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AKHILESH, SHAH
LOCK HORNS OVER
NEW BJP PREZ



11
HEGSETH BACKS TAIWAN,
BUT TRUMP'S APPROACH
DECIDES US STANCE



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IPL: LIVINGSTONE
HELPS RCB POST 169/8
AGAINST GT

HISTORY MADE AT MIDNIGHT AS LOK SABHA PASSES WAQF BILL

The bill was passed after a marathon debate that lasted almost 12 hours.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

In a historic development, the Lok Sabha in early hours of Thursday passed the WAQF Amendment bill after a marathon debate that lasted almost 12 hours.

Earlier on Wednesday, Minority Affairs Minister Kiran Rijiju introduced the bill on Lok Sabha which witnessed heated discussion.

Slamming the opposition parties for terming Waqf Amendment Bill as "un-constitutional", he said the law relating to Waqf property has been in existence for decades and has not been struck down by courts and such words should not be used lightly. Deputy leader of opposition, Gaurav Gogoi said "Did the Minority Affairs Ministry make this bill, or did some other department make it? Where did this Bill come from?... Today, the condition of minorities in the country has become such that today, the government will have to give a certificate of their religion... Will they ask for a certificate from other religions whether you have completed five years or not? Why is this being asked in this bill?"



Lok Sabha proceedings are underway during the Budget session of the Parliament, in New Delhi. ANI

WAQF AL-AULAD: WHERE FAITH, FAMILY, AND LAW COLLIDE

In recent months, debates around India's Waqf Board and the proposed Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 have brought the term Waqf al-Aulad into the spotlight. So, what exactly is it? And why is it important?

What is Waqf?

A waqf is a permanent donation of property or land made under Islamic law for religious, charitable, or public good. Once declared, waqf property can't be sold or inherited—it belongs to God and is

managed for the purpose it was dedicated to India has over 8.7 lakh waqf properties, including mosques, schools, graveyards, and commercial real estate, managed by State Waqf Boards.

What is Waqf al-

Aulad?

Waqf al-Aulad, also called family waqf, is a type of private waqf created for the benefit of the donor's own family or descendants. For example, a man might donate his property as

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"Asaduddin Owaisi calls the bill unconstitutional, but he has done the unconstitutional thing by tearing up the bill... I want to ask him why he tore the bill?..."



— Jagdambika Pal
JPC Chief and BJP MP

'I tear this law. It is an unconstitutional law'

NEW DELHI: AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi said the Waqf bill is a violation of the Constitution, and the bill protect ancient temples, not mosques. Participating in the debate on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, Owaisi said: "The Waqf (Amendment) Bill doesn't protect the Muslims. It is a violation of Article 26. The ruling party is non-stop saying that nothing will happen. If the amendment comes into effect, only ancient temples will be protected, not mosques."



Army retaliates as Pak violates ceasefire along LoC in Poonch



Indian Army personnel keeping the strict vigil along the Line of Control, in Poonch on Sunday. (ANI Photo) File photo

AGENCIES
POONCH (J&K)

The Indian Army troops retaliated strongly after the Pakistan Army violated the ceasefire by opening fire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district.

According to a statement issued by PRO Defence Jammu, "On April 1, 2025, a mine blast occurred in the Krishna Ghati Sector while the Pakistan Army was patrolling across the Line of Control (LoC). This was followed by unprovoked firing and a ceasefire violation by the Pakistan Army. Indian Army troops responded effectively. The Indian Army continues to dominate the LoC. The situation is under control." The Indian Army has re-

iterated the significance of upholding the principles outlined in the 2021 DGSMO understanding to ensure peace along the LOC, as stated by PRO Defence Jammu.

The Pakistan Army violated the ceasefire agreement by firing at Indian positions across the Line of Control (LoC) in the KG Sector, Poonch, on Tuesday. The troops of the Nangi Tekri Battalion, under the aegis of the Krishna Ghati Brigade of the Indian Army, retaliated strongly.

Earlier, the security forces intensified search and cordon operations following the exchange of fire with terrorists in the Panjirthi area of Kathua.

Multiple surveillance and ambush-

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Fighter jet on training mission crashes in Jamnagar

TDG NETWORK
JAMNAGAR

A Jaguar fighter jet of the Indian Air Force crashed at a village near Jamnagar IAF station in Gujarat on Wednesday night while on a training mission with one of the pilots ejecting safely, police officials said. The pilot, who ejected safely, suffered injuries, while the second pilot was missing as he failed to exit the jet in time, they said.

The fighter jet crashed at around 9:30 pm in an open



A Jaguar fighter jet of the Indian Air Force (IAF) crashed during a training mission near Jamnagar Air Force Station, in Jamnagar. ANI

Patkar's plea against conviction dismissed

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

The Saker District Court on Wednesday dismissed Social activist Medha Patkar's appeal against her conviction in a defamation case from 2001. While dismissing the appeal Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Vishal Singh said, "appeal is dismissed and conviction sustained."

The court clarified that there is no question of enhancement of sentence as the same has not been prayed. In this situation the sentence

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Dhaka hopes PM Modi will meet Yunus at BIMSTEC summit

TDG NETWORK
BANGKOK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive in Bangkok on Thursday on a two-day visit, during which he will hold talks with his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra and attend the 6th BIMSTEC Summit.

Modi will be given a grand welcome by the Indian community in Thailand and is scheduled to meet Shinawatra at the Government House, where he will be accorded a ceremonial welcome.

On Thursday evening, the Prime Minister will join the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) leaders from Thai-



land, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar and Bhutan to oversee the signing of the Agreement on Maritime Cooperation. Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin said that Bangladesh has requested for a meeting with the Indian side and expressed optimism for it to take place.



When asked about reports stating Bangladesh's request for a meeting between PM Modi and Chief Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, at BIMSTEC, Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin said, "There has been a request from our side and we certainly

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Chile President Gabriel Boric Font during his visit to the Taj Mahal, in Agra on Wednesday. ANI

Kukis put up 3 conditions ahead of talks called by Centre on April 5

AGENCIES
IMPHAL

Ahead of the April 5 talks between Kuki Zo and Meitei groups called by the Ministry of Home Affairs in New Delhi, the Kuki leadership based in Manipur's Kangpokpi district has set up three pre-conditions including no cross movement between Meitei and Kukis in the areas where

the other community is in majority.

Kuki Zo Council (KZC) chairman Henlianthang Thanglet said the three conditions were set up during a consultation meet organised at Kangpokpi by the Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) on Tuesday.

Thanglet said the three pre-conditions are "the movement of Meitei in-

dividuals in Kuki-Zo-dominated areas and vice versa shall be strictly restricted, hostilities shall be halted for a minimum period of six months to facilitate negotiations, a structured formal and meaningful dialogue process must be initiated during the ceasefire period." A functionary of the Kuki Zo Council said the Union Ministry of

Home Affairs has called for a meeting between the Kuki Zo and Meitei groups in New Delhi on April 5.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based majority Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo tribals since May 2023.

Poonam Gupta, DSE alumna, new RBI Deputy Guv

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Poonam Gupta, at present Director General of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), has been appointed Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India for three years or until orders.



The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has given its nod for the appointment.

Poonam Gupta is the Director General of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), an economic policy think tank. She is also a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Conve-

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WHO SAID WHAT
ON WAQF BILL IN
PARLIAMENT



"Waqf is a sort of Trust which is formed to work in the interest of Muslims. This is not a religious organisation. The Trust has the right to do justice to all sections of Muslims, but that is not happening, today, a narrative is being made. PM Modi is being criticised, if you do like him then do not look at him. But appreciate his good work"

-JD(U) leader Rajiv Ranjan (Lalan) Singh



"The irony is that the rights of the minorities are going to be protected by a party which has no member of a Muslim community. Today, it is a remarkable day for the Indian Parliament to decide our destiny whether this secular country is going to travel in the path which was well written by the forefathers of the Constitution or a negative path decided by the communal forces in the country,"

- A Raja of DMK



The state I come from, Bihar, has a lot of backward Muslims; there are also in UP. They do not get the opportunity to participate in the management of Waqf. Why should there be an issue if the bill provides space for backward Muslims to have rights in Waqf properties?"

-Ravi Shankar Prasad of BJP



"The Waqf Amendment Bill is a dangerous, divisive law which runs against the tenets of our Constitution. The Government is bringing this today as if all other pressing issues of our country have been solved. Is there no unemployment anymore? Are farmers happy? Are women safe? Why is this the BJP's focus? This Bill is yet another example of the BJP's visceral hatred towards minorities - they want to control their lives and suppress their rights, bringing non-Muslims to control Waqf properties," Venugopal said. "This is just the beginning, they will come after every minority religion going forward. We vehemently reject this Bill and will always fight to protect the Constitution and every citizen's fundamental rights,"

- KC Venugopal of Cong

RIJIJU TARGETS CONGRESS OVER WAQF AMENDMENTS IN 2013

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Introducing the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025, in Lok Sabha, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday targeted UPA government's 2013 amendment in the Waqf Act, questioning the powers provided under section 108.

Rijiju noted three changes made by the UPA government. "In 2013, right before Lok Sabha elections in 2014, there were some steps taken which will raise questions in your mind. In 2013, the act was changed to allow Sikhs, Hindus, Parsis and others to create Waqf. Everyone knows Waqf is for Muslims to create Waqf in the name of Allah."

Rijiju added that the UPA government made Waqf board-specific, limiting it to a single community and provided an overriding effect with section 108.



"This change was made by Congress in 2013. Congress made the boards specific, only Shias in Shia boards...A section 108 was added that Waqf will have an overriding effect over every other law. How can this section be acceptable?" Rijiju said.

Rijiju alleged that under these changes, the UPA government denotified 123 properties and handed them to the Delhi Waqf board.

"A case ongoing since 1970 in Delhi involved several properties, including the

CGO Complex and the Parliament building. The Delhi Waqf Board had claimed these as Waqf properties. The case was in court, but at that time, the UPA government denotified 123 properties and handed them over to the Waqf Board. If we had not introduced this amendment today, even the Parliament building we are sitting in could have been claimed as Waqf property. If PM Modi Govt did not come into power, several properties would have been de-notified," Rijiju said.

"When our country has the largest Waqf property in the world, why hasn't it been used for the education, medical treatment, skill development, and income generation of poor Muslims? Why has no progress been made in this regard so far?"

-Kiren Rijiju

Rijiju further clarified that, "Waqf Bill is not interfering in any religious system, any religious institution, or any religious practice in any way."

He also clarified the provisions have nothing to do with the management of any mosque, temple, or religious site. "It is simply a matter of property management. However, Waqf properties are managed by the Waqf Board and the Mutawalli. If someone fails to understand this basic distinction or deliberately chooses not to, then I

have no solution for that," Rijiju added.

Along with the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, Rijiju also moved the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, 2024, for consideration and passing in the Lok Sabha.

Ahead of the tabling of the bill, Union Home Minister Amit Shah countered opposition over their criticism of JPC and said "We have a democratic committee, which brainstorms. Congress ke zamane mein committee hoti thi jo thappa lagati thi."

Waqf Bill is against nation's integrity: Gogoi



AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday targeted the BJP-led government over the Waqf Amendment Bill alleging that the legislation is against "the integrity of the nation" and that government is "interfering in this matter of religion".

Participating in the debate on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, in Lok Sabha, Gogoi said the nationalism of Congress is that which is enshrined in the Constitution.

"Did the Minority Affairs Ministry make this bill, or did some other department make it? Where did this Bill come from?... Today, the condition of minorities in the country has become such that today, the government will have to give a certificate of their religion... Will they ask for a certificate from other religions whether you have completed five years or not? Why is this being asked in this bill? Why is the government interfering in this matter of religion," Gogoi said.

"Our constitution says that every citizen must receive political, social and economic justice... freedom of expression and religion... this Bill is an attack on the fundamental structure of the constitution. This government aims to dilute the constitution through this Bill. Second, they want to defame the minority community. Third, they want to divide Indian society," he alleged.

Gogoi rejected Minority

Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju's allegations against the Congress and said he should authenticate them.

"What the minister said about the UPA government was entirely misleading. We demand that this be authenticated," Gogoi said.

In his remarks, Rijiju said there were some anomalies in this bill, so it was necessary to amend it.

"I had mentioned earlier that any Indian could create a Waqf, but this was not the case in 1995. In 2013, you made changes, and now we have reinstated the 1995 provision, ensuring that only someone who has practiced Islam for a minimum of five years can create a Waqf," Rijiju said. "About the work done in 2012-2013, I want to mention that the elections were approaching and the Model Code of Conduct was about to be imposed.

The elections happened in April-May 2014. On March 5, 2014, the UPA government transferred 123 prime properties under the Housing and Urban Development Ministry to the Delhi Waqf Board.

What was the need? Only a few days were left before elections. Couldn't you have waited? You thought this would help you win the elections but you lost the election anyway, so what was the gain? Such actions don't win votes," the minister added.

Gogoi alleged that the BJP was seeking to raise questions about a community which took part in the freedom struggle.

'Balasaheb Thackeray had also opposed Waqf': Shiv Sena MP

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Shiv Sena MP Naresh Mhaske on Wednesday expressed his support for the Waqf bill and said the opposition is spreading misinformation that the Waqf Amendment Bill is against Muslims.

Speaking to ANI, Shiv Sena MP Naresh Mhaske said, "The Opposition is spreading misinformation that the Waqf Amendment Bill is against Muslims only for their own gains... Balasaheb Thackeray had also opposed Waqf. Sanjay Raut is a liar and a puppet of Rahul Gandhi."

Lok Sabha on Wednesday took up for consideration the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which incorporates suggestions made by the Joint Parliamentary Committee

that examined the bill tabled in Parliament in August last year. BJP leader Siddharth Nath Singh said, "This bill needs to be improved because this bill is becoming very old and according to time, there is also a demand that improvements should be made from time to time. So that the public gets benefits and PM Modi's government and PM Modi wants that poor Muslims should get benefits from this bill... Poor Muslims will get benefits from this bill, but Akhilesh Yadav is opposing it; he does not want this." Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "I feel pity on the mentality of those who are opposing this bill... The Waqf (Amendment) Bill is going to work towards the progress of all those people whose rights have been snatched away.

'I.N.D.I.A alliance stands together to oppose this Bill'

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

DMK MP Kanimozhi on Wednesday reaffirmed that INDIA alliance stand together to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025.

"The DMK is opposing it. Our CM MK Stalin has passed a resolution in the Tamil Nadu Assembly. We will not give up on the minorities of this country. The INDIA alliance stands together to oppose this Bill," Kanimozhi said.

AAP MP Sanjay Singh alleged that this is BJP's initiation to "take possession" of Waqf properties and give it to their friends.

"The people of the country should beware now that BJP has made an initiation towards taking possession of Waqf properties and giving them to their own friends.



They will do the same with properties belonging to gurudwaras, temples and churches," Sanjay Singh said.

Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju introduced Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025 and the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, 2024, for consideration and passing in the Lok Sabha.

Introducing the bill, Rijiju said that Joint Parliamentary Committee, which examined the legislation, held very extensive discussions and such wide consultations on the leg-

islation had never been done in the parliamentary history of India.

"I want to say that the discussion that has taken place on the Waqf Amendment Bill in the Joint Committee of both the Houses has never been done in the parliamentary history of India till date. I thank and congratulate all the members of the Joint Committee... Till date, a total of 284 delegations... of different communities... have presented their views and suggestions before the committee. Waqf boards of 25 state governments and union territories have also presented their submissions," Rijiju said.

The bill was earlier presented in the Lok Sabha on August of last year and a Joint Parliamentary Committee, headed by BJP member Jagdambika Pal, examined it.

GLIMPSES FROM THE PARLIAMENT



Samajwadi Party (SP) MPs Akhilesh Yadav, Dimple Yadav, Dharmendra Yadav, Anand Bhadauriya, Zia Ur Rehman Barq, Mohibullah Nadvi and others at Parliament premises during the ongoing Budget Session, in New Delhi. ANI



Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi protests against Waqf Amendment Bill outside Makar Dwar during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi. ANI



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Jagdambika Pal and Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Anand Bhadauriya at Parliament premises during the ongoing Budget Session, in New Delhi. ANI



Lok Sabha LoP and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi chairs a meeting of the party's Lok Sabha MPs, at Parliament Annex building in New Delhi. ANI

Parliament passes Immigration and Foreigners Bill with Rajya Sabha nod

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Parliament approved a bill to regulate immigration, entry and stay of foreigners in India, with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod on Wednesday.

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 was passed in Lok Sabha on March 27, 2025. The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill by voice vote on Wednesday after various amendments moved by Opposition members were negated.

Replying to the discussion on the Bill, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai attacked the previous Congress government and the TMC dispensation in West Bengal for "aiding" illegal immigrants enter the country and "facilitating" their stay by including their names in voters' list and ration cards.

This was strongly objected to by the Congress and TMC members, who along with other opposition parties' MPs, staged a walkout from the Upper House.

One of the key provisions in the Bill is that anyone found to be using a forged passport or visa for entering India or staying in or exiting from the country will be punishable with a jail term of



up to seven years and a fine which could extend to Rs 10 lakh.

The Bill also seeks to ensure a close monitoring of everyone who visits India. The proposed legislation also provides for mandatory reporting of information about foreigners by hotels, universities, other educational institutions, hospitals and nursing homes to enable tracking of overstaying foreigners. During the discussion, Rai said, "As many as 26 members expressed their views on the Bill. It was necessary to bring this Bill to make our universities, education system and economy world class level." About the suggestion on referring the Bill to the standing committee, he stated that this Bill was brought after deep study of three years. Rai stated that

the Immigration Bureau is already in existence which was questioned by members. The bureau will be the only agency to deal with issues related to immigration and this is the system which is being followed worldwide, he said. The minister said that all those people are welcomed in the country who come here for education, research and development work. He also stressed that there is a need to deal with all those foreign nationals who are indulged in anti-national activities. Rai said that the Bill provides for mandatory reporting of information about the admission in hospitals or their place of residence. "We want people to visit this country and see the development works done by Modi ji and tell that to their countrymen.

AAP MLAS SUSPENDED FROM ASSEMBLY FOR DEMANDING RESIGNATION OF MIN KAPIL MISHRA

Atishi accused the BJP of shielding Mishra while other riot accused were jailed.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The final day of the first Budget Session of the newly constituted eighth Assembly witnessed high drama as AAP MLAs staged a protest demanding the resignation of Delhi Law and Justice Minister Kapil Mishra. The protest erupted a day after a court directed the registration of an FIR against Mishra over his alleged role in the 2020 Delhi riots.

Carrying placards and raising slogans, AAP legislators stormed into the well of the House, prompting Speaker Vijender Gupta to suspend at least seven of them - Kuldeep Kumar, Sanjeev Jha, Mukesh Ahlawat, Surendra Kumar, Jarnail Singh, Aale Mohammed,

AAP PROTEST

- Speaker Vijender Gupta suspended seven AAP legislators for disrupting the Assembly.
- A court found grounds for an FIR against Mishra and directed Delhi Police to investigate.
- Suspended MLAs must vacate the entire Assembly premises.
- Delhi Police denied Mishra's involvement, calling it an attempt to shift blame.



Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Atishi with AAP MLAs stages a protest demanding the resignation of Delhi Law and Justice Minister Kapil Mishra, during the Budget session of the Assembly. ANI

and Anil Jha.

Leader of Opposition Atishi, leading the protests, accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of shielding Mishra. "All the accused in the riots are in jail. Why is Kapil Mishra not behind bars? We are demanding his resignation, but the BJP is protecting him," she said.

Speaker Gupta instructed the Assembly secretary to verify whether the suspended MLAs remained within the premises and were continuing their protest despite the suspension order.

Speaker Gupta during the first session of the eighth Assembly on March 3, ruled that any MLA who is

suspended or marshalled out must vacate the Vidhan Sabha premises entirely.

The ruling comes in response to a dispute over whether the suspended legislators could remain in certain areas of the Assembly complex, such as the lawns and the office of the Leader of Opposition.

Govt to boost water supply with 249 new tube wells, over 1,000 tankers

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Water Minister Parvesh Verma on Wednesday announced mandatory biometric attendance for Delhi Jal Board employees, the installation of 249 new tube wells, and an increase of 1,327 water tankers to improve supply.

Speaking in the Delhi Assembly session, Verma said a command centre has been established to monitor water distribution, which will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in a few days.

He said that Delhi requires 1,200 million gallons per day but currently receives only 990 MGD.

"To address this gap, the government will install 249 new tube wells over the next three months 96 will be operational by May, 88 in June, and 55 in July."

"At present, 901 water tankers are in operation, and this number will be increased to 1,327. However, tankers are only a temporary solution, we need to



Speaking in the Delhi Assembly session, Verma said a command centre has been established to monitor water distribution, which will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in a few days.

address the root causes of water shortages," Verma said.

The minister said 32 new super sucker machines will be deployed soon to clean sewers, with tenders for 30 more approved to ensure each constituency has one. Within the next four months, all gutters and sewers will be desilted, and sensors will be installed in water tankers to monitor levels accurately, he said. "All sectors will be inte-

grated with the IT cell for better monitoring," Verma added. A water infrastructure project in Sangam Vihar, built at a cost of 4 crore under the previous government, remains unused due to multiple leaks, he said.

"Officials have informed me that an additional 5 crore would be required for its repairs and many of Delhi's pipelines are over 80 years old and require urgent replacement," he said.

HC asks MCD to secure school premises, examine shop legality

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court, on Wednesday, heard a public interest litigation (PIL) concerning alleged unauthorized construction, illegal shops, and a religious structure situated within the premises of a school operated by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

During the proceedings, the court raised serious concerns about certain unmonitored openings in the school that could potentially compromise the safety of students.

The bench, comprising Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyay and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela, emphasized that it was MCD's responsibility to ensure adequate security measures. The judges directed the corporation to take immediate steps to secure these openings and protect the children.

On the matter of illegal shops, the court instructed MCD to conduct a thorough

Govt tightens pollution control measures

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced in the assembly on Wednesday that the Delhi government will introduce a new policy for issuing Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificates to vehicles from other states, in a bid to tackle air pollution. The move comes in response to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report titled 'Vehicular Air Pollution in Delhi', which flagged lapses in the national capital's pollution control mechanisms.

Gupta also announced a significant expansion of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in Delhi, stat-

ing that by 2026, the city will have 48,000 charging points 18,000 government-operated and 30,000 semi-private.

Additionally, six new air quality monitoring centres will be set up to improve pollution tracking and enforcement.

The chief minister further revealed plans to establish a new eco-park dedicated to processing electronic waste, aiming to curb air pollution caused by improper disposal of e-waste.

"These steps are crucial in strengthening Delhi's fight against pollution, ensuring stricter enforcement and better infrastructure," Gupta said while speaking on the CAG report.

Govt orders fire audit before summer



AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has ordered the fire safety audit of all its buildings, with focus on hospitals and health centres, by the Public Works Department (PWD), officials said on Wednesday. The audit will cover all safety aspects, including verifying the presence and functionality of fire prevention measures such as fire alarms, sprinkler systems, and fire extinguishers.

"The fire audit should

focus on assessing the fire safety measures in place, identifying potential fire hazards, and recommending corrective actions to ensure compliance with fire safety norms," PWD principal secretary said in an order.

The audit exercise is to be completed by April 15, it added.

For fire detection and alarm, the PWD officials have been directed to inspect the functionality of fire detection and alarm systems and ensure they are regularly tested and maintained.

Fake pharmacy registration racket busted, 47 held

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The ACB busted a fake pharmacy registration racket and arrested 47 people, including a former employee of the Delhi Pharmacy Council (DPC), an official said on Wednesday. According to the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) statement, the accused allegedly facilitated fraudulent pharmacist registrations using forged documents, allowing unqualified people to operate as pharmacists in the city.

"The scam was orchestrated by Kuldeep Singh, former registrar at DPC, in collaboration with a private firm which was hired to conduct online registrations of the pharmacists. However, the company was hired without any tendering process and in violation of the laid down procedures," Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Madhur Verma said in a statement.

"The investigation revealed that bribes were taken through a middleman named Sanjay, who coordinated between DPC officials and various diploma colleges," Verma said.

The racket enabled applicants to upload fake certificates which were then



"The investigation revealed that bribes were taken through a middleman named Sanjay, who coordinated between DPC officials and various diploma colleges," Verma said.

falsely verified by complicit employees of pharmacy institutes, read the statement.

Some applicants even submitted different sets of documents for multiple registrations, all of which were approved without scrutiny. False verification emails were sent from fabricated addresses to validate counterfeit credentials, it read.

Authorities discovered that Kuldeep Singh continued approving registrations through his personal email

even after leaving office on August 16, 2023. Before his final suspension on September 25, 2023, he had illegally approved 232 additional applications, the statement read.

In total, Singh had approved 4,928 pharmacist registrations during his tenure from March 17, 2020, to September 25, 2023.

The ACB has arrested 47 people, including six touts, a printing shop owner, three employees of pharmacy col-

leges and 35 people operating as illegal pharmacists or chemists, read the statement.

Neeraj, a printing shop owner from Delhi's Shahbad, was identified as the supplier of fake certificates. A forensic analysis of his computer revealed the creation of multiple forged documents.

"ACB have seized forged training certificates, diplomas and the computer systems used for document fabrication. Investigators suspect that a large number of chemists in Delhi have been operating illegally without proper qualifications, with some not even having completed high school," the officer said in the statement.

Fire in Dwarka garage guts 11 cars

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Eleven cars were gutted in a fire in a garage in Delhi's Dwarka Sector-24 in the early hours of Wednesday, an official said. No one was reported injured in the blaze. Nine fire tenders were dispatched to control the fire, he said.

A call regarding the fire in a garage in Dhul Siras in the Dwarka area was received at 2.58 am on Wednesday, a Delhi Fire Services official said. The firefighting operation went on till 4.05 am, he said.

Eleven cars were gutted in the fire and some spare parts were damaged, he added.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh said they received information about the fire at 3.12 am at Dwarka Sector 23 Police Station.

Ritik, the owner of the garage that caught fire, said 10 to 12 cars parked near Shri Shyam Automobile caught fire, the DCP was quoted as saying in a statement.

"The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained and investigations on the incident are still on," the DCP said.

Fire strikes Gandhi Nagar again in a week

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A fire broke out in a building in Delhi's Gandhi Nagar area on Wednesday, the second such incident at the same site in a week, an official said.

No casualties were reported in the incident, he said.

A call regarding the fire at a building in Gali Number 5 in Peepal Wali Gali was received at 3.42 pm on, a

Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said, adding that the blaze was caused by a short circuit.

Three fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the flames, he said.

Fire officer Anoop Singh informed that a fire had broken out in the same building on March 29.

While no injury was reported, household belongings were damaged in the fire, he added.

Police dismantles international drug gang

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Crime Branch has dismantled a narco-syndicate operating across multiple states and arrested seven key operatives, including three Nepalese nationals, an official said on Wednesday.

The operation led to seizure of above 17 kilograms of 'charas' (hashish) worth approximately Rs 8.75 crore in the international market, police said.

The syndicate was supply-

ing 'charas' from Nepal and Kasol (Himachal Pradesh) to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

Rajal Commissioner of Police (Crime) Devesh Chandra Srivastava said the "operation was initiated following a tip off on November 20 regarding the supply of hashish in Delhi's Majnu Ka Tila area".

"A police team arrested two suspects -- Prem Thapa and Md Jameel -- recovering 1.192 kg of charas from them. Subsequently, an FIR was registered and

further investigation was launched," he added.

The senior police official said the interrogation of the arrested suspects led to identification and arrest of other key operatives.

Ganga Gurung Thapa, a Nepalese national, was apprehended in Wazirabad with 712 grams of charas. Further searches at her residence resulted in the recovery of an additional 13.766 kg of drug, police said.

Based on Thapa's disclosures, the police arrested Ankit Budha, a Nepalese

resident of Kasol, who was supplying drug to the syndicate.

Another accused, Pradeep Kumar from Haryana, was arrested for distributing 'charas' to the drug users in Faridabad and Ballabhgarh.

The operation also led to the arrest of Manjeet from Punjab's Kharar. He was caught while transporting 1.856 kg of drug hidden in the stepney of his SUV. He was on his way to deliver the contraband to Moti Lal in Jaipur who was also arrested.

SENSEX, NIFTY REBOUND AHEAD OF TRUMP TARIFF CALL

President Trump has emphasised that the US will match tariffs imposed by India, to ensure fair trade.


AGENCIES
MUMBAI

Indian stock indices recovered considerably on Wednesday after experiencing a slump in the previous session. Sensex closed at 76,617.44 points, up 592.93 points or up 0.78 per cent, Nifty closed at 23,332.35 points, up 166.65 points or 0.72 per cent, respectively.

All the sectoral indices were in the green today, with Nifty Realty rising the most at 3.61 per cent, data showed. On Tuesday, Sensex slumped about 1,400 points in a stock market bloodbath. Now, all eyes are on the Trump administration's reciprocal tariff plans set to be announced in the early hours of Thursday. Those announcements will come into effect immediately. Trump administration intends to implement reciprocal

QUICK VIEW

- **Markets Rebound:** Sensex jumps 593 pts, Nifty up 167 after Tuesday's sharp fall.
- **Broad Gains:** All sectoral indices in green; Nifty Realty surges 3.6%.
- **Tariff Relief Hopes:** Trump hints at softer stance on India; investors upbeat.
- **PMI Boost:** March manufacturing PMI hits 8-month high, lifts sentiment.



tariffs on trading partners as part of the "Fair and Reciprocal Plan".

Experts say that US President Donald Trump's statement that India was planning to drop its tariffs on American goods, substantially supported the markets on Wednesday.

Perhaps Trump's comments were seen by investors as a hint that the US will go soft on India as both countries are negotiating a bilateral trade pact. Faced with Trump's tariffs, some countries have imposed counter-tariffs on US goods, but India has stayed

away from any such move. "Despite mixed global cues surrounding the impending US tariffs, the domestic market experienced steady gains. This optimism was largely driven by expectations that the tariffs would have a minimal impact on the domestic

economy, given the positive progress in India-US trade negotiations," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited.

Nair added that sentiment was further reinforced by India's manufacturing PMI for March, which reached an eight-month high, hinting at a recovery in Q4FY25 corporate earnings.

Since assuming office for his second term, President Trump has reiterated his stance on tariff reciprocity, emphasising that the United States will match tariffs imposed by other countries, including India, to ensure fair trade.

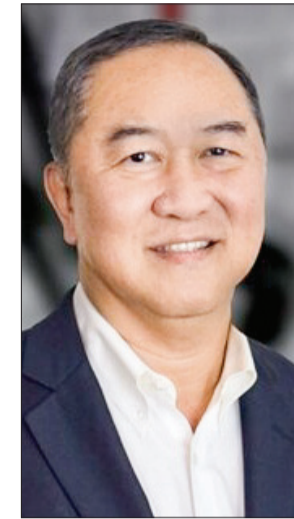
The performance of the stock market has significant implications for the national economy, investor confidence, and financial stability, especially in the context of international trade developments.

KC Ang new president of Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing

AGENCIES
MUMBAI

Tata Electronics Private Limited, a pioneer in the Indian electronics and semiconductor manufacturing sector, announced the appointment of KC Ang as President and Head of its Foundry business - Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing Private Limited reporting to Dr. Randhir Thakur, CEO & MD of Tata Electronics. In this role, KC will spearhead Tata Electronics' advanced AI-enabled foundry operations and play a key role in driving innovation and excellence while forming strategic partnerships to position Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing as a global leader in chip manufacturing.

With over three decades of experience in the foundry industry, KC specialises in fab start-up, management, operations, and technology transfer, as well as customer, supplier, and industry relationship management. Throughout his global career, KC has worked extensively in



countries such as Malaysia, Germany, the United States of America, and China. Most recently, KC was President - Asia and Chairman - China at Global Foundries, a global leader in semiconductor manufacturing, where he served for over fifteen years.

Born in Malaysia, KC holds a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from National Taiwan University and a Master's degree in Engineering from the University of Texas.

Commenting on the ap-

pointment, Dr. Randhir Thakur, said, "We are delighted to have an industry veteran like KC Ang join us and be part of the team driving our semiconductor journey. I welcome KC to Tata Electronics and Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing. His extensive industry knowledge and diverse expertise will be valuable as we make steady progress towards commencing operations at our Dholera Fab. With his extensive experience, KC will drive manufacturing operations and work closely with our customers and ecosystem partners."

KC Ang said, "I am excited to be a part of Tata Electronics at this extremely promising juncture for the Indian semiconductor manufacturing industry. This sector is poised to make a significant global impact in the coming years, and I look forward to leveraging my experience to drive Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing to the forefront of global chip manufacturing."

Airtel, Nokia expand collaboration to speed up 5G service delivery

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Telecommunications companies Bharti Airtel and Nokia are expanding their partnership with the deployment of Nokia's Packet Core appliance-based and Fixed Wireless Access solutions for providing a better network experience for Airtel's growing 4G and 5G customer base.

As per a joint statement, the solution will help seamlessly integrate 5G and 4G technologies into a single set of servers.

Nokia's FWA will provide additional capacities for home broadband and enterprise-critical application services.



As per the statement, Airtel will use Nokia's automation framework to realise zero-touch service launch and efficient lifecycle management for core network functions to enhance its ability to deliver new services faster while reducing network operational costs.

Using Nokia's converged Packet Core solution for 5G standalone (SA) readiness,

Airtel will continue its evolution toward advanced 5G and simplify its network architecture to meet the ever growing need of data while reducing network operational costs.

This, the statement said, will help Airtel optimise its hardware footprint and reduce its cost per bit by utilising appliance-based Packet Core gateways, while maintaining the rest of the network elements in a cloud-native architecture.

The rollout covers network automation in a multi-year deal that spans the majority of Airtel's service regions across the country. The collaboration entails advancing autonomous networks by utilising GenAI for service orchestration and assurance.

Startup Mahakumbh 2.0 kicks off today

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Second Edition of Startup Mahakumbh, presented by Government e Marketplace (GeM), is set to commence from April 3rd to 5th, 2025, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. End-to-end onboarding assistance will be provided to all Startups so that they are ready to start selling on GeM.

The GeM Pavilion will serve as an open platform for participating Startups to engage with select Government buyers and explore market-fit opportunities for their innovative products and



services. Visitors can also interact with GeMAI, a virtual chatbot providing an immersive experience on the GeM portal, according to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry in an official statement.

According to the statement, with chat features and voice command functionality in eight

languages, GeMAI will assist visitors in navigating the platform, answering queries, and tracking tickets. CEO, GeM, Ajay Bhadoo, said that the GeM Pavilion (Hall 5) will provide an exclusive opportunity for newly registered Startups to avail professional product photoshoot and catalogue

uploading assistance - completely free of cost.

In alignment with its vision of onboarding maximum eligible Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)-registered Startups onto its platform, GeM is setting up a mega Pavilion in Hall 5 to facilitate Startup registrations during the three-day event. As part of GeM's extensive outreach program, Team GeM will offer guided onboarding support to help Startups seamlessly integrate as Sellers on India's largest e-marketplace for Government buyers, the statement added.

Throughout the event,

various sessions led by GeM leadership will explore opportunities for Startups in public procurement. Special masterclasses are also being planned to provide sector-specific insights that will help Startups scale their business in the public procurement domain. Senior officials from GeM will be present at the event to engage with the Startup community.

The event will bring together over 3000 Startups, 1000+ incubators and accelerators, and industry leaders across 10 key sectors, making it the world's biggest platform for showcasing innovation.

GeM facilitates hiring of over 1 mn manpower in 2024-25

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Digital procurement platform, Government e-Marketplace (GeM), has achieved a significant milestone by facilitating the hiring of over 1 million manpower resources by government organisations in the current fiscal year (2024-25), the Ministry of Commerce & Industry said on Wednesday.

Manpower outsourcing of GeM provides government buyers with a seamless solution to hire outsourced resources.



Over 33,000 service providers on the platform enable buyers to engage manpower based on diverse criteria, including minimum wages and fixed remuneration.

Various skilled and unskilled roles such as Security Personnel, Horticulture Staff, Multi-Tasking Staff, Data Entry Operators, and Facility Management Professionals can be hired through

the portal.

Speaking on this achievement, CEO of GeM, Ajay Bhadoo, stated, "GeM has harnessed digital capabilities and has emerged as a one-stop-shop for procurement of all possible services required by government buyers at various levels of administration. Our manpower outsourcing service not only simplifies the hiring process for government organizations but also ensures strict labour compliance through our comprehensive Service Level Agreement." "This milestone under-

scores GeM's commitment to transforming public procurement through transparency, compliance, and efficiency," the ministry said.

GeM's manpower outsourcing service offers flexibility to select resources based on skills, profiles, educational qualifications, and experience

GeM's adherence with labour laws and regulations ensures that all transactions meet statutory requirements, providing government buyers with peace of mind while engaging outsourced resources.

'Hiked fertiliser subsidy unlikely to improve companies' margins'

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The gross margins of fertiliser makers are unlikely to improve in tandem with the previous financial year 2024-25, despite the latest raise in subsidy rates by the central government, asserted brokerage firm Anand Rathi.

The brokerage firm has argued that a considerable increase in global retail market prices, coupled with rupee depreciation,

are the key reasons behind the projections.

Anand Rathi said back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that gross margins, on average, for H1 2025-26 are likely to be 32 percent versus 35 percent in the same period last year (assuming the status quo in farmgate and retail market prices).

At the same time, it believes the industry is likely to benefit from carry-over inventories in H1 2025-26. "Overall, we believe this

to be neutral to positive for the complex fertilizer industry," Anand Rathi said.

"The government increasing subsidy/tonne for H1 FY26 would result in similar/marginal contraction in gross margin for most of the complex fertiliser grades. Ahead, we believe that the sector will focus on manufacturing more NPK than DAP, as the former would be more margin accretive," it added.

ECONOMY WRAP

Mudra scheme boosts financial inclusion: SBI Report

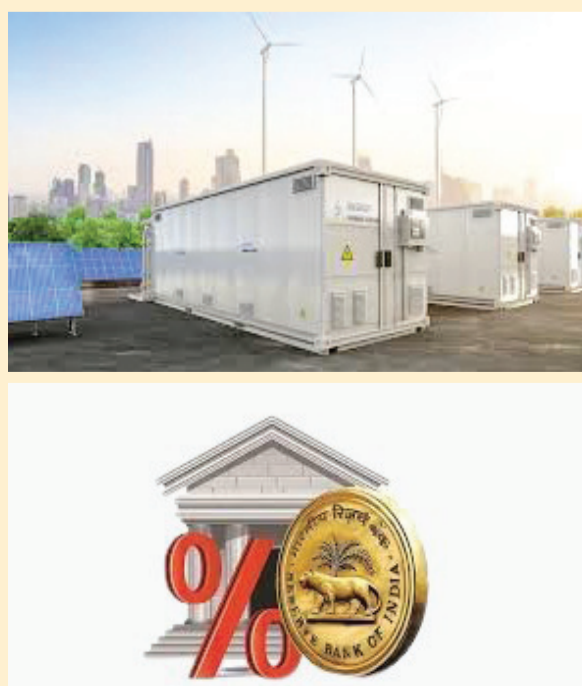
According to SBI Research, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is significantly benefiting financially weaker states like Bihar, UP, Odisha, and the North East, enhancing financial inclusion and economic empowerment. The report highlights a rise in disbursements to women-

led MSMEs, leading to increased employment by women. Around 68% of PMMY account holders are women. Per-woman loan disbursement and deposits have grown at 13% and 14% CAGR respectively since FY16, making PMMY a key tool for grassroots empowerment.



Mumbai housing registrations surge ahead of rate hike

Mumbai saw a 10% YoY rise in housing registrations in March 2025, reaching 15,501 units, with property values jumping 42% to Rs 265 billion, according to Nuvama. The surge was driven by buyers advancing purchases before the April hike in ready reckoner rates. Residential units made up 80% of registrations, with a shift toward larger homes—units over 1,000 sq ft rose to 14% from 9% YoY. FY25 marked a record year with unit registrations up 9% and values up 22% to Rs 2.2 trillion.



Battery storage key to net-zero goals: Report

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) are crucial for achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, according to BofA Global Research. As solar and wind power are intermittent, BESS ensures grid stability and efficient use of renewables. However, raw material shortages and recycling challenges—especially for lithium, cobalt, and nickel—pose major hurdles. The EU and US are working on circular economy policies, aiming to recover key materials from waste batteries.

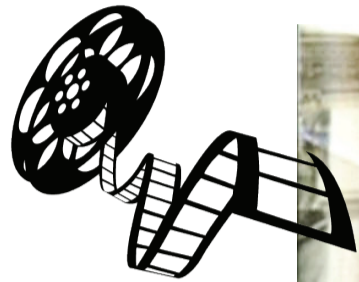
India SME Forum seeks phased IMS rollout under GST

The India SME Forum has urged the government to delay and phase the rollout of the Invoice Management System (IMS) under GST, citing major financial and operational challenges for MSMEs. IMS, aimed at real-time invoice reconciliation to curb Input Tax Credit mismatches, is proving difficult for small businesses due to limited preparation time, technical glitches, and increased compliance costs—estimated at Rs 1.5 lakh annually per business. Key concerns include

short reconciliation windows, lack of infrastructure, delayed API tools, and strict credit note timelines. The Forum recommends a 6-12 month phased rollout, improved supplier dashboards, and more flexibility in handling disputed invoices to avoid disruption in MSME operations and ensure smoother compliance.

HOW BOLLYWOOD BECAME INDIA'S CULTURAL SUPERPOWER — AND WHY THE SOUTH IS NOW STEALING THE SPOTLIGHT

In the 1950s, Raj Kapoor's 'Awaara' captivated over 100 million viewers in the USSR and China. Amitabh Bachchan ruled screens from Egypt to Nigeria in the '80s, while Bollywood became a cultural lifeline for the Indian diaspora in cities like London and Toronto.



For decades, Bollywood was more than just India's biggest film industry — it was a cultural juggernaut. The music, the stars, the stories: they weren't merely entertainment. They were a religion. In a country as vast and diverse as India, Bollywood was the unifying dream, offering millions a glittering window into romance, rebellion, family, and fantasy. It set the tone, the trend, and the tempo for the rest of the nation's film industries. But now, as the celluloid reels spin into the 2020s, there is a dramatic twist in the tale.

THE SOUTH RISES

What was once a one-way current of influence from Bollywood to the regional industries has evolved into a dynamic exchange. And more strikingly, the South Indian film industries — particularly Telugu (Tollywood) and Tamil (Kollywood) — are no longer following in Bollywood's shadow. They are setting the pace, commanding the audience, and shaping the future of Indian cinema.

THE GOLDEN ERA OF BOLLYWOOD INFLUENCE

Bollywood's dominance wasn't an accident. From the 1950s through the 1990s, it served as both a mirror of Indian society and a mould shaping it. The Golden Age brought socially resonant films like 'Mother India' and 'Pyasa', whose stories of poverty, patriotism, and poetic despair struck deep chords. The '70s and '80s introduced the anti-hero and the 'Angry Young Man' through the genius of Salim-Javed, who penned films like 'Deewar', 'Sholay', and 'Don'. These narratives of



Soviet citizens gathered around a poster of Raj Kapoor's 'Awaara' in Moscow in 1950. Source: Reddit

vengeance, justice, and redemption echoed the frustration and aspiration of an India in flux.

Regional industries took notice. Remakes of Hindi films became a common practice. Scripts by Salim-Javed were adapted into Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam, sometimes becoming career-defining hits for actors in those regions. Rajinikanth's early stardom in Tamil cinema owes much to this era, with his performances in 'Billa' (a remake of Don) and 'The' (a remake of 'Deewar') cementing his image as a Southern superstar with pan-Indian appeal.

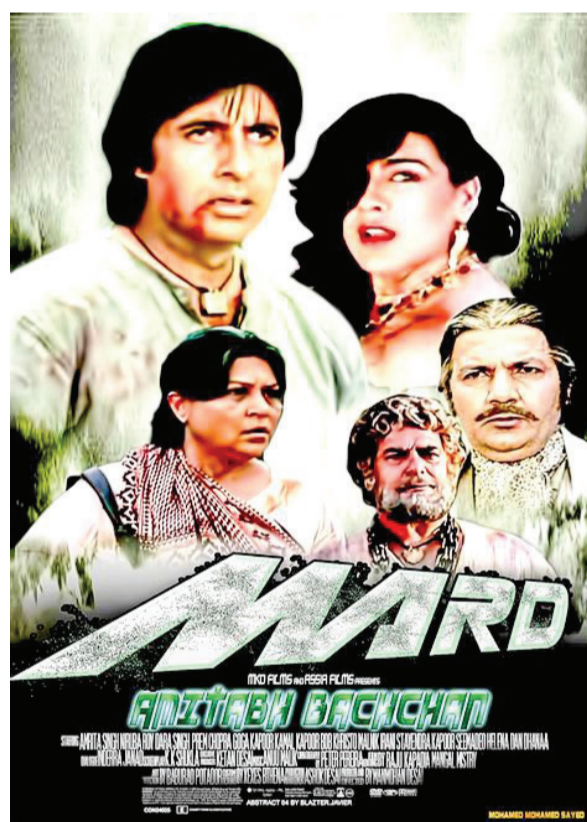
Bollywood's musical grammar was also contagious. Songs weren't just interludes; they were emotional punctuation marks. The trend of elaborate song-and-dance sequences, romantic ballads, and high-energy item numbers quickly spread to other in-

dustries. Tamil and Telugu films in the '60s and '70s began integrating these musical spectacles, recognizing their mass appeal. In Maharashtra and Bengal, too, mainstream filmmakers often mirrored the Bollywood formula: melodrama, romance, a dash of comedy, and a climactic family reunion.

A SHARED STORYTELLING CULTURE

By the 1990s, Bollywood had perfected its formula for family-centric entertainment. Films like 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!' and 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' became cultural events, not just films. Weddings weren't complete without referencing these films; fashion was dictated by what Madhuri or Kajol wore on screen. And these weren't just Hindi-language phenomena.

'Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!' was dubbed into Telugu and ran for over 200 days in Andhra Pradesh — a staggering feat that demonstrated the magnetic pull of Bollywood across linguistic lines. Regional filmmakers took note, adapting the themes of family loyalty, tradition, and diaspora romance to their cultural



Amitabh Bachchan, Prem Chopra, Nirupa Roy, Amrita Singh, and Dara Singh in Mard (1985). IMDB

contexts. The South Indian cinema, while rooted in its own mythologies and social issues, began weaving Bollywood-style narratives into its storytelling fabric.

The cross-industry remake culture blossomed. Comedies like 'Golmaal' (1979) became 'Thillu Mullu' (1981) in Tamil. But increasingly, regional films also began influencing Bollywood.

While the primary flow of inspiration was still north-to-south, the seeds of mutual influence were sown.

Technically, Bollywood also led the way. When it transitioned to color, or embraced multi-location shoots, other industries followed. When the PR machine of Bollywood began cultivating fan clubs and mass merchandising



Baahubali Poster.

around stars like Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan, regional industries mirrored the model, building their constellation of fan-driven stardom. Bollywood, in effect, set the gold standard.

THE SOUTH BREAKS THE CEILING

The turning point came in the 2010s. South Indian cinema, long considered "regional," decided to stop playing second fiddle. With bigger budgets, bolder ideas, and brilliant execution, it rewrote the rules of the game.

'Baahubali: The Beginning' (2015) and its sequel 'Baahubali 2: The Conclusion' (2017) weren't just movies — they were spectacles. Directed by S.S. Rajamouli, these Telugu-language epics brought myth, fantasy, and heroism to a scale unseen in Indian cinema. Baahubali 2 became the highest-grossing Indian film of all time, proving that a regional industry could not only match Bollywood but eclipse it.

The floodgates opened. 'K.G.F: Chapter 1' (Kannada) and 'Pushpa: The Rise' (Telugu) became household names across India. 'RRR' (2022), another Rajamouli magnum opus, became a global sensation, winning an Oscar for Best Original Song ('Naatu Naatu') and receiving standing ovations in American theatres. These were not Hindi films. Yet they united Indian audiences in a way Bollywood once did.

The numbers tell the story. In 2022, Bollywood accounted for only 33% of domestic box office revenue. Telugu and Tamil films, combined, took 36%. This was unthinkable a decade ago.

And the North took notice. Hindi-speaking audiences, long loyal to Bollywood, now thronged theatres for dubbed Telugu and Tamil films. South Indian heroes like Allu Arjun, Yash, and Jr. NTR became national icons. The roles reversed. Bollywood began remaking Southern hits — Kabir Singh (2019) was a remake

of Arjun Reddy (Telugu), and Vikram Vedha (2022) was adapted straight from its Tamil namesake.

AN INDUSTRY WITHOUT BORDERS

What does this mean for Indian cinema? In a word: convergence.

The industry is no longer fragmented by language or geography. Today, filmmakers collaborate across regions. Bollywood actors appear in Tamil films; Telugu producers finance Hindi releases. Directors like Shankar are pan-Indian by design. The lines have blurred.

Cinematically too, the convergence is exciting. Southern films brought high-octane action and rooted folklore into the national mainstream. Bollywood, in turn, contributed polish, global appeal, and star power. The result is a new Indian cinema that is grander, bolder, and more inclusive than ever before.

The creative synergy has also impacted audience expectations. Viewers now crave spectacle — not just emotionally driven drama. Films like 'Pathaan' and 'Brahmastra' show Bollywood responding to the challenge with high-concept storytelling and visual wizardry. But it's not always easy. Where 'Baahubali' and 'RRR' succeeded with conviction and storytelling muscle, some Bollywood big-budget attempts ('Thugs of Hindostan', 'Shamsher') fell flat. The message is clear: scale alone isn't enough — story and soul matter.

THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Bollywood's international journey began long before the South went pan-India. In the 1950s, Raj Kapoor became a household name in the USSR. His film 'Awaara' drew over 100 million viewers across the Soviet Union and China. Its themes of class struggle and justice resonated across ideological boundaries.

In the Middle East and Africa, Amitabh Bachchan's films lit up screens from Cairo to Casablanca.

'Mard' (1985) was a sensation in Egypt, and vendors sold t-shirts with his face for years. In Nigeria, Hindi movies were weekend staples. Even today, older fans in Egypt and Russia remember the songs and characters of Bollywood's golden age with affection.

The diaspora carried the torch further. In London, Toronto, Dubai, and Durban, Bollywood offered Indians abroad a taste of home. By the 1990s, Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, and Hrithik Roshan were global icons. Western curiosity grew: Bombay Dreams hit London's West End, and 'Lagaan' was nominated for an Oscar. Bollywood became a genre unto itself: vibrant, emotional, musical.

In the 2010s, films like '3 Idiots' and 'Dangal' broke into non-traditional markets. 'Dangal' earned over \$190 million in China alone. Its message of gender empowerment and personal triumph crossed language barriers. In Japan, 'Muthu' (starring Rajinikanth) and 'Dil Se' (with Shah Rukh Khan) gained cult status. Bollywood had officially gone global.

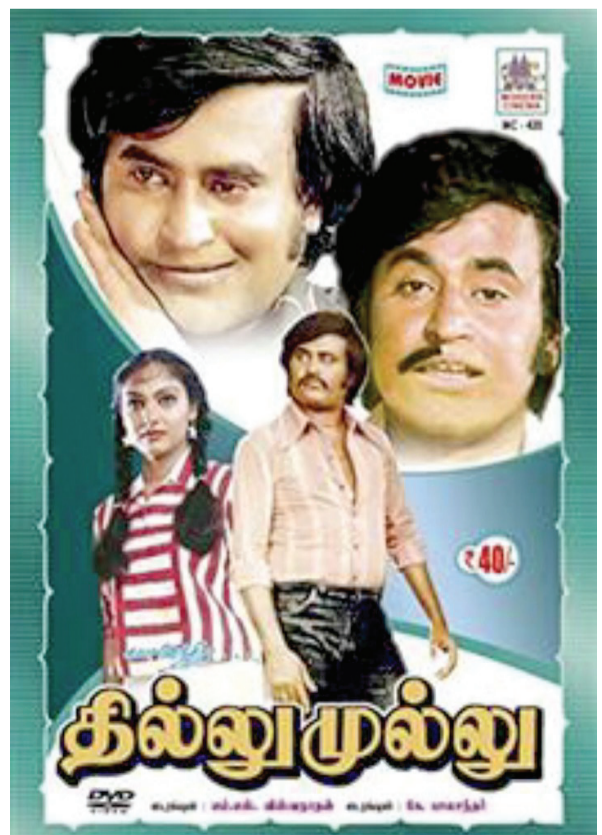
But here too, the Southern wave followed. RRR wasn't just a national success. It was a phenomenon. The West embraced it with viral enthusiasm, drawn by its operatic action, emotional arcs, and infectious energy. At film festivals and award shows, it stood shoulder-to-shoulder with global cinema giants. The narrative had changed: Bollywood no longer held India's only passport to the world.

THE NEW EPIC

Today, Indian cinema is in the middle of its most exciting chapter yet. Bollywood remains powerful, but it is no longer the singular voice of Indian storytelling. The South has risen, not in opposition, but in collaboration. And together, they are crafting a cinema that is rich, diverse, and fearless.

Audiences have grown smarter, bolder, and more curious. They want depth with dazzle, tradition with innovation, and emotion with impact. And filmmakers — from Mumbai to Madurai — are rising to the challenge.

The interval is over. The second half has begun. And the climax? It's anyone's guess. But one thing is certain: Indian cinema is no longer just Bollywood. It is a chorus of many voices, singing together in spectacular harmony on the world stage.



The Hindi comedy 'Golmaal' (1979) was remade in Tamil as 'Thillu Mullu' (1981)



'The Brothers' (1979) Chinese film was a remake of 'Deewar', stars Tony Liu as Amitabh Bachchan's criminal, while Danny Lee steps into the role of the righteous police officer brother played by Shashi Kapoor.

HERITAGE CARS OF RAJASTHAN: A GLIMPSE INTO ROYALTY, LUXURY, AND HISTORY

TDG NETWORK

Rajasthan, often referred to as the land of kings, has a rich and vibrant history. The state has always been known for its royal families, majestic palaces, and grandiose lifestyle. Among the many symbols of royal luxury, one of the most captivating is the fleet of heritage cars owned by the royal families of Rajasthan. These cars, many of which date back to the early 20th century, are not just vehicles but embody the rich legacy, opulence, and history of the region. Today, these cars are treasured collectibles and a significant part of Rajasthan's cultural heritage.

THE ROYAL CONNECTION TO CARS

The introduction of automobiles to India in the early 20th century coincided with the flourishing of the princely states, including Rajasthan. With their increasing wealth and prominence, the royal families wanted to make a mark in terms of style and luxury. Cars were seen as a status symbol and a means to exhibit their power and prestige.

The royals of Rajasthan were among the first to embrace the luxury of automobiles. They didn't just buy ordinary cars; they went for the best and most opulent models available, often commissioning unique, customized vehicles with special features. Many of these cars were imported from European countries, such as England, France, and Germany, and were equipped with the finest materials, including polished wood, leather upholstery, and gold inlays.

THE CARS OF THE MAHARAJAS

The history of heritage cars in Rajasthan is closely tied to the opulent lifestyles of its Maharajas and Maharani's. The royal families were known for their extravagant tastes, and their love for automobiles was no exception. These majestic vehicles were used for ceremonial purposes, royal processions, and personal transport. Some of the most notable royal families of Rajasthan, such as the Mewar, Jaipur, Udaipur, and Jodhpur families, have an impressive collection of heritage cars.

THE MAHARANA OF MEWAR'S CARS

The Maharana of Mewar, a royal family from Udaipur, is known for its large collection of vintage cars, many of which were custom-made for the family. The famous vintage collection includes cars such as the Rolls-Royce Phantom, Bentley, and the iconic Packard. One of the most noteworthy cars in the collection is the Rolls-Royce Phantom III, which was used by the Maharana for ceremonial purposes and is now displayed in the Vintage & Classic Car Museum in Udaipur. The museum, set in the beautiful City Palace complex, showcases the luxury and royal taste in vehicles.

The Maharana's love for automobiles extends to their other vehicles as well. The family also possesses a 1934 Packard 1207, which is considered one of the most prestigious cars of its time. These cars are symbols of the Maharana's influence and the pride of Rajasthan's heritage.



THE MAHARAJA OF JAIPUR'S ROYAL FLEET

Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, is home to one of the most magnificent car collections, most of which belong to the Maharaja of Jaipur. Among the numerous cars in the royal collection, the Rolls-Royce Phantom IV stands out. This car, which was exclusively made for heads of state, is a classic example of luxury and power. The car was used by the Maharaja during state visits and official events.

Another significant car from Jaipur's royal col-

lection is the Jaguar MK VII, which was used by the Maharaja for personal transport. The sleek lines and elegant design of the car reflect the Maharaja's sophisticated taste. The Jaipur royal family also owns a 1948 Buick Roadmaster and several other luxury cars from the mid-20th century, each representing the grandeur and opulence associated with the Jaipur monarchy.

JODHPUR'S CLASSIC CAR COLLECTION

Jodhpur, home to the Maharaja of Jodhpur, has its own

prestigious car collection. The Maharaja of Jodhpur was an avid car collector, and the royal family is known for owning several vintage and heritage cars, many of which are considered among the finest in India. Among the collection are Rolls-Royce models, Cadillac, Jaguar, and Buick.

The 1934 Packard Convertible is one of the most prized cars in the Jodhpur collection. This car, with its distinctive design and unique features, is a testament to the royal family's impeccable taste in automobiles. The Maharaja of Jodhpur's collection is housed in the Umair Bhawan Palace and also displayed at a local museum for the public to enjoy.

THE ROYAL COLLECTION OF ALWAR

The Maharaja of Alwar, another prominent royal family in Rajasthan, also boasts a collection of classic cars. Known for their exclusivity, the cars in the Alwar royal collection include rare



models from Rolls-Royce, Cadillac, and Aston Martin. These vehicles were often used for ceremonial events and royal gatherings.

The 1930s Rolls-Royce Phantom II is one of the key pieces in the Alwar collection, known for its grandeur and elegance. The attention to detail in these cars, from the finely crafted interiors to the smooth engine performance, reflects the craftsmanship and artistry of the time.

THE ROLE OF HERITAGE CAR MUSEUMS

Several museums and institutions in Rajasthan now showcase the collections of these royal families, allowing the public to catch a glimpse of the grandeur of yesteryears. The Vintage & Classic Car Museum in Udaipur is one of the most famous museums in Rajasthan, exhibiting over 30 vintage cars, including the Rolls-Royce Phantom and the Packard 1207. The museum not only offers a look into the history of these royal cars but also educates visitors on the luxury and craftsmanship of the time.

In Jaipur, the Maharaja's Vintage Car Collection is a significant attraction. Housed in a section of the City Palace, this collection includes a wide range of

vehicles that were used by the royal family, including the Jaguar MK VII, Rolls-Royce, and Cadillac models. The museum also features various other vintage cars, each with its own history and significance.

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE CARS

Heritage cars are more than just vehicles; they represent the cultural and historical fabric of Rajasthan. They are symbols of the state's royal past and showcase the creativity, luxury, and opulence of the time. These cars were not merely tools for transportation; they were a means of showcasing power and prestige. The royal families' preference for European brands such as Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Cadillac, and Jaguar reflects the strong cultural exchange between Rajasthan and the rest of the world, especially during the British colonial period when many royal families had direct access to European luxury items.

Beyond their luxury and historical significance, these heritage cars are also a reminder of the rich craftsmanship of the time. Many of the cars were customized to meet the exact specifications of the royal families. For example, custom upholstery made from the finest leather, intricate woodwork, and specialized paint finishes were common features of these vehicles.

HERITAGE CARS AND RAJASTHAN'S TOURISM

The heritage cars of Rajasthan also play a significant role in tourism. Visitors

from across the globe flock to Rajasthan to experience its royal history, and the opportunity to see or ride in these majestic cars is a major attraction. Special heritage car rallies and exhibitions are organized in Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur, where enthusiasts and tourists can marvel at these timeless pieces of automotive history.

In recent years, some of the heritage cars have also been restored to their former glory and are available for hire in Rajasthan's luxurious hotels and palaces. Visitors can experience the royal lifestyle by riding in these iconic vehicles, making it a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many.

The heritage cars of Rajasthan represent the grandeur, opulence, and rich history of the region. These cars are not just machines; they are symbols of the royal families' power, taste, and cultural significance. From the Rolls-Royce Phantoms to the Packards and Cadillacs, each car has its own story to tell. These vehicles have become an integral part of Rajasthan's heritage and continue to be cherished by locals and visitors alike.

As Rajasthan moves forward, these heritage cars serve as a reminder of its majestic past, offering a glimpse into the royal lifestyle that once defined the state. Whether displayed in museums, participating in vintage car rallies, or being used for special events, these cars continue to captivate the imagination of people around the world, preserving the legacy of Rajasthan's royal history for generations to come.

MUSEUM OF CHITTORGARH: A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND HERITAGE

TDG NETWORK

Chittorgarh, one of Rajasthan's most historically rich cities, is home to numerous monuments, forts, palaces, and temples that narrate the stories of bravery, valor, and sacrifice of its royal past. Among the many attractions in this historic city, the Chittorgarh Museum stands as an important institution that preserves the region's illustrious history and cultural heritage. The museum offers a window into the grand past of Chittorgarh and provides visitors with a chance to witness the treasures, artifacts, and narratives that make up the essence of this fort city.

LOCATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Chittorgarh Museum is located within the premises of the Chittorgarh Fort, one of Rajasthan's largest and most significant forts, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The fort, with its vast expanse and numerous structures, tells the tale of Rajasthan's warrior kings and queens. Situated at a strategic location atop a hill, the fort was historically important for military defense and as a center of political power.

The museum itself is nestled near the entrance to the fort, and its central role is to offer a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical significance of Chittorgarh. With exhibits that showcase the legacy of Chittorgarh's rulers, their military conquests, and the daily life of the people during the medieval

period, the museum serves as an educational hub for both locals and tourists.

HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

The Chittorgarh Museum was established with the intent of preserving the rich history of the fort and the city, which dates back to the 7th century. The city was a prominent center of power in Rajasthan for centuries, with several Rajput dynasties ruling the region. The museum began as a small collection of artifacts but soon expanded due to the increasing interest in preserving the region's royal legacy. The Chittorgarh Fort, being a symbol of Rajput valour and sacrifice, was the ideal location for the museum, where visitors can view relics from a bygone era.

Over the years, the museum has grown in stature and scope, offering an immersive experience for those interested in understanding the cultural and historical context of Chittorgarh's past. Today, it houses a large collection of ancient sculptures, inscriptions, miniature paintings, arms, armor, and coins, among other artifacts.

COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITS

The Chittorgarh Museum's collection is as diverse as it is fascinating. The exhibits are carefully curated to provide an in-depth insight into various aspects of life in Chittorgarh and the Rajput culture. Some of the key highlights of the museum include:

Sculptures and Stone



Carvings: The museum features an extensive collection of sculptures and stone carvings that highlight the artistic achievements of Chittorgarh's artisans. These sculptures represent Hindu gods and goddesses, animals, and everyday life. The intricately carved statues are made from stone and marble, showcasing the fine craftsmanship of the region's sculptors.

The museum also houses several Ashtadhatu (eight metals) idols, which are sacred in Hindu culture.



These idols were once used in temples, and some of them date back to the 9th and 10th centuries. The carvings and inscriptions on these idols offer a glimpse into the spiritual and artistic traditions of medieval Rajasthan.

Weaponry and Armor: A key feature of the museum is its collection of ancient weapons and armor. Chittorgarh, known for its legendary warriors, was home to a number of battles, and the display of swords, shields, daggers,

and armor is a testament to the martial history of the region. The Rajput armor, which includes intricately designed helmets, shields, and weapons, is especially notable. Many of these items were used by the royal family and their soldiers during battles. One of the most significant pieces in the collection is the Khanda sword, a traditional weapon of the Rajputs, which is known for its double-edged blade and broad hilt. Other weapons include maces, spears, and daggers, all of which reflect the martial traditions of the Rajput kings.

Coins and Inscriptions: The museum also features a collection of ancient coins and inscriptions that help trace the history of Chittorgarh and its rulers. The coins, made of gold, silver, and copper, were minted during different periods of Chittorgarh's history, and they bear the names of

its rulers. These coins provide valuable insights into the economy and trade systems of the time. Inscriptions found on stone slabs and pillars offer important historical context. These inscriptions often contain royal edicts, battle records, and details about the administrative structure of the region. The ancient Sanskrit inscriptions, in particular, offer valuable information about the political and social environment during the reign of the Rajputs.

Miniature Paintings: The museum showcases a collection of miniature paintings, which were an important art form during the reign of the Rajput kings. These paintings depict royal life, battles, and religious themes and are characterized by their vibrant colors and intricate details. The miniature paintings also depict the legends of Rani Padmini, the queen of Chittorgarh, and her tragic story, which has become a part of Rajasthan's folklore.

The artistic style of these paintings is a blend of Mughal and Rajput influences and provides insight into the aesthetic preferences of the royal families. Some of the paintings date back to the 16th and 17th centuries, a period during which Chittorgarh was at its peak.

Rani Padmini's Legacy: The story of Rani Padmini is integral to Chittorgarh's history and is an iconic legend in Rajput culture. The museum dedicates a section to Rani Padmini, whose beauty and bravery are said to have

inspired the famous battle against the Sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khilji. The story of Padmini's self-sacrifice, known as Johar, is one of the most poignant chapters in Rajasthan's history. The museum displays paintings and manuscripts that depict Rani Padmini's life and the events that led to the tragic end of her reign.

Relics of Rajput Kings and Queens: The museum also houses personal artifacts that once belonged to the Rajput kings and queens of Chittorgarh. Items such as jewelry, decorative items, and royal attire offer a glimpse into the luxurious lifestyles of the Rajput rulers. The intricate craftsmanship of these items reflects the grandeur of the royal family.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

The Chittorgarh Museum itself is housed in a building that reflects the architectural style of the Rajput period. The design of the museum incorporates elements of traditional Rajput architecture, such as ornate carvings, arched doorways, and intricate lattice work. The museum is built in close proximity to the Vijay Stambh (Victory Tower) and the Kirti Stambh (Tower of Fame), both of which are iconic landmarks within the Chittorgarh Fort. Visitors can enjoy the panoramic views of the fort and its surroundings from the museum's vantage points.

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE

The museum plays a crucial role in preserving the history and culture of Chittorgarh for future generations. It serves as a source of education for both local residents and tourists who wish to learn about the region's past. The museum also conducts various educational programs and activities for school children and young adults to foster a deeper understanding of Rajasthan's rich heritage.

In addition to serving as a repository of history, the museum is an integral part of Chittorgarh's tourism industry. It attracts visitors from all over the world who are interested in the history of Rajasthan, and it contributes to the cultural and economic development of the region.

The Chittorgarh Museum is a treasure trove of history, culture, and art. With its vast collection of artifacts, sculptures, weapons, paintings, and royal relics, the museum offers an immersive journey through the glorious past of Chittorgarh. Whether you are a history enthusiast, an art lover, or a traveler exploring the royal legacy of Rajasthan, the Chittorgarh Museum is a must-visit destination that brings the ancient city's vibrant history to life. It not only preserves the memories of the past but also helps in passing down the legacy of the Rajput kings and their valorous contributions to Rajasthan's history.

HEGSETH BACKS TAIWAN, BUT TRUMP'S APPROACH DECIDES US STANCE

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth signals US support for Taiwan during his Asia tour, but Trump's transactional foreign policy and unpredictable decisions will ultimately dictate America's commitment to Taiwan.

TDG NETWORK

On Tuesday, China's military launched large-scale joint drills around Taiwan, showcasing an array of ships, aircraft, and even bizarre propaganda videos across the Taiwan Strait. This military show of force was widely interpreted as both a warning and a punitive action against Taiwan's government, which Beijing accuses of engaging in "separatist activity." The provocation came shortly after Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te designated China as a "foreign hostile force" in March, accompanied by 17 new measures aimed at countering espionage and influence operations from Beijing.

These military maneuvers were not only meant to intimidate Taiwan but also to send a calculated message to Washington. Beijing's strategic objective was clear: to test the resilience of U.S. support for Taiwan, especially amid the shifting dynamics of the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The timing of the drills was significant, coinciding with the recent diplomatic tour of U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth across Asia. His visit, which included meetings with key allies such as Japan and the Philippines, underscored America's ongoing commitment to maintaining strategic stability in

the Indo-Pacific. However, China's actions suggested that Beijing was attempting to recalibrate Washington's stance, questioning the reliability of U.S. support for Taiwan's sovereignty.

HEGSETH'S REASSURANCES

While Beijing's military drills aimed to destabilize Taiwan's confidence, Hegseth's remarks during his diplomatic tour offered a measure of reassurance. In Tokyo, he met with Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani and declared that the U.S. was "re-establishing deterrence" in the Indo-Pacific, suggesting that America's commitment to countering China's aggressive posture had not diminished.

Hegseth emphasized that the U.S. was committed to sustaining "robust, ready, and credible deterrence" in the Taiwan Strait. This message was particularly significant given the growing concerns among U.S. allies about China's expanding influence and military capabilities in the region.

In addition to his meetings in Japan, Hegseth visited the Philippines, where he met with President Ferdinand Marcos. Both leaders underscored the importance of standing "shoulder to shoulder" to deter potential conflict, especially amid escalating tensions in the South China Sea. These diplomatic



A Taiwan Air Force Mirage 2000 fighter jet approaches Hsinchu Airbase for landing. File Photo

engagements painted a picture of a U.S. determined to uphold its strategic interests in Asia.

However, analysts caution that while Hegseth's words were strong, they do not necessarily guarantee long-term U.S. support. The Trump administration's foreign policy has been marked by unpredictability, raising questions about the sustainability of these commitments.

THE PENTAGON'S LEAKED MEMO

While Hegseth was in Asia, a leaked internal Pentagon memo surfaced, revealing a shift in U.S. military strategy. The memo reportedly prioritized deterring a potential Chinese annexation of Taiwan, signaling a recalibration of America's defense posture in the Indo-Pacific.

The document stated, "China is the department's sole pacing threat, and denial of a Chinese fait accompli seizure of Taiwan—while simultaneously defending the U.S. homeland—is the department's sole pacing scenario."

This leaked directive suggested that the U.S. was redirecting its military focus away from traditional hotspots like the Middle East and Europe, where Russia continues to wage war on Ukraine. Instead, the Pentagon appeared to be concentrating its efforts on countering China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The memo's language—particularly the phrase "sole pacing scenario"—was notable because it underscored the seriousness with which the U.S. viewed the Taiwan

situation. It indicated that Taiwan's security had become a central concern for American defense planners, reflecting the administration's recognition of the high stakes involved.

For Taiwan, this development was both reassuring and concerning. On one hand, it suggested that the U.S. remained committed to protecting Taiwan's sovereignty. On the other hand, it highlighted the growing risks of increased military tensions between China and the U.S., with Taiwan caught in the middle.

TAIWAN'S REACTIONS

Taiwan responded to Hegseth's remarks with a mix of gratitude and cautious optimism. A Taiwanese official acknowledged that the U.S. commitment to bolstering

TDG EXPLAINER

Taiwan's military deterrence capabilities remained consistent with longstanding policy. The official also noted that Taiwan maintained "frequent and very positive" communications with various levels of the Trump administration, indicating ongoing diplomatic engagement.

Beyond diplomatic statements, there were other signs of U.S. support for Taiwan. A recent visit from the Alaska governor to Taiwan for discussions on gas sales, along with increased U.S. military training for Taiwanese soldiers and expedited deliveries of major weapons orders, demonstrated America's ongoing commitment to Taiwan's defense.

However, some analysts argue that Taiwan's actions reflect underlying concerns about U.S. reliability. Taipei's recent diplomatic efforts, including high-level delegations to Washington, pledges to increase defense spending, and major semiconductor deals, suggest that Taiwan is seeking to diversify its security partnerships. This indicates a growing awareness that America's support, while significant, may not be as steadfast as it once was.

THE TRUMP FACTOR

While Hegseth's comments and the Pentagon's memo provided some reassurance, experts warn that the ultimate arbiter of U.S. policy toward Taiwan is former President Donald Trump. His transactional approach to foreign policy has been a defining feature of his administration, characterized by shifting alliances, unpredictable decisions, and an emphasis on short-term gains over long-term commitments.

Trump's past actions, including his public questioning of Taiwan's strategic value, accusations of industrial theft, and his abrupt withdrawal of U.S. support for Ukraine, have left many in Taiwan questioning the reliability of America as a partner.

His disdain for multilateral alliances and his tendency to prioritize personal interests over global stability have further eroded confidence in his leadership.

Furthermore, Hegseth's own controversies—such as sharing sensitive military information with a journalist and his disparaging remarks about European allies—have

raised questions about his credibility and effectiveness as a defense leader. These issues cast a shadow over the administration's broader strategic objectives, including its commitment to Taiwan's security.

BEIJING'S WATCHFUL EYE

As tensions simmer, Beijing remains watchful, with reports of potential high-level meetings between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Ryan Hass from the Brookings Institution emphasized that it will be critical for Trump to deliver a clear and consistent message of resolve when engaging with Xi.

While Hegseth's statements and the leaked Pentagon memo are encouraging, they are ultimately only part of the equation. The true test of U.S. commitment will come down to Trump's actions—whether he can translate rhetoric into tangible support for Taiwan in the face of growing Chinese pressure.

The international community will be watching closely. The stakes are high, not just for Taiwan, but for the future of U.S.-China relations and the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. As Beijing evaluates Washington's resolve, the world holds its breath, awaiting the next chapter in this complex and volatile geopolitical saga.

Marine Le Pen's election ban escalates political crisis in France

TDG NETWORK

The decision by a French court to convict far-right leader Marine Le Pen of embezzlement and impose a five-year ban on her candidacy for public office has sent shockwaves through the French political landscape. This ruling, which also includes a four-year prison sentence (with two years suspended and two to be served under home detention), significantly reshapes the political dynamic of a country already grappling with instability.

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

France has been in a state of political turbulence for some time. President Emmanuel Macron's administration has faced significant resistance in a hung parliament, struggling to pass key reforms. His weak mandate, coupled with the rising influence of opposition parties, has exacerbated an already precarious situation. With Prime Minister François Bayrou at the helm of a fragile minority government, governing effectively has proven challenging. The ruling against Le Pen adds another layer of complexity to this scenario.

Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN) has been a dominant force in right-wing politics in France, steadily gaining support in recent elections. Opinion polls prior to the ruling suggested she was the frontrunner for the 2027 presidential elections. Her forced removal from the race introduces a vacuum in the political right that will be difficult to fill and could destabilize the



Le Pen waves at the audience after speaking at a rally in Paris on April 17, 2024. File Photo

TDG EXPLAINER

broader political spectrum.

THE CHARGES AND THE TRIAL

The conviction stems from accusations that Le Pen and other RN members engaged in embezzlement when she was a Member of the European Parliament. The court found that a fraudulent job contract scheme was used to siphon off more than 4 million euros in EU funds to benefit the RN. While Le Pen has denied any wrongdoing and vowed to appeal the decision, the ruling has immediate and significant consequences.

The appeal process in France can take several months, and during this period, political uncertainty will persist. If the conviction is upheld, Le Pen's political career could suffer an irreversible setback. However, if

the ruling is overturned, she could emerge even stronger, claiming vindication and reinforcing her narrative of being a victim of political persecution.

IMPACT ON RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL

With Le Pen sidelined, RN faces the challenge of finding a new presidential candidate. The most likely successor is Jordan Bardella, the party's president and one of Le Pen's closest allies. Bardella has been instrumental in modernizing the party and broadening its appeal beyond its traditional far-right base. However, he lacks Le Pen's charisma and widespread recognition among voters.

The RN will attempt to leverage Le Pen's conviction to galvanize its base, portraying her as the vic-

tim of a political conspiracy designed to prevent an outsider from reaching power. This narrative could resonate with many voters who already distrust the political establishment. If Bardella or another RN candidate can effectively channel this outrage, the party could still remain a formidable force in 2027.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL PRECEDENTS

Le Pen's supporters are quick to highlight that similar accusations have been levied against other politicians, including Prime Minister Bayrou, who was investigated for misappropriation of funds but ultimately cleared due to insufficient evidence. They argue that the judicial system disproportionately targets opposition figures, reinforcing their claim of an unfair establishment.

This case bears similarities to other high-profile legal battles involving politicians, such as former French President Nicolas Sarkozy,

who was convicted of corruption. However, unlike Sarkozy, Le Pen remains a viable candidate with a strong support base, making the stakes of her appeal even higher.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE

The ruling further weakens the already precarious position of Bayrou's minority government. The RN holds 142 out of 577 seats in the French National Assembly, and while this is not enough to topple the government outright, it can significantly hinder legislative progress. A more obstructive right-wing opposition could force Bayrou to rely even more heavily on the Socialist Party, further complicating governance and reducing the government's ability to implement economic reforms.

France is currently facing major economic challenges, including a public debt set to reach 120% of GDP by the end of the year. The country also needs to



French far-right leader Marine Le Pen leaves the courthouse on the day of the verdict of her trial alongside 24 other defendants and the RN party itself in Paris, France, March 31, 2025. File Photo

secure an additional 40 billion euros annually to bolster its military, a crucial requirement given the changing geopolitical landscape in Europe. The ongoing political instability could deter investors, keeping bond yields high and worsening the economic outlook. France's ten-year bonds are already at 3.4%, returning to 2023 levels, largely due to broader economic uncertainty exacerbated by the political situation.

THE 2027 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

With Le Pen potentially out of the race, the 2027 election becomes an open contest. If her conviction is upheld, the RN will need to find a candidate capable of maintaining its momentum. Jordan Bardella is the most obvious choice, but his ability to unite the party and appeal to voters beyond RN's core base remains untested.

On the left, no clear frontrunner has emerged. The Socialist Party remains fragmented, while the far-left La France Insoumise has struggled to gain traction beyond its loyal base. President Macron, ineligible for a third term, has yet to groom a successor with his level of appeal and political acumen.

If Le Pen's appeal is successful and she is allowed to run, she could enter the race with renewed vigor, portraying herself as a fighter who overcame legal persecution. Such a scenario could boost her electoral chances and lead to an even more polarized election campaign.

THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Regardless of how Le Pen's legal battle unfolds, the decision has already reshaped French politics. The ruling will likely fuel further distrust in the judiciary and political institutions, par-

ticularly among Le Pen's supporters. If she is prevented from running and the RN's candidate loses, the next president could face legitimacy concerns, with a portion of the electorate believing that the election was unfairly influenced by the courts.

Additionally, the case sets a precedent for legal battles playing a decisive role in French elections. This could open the door for more politically motivated prosecutions in the future, further eroding public trust in the political system.

CONCLUSION: A TENSE ROAD AHEAD

France is entering a period of heightened political and economic uncertainty. The conviction of Marine Le Pen removes a key player from the upcoming presidential race, but it does not eliminate the influence of the far right. If anything, it could embolden RN supporters and deepen the divide between populists and the political establishment.

For Prime Minister Bayrou's government, the ruling presents an additional challenge in an already difficult political landscape. With economic pressures mounting and legislative gridlock becoming more pronounced, navigating the coming years will require careful political maneuvering.

As Le Pen's appeal process unfolds, France will remain in a state of political limbo. Whether she ultimately returns to the race or not, the fallout from this decision will shape French politics for years to come.

FRANCE HOLDS RARE DEFENCE CABINET MEETING OVER IRAN

European strategists were asking themselves whether the campaign could be a precursor to a U.S. strike on Iran in the coming months.

AGENCIES
PARIS


French President Emmanuel Macron was convening key ministers and experts on Wednesday to discuss Iran, including its nuclear programme, amid growing tensions between Tehran and U.S. President Donald Trump, three diplomatic sources said.

Such a cabinet meeting dedicated to a specific subject is rare and highlights mounting concern among Washington's European allies that the United States and Israel could launch air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities unless there is a quick negotiated deal on its nuclear programme.

U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has reinforced

THE SUMMARY

- Macron convenes a rare, subject-specific cabinet meeting on Iran's nuclear programme.
- Growing U.S.-Iran tensions: Trump warned of air strikes and additional tariffs if negotiations stall.
- U.S. Defense Secretary Hegseth has boosted Middle East forces amid the bombing of Iranian-backed Houthis.
- European allies (France, Britain, Germany) are increasingly worried about a potential U.S./Israeli strike on Iran.



Military personnel stand guard at a nuclear facility in the Zardanj area of Isfahan, Iran, April 19, 2024, in this screengrab taken from video.

U.S. military capability in the Middle East with more warplanes, the Pentagon said on Tuesday, amid a U.S.

bombing campaign against the Houthis who control much of Yemen and are supported by Iran.

A senior European official said European strategists were asking themselves whether the campaign

could be a precursor to a U.S. strike on Iran in the coming months.

Trump, who has urged Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to engage immediately in negotiations, threatened Iran on Sunday with bombing and secondary tariffs if it did not come to an agreement over its nuclear programme, which Western countries say amounts to weapons development.

The foreign minister of Iran's direct adversary Israel will be in Paris on Thursday. Diplomatic sources said ministers from France, Britain and Germany were hoping to discuss the Iran dossier with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio when they convene in Brussels for a NATO ministerial meeting this week.

US sanctions target Iran's missile programmes

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

The United States on Tuesday (local time) sanctioned six entities and two individuals based in Iran, the UAE, and China that have been involved in the procurement of key components on behalf of entities connected to Iran's UAV and ballistic missile programs.

The US State Department said in a statement that "today's action is a part of President Trump's maximum pressure campaign on the Iranian regime to disrupt efforts by the US-sanctioned Iran-based Qods Aviation Industries to procure equipment for Iran's military-industrial complex and UAV program." "The United States will use all available means to expose and disrupt Iran's growing UAV and missile development programs and weapons proliferation, which destabilize the Middle East and beyond," the statement added.



Further, the State Department said that they will "continue to act" against the complex schemes Iran uses in third countries to conceal its acquisition and its transfers of sensitive technology.

According to the US State Department, Iran uses this technology and the proceeds from arms sales to bolster its military industrial base to build missiles and UAVs, which are used against fellow countries, as well as exported to Russia, terrorist proxy groups around the Middle East, and to other actors of concern.

On Monday, the US imposed visa restrictions on Chinese officials responsible for limiting the access of US officials to Tibetan areas.

This move is in response to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) long-standing refusal to allow US diplomats, journalists, and international observers into Tibet while Chinese officials enjoy unrestricted access to the United States.

US Senator Cory Booker makes record for second-longest Senate speech

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

In a remarkable display of determination, US Senator Cory Booker has shattered the record for the longest floor speech in modern Senate history. Booker, a Democrat from New Jersey, surpassed the late Senator Strom Thurmond's 1957 record of 24 hours and 18 minutes, CNN reported.

Booker began his speech at 7 pm on Monday (local time) and continued through the night, vowing to keep speaking as long as he was physically able. His marathon speech is a protest against actions taken by President Donald Trump's administration.

The speech has delayed legislative business in the Senate, but it is largely symbolic, as Booker is not attempting to block any specific legislation, as per CNN.



US Senator Cory Booker.

Booker's speech comes as Democrats face increasing pressure from their voters to take a tougher stance against Trump. With limited options available to them in Washington, Booker's speech stands out as a high-profile form of protest by a Democratic lawmaker so far in Trump's second term.

During his speech, Booker warned in his remarks that the "country is in crisis" as he railed against a wide range of issues, from castigating Elon Musk's efforts to overhaul the federal government under Trump to warning of potential cuts to key health care programs for millions of Americans.

"I rise with the intention of disrupting the normal business of the United States Senate for as long as I am physically able," Booker said at the outset of his remarks. "I rise tonight because I believe sincerely that our country is in crisis," Booker said.

"In just 71 days, the president of the United States has inflicted so much harm on Americans' safety, financial stability, the core foundations of our democracy," Booker said. "These are not normal times in America. And they should not be treated as such in the United States Senate."

Israel cancels all import duties on American-made goods

AGENCIES
TEL AVIV

At the directive of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Economy and Industry Minister Nir Barkat, Israel has cancelled all of the customs duties - tariffs - that have been levied until now on products from the US, Israel's largest trading partner.

After the approval of the Knesset Finance Committee and the Economy and Industry Minister's signature on the order, the amendment to the order regarding trade levies and protective measure will take effect and customs duties on all imports from the US will be cancelled.



Benjamin Netanyahu.

The US is Israel's closest ally and its most significant trading partner. In 2024, the export of goods to the US stood at USD 17.3 billion, while the export of services was estimated at USD 16.7 billion. Israel's government explained that the 1985 free trade agreement with the

After the approval of the Knesset Finance Committee and the Economy and Industry Minister's signature on the order, the amendment to the order regarding trade levies and protective measure will take effect and customs duties on all imports from the US will be cancelled.

US has led to the fact that the overwhelming majority (approximately 99 per cent) of goods imported from the US are already fully exempt from customs duties. Therefore, the reduction in customs duties will begin on a very limited number of products,

in the category of imported food and agricultural products from the US. "The reduction in customs duties will, in effect, expand the US-Israel trade agreement and strengthen bilateral strategic relations," the Prime Minister's Office,

N. Korea denounces US, Japan's pledge to co-produce missiles

AGENCIES
SEOUL

North Korea criticised a recent agreement by Japan and the United States on co-producing air-to-air missiles as aggravating regional security risks and another example of Washington's push to militarize Japan, state media said on Wednesday.

At a time the United States is upgrading its military command in Japan, the two countries' cooperation in munitions production clearly has military and aggressive intentions aimed at countries in the region, KCNA state news agency said.

The comments were attributed to an unnamed vice general director of the North's defence ministry and did not name specific countries.

But the official referred to the AIM-120 air-to-air missile system that the United States and Japan have agreed to accelerate co-producing during U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's visit to



US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth gives his opening speech at the beginning of his meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at the Prime Minister's office in Tokyo, Japan, March 30, 2025. File Photo

Tokyo on Sunday. Advancing the deployment of such a weapon used by aircraft involved in frequent military drills in the region that already pose a grave security threat adds a "new element of strategic instability to the Asia-Pacific region," the official said.

"Certainly, the centre of gravity of the U.S. hegemony-oriented military security strategy is changing and it is a new warning signal for the Asia-Pacific regional

society including the countries in Northeast Asia," the official said.

The agreement comes as "the U.S. has connived at and encouraged Japan's moves for a military giant since last century," the official said. In Tokyo, Hegseth and his Japanese counterpart agreed to accelerate a plan to jointly produce beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles and to consider co-producing other surface-to-air missiles.

Quoting from a telephone conversation between the two leaders, the newspaper reported, "The Senior General responded that he was deeply grateful and moved by the expression of the Prime Minister of India's

Myanmar govt, media welcome India's earthquake relief support

AGENCIES
MANDALAY

The Government of Myanmar has expressed deep gratitude for India's swift and substantial support in providing relief assistance following the devastating earthquake that struck the country on March 28.

Myanmar's Prime Minister, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, conveyed his appreciation through the Global New Light of Myanmar, stating that Myanmar was "deeply moved" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's support as Indian relief supplies continued to arrive at Yangon International Airport.

Quoting from a telephone conversation between the two leaders, the newspaper reported, "The Senior General responded that he was deeply grateful and moved by the expression of the Prime Minister of India's

condolences for the country of Myanmar and its people."

The report further added that the Senior General "sincerely appreciates the sympathy and support from the people of India."

On March 29, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with the Myanmar military junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing, and offered condolences on the loss of lives in the earthquake that struck Myanmar. He expressed India's readiness to stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar in this difficult hour.

He said that disaster relief material, humanitarian assistance, and search and rescue teams are being expeditiously dispatched to the affected areas as part of Operation Brahma. "Spoke with Senior General H.E. Min Aung Hlaing of Myanmar. Conveyed our deep condolences at the loss of lives in the devastating earthquake.

Uyghur deportation puts Thailand-EU trade talks at risk

AGENCIES
BANGKOK

The Committee on Economic Development is working alongside the foreign affairs and commerce ministries to assess the impact of the Thai government's deportation of Uyghurs on ongoing free trade negotiations with the European Union (EU), Bangkok Post reported.

On Thursday, the committee met with officials from both ministries, private sector representatives, the Thai Chamber of Commerce (TCC), and the Federation of Thai SMEs to discuss the situation.

Sittiphol Viboonthanakul, a People's Party (PP) MP and the committee's chairperson, stated before the meeting that the deportations could have serious consequences for Thailand's international trade relations, particularly given the EU's strong condemnation of the gov-



ernment's actions, as highlighted in the Bangkok Post report.

He further emphasised that the situation must be carefully examined to determine whether it could delay the signing of the free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU, which is expected to be finalised this year. Additionally, he noted that Thailand's ambitions to join the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) could also be affected.

Viboonthanakul suggested that discussions should

also consider the potential impact of US trade policies, including the possibility of increased tariffs on Thai exports, BP reported.

He stressed that the government must develop a strategy to handle any potential trade conflict and the economic repercussions if the Thailand-EU FTA is not completed as planned. During the meeting, representatives from the TCC maintained that Thailand has consistently adhered to international human rights standards, according to BP.

Nepal govt appeals public not to participate in any pro-monarchists demonstration

AGENCIES
KATHMANDU

The Government of Nepal has appealed to the general public not to participate in any of the demonstrations organized by monarchists.

Announcing the decisions of the cabinet meeting on Tuesday, the Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Prithvi Subba Gurung, informed that an appeal has been made not

to participate in the demonstrations of the royalist group.

"The Government of Nepal appeals to the general public not to get involved in such chaotic activities," he said, referring to the violence of 28 March, which claimed the lives of two.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs has been instructed to investigate the truth and facts of the Tinkune incident and take action against the culprits and make arrange-

ments to prevent such incidents from happening in the future," the cabinet decision said.

Minister Gurung informed about the decision to give the responsibility to the Ministry of Health and Population to arrange for the treatment of those injured in the incident.

"The government has decided to direct the Ministry of Health and Population to make arrangements for free medical treatment for those



injured in the protest that took place last Friday in the

name of supporters of the former monarch," the min-

ister said.

The cabinet meeting also decided to investigate the incidents of vandalism that took place during the protests and act against those found guilty.

One of the bloodiest pro-monarch protests in the Himalayan Nation's history, the March 28 protest called by pro-monarchist forces under the leadership of controversial businessman Durga Prasad, sent a spree of violence

across the capital.

The protest organized near the Tribhuvan International Airport turned violent, claiming the lives of two, which included a TV journalist. The Police, at the time to bring the situation under control, fired 60 live rounds.

One of the casualties has been identified to have bullet-inflicted wounds. Similarly, the Police fired 746 rounds of tear gas in an attempt to disperse the protesters.

During the protest 55 Nepal Police, 22-Armed Police Force (APF) personnel has been recorded to be injured.

In addition, 52 general public were injured in the violent clash which was followed by arson and vandalism. Nepal has arrested over 100 protesters including top most leaders from the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) for inciting violence in Kathmandu's Tinkune, which resulted in two deaths.

INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF LOS ANGELES TO BEGIN ON MAY 6

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The 23rd edition of the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) is set to run from May 6 and May 10, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

The gala will open with Varsha Bharath's directorial debut *Bad Girl* and close with Lawrence Valin's debut *Little Jaffna*. It will be held at Landmark Theatres Sunset and the WGA Theatre in Los Angeles.

Part of IFFLA are films including this year's Sundance Grand Jury winner *Sabar Bonda* (Cactus Pears) directed by debutant Rohan Kanawade, Raam Reddy's *The Fable* starring Manoj Bajpayee, Deepak Rauniyar's *Pooja*, Sir, *Village*



Rockstars 2 by Rima Das, Aranya Sahay's *Humans in the Loop*, documentary *A Fly on the Wall* from Nilesh Maniyar and Shonali Bose, and TV series *DUI Shaw* in its Los Angeles premiere by Bangladeshi filmmaker Nuhash Humayun.

The screening of the show will be followed by a masterclass with Humayun, an

IFFLA shorts alum. Anu Rangachar, IFFLA's Artistic Director, said the 2025 IFFLA line-up celebrates the rich diversity of South Asian cinema with a strong emphasis on female-driven narratives both in front and behind the camera.

"We are thrilled to present an expanded lineup

that not only showcases an exciting mix of talent, ranging from fearless new voices to returning alums and established auteurs, but also sparks vital crucial conversations.

"These films reflect complex and timely themes such as gender identity, migration, sexuality, mental health, climate change, and responsible technology, ensuring a truly thought-provoking and unforgettable festival experience," Anu said in a statement.

The slate includes an eclectic mix of South Asian films from countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the U S, the U K, and Canada, along with international co-productions from France, Singapore, and Norway.

Kartik accidentally hits man with guitar

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Kartik Aaryan and South Indian sensation Sreeleela are presently shooting for Anurag Basu's next romantic drama, the third part of *Aashiqui*, in Gangtok. Two of the recent behind-the-scenes (BTS) videos from the set that popped up online have got fans buzzing.

In a clip, Kartik is holding a guitar lip-syncing to the remixed version of *Tu Meri Zindagi Hai* from the old *Aashiqui*. Sreeleela, who also holds a guitar, seems to be a part of the band, while Anurag Basu



is directing the scene, giving cues to the audience.

Another video that went viral features Kartik Aaryan slapping a man with his guitar on stage. The clip left fans curious, with everyone wondering what happened to make this happen.

The actors were earlier seen shooting in North Bengal. One of the most shared photos from the shoot is of Kartik on a bike with Sreeleela as a pillion. With long hair and a thick beard, Kartik's left hand is clearly bandaged.

Besides the on-set snap-

shots, viral pictures also featured Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela being greeted warmly at a hotel in Siliguri. There were other BTS pics too, which featured the cast and crew celebrating some downtime together.

The title of the film is not revealed. Triptii Dimri was initially cast alongside Kartik but was replaced by Sreeleela. While discussing the casting swap at an event, Anurag Basu said, "She is still my best friend, I really like her as an actress. You should ask her too what happened."

SRK returns to Mumbai in style, spotted at airport

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan returned to Mumbai in the wee hours on Wednesday.

Shah Rukh Khan, popularly known as King Khan of Bollywood, was spotted at Mumbai International Airport as he returned from his long trip and hopped into a car.

Often seen in a mask and hoodie, Shah Rukh Khan's latest airport look has surprised his fans. In the visuals, the 'Jawan' actor looked handsome in a black shirt and loose blue jeans.

Shah Rukh complimented his outfit with black sunglasses. The actor greeted his fans before he hopped into his car after a long journey. He was accompanied by his manager, Pooja Dadlani.

Shah Rukh recently hosted an IPL 2025 opening ceremony, which signified a beautiful crossover between cricket and Bollywood. With his amazing hosting skills, SRK added "chaar chand" to the cer-



Shah Rukh complimented his outfit with black sunglasses. The actor greeted his fans before he hopped into his car after a long journey. He was accompanied by his manager, Pooja Dadlani.

emony. The highlight of the event was undoubtedly the moment when SRK called former RCB captain 'GOAT' and shook a leg with him on his blockbuster song 'Jhoomo Jo Pathaan'.

The entire Eden Gardens erupted into loud 'Kohli Kohli' chants. Like the audi-

ence, SRK could not resist himself and chanted 'Kohli Kohli'.

"Virat bhai is the only player who has been associated with just one team in the entirety of the IPL. He is the OG. The GOAT of IPL," said Shah Rukh before asking Kohli to come on the stage.

I can't support AI's plagiarism: Singer Vishal Dadlani

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Studio Ghibli trend of creating images in the unique Japanese art form using AI is creating a buzz on the internet. Turning pictures into a unique art style of the popular studio, Studio Ghibli, may have been loved by many, but for singer Vishal Dadlani, it is nothing more than a mere example of "AI Plagiarisation."

Indian Idol judge and singer Vishal Dadlani slammed the ongoing Studio Ghibli trend and urged fans not to



tag him in posts featuring his Ghibli-style avatar.

Through his Instagram story, Dadlani expressed his unhappiness with the plagiarism of an artist's life work by an Artificial Intelligence tool. The singer also highlighted the environmental hazards due to the generation of Ghibli-style photos.

He wrote, "Sorry, I'm not sharing any of the Studio Ghibli style images you guys have made of or for me. I just can't bring myself to support AI's plagiarism of an artist's life's work. Not to mention, the environmental horror that those images are. Please do NOT make any more. Thank you."

Vishal is best known for composing tracks for Om Shanti Om, Anjaana Anjaani, Dostana, I Hate Luv Storys, Bang Bang!, Sultan, Student of the Year, Befikre and War.

BRAIN PICKING



I think my confidence stems from my honesty. I'm brutally honest

— ALIA BHATT
(Indian Actress)

'Kantara Chapter 1' makers shut down delay rumours

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The much-awaited prequel to 'Kantara' has been confirmed for release on October 2, 2025. Fans can now relax, as the makers have officially shut down rumors about any delays.

Recently, social media was buzzing with speculation about the film's postponement. However, Hombale Films took to its Instagram account on Wednesday to clear the air with a firm statement that read, "????????? Doubts. ?????????? Delays The legendary saga, #KantaraChapter1 unfolds on October 2nd, 2025."

Actor Rishab Shetty has put his heart and soul into



his upcoming film, 'Kantara: Chapter 1'. Earlier, Instagram, he shared a glimpse of his intense training.

In the post, he can be seen deeply focused during his Kalaripayattu session and the dedication on his face said it all. The actor kept the caption simple, adding just a heart-shaped emoticon.

Rishab also won the pres-

tigious National Award for Best Actor for 'Kantara'. Written and directed by Shetty, 'Kantara' became a pan-India hit in 2022.

On receiving a National Award for the film, he told ANI earlier, "This has been possible because of my entire team. I am just the face of the film, it is all because of their hard work."

Aamir turned down 'Josh' for lack of communication: Mansoor Khan

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Mansoor Khan only has a few films under his belt and almost all of them featured his cousin Aamir Khan, but why was the actor not in Mansoor's 2000 romantic-action flick *Josh*.

Josh tells the story of a town in Goa divided by two rival gangs - the Eagles and



Scorpions. Max Dias heads the Eagles, but things take a turn when his twin sister, Shirley Dias, falls in love with Rahul, the younger brother of Prakash Sharma, leader of the Scorpion gang.

According to PTI, Mansoor initially wanted to offer the role of Rahul to Aamir but it seems that lack of communication led to the assumption that he would play the lead

role of Max. "I had written the script, and in my mind, Shah Rukh was always going to play Max... In my mind, Aamir was the younger brother (of Sharad's character), so the romantic angle was (supposed to be) between Aamir and Aishwarya. I narrated it to Aamir, but I didn't say who is playing who, and he immediately thought he is Max."

'Bring Her Back': Makers drop terrifying trailer of the new horror flick

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON DC

The horror film 'Bring Her Back' has finally released its first full trailer.

The film is directed by Australian twin filmmakers Danny and Michael Philippou, who previously made the hit horror film 'Talk to Me.' They have called this new movie a 'spiritual successor' to their previous work, according to Deadline.

The one-minute-forty-second trailer reveals more



about the story, featuring two-time Oscar nominee Sally Hawkins as a mother struggling with the loss of her child. The trailer shows someone asking Hawkins how she dealt with the tragedy, to which she replies, "I didn't." However, she claims to have a 'secret'--she has spoken with an angel who can help her bring her child

back. The film revolves around a terrifying supernatural ritual that aims to reunite her with her lost child.

'Bring Her Back' is set to release in U.S. theaters on May 30. The film follows a brother and sister who uncover a horrifying ritual in the home of their new foster mother. Alongside Sally Hawkins, the cast includes Billy Barratt, Sora Wong, and Jonah Wren Phillips. The movie was co-written by Danny Philippou and Bill Hinzman.

'Batman Forever' actor Val Kilmer dies at 65 in Los Angeles

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

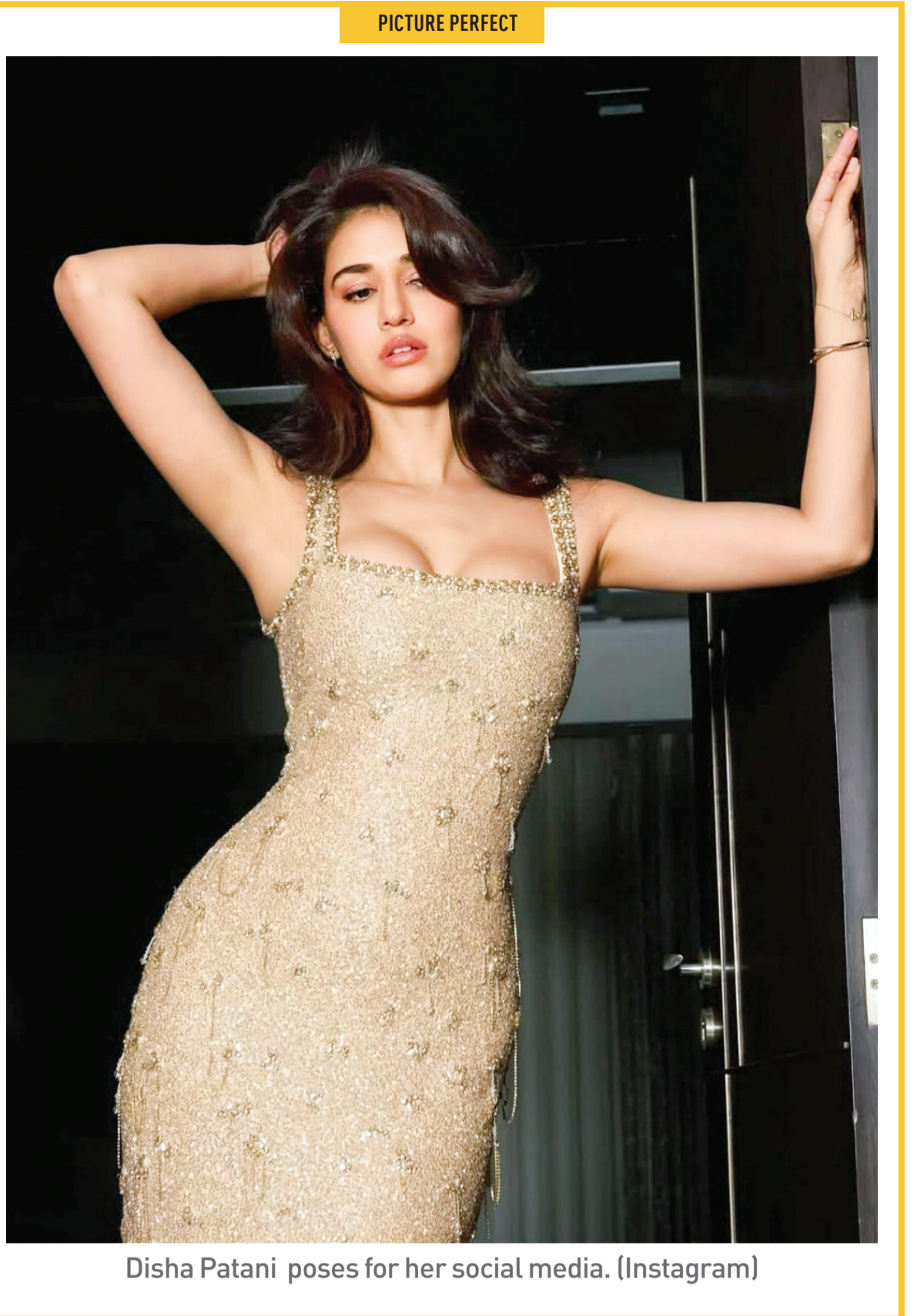
Val Kilmer, who played Bruce Wayne in *Batman Forever*, died of pneumonia in Los Angeles, US, on Tuesday, April 1. He was 65. His daughter Mercedes confirmed his death to *The New York Times*. Kilmer was battling throat cancer for several years.

Kilmer's early films included comedies like *Top Secret!* (1984) and *Real Genius* (1985), as well as a breakout



role as Lt Tom 'Iceman' Kazansky opposite Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* (1986). It was followed by the fantasy film, *Willow* (1988).

Val Kilmer's breakout act a leading man came with his mesmerising, leather-clad portrayal of Jim Morrison in *Oliver Stone's The Doors* (1991).



Disha Patani poses for her social media. (Instagram)

RENAULT KIGER TURBO MT REVIEW

SYED SHIRAZ SHAH

Following convention could be a good or bad practice, but, in the world of automobiles, it's never really the most exciting path. Similarly, while "disrupting the market (or segment)" can again have positive or negative outcomes, it certainly does check the "exciting" box a lot more often than a conventional approach. For example, when Renault launched the Duster in India in 2012, it was not only a market disruptor but a segment creator as well. For the first time in India, the masses tasted a vehicle that looked like an SUV but handled like a car. The icing on the cake was its superlative ride quality and overall robustness. In fact, the ride and handling balance of



the Duster still remains the benchmark not only in its segment, but also in those comprising vehicles more than double the Duster's price.

The Kiger on the other hand, just like every other sub-four meter crossover that came after the Premier Rio and Ford Ecosport, is an example of a conventional approach. It neither created the segment nor does it have the attributes of a disruptor. And that's okay. No manufacturer can launch disruptors or segment creators everyday. That said, I will have to say that subconsciously I was expecting the Kiger to have at least one trait that either reminds me of the Duster or makes it the best in segment in at least that parameter. Did the Kiger live up to it or not? Well, you'll have to read the rest of the story to find out.

DESIGN & INTERIORS

The Kiger is a good looking car. There are absolutely no two ways about it. However, it does face the issue of looking not too dissimilar to the Kwid from a distance. That shouldn't be a problem if you aren't into buying cars to project an image, but if you are one of those people, you will be reminded of it more often than you would like. But again, it still does manage to turn a few heads, which was pleasantly surprising for me.

Get inside the car and at first the cabin might not feel premium like it does in some of its competitors. But spend some time in it and you realise that the ergonomics are second to none. I must also add that its rivals with better interiors do come at a higher price. Therefore, as far as both perceived and real quality is concerned, the Kiger is on a par with its similarly priced competitors. Also, the space management is terrific. The storage spaces everywhere are thoughtfully AND intelligently carved out. You will appreciate the dual gloveboxes in the dashboard, dual pads (including one for wireless charging) for keeping phones, and also the large center compartment that extends all the way to the end of the center armrest.

The seats all around are comfortable as well, and there is no dearth of space felt anywhere in the cabin. You'd also love the fact that at the rear the floor is almost completely flat, so your middle passenger would be happy too.

My only complaint is that the thick A-pillar creates a terrifyingly big blind spot for the driver. Therefore, you really have to be more cautious than ever at intersections, roundabouts, etc. Also, I don't know what a few have been on about the Kiger's air-conditioning as I found it to be absolutely satisfactory even in a suddenly hotting up place like Delhi. And while you have a company's website and brochure to read up on all the features, the one I would like to share here would be its keyless entry which is truly keyless. Just keep the remote (it's actually a mini remote and not one of those regular key-fobs you're used to seeing/using) in your pocket and it would unlock the car the moment you go near it and lock it the moment you walk away (some say that it even locks your emotions the moment you go near the wrong person).

The remote has the essential lock, unlock, boot release, and illumination buttons but I never had to use any of them, thanks to the auto locking/unlocking feature. Yes, it worked flawlessly every time.

The boot is decent but the loading lip is quite high prompting you to take your core exercises more seriously than ever, especially if you're approaching 40.

PERFORMANCE

This Kiger, as you can make out from the heading itself, was the turbocharged manual and it didn't disappoint. The best time that I managed in a total of six 0-100 km/h

acceleration runs was 10.2 seconds. The worst stood at 11.1 seconds, but the remaining four were all in 10s, which means that anyone and everyone should be able to post sub-11-second runs most of the time. I must also add that this Kiger has three drive modes—Eco, Normal, and Sport—which essentially alter the throttle response. Just don't drive it in Eco. Watching grass grow would be more entertaining in comparison.

Therefore, I did all the six runs in Normal and Sport, and the best results were obviously achieved in Sport.

But, do not underestimate Normal mode as one of the runs in it, at 10.4 sec-

onds, was almost as good as the best run (10.2 s) in Sport. Where Sport mode excels in is overtaking. The throttle response is instant and you are able to get past most forms of traffic without any meticulous planning. It should be a blast in the mountains too. It's also worth mentioning that overtakes are not at all an issue in Normal mode as well, which is the mode you'd be driving in the most as it's the default mode the car starts in every time, irrespective of the mode chosen in not only the previous but same ignition cycle as well.

It's a good highway cruiser too. In top (5th) gear it does 100 km/h at 2,400 rpm, and the NVH levels are quite acceptable at this speed. In fact, the noise does not increase exponentially even thereafter if you increase the speed further. However, I wouldn't recommend doing high speeds in this one as the braking and also the composure under braking from high speeds is not confidence inspiring. It could be a case of worn brakes on this particular unit, which I didn't get the time to inspect, but that's how it was on this car.

However, I did like the precise shifting gearbox with the gear lever moving into the intended slot without any hesitation whatsoever even during the intense acceleration runs, which is where the less robust gearshift mechanisms show their true colours. This car had done close to 10,000 km in the hands of inconsiderate auto journalists (equal to at least 50,000 km clocked by the worst kind of owner), despite which all the linkages and synchro rings were still synchronising perfectly, which is a fine testimonial of Renault's engineering at places where it really matters. I can live with the less premium interiors, but I can't compromise on the mechanicals.

RIDE QUALITY AND HANDLING

The ride quality with just the driver on board is a bit on the stiffer side but not jarringly so, and it becomes a lot better with a full house. However, I would urge Renault India to equip this car with better quality springs and dampers. Again, they aren't bad by any stretch of imagination. It's just that others (read: "Japs and Koreans") have upped their game here and I expect Renault, the company that gave us the Duster, to be ahead here, especially now with fellow frenchmen, Citroen, around.

It's the same case with handling. It's okay, but nothing to write home about. A bit more work in the steering rack, along with the aforementioned suspension upgrade, might just make it the best handling car in its segment...

FUEL EFFICIENCY

The fuel efficiency of the Kiger Turbo MT in my test came out to be close to 14 km/l. I reckon 11-12 km/l to be the worst any owner would see in the city, whereas on highways a considerate right foot should be able to extract even 18 km/l. What I must point out is that, unlike in a few other turbo petrols, you would almost never see the fuel efficiency figures dropping down to single digits, which is commendable.

VERDICT

You might have understood by now that the Kiger doesn't have a major "best-in-segment" USP. However, the truth is that most prospective owners nowadays don't always go to a showroom with a narrow focus on just one thing; they want a complete package that doesn't have any major flaws. The Renault Kiger is just that and, at Rs. 9.99 lakh ex-showroom for this top-end RXZ variant, great value too.



Photos: Syed Shiraz Shah.

How AI and Embedded Finance Are Transforming Digital Lending: The Future of FinTech



THE NEXT
ABHISHEKANAND

The future of lending isn't just digital—it's deeply embedded and increasingly intelligent. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to reshape industries, it is the convergence with embedded finance that's fueling a quiet revolution in how credit is delivered, accessed, and managed.

I recently had a fascinating conversation with Rajat Deshpande, Co-founder and CEO of FinBox, where I explored how AI-powered embedded finance is not just disrupting—but rebuilding—the foundations of digital lending. So, I thought of sharing industry insights about how AI and embedded finance are transforming digital lending.

EMBEDDED FINANCE: FROM BANKS TO WHERE THE CUSTOMER IS

"The traditional lending funnel has flipped," Rajat shared with me. "Banks once expected customers to seek them out, but credit today flows directly where customers already are."

He explained me how embedded credit is addressing the long-standing barriers in financial inclusion. "The most overlooked factor," he said, "is how it solves the last mile problems. When credit becomes available at the exact moment of need—like a trucker needing fuel financing or a merchant restocking inventory—you eliminate both the awareness and access barriers simultaneously."

This shift is fundamental. Embedded finance brings credit to the checkout counter, to the gig work platform, or even directly inside a supplier's app. It's financial services that don't feel like "services" anymore—they're seamlessly woven

into everyday experiences.

AI AS THE BRAIN BEHIND SEAMLESS LENDING

Behind this seamless delivery is a brain that's always learning. That brain is AI.

AI enables platforms to evaluate borrowers using both traditional credit signals and alternative data like transaction patterns, behavioral insights, and real-time interaction. With machine learning models, platforms can dynamically calibrate risk, allowing lenders to approve loans with higher confidence and lower defaults.

Rajat explained, "We create learning models that continuously adjust to emerging patterns. With quality alternative data from platform interaction, we solve for expanding access while improving quality underwriting."

In an ecosystem where access and responsibility often compete, AI bridges the gap—making responsible lending scalable.

REAL-WORLD USE CASE: CREDIT WHERE IT MATTERS

One example that Rajat shared brought this all to life.

A Chennai-based NBFC wanted to venture into MSME lending using QR-based payment platforms. By integrating FinBox's Equated Daily Installment (EDI) stack, they launched a credit product that allowed repayments daily rather than monthly—a model that aligned perfectly with the cash flows of small merchants.

"Approval rates increased by 60-85% across platforms, customer acquisition cost rose strategically by 30-53%, and NPAs stayed significantly lower," Rajat

told me. "We launched a fully digital journey in under three months and rolled out 30+ policies across three major payment partners in a year."

This is where the magic of embedded lending meets AI. It's not just about offering credit—it's about designing context-aware, responsible lending ecosystems that unlock new revenue models and serve previously unreachable segments.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF BANKS: FROM FRONTLINE TO BACKEND

But does this mean traditional banks are being left behind?

Not quite. "Embedded credit isn't here to replace banks, but to redefine their role in the value chain," Rajat clarified. "Banks are great at capital management and compliance but struggle with acquisition and contextual engagement. Platforms are the opposite—they already have the relationships. Embedded lending brings them together."

AI and embedded finance thus decentralize the customer journey, but centralize trust, compliance, and capital management—the core strengths of traditional financial institutions.

This creates a win-win ecosystem: Banks reduce acquisition costs, platforms unlock new monetization avenues, and customers get instant, personalized access to credit.

NAVIGATING THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

While the opportunity is massive, the regulatory framework is playing catch-up.

"There is an asymmetry between innovation and regulatory evolution," Rajat pointed out. "Most regulatory frameworks were designed for bilateral relationships, but embedded fi-



nance involves multi-sided marketplaces. The risk isn't just additive—it's multiplicative."

Businesses need to approach compliance proactively, not reactively. The embedded finance space must consider intersecting frameworks—from lending laws to platform data policies—and AI models must operate within transparent, explainable parameters.

IS EMBEDDED CREDIT MORE RESPONSIBLE BY DESIGN?

Perhaps the most compelling insight from our conversation was this: Embedded finance might be inherently more responsible than traditional lending.

"When the credit is con-

textual and extended at the time of actual need," Rajat said, "it's less prone to misuse than general-purpose loans. And because platforms have skin in the game—the borrower's success impacts their own revenue—healthy credit practices become a shared priority."

This creates a feedback loop where AI, embedded finance, and platform eco-

nomics align, reinforcing both profitability and responsibility.

THE ROAD AHEAD: AI + EMBEDDED FINANCE = FINTECH 2.0

The future of digital lending will be invisible yet intelligent. It won't come from a visit to the bank—it will arrive at the point of need, precisely calculated,

responsibly priced, and instantly available.

The blend of AI and embedded finance is not just transforming the way we lend—it's reshaping who gets credit, how they get it, and how well it's managed.

As Rajat summed it up: "Embedded finance is not just about interest income—it's a way to unlock entirely new business models and customer segments."

This article is authored by Abhishek Anand, Founder of Skill Bud Technologies Pvt. Ltd., a company specializing in CGI Ads, Social Media, and other related services including Website Development, AR, Web 3.0, Metaverse, and Digital Marketing. Abhishek is also an Author, Speaker, and Mentor, helping businesses grow through technology.

And the businesses that embrace this shift today?

They'll be the ones defining the next decade of financial innovation.

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Recently, Skill Bud Technologies launched a new brand, Grow My Hospital, to help hospitals, doctors, clinics, and the healthcare industry thrive and grow digitally.

AI Will Redefine Jobs, Not Replace Them: How Gen Z Can Prepare for the Future of Work

BY ANKIT AGGARWAL

AI has been in the spotlight for years, and its influence continues to grow, transforming industries and redefining work as we know it. It's no longer a distant sci-fi concept or just a buzzword—it's a reality shaping the world at an unprecedented pace. Yet, one persistent misconception remains: AI is here to steal jobs. The truth is more nuanced. AI will not replace humans entirely, but it will redefine job roles and the future of work in profound ways.

UNDERSTANDING AI'S REAL IMPACT

AI's integration into the workforce has sparked concerns about job displacement, but data suggests a different narrative—one of evolution rather than elimination. A 2023 McKinsey report estimated that up to 375 million workers worldwide may need to transition to new occupations by 2030 due to automation. However, the World Economic Forum (WEF) offers a more optimistic outlook, projecting that while 85 million jobs may be displaced by 2025, AI-driven

industries could generate 97 million new roles in fields like AI development, data analytics, and digital transformation. This shift highlights the importance of adaptation rather than fear.

AI IN ACTION: AIDING, NOT REPLACING

AI's integration across industries showcases its potential as a powerful assistant rather than a competitor. In healthcare, AI aids doctors in diagnosing diseases with 95% accuracy—higher than human doctors alone. In marketing, AI streamlines ad campaigns and personalizes consumer experiences. Engineers use AI for complex calculations, allowing them to focus on innovation. AI is an enabler, amplifying human efficiency rather than making professionals redundant.

GEN Z AND THE AI ERA: A UNIQUE ADVANTAGE

Gen Z, a generation raised in the digital age, is at a crossroads of both challenge and opportunity in an AI-driven workforce. While over 53% of Singaporean professionals



worry about AI replacing jobs, a contrasting 70% of Gen Z professionals in India believe AI skills will enhance their careers. This difference underscores an essential mindset shift: AI should be seen as a collaborative tool, not a threat.

However, being tech-savvy alone won't guarantee success. The Harvard Business Review found that 90% of top perform-

ers in leadership roles possess high emotional intelligence. This highlights the enduring value of human skills—empathy, strategic thinking, and creativity—none of which AI can replicate. Understanding AI's applications within industries while cultivating adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking will be key to thriving in the evolving job market.

AI AND ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Beyond traditional employment, AI is opening new doors for entrepreneurship. Gen Z has the opportunity to leverage AI in innovative ways—launching businesses, developing AI-powered products, or offering consulting services. The key is identifying areas where human intuition remains ir-

replaceable while using AI to automate routine tasks. This entrepreneurial approach enables individuals to carve out roles that AI cannot fully assume, fostering economic growth and job creation.

THE HUMAN CONNECTION IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD

While AI excels in automation and data processing,

it cannot replace human relationships. Building networks with peers, mentors, and industry leaders remains crucial for career growth. Human collaboration, creativity, and emotional intelligence will continue to define successful workplaces, even as AI becomes more prevalent. The ability to work effectively with AI while maintaining strong interpersonal skills will be a defining trait of the future workforce.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: A CONTINUOUS LEARNING APPROACH

Adapting to the AI era requires continuous learning. According to the OECD, 60% of workers currently lack the digital skills needed for an AI-driven economy. Bridging this gap through online courses, certifications, and industry-specific training is essential. A proactive learning mindset ensures professionals remain relevant and capable of navigating technological advancements.

The most successful professionals recognize AI as a collaborative tool rather than a competitor. By automating repetitive tasks,

AI frees up time for higher-value work, fostering greater productivity, enhanced decision-making, and more engaging roles. Mastering this human-AI partnership is the key to future success.

THE ROAD AHEAD: WORKING ALONGSIDE AI

The future of work is not about competing with AI—it's about coexisting and collaborating with it. For Gen Z, success lies in embracing AI while developing distinct human capabilities. By blending technical expertise with emotional intelligence, adaptability with continuous learning, and innovation with empathy, this generation can lead the way in shaping a workplace where AI complements human potential rather than replaces it.

The challenge is not to outperform AI but to harness its power to unlock new opportunities for growth and innovation. The future belongs to those who recognize AI's potential as an ally and use it to enhance—not replace—human intelligence.

The author is the Founder and CEO of Unstop.

