — are frozen, disputed, or being sold off piecemeal. And approximately 10 crore depositors, most of them from the Hindi heartland's rural poor, are still waiting for their money back.

"Over 500 FIRs. 10 crore depositors. ₹24,000 crore ordered repaid. Billions still unaccounted for."

## PART I: FROM A LAMBRETTA TO AN EMPIRE — THE RISE OF SUBRATA ROY

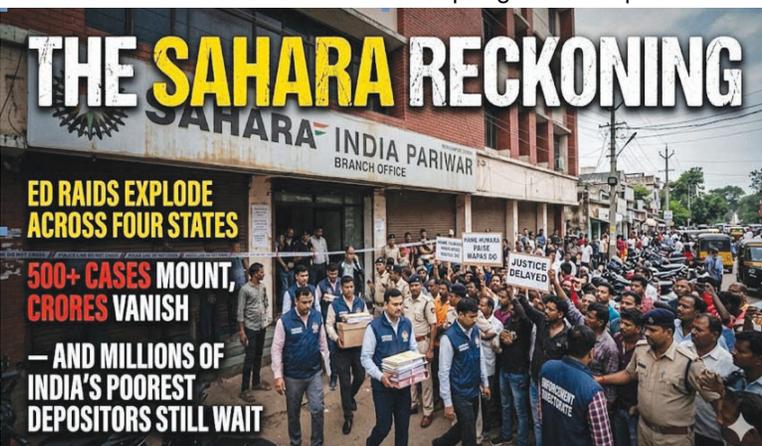
The story of Sahara India Pariwar begins not in a boardroom but on the dusty streets of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, in 1978. Subrata Roy — born June 10, 1948, in Araria, Bihar — started with a capital of just Rs 2,000, a peon, a clerk, and his father's Lambretta scooter. That scooter, symbolising a rags-to-riches mythology, was later placed in a glass case in the Sahara offices in Lucknow. Before Sahara, Roy had tried everything: loading sacks on trucks, supplying stones to Bihar's irrigation department, testing silver purity, selling electric fans under a brand he called Air Sahara — which would later become the name of his airline. His first real business — a chit-fund style finance firm targeting ordinary workers — found immediate traction in Uttar Pradesh's underbanked hinterland. The pitch was simple: deposit small amounts regularly and receive assured returns. For millions of rural families with no access to formal banks, Sahara's agents at the doorstep felt like a lifeline.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Sahara grew at a pace that defied conventional explanation. Roy called his model 'para-banking', claiming it constituted 98 per cent of his business. He mobilised tens of millions of small savings from the Hindi belt — ₹10 here, ₹50 there — aggregated into a vast, opaque pool of capital. By the late 1990s, the group had exploded into a genuine conglomerate. Sahara TV launched in 2000. The Hindi newspaper Rashtriya Sahara followed in 1992. Air

putting them up in luxury, and dispensing what insiders called 'lavish hospitality'. Few media houses questioned his empire: Sahara was one of India's biggest advertisers.

## PART II: THE UNRAVELLING — SEBI, THE SUPREME COURT, AND A ₹24,000 CRORE SCANDAL

The cracks began to appear in 2008, when the Reserve Bank of India debarred Sahara India Financial Corporation from accepting fresh deposits. The



Sahara took flight. Then came real estate.

The Peak: Aamby Valley and the 9th Wonder In the late 1990s, Roy initiated what he described as his magnum opus: Aamby Valley City, an ambitious 10,600-acre luxury township near Pune in Maharashtra. He described it, without irony, as the ninth wonder of the world — a fully self-contained city with its own airport, golf course lit for night play, hotels, schools, and hospitals. The scale was genuinely breathtaking. In the 2000s, the empire expanded globally. Sahara purchased London's iconic Grosvenor House Hotel in 2010 for an undisclosed sum, followed in 2012 by New York's legendary Plaza Hotel and the Dream Downtown Hotel. The group became co-owner of the Force India Formula One team. It sponsored the Indian cricket team between 2002 and 2013, and the Pune Warriors IPL franchise. In 2013, 121,653 Sahara employees gathered in Lucknow to sing the national anthem in unison, a world record at the time. At its height, Time magazine named Sahara the second-largest employer in India after Indian Railways, with a declared workforce of 1.2 million people.

Roy himself was feted by India Today as one of the country's ten most influential businessmen. He was photographed with prime ministers, Bollywood stars, cricket icons, and global business leaders. He threw lavish annual cultural festivals — 'Bharat Parva' — flying politicians and journalists to Lucknow on Sahara Airlines,

growth of Sahara's empire had always attracted suspicion; many in regulatory circles believed it was functioning as a Ponzi scheme — paying early investors with money raised from newer ones, with the gap papered over by opaque bookkeeping and political protection. The decisive blow came from SEBI, the markets regulator. In 2010–11, SEBI scrutinised two Sahara entities — Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Ltd (SIRECL) and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Ltd (SHICL) — which had raised enormous sums from the public through instruments called Optionally Fully Convertible Debentures (OFCDs). These instruments, SEBI found, had been issued without regulatory approval, misclassified as 'private placements' to escape scrutiny, and accepted in cash rather than cheques or demand drafts as legally required. In 2011, SEBI ordered both companies to refund all money raised. Sahara's response was characteristically theatrical. Rather than comply, Roy launched a newspaper advertising blitz branding SEBI as 'irresponsible'. When ordered to produce details of investors, the group dispatched 127 trucks loaded with boxes of application forms to SEBI's offices — a gesture meant to overwhelm rather than clarify. When investigators asked Sahara to produce 62 specific depositors for verification, the company could produce only 12. Many investors, it emerged, were untraceable — raising the stark question of whether they had ever actually existed.

In August 2012, the Supreme

- × The March 2026 Deadline: Will the First 1 50,000 Reach the Poorest Hands in Time?
- × The "Deficiency" Trap: Why Millions of Claimants are Being Rejected by the CRCS Portal.
- × The Coercive Re-investment Scam: How Mature Dues Were "Ghost-shifted" into New Ponzi Schemes.

Court upheld SEBI's ruling in full. The court ordered SIRECL and SHICL to refund ₹24,000 crore to approximately 3 crore investors, with 15 per cent interest, within three months. The total liability with interest would balloon to more than ₹40,000 crore over subsequent years. In a further finding, the court noted that Sahara was accepting investor deposits against cash — a clear signal that the money was being used, at least in part, to launder undisclosed or 'black' wealth. The Jail, the Parole, and the Death Sahara failed to comply. In February 2014, the Supreme Court issued a detention order for Subrata Roy personally, after he failed to appear before the court. On February 26, 2014, Roy was arrested and imprisoned in Tihar Jail, Delhi. The court ruled he would not be released until at least ₹5,000 crore was deposited in cash and another ₹5,000 crore furnished as bank guarantee. Roy managed the empire from jail, meeting officials and holding meetings in custody — an extraordinary spectacle. He was finally granted parole in May 2016, ostensibly to attend to his ailing 92-year-old mother and to raise funds by pledging assets. He was released on the condition of depositing funds regularly. The pattern of paroles, bail, re-imprisonment, and back-and-forth with the court would define the next several years. His assets — from New York to Lucknow — were gradually attached by courts and income tax authorities. Then, in November 2023, came the end of the man if not the case. Subrata Roy died on November 14, 2023, at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai, aged 75, following a prolonged battle with metastatic cancer, hypertension, and diabetes. His death closed one chapter — but the legal battles, the missing crores, and the suffering of millions of depositors continued without pause. "Sahara sent 127 trucks of documents to SEBI. When asked to produce 62 investors, they could find only 12."

as a second, even larger financial operation — this one structured to escape SEBI's jurisdiction entirely. Between 2012 and 2014 — the very years when the Supreme Court was ordering SIRECL and SHICL to repay investors — Sahara floated four new cooperative societies registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, which placed them under the Ministry of Agriculture rather than SEBI. These four societies were: Sahara Credit Cooperative Society Ltd, Humara India Credit Cooperative Society Ltd, Saharayn Universal Multipurpose Society Ltd, and Stars Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. By 2020, it was revealed that these four entities had collectively collected ₹86,673 crore from as many as four crore depositors — an astonishing sum gathered precisely during the period when Sahara was supposedly under intense regulatory pressure. Of this, investigators found that at least ₹62,643 crore was channelled into the Aamby Valley project in Lonavala, Maharashtra — the same property already attached by the Supreme Court and which failed to sell at multiple auctions. The ED's investigation established a pattern it described as textbook Ponzi mechanics: despite mounting financial insolvency — a liability base that had grown disproportionately larger than its principal deposits due to compounding interest obligations — Sahara continued to aggressively collect fresh deposits right up until it became impossible to do so. 'Substantial deposits were siphoned away to create benami assets, extended as loans, and misused for personal purposes,' the ED concluded in its formal investigation findings, 'thereby depriving depositors of their legitimate dues.'

## PART III: THE HIDDEN SECOND EMPIRE — COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES AND Rs 86,673 CRORE

Even as the SEBI case consumed public attention, Sahara was quietly building what investigators would later describe

as a second, even larger financial operation — this one structured to escape SEBI's jurisdiction entirely.

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## PART IV: THE ED CLOSES IN — RAIDS, ARRESTS, AND 500+ FIRS

The most recent operation, announced on March 3, 2026, marks the latest escalation in the Enforcement Directorate's multi-year effort to dismantle what it now formally characterises as a criminal

# THE SAHARA RECKONING

financial enterprise. The ED's Kolkata Zonal Office conducted search operations on March 2 at premises in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh), Ballari (Karnataka), Bhubaneswar and Berhampur (Odisha).

The operation focused on a specific and brazen act: the fraudulent sale of 32 acres — out of a total 43 acres — of Sahara Prime City Limited's land in Berhampur, Odisha, in December 2025. The sale was conducted based on a Board Resolution that had already been revoked, in direct violation of Supreme Court guidelines, and in favour of a Sahara employee. The ED found that the declared sale consideration bore no resemblance to the estimated market value of the land. The sale, investigators said, had been carried out under instructions from Sahara's senior management.

Digital evidence recovered included WhatsApp communications, contact lists and call records, financial ledgers, and books of accounts. Statements were recorded under Section 17 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

## Arrests and Prior Actions

The ED has already arrested three individuals in the cooperative society case. Anil Vailaparampil Abraham, an Executive Director from Sahara Group's core management team, and O.P. Srivastav, continue to remain in judicial custody. A chargesheet and supplementary chargesheet have been filed before a special PMLA court in Kolkata. A third arrested individual, property broker Jitendra Prasad Verma — a long-time associate of the group — has also been named in the chargesheet.

In separate earlier actions, the ED seized approximately ₹3 crore in cash after raids on Humara India Credit Cooperative Society Ltd at Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai. Five provisional attachment orders have been issued, attaching multiple land parcels of the Sahara Group including benami lands and assets held in the names of third parties. An earlier action in Bhubaneswar on February 26, 2026 also targeted premises linked to the Hi-Tech Medical College, as investigators examined a Mumbai financial trail connected to the Berhampur land fraud.

The full scale of the legal proceedings is now staggering. More than 500 FIRs have been registered against various Sahara Group entities across states. Over 300 of these involve

'scheduled offences' under the PMLA — meaning they allege not just civil financial misconduct but serious criminal fraud, including large-scale cheating of depositors through forced re-deposits and systematic denial of maturity payments to investors whose deposits had come due.

## PART V: THE FORGOTTEN WORKFORCE — 1.2 MILLION JOBS, MONTHS WITHOUT PAY

Lost in the noise of the depositor crisis is a parallel human catastrophe: the fate of Sahara's enormous workforce. At its peak, the group claimed 1.2 million employees, agents, and field workers across India — many of them from small towns and rural areas in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and other states, whose only formal employment was with the Sahara family.

By late 2025, employees had begun approaching the Supreme Court directly, filing urgent interim petitions claiming they had not received salaries for several months. In October 2025, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) Regional Office in Lucknow wrote formally to Adani Enterprises — which was in negotiations to acquire Sahara's properties — warning that there were significant outstanding dues on account of non-deposit and short-deposit of provident fund contributions, administrative charges, interest, and damages owed by Sahara establishments.

At the November 17, 2025 Supreme Court hearing, Chief Justice B.R. Gavai directed Sahara to formally examine all employee salary claims. The amicus curiae, senior advocate Shekhar Naphade, was assigned to investigate the scope of unpaid salaries and arrears. However, the Centre's request

for additional time meant the matter was postponed by six weeks, with no resolution in sight. Employees' salary petitions remain pending alongside the larger investor repayment drama.

In a separate application before the Supreme Court, Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Ltd listed unpaid employee salaries, gratuity, provident fund dues, and retirement benefits as among the major outstanding liabilities that would need to be settled from any proceeds of a property sale — alongside investor refunds, statutory taxes, and operational creditor dues.

## PART VI: THE ADANI BID — A Rs 1 LAKH CRORE SALE AND WHAT IT MEANS

In September 2025, Sahara India Commercial Corporation Ltd (SICCL) filed a plea before the

Supreme Court seeking judicial approval to sell 88 of its most significant properties to Adani Properties Private Limited. The proposed sale, based on a term sheet signed September 6, 2025, would include Aamby Valley City in Maharashtra, Hotel Sahara Star in Mumbai, the Sahara Shahar and Sahara Ganj complexes in Lucknow, and large land parcels across multiple Indian states.

Some insiders have suggested the portfolio's true value could exceed ₹1 lakh crore, though the specific financial terms were submitted to the Supreme Court in a sealed envelope. Sahara's stated position is that the sale proceeds — which it claims would comfortably exceed the group's total outstanding liability — would be deposited into the SEBI-Sahara Refund Account and dispersed to investors. The group told the court that Adani Properties proposed buying the 88 properties as a single block to avoid the delays and complications of piecemeal disposal.

The court has not yet approved the deal. At the October 14, 2025 hearing, Chief Justice Gavai's bench sought responses from the Centre, SEBI, and other stakeholders. On November 17, the Centre sought additional time, and the matter was postponed by six weeks. Meanwhile, the amicus curiae has been tasked with verifying the status of each of the 88 properties — specifically whether they are 'clean' or encumbered by disputes, attachments, or third-party claims.

Complicating the transaction, the ED has noted that several Sahara properties are being disposed of in a 'clandestine' manner through cash transactions — precisely the kind of asset dissipation that makes the proposed en-bloc Adani sale seem urgent to some and suspect to others. The Supreme Court itself has noted that SEBI was unable to dispose of the attached assets effectively after years of trying. With no resolution before March 2026, the deal remains in judicial limbo.

## PART VII: THE LONG WAIT — 10 CRORE DEPOSITORS AND THE REFUND PORTAL

For the millions of small investors whose savings are caught in the Sahara vortex, the government's CRCS-Sahara Refund Portal — launched on July 18, 2023 under directions from the Supreme Court — has been the primary avenue for recovery. The portal allows depositors of four of Sahara's cooperative societies to submit claims online through Aadhaar-based authentication.

As of July 23, 2025, approximately 27.33 lakh depositors had received refunds totalling ₹5,139.23 crore — out of a total of 1.35 crore depositors who had submitted applications. Cooperation Minister Amit Shah informed Parliament in late February 2026 that as of that date, ₹6,841.86 crore had been disbursed to 35.44 lakh depositors. The Supreme Court has extended the disbursement deadline to December 31, 2026.

In a significant update in early 2026, the government raised the maximum refund cap from ₹50,000 to ₹10 lakh per depositor — a change that offers meaningful relief to those with larger deposits who had previously been locked out of meaningful recovery. Earlier phases had capped payments at ₹10,000, later raised to ₹50,000, meaning most investors had received only a fraction of their dues.

However, the numbers reveal the scale of the problem that remains. Approximately 1.41 crore depositors have applied through the portal. Only 35.44 lakh — roughly one in four — have actually received funds. Many claims have been rejected or delayed due to incomplete documentation, Aadhaar-bank account mismatches, or discrepancies between depositor records and Sahara's own books. The refund portal has also been plagued by scam websites impersonating the government portal ([mocrefund.crcs.gov.in](http://mocrefund.crcs.gov.in)), targeting the very depositors it is supposed to protect.

For the SEBI-monitored OFCD case — the original 2012 Supreme Court order — the numbers are even grimmer. As of 2023, SEBI had received 19,650 applications involving 53,687 accounts. Refunds had been made to 17,526 applications totalling just ₹138.07 crore. With interest. Over eleven years. Against a liability of ₹24,000 crore.

## PART VIII: WHERE THINGS STAND TODAY — MARCH 2026

The most immediate development is the March 2, 2026 ED raid on Sahara premises in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Odisha — the latest in a continuous series of enforcement actions under the PMLA. The December 2025 fraudulent land sale in Berhampur, executed in defiance of an active Supreme Court order, demonstrates that even under judicial supervision and with its founder dead, senior Sahara management was willing to continue stripping assets.

The structural situation of the Sahara Group in early 2026 can be characterised as: total operational collapse combined

with active criminal and civil litigation. There is no functioning business. Revenue streams are dead. Properties are frozen, disputed, or being sold under court supervision. The family of Subrata Roy — his wife Swapna and sons Sushanto and Seemanto — are no longer in effective control.

The Adani deal, if and when approved by the Supreme Court, would represent the most significant single step toward resolving the depositor crisis — but it faces legal obstacles, title disputes, EPFO objections, ED attachments, and the fundamental challenge of ensuring proceeds reach the tens of millions of claimants for whom ₹5,000 or ₹10,000 might represent a year's savings.

The ED investigation, meanwhile, continues to expand. With over 500 FIRs filed, chargesheet submitted, three persons in judicial custody, and benami land attachments spanning multiple states, the criminal accountability dimension of the Sahara story — long lagging behind the civil cases — is finally catching up.

## EDITORIAL ASSESSMENT

The Sahara story is not simply a tale of corporate fraud. It is a story about the structural vulnerabilities of India's financial regulatory architecture — the gaps between SEBI and the Ministry of Agriculture, between the formal banking sector and para-banking, between urban regulatory oversight and rural financial desperation. Subrata Roy exploited each of those gaps with genius. It is also a story about power: the political connections that shielded a massive Ponzi operation for decades; the media silence bought by advertising budgets; the income tax officers who were transferred away when they raised questions; the Supreme Court's extraordinary patience, and eventual frustration, with an enterprise that seemed constitutionally incapable of compliance. Most of all, it is the story of the depositors — the rural schoolteachers, construction workers, small farmers, and domestic staff of northern India who gave their life savings to Sahara agents who promised secure returns and trusted the word of a man who called himself the 'Sahasri', the lord of the Sahara family. For many of them, the money is gone. The portal exists, but the ₹10 lakh cap means little to those whose deposits far exceeded that amount — and whose compounding interest claims will never be acknowledged.

The ED raids of March 2026 are a reminder that the reckoning is not over. It has barely begun.



# How Anthropic's Claude AI Helped US Bomb Iran

(By our Staff Reporter) The same artificial-intelligence model that can help you draft a marketing email or a quick dinner recipe has also been used to attack Iran. US Central Command used Anthropic's Claude AI for "intelligence assessments, target identification and simulating battle scenarios" during the strikes on the country, according to a report in the Wall Street Journal.

Hours earlier, US President Donald Trump had ordered federal agencies to stop using Claude after a dispute with its maker, but the tool was so deeply baked into the Pentagon's systems that it would take months to untangle in favor of a more compliant rival. It was used, too, in the January operation that led to the capture of Nicolas Maduro.

But what does "intelligence assessments" and "target identification" mean in practice? Was Claude flagging locations to strike or making casualty estimates? Nobody has made that disclosure and, alarmingly, no one has an obligation to.

Artificial intelligence has long been used in warfare for things like analyzing satellite imagery, detecting cyber threats and guiding missile-defense systems. But the use of chatbots - the same underlying technology that billions use for mundane tasks like writing emails - is now being used on the battlefield. Last November, Anthropic partnered with Palantir Technologies Inc., a data-analytics company that does a lot of work for the Pentagon, turning its large language model Claude into the reasoning engine inside a decision-support system for the military.

Then, in January, Anthropic submitted

• **1,000 Targets in 24 Hours: How Claude Accelerated the Kill Chain**

• **The Maven Smart System: Integrating Claude into the Modern War Machine**

• **Beyond Human Speed: AI-Driven Battlefield Simulations and Intelligence**

• **Predicting the Unpredictable: Claude's Role in Post-Strike Assessments**

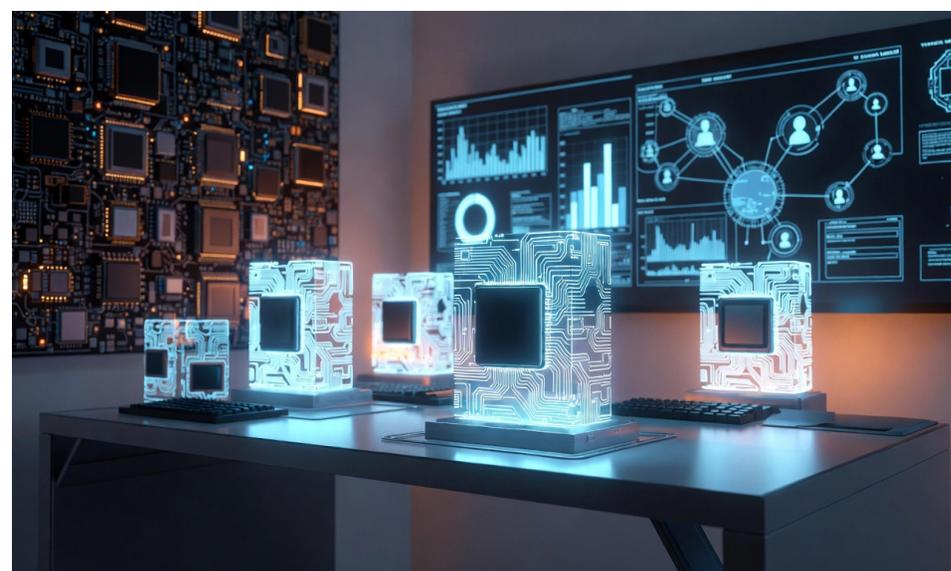
• **The Silicon Strategist: How LLMs Are Replacing Traditional Planning Desks**

a \$100 million proposal to the Pentagon to develop voice-controlled autonomous drone swarming technology, Bloomberg News reported. The company's pitch: Use Claude to translate a commander's intent into digital instructions to coordinate a fleet of drones.

Its bid was rejected, but the contest called for much more than just summarizing intelligence reports, as you might expect a chatbot to do. This contract was to develop "target-related awareness and sharing," and "launch to termination" for potentially lethal drone swarms. Remarkably, all of this has been happening in a regulatory vacuum and with technology that is known to make errors. Hallucinations by large language models are a result of their training, when they are rewarded for grasping for an answer instead of admitting uncertainty. Some scientists say the persistent challenge of AI confabulation may never be fixed. This would not be the first time unreliable AI systems have been used in warfare. Lavender was an AI-driven database used to help identify military targets associated with Hamas in Gaza.

It was not a large language model but analyzed vast amounts of surveillance data, such as social connections and location history, to assign each individual a score from 1 to 100. When someone's score passed a certain threshold, Lavender flagged them as a military target. The problem was that Lavender was wrong 10% of the time, according to an investigative report published by the Israeli-Palestinian outlet +972. "Around 3,600 people were targeted by mistake,"

Mariarosaria Taddeo, a professor of digital ethics and defense technology at the Oxford Internet Institute, tells me. "There are such incredible vulnerabilities in these systems and such extreme unreliability... for something so dynamic, sensitive and human as warfare," says Elke Schwarz, a professor in political theory at Queen Mary University London and author of *Death Machines: The Ethics of Violent Technologies*. Schwarz points out that AI is often used in war to speed things up, a recipe for unwanted outcomes. Faster decisions are made at a greater scale and with less human scrutiny. The last decade and a half has seen military use of AI become even more opaque, she says. And secrecy is baked into how AI labs operate even before the warfare applications. These companies refuse to disclose what data their models are trained on or how their systems reach conclusions. Of course, military operations often have to be kept under wraps to protect combatants and keep enemies off the scent.



# Silicon Valley Showdown: Tech Founder Agarwal Eyes Ro Khanna's Seat



nearly \$50 million, even as Khanna publicly championed a congressional stock-trading ban.

Khanna, who sits on \$15.5

million in campaign cash and is widely viewed as a potential 2028 presidential contender, welcomed the challenge.

The irony is not lost on

observers: when Khanna first ran in 2014, he too was the Silicon Valley outsider backed by tech's gilded class against an entrenched incumbent.

(News Agency) A billionaire-backed challenger from the tech world takes aim at the congressman he once admired — and the race could be one of 2026's most expensive primaries. Tech entrepreneur Ethan Agarwal, 40, officially entered California's 17th Congressional District race this week, setting up what many expect to be among the most lavishly funded Democratic primaries of the 2026 cycle. His target: five-term incumbent Rep.

Ro Khanna, whom Agarwal accuses of drifting too

far left in pursuit of national ambitions. The flashpoint is Khanna's backing of a proposed 5% annual wealth tax on billionaires, co-introduced with Sen.

Bernie Sanders, which an infuriated Silicon Valley donor class estimates could raise \$4.4 trillion over a decade.

Agarwal — founder of fitness app Aaptiv and backed by Y Combinator CEO Garry Tan and DoorDash co-founder Stanley Tang — has dubbed his opponent "Trader Ro," citing over 4,000 stock trades Khanna's family executed last year, worth

## A World Painted in Colour: Indian Missions Celebrate Holi Across the Globe

(News Agency) From Washington to Wellington, Indian diplomatic missions marked the Festival of Colours with joyous gatherings of diaspora communities.

Indian embassies and high commissions across the world hosted vibrant Holi celebrations this week, bringing together diaspora communities to mark the arrival of spring.

Known by many names — Rangwali Holi, Badi Holi, and Dhulandi among them — the festival carries deep cultural resonance for over 30 million people of Indian origin living abroad. The celebrations served both as cultural touchstones for communities far from home and as exercises in soft diplomacy, with local dignitaries and guests



joining Indian nationals in the traditional exchange of colours. Events in North America, the United Kingdom, Southeast Asia, and the Gulf drew large crowds, many of whom used the occasion to reconnect with heritage amid the rhythm of their

adopted countries. Holi, rooted in Hindu tradition, marks the triumph of good over evil and the end of winter — themes that carry a universal resonance that has helped the festival gain mainstream visibility in cities across the world in recent years.

# U.S. Senator Flags H-1B Abuse; DHS Commits to OPT Review This Year

(News Agency) Senator Eric Schmitt's Senate hearing remarks have put America's most-used skilled-worker visa back in the crosshairs, with potentially sweeping consequences for Indian professionals. Republican Senator Eric Schmitt (R-MO) used a Senate Judiciary Committee oversight hearing this week to sharpen his long-running critique of the H-1B visa programme, arguing it was being systematically abused to replace American workers with cheaper foreign labour. The H-1B



programme, designed to admit workers in speciality occupations, is disproportionately used by Indian nationals, who receive over 70% of approved visas each year.



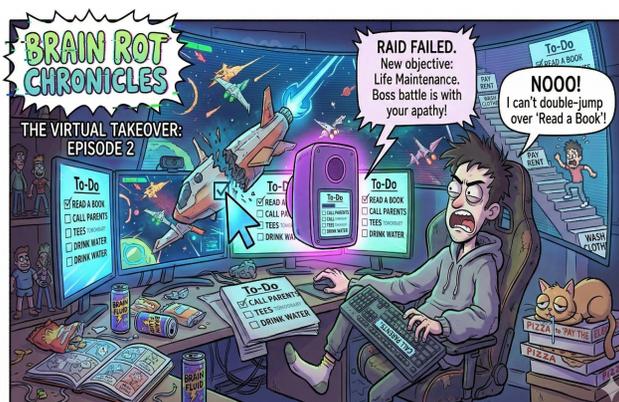
During the hearing, Schmitt pressed Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on whether DHS would commit to reviewing the Optional Practical

Training (OPT) programme — the post-study work pathway for F-1 student visa holders — within 2026. Noem confirmed the review is already underway and pledged

it would be completed this year.

The remarks come alongside a broader tightening of the H-1B ecosystem, with enhanced workplace inspections, increased Requests for Evidence for entry-level IT roles, and a new weighted lottery model prioritising higher-paid applicants expected in the FY2027 cap season. For India's substantial professional diaspora in the United States, the convergence of legislative scrutiny and regulatory reform signals a significantly more uncertain pathway ahead.

### THE BRAIN ROT CHRONICLES-FEATUREING ARJEE



# Britain Cuts Refugee Protections to 30 Months in Sweeping Asylum Overhaul



(News Agency) Taking a cue from Denmark's dramatic asylum decline, the UK Home Office has fundamentally restructured the country's refugee framework — effective immediately. The United Kingdom's most sweeping asylum reform in decades took effect on 2 March, with the Home Office replacing the established five-year grant of refugee protection with a new 30-month temporary status, subject to periodic review. Under the new framework, refugees whose home countries are deemed safe at the point of review will be expected to return,

while those with a continuing need for sanctuary will have their protection renewed. Unaccompanied minors are exempt and will still receive five years' protection. The overhaul was announced by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood last November, drawing explicit inspiration from Denmark, which slashed asylum applications by more than 90% over a decade after introducing comparable measures. The UK saw a 13% increase in asylum claims in the year to September 2025 — reaching 110,000, a new record — even as the EU recorded a 22% fall.

Pakistan, Eritrea, Iran, Afghani- able populations. Under the routes — a shift that ties protec- tion to economic contribution in top five source nationalities. Crit- remain in Britain beyond review a way that human rights ics warn the reform will create periods will need to qualify organisations have called a fun- systemic uncertainty for vulner- through new work or study visa damental redefinition of sanctu- ary

## Trump Administration Reevaluates OPT — With 300,000 Indian Students Watching Closely

(News Agency) The post-study work route for F-1 visa holders is under formal review, putting the career plans of hundreds of thousands of Indian graduates in the United States in a state of uncertainty.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has confirmed it is conducting a formal re-evaluation of the Optional Practical Training programme, which allows international students on F-1 visas to work in the United States for up to three years after completing their studies — a crucial stepping stone for most Indian graduates seeking a transition to H-1B sponsorship. With over 300,000 Indian students currently enrolled in American universities — the single largest international student cohort — the implications of any regulatory changes to OPT are considerable.

Many of these students rely on the STEM OPT extension, which grants up to 36 months of work authorisation, to build their professional pro-

files and pursue H-1B lottery registration. The review, confirmed by DHS Secretary Kristi Noem during a Senate Judiciary hearing on Tuesday, is



expected to be completed by the end of 2026. The DHS has not yet indicated the scope or direction of potential changes, but the political environment — marked by growing congressional scepticism of programmes seen as displacing American workers — has prompted significant anxiety among current and prospective OPT holders and their employers.

## The Beginning

**MAD MEN**  
OF  
**NU WAY ADVERTISING**

About the Author



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

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

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



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

## The Beginning

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

Sharanjit Thind Singh



**MAD MEN**  
OF  
**NU WAY ADVERTISING**

# Is US using Indian ports to strike Iran? New Delhi fact-checks claim

(News Agency) India has rejected claims that the US was using Indian ports to launch strikes against Iran, calling the report "fake and false".

New Delhi's reaction came after a former US Army Colonel claimed in an interview that the US Navy had begun relying on Indian ports in the ongoing war with Iran.

In an interview with a US-based channel, One America News Network, Douglas Macgregor said. "All of our bases have been destroyed. Our harbour installations are destroyed. We are actually having to fall back on India and Indian ports, which is less than ideal; that is what the navy

says," he said.

However, the Press Information Bureau (PIB), the government's fact-check bureau, called the claim "fake."

"Claim: On a US-based channel, One America News Network (@OANN), former US Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor made a statement suggesting that the United States is using Indian naval bases to attack Iran, amidst the ongoing Iran-US conflict.

This claim is fake," PIB tweeted.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)'s official fact-check account also swiftly dismissed the claim.

"Fake News Alert! Claims being made



on OAN, a US-based channel, that Indian ports are being used by the US Navy are such baseless and fabricated comments," the MEA FactCheck handle posted on X. fake and false. We caution you against

## Why putting India in dock over US attack on Iran ship is nonsense

(News Agency) On March 4, the Iran war took an unholy turn. As India celebrated Holi, the conflict reached the country's backyard when a sneaky US submarine torpedoed and sank a defenceless Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean, leaving over 80 sailors dead and 100 missing. The incident has drawn further scrutiny as the warship, IRIS Dena, was returning after participating in two exercises organised by the Indian Navy. India has received heavy criticism, with the Congress framing it as Delhi losing influence in its own neighbourhood. However, is it justified to blame India for the incident?

We will come to the answer shortly. Before that, let us understand why the incident is significant for India. The incident has signalled that the US-Israel war on Iran, launched just days ago, is not just limited to the Gulf. It has arrived in India's strategic backyard. <https://t.co/PiqQpVlrMu> [pic.twitter.com/Wc1e0B0um7](https://pic.twitter.com/Wc1e0B0um7)— Department of War

(@DeptofWar) March 4, 2026

### HOW IRAN SHIP WAS SUNK IN INDIAN OCEAN?

The IRIS Dena, a frigate belonging to the Iranian navy's Southern Fleet, docked in Visakhapatnam on February 16 to participate in the International Fleet Review (IFR) and the multilateral exercise, MILAN-2026. It received a warm welcome from India's Eastern Naval Command. "Indian Navy welcomes IRIS Dena, of the Iranian Navy, on her arrival at Visakhapatnam... reflecting long-standing cultural links between the two nations," it tweeted. Around 74 nations participated in the exercise, except the US. The US Navy's guided-missile destroyer USS Pinckney was expected to participate, but it cancelled at the last minute. The exercise ended on February 25. Three days later, the US and Israel struck Iran, kicking off a full-blown war that has now spread across the Middle East.

On February 4, the IRIS Dena was returning home from Visakhapatnam when

it was attacked off the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The US did not mince words about the fact that it brazenly sank a ship in international waters. "An American submarine sank an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters. Instead, it was sunk by a torpedo. Quiet death," US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said. Iran, highlighting that the frigate was a guest of India's Navy, warned that the US would "regret" the incident

bitterly. "Frigate Dena, a guest of India's Navy carrying almost 130 sailors, was struck in international waters without warning," Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said. It is the closest that the war has come to India.

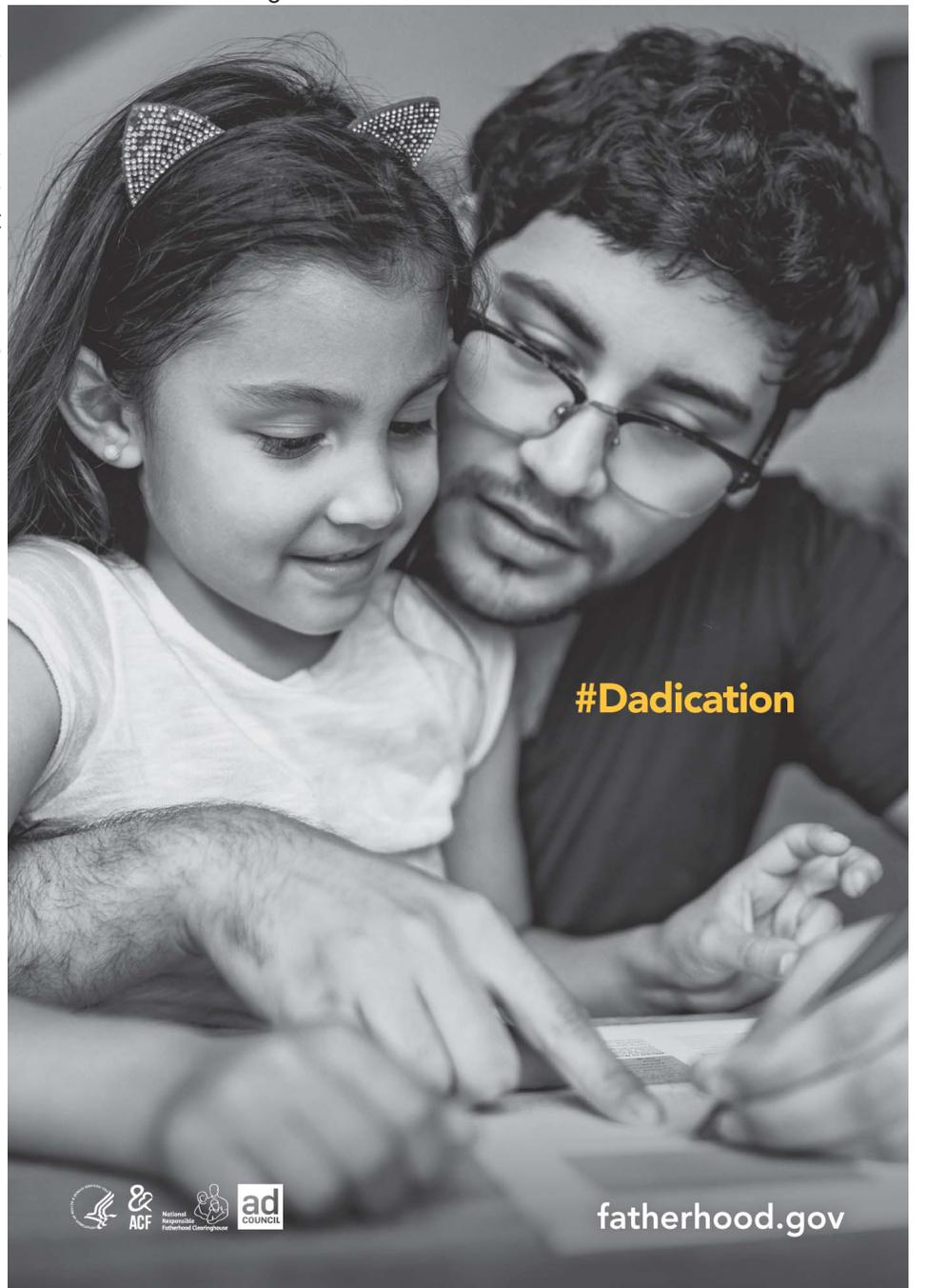
The Iranian ship was sunk in a region that is part of PM Narendra Modi's MAHASAGAR vision, which envisages India as a key pillar of stability in the Indian Ocean.

## US sinks Iran warship in India's strategic waters. Why this is significant

(News Agency) The US-Israeli war on Iran has triggered turbulence in the Indian Ocean, waters that are strategic for India. An American submarine torpedoed and sank the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena in international waters in the Indian Ocean, off the southern coast of Sri Lanka. This was the first sinking of an enemy ship by torpedo by the US since World War II. The incident occurred as the frigate, a small warship, was returning from joint naval exercises in India. This comes even as Pakistan signalled that it could get drawn into the Iran conflict due to the defence pact with Saudi Arabia. These developments raise questions about stability in the Indian subcontinent and the wider South Asian waters. The IRIS Dena, a frigate-class warship, participated in the Milan International Fleet Review in the Bay of

Bengal from February 18 to 25, where it was welcomed by the Indian Navy. It was returning from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, and was targeted in international waters. Reports suggest that 80 aboard the IRIS Dena might have been killed in the American attack. The Sri Lankan Navy has rescued approximately 30 sailors from the IRIS Dena so far, with the survivors being brought to Karapitiya Hospital in the southern port city of Galle for medical attention. Operations continue in hopes of finding more people, with air force support aiding the search.

The response aligns with Sri Lanka's duties under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which mandates that states provide assistance to vessels in distress at sea, regardless of nationality.



#Dadication

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It is the closest Indians have felt the Iran war close to home.

Israel and the US launched airstrikes on Iran on February 28, taking out its top-tier leadership, including Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

Iran has been firing drones and missiles since then at countries that hosted American bases and even those that didn't, turning the entire Middle East into a conflict zone.

# Nitish Kumar's Rajya Sabha move sparks political turmoil, JDU pins hope on his son



(News Agency) Bihar politics is witnessing a significant shift after Nitish Kumar announced his plans to move to the Rajya Sabha. This decision has intensified political turmoil within the Janata Dal (United), with the party now focusing on the future leadership and the possibility of Nitish's son, Nishant Kumar, entering politics. Nitish Kumar, who was sworn in for a record 10th term as Bihar Chief Minister just four months ago, has confirmed his Rajya Sabha move, which has sparked widespread speculation about his successor and the direction of the party. The Janata Dal (United) is currently grappling with internal disputes over leadership. Several senior leaders, including acting national president Sanjay Jha, Union Minister Lallan Singh, and Bihar government ministers Ashok Choudhary and Vijay Choudhary, are being considered. However, their leadership bids risk increasing factionalism and possibly splitting the party. Discontent among JDU

workers has grown and cracks are likely to widen, particularly within the Kurmi-Koeri vote bank, which has been the backbone of Nitish Kumar's political success. Party members suspect some leaders are strategising to help vacate the Chief Minister's position and ensure Nitish shifts to Delhi. Amid this uncertainty, Nishant Kumar has emerged as a potential unifying figure. An engineer with no prior political experience, Nishant is seen as a clean and acceptable candidate to lead the party without causing further divisions. Nishant's background in the Kurmi community aligns with the social base that has supported Nitish Kumar for decades. Senior party leaders have suggested that Nishant's entry into politics could help address the growing unrest within the party ranks and preserve its vote bank. There is also speculation that with the BJP likely to have its own chief minister in Bihar, the deputy chief minister post might be offered to the JDU. Party sources indicate that Nishant

Kumar could be appointed to this position to maintain the party's political relevance and support base.

As Bihar approaches a critical juncture, the future unity of the JDU appears closely linked to Nishant Kumar's accep-

tance of party leadership.

The party faces challenges including internal opposition, leadership disputes, and potential splits, with Nishant's role seen as pivotal in determining its path forward.

## 28-year-old man arrested for sending over 50 hoax bomb threat emails across India

(News Agency) A major breakthrough has been achieved in the nationwide hoax bomb threat case after investigators arrested the man accused of sending a series of threatening emails that triggered panic across multiple Indian cities. The Gujarat Crime Branch, in a joint operation with the Ahmedabad Cyber Crime Unit, arrested 28-year-old Sourav Biswas from West Bengal for allegedly sending bomb threat emails targeting schools, courts, metro stations and financial institutions across the country. Officials said the arrest marks the first major breakthrough in the investigation into a wave of threatening emails that caused widespread alarm among security agencies and the public.

According to investigators, the accused allegedly sent more than 50 bomb threat emails over the past five days to locations in Mumbai, Delhi, Gujarat and several other states. Among the targets were schools, metro stations and even the stock exchange in Mumbai.

The man also triggered panic in Mumbai on February 27 when, at around 8:46 am, threatening emails were sent via

the internet to several schools and metro stations in Mumbai, warning of bomb blasts within two days. The message immediately set off alarm bells among security agencies, prompting emergency checks and evacuations at multiple loca-



tions. Following the threat, a case was registered at the Dindoshi Police Station in Mumbai and a technical investigation was launched. Cyber experts began tracking the digital trail of the email, eventually identifying the source in the New Barrackpore area of West Bengal.

Police teams were dispatched to the state to locate the suspect. During the investigation, authorities also discovered that the same accused had earlier sent a similar threatening email in Ahmedabad on February 16.

# Nitish Kumar is BJP's puppet, paid price for betraying allies: Rohini Acharya

(News Agency) Former RJD leader Rohini Acharya on Thursday launched a sharp attack on Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar after he announced his decision to contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha election, alleging that the JD(U) chief was facing the consequences of repeatedly "betraying" his political partners. She also claimed that the BJP ill-treated Nitish Kumar and "forced" him to contest the Rajya Sabha polls.

In a post on X, Acharya, the estranged daughter of RJD chief Lalu Yadav, asserted that Nitish Kumar himself was responsible for his current political situation and called him a "puppet of the BJP."

She remarked that leaders who repeatedly abandon their allies eventually have to face the repercussions of their own decisions.

"Nitish Kumar ji, who repeatedly betrays his own allies. You



are yourself responsible for being pushed into your own abyss and for your own wretched state.

You are the rightful recipient of whatever is happening to you today," said Acharya, who quit politics after Mahagathbandhan's drubbing in last year's Bihar Assembly

polls. Calling Nitish Kumar a "pinnacle of opportunism", Acharya claimed that he was forced by the BJP to contest the Rajya Sabha election.

According to her, the development stems from Kumar's decision to walk out of the Grand Alliance (INDIA bloc)

and return to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on January 28, 2024.

"This was already decided on January 28, 2024, when Nitish Kumar ji repeated his world-famous skill of somersaulting by abandoning the Mahagathbandhan. It is precisely because of his inherent

compulsion to cling to the chair that Nitish Kumar ji has today become a puppet in the hands of that BJP, which is notorious for digging the political graves of its allies and burying them," she said.

She further said that Nitish Kumar had ignored warnings from several of his former socialist colleagues about aligning again with the BJP.

Acharya also referred to the 2022 incident in Maharashtra involving Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who split the Shiv Sena and led to the collapse of the Uddhav Thackeray-led government, suggesting that Nitish Kumar should have taken note of how the BJP allegedly treats its regional allies in other states.

"Despite repeated warnings from his old socialist comrades, he himself went and sat in the lap of the BJP, which is like a grave," she said.

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# The Democrats' Instant "No"

# The Opposition Party's Reflex Problem



The hallmark of the modern opposition party isn't a counter-proposal or a competing vision for American security; it is the reflexive, immediate, and entirely predictable "no." We saw it again this past weekend following the joint U.S.-Israeli operation that resulted in the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Before the smoke had even cleared over Tehran, the usual suspects in the Senate were already drafting press releases decrying the "illegality" of the strike.

For Senators Tim Kaine and Chris Murphy, the primary concern wasn't the neutralization of a man who spent decades orchestrating the murder of Americans and the destabilization of the Middle East. It was, as always, a process complaint. Their instant "no" wasn't a strategic critique—it was a legalistic refuge. They argue that because Congress didn't hold a floor debate and a committee markup before a time-sensitive military strike, the entire action is a constitutional affront.

This is the same tired script we've seen for years. Whether the theater is the southern border, the tax code, or a drone strike on a high-value target, the Democratic reflex is to prioritize the procedural hurdle over the national interest. They cry "illegal" not because they have a better plan for a nuclear-threshold Iran, but because "illegal" is the only word they have left to describe a reality they didn't authorize and cannot control.

The irony, of course, is that many of these same voices remained remarkably quiet during the previous administration's various "kinetic actions" and executive maneuvers. Suddenly, however, the War Powers Act is treated with the sanctity of the Ten Commandments. They ignore the reality that the Commander-in-Chief has the inherent authority under Article II to defend the United States against imminent threats—and if the leader of a state that regularly chants "Death to America" while funding proxy wars doesn't qualify as a threat, it's hard to imagine who does.

The danger of the "Instant No" is that it signals to our adversaries that the American political class is more interested in suing the President than in winning a war. When the IRGC sees U.S. Senators calling their own country's military actions "heinous" and "unauthorized" while Tehran is busy firing ballistic missiles at Dubai, the message is clear: America is a house divided by its own bureaucracy. Leadership requires more than just pointing to a rulebook every time a difficult decision is made. It requires an acknowledgment of the world as it is—not as a law school seminar would like it to be. Until the opposition can move past the reflexive "no" and offer a credible "yes" to the security challenges of 2026, they will continue to be a party that is very good at complaining about the process, but entirely incapable of protecting the country.

**Sharanjit Singh Thind**

When "no" becomes the only word in the political vocabulary, voters start to notice. There is a particular kind of Washington theater that has become so routine, so reflexive, so utterly predictable, that it barely registers as news anymore. A policy proposal arrives. The opposition party schedules a press conference. And before anyone has read past the title page, the verdict is delivered: absolutely not.

Call it the Instant No. It requires no deliberation, no committee hearings, no staff analysis. It requires only the awareness that the other party proposed something—and that is sufficient cause for opposition.

This is not governance. It is performance. And both parties have indulged in it at various moments in American history. But the current Democratic opposition has elevated reflexive rejection to something approaching an art form. Whatever the Trump administration proposes—whether it involves border enforcement, federal spending cuts, regulatory rollbacks, or agency restructuring—the answer arrives within hours, fully formed, complete with talking points and the requisite outrage. Somewhere in Washington, a clocking mechanism must be running, measuring the speed from proposal to condemnation.

The problem is not opposition itself. A robust minority party serves an essential democratic function. Scrutiny, accountability, the forcing of debate—these are features of a healthy republic, not bugs.

But there is a meaningful difference between principled opposition and positional opposition. One requires engaging with the substance of a proposal, identifying its flaws, and offering alternatives. The other requires only

knowing who proposed it. What makes this moment particularly striking is that the Democrats have a real opening. Public skepticism about executive overreach, about the pace and scope of federal restructuring, about the implications of concentrated power—these are legitimate concerns that command genuine public attention. A serious opposition party would seize that ground. It would make careful, specific arguments. It would distinguish the measures it finds genuinely dangerous from the ones it simply dislikes for partisan reasons. It would put forward its own vision.

Instead, the volume is turned up uniformly across every issue, which means the volume communicates nothing. When everything is a constitutional crisis, nothing is. When every proposal is described as extreme, voters stop using that word as a filter.

There is also a political cost that Democrats seem unwilling to calculate honestly. The voters who abandoned the party in 2024 did not do so because the party was insufficiently confrontational. They left, in many cases, because the party seemed more interested in cultural and institutional politics than in the material conditions of ordinary life. Endless press conferences denouncing DOGE do not address that perception. They deepen it.

None of this excuses the administration from scrutiny. Nor does it mean that every objection raised by the minority party is wrong. On matters of constitutional procedure, executive authority, and civil service protections, there are serious questions worth asking. But asking serious questions requires slowing down long enough to distinguish them from the reflexive ones.

**Sharanjit Singh Thind**


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# The Middle East Inferno, And Why India Can Play Mediator

In the shadow of perennially shifting alliances, the recent eruption of hostilities between Iran and a coalition led by Israel and the United States marks a pivotal moment in the geopolitics of the Middle East. With the targeted assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the region stands at a cruel crossroads where retaliation and survival intersect, creating a tumultuous environment that threatens to engulf much of the Gulf.

Though Iran has long been viewed as a formidable leader in shaping regional politics, its ambitions now wield a dangerous, double-edged sword. Perceived by Iran as the vassal states of the US, the six Gulf Arab monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) find themselves ensnared in the conflagration, suffering immensely in the face of Iranian vengeance.

## Diversification Of Hydrocarbon Sector

Having spent over a decade as an Editor of various media groups in the Gulf region, I witnessed the massive diversification out of the hydrocarbon sector and the transformation of some of these Gulf states from close quarters. During the first Gulf War of the 1990s, the Middle East practically lived off hydrocarbons: oil and gas.

In sharp contrast today, about 77 per cent of the UAE's economy is based on non-hydrocarbon sectors: finance, technology, tourism, real estate, sports and education. The corresponding figures for Oman are 73 per cent, 66 per cent for Qatar and 57 per cent for Saudi Arabia. In the Global Financial Centre Index (GFCI) 38 Rank, for 2025, Dubai was ranked 11th out of 38 leading financial hubs globally, ahead of Frankfurt, Washington DC, Geneva, Tokyo, Zurich, Boston, Paris and others. To achieve such a remarkable structural transformation, all the Gulf countries have projected an image of safety and stability, as champions of "soft power."

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Pentagon Warns Of Low Missile Stock If Iran War Rages For 10 Toxic Avoids Dhurandhar 2 Clash, Shifts To June 4 Amid Middl The days of relative stability, stretching from the 1990s to 2020, appear as a utopia of the past. In sharp contrast, today the Gulf countries, pounded by Iranian drones and missiles, appear as a desert inferno, wherein each missile and drone strike sends ripples through the global energy supply and shakes the very foundations of regional economies.

## Iran's Fight For Survival

Iran's response to the unprovoked aggression has been vehement and uncompromising. The drone strikes --

targeting oil refineries, embassies, and even iconic landmarks -- serve not only as acts of defiance but as desperate measures in a fight for survival. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial artery for global oil transport, sends shockwaves through international markets, driving gas prices to unprecedented heights. The earth beneath the rich sands of the Gulf no longer feels stable; instead, it reverberates with the cries of economies on the brink, as investment flees and the prospect for growth dims.

## The Spectre Of War

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, once a beacon of energy wealth, finds its giant oil refining facility at Ras Tanura under siege, its economic backbone threatened by Iranian hostility. With every attack on US embassies across the region -- be it in Riyadh or Kuwait -- the landscape of safety and security that

Gulf states had long cultivated crumbles. The closures of strategic sites are akin to death knells, resonating through the halls of power and striking fear into the hearts of investors. Half of Dubai, once a flourishing hub of tourism and commerce, is scrambling for exits, as the spectre of a protracted war looms large. Ironically, the Gulf monarchies -- despite their relative wealth, sovereign wealth funds and modernised economies -- possess much more to lose in this newly minted chaos. Over the past quarter-century, they have diversified their economies away from a sole reliance on fossil fuels, yet the very infrastructure that allows this transformation is now vulnerable to threat. UAE's economy, for instance, is now predominantly non-hydrocarbon, driven by finance, tourism, and technology. Yet, when drones strike AWS facilities and disrupt critical services, the progress they made appears ephemeral, caught in the crossfire of escalating conflict.

## Psychological Toll On Gulf Monarchies

The psychological toll on these nations is profound. The attacks sow seeds of doubt about safety and stability -- qualities that were once a bedrock of their relationship with the United States. The image of the Gulf as a sanctuary for expatriates and tourists disintegrates under the weight of a sullied reputation. Faced with an uncertain horizon, nations like Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE and Oman must urgently advocate for peace,

seeking to quell the flames of unrest that threaten their very existence.

In the bitter aftermath of the US strikes on Iranian soil, as nearby populations -- fearing for their lives -- experience devastation firsthand, the reciprocal hostility from Iran cannot be understated. Missiles launched toward Israel disrupt the very fabric of what was assumed to be a stabilised region. Both sides are locked in a dance of devastation, and with each lost life, a broader narrative of vengeance is etched into the sands of history. India A Glimmer Of Hope Yet, amid the destruction, there lies a glimmer of hope. India, standing at an advantageous intersection of good relations with Iran, Israel, the Gulf states and the United States, possesses the unique opportunity to mediate a path toward peace. With over 1 crore Indian workers residing within the Gulf economies, the stakes are personal, transcending diplomatic rhetoric. India's intervention could pave a way for dialogue -- a flicker of rationality amid chaos.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to leaders of Qatar, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia and condemned the Iranian attacks on these Gulf economies. The Prime Minister continues to lead India's efforts to ensure the well-being of the expatriate community and the return of a large number of students from Iran and the Gulf countries. For many Indian families, separated across the Indian Ocean, Holi and Eid will be an occasion to celebrate reunion. The brewing storm does not merely pose a regional threat; it spirals into a global crisis. As stocks tumble and energy prices soar, the consequences of conflict reverberate beyond the Middle East. A world interconnected through trade and economy watches anxiously, knowing that peace -- or the lack thereof -- will shape the future of energy and security for generations to come. In this boiling cauldron of conflict, one truth remains: while one nation retaliates, the others face the dire consequences of its fury.

Rich Arab Gulf monarchies must actively lobby with Israel and the United States to end the Iran War. The prosperous Gulf economies depend on their image as oases of safety and sustainability. As the cries for peace in the Gulf grow louder and as the world holds its breath, one hopes that reconciliation may arise from the ashes, restoring a sense of stability before the flames consume all.

**Ajit Kumar Jha**

# Gasping In 4 Days? How Iran Humbled US-Israel's Million-Dollar War Inventory

Israel claimed Iran to be an 'existential threat', while the US claimed Iran to pose an 'imminent threat' to its mainland through the latter's rapidly growing capability in ballistic missiles. Both launched a pre-emptive air campaign on February 28, targeting key infrastructure in Iran and also taking out its top leadership in a well-timed and executed intelligence operation. Obviously, the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was the top prize for both the US and Israel. The campaign was expected to pulverise Iran in a matter of days, decapitate its entire political and military leadership and orchestrate a change of regime in Iran in no time.

However, what has been witnessed in the four days has shocked the world and has gone well beyond the wildest calculations of American and

Israeli generals. The Iranian counterattack has been focused and ferocious, unmindful of the mighty armies that it is opposing. The death of its Supreme Leader and over 40 top generals has not deterred it but has, on the contrary, strengthened its resolve to fight back. The inadequacy of the American security umbrella in the Gulf region has been exposed as the American defensive systems get overwhelmed and outnumbered. US bases and embassies are being vacated, energy supplies across the Persian Gulf have come to a halt, and there is fear that if the conflict prolongs, the costs that it imposes will soon become untenable for Israel and the US.

## Low-Cost For The Win?

Iran is fighting an uneven battle against Israel-US. There is no military matchup when Iran is up against the most modern and lethal militaries in the world. However, military superiority comes at a cost. This war is about fighting with stand-off weapon platforms such as missiles, drones and fighter jets. A comparison in costs is revealing. Some estimates suggest that the US may have incurred a cost of around USD 779 million in the first 24 hours of Operation Epic Fury. The cost estimates suggest an overall expense of around USD 1.24 billion in the first three days. It may not seem too much given that the US military budget is around USD 1 trillion. But the figures give an idea about the cost of a military campaign of this size.

Even so, it is not the overall expense that matters as much as the cost of each weapon platform pitched against what

Iran is firing and paying for.

The American Patriot and Tomahawk missiles cost between USD 1-3 million apiece, whereas an average Iranian ballistic missile is priced at merely USD 800,000 to 1 million. Similarly, the MQ-9 Reaper drone costs a staggering USD 30 million compared to the Shahed drone of Iran costing merely USD 30-50K. This huge disparity in costs is resulting in



double trouble for Israel and the US. First is the heavy costs, and second is the shorter numbers being produced annually, as a result of which replacement in battlefields, where large numbers are required, becomes problematic.

## Will US Run Out Of Inventory?

In the ongoing war, in just four days of battle, there are fears that the inventory of Patriot and Tomahawk missiles may run out soon. The availability of Patriot missiles in the war zone is estimated to be around 600-800 only. Also, for any incoming missile from Iran, four to six interceptors are fired. With an estimate of 150-200 missile interceptors already fired, it is feared that Israel and the US may run out of interceptors in the next four to seven days. There are reports that the US is contemplating shifting some Patriot missiles from Japan and Korea to augment the inventory. Similarly, the Tomahawk missiles, too, may start facing criticality, especially if the battle intensifies in the seas. The production rate of around 600-650 Patriot missiles annually cannot keep pace with the requirements of a war where almost 250-400 missiles are required every week.

Iran knows it and has prepared for it. It has huge missiles and drone inventories, many of them safely kept in underground silos deep inside mountains where American air or missile strikes cannot reach. As per some estimates, Iran's inventory of missiles of various types ranges from 20,000 to 50,000; its drones, too, are in thousands. Knowing the asymmetric advantage it has, Iran is steadily firing a combination of old and

new missiles and drones, keeping the Israeli and American defences occupied, knowing fully well that its inventory could last months, if not longer. Plus, it is producing dozens of missiles every month, enough to keep replenishing stocks for months to come. The costs that it is imposing both in terms of expenditure and availability of numbers for critical missiles is becoming a challenge for Israel and the US.

## The Human Cost

The cost of body bags is yet another key determinant in the outcome of war. Although President Trump hinted at a number of casualties in the ongoing conflict, the return of body bags in 'away wars' is a big 'No' in America. The early signs of despair are

already to be seen as President Trump as well as the Secretary of War counted in their address on March 2 the three lives lost. This was just the third day of war, and they promised to honour their sacrifice with a medal of honour. With many more casualties expected, especially as Iranian missiles are successfully hitting US embassies, bases, ammunition depots and even hotels where evacuated soldiers are staying, this could soon become a cost that President Trump will not be able to bear much longer. Similar is the case with Israel, although it can claim to have a higher threshold, especially as it is fighting an 'existential threat'.

## The Political Stakes For Trump And Netanyahu

Both President Trump as well as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have a lot riding on in this war, as far as their political future is concerned. President Trump is fighting steadily lowering approval ratings in the year of mid-term polls. His MAGA base is just about holding on, and the recent Supreme Court judgment against his unilateral tariffs and the scandals triggered by the Epstein files have put him on the back foot. The war with Iran is perhaps an attempt to divert the attention and build on his campaign for the midterm election later this year. Similarly, Prime Minister Netanyahu faces elections later this year. With the Gaza war still unresolved, his right-wing allies are pushing him to restart a ground offensive in Gaza. The controversial judicial reforms and corruption allegations have put him in the dock, with several court cases against

him. In fact, on February 28, the day Israel-US launched pre-emptive strikes, he was due to be present in the courts for a hearing, which was then put off. His actions of firing the Attorney-General as well as the Shin Bet Chief last year have also been met with protests and opposition.

Given this, anything less than an outright victory against Iran could spell doom for the two leaders' respective political careers. Iran knows it and is happy to keep prolonging and expanding the conflict, increasing the time and cost for both Israel and the US.

## Reputation At Stake

The Gulf countries had bought their security through American guarantees for decades. Granting permission to locate American bases in the region was part of the security umbrella against any external aggression. After Israel struck Qatar with a missile strike in September 2025, the US had doubled down on giving iron-clad security assurances to the Gulf countries. The bubble has, however, burst. Almost all Gulf countries have been successfully targeted by Iranian missiles and drones. The American security umbrella has proven ineffective as missiles and drones have destroyed the Fifth Fleet HQ in Bahrain, the largest military base in Doha, other bases in Kuwait, Iraq, the UAE and Jordan, as well as embassies and consulates in Riyadh and Kuwait. Even Oman, the most neutral country and mediator in talks between Iran and the US, has not been spared. Hotels and ports have been successfully struck and there is panic in the region. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has triggered fears of a global economic meltdown owing to stoppage of critical energy supplies. In the midst of it, the myth of American security lies busted. The reputation built over decades has been shattered. Iran knew about it and the costs it could impose on the US in the future. Its decision to expand the conflict across the region is, therefore, well-calculated, imposing huge economic as well as reputational costs on the US.

## Unexpected Outcomes

The conflict is only in its first week, but the tables have turned sooner and faster than expected. Iran, battered by unstoppable air strikes, the assassination of its Supreme Leader and over 40 top leaders, has refused to bow down and surrender. Instead, it has unleashed a strategy that has not only caught Israel, the US and the entire region by surprise but is also imposing costs upon Israel and the US, which may become unbearable soon.

**Col Rajeev Agarwa**

# Can Iran Really Win?

On the morning of March 2, 2026 - just four days into what has rapidly become the most dangerous military confrontation of the twenty-first century so far - retired Justice Markandey Katju, former Judge of the Supreme Court of India and former Chairman of the Press Council of India, published a provocative essay asking a question that most Western commentators have been reluctant to take seriously: Why Iran Will Win The War. It is a bold claim. On the surface, the arithmetic is overwhelming - the United States is the world's pre-eminent military power, technologically sophisticated, nuclear-armed, and backed by Israel. Iran is a country of 93 million people under decades of sanctions, relatively under developed, and now without its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of Operation Epic Fury on February 28. And yet. Read Justice Katju's argument carefully, and read the news coming out of the region this morning, and it is difficult to dismiss his thesis entirely. This newspaper has looked hard at both the Katju analysis and the emerging facts on the ground. Our conclusion is nuanced - but it leans, perhaps uncomfortably, in Katju's direction.

The United States has the firepower to destroy Iran. What it does not have - and what no military in history has managed - is the ability to destroy a people's will to resist.

## The Vietnam Parallel: Compelling, But Imperfect

Justice Katju's central historical parallel is Vietnam, and it is a powerful one. He argues that Iran, like Vietnam before it, need not defeat the United States militarily to win - it need only refuse to be defeated. A stalemate, he writes, equals an Iranian victory. Katju writes: Vietnam was a much smaller and poorer country than the United States. Yet it won by achieving victory through not being defeated - by simply refusing to surrender. Similarly, this war will not end in a quick US-Israeli victory and a regime change, but will drag on in a stalemate for a long time. The parallel is historically compelling. The Vietnam War cost the United

States 58,000 lives, trillions of dollars in today's money, and ended in humiliation not because America lacked military superiority - it never did - but because it lacked the political will to sustain an indefinite occupation against a population that was willing to absorb casualties indefinitely. President Trump has already said publicly that this war will last 'four to five weeks.' That is a political timeline, not a military one, and it is almost certainly optimistic. Four days in, Iran has already struck the US embassy in Riyadh with drones, forced the closure of major Gulf airports, sent the Dow Jones falling over 1,000 points, and - critically - shown no signs whatsoever of capitulation.

The Vietnam parallel does, however, have limits that Katju does not fully address. Vietnam was a ground war, fought in jungle terrain that neutralised American air superiority and made occupation prohibitively costly. Iran is being fought primarily from the air. The United States and Israel are not sending ground troops - not yet - and Trump has been explicit that his objective is regime change, not territorial occupation. This is a different kind of war, and the Vietnam template does not map onto it perfectly.

The Will to Fight: Where Katju Is On Strongest Ground

Where Justice Katju is on his most solid ground is in his assessment of Iranian national psychology and the role of martyrdom in Shia Islamic tradition. This is not a spiritual abstraction - it is a political and military reality that American planners have consistently underestimated in the Middle East, from Iraq to Lebanon to Gaza.

Katju writes: Iran is predominantly a Shia country, and Shias regard martyrdom as the supreme crowning achievement. So how does one fight a people who are not afraid of death? The Americans are fighting people who are not afraid to die. The only way they can win is by killing all 93 million Iranians.

This is bluntly stated, and deliberately so. The history of the region supports it. The killing of Ayatollah Khamenei - far from triggering the popular uprising that

Trump and Netanyahu appear to have anticipated - has, according to multiple reports this morning, hardened Iranian resolve and unified a population that was, until last week, genuinely divided over its government. This is a well-documented pattern. The 2006 Israeli bombardment of Lebanon did not break Hezbollah; it transformed it into the most popular political force in the country. The years of sanctions on Iran did not produce regime collapse; they produced a population that blamed Washington, not Tehran, for its hardships. Decapitation strategies - killing leaders in the expectation that populations will crumble - have a remarkably poor track record in modern warfare.

Today, as Iranian drones strike US diplomatic facilities and Iranian missiles continue to fly despite four days of the most intensive bombardment the country has ever experienced, it is becoming increasingly clear that the will to resist is not broken. It may, in fact, be stronger than it was last Friday.

Decapitation strategies have a remarkably poor track record. Killing Khamenei may have unified the Iranian people rather than fractured them.

The Geopolitical Context Katju Identifies - And Its Complications

Justice Katju also points to Russian and Chinese support for Iran as a structural advantage, drawing a parallel with the Soviet and Chinese aid that sustained North Vietnam throughout the 1960s and 70s. This is a legitimate observation. Russia and China have significant strategic interest in seeing the United States bogged down in a prolonged Middle Eastern conflict. Neither is likely to allow Iran to be completely crushed - both have pre-existing energy and trade relationships with Tehran, and both have made clear, in diplomatic language, their opposition to the war.

What Katju does not dwell on - and what complicates this picture considerably - is the nuclear dimension. The Trump administration's stated justification for the war is preventing Iran from acquiring

nuclear weapons. US intelligence assessments, as reported by multiple outlets this week, actually suggest Iran was still roughly a decade away from a militarily viable intercontinental ballistic missile. That inconvenient fact has not stopped the administration from using the nuclear argument as its primary public justification - echoing, with uncomfortable precision, the false WMD claims that preceded the Iraq War in 2003. If this parallel holds, the strategic and reputational cost to the United States could be severe.

There is also the global economic dimension, which is already materialising rapidly. Iran has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz - through which approximately 20 percent of the world's oil passes. Oil supertanker rates have hit all-time highs. European stock markets are down sharply. The Dow has shed thousands of points in four days. Global supply chains that run through Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha are disrupted, with over 1,900 flights cancelled on Tuesday alone. A prolonged conflict does not merely damage Iran - it destabilises the global economy in ways that will generate political pressure on Washington from allies who did not sign up for this.

Where We Part Company With Katju

It would be intellectually dishonest to present Justice Katju's thesis as uncontested, and we do not do so. There are real and significant ways in which the Iran conflict differs from Vietnam, and in which American military power may yet achieve its objectives - or at least prevent the kind of clean Iranian 'victory' Katju describes.

First, the technological gap between the two sides is of a different order of magnitude than anything seen in Vietnam. The United States and Israel have demonstrated the ability to strike with extraordinary precision - targeting the Supreme Leader himself, targeting military infrastructure, targeting Iran's nascent nuclear programme. Iran's air defences, while not negligible, have not proven capable of stopping this. A prolonged air campaign,

combined with renewed economic strangulation, may ultimately produce regime change without the ground war that doomed American efforts in Vietnam and Iraq.

Second, Iranian society, while clearly united in its anger at foreign attack, was not uniformly supportive of the Islamic Republic before this war began. There were genuine, deep tensions between reformists and hardliners, between the young urban population and the clerical establishment. Whether the current nationalist unity holds over weeks and months of war - or whether, as the economy deteriorates further under intensified sanctions and bombardment, internal fractures re-emerge - remains genuinely uncertain.

Third, the 'four to five weeks' timeline Trump has stated publicly is a political signal as much as a military one. It is possible - we would not say probable, but possible - that a sustained, intensive campaign does produce enough degradation of Iran's military and governmental infrastructure to force a political transition within that window. It would be a pyrrhic outcome by almost any measure, but it cannot be entirely ruled out.

The Verdict: A Flawed But Prophetic Warning

Justice Katju's essay is not a dispassionate strategic analysis. It is the work of a passionate, morally engaged thinker who believes, as he states explicitly, that Iran is fighting for a just cause - the right of nations to self-determination - and that justice, in the long arc of history, has a tendency to prevail. One may or may not share that moral framework. But the strategic logic beneath it is sounder than it first appears. The United States has the firepower to destroy Iran's military infrastructure. What it does not have - and what no military in history has successfully deployed - is the ability to destroy 93 million people's will to resist. Wars are not won by destroying things. They are won by destroying the enemy's will to fight. And on that measure, four days into this conflict, Iran is not behaving like a country whose will is breaking.

# How did Iran catch the mightier US and Israel on the back foot?

Three days into the war, many previously held assumptions are already being proved wrong.

The US and Israel's military campaign was expected to pulverise Iran in a matter of days — destroy its military industrial complex including the massive ballistic missiles inventory, decapitate its entire political and military leadership, bring people out on the streets, and as a result of all this, orchestrate a change of regime in Iran.

But what has happened is, to use a colloquialism, clearly out of the American and Israeli generals' syllabus.

Iran's counterattack, both in ferocity and spread, shocked everyone. Iran not only attacked Israel but delivered on its threat by targeting US bases in almost every Gulf country, exposing inadequacies of the American security umbrella in the region.

American defence systems are being overwhelmed. Gulf nations are shouting for help and protection. US bases and embassies are being vacated. Energy supplies across the Persian Gulf have come to a halt. And there is fear that if the conflict prolongs, the tables could turn rapidly — leaving no "safe exit" for the US and Israel.

How did this happen? Why is what's unfolding so different from earlier projections? How is Iran, a nation under severe sanctions for almost three decades, fighting a lone battle against the mightiest armies on the planet across more than 12 countries? The answer lies in a remarkable military strategy forged by Iran, which expected and prepared for a war of this kind for over a decade!

## WAR OF ASYMMETRIC STRENGTHS

In pure military capabilities, Iran simply can't compete with the Israel-US combine. Israel and the US have the most modern, lethal weapon systems that no other nation on the planet has. Their air power assets have unmatched range, lethality and stealth that gives them virtually unrestricted capability to operate unhindered in any theatre of war. Iran on the other hand has a virtually non-existent Airforce and a very weak and depleted air and missile defense system Air

Force: Israel and the US possess the most modern fighter aircraft, like the F-35, the F-22 Raptor, and the F-16. Adding to these capabilities are integrated electronic warfare systems and precision- and long-range targeting weapons. The longer-range missions are ably assisted by air-to-air refuelling, and the B-1 and the B-2 stealth bombers can have devastating effects on the battlefield, as witnessed during the Twelve-Day War in 2025.

Iran, on the other hand, has a poorly equipped and ageing fleet. Its air force comprises a wide array of aircraft, ranging from US-made F-14s, Chinese F-4s, F-5s, and F-7s, and Russian Sukhoi and MIG-29s, most of them decades old. Air Defence: Here, too, Israel and the US have an overwhelming superiority. The Patriot and the Arrow Anti-Missile Systems are designed to intercept long-range missiles. The Iron Dome system, the Iron Beam, and the David's Sling System have an interception success rate of over 90 per cent for short-range rockets and missiles. And the American Terminal High Altitude Area Defence System is capable of intercepting missiles at longer ranges. Plus, the Aegis missile system mounted on ships provides additional coverage and redundancy.

In comparison, Iran has an old S-300 Air Defence System coupled with other older Russian-origin anti-aircraft missiles. It has developed the Bawar 373, which is touted to be almost as good as the Russian S-400 system. But it is yet to prove its worth. Reportedly, Iran has acquired a Chinese HQ-9B missile defence system, but it is yet to be seen.

Satellite and intelligence: With its advanced satellite systems, modern long-range radars, and airborne warning and control system, Israel and the US are way ahead of Iran in terms of satellite coverage and real-time data links. And in terms of intelligence, Israel has proved more than once how effective it is in penetrating enemy lines and carrying out targeted strikes. The elimination of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Hezbollah

leader Hasan Nasrullah in 2024, and the top Iranian leadership, including the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the current conflict, are cases in point.

Missile systems: In the missile systems department, Iran has the upper hand. Iran's array is the largest and most modern in the region. Many Iranian missiles are inherently capable of carrying nuclear payloads. In its medium and long-range category are the Khorramshahr-1, 2, and 3, medium-range ballistic missiles with ranges of 2,000–3,000 km, the Fatah-1 with a range of 1,400–1,700 km, and many others like the Sejil (2,000 km), the Paveh (1,650 km), etc. Iran has also developed hypersonic glide missiles that fly at five to eight times the speed of sound and are beyond the interception capability of most anti-missile systems. Israel, on the other hand, has more short-range missiles with ranges up to 500 km, which cannot target Iran directly. However, it has Jericho-2, with a range of 1,500–3,000 km and Jericho-3, an intermediate-range ballistic missile with a range of 4,800–6,500 km. Plus, the US provides additional teeth with Tomahawk missiles.

Drones: Iran possesses a large variety of drones and has mastered developing low-cost ones. It has exported its drones to Russia as well. Prominent among its arsenal are the Shahed drones, which are suicide or Kamikaze drones meant to explode on targets. The Shahed-136 has a range of over 2,300 km and can carry 20–40 kg of explosives, enough to cause significant damage in a non-hardened structure. The Shahed-238 drones also have jet propulsion, making them faster and capable of carrying far more payload. There are also the Samad-1, 2, and 3 drones, which have an effective range of 1,800 km and can carry a sufficient payload to inflict damage. In comparison, Israeli and American drones are more modern and costlier. The major ones are the famous Heron and Hermes 900 armed drones that have a range of over 1,000 km. The American drones LUKAS (Kamikaze

drones) and the famous MQ-9 Reaper add to the firepower. However, going by sheer numbers, Iran may hold an edge.

## ASYMMETRIC

## OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

The US bombed Iran's nuclear sites in June 2025, eliminating a nuclear threat at least for the time being. Plus, talks being mediated by Oman were promising a nuclear deal where it would make it virtually impossible for Iran to develop nuclear weapons — ever. For Israel, however, the "existential threat" it claimed came from the Iranian regime and Iran's powerful ballistic missile programme. The US merely joined in, compelled to support Israel. The politico-military objective for the US-Israel combine was therefore very clear: take out top leadership, destroy completely all military capability and key infrastructure, and force regime change. Iran, on the other hand, knew from the very beginning that there was no way that it could fight back against American and Israeli air and missile strikes. It has therefore adopted a "disperse, absorb, and fight back" strategy. Blessed by a huge landmass, a long coastline, and rugged mountain ranges, it dispersed its assets not only widely but also deeply into the mountains. The military response led by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, too, has been dispersed into 31 independent units in a 'decentralised mosaic defence'. Each unit is completely cut off from any communication from central command, and each commander is given full autonomy to plan and strike at will, making it very difficult for modern technology to pick up any chatter and plan any counter to it. Iran is also fighting a well-calibrated battle based on a mathematical calculation and the probability of success. It knows that the Patriot missiles, which are available in the war zone, total only 600–800. Also, for any incoming missile from Iran, 4–6 interceptors are fired. With an estimate of 150–200 missile interceptors already fired, it is feared that Israel and the US may run out of interceptors in the next 7–10 days. There are reports that the US is contemplating

shifting some Patriot missiles from Japan and Korea to augment the inventory. Iran, on the other hand, is keeping the American air defence occupied by steadily firing old and new missiles and drones, knowing fully well that its inventory could last months if not longer. Secondly, while Israel and the US are banking on intercepting almost all incoming missiles, Iran is banking on the destruction from the few that can escape the defence and reach its targets. The strikes on Tel Aviv, Haifa port, and the Beit Shemesh area near Jerusalem, the destruction of crucial long-range AN/FPS-132 Radars in Bahrain and Qatar, as well as successful strikes on over 10 American military bases and targets, are testament to the success of its strategy. The third part of this asymmetric strategy is targeting almost every Gulf country that houses American troops or bases. The fact that Iran could trace American soldiers to hotels in Dubai, Manama, etc., has added a layer to its strategy. Iran knows that these countries don't have the wherewithal to protect themselves, and that the American security umbrella, which is focused on Israel and itself, will find it difficult to do that as well. The additional decision of announcing the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, the lifeline to global oil supplies, has sent shockwaves, as this is the first time that Iran has actually done it despite many previous threats. All this is banking on a strategy that ultimately the weight of losses and pressure from the Gulf countries, as well as nations around the world, will force the US-Israel combine to seek an end to the war. The American strategy of taking out leaders to change regimes may have worked in Libya or Iraq. But in a complex political structure and a strong military force like Iran, it is proving counterproductive.

As the war is progressing, it is quite evident that Iran's asymmetric approach is not only compensating for the deficiencies in military capabilities, but is also creating circumstances where the war may soon become untenable for the US and Israel.

Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd)

# Michael Goodwin: The war on Iran was never a choice — Trump was left with no option but to defend America and all Western civilization

In fact, we now can be certain that the war on Iran is not a war of choice. It is instead a war of American self-defense and maybe even a war of survival for Western civilization and Israel.

We know this because the curtain has been lifted on what happened inside the room during the last-ditch negotiations to head off the war.

The picture that emerges is of an Iran hell-bent on becoming a nuclear-armed power and determined to continue exporting its bloody Islamist revolution throughout the region and around the world.

That was the leaders' fatal mistake, for unlike his two immediate predecessors, Barack Obama and Joe Biden, Trump had no interest in bribing the mullahs with pallets of cash and sweet talking them into joining the civilized world.

That he is cut from a different cloth became clear early in his first term, when Trump withdrew the US from the toothless nuclear pact Obama crafted.

## Bombs & olive branches

Trump's more hawkish approach was confirmed when he droned Qasem Soleimani, the key Iranian military leader whose preference for roadside bombs had caused so many injuries and deaths to American soldiers in Iraq.

Those experiences led Trump to begin his second term with a vow that Iran would never get a nuclear weapon on his watch.

And there certainly would be no deal that depended on trusting the ayatollah or weak-kneed international organizations, such as the United Nations.

Despite that posture, Trump still believed that a negotiated settlement was possible and far more preferable than military action. The problem was there was never a sign that Iran would be willing to voluntarily give up its quest for nukes.

The ayathollah's commitment to getting a doomsday weapon was one of the pillars that made the regime a feared regional power, even among Muslim-ruled lands, and the mothership of Islamist terrorists.

Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis — they were like so

many cancerous cells metastasizing in the region and around the world because of Iran's guidance, protection and aid.

Nonetheless, Trump took office last year and offered again to negotiate the terms of a pact with Iranians.

My first reaction was surprise that he seemed optimistic about

Iranians were not negotiating in good faith, the actual substance of what happened in those high-stakes talks has been a well-kept secret.

Until now, thanks to what Witkoff told Sean Hannity on Fox News Monday.

The envoy revealed how the Iranians arrogantly boasted about their stockpiles of highly enriched

offer the US made, the answer was no.

The upshot was he and Kushner concluded that Tehran simply had no intention of dismantling its nuclear program.

In addition to the continued killing of civilians, the refusal to budge was the final straw for Trump. Indeed, the six-hour meeting in Geneva on Feb. 26

also dropped another big hint when asked if he favored "regime change." His quick answer made news because he seemed open to the idea for the first time: "Well, it seems like that would be the best thing that could happen." Showing his eagerness for a resolution, he added: "For 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking."



success.

What few people realized was how willing he would be to use America's military might if and when those negotiations failed.

He first demonstrated that willingness last June, during Israel's 12-day-war with Iran. In a single night, seven American B-2 bombers flew from Missouri to smash the mullahs' three main enrichment sites with bunker-buster bombs. Yet soon after the war ended, Trump surprisingly renewed his offer for direct talks. Then came the Iranian street protests, and the regime's slaughter of thousands of unarmed civilians. Trump was infuriated, and publicly promised the protesters that "help is on its way." Still, he dispatched his top Middle East envoys, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, to three long meetings with Iranian officials that were focused on the nuclear issue. **Nukes 'with no shame'** Although we know there were no breakthroughs and Trump finally concluded the

uranium and showed no willingness to yield.

"In that first meeting, both of the Iranian negotiators said to us directly, with no shame, that they controlled 460 kilograms of 60%, and they were aware that that could make 11 nuclear bombs," Witkoff told Hannity.

"That was the beginning of their negotiating stance .??. they were proud of it," Witkoff added. "They were proud that they had evaded all sorts of oversight protocols to get to a place where they could deliver 11 nuclear bombs."

He noted that uranium enriched to 60% represented an immediate threat because it could be brought to 90% enrichment, which is weapons grade, in about "one week, maybe 10 days at the outside."

Because the Iranians "manufacture their own centrifuges to enrich this material, there's almost no stopping them," Witkoff said.

He told Hannity that to every

produced only an agreement to hold yet another meeting.

Even before then, the belief that the Iranians would never get to yes on any meaningful pact led Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to begin planning a joint attack.

One obvious sign was the massive US military buildup in the region, which included an armada with two aircraft carrier groups.

Taking media questions about the situation almost daily, the president provided a running commentary about progress in the negotiations, or the lack of it. Although Oman's foreign minister, who served as the Geneva session had yielded "significant progress," that wasn't how Trump saw things. When he had been asked why he had sent the second carrier group to the region, the president's answer provided a jolt of realism: "In case we don't make a deal, we'll need" more firepower, Trump said. He

## Death over deals

Days earlier, Netanyahu had come to the White House, where they had reached final agreement on the battle plan. Israeli media reported Netanyahu was eager to get underway and his desire for America to focus on Iran's ballistic missiles, which were and still are a major threat to Israel's population centers. Israel's first order of business, it seems, would be to take out the ayatollah and other regime leaders. It was able to succeed spectacularly because nearly 30 of them had foolishly gathered for a morning meeting, their location known through tracking intelligence gathered by both Washington and Jerusalem. Boom, they were all gone with one missile. Days later, their possible replacements made the same mistake and they too are gone. They would all be alive if they had only been smart enough to make a deal with the man who wrote the book on the art of it.

**Michael Goodwin**

# Planning your first international trip as a couple? Read this first

Every relationship has many layers that slowly unfold with time, and most of them are tied to those unforgettable firsts. The first time you made things official, the first time a toothbrush or a spare t-shirt quietly found a place in each other's apartment, the first time parents were introduced; each milestone adds depth, trust, and a stronger sense of togetherness. These moments may seem small at the time, but they quietly shape the foundation of the relationship.

Amid all these decisions and shared experiences, there often comes a point when couples start thinking about taking an international trip together. Travelling to a different country with your partner is more than just ticking off a destination from a bucket list.

It brings out a completely new side of the relationship: how you plan together, handle stress, compromise, and even enjoy silence. Being away from familiar comforts and routines can strengthen your bond, reveal compatibility in unexpected ways, and create memories that stay long after the trip ends.

So, it wouldn't be wrong to say that this is a big milestone for a couple.

But it's more than just a milestone

Ruchi Ruuh, a Delhi-based relationship counsellor, shares that international trips are not just a relationship milestone; they're also a chance to experience each other outside your comfort zone.

Travelling to another country together reveals sides of your partner you may not see in everyday life. From missed flights and unfamiliar cultures to tight schedules and budget decisions, it shows how well you both regulate yourselves in unpredictable situations.

You notice flexibility, adaptability, and how willing each person is to accommodate the other's needs. Stress responses, spending habits, planning styles, patience levels, everything comes to the surface. And this is what makes it such a defining moment.



It quietly answers a big question every couple eventually faces: can we navigate uncertainty together?

## So, is there a fixed timeline?

Well, according to Ruhh, it is all about emotional readiness. The better question to answer is this: Have you seen each other disappointed, tired, mildly irritated? Have you overcome conflict and recovered well afterwards?

"If you've only experienced each other in curated, date-night energy, an international trip might feel like emotional shock, as a lot of the person behind the curated image will be discovered."

Basically, how comfortable you are with your partner will tell you whether you are ready or not.

And real comfort will look like being able to be yourself, that is, tired, confused, and slightly cranky, without fearing that it will upset the partner.

"If you can disagree without escalation and navigate the trip at your own pace, that's emotional comfort. And that kind of safety makes travel smoother because you're not managing both logistics and emotional fragility at the same time," Ruhh tells India Today.

Travel magnifies tiny issues. Now, you will agree travel has a way of amplifying small issues, so how you handle disagreements becomes another important factor here.

Imagine this: you're together 24/7, jet-lagged, overstimulated,

and out of your comfort zone. there are no awkward moments later.

Small issues don't stay small if conflict-resolution skills are weak. You will, of course, argue and disagree. What matters, according to Ruhh, is how quickly you both repair.

Do you blame or collaborate? Does one person shut down or become overly anxious?

Further, from a relationship point of view, Ruhh shares a few things couples should keep in mind while going on their first international trip together.

First, remember that travel is a collaboration. Don't let one person turn into the tour manager while the other just follows along. Plan together.

Second, have clear conversations about money before you book anything, so

there are no awkward moments later.

Third, build in some alone time; being together constantly can get overwhelming, even in the most loving relationships.

And finally, don't romanticise the trip as proof of compatibility.

The goal isn't to create an Instagram-worthy vacation, but to enjoy a genuinely shared experience.

Now, before you start planning that trip

Understand that many couples also walk into their first international trip carrying a few unspoken assumptions. There's often a belief that travel will automatically bring them closer or smooth over existing issues.

In reality, travel tends to magnify what already exists. If

communication gaps, mismatched expectations, or unresolved conflicts are present, they are more likely to surface when you're navigating long days, unfamiliar places, and shared decisions.

However, arguments on a trip don't mean the relationship is failing; they simply highlight areas that need attention.

What often matters just as much as the trip itself is what happens after you return home. Couples tend to process the experience in hindsight, reflecting on what felt easy, what was challenging, and how they supported each other.

These post-trip conversations can bring clarity, deepen understanding, and even reshape expectations for the future. Sometimes, the biggest insights come not during the journey, but once normal life resumes.

Lastly, remember that there's no universal timeline for hitting this milestone. Not travelling together yet doesn't mean a relationship is behind or lacking depth. Readiness looks different for every couple and depends more on emotional safety than on duration. When both partners feel secure, understood, and capable of navigating uncertainty together, the trip becomes less about the destination and more about the shared growth along the way.



# Chanel model Bhavitha Mandava from Hyderabad gets a shoutout from Macron

India's fashion prowess stole the show at the India–France Innovation Forum in Mumbai as French President Emmanuel Macron mentioned Chanel CEO Leena Nair and model Bhavitha Mandava in his speech.

(Our Staff Reporter) Twenty-six-year-old architect-turned-model from Hyderabad, Bhavitha Mandava, found a mention in French President Emmanuel Macron's speech in Mumbai on February 18. Macron, who is on a three-day visit to India, praised India's growing influence in global leadership at the India–France Innovation Forum in Mumbai, where he highlighted Indian-origin CEOs leading major multinational companies, from IBM to Microsoft. He also mentioned the CEO of the French luxury fashion house Chanel, Leena Nair, who hails from Kolhapur.

But that was not all. He also mentioned Bhavitha Mandava in his speech. The 26-year-old made headlines after being spotted at a subway station and later becoming the first Indian model to both open and close a Chanel show.

"And the CEO of Chanel, one of the most iconic houses in France, is Leena Nair - from Kolhapur, right here in the state. And if I would add to that, three months ago, Matthieu Blazy, Chanel's new creative director, chose a young

woman from Hyderabad, Bhavitha Mandava, to open his show in New York, and she was the first Indian model ever to open a Chanel runway," Macron said.

"She was discovered on the subway platform and she walked into a subway station in front of the world. So India does not just participate in global innovation, India leads it from Silicon Valley," he added. Bhavitha Mandava's story, which feels straight out of a movie, has struck a chord around the world. Her modelling career, which is reaching great heights - she was just on the cover of British Vogue, by the way - began almost by accident. Modelling was never part of her plan.

A little over a year ago, Bhavitha was yet another New York University student navigating the NYC subway system, completely unaware that a single ride in October 2024 would change the course of her life. She was scouted by a talent representative on that subway, setting off a whirlwind modelling journey that has since taken her to some of fashion's most iconic runways and has now also found



a mention in French President Emmanuel Macron's speech. As for Nair, she has been leading Chanel for four years now. She officially took charge of the luxury house in January 2022.

## Met Gala 2026 dress code is out. Expect a seriously fun red carpet

(Our Staff Reporter) If you love fashion, admire art, or simply enjoy decoding what celebrities wear when they go all out, this one's for you. The dress code for the 2026 Met Gala has been announced, and as always, it's far more than a guideline. For those who follow fashion closely, the Met Gala isn't just another red-carpet event; it's the most iconic night in global fashion, where creativity, couture, and cultural commentary collide.

Held every year at the legendary Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Met Gala brings together designers, artists, actors, athletes, and cultural tastemakers from across the world. This year, guests will gather on Monday, May 4, and the official dress code is "Fashion is Art." Previously, it was revealed that the 2026 Met Gala theme is "Costume Art," linked to the spring exhibition at the museum's Costume Institute.

The dress code was unveiled by Vogue on social media. "On



Monday, May 4, guests at the 2026 #MetGala will celebrate 'Costume Art,' the spring exhibition at the @MetMuseum's @MetCostumeInstitute. But what will they wear? The Met Gala dress code for this year is 'Fashion is Art,' inviting guests to express their own relationship to fashion as an embodied artform,"

read the caption. The post further explained that the directive mirrors the ethos of Costume Art, an exhibition that explores the "centrality of the dressed body" through artistic depictions and interpretations of the human form from the museum's vast collection. In simpler terms, fashion this year isn't just about

glamour, it's about how clothing becomes expression, identity, and art in motion. Leading the night as co-chairs are Beyonce, Nicole Kidman, Venus Williams, and Anna Wintour. The Gala Host Committee co-chairs include Anthony Vaccarello and Zo Kravitz. The dress code itself leaves ample room for

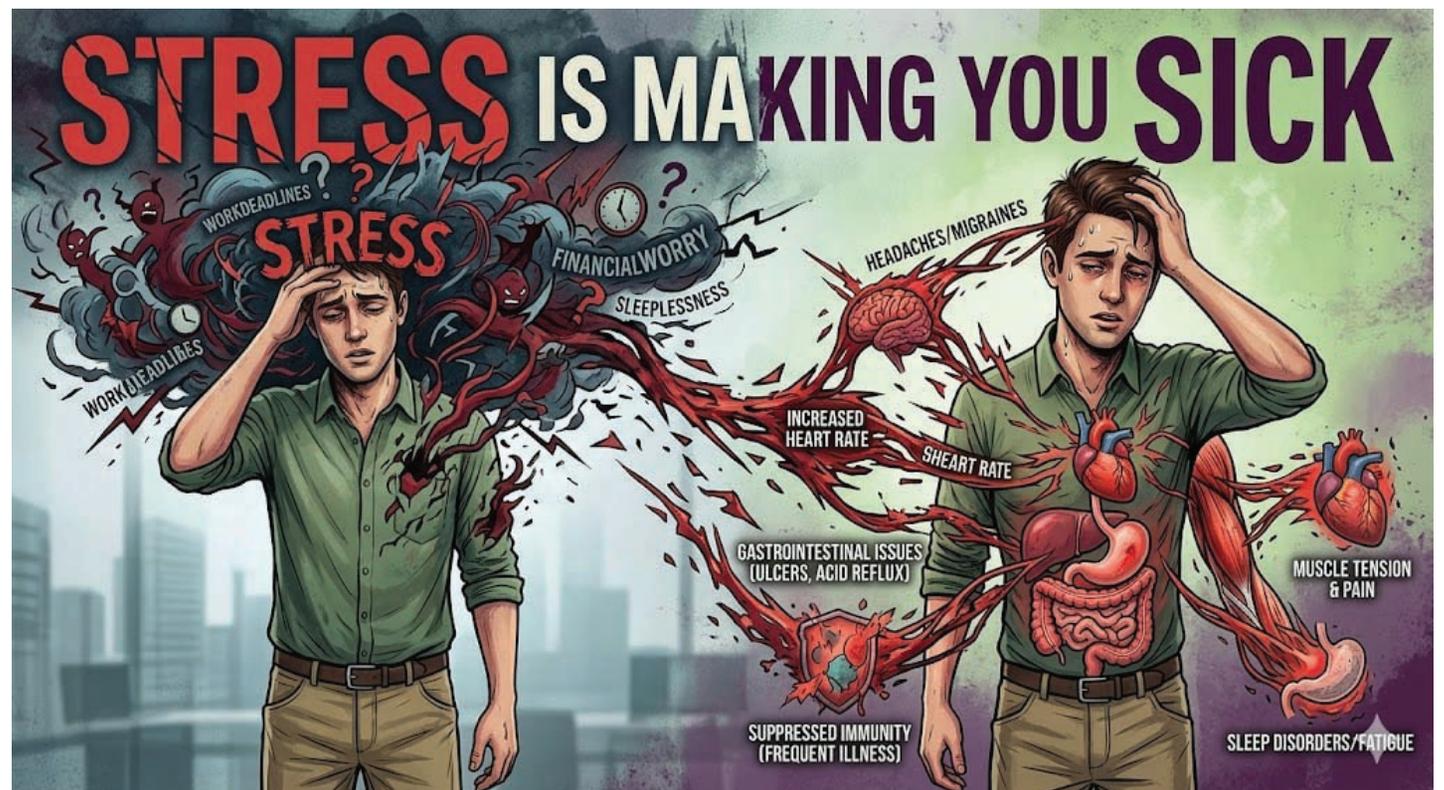
experimentation, sculptural silhouettes, painterly fabrics, archival references, and deeply personal interpretations. It will be fascinating to see how attendees translate the idea of fashion as a living, breathing art form onto the red carpet. Equally exciting is the anticipation around which Indian celebrities will make an appearance this year. While no official confirmations have been announced, fashion watchers are already speculating the return of familiar faces like Priyanka Chopra, Isha Ambani, and Natasha Poonawalla. Looking back at last year's Met Gala only adds to the excitement. Indian representation was stronger than ever, with memorable appearances by Shah Rukh Khan, Diljit Dosanjh, Manish Malhotra, and Kiara Advani, all making their Met Gala debuts, with Priyanka Chopra, Natasha Poonawalla, Mona Patel, Isha Ambani, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and Diya Mehta, taking over the red carpet.

# Stress Is Making You Sick

(Our Staff Reporter) And for South Asians, the damage runs deeper than most doctors tell you. By Our Staff Reporter | March 2026 You already know you are stressed. The commute, the job, the family obligations, the money worries, the WhatsApp group that never goes quiet. You live with it, manage it, push through it - because that is what you do. But here is what your body is doing while you push through: it is quietly accumulating damage that will show up, if left unchecked, as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, or a breakdown that seems to come from nowhere but has, in fact, been building for years. Stress is not just unpleasant. For South Asians specifically, it is a measurable, documented, and disproportionate health risk - and it is time to treat it with the seriousness it deserves.

## Why South Asians Carry a Heavier Stress Burden

Research published over the past two decades has established clearly that people of South Asian descent are disproportionately vulnerable to the physical consequences of chronic stress. The reasons are partly genetic — South Asians tend to carry higher levels of visceral fat (the dangerous fat stored around internal organs) and show heightened inflammatory responses to cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. But the reasons are also cultural and social, and these are rarely discussed openly. South Asian communities, whether living in the subcontinent or in the diaspora, operate under a specific set of stressors that are rarely acknowledged as health issues. The pressure to succeed academically and professionally — often carrying the weight of a family's sacrifices and expectations — is pervasive and relentless. The stigma around mental health means that stress, anxiety, and depression frequently go unacknowledged and untreated for years, sometimes decades. The concept of 'coping' is deeply embedded: you do not talk about it, you do not seek help, you carry on. That stoicism, admirable in many ways, is quietly destroying people's health. 3x South Asians are up to three times more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes - stress-driven cortisol spikes are a significant contributing factor 10 years the average age gap by which South Asians develop cardiovascular disease earlier than white Europeans of equivalent lifestyle profiles What Chronic Stress Actually Does to Your Body When you experience stress, your body releases cortisol and adrenaline - hormones designed to prepare you to fight or flee a threat. Your heart rate increases, your blood pressure rises, your liver floods your bloodstream with glucose for quick energy, and your immune system



temporarily suppresses non-essential functions. This is a brilliant short-term survival mechanism. The problem is that it was designed for short-term threats - a predator, a fight, a flood. It was not designed for the unrelenting, low-grade, chronic stress of modern life. When cortisol remains elevated for weeks, months, or years, the damage accumulates methodically. Blood pressure stays chronically high, quietly damaging arterial walls. Blood sugar remains elevated, progressively impairing insulin sensitivity and driving the body toward Type 2 diabetes. Inflammation - the immune system's response to perceived threat - becomes chronic, and chronic inflammation is now understood to be a root driver of heart disease, certain cancers, autoimmune conditions, and accelerated ageing. Sleep deteriorates, which itself elevates cortisol further, creating a feedback loop that is genuinely difficult to break without deliberate intervention. For South Asians, whose baseline biological vulnerability to these conditions is already higher, the compounding effect is severe. Perhaps most troublingly, chronic stress directly affects mental health in ways that most South Asian families are still reluctant to name. Persistent anxiety, low mood, emotional exhaustion, and eventually clinical depression are not character weaknesses. They are the predictable physiological outcomes of a nervous system that has been running on high alert for too long. Naming this clearly is the first step toward addressing it.

When cortisol remains elevated for months or years, the damage is not dramatic - it is slow, systematic, and cumulative. By the time symptoms appear, the process has often been underway for a decade. Five Practical Steps - Starting This Week None of what follows requires expensive gym

memberships, therapists you cannot afford, or lifestyle changes that are impossible to sustain. These are evidence-based, practical interventions that cost little or nothing and can begin immediately. 1 Walk for 30 minutes every day - without your phone. A 2023 meta-analysis confirmed that 30 minutes of brisk daily walking reduces cortisol levels by measurable amounts within two weeks. Leave the phone at home or in your pocket. The walk is also a mental break, not just a physical one. This single habit, sustained consistently, has more evidence behind it than almost any supplement or wellness product on the market. 2 Fix your sleep before anything else. Chronic stress and poor sleep feed each other in a vicious cycle. Prioritise seven to eight hours of sleep above almost everything else on your to-do list. Keep a consistent sleep and wake time, including weekends. Reduce screen exposure in the hour before bed. Poor sleep elevates cortisol the following day, which makes stress worse, which further disrupts sleep. Breaking this cycle is foundational.

**3 Talk to someone - anyone.** The South Asian cultural resistance to discussing mental and emotional struggle is well documented and deeply harmful. You do not need a therapist immediately, though one can be transformative. Start smaller: a trusted friend, a sibling, a spouse. Simply articulating what you are carrying reduces the physiological stress response. Silence is not strength. It is a health risk.

**4 Reduce ultra-processed food - especially when stressed.** Stress drives cravings for high-sugar, high-fat processed foods, which in turn spike blood sugar, provoke inflammation, and worsen mood. South Asian diets have been increasingly colonised by ultra-processed snacks

and convenience foods. A return to whole foods - dal, sabzi, roti, rice, yoghurt - is not nostalgia. It is nutritionally and physiologically sound stress management.

## 5 Build one daily moment of genuine rest.

Not scrolling. Not half-watching television. Actual rest - ten minutes of sitting quietly, breathing slowly, doing nothing. Breathwork and mindfulness have substantial clinical evidence behind them for cortisol reduction. You do not need an app or a course. Sit, breathe slowly and deeply for ten minutes, and do it at the same time each day. It is one of the cheapest and most effective health interventions available to anyone.

**The Bigger Picture: A Community Conversation We Need to Have** The stress epidemic in South Asian communities is not going to be solved by five tips in a newspaper article. It requires a broader cultural shift - a willingness to talk openly about mental and emotional health, to challenge the stigma that keeps so many people suffering in silence, and to recognise that admitting struggle is not weakness but wisdom.

General practitioners in the UK, US, Canada, and Australia consistently report that South Asian patients present later with stress-related conditions, having endured symptoms for far longer than other patient groups before seeking help. By the time they arrive, the damage is often more advanced and harder to reverse. Earlier conversation, earlier intervention, and earlier treatment saves lives. It is genuinely that simple. If you are experiencing persistent stress, anxiety, or low mood, speak to your GP. In the UK, you can self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). In the US, SAMHSA's helpline is available at 1-800-662-4357. You are not alone, and help is available.

# LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY: A Complete Guide to the Incerto

(Our Staff Reporter) Few thinkers have provoked, infuriated, and enlightened readers in equal measure quite like Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Over two decades, the former derivatives trader turned philosopher-statistician has built the Incerto - a sprawling, genre-defying five-volume meditation on how we misunderstand probability, how institutions deceive us with false certainty, and how individual human beings can not merely survive but thrive amid radical uncertainty. Collectively, these books may be the most important work of popular philosophy published this century. Here, we review each title in turn.

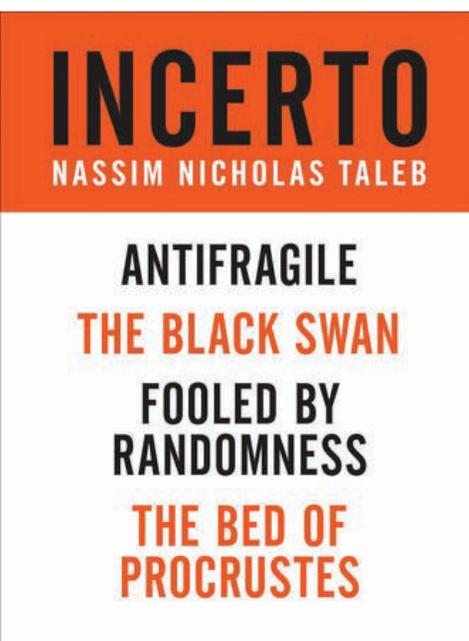
## 1. Fooled by Randomness

Published: 2001 (revised 2004) | Recommended for: Investors, journalists, anyone who believes in 'skill' 4/5 Taleb's debut salvo is both the most personal and the most playful entry in the Incerto. Drawing on his years as a Wall Street trader, he argues that human beings are psychologically wired to see patterns, narratives, and cause-and-effect where only luck and noise exist. The book's central target is what Taleb calls 'survivorship bias' - we study the winners and mistake their random good fortune for genius. The writing crackles with irreverence. Taleb name-drops Proust and Popper in the same breath, skewers financial analysts with gleeful contempt, and introduces his alter ego 'Nero Tulip' - a fictional trader who knows the markets are a casino yet cannot resist playing. The self-awareness is disarming. Taleb is not preaching from above; he is confessing alongside you. The book's weakness is its discursiveness. Taleb meanders, repeats himself, and occasionally seems more interested in showcasing his reading list than sharpening his argument. But the core insight - that we are consistently fooled by the randomness that governs far more of our lives than we dare admit - lands with the force of revelation. VERDICT: The book that started it all. Uneven but electrifying - a necessary assault on the illusion of control.

## 2. The Black Swan

Published: 2007 | Recommended for: Policy-makers, business leaders, everyone alive post-2008 If Fooled by Randomness was a provocation, The Black Swan was an earthquake. Published just months before the global financial crisis it had effectively predicted, this book turned Taleb into a celebrity intellectual and introduced 'Black Swan' into the permanent vo-

cabulary of risk - those rare, high-impact, unpredictable events that retrospectively seem inevitable but that our models consistently fail to anticipate. The central argument is deceptively simple: we live in 'Extremistan,' a world where a single outlier can dwarf the significance of all that preceded it - a pandemic, a market crash, the invention of the internet. Yet our statistical tools, our institutions, and our psychological instincts are calibrated for



'Mediocristan,' a world of gentle averages and bell curves. The mismatch is lethal. Taleb is at his most brilliant here, weaving together philosophy of science, cognitive psychology, and savage financial critique into a seamless, urgent whole. The 'ludic fallacy' - the mistake of modelling real-world uncertainty on the controlled randomness of a casino - is one of the great conceptual contributions of the era. The book's timing, appearing just as bankers worldwide were busy pretending they had tamed risk forever, remains its most devastating argument. VERDICT: A masterpiece. One of the genuinely essential books of the twenty-first century. Read it before the next crisis, not after.

## 3. The Bed of Procrustes

Published: 2010 (expanded 2016) | Recommended for: Readers who like their philosophy in concentrated doses A departure in form, this slim volume collects philosophical aphorisms - short, sharp, often wickedly funny observations in the tradition of Nietzsche and La Rochefoucauld. The title refers to the myth of the Greek giant who stretched or amputated his guests to fit his iron bed: Taleb's theme is our compulsive need to force reality into pre-existing categories, distorting the world rather than expanding our under-

standing. The best aphorisms are genuinely memorable. On modernity, Taleb observes that the difference between technology and slavery is awareness of one's condition. On experts, he is withering. These are the observations of a man who thinks in flashes of lightning rather than sustained argument. The collection is inevitably uneven - aphorism-writing rewards brutality in the editing room, and Taleb occasionally lets through lines that feel smug rather than wise. As a standalone introduction to his thought, this is the wrong place to start. As a companion to the wider Incerto, it functions as a distillation - a pocket guide to what Taleb actually believes when stripped of all qualification. VERDICT: An acquired taste, but a rewarding one. Best savoured in short sessions alongside stronger coffee.

## 4. Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder

Published: 2012 | Recommended for: Entrepreneurs, policy-makers, anyone designing systems under pressure This is arguably the most important book in the Incerto - the one where Taleb stops merely diagnosing civilisational dysfunction and starts prescribing a cure. The concept at its heart is deceptively original: we have words for things that break under stress (fragile) and things that resist stress (robust), but no word for things that actually improve when stressed. Taleb calls these 'antifragile,' and argues that understanding this quality is the key to survival - individual, institutional, and civilisational. The examples cascade magnificently. Muscle tissue, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and evolutionary biology are all antifragile - they require volatility, trial and error, and occasional failure to thrive. Modern states, large corporations, and over-medicated human bodies are fragile - they suppress small stresses only to ensure that the eventual, inescapable failure is catastrophic. The 'naive interventionism' of technocrats who smooth out every bump in the road is revealed as a form of quiet violence against resilience. Taleb also introduces the 'barbell strategy' - rather than seeking a false middle ground of moderate risk, build systems that combine extreme caution in most domains with selective bold risk-taking in others. This philosophy applies as readily to investment portfolios as to career choices, diet, or the structure of governments. VERDICT: Taleb's most original contribution. Dense, digressive, occasionally maddening - and utterly

## 5. Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life

Published: 2018 | Recommended for: Anyone who has ever been lectured by someone with nothing to lose The final - and most accessible - volume of the Incerto arrives with the energy of a man who has grown magnificently impatient. Skin in the Game is Taleb's most direct engagement with ethics, arguing that the foundational requirement for any just and functional society is that those who make decisions must bear the consequences of those decisions. The banker who privatises profit while socialising losses has no skin in the game. The pundit who advocates for war from the safety of a television studio has no skin in the game. The argument is ancient - it echoes Hammurabi's Code, where builders whose houses collapsed were held to account - but Taleb's genius is to reveal how radically modern institutions have severed accountability from action. He is particularly scathing about the 'intellectual yet idiot' - the credentialed professional class who mistakes the map for the territory and has never been punished for being wrong. The book is the breeziest of the five, and at times the least rigorous - Taleb's talent for polemic occasionally overrides his analytical precision. But as a moral statement and a coda to the entire Incerto project, it is powerfully satisfying. The series began by asking how we misunderstand risk. It ends by asking who should pay when we get it wrong. The answer, Taleb insists, must always be: the person who made the call. VERDICT: The Incerto's fitting conclusion - passionate, occasionally combative, and morally essential. **THE COLLECTION AS A WHOLE** Taken together, the Incerto constitutes one of the great intellectual projects of recent decades - a sweeping, idiosyncratic, fiercely independent attempt to rebuild how we think about uncertainty, risk, ethics, and resilience. Taleb is not an easy companion. He is combative, repetitive, and possessed of a vanity he would doubtless argue is simply 'skin in the game.' But his ideas are genuinely transformative, and the world since 2008 has done nothing but confirm his core thesis: that we build our institutions on the assumption of predictability, and are repeatedly, catastrophically surprised when reality refuses to cooperate. Start with The Black Swan. Finish with Skin in the Game. Read Antifragile in between. The rest will follow naturally - as all good thinking eventually does.

# What Is Alpine Divorce, A Dark Dating Trend Of Abandoning Partners Mid-Adventure

(Our Staff Reporter) Much like the internet, the world of dating also has a dark web comprising red flags and dark trends. Until now, we believed that abuse, torture, and gaslighting were the obvious red flags, but what about actions like abandoning a partner?

Alpine divorce refers to abandoning your partner mid-adventure, like a hike or in the wilderness. Guess what? This dating trend is gender-specific. Men leaving their wives, girlfriends, or partners on a hike has become quite common.

Instead of telling the person to their face that they want to end the relationship, they take extreme steps to put the life of their partner in danger just so they can avoid an uncomfortable conversation and move on with their lives.

## How Alpine Divorces Work

Say you have planned a hike on a treacherous path, thinking that it will be an adventure that you and your partner will remember forever. However, your boyfriend or husband adds a dark twist to the itinerary.

They leave you in the middle of the hike, especially when you might be in danger or come across deadly conditions, like freezing temperatures or treacherous paths.

The term is derived from isolated alpine regions, known for their dangerous terrain and harsh weather conditions.

But the concept can be traced back to a 1893 story - An Alpine Divorce by Robert Barr. It is a tale of a man plotting to kill his wife on a Swiss Alps trip. The fictional story not only inspired the modern dating term, but people have also

shared real-life experiences on the internet.

Social Media Users Share Alpine Divorce Instances A user on X wrote, "The whole 'Alpine Divorce' thing is terrifying, but not surprising. The scariest thing in the woods isn't a wild animal, but a man. That's why I always go off into the backcountry alone. The elements are predictable, people are not."

The whole 'Alpine Divorce' thing is



terrifying, but not surprising. The scariest thing in the woods isn't a wild animal, but a man. That's why I always go off into the back-country alone. The elements are predictable, people are not.

— modern day isabella bird (@\_alienbride) February 26, 2026

A second wrote, "Just saw a TikTok of a girl whose boyfriend abandoned her during a hike in the woods. The comments were all about how this is a

thing multiple men do. It's so common it's called Alpine Divorce, and there are support groups for it....All I can say is wtf is wrong with men??? Why would you ever consider abandoning someone that way? I'm mortified."

Just saw a Tiktok of a girl whose boyfriend abandoned her during a hike in the woods. The comments were all about how this is a thing multiple men do. It's so common it's called Alpine Divorce and

I just re-learned about this weird phenomenon people call 'alpine divorce' where men intentionally take their girlfriends, wives, or partners on hikes into remote areas to break up with them, start arguments, ask for divorces... and then.. they abandon them there.

— Blacksage (@Razifly) February 24, 2026

A fourth shared, "Terrifying post on Threads. A woman talked about the phenomenon of 'Alpine divorce' and the replies are full of women with traumatic experiences of being abandoned."

Terrifying post on Threads. A woman talked about the phenomenon of "Alpine divorce" & the replies are full of women with traumatic experiences being abandoned.

Women underestimate how much men hate us.

I've had a few of these experiences, though not as bad as these women ?? pic.twitter.com/EbqePf5ywx A fifth wrote, "This TikTok came up on my FYP, and it has 4.4 million views."

Apparently, men abandoning their partners on a hike or in the wilderness is so common that it has a name: alpine divorce. Comments are filled with stories."

This tiktok came up on my FYP and it has 4.4 million views. Apparently men abandoning their partners on a hike or in the wilderness is so common it has a name: alpine divorce.

Comments are filled with stories. Things like this snap me back into why being single is perfectly ok. pic.twitter.com/RmiqJXwPan

## Naati Dance, Feasts: How Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur Celebrates Holi

(Our Staff Reporter) Holi is often described as the festival of colours, but much like vibrant gulal, the festivities take on different hues in different regions. In the Braj region alone, people celebrate the festival in seven ways - Ladoo Mar Holi, Lathmar Holi, Chhadi Mar Holi, Phoolon Ki Holi, Widow's Holi, Rangbhari Holi, and Harunga Holi.

West Bengal and Odisha celebrate Dol Jatra or Dol Purnima. For Manipur, it is Yaosang; for Kerala, it is Manjal Kuli; for Punjab, it is Hola Mohalla; for Uttarakhand, it is Baithki Holi; for Rajasthan, it is Royal Holi hosted by royal families; and for Varanasi, it is Masan Holi.

One of the most scenic Holi celebrations you can witness in India is in the Kinnaur district, Himachal Pradesh. The celebrations in Sangla Valley have already begun and are trending on social media.

Satyajit Dahiya, a solo traveller, celebrated Holi in Sangla. Describing his experience, he wrote, "Celebrated Holi this year in the peaceful valleys of Sangla, Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh - where colours are not just on faces, but in the

mountains, rivers and the sky itself. No loud parties. No chaos. Just local traditions, pure smiles, folk music and the calm flow of the Baspa River." How Kinnaur In Himachal Pradesh Celebrates Holi There are different elements attached to Holi celebrations in Kinnaur, bordering the Shimla district and Lahaul Spiti. A travel blogger, Map My Bharat, shared a video of how people participate in the processions, dance, and relish community meals.

He explained, "The celebrations begin at Beri Nag Temple, where devotees representing Shiv and Vishnu appear in sage-like forms. A striking highlight is women carrying a sickle in one hand and a mirror in the other, symbolising strength and self-awareness."

People believe that Lord Hanuman participates in the celebration, and he punishes anyone who breaks ritual discipline during the procession. "From the temple, the entire village moves towards Kala Kendra, surrounded by snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Here, the iconic Kinnauri Naati dance takes over," he added.

Naati is a traditional folk dance of

Himachal Pradesh, quite popular in Mandi, Kullu, Kinnaur, Chamba, and Shimla. Dancers bend their knees and perform steps slowly to the beats of the dhol-damau instrument.

"Community feasting is a core part of the celebration, along with local Kinnauri cuisine and traditional drinks. It is not uncommon for over a thousand people to share meals," he further shared.

"The ritual concludes back at the Beri Nag Temple with the burning of Holika, symbolising the victory of good over evil. From the vibrant Kinnauri caps to the echoing drumbeats in the mountains, Sangla's Holi shows how one festival can transform into something deeply regional, spiritual, and unforgettable," the travel blogger concluded.

## Kinnaur's Holi Is The Festival Of Masks

In the local dialect, people call it Fagli (Phagli) or Faguli. The celebration is believed to be 800 years old, making it one of the oldest traditions that people continue to follow in the Himalayan region. The celebration of Holi in the Sangla region is considered a blend of Hindu and Buddhist influences, marking the end of

winter and the transition to spring.

Abhinav Chandel, a travel influencer, shared, "I once again learned why this is called the Happiest Holi of India, because everyone is so welcoming, everyone is so full of joy, ensuring we are comfortable and well fed, everyone sharing their happiness with people who've come from outside in their village and then those beautiful Himalayan peaks in front of us, shining brightly while we paint each other with many colours, dancing to the tunes of folk songs and realising that it isn't difficult to smile with all our heart in these mountains!" It is often referred to as the Festival of Masks because people, dressed elaborately, enact characters from Hindu epics and local folklore. This community's culture of storytelling is not only rich but takes the art to a whole new level. Describing his experience of witnessing Sangla Holi, Laksh Puri, a travel influencer, wrote, "Every time I go there, I feel a different kind of energy - something divine, something ancient. When the Ramayan characters come alive during the festival, it doesn't feel like a performance... it feels like witnessing gods in physical form."

# In Praise of Pulses

## Beans, lentils, and chickpeas are the most underrated foods in your kitchen.



**BEANS, LENTILS, AND CHICKPEAS ARE THE MOST UNDERRATED FOODS IN YOUR KITCHEN.**

(Our Staff Reporter) They are cheap, endlessly versatile, genuinely good for you - and it is time to give them the spotlight they deserve. By Our Food & Health Correspondent Let's be honest. Pulses do not have the best reputation. Mention lentils at a dinner party and you are more likely to get a polite grimace than genuine excitement. Chickpeas are what you reach for when you have run out of ideas. Beans are, well, beans. But here is the thing: pulses are quietly one of the greatest foods available to us, and for most of human history, entire civilisations have been built on them. It is time to change how we think about them.

A bag of lentils costing \$1.50 contains more protein per serving than most cuts of meat - at a tenth of the price.

### So, what exactly are pulses?

Pulses are the dried edible seeds of legume plants - think lentils (red, green, Puy), chickpeas, all varieties of beans (black, kidney, cannellini, butter), and split peas. They have been a staple of human diets for at least 10,000 years, from the lentil dahls of South Asia to the feijoada of Brazil to the hummus of the Middle East. These are not fringe health foods. They are the backbone of some of the world's most beloved cuisines.

### Why pulses are genuinely brilliant

Where do we start? Nutritionally, pulses are almost embarrassingly good. They are high in plant-based protein - a cup of cooked lentils delivers around 18 grams. They are packed with dietary fibre, which feeds the good bacteria in your gut and keeps you fuller for longer. They are rich in iron, folate, magnesium, and potassium. They have a low glycaemic index, meaning they release energy slowly rather than spiking your blood sugar. And for those trying to eat less meat, they are one of the most complete and satisfying replacements you will find.

Then there is the cost. A 500g bag of dried red lentils costs around \$1.50 at most supermarkets and contains roughly ten generous servings. A 400g tin of chickpeas - already cooked and ready to go - costs less than \$1. Dried black beans, kidney beans, cannellini beans: all under \$2 for a bag that will feed a family multiple times over. There is simply nothing else in the shop that delivers this much nutrition for this little money.

18g protein per cup of cooked lentils - comparable to many cuts of meat  
\$1.50 average cost of a 500g bag of red lentils - roughly 10 hearty servings  
Getting started: easier than you think  
The main barrier for most people is

unfamiliarity. Pulses can seem like they require effort - soaking overnight, long cooking times - but tinned pulses remove all of that friction entirely. Open a tin of chickpeas, rinse them, and they are ready in thirty seconds. Toss them in olive oil with cumin and paprika, roast for twenty minutes, and you have an addictive snack. Blend them with garlic and lemon and you have hummus. Add them to roasted vegetables and spinach and you have a complete, satisfying meal.

Red lentils are even more forgiving. They need no soaking and cook in around twenty minutes. They dissolve beautifully into soups and stews, thickening and enriching while quietly adding protein and fibre to every spoonful. A simple red lentil soup - onion, garlic, cumin, a tin of tomatoes, stock - costs under \$3 to make and comfortably feeds four people.

Tinned pulses have already done the hard work. Open, rinse, cook. That is genuinely all there is to it.

Try this: Weeknight Red Lentil Soup  
Serves 4 | Ready in 30 minutes | Cost: approx. \$2.80 total

What you need & how to make it  
1. Soften 1 large diced onion and 3 garlic cloves in a little oil for 5 minutes. 2. Add 2 tsp cumin, 1 tsp smoked paprika, and a pinch of chilli flakes. Stir for 1 minute. 3. Add 300g red lentils

(rinsed), 1 tin of chopped tomatoes, and 1.2 litres of vegetable stock.

4. Simmer for 20 minutes until lentils are soft. Season well. Finish with a squeeze of lemon.

5. Serve with crusty bread. Keeps in the fridge for 4 days - and gets better every day. Five more ways to use pulses this week

Add a tin of drained cannellini beans to any pasta sauce for extra protein and a lovely creaminess.

Mash chickpeas with mayo, lemon, and celery for a sandwich filling that genuinely rivals tuna mayo.

Stir Puy lentils into a simple vinaigrette with roasted beetroot and crumbled feta for a quick lunch.

Use black beans as the base for a quick burrito bowl with rice, salsa, and avocado.

Roast a tin of chickpeas with olive oil and za'atar for a crunchy, high-protein afternoon snack. The world's great pulse-based cuisines - Indian dahl, Moroccan harira, Italian ribollita, Mexican frijoles - did not become beloved by accident. They are the product of generations of cooks discovering that these humble little seeds, treated with care and good seasoning, are capable of producing food that is genuinely, deeply satisfying. Give them a proper chance this week. Your kitchen, your health, and your grocery bill will all be better for it.

# THE CARNEY DOCTRINE: Canadian PM Declares Post-WWII Order 'Dead' in Blunt Sydney Address

(By Our Staff Reporter) SYDNEY — In an unscripted fireside chat that has sent ripples through diplomatic circles, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney delivered a searing post-mortem on global multilateralism, signaling a sharp departure from the cautious diplomacy of his predecessor. "Speaking at the Lowy Institute during his three-nation Indo-Pacific tour, Carney—who assumed office in 2025—swapped talking points for "unfiltered" reality, even dropping a rare expletive to describe the current state of global instability. "The UN: 'A Death Notice' "Perhaps his most jarring comments were directed at the United Nations. Carney pointed to the recent U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran—conducted without consulting allies like Canada—as proof that the UN Security Council has become "irrelevant." "The system failed," Carney remarked, noting that decades of resolutions and IAEA frameworks failed to neutralize Iran's nuclear threat. He framed the current moment not as a temporary lapse, but



as the final "death notice" for the post-WWII multilateral order. "Iran: Support with 'Regret' "While Carney affirmed that the Islamic Republic remains the "principal source of instability" in the Middle East, he distanced Canada from the unilateral nature of recent military actions. He supported the strikes "with some regret," noting they appeared "inconsistent with international law"—a

rare public rebuke of Washington's tactical choices by a G7 leader. "The 'Big Three': Trump, Xi, and Modi "Carney offered a masterclass in personality-driven diplomacy, sharing his "cheat sheet" for dealing with the world's most powerful men: "Donald Trump: Carney dismissed the public bluster, noting Trump is "very different in private" and values blunt, direct viewpoints. Carney

highlighted his own refusal to back down from his Davos speech, proving that "standing your ground" is the only currency Trump respects. "Xi Jinping: His takeaway from APEC 2025 was simple: Never lecture. Carney noted that Beijing is receptive to direct issue-sharing but shuts down when Western leaders resort to public moralizing. "Narendra Modi: Fresh off a historic uranium deal in New Delhi, Carney called Modi "unique" and "relentless." He marveled at Modi's 25-year streak of no days off and his "laser-focus" on digital delivery for rural citizens via systems like UPI. "On the Menu "Carney's core message was a warning to "middle powers" like Canada and Australia. Echoing his viral line from Davos, he warned: "If we're not at the table, we're on the menu." With the U.S. increasingly acting without constraint and the old rules being "erased," Carney's Sydney appearance confirms his intent to lead a coalition of "nimble" nations that protect themselves when the old guard won't.

## The Strikes: Operation Epic Fury & Lion's Roar

(By Our Staff Reporter) "The joint U.S.-Israeli offensive (codenamed Epic Fury by the U.S. and Lion's Roar by Israel) began on February 28, 2024. "Targeting: CENTCOM confirms strikes on approximately 2,000 targets across Iran. These include IRGC command centers, missile silos, and naval assets. "The Decapitation Strike: Reports indicate that a daylight strike on Tehran's political district targeted the leadership



complex. "Nuclear Infrastructure: The Natanz enrichment facility has sustained significant damage. Satellite imagery shows destruction at personnel entrances and vehicle ramps leading to underground halls. While Iran's UN envoy called it an attack on "peaceful facilities," the U.S. maintains the strikes are necessary to prevent a breakout.

The Shakes: Fact-Checking "Area 52" A swarm of over 100 earthquakes near the Tonopah Test Range (often called "Area 52") in Nevada has triggered intense speculation.

"The Claim: Social media suggests these are "Doomsday" rehearsals or clandestine nuclear tests by the Trump administration. "The Science: The USGS and Nevada Seismological Laboratory report the tremors range from 1.0 to 4.3 magnitude. "The Verdict: Experts note these events are consistent with the Central Nevada Seismic Zone, a known tectonic area. Unlike nuclear explosions, which produce a single, massive "spike" on seismographs, this is a "swarm" of shallow, tectonic shifts. There is no verified evidence of a domestic nuclear test. The Fallout: No Nuclear Detonations "Despite the chaos, it is critical to separate conventional strikes from nuclear ones. "IAEA Monitoring: Director General Rafael Grossi has expressed "grave concern" regarding the risk of a radiological release from damaged sites like Natanz. "Current Status: As of today, there is no data confirming a nuclear detonation (atomic explosion) by any party in the conflict. "Regional Contagion: The conflict has expanded, with the Strait of Hormuz effectively blockaded and retaliatory strikes hitting targets in the UAE, Kuwait, and Israel. Market & Humanitarian Impact "Oil: Global prices have surged as the Strait of Hormuz—which carries 20% of the world's oil—is currently stalled.

## THE INCIDENT: Scuffle in the Tenderloin

(By Our Staff Reporter) The confrontation began around 5:38 p.m. near Cedar and Polk streets. Mayor Lurie was traveling in a black SUV with two plainclothes officers when the vehicle was blocked by three individuals. What the Video Shows While early reports suggested a direct ambush, a surveillance video obtained by Mission Local offers a more granular look at the escalation: The Interaction: The video shows one of the mayor's bodyguards (in a suit) confronting a man identified as Tony Phillips. The Escalation: The bodyguard is seen abruptly shoving Phillips backward into a pile of debris.

The Struggle: Phillips then rushes back at the officer. The two enter a clinch, and as they struggle, Phillips throws the officer to the ground.

The Injury: The officer struck his head on the pavement, resulting in significant bleeding.

The Mayor's Reaction The footage shows Mayor Lurie standing a few feet away as the physical struggle begins. As the officer is taken to the ground, Lurie is seen backing away and hurrying out of the frame. While critics have labeled this "walking away," the Mayor's office maintains he was signaling for help and following standard safety protocols for an "unprotected" principal during an active

threat. THE FALLOUT: Arrests and Conflicting Narratives Following the scuffle, backup arrived quickly.

Two men were arrested: Tony Phillips (44): Booked on charges of assault on a peace officer with force likely to cause great bodily injury, battery on



an officer, and resisting arrest. Abraham Simon: Booked for resisting/obstructing an officer.

The Contradiction: Before the video surfaced, the official narrative from the Mayor's office and SFPD was that the suspects "tried to fight" the officers. The footage showing the bodyguard initiating the physical contact (the shove) has led to calls for an internal investigation into the use of force.

THE BIG PICTURE: San Francisco's "Reset" The timing of the incident is particularly sensitive.

# NO BOOTS, TOTAL DOMINANCE: Trump Dismisses Iran's Ground War Threats as "Wasted"

(By Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has flatly rejected calls for a ground invasion of Iran, declaring the Islamic Republic's military capacity so depleted that a terrestrial campaign would be a "waste of time. Speaking to NBC News via telephone on March 5, 2026, the President brushed off warnings from Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who had stated Tehran was "waiting" for U.S. troops to enter a "disaster" of a ground war. It's a waste of time. They've lost everything," Trump said. "They've lost their navy.

They've lost everything they can lose. [Araghchi's statement] was a wasted comment. The Seven-Day Audit: Regime on the Brink "White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt and CENTCOM officials provided a staggering look at the first week of Operation Epic Fury: "The Navy: CENTCOM confirmed that at least 43 Iranian vessels have been destroyed or severely damaged. The White House now officially classifies the Iranian Navy as "combat ineffective. The Missile Threat: Retaliatory ballistic missile strikes from Iran are reportedly down 90% since the opening 48 hours of the

conflict, suggesting a near-total degradation of launch infrastructure. "The Leadership Vacuum: Following the confirmed death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the initial "decapitation strike" on February 28, the regime is currently being managed by a temporary three-person council. "Proxy Paralysis: U.S. intelligence reports that Hezbollah and Houthi forces have been "hardly putting up a fight," likely due to the severing of command-and-control links with Tehran. The "Guaranteed Death" Deadline "Despite the lack of U.S. ground troops, the administration is not easing the pressure. President Trump issued a blunt ultimatum to members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular Iranian military. Lay down your arms — or face guaranteed death," Trump warned, offering "total immunity" to those who surrender and asylum to Iranian diplomats who defect. The President emphasized that while he is not mulling a ground deployment, he intends to be personally involved in "cleaning out" the current leadership structure to ensure the next government does not spend the next decade rebuilding military threats. "Unlimited



Ammunition" "Addressing concerns about public that the U.S. maintains a "virtually depleted Pentagon stockpiles, the unlimited supply" of medium-grade President met with major defense munitions, stating, "America is not running out of ammunition."

## ROOSEVELT AND CHURCHILL": Graham Hails Trump-Netanyahu Alliance as Iran Regime Totters



(By Our Staff Reporter) WASHINGTON — Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) has lauded the joint U.S.-Israeli military campaign as a "brilliant, bold, and historic" masterstroke, comparing President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu to the legendary World War II duo of FDR and Winston Churchill. "Speaking on Meet the Press and Sunday Night in America, Graham declared the Iranian theocracy effectively

finished following the reported death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The mothership of terrorism is sinking. The captain is dead," Graham told viewers. "President Trump gave them 60 days to choose peace. They chose poorly. Now, the hour of freedom for the Iranian people has arrived. Regional Impact: By the Numbers "The Senator highlighted several strategic shifts that he claims validate the administration's "Peace Through Strength"

doctrine: "Maritime Security: Global shipping data suggests a dramatic cooling in the Red Sea. Attacks on commercial vessels—which peaked at 150 earlier in the year—have plummeted to just 7 reported incidents this week as Houthi launch sites are neutralized. "The "Accords" Expansion: Diplomatic sources suggest that nations previously "hedging" due to Iranian intimidation—including Saudi Arabia and Qatar—are now moving

toward a "Rubicon moment" regarding the Abraham Accords. "Lebanon's Pivot: In a stunning move, the Lebanese Cabinet recently issued a decree ordering Hezbollah to stand down and surrender its arsenal to the state, citing a "narrow window" to reclaim national sovereignty while its patron in Tehran is incapacitated. The "Board of Peace" vs. The "Radical Left While Graham celebrates, the domestic political divide remains sharp. The Support: GOP leaders like Speaker Mike Johnson and Senator Tom Cotton have echoed Graham, praising the "bold, decisive act" and noting that "the butcher's bill has finally come due. The Opposition: Critics, including Senator Chuck Schumer and Rep. Thomas Massie, have warned of an "endless and costly war," with some Democrats moving to vote on a War Powers Resolution to curtail the operation. The New Reality "Graham concluded his remarks by noting that the "old Middle East" died on February 28. With Iran's nuclear facilities struck and its leadership in shambles, the Senator argued that the administration is now writing a "new chapter of history" that bypasses the failed multilateralism of the UN.

# THE \$54 MILLION VOID: Kalshi Faces "Rug Pull" Accusations After Freezing Iran War Bets

(By Our Staff Reporter) NEW YORK — It was the trade of a lifetime for thousands of retail investors. As U.S. and Israeli jets entered Iranian airspace during Operation Epic Fury, the odds of Ayatollah Khamenei being "out" as Supreme Leader surged. Traders poured millions into the contract, emboldened by Kalshi's own social media promotion of the market. But when the smoke cleared and the 86-year-old leader's death was confirmed, the "green checks" of victory turned into frozen accounts.

The "Death Carveout" Defense "At the heart of the dispute is a technicality in Kalshi's contract. While the market asked if Khamenei would be "out," the fine print contained a specific restriction: The Rule: Kalshi claims its license prohibits profiting directly from "war, assassination, or terrorism."

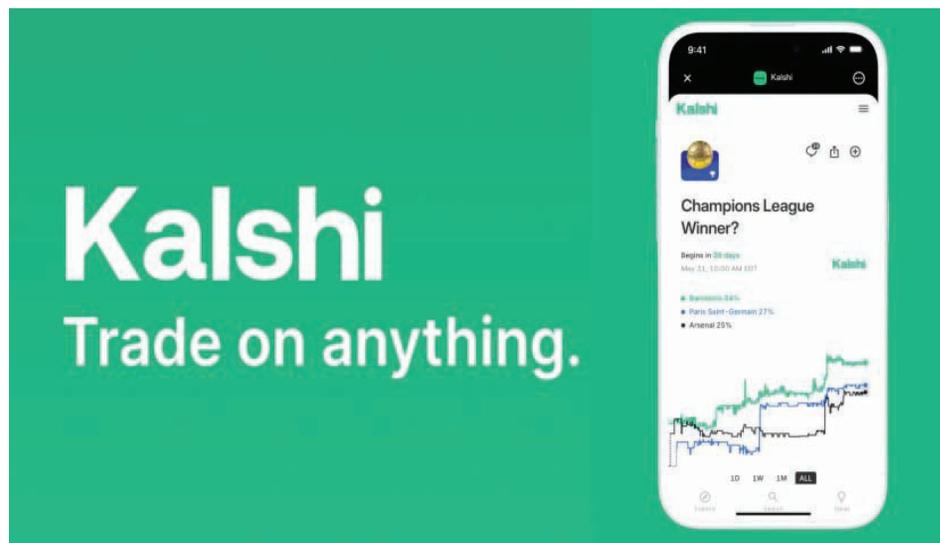
The Payout: Instead of paying the full value of the winning contracts, Kalshi resolved the market at the last traded price before the confirmed strike. "The Result: Traders who expected a windfall—

like one New York executive who turned \$3,400 into a phantom \$63,000—were left with only their initial principal and a refund of fees, totaling a mere \$2.2 million payout. "They promoted it, they took the juice, and when they lost, they changed the rules," said one trader on Discord. "This isn't a regulated market; it's a 'heads they win, tails we lose' casino."

The Insider Trading Scandal: "Magamyman" "The controversy has shifted from "fairness" to "national security" following suspicious activity on Polymarket (Kalshi's offshore rival)."

"An anonymous trader known as "Magamyman" netted nearly \$600,000 by betting on the exact three-hour window the strikes would begin. "This follows a January incident where a trader correctly predicted the timing of Nicolás Maduro's capture in Venezuela within hours."

Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) has seized on these wins as evidence of "commercial immorality," suggesting that military or intelligence insiders may be using classified "War Plans" to front-run



the betting markets. "??? Washington's Response: The Death of Death Bets?" "The "Khamenei Default" has provided fresh ammunition to critics who want to see prediction markets shuttered entirely. The Legislative Move: A group of six Democratic senators is currently drafting the "Sanctity of Life in Markets Act," which would broadly ban any derivative contract tied to the death, assassination, or health

of a world leader. The Bottom Line "Kalshi's decision to invoke the "death carveout" may have saved the company from a \$54 million liquidity event, but it may have cost the industry its future. As Congress investigates whether these markets are "proxies for war," the era of betting on the fall of regimes appears to be facing its own "death notice."

## Global Reach: FBI Flies Child Exploitation Suspect "Zobaidul Amin" From Malaysia to Face Alaska Charges

(By Our Staff Reporter) The federal indictment paints a chilling picture of Amin's alleged activities. While living in Malaysia and attending medical school, Amin is accused of operating a sophisticated "sextortion" and exploitation enterprise that spanned years. The Tactic: Amin allegedly posed as a teenager on apps like Instagram and Snapchat to gain the trust of children as young as 11. The Escalation: After obtaining explicit images, he reportedly coerced victims into producing increasingly "sadistic" material, using threats of exposure to keep them trapped in a cycle of abuse.

The Scope: Investigators have identified hundreds of victims across Alaska, the broader United States, and several other countries. The Charges: Facing Life in Prison "Amin appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Kyle F. Reardon on March 5, where he pleaded not guilty to a 13-count federal indictment. The charges include: "Conspiracy to produce, receive, and distribute child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Operation of a child exploitation enterprise. Cyberstalking and wire fraud. Aggravated identity theft. If convicted, Amin faces a

mandatory minimum of 20 years, with the potential for life in federal prison. A Triumph of International Cooperation "The extradition was the culmination of a four-year effort involving the FBI Anchorage Field Office, the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, and the Royal Malaysia Police.



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

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# THE FIRST CASUALTY: Trump Ousts Kristi Noem at DHS, Taps Sen. Markwayne Mullin

(By Our Staff Reporter)

WASHINGTON — In a move that stunned the capital but followed weeks of mounting pressure, President Donald Trump fired Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Thursday via Truth Social. The dismissal came just 24 hours after a disastrous two-day congressional hearing where Noem faced blistering criticism from both sides of the aisle. The Anatomy of a Fall: Why Noem Was Fired "Noem's tenure, which lasted just over a year, was defined by "performative" tactics that eventually became political liabilities for the White House. The "last straws" included: "The Minneapolis Shooting: DHS faced nationwide protests following the shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, by federal agents during a "Metro Surge" immigration operation. Noem's labeling of the victims as "domestic terrorists"—a claim later debunked by video—outraged lawmakers." The "Ad Campaign" Betrayal: During her



**Noem's Gone, the first Cabinet casualty of Trump's second term — and it happened fast**

testimony, Noem claimed President Trump personally approved a \$220 million taxpayer-funded ad campaign featuring herself. Trump flatly denied this to Reuters, stating, "I never knew anything about it," reportedly viewing her testimony as a move to shift blame onto him. "Luxury Spending: Critics hammered Noem for authorizing \$172 million for two Gulfstream G700 jets for



DHS use during a government shutdown, while FEMA response times in disaster zones were lagging.

The "Shield of the Americas" Reassignment "In a classic Trump-era "soft landing," the President announced that Noem would not be leaving the administration entirely. Instead, she will serve as Special Envoy for the Shield of the Americas, a new regional security

initiative focused on Latin American cartels and border cooperation. While Noem thanked the President for the "new role," analysts widely view it as a significant demotion. Enter the "Warrior": Who is Markwayne Mullin "To replace Noem, Trump has nominated Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK). Effective March 31, 2026, the 48-year-old former professional MMA fighter and plumbing company owner will take the helm of the 260,000-person department. The Political Aftermath "The reaction in Washington was swift.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries remarked, "Good riddance. She was a disaster." Meanwhile, even retiring Republicans like Sen. Thom Tillis, who had called Noem's leadership a "disaster" earlier in the week, appeared relieved by the pivot to Mullin. The bottom line: The Trump administration is doubling down on its immigration agenda but has signaled that "theatrical" leadership that generates negative TV coverage will not be tolerated.

## THE MAGA SCHISM: Marjorie Taylor Greene Accuses U.S. and Israel of "Starting" Iran War

## HEGSETH'S PENTAGON PRESSER: Victory Claims vs. The "Fog of Fury"

(By Our Staff Reporter)

WASHINGTON — In a move that has stunned Republican leadership, former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has publicly challenged the Trump administration's justification for the ongoing strikes against Iran. "Greene, once one of the President's fiercest defenders, asserted this week that "America and Israel definitely started this war," a direct rebuke of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's framing of the conflict as a "preemptive defensive necessity. Fact-Checking the Claims "As the conflict enters its second week, a review of the operational timeline and intelligence lends weight to several of Greene's assertions: "The "First Strike" Reality: The coordinated U.S.-Israeli operation, launched on February 28, 2026, was not a response to an active Iranian kinetic attack. While the administration cited an "imminent nuclear breakout," Iran was not engaged in hostilities against the U.S. or Israel at the moment the strikes began.

"The Omani Breakthrough: Greene highlighted that indirect nuclear negotiations in Oman were reportedly on the verge of a deal.

This was bolstered by comments from Oman's Foreign Minister, who stated a "diplomatic breakthrough" was imminent just 24 hours before the missiles flew. "The Minab Tragedy: Greene's claim

regarding civilian casualties has been confirmed by independent reporting. A strike targeting an IRGC facility in Minab reportedly hit a nearby girls' school, resulting in the deaths of nearly 100 children. "America First, Not Israel First" "The core of Greene's dissent is ideological. She argued that the "Make America Great Again" movement was built on avoiding "forever wars" in the Middle East. "MAGA was supposed to be America First, not Israel First," Greene stated, echoing a growing sentiment among the "isolationist" wing of the GOP that feels Prime Minister Netanyahu had undue influence over the decision to strike Tehran. The Administration's Rebuttal "The White House and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have maintained a unified front, dismissing Greene's narrative as "dangerous misinformation." The Intelligence Gap: While pre-strike assessments from some agencies suggested Iran had not fully restarted its weapons program, Hegseth maintains that "secret hardening" of sites like Natanz signaled a point of no return.

"The Netanyahu Factor: While The New York Times reported that Netanyahu was instrumental in the final push for action, President Trump has pushed back, suggesting the decision was his own "strategic masterstroke" to secure regional peace.

(By Our Staff Reporter)

WASHINGTON — In a briefing described as the most aggressive since the 1991 Gulf War, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth took the Pentagon podium on Wednesday, March 4, 2026, to declare that Operation Epic Fury has effectively broken the back of the Iranian regime. "Flanked by Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Dan Caine, Hegseth delivered a blunt ultimatum to the remnants of the IRGC: "Iran is toast, and they know it." However, as the conflict enters its second week, a stark divide has emerged between the Pentagon's "victory metrics" and the reports from the ground. "1. The Claim: "Complete Control of the Skies" "Hegseth's Stance: The Secretary asserted that in under a week, the U.S. and Israel have achieved "uncontested airspace" over Iran. He claimed that the "two most powerful air forces in the world" are now free to "hunt, fix, and finish" any remaining military infrastructure with zero mercy. The Reality Check: While Iran's air defenses have been severely degraded, the Pentagon admitted that U.S. and allied systems "can't stop everything." On Monday, Kuwaiti air defenses mistakenly shot down three American F-15E fighters during a chaotic Iranian retaliatory wave, resulting in the loss of six U.S. service members. "2. The Claim: "The Regime is

Toast" "Hegseth's Stance: Hegseth confirmed the "decapitation" of Iranian leadership, noting that following the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Day 1, the regime's command structure has evaporated. "Everyone that wants to be a leader ends up dead," he remarked. The



Reality Check: While the top tier was hit, an Interim Leadership Council has already formed. Intelligence analysts warn that the IRGC has transitioned to a decentralized command structure, making them more unpredictable. Furthermore, the selection of Mojtaba Khamenei (the late leader's son) as a potential successor suggests the regime's ideological core remains defiant. "3. The Claim: "We Never Target Civilians" "Hegseth's Stance: Confronted with reports of a strike on a girls' school in Minab that killed between 168 and 180 people, Hegseth was evasive. "All I can say is that we're investigating," he said, adding that the U.S. "never targets civilians" and blaming the press for focusing on casualties to "make the President look bad.

# Nolan's Ancient Ambition: Is 'The Odyssey' the Definitive Cinematic Event of 2026?

(Our Staff Reporter) The rumors have finally coalesced into a thunderous reality. Christopher Nolan, the architect of modern high-concept cinema, is officially trading the atomic age of *Oppenheimer* for the bronze age of Homer. His latest project, *The Odyssey*, is already being hailed as the most ambitious production in Hollywood history. With a budget that reportedly eclipses his previous records and a promotional campaign that began a full year ahead of release, Nolan is attempting something unprecedented: turning a 2,700-year-old poem into a must-see summer blockbuster. A Cast for the Ages

Nolan has assembled a "murderer's row" of talent that feels more like an awards ceremony than a call sheet: Matt Damon takes on the titular role of Odysseus, the cunning king of Ithaca. Anne Hathaway returns to the Nolan-verse as Penelope, the pillar of strength waiting at home. Tom Holland steps into the sandals of Telemachus, bringing a youthful urgency to the search for his father. Zendaya rounds out the leads as the goddess Athena, serving as the

strategic mind behind Odysseus's survival.

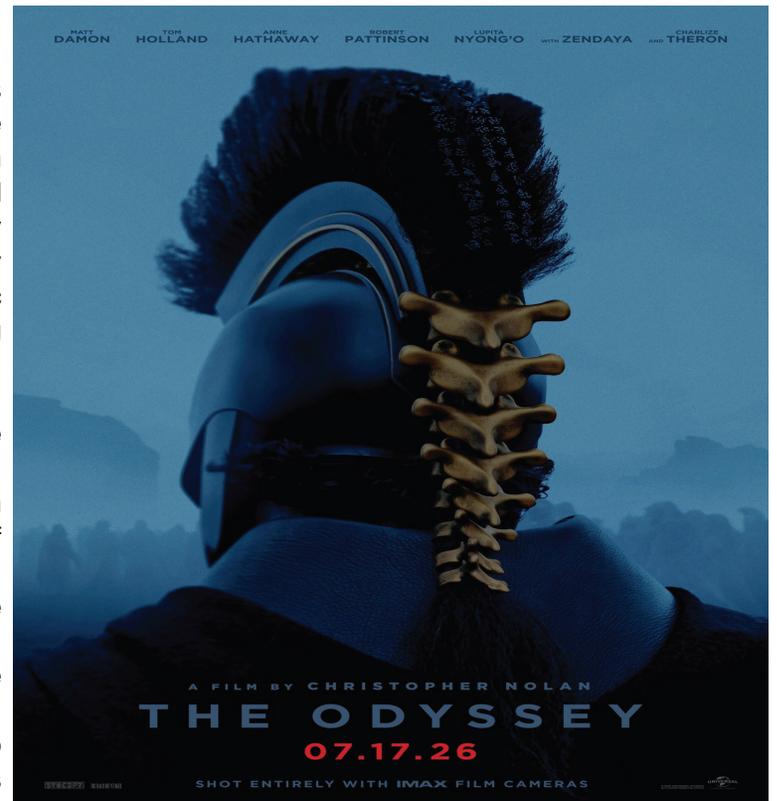
## Technical Prowess: The IMAX Factor

In a move that will delight cinephiles, Nolan is reportedly the first director to shoot an entire feature-length narrative entirely on 15-perforation IMAX 70mm film. While previous films have used the format for key sequences, *The Odyssey* aims to maintain that massive scale for every second of its runtime—from the claustrophobic cave of the Cyclops to the infinite, churning horizons of the Mediterranean.

## The Hype Machine

The decision to sell tickets a full year in advance is a bold gamble that seems to be paying off. Industry analysts suggest that the "Nolan Brand"—built on the massive success of *Inception* and *Interstellar*—is now powerful enough to treat a historical epic with the same fervor usually reserved for superhero franchises. "This isn't just a movie; it's a reclamation of the 'Epic' genre," says one industry insider.

"Nolan is using practical effects to build monsters we've only ever seen in CGI. It's going to be visceral."



## The Final Girl Returns: 'Scream 7' Slashes Franchise Records with \$100M Global Opening



(Our Staff Reporter) WOODSBORO (Staff Reporter) — Three decades after the first phone call changed horror forever, Sidney Prescott has proven that some nightmares never truly end—they just get bigger. *Scream 7*, which debuted in theaters on February 27, 2026, has officially become the highest-grossing opening in the franchise's history. The film, which marks the highly anticipated return of Neve Campbell, raked in a massive \$64.1 million domestically in its first weekend, pushing its global total past the \$100 million milestone in record

## Box Office Breakdown

Budget: \$45 Million

Opening Weekend (Domestic): \$64.1 Million

Global Total (To Date): \$100.1 Million

IMAX Impact: As the first *Scream* film shot for the format, IMAX screenings accounted for a significant 12% of the opening weekend revenue.

"We wanted to follow Sidney," Campbell said during the premiere. "The concept Kevin pitched me was the only reason I came back. It's about family, legacy, and the fact that you can never truly run from your past."

time.

## A Full-Circle Reunion

The seventh installment serves as a homecoming for the series. For the first time, original creator Kevin Williamson has stepped into the director's chair, bringing the saga back to its roots while navigating the complexities of 2026 technology.

The story follows an older Sidney Prescott, now living a quiet life in Pine Grove with her husband, Mark Evans (played by Joel McHale). However, the peace is shattered when a new Ghostface emerges, specifically targeting Sidney's teenage daughter, Tatum (breakout star Isabel May). **Legacy and Controversy: The "Deepfake" Twist** While the film is a hit, it hasn't arrived without its share of meta-commentary and fan debate. To heighten the psychological terror, Williamson introduced a plot point involving AI deepfakes.

This allowed for the "return" of several legacy characters who died in previous installments:

Matthew Lillard (Stu Macher)

David Arquette (Dewey Riley)

Scott Foley (Roman Bridger)

The film uses high-tech "in-universe" deepfakes to allow Ghostface to taunt Sidney with the faces of those she's lost or survived. While some critics called the move a "betrayal of legacy," others praised it as a terrifyingly modern take on the franchise's "rules."

## Vijay Deverakonda jokes about going underground after reception



(Our Staff Reporter) After a series of vibrant wedding events, actors Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna concluded their celebrations with a grand reception in Hyderabad. Vijay also addressed the paps, noting that they hope to end their festivities. After days of elaborate wedding festivities, actors Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna wrapped up their celebrations with a grand reception in Hyderabad on March 4. While addressing the paps, the Liger actor playfully noted that with the reception they hope to put an end to the celebration. The star-studded evening, held at Taj Krishna, saw several prominent figures from the Telugu and Hindi film industries gather to congratulate the newlyweds. But before stepping into the celebrations, Vijay joked to the media that he and Rashmika planned to "go underground" once the festivities were finally over. In the clip, Deverakonda can be seen saying, "Today, we hope to finish the celebration and go underground, quiet." Ahead of the reception, the couple briefly interacted with the Telugu press in Hyderabad, thanking them for their support and warm wishes.

# Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda to resume Ranabaali shoot soon: Report

Actors Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda are reportedly preparing to return to the Ranabaali shoot after their wedding. Here's when the couple is expected to resume filming, and why fans are closely watching the schedule.

(Our Staff Reporter) Newly married stars Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda are reportedly gearing up to return to work together sooner than expected. According to a report by 123Telugu, the couple will resume filming for their upcoming period action drama, Ranabaali, from March 12, marking their first professional commitment together after their wedding celebrations. The production is set to restart on March 9, but the lead pair are expected to join the shoot a few days later. Their return is being closely watched by fans, as it will be the first time the actors step in front of the camera together following their marriage, a development that has already sparked considerable excitement around the film.

**What is Ranabaali about?**



Directed by Rahul Sankrityan, Ranabaali draws inspiration from real-life events that unfolded in India between 1854 and 1878, during British colonial rule. The film explores a turbulent

historical period marked by violence, economic struggles and widespread human loss. Vijay Deverakonda plays the titular character Ranabaali, a fearless freedom fighter known for

resisting colonial oppression, while Rashmika Mandanna portrays Jayamma, the wife of Ranabaali, a character expected to bring emotional depth and humanity to the narrative. By

blending historical conflict with personal stories, the film aims to portray both the sociopolitical upheaval of the era and the intimate relationships shaped by it.

**Why did the Ranabaali wedding poster attract attention?**

The film sparked buzz after the makers released a wedding poster featuring Vijay and Rashmika in traditional attire. The image quickly caught fans' attention, especially because it coincided with the actors' real-life marriage. Director Rahul Sankrityan later revealed on X that the image was never meant to be a conventional promotional poster. Instead, it was designed to resemble an old photograph from the late 19th century, capturing the simplicity and sincerity often seen in vintage portraits.

## The Kerala Story 2 box office Day 6: Holi lifts weekday business to Rs 20 crore

The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond crossed Rs 20 crore at the Indian box office after six days, with the Holi holiday boosting weekday collections. The Vipul Shah-produced film saw a slight jump on Tuesday and Wednesday amid mixed reviews.



(Our Staff Reporter) The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond benefitted slightly from the Holi holiday on Tuesday and Wednesday, wrapping up its six-day run at Rs 20.15 crore nett. According to trade website Sacnilk, the film collected nearly Rs 4 crore on Tuesday and around Rs 3.5 crore on Wednesday.

Produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah and directed by Kamakhya Narayan Singh, the film hit theatres last weekend after a court battle over its censor certification. It follows the journey of three women from different parts of the country who marry Muslim men and allegedly face trauma, violence and forced conversion. The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond opened to a negligible figure on Friday, but collections grew over the weekend.

## Sonu Sood offers free stay in Dubai to stranded people, nationality no bar

Actor Sonu Sood announced that he was offering free accommodation in Dubai to travellers stranded amid the Iran-Israel-US tensions. The humanitarian said anyone in need can reach out to him for a safe place to stay, regardless of nationality.

(Our Staff Reporter) Actor and humanitarian Sonu Sood on Thursday announced free accommodation for people stranded in Dubai amid the ongoing Middle East conflict. The actor shared a video on social media, asking travellers who are stuck in the city to reach out to him if they need a place to stay. Sood also said he has arranged the facility for anyone who has nowhere to go amid the Iran-Israel-US tensions, irrespective of their nationality. He said in the video, "Anyone who's stranded in Dubai because of the ongoing crisis, we just want to tell you that you have a place to stay. We'll make sure that you get free-of-cost accommodation (sic)." Sood further asked people to reach out to him through a direct message on his social media accounts and share their details. The 52-year-old added, "Jo log bhi humare Hindustani hai, ya kisi bhi nationality ke log phase hue hain Dubai ke andar, aap mujhe DM kijiye. We will make sure that you get a free of cost stay till you reach your country. Jai Hind. God bless you all [Whoever, whether our fellow Indians, or people of any



nationality who are stranded in Dubai, please send me a DM. We will make sure you get a free stay at no cost until you are able to return to your country. Jai Hind. God bless you all]. The actor, often regarded as a "real-life hero" for his humanitarian work, first gained widespread appreciation for assisting thousands of stranded migrant workers with transport, food and shelter during the Covid-19 pandemic. He continues to be actively involved in initiatives related to education, healthcare, disaster relief, and rural empowerment.

Fearless Voice of the Community

# The South Asian Insider

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**Venezuela's Maria Machado dedicates Nobel Prize to Trump**  
Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2022 and created Donald Trump's dream of winning the prize, praised the US President for supporting the Venezuelans working to establish democracy and end President Nicolas Maduro's dictatorship.  
*Story on Page 26*

**British and Indian prime ministers promote trade deal during visit by Starmer**  
*Story on Page 28*

**The American Dream turned nightmare, Gujaratis in Peril in US Motel Business?**  
*Story on Page 3*

**The Road from Patna to Pennsylvania Avenue: How Bihar's Verdict Will Shape Modi's Hand in US Trade Talks**  
*Story on Page 11*

**Big Crackdown Coming: India To Audit All Cough Syrup Makers**  
*Story on Page 34*

**Brazilian influencer's death after 'fox eyes' surgery exposes beauty culture's dark side**  
*Story on Page 24*

**As Afghan Taliban Minister Begins 1st India Visit, Delhi Has A Flag Dilemma**  
*Story on Page 27*

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**Who is Ashley Tellis, Indian-American Expert Charged Over Top Secret Files**  
*Story on Page 21*

**Inside India's Scariest Scam, And How To Stop It**  
Digital scams are proliferating as India's elderly population embraces the internet. Scammers are highly effective, preying on the inherent vulnerabilities of seniors, such as respect for authority, fear of legal trouble, and loneliness.  
*Story on Page 25*

**Starship Hits the Bullseye: Lands in Indian Ocean and Crashes Exactly Where Musk Predicted**  
*Story on Page 28*

**Mass Surrender: Naxal Commander and 50 Cadres Lay Down Arms in Maharashtra**  
*Story on Page 26*

**Rs 60-crore cheating and fraud case: Why don't you turn approver against Raj Kundra, High Court asks Shilpa Shetty**  
*Story on Page 26*

**Vijay Mallya Abandons UK Bid to End Bankruptcy**  
*Story on Page 18*

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**Social Media and Political Violence: A Complex Relationship**  
Does Social Media fans political violence?  
*Story on Page 28*

**China saw it coming: The long game of geo-nationalism**  
*Story on Page 24*

**India to crack down on deepfakes, new rule may force companies to label AI-generated content**  
*Story on Page 34*

**What's kafala that turns millions of Indians into slaves in the Gulf?**  
*Story on Page 21*

**Not just fake paneer, India has an egg problem as well**  
*Story on Page 22*

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**US Acknowledges 'Armed Conflict' Against 'Terrorist' Drug Cartels**  
*Story on Page 26*

**US-India Diplomacy in Focus: Modi-Trump Meeting Eyed Ahead of Quad Summit**  
*Story on Page 28*

**India's Enduring Fascination: From Delhi 'Baba' to Ram Rahim and Asaram, The Saga of Godmen**  
*Story on Page 34*

**From Prison Walls to Murders**  
The Jharkhand Pradesh of Dhanbad, where Babbar's Mother Operated a Gang.  
*Story on Page 28*

**SRK Enters Billionaire Club For First Time. See Bollywood's Top 5 Richest**  
*Story on Page 28*

**Should TVK Chief Vijay Be Made Accused in Karur Stampede Case?**  
*Story on Page 28*

**Meet India's Youngest Billionaire: His Net Worth Is Rs 21,190 Crore**  
*Story on Page 28*

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