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# CULT CURRENT

Vol: 8   Issue: 9   September, 2025

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# RIC

## FIERY PATH

### The Crucible of Power



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## # POSITIVE INDIA

### UNSUNG HERO

A SUCCESS STORY BORN FROM  
THE HEART OF A VILLAGE



**Hariom Nautiyal**

**H**ariom Nautiyal's journey is truly inspirational. Once seen as a symbol of big-city comfort and corporate jobs, he shocked many when he decided to return to his village. People called him foolish, but his deep connection with farming and rural life guided him forward. Hariom proved that real strength doesn't lie in chasing jobs in cities, but in creating opportunities in villages. His small dairy business in Dehradun has now caught the attention of leading companies and investors across India. His success has inspired countless young people to launch their own dairy ventures. This story is not just about entrepreneurship, but about the enduring power of staying rooted in one's soil and community.





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*From Gaganyaan to Aditya*



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**Game on,  
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## Small talk



### ANJALI'S BOLD EXIT: GOODBYE TO BHOJPURI

**H**aryanvi star Anjali Raghav has stunned the Bhojpuri industry with a dramatic decision to walk away. The trigger was a shocking incident during the promotional event of "Saiyaan Seva Kare", where singer Pawan Singh allegedly touched her waist on stage without consent. The video went viral, leaving Anjali humiliated and deeply hurt. In an emotional Instagram post, she asked, "If someone touches me publicly like this, am I expected to just keep smiling?" She also revealed that Pawan Singh's PR team tried to pressure her into silence. ●

## The discoveries that will create a stir in 2025

### OFA and Alzheimer's

New research suggests that omega fatty acids may help protect women against Alzheimer's disease. The study found that women with Alzheimer's had significantly lower levels of unsaturated fats—particularly omega fatty acids (OFA)—in their blood, a difference not observed in men. This indicates that the role of fats in maintaining brain health may differ between genders. ●



### From Myth to Science!

On January 1, 1995, an 80-foot wave struck the Draupner oil platform in the North Sea, rewriting history. It bent steel railings, tossed heavy equipment, and most importantly—provided the first precise measurement of a "rogue wave" in the open ocean. For centuries, sailors had spoken of these mysterious giant waves, but they were long dismissed as myth. Now, they were real. ●



### Clues of a Hidden Black Hole!

The study of gravitational waves from GW190814 has revealed possible evidence of a previously unknown supermassive black hole nearby. According to research led by Dr. Wenbiao Han of the Shanghai Astronomical Observatory, this cosmic event may not have been caused solely by the merger of two black holes, but possibly influenced by a third hidden compact object. ●



### DNA-BASED NANO-SKYSCRAPERS



Scientists at Columbia University are harnessing DNA to design complex, functional nanomaterials. Inspired by nature's own blueprinting, the team programmed DNA into voxel-shaped frameworks capable of organizing other nanoscale components. This breakthrough has enabled the creation of light-reflecting crystals, miniature electronics, and brain-like circuits. ●

### Tata Launches 9-Seater Commercial MPV

On August 29, 2025, Tata Motors launched the all-new Winger Plus 9-seater commercial MPV in India, with a starting ex-showroom price of ₹20.60 lakh. Designed to meet the growing demands of the commercial transport sector, the vehicle promises modern features, improved comfort, and enhanced operational efficiency, making it a strong contender in the business mobility segment. ●



## APPOINTMENTS



**Dr. Urjit Patel, ED, IMF**

On August 29, 2025, former RBI Governor Dr. Urjit Patel was appointed as the new Executive Director of the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a three-year term.

## Resignation

**Girish Kaushagi, CEO of PNB Housing Finance**

Girish Kaushagi has resigned from his position as Chief Executive Officer of PNB Housing Finance.

He had long played a pivotal role in shaping the company's strategic and financial operations. His resignation comes at a time when the company is facing growing investor concerns and a critical review of its financial plans.



**Peter Navarro  
Trade Advisor, USA**

India's decision to continue purchasing oil from Russia can be seen as a form of 'Modi's War.' In reality, however, the path to peace runs through New Delhi.

## THEY SAID IT...



**Vikas Swarup  
Former Diplomat,  
India**

India has always upheld its strategic autonomy and will not yield to pressure from any country. Such statements are detrimental to bilateral relations.

## THE TRIBUTE

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was one of India's greatest philosophers, teachers, and statesmen, whose life remains a remarkable example of dedication to education and moral values. Born in Tiruttani, Tamil Nadu, he began his career as a teacher and soon gained recognition for his profound scholarship and inspiring teaching style. Deeply respectful of teachers, he firmly believed that they form the strongest pillar of society. It was this conviction that inspired India to celebrate his birthday, September 5, as Teachers' Day every year. Radhakrishnan had a deep interest in philosophy and played a pivotal role in presenting Indian philosophy to the Western world. He taught at several leading international institutions, including the University of Oxford, where he introduced the richness of Indian thought and culture to global



**DR. SARVEPALLI  
RADHAKRISHNAN**  
(05/09/1888-17/04/1975)

audiences. For him, education was not merely the accumulation of information but a transformative path toward character-building and moral development. In the political sphere, his contribution was equally remarkable. He served as the first Vice President and later as the second President of India, remembered for his simplicity, integrity, and visionary leadership. His life demonstrated that true leadership rests on the union of knowledge and ethics. Radhakrishnan's journey continues to inspire us with the message that passion for education, adherence to moral values, and a commitment to social welfare can elevate any individual to extraordinary heights. His thoughts and legacy remain a source of inspiration for teachers, students, and society at large. ●





## Fresh Warmth in India–China Ties after Modi–Xi Meeting

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Tianjin on the sidelines of the SCO Summit, marking Modi's first visit to China since 2018. The talks signaled a renewed effort to stabilize relations strained by recent border tensions. During the meeting, Modi reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability along the border and highlighted the resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and direct flight services. Both leaders agreed on steps to improve border management, boost bilateral trade, and strengthen cooperation, with China extending support to India's upcoming BRICS presidency. In a significant gesture, China also backed India against the 50% U.S. tariffs, aligning with New Delhi on key global trade issues. ●

## Is Trump Tightening His Grip on Corporate America?



Former U.S. President Donald Trump has pledged to acquire a stake in Intel, sparking unease within the business community. The move is part of his broader push to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce America's reliance on China. Supporters hail it as a bold step for national security and job protection, while critics warn it could blur the lines between government and private enterprise, raising concerns about state interference in corporate decisions. ●

## EU Divided Over Sanctions on Israel



The European Union remains split over whether to impose sanctions on Israel in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. A meeting of EU foreign ministers in Copenhagen on Saturday ended without consensus. The European Commission had recommended suspending research funds for Israeli companies, but the proposal failed to gain unanimous support. Countries including Germany opposed the measure, arguing that such steps would have little impact on Israel's actions in Gaza. ●

## Mozambique Opens Doors to Investment

The 60th Maputo International Trade Fair opened in Mozambique's capital Maputo, bringing together more than 3,000 exhibitors from 30 countries. Speaking at the event, Lucia Matimele, Director of Industry and Commerce for Gaza Province, highlighted the country's potential: "We have land, water, and farmers—what we need is investment." President Daniel Chapo emphasized the importance of encouraging foreign investment to build an inclusive and sustainable local economy. ●



## US Tech Giants Under Pressure as Europe Tightens Rules



Donald Trump has threatened new tariffs on countries that are curbing the power of American tech companies. Under the European Union's Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act, major firms such as Meta, Apple, and Google have been hit with heavy fines. These laws compel platforms to take strict action against illegal content, misinformation, and harmful material, adding to the regulatory challenges facing US tech giants in Europe. ●



## Germany Moves to Reintroduce Voluntary Military Service



**O**n August 27, Germany's cabinet approved a bill to launch a voluntary military service program. Chancellor Friedrich Merz described it as a step toward "a military service-based army." Defense Minister Boris Pistorius stated that young people would initially be recruited on a voluntary basis, but if participation proves insufficient, the program could shift to mandatory service. The decision comes amid the creation of a NSC and growing security challenges in Europe. ●

## Trump's Tariffs Strengthen BRICS Unity



**D**onald Trump has shaken the global economic landscape by imposing steep tariffs on BRICS nations — 145% on China, 50% on India and Brazil, and 30% on South Africa. The tariff on India specifically targets its purchase of discounted oil from Russia. Trump has defended the move as necessary to counter "anti-American policies" and protect U.S. interests. However, experts argue the opposite may be unfolding. Rather than isolating BRICS members, the tariffs are accelerating their drive for deeper cooperation. The bloc is increasingly conducting trade in national currencies, reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar. Growing alignment between India, China, and Russia is emerging as a direct challenge to Washington's global influence. This strengthened solidarity is expected to be on full display at the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit China for the first time in seven years. ●

## U.S. Court Rules Trump's Tariffs Illegal



**A** U.S. appeals court has largely struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariff policy, declaring it unlawful. The court upheld a May ruling that found Trump had overstepped his authority by imposing tariffs on all trade partners. Trump had invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to justify the measures, but the court ruled that the law does not apply in the absence of a declared national emergency.



## South Africa Launches Global Inequality Committee for G20

**U**nder its G20 presidency, South Africa has launched an Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts to present the first comprehensive report on global wealth and income inequality to G20 leaders. The committee, established by President Cyril Ramaphosa, will be chaired by Nobel laureate economist Professor Joseph Stiglitz. The initiative aims to spotlight rapidly rising inequalities that threaten economic stability, social cohesion, and political progress. Recent analysis shows that since 2015, the world's richest 1% have amassed an additional \$33.9 trillion—enough to eradicate global poverty 22 times over. ●



## India Won't Bow to U.S. Tariff Pressure: Piyush Goyal

**A**t a conference in New Delhi, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal declared that India will neither bow down nor weaken under U.S. tariff pressure. He expressed confidence that India's exports will surpass last year's levels in 2025–26. Following Donald Trump's return to office, Washington imposed steep tariffs on India, citing its oil imports from Russia. The Indian government has called the measures "unfair and unjust." Experts warn that the 50% duties are severely impacting sectors such as textiles, seafood, and jewelry. Several U.S. firms have already canceled orders from Indian exporters and shifted business to Bangladesh and Vietnam, raising fears of an employment crisis. The government has hinted at relief measures, including subsidies and efforts to diversify into new markets. ●

## Dowry Laws: Women Still Burning



**T**he debate over dowry, sparked as early as 1914 with the tragic suicide of Snehlata Mukhopadhyay, continues to haunt India even today. Despite the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and the introduction of Section 498A in the IPC in 1983, the menace has not subsided. In the 1970s and 1980s, a series of dowry-related killings in Delhi gave new direction to the women's movement, with street plays like Om Swaha raising awareness across society. ●

## Durga Puja Turns Political in Bengal



**T**his year, West Bengal is set to host over 45,000 Durga Puja pandals, many with multi-crore budgets. But as elections draw near, the festival has taken on a political hue. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has launched a campaign highlighting the alleged harassment of Bengalis in BJP-ruled states. In response, several committees in Kolkata have chosen "Bengal and Bengalis" as their central theme. ●

## Voter List Row: 10 Million Fake Names in Bengal!

**A** recent study has uncovered a shocking revelation in West Bengal's 2024 voter list—over 10.4 million fake names, accounting for nearly 13.7% of the electorate. According to the report, while the number of voters between 2004 and 2024 should have reached 65.7 million, the rolls instead show a staggering 76.1 million. The list allegedly includes deceased persons, underage voters, and individuals who have long left the state. ●



## Akhilesh Yadav's Jibe: "Change is Certain, BJP is a User Party"



**S**amajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, while joining the Voter Rights Yatra in Bihar, declared that the state is headed for change. He predicted an INDIA bloc government with Tejashwi Yadav as the next chief minister. Taking a swipe at the Election Commission, Akhilesh dubbed it a "Jugaad Commission." He also attacked the BJP, branding it an "Istemali Party" — one that, according to him, uses people and then discards them. ●



## North & South Block Set to Become History



**A**s a part of the Central Vista Project, ministries are shifting to the newly built Kartavya Bhavans. PM Modi recently inaugurated Kartavya Bhavan-3, now housing the Home, External Affairs, and Rural Development Ministries. In total, ten Kartavya Bhavans will accommodate all central ministries under one roof. Iconic buildings like Shastri Bhavan, Krishi Bhavan, and Udyog Bhavan, built between the 1950s and 1970s, are gradually being vacated. ●

## Judicial Appointments Spark Dissent, Collegium Transparency Questioned



**T**he recent appointment of Chief Justice Vipul Pancholi of the Patna High Court and Chief Justice Alok Aradhe of the Bombay High Court has taken the strength of the Supreme Court to 34 judges. However, the decision has triggered rare dissent within the collegium itself. Justice B.V. Nagarathna objected to the recommendation, pointing out that Justice Pancholi ranks much lower in the seniority list and that the Supreme Court already has two judges from Gujarat, potentially upsetting regional balance. Her note of dissent was not published on the Court's website, further fueling the controversy. The Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms (CJAR) has demanded that Justice Nagarathna's dissent be made public, questioning the transparency of the collegium system. ●

## Rahul Gandhi: In Search of New Political Ground



**C**ongress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Voter Rights Yatra' is being seen as a fresh attempt to revive the party's presence in Bihar. Through the campaign, he is seeking to connect with youth, farmers, and backward communities, positioning the Congress as a voice for electoral reforms, reservation, and social justice. Rahul is targeting BJP and JD(U) on these issues, seeking space in a state where Congress has long been weak. ●



## Mohan Bhagwat Clarifies Retirement Remark, Jibes Seen at BJP

**R**SS chief Mohan Bhagwat on August 28 clarified that he has no intention of retiring anytime soon. As the RSS steps into its centenary year, Bhagwat, speaking at a lecture series in Delhi, said there may be "differences of opinion with the BJP, but never differences of heart." However, parts of his speech were perceived as veiled jibes at the ruling party. His recent remark about leaders stepping down at the age of 75 had sparked speculation that it was a reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who turns 75 this September. Bhagwat explained that he was merely quoting the humorous style of the late Moropant Pingale. ●





**SRIRAJESH**, Editor

## MODI-XI RESET

# SCO'S SHIFTING BALANCE

*At the Tianjin SCO summit, India emerged as a decisive voice—balancing tensions with China, countering U.S. trade coercion, and shaping the anti-terror narrative. Beyond symbolism, the summit highlighted India's growing role as an architect of the multipolar world.*

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tianjin was far more than a routine diplomatic gathering; it underscored India's growing stature as a strategic player in a rapidly changing global order. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping symbolized an attempt to recalibrate ties between Asia's two largest nations, strained since the Galwan clash of June 2020. His first visit to China in seven years carried both symbolic and substantive weight.

Modi's central message was unambiguous: peace and stability along the border remain the bedrock of India-China relations. Announcements such as the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage and restoration of direct flights were not mere optics but confidence-building measures. His statement that "the interests of 2.8 billion people are tied to our partnership" signaled a vision extending beyond bilateral concerns, situating Indo-China cooperation as essential to global stability.

The summit unfolded against a backdrop of Washington's rising economic coercion. The U.S. had recently imposed tariffs of up to 50% on Indian exports, creating fresh pressures on New Delhi. In this context, Beijing's open pledge of support was a striking diplomatic success. The Chinese envoy's assurance that "China will firmly stand with India and reject America's politics of coercion" marked a subtle yet powerful shift. For India, this not only widened strategic space but also projected an image of resilience in navigating U.S. pressure.

Much of this ground was prepared in advance by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who led the 24th round of Special Representatives' talks on the boundary issue. Agreements on border management, resumption of cross-border trade, and mutual support during upcoming BRICS presidencies (2026–27) were outcomes of this groundwork. They revealed that, while mistrust lingers, cooperation is taking tentative root.

A defining feature of Indian diplomacy at Tianjin was its uncompromising stand on terrorism. Citing the recent attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, Modi declared that "double standards on terrorism are unacceptable." The message, aimed primarily at Pakistan, resonated across the forum. The SCO's joint declaration echoed this language, condemning terrorism in all forms without caveats—a notable victory

for India, which has long sought global recognition of its stance.

Equally significant was Modi's emphasis on connectivity. While Xi called for "seeking common ground while setting aside differences," Modi firmly underlined that connectivity initiatives must respect national sovereignty—an implicit critique of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Instead, India projected its vision of inclusive connectivity through initiatives like the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor, which prioritize trust, equality, and genuine partnership.

The summit also reopened discussions on the Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral dialogue. Once seen as a balancing mechanism against Western dominance, RIC could emerge as a vital pillar of a multipolar order. Keeping this in mind, **Cult Current** has focused its cover story on this very subject. In today's climate, with the U.S. retreating into protectionism and Europe reduced to a secondary role, the revival of RIC carries strategic significance for India's pursuit of greater autonomy in world affairs.

For New Delhi, the Tianjin summit was about more than mending ties with Beijing. It showcased India's ability to shape narratives on terrorism, economic resilience, and connectivity while engaging major powers on equal terms. The outcomes—border stability, China's support against U.S. tariffs, an international endorsement of India's anti-terror position, and the framing of an alternative connectivity model—collectively highlighted India as the standout diplomatic force at the forum.

Challenges remain. The structural fault lines in India-China relations are deep, and trust cannot be rebuilt overnight. Yet Tianjin demonstrated that New Delhi is willing to engage pragmatically, balancing confrontation with dialogue, and safeguarding sovereignty while exploring cooperation.

Ultimately, the summit reflected India's diplomatic confidence. No longer seen as a peripheral player, it has emerged as a country capable of shaping the rules of engagement in Asia and beyond. The real challenge now lies in sustaining this momentum and translating diplomatic breakthroughs into durable policy outcomes. But there is little doubt that Tianjin has opened a new horizon for Indian diplomacy—one where India is not merely a participant but an architect of the emerging world order.



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# From Gaganyaan to Aditya

## ISRO's New Identity



Jalaj Srivastava

*From Gaganyaan's successful flight to the scientific marvels of Aditya-L1, August 2025 has emerged as a golden chapter for ISRO — marking India not just as a participant in the space race, but as a rising power redefining its place on the global stage.*

August 2025 has been etched into history as a landmark and transformative month for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). During this period, several major technical achievements—the successful testing of a human-rated spacecraft, the execution of a groundbreaking joint satellite mission, the announcement of a super-heavy-lift launch vehicle, and significant contributions to solar physics—have elevated India's space capabilities to a new orbit. These accomplishments establish India not merely as an emerging space power, but as a prominent, autonomous, and influential pillar in the global space order. ISRO's journey, paralleling the developmental trajectory of the American space agency NASA, underscores India's transition from a 'follower' to a 'parallel power'.

### The Changing Equation of Space Dominance

In the 21st century, space exploration is no longer merely a subject of scientific curiosity, but a decisive domain for geopolitical dominance, technological superiority, and economic opportunities. Moving beyond the bipolar space competition of the Cold War era (USA vs. Soviet Union), today's landscape is multipolar, involving major actors like China, Europe, and now India. In this competitive environment,





August 2025 proved to be a pivotal moment for ISRO, as the organization demonstrated its capabilities across several critical areas, fundamentally altering its position on the global stage. These achievements indicate that ISRO now stands on par with established institutions like NASA, capable of shaping the future of global space.

## Attaining Strategic Autonomy

Two primary criteria for any nation to achieve space superpower status are: the sovereign capability to send humans into space, and self-reliance in placing heavy payloads into desired orbits. In August 2025, ISRO made decisive progress in both these areas.

The IADT-01 test, successfully conducted on August 24, 2025, symbolizes the technical maturity of the Gaganyaan mission. This test successfully evaluated the accuracy of the crew module's atmospheric re-entry and parachute-based descent system. This process is the most complex and high-risk phase of human spaceflight, where there is no margin for error. NASA spent years proving this technology for its Apollo and Space Shuttle programs. ISRO's overcoming of this significant milestone certifies that India has mastered the necessary engineering and system integration to ensure the safe return of its astronauts. This achievement places India in the exclusive club of nations—the United States, Russia, and China—that possess indigenous human spaceflight capability.

Later the same month, the ISRO chief's announcement of a new rocket, 120 meters tall and capable of carrying a 75-ton payload to Low Earth Orbit (LEO), highlights India's long-term space strategy. This capability is equivalent to NASA's 'Space Launch System (SLS)' and SpaceX's 'Starship'. Such a vehicle will not only make India a major player in the most lucrative segment of the commercial satellite launch market (heavy communication and military satellites) but also pave the way for interplanetary missions like lunar bases, Mars missions, and future space stations. This announcement signifies a strategic shift in ISRO's thinking—no longer limited to need-based applications, but now focused on future exploration-driven opportunities.

## A New Paradigm of Global Cooperation

The NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar)

satellite, launched in July 2025, successfully deployed its 12-meter reflector antenna and began operations in August. This mission is an excellent example of the evolving nature of cooperation between ISRO and NASA. Previously, in such collaborations, ISRO often played a junior partner role, contributing data or smaller components. In NISAR, ISRO provided the S-band SAR payload, the spacecraft bus, and the launch vehicle, which are as critical to the mission's success as NASA's L-band payload.

NISAR's success demonstrates that India is no longer merely a recipient of technology but an equal partner capable of co-developing and co-operating state-of-the-art systems. This mission will provide data on global issues such as climate change, disaster management, and ecological monitoring, further strengthening India's role as a responsible global scientific stakeholder.

## Confluence of Science and Society

The sustained success of space programs depends not only on technical achievements but also on public support and the ability to inspire the next generation.

## Building National Consciousness

National Space Day, celebrated on August 23rd with the theme 'Aryabhatta to Gaganyaan: Ancient Wisdom to Infinite Possibilities,' reflects ISRO's mature approach to public engagement. Like NASA, which for decades has made its missions a source of American pride and inspiration, ISRO is now consciously attempting to link space with national consciousness. Issuing educational modules through NCERT and presenting future astronauts as national icons ensures that the space program remains not just a government initiative but becomes a mass movement.

## Aditya-L1's Contribution

In August 2025, the Aditya-L1 mission's completion of one year of operations establishes India as a significant data producer in the field of solar physics. The unique data provided by its SUIT payload has enhanced global understanding of the Sun's corona and solar flares. While previously the world largely relied on missions like NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO), Aditya-L1 now offers a complementary and independent data source. This signifies ISRO's transition from a 'data importer' to a 'data exporter'.

# Game on, Parents off?



Kumar Sandeep

***The Lok Sabha has passed the Online Gaming Bill, 2025, placing the responsibility of children's digital safety squarely on parents. While it promises to curb betting, addiction, and in-app spending, the real challenge lies in turning largely unaware parents into digital referees.***

Last week, the Lok Sabha passed the Online Gaming Bill, 2025 with a clean, catchy promise: make online gaming safe, particularly for children. The provisions sound reassuring. Ban the betting. Limit the playtime. Hold platforms accountable. And most crucially, place parents at the center as the final gatekeepers. No parental consent, no play.

Simple, right? Except, it isn't.

This is not the first time Indian lawmakers have looked to parents as the safety lock on children's digital lives. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 demanded the same—no data processing of minors without parental approval. At the time, critics noted the irony: parents were cast as all-knowing guardians in a digital world they barely understood. We placed them in the cockpit without teaching them how to fly.

Two years later, the cockpit looks even more daunting. Flashing neon lights, immersive loops, multiplayer ecosystems that children navigate like natives while their guardians stumble like tourists. The state has again handed parents the referee's whistle—without ever explaining the rules of the game.

## Law vs. the Living Room

On paper, the bill looks muscular. It calls out gambling disguised as gaming, forces platforms to register with oversight bodies, and mandates

safeguards such as playtime limits and spending caps for minors. It even acknowledges psychological risks like addiction. At its heart, though, is the principle of parental consent.

Yet families don't operate in legalese. They operate in living rooms.

A parent clicking "I consent" without reading the fine print is not a safeguard; they are a rubber stamp. A parent who sighs, "I don't understand these apps," has effectively left their child alone in a casino and hoped for the best. The chasm between legislative ambition and household reality is vast—and widening.

## The Illusion of Control

We've been here before. When smartphones swept through Indian households, children embraced Instagram trends, Discord





servers, and gaming guilds, while parents were still fumbling with how to silence the family WhatsApp group. The generational knowledge gap was so wide that rules at home became clichés: “Don’t use the phone too much,” or “Focus on your studies.”

The new law imagines consent as a magic key. But consent without comprehension is meaningless. If parents cannot tell the difference between an in-game skin and a loot box, between a role-playing server and a betting exchange, their consent is little more than a blind nod.

In practice, the law has given parents the joystick. The uncomfortable truth: many don’t know where the buttons are.

### Parenting Needs a Reboot

The easy narrative is to blame parents: careless, digitally illiterate, unwilling to adapt. But the reality is harsher. India has never invested in preparing parents for the digital age. We treat technology as an optional add-on—something kids will “figure out,” while adults can remain proudly ignorant. That might have been barely tolerable in 2010. In 2025, it is reckless.

The playground has shifted. Strangers don’t knock on doors anymore; they send friend requests. Pocket money doesn’t change hands in crumpled notes; it leaks invisibly through in-app purchases. Childhood friendships form not in neighborhood gullies but on Fortnite servers and Roblox maps. Parenting, then, cannot remain stuck in analog instincts. It needs a reboot.

Rebooted parenting does not mean banning screens or forcing children into digital exile. It means equipping parents with awareness, tools, and confidence to guide their children in this terrain. That shift must happen at scale—not just at dining tables, but at the level of schools, communities, and governments.

### Schools as the First Line

The most obvious entry point is the school system. Today, parent-teacher meetings are almost entirely consumed by grades, attendance, and discipline. These meetings could easily devote twenty minutes to digital safety: the mechanics of online games, the psychology of in-game spending, the warning signs of cyberbullying.

Schools should host regular literacy workshops not only for students but for parents. Imagine sessions where teachers explain what loot boxes are, how grooming occurs in chat rooms, or how parental control dashboards can restrict risky behavior. These need not be technical masterclasses; they can be plain-language primers, backed by simple handouts and live demonstrations.

Education policy has spent years emphasizing coding and STEM. It is time to emphasize the other side: digital resilience and literacy for the entire family.

### Community as a Safety Net

Parenting is not a solo act. It thrives in community. Local resident associations, mohalla committees, even religious and cultural groups can host awareness drives.





# FAMINE

## WHO IS Responsible?



Mariel Ferragamo



***A UN-backed agency has declared Gaza City's famine 'entirely man-made,' exposing millions to acute hunger. Israel rejects the claim as 'outright lies,' pointing fingers at Hamas for diverting aid. Beyond the immediate humanitarian catastrophe, the crisis highlights systemic failures in aid distribution, raises urgent questions about accountability, and forces the world to confront who truly bears responsibility for Gaza's suffering***

The UN-backed global hunger monitor officially declared on August 20 that there is an “entirely man-made” famine in Gaza City, the enclave’s largest population center prior to the outbreak of the war. The announcement follows weeks of limited aid distribution to the enclave of nearly two million people.

Five hundred thousand people—at least a quarter of Palestinians in Gaza—are currently in a state of starvation, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system that confirmed what it called a “worst-

case scenario" famine on August 20. This figure could rise to 640,000 by the end of September, IPC added.

UN and local health officials have attributed hundreds of deaths in the territory to either malnutrition or violence at food aid distribution sites. Locals and humanitarian officials have said the situation is the worst they've witnessed since the start of the conflict in October 2023.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has called the IPC famine report an "outright lie." It contends that Israel has delivered two million tons of aid since the war began and that Hamas has looted many distribution shipments to "finance its war machine."

International calls are growing for Israel to end limits on aid distribution, which some experts allege is a violation of international humanitarian law. Israeli, Palestinian, and international actors—including the United States and UN agencies—have all been major players in the aid delivery system at various points, though the current aid operation is now limited to one U.S. group with close oversight by Israel. Israeli authorities have said they want an alternative means of delivering aid to Gaza, as they continue to allege that Hamas is seizing the aid at the expense of the Palestinian population.

In response to mounting international criticism, the Israeli military announced on July 27 that it was implementing a "tactical pause" in operations in some areas of Gaza and opening humanitarian corridors to enable UN and aid agency convoys into the enclave. But in late August, the Israeli military pressed on with an expanded offensive into Gaza City, despite calls for Israel to quell the violence.

**What is going on in Gaza?**



## GAMING BILL

Misinformation and the lack of outside reporting due to Israel's media restrictions have made it difficult to develop a clear picture of the situation, experts say. Israeli officials have defended the controversial, for-profit, U.S.- and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF).

UN officials have said that staff on the ground and other aid workers, doctors, and journalists are now fainting from hunger and exhaustion due to limited food access—all as the reported death toll from food scarcity incidents continues to grow.

Local groups and international aid organizations have highlighted the growing risk to the population in Gaza, too.

- As of August 22, at least 273 people have died from starvation in recent weeks, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.
- The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, has said that one million children in Gaza—half the population—are at risk of starvation.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that more than fifty children have died of malnutrition since March.
- The worsening hunger situation has sent even more people to already overwhelmed hospitals, which the WHO has said are at their “breaking point”—94 percent are damaged or completely destroyed due to the conflict.
- The United Nations reported that more than one thousand Palestinians have died in recent weeks trying to access food. It warned on Tuesday that Gaza’s “last lifelines keeping people alive are collapsing.”

David J. Scheffer, a CFR expert on international law, said the situation could put Israel at risk of war crimes charges, especially if the international community finds that it is obstructing aid or harming civilians seeking it. “If any strategy of aid obstruction unfolds that leads to starvation among civilians, including willfully impeding relief supplies, then that could risk charges of war crimes,” he said.

Israeli officials have repeatedly rejected allegations that its military actions violate the laws of armed conflict, saying charges have relied on faulty figures



provided by Hamas-run health facilities.

The food scarcity has made distribution sites increasingly dangerous. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said that the Israeli military has “targeted civilians,” accusing them of firing on Palestinians trying to reach aid at a distribution site in northern Gaza. Israel denied the allegation. The Israel Defense Forces said it had “fired warning shots in order to remove an immediate threat” and contested the casualty totals reported.

On July 20, nearly one hundred civilians were fatally shot as they tried to get food aid from UN convoys handing out flour for bread. The week before that, there was a stampede of thousands swarming the GHF aid site, which killed at least twenty people.

### How have aid groups in Gaza responded and how are they affected?

More than one hundred aid groups operating in Gaza have cautioned that Israel's aid restrictions are causing a hunger crisis, with Doctors Without Borders stating that “humanitarian organizations are witnessing their own colleagues and partners waste away before their eyes.”





***In Gaza City, a UN-backed organization has declared a ‘completely man-made’ famine, leaving millions facing starvation. Israel calls this a ‘sheer lie,’ accusing Hamas of diverting aid. This article examines the complex obstacles in aid distribution, the deaths caused by famine, and raises questions about who is truly responsible for the crisis in Gaza.***



CARE International, a global nonprofit working on hunger and poverty in more than one hundred countries, has been operating in Gaza and the West Bank since 1948 and was one of the first organizations to respond to the recent Gaza crisis.

What they’re seeing in Gaza now, its Chief Humanitarian Officer Deepmala Mahla told CFR, is “worsening by the minute.” She described cities turned to rubble, children clutching empty pots, and people “shrinking” by the day due to starvation. As of late July, her team in Gaza had not received an aid shipment in 140 days.

The World Food Program, which also has staff in Gaza, has raised alarm about the situation, saying “nearly one person in three is not eating for days.” Journalists working in Gaza are also affected by the food shortages. French news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) has reported that its employees in Gaza are starving.

“Since AFP was founded in 1944, we have lost journalists in conflicts, some have been injured, others taken prisoner. But none of us can ever remember seeing colleagues die of hunger,” the outlet’s union said.

## What led to this crisis?

Humanitarian aid has long been a contentious aspect of the war between Israel and Hamas since it broke out in 2023. It has frequently been cited as a sticking point in the last few weeks’ ceasefire negotiations.

Steven A. Cook, CFR senior fellow for Middle East Studies, said it has been challenging to track aid over time, as information coming out of the region is difficult to parse and often misleading. The situation is also much more complex than most reports capture, he said. Aid levels over the war’s twenty-one months have fluctuated, CARE’s Mahla said. But generally, “it has continuously deteriorated,” she told CFR. “Our ability to deliver it has gone down drastically this year.” In March, Israel halted shipments of aid into Gaza, citing Hamas’s siphoning off the aid for itself, an allegation the group has denied. That ban lasted eleven weeks, until Israel began to allow aid back in by May via GHF. Cook said that Israel pursued this model to keep Hamas from using stolen aid to generate revenue to pay its fighters.

## GAMING BILL

But the aid brought in by GHF so far has been a trickle of what was previously provided, both earlier in the war and before the war.

“They were unable to scale it in a way that would actually deliver it in an effective and safe way,” Cook explained. “It clearly has not worked and has cost many people’s lives.”

### What have the Israeli, Hamas, and international roles been?

The United States has supported the GHF with at least \$30 million in June—though tranches of the money won’t be released until the GHF completes certain tasks, including pre-vetting partners. With the Donald Trump administration’s distrust of the United Nations, Cook said, the alternative aid channel was more appealing since it was not affiliated with the international body, but instead with its ally, Israel. The IPC analysis of GHF’s operations said their current distribution plan would “lead to mass starvation, even if it was able to function without the appalling levels of violence.”

U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee added to Israel’s dispute of the IPC famine declaration. In an X post, he wrote that “the uninformed who claim that Israel is starving Gaza” should know that “tons of food has gone into Gaza but Hamas savages stole it.”

Hamas and Israel are both provocateurs in the melee of aid chaos, Cook said. Hamas has incited violence at aid sites to create chaos, he said, knowing that the Israelis will be blamed for the chaos in Gaza. Israel’s motivations for constricting aid are both to keep it out of the hands of Hamas and as a means of wielding political control to “demoralize the population,” said

Cook.

Hamas has insisted that aid is funneled solely through the United Nations, which raises concerns among some experts that Hamas has been able to take advantage of the UN system.

“The malnutrition that’s happening is clearly a function of the fact that the Israelis withheld aid for eleven weeks and then moved into this mode of the GHF,” Cook said. But “the distribution of aid was hardly easy when it was being run by UN aid agencies.”

### What’s next for Gaza?

Humanitarian watchdogs are calling for the immediate reduction of bureaucratic barriers to bringing aid in and stopping the targeting of aid workers.

A group of twenty-eight foreign ministers including Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom condemned the recent deaths at food aid sites in a statement on Tuesday and said that the war “must end now.” U.S. Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff on Thursday announced his team was cutting short its latest efforts to broker a ceasefire and hostage

deal, saying Hamas “shows a lack of desire.” He said in a statement, “We will now consider alternative options to bring the hostages home and try to create a more stable environment for the people of Gaza.” In the absence of a ceasefire, “The rules of engagement for military troops should prioritize the lives of innocent civilians seeking humanitarian relief under desperate wartime conditions threatening their very survival,” Scheffer said.

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*Muriel Ferragamo covers Africa, the Middle East, and global health. She has previously served as the editor-in-chief of Daily News Brief.*







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# DADDY IN THE OVAL OFFICE

***At the White House court, it wasn't a summit but a spectacle of subordination—Trump at the center, Europe reduced to side characters. The continent once hailed as the leader of civilization now stands confined to applause.***



Anwar Hussain

Last month in Washington, the air was charged like the hush before curtains rise.

The stage: the White House, polished and gleaming.

The audience: the watching world.

And the cast: Donald J. Trump, flanked by the leaders of Western Europe, each rehearsed, each cautious, each silently aware that this was no ordinary summit—it was a performance.

Every actor had their lines. Every bow, every nod, every fleeting smile had been scripted in advance. But behind the well-crafted mise-en-scène lay the real story: a Europe that no longer knows its own script, and instead performs lines handed down from across the Atlantic.

## Act I – The Father Figure

Here, it was Trump. The rest were satellites orbiting a sun that shone too brightly, sometimes scorching, sometimes blinding.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte gave the metaphor bluntly: “Trump is Daddy.”

It was not a joke. It was confession.

The leaders treated him like a patriarch whose moods had to be managed, whose anger had to be avoided, whose vanity



had to be fed. They whispered advice to one another, as children would: Wear this, say that, remember to thank him often. Even Ukraine's Zelensky was schooled in the etiquette of pleasing "Daddy."

Absurd? Perhaps.

But absurdity is the new political reality of the transatlantic relationship. The EU no longer acts with autonomy. Its politics revolve not around strategy or vision, but around the volatile temperament of a man in Washington.

## Act II – Layers of Dependence

It would be easy to blame this farce on Trump's singular personality. But the truth is deeper, older, more entrenched.

Europe has woken up to the fact that its very strategic lifeblood is tied to the United States. It cannot act alone—not even when its own vital interests are at stake.

And this dependency did not begin with Trump. Ironically, it grew under Joe Biden, whose sonorous words of "unprecedented solidarity" masked a cold transaction: the Old World bore the cost of confronting Russia, while the New World reaped the profit.

Trump simply tore away the polite veil. He made the arrangement explicit.

To him, the EU is not a partner, but a resource. A treasury to finance American priorities. A workshop to handle the technical chores once Washington has decided the terms of a settlement.

When Europe speaks, its voice matters only if it harmonizes with America's. When it differs, it is dismissed.

## Act III – The Cult of Flattery

Faced with this reality, Western Europe has adopted a strategy: flattery.

They seem to believe that praise can smuggle dissent into the conversation. That by showering compliments on Trump, they might earn a moment's indulgence.

But the tactic is self-defeating.

Trump interprets admiration not as persuasion, but

as recognition of obvious truth. If you praise me, it means I am right. If you applaud me, you have joined me.

Thus, every cheer becomes an act of surrender. Every bow a seal of consent.

## Act IV – The Temporary Delusion

Brussels comforts itself with illusions. This humiliation is temporary, they whisper. When Trump leaves, normality will return.

But illusions are the opium of declining powers.

For two decades—since the days of George W. Bush—Washington has been shifting its gaze eastward. From Europe to Asia. From NATO to the Indo-Pacific.

This trajectory has not changed with parties or presidents. It will not change after Trump.

And given how readily EU leaders prostrate themselves today, why should any future president expect anything different? The precedent is being set: Europe will kneel, and Washington will command.

## Act V – The Outsiders' Defiance

Canada, America's closest neighbor, has stood firm under its new prime minister. Trump's attacks softened.

Further afield, the giants of the Global South—China, India, Brazil, South Africa—have all resisted. They may compromise, but they do not capitulate. They bend, but they do not break.

Only Europe folds without a fight. Only Europe dresses its submission in the language of prudence.

## Act VI – The Cost of Obedience

History offers reminders. In the 1980s, when Soviet-American dialogue collapsed, Western Europe pursued its energy projects with Moscow, even against Washington's wishes. Why? Because it suited Europe's own interests.

That clarity is gone. The problem today is not simply that Brussels follows Washington. It is that Brussels no longer knows what its own interests are. The compass is lost. And when you cannot define your own path, you inevitably march to someone else's drum.



Srirajesh

***The unipolar world that rose from the ashes of the Cold War is now buckling under its own weight. Cracks are deepening in the walls of Western dominance, and through these fissures emerges a new triangle—Russia, India, and China (RIC). This alliance of the Elephant, the Dragon, and the Bear is scripting a new drama on the global stage. The question remains—will this saga become a tale of triumph or a tragedy?***

It was the twilight of the twentieth century. The grand edifice of the unipolar world order, built upon the ashes of the Cold War, now clearly showed cracks in its walls. The foundations of this Western-led fortress, whose leaders had boasted for decades of scripting the world's destiny, were now shaking. The earthquake of the 2008 financial crisis rattled its economic underpinnings, and the self-centered clamor of America's "America First" policies sowed seeds of distrust even among its own allies. A resentment, a profound indignation towards the system, smoldered across the world, especially in those nations marginalized by this order for decades.

This global discontent first found a platform in the form of non-Western alliances like BRIC, which began forming in 2006, and truly emerged with its first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on June 16, 2009. Subsequently, with the inclusion of South Africa in 2010, it became BRICS. It was a collective roar from the Global South, an attempt to signal to the erstwhile masters that they would no longer dictate the rules of the game alone. BRICS, once dismissed as mere investment jargon, swiftly transformed into an institution that established its own bodies like the New Development Bank (NDB), directly challenging the Western fiefdom of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Similar circumstances have been observed in global politics over the past decade. From within this global discontent, a new axis was being forged. This axis was not shaped by a single power, but by historical imperative and a shifting balance of power. And the triumvirate destined to become the icon of this new world order were – Russia, India, and China (RIC). This triumvirate aimed to project itself as an alternative world order, a non-Western provider of solutions to global problems, and create an environment challenging their Western adversaries. Simultaneously, they sought to convey that only they could offer respite from the oppressive atmosphere of this unipolar world.

Behind this entire scenario, the desire for a multipolar world was systematically playing its part. For Russia, India, and China in this new role, it was clear that their collaboration needed to present them as the sole alternative to the almost paralyzed old American-centric world order. Swiftly, this triumvirate appeared successful in turning all Western leadership failures into keys for their own success, emerging as a ray of hope in the frustrated and disillusioned environment of the Global South. The remaining shortfall was amply filled by the policies of US President Donald Trump's second term.

And it is from here that the rumblings of a



# RIC

## FIERY PATH

**The Crucible of Power**



new era began to be heard. An era where this Russia-India-China axis is seen as the driving force behind the colossal chariot of BRICS+. But the question remains: Can this triumvirate truly move forward in unison? Will this collaboration of the Elephant (India), the Dragon (China), and the Bear (Russia) write a new history on the global stage, or will their internal contradictions turn this script into a tragedy? For India, this is not just a global development, but an 'Agneepath' – a trial by fire – where every step must be taken with utmost caution.

### **The Three Faces of the Triumvirate**

The resurgence of RIC on the global stage is akin to a play where each of the three main characters has their own script, their own compulsions, and their own goals. They are on the same stage, but their gazes are fixed in different directions. Without unraveling the layers of these characters' minds, understanding the direction of this play is impossible.

#### **Character Number One: Russia**

Today, if anyone is most restive for this trilateral dialogue, it is Russia. Shackled by Western sanctions after its 2022 attack on Ukraine, Russia is knocking on

the doors of the East to break its diplomatic isolation. For it, RIC is not merely a diplomatic platform but a means to preserve its existence and prove that it remains a crucial global player. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's call to revive RIC reflects Moscow's internal dual conflict.

First, it's an open message to the West that their days of hegemony are over. The more you try to isolate us, the stronger new allies we will find. Second, and perhaps more significantly, it is an attempt to protect itself from the fear of being completely absorbed into China's embrace. Today, Russia's economy and politics have become dangerously dependent on China. Their bilateral trade is skyrocketing, but Moscow is aware of the asymmetry of this relationship. It knows it is becoming a junior partner in this relationship. In this context, the RIC platform provides it with psychological leverage to negotiate on an equal footing with China. India's presence on this platform offers Russia an invaluable opportunity to balance its dependence on China. For Russia, RIC is a 'Sanjeevani Booti' – a life-giving elixir – to regain its lost global prestige and maintain its relevance in Eurasia.



## Character Number Two: China

China's affinity for RIC is not a result of emotional attachment but a calculated strategic move. The Dragon's eyes are fixed on Taiwan and the South China Sea. Its entire focus is on transforming its military into the world's most powerful. Thus, it does not want a new front to open on its land border with India. RIC serves as a slow burner to melt the ice that has frozen relations with India since the bloody Galwan clash of 2020. It offers China an opportunity to maintain a controlled dialogue with India, without giving any substantial concessions on core issues like border disputes.

Furthermore, China is embroiled in an all-out confrontation with the United States. From trade wars to technological dominance, Washington is attempting to encircle it on every front. In this scenario, China utilizes platforms like RIC and BRICS to demonstrate that it is not alone, and that many major nations stand with it against the American order. This is an attempt to entice the Global South and convey the message that Beijing, not Washington, will lead the future world. However, China also doesn't shy away from flexing its muscles. From disrupting India's auto industry by restricting rare earth exports to halting fertilizer shipments – these subtle maneuvers are enough to remind who the 'big brother' is in this relationship. For China, RIC is merely a pawn in its grand strategic game.

## Character Number Three: India

And then comes India – the Elephant, methodically charting its path through this complex geopolitical jungle with its slow but steady gait. For India, RIC is a riddle it is compelled and needs to solve. India has always envisioned a multipolar world, where no single nation's arbitrary will dictates. But today, it stands at a peculiar crossroads. On one side is its deepening strategic and economic partnership with the US and the West, while on the other is its decades-old, time-tested friendship with Russia.

However, the policies of US President Donald Trump are shattering the bridge of trust built with America over nearly three decades. Be it Trump's claims of orchestrating a ceasefire in Operation Sindoor, the absence of a trade deal with India coupled with heavy tariffs up to 25 percent, and to top it all, an additional 25 percent tariff as a penalty for buying oil from Russia.

To navigate such circumstances, India has adopted

the mantra of 'strategic autonomy'. It refuses to be a satellite of any single bloc. RIC is a crucial instrument in maintaining this autonomy. It provides India a platform to balance Western pressure, energize its relations with Russia, and most importantly, keep a channel for dialogue open with China despite tensions. This is a highly delicate balance. When India eases visa norms for Chinese citizens or opens doors for Chinese investment, it signals to the world that it is not averse to dialogue, while simultaneously maintaining its iron grip on the border. For India, RIC is a strategic hedge, an option it will always want to keep in its foreign policy quiver.

## Cracks and Contradictions

The image of this triumvirate, as alluring as it appears from the outside, is equally hollow and riddled with cracks within. Numerous unresolved questions and deep contradictions exist that could shake the very foundations of this purported alliance at any moment.

## The Unresolved Knot of Distrust

The most vulnerable corner of this triangle, its 'Achilles' heel', is the unresolved border drawn across the snowy peaks of the Himalayas between India and China. This is not merely a boundary dispute, but a festering wound of deep distrust between two civilizations that has been oozing for decades. The sacrifice of Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley in 2020 deepened that chasm of mistrust even further. Although agreements have been made to de-escalate tensions in some areas of Ladakh, this is merely like applying ointment to a wound, not curing the disease. Until China ceases its attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo on the border and respects India's sovereignty, true trust between the two nations will remain a distant dream. This mistrust is a heavy burden on the soul of RIC. How can nations redraw the world map when they cannot even define their own? For India, standing on any platform with China comes with the risk of a stab in the back. However, this month's visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to India has begun to thaw the ice in relations, and where complexities are fewer, an agreement on border demarcation has been reached between the two countries. Similarly, in the initial week of September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to attend the SCO summit, where he will meet not only Xi Jinping but also Vladimir Putin. It is hoped



that the situation will progress positively.

### A Red Flag for India

Another significant threat is the burgeoning 'unbreakable' camaraderie between Russia and China, which is drawing lines of concern in the corridors of power in New Delhi. The Ukraine war has rendered Russia so weakened and isolated that it has been compelled to become a junior partner to China. This partnership dangerously skews the balance of power within RIC in Beijing's favor. India's apprehension is natural: that RIC might not become a platform where Beijing and Moscow together pressure New Delhi to acquiesce on a particular issue. India wishes to remain the third corner of this triangle, not a target created by the other two. If Russia loses its independent foreign policy identity and begins to dance entirely to China's tune, RIC could transform from a beneficial platform into a dangerous trap for India.

### The Tangled Threads of Economy

The foundation of this triangle rests not merely on politics but also on economics, and even this base is not very robust. Trade between India and China is substantial, but it is largely one-sided. India's market is flooded with Chinese goods, whereas the access of Indian products to the Chinese market is severely limited. This massive trade deficit is a perpetual headache for India's economy. The situation is similar with Russia, where India imports vast quantities of oil and weapons but struggles to open the Russian market for its own products.

Furthermore, the differing regulations, business practices, and technical standards across the three countries make seamless economic integration seem almost impossible. India's digital data laws do not align with China's state-controlled internet model. Until these structural impediments are overcome, RIC cannot become an effective economic bloc.

### Can This Triumvirate Make History?

Despite these myriad challenges and thorns, there remains a glimmer of hope for some flowers of opportunity to bloom in the courtyard of RIC. If these three nations can set aside their differences and focus on common interests, they could usher in a new dawn not just for themselves, but for the entire Global South.

The Foundation of a New Economic Order: India's



UPI has today become a symbol of the digital payment revolution globally. China too possesses robust platforms like Alipay. If these countries were to jointly develop a shared digital payment system, they could significantly reduce their dependence on the dollar and Western financial systems. The 2025 Submarine Internet Cable Project is also a step in this direction, which could liberate them from the 'slavery' of Western infrastructure for data flow.

*The RIC triumvirate—Russia, India, and China—stand as the lead actors in a new drama on the global stage, each driven by its own goals and compulsions. For Russia, after the Ukraine war, this platform offers a way to break free from Western sanctions and reduce its growing dependence on China. For China, locked in fierce competition with the United States and intent on keeping border disputes under control, RIC serves as a channel to maintain a measured dialogue with India.*



**Partnership in Technology and Innovation:** China is a world leader in green energy and 5G. India has established its prowess in solar energy and software. Russia possesses vast experience in space and defense technology. If these three nations collaborate in research and development, they could give the West formidable competition in next-generation technologies.

**A Strong Voice on Global Platforms:** Institutions like the UN Security Council still represent the world of 1945. RIC, acting in concert, could exert pressure for reforms in these institutions, ensuring that emerging powers like India receive their rightful due and the voice of the Global South is not ignored.

### India's Agneepath (Trial by Fire)

Ultimately, this emerging Russia-India-China axis presents both an opportunity and a challenge for India. It is an 'Agneepath' – a trial by fire – upon which India must prove both its diplomatic dexterity and national resolve.

The path ahead for India is clear, but not easy. Its strategy must rest on three pillars:

**Iron Resolve on the Border:** While channels for dialogue with China may remain open, there should be no room for any laxity or weakness on the border. India must continuously strengthen its military and infrastructural capabilities, for respect and security stem from strength.

**The Protective Shield of Multi-alignment:** India should not pin all its hopes on RIC. It must also strengthen the Quad with the United States, Japan, and Australia. Furthermore, it must deepen its ties with Europe, ASEAN, and Middle Eastern countries. Holding onto the thread of dialogue with RIC on one hand, while standing shoulder-to-shoulder with its democratic partners on the Quad platform on the other – this is the diplomatic tightrope walk that has become India's destiny today.

**Pragmatic and Issue-Based Cooperation:** Within RIC, India must avoid emotional rhetoric and focus purely on pragmatic interests. Cooperation should be pursued on issues where interests converge, such as terrorism, climate change, trade, and connectivity, but it must never cross its 'Laxman Rekha' (red line) on strategic matters.

This collaboration of the Dragon, the Bear, and the Elephant is perhaps the most intriguing and significant drama in global politics. They may never sing in perfect unison, but in the changing symphony of the world, they must find a way to remain on stage together. For India, deftly playing its role in this drama, preserving its autonomy, and advancing its national interests is the greatest challenge of the 21st century. This is a struggle that will not be fought in the corridors of power in Delhi, but on the global chessboard of diplomacy, and its outcome will determine India's place in future history.

# BROMANCE IN ASHES

## A New Global Upheaval







Sachchidanand

*The stadiums echoing with "Howdy Modi" and the glittering moments of "Namaste Trump" are now history. That warmth of friendship has turned to ashes—and from those very ashes, a new upheaval has risen. Chained migrants, the false credit for 'Operation Sindoor', and the reverberations of 50% tariffs have not only fractured India-US relations but also shaken the very foundations of global politics. And the architect of this reality is—Donald Trump.*

There was a time when India-America friendship was cited as an example. The echoes of "Howdy Modi" in Houston's grand stadium and the chants of "Namaste Trump" in Ahmedabad's Motera—the world watched with great anticipation this unique camaraderie blossoming between two strong leaders of two democratic nations. This friendship was not merely confined to photographs and warm handshakes; it was a magnificent edifice of strategic partnership that both nations had painstakingly built, brick by brick, over the past three decades. The foundation of this edifice rested on shared democratic values, a joint fight against terrorism, and a common strategic resolve to counterbalance China's growing dominance.

But on the chessboard of politics, golden images of friendship are often merely the first installment of a harsh reality. When Donald Trump made his return to the White House in January 2025, many Indian strategists felt a sense of relief. They believed that Trump's personal chemistry with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that "bromance" the world had witnessed, would act as a protective shield for India. It was thought that while the world might tremble at Trump's unpredictable and tumultuous temperament, India would remain safe from this storm.

Yet, within six months, this golden dream began to transform into a nightmare. That canvas of friendship, painted with the colors of hope, was now being discolored by the ink of distrust and pressure. This story began with images of Indian migrants in America with their pride in chains, then progressed

to the peculiar claim of "Operation Sindoor," where Trump attempted to present himself as a peacemaker between India and Pakistan, and finally arrived at the heavy economic blow of massive tariffs imposed on India for purchasing Russian oil. Where it will go next is hard to say, but all this has shaken the very foundation of this relationship.

In no time, that magnificent edifice of strategic partnership began to crack. India-US relations plunged to their lowest point in decades. Just as constitutional institutions in India felt ensnared in the grip of a centralized governance system, India's foreign policy on the global stage appeared to be caught in the shackles of Trump's unpredictable and unilateral actions. This was not merely a bilateral issue between two nations; its impact was influencing every move on the chessboard of global geopolitics. Unraveling the layers of how and why the situation changed, and understanding what lies buried beneath the debris of this friendship—a temporary misunderstanding or a permanent rift—is the greatest imperative today.

### Pride in Chains

The first deep and public crack in this relationship appeared in February 2025, just before Prime Minister Modi's White House visit, when the world witnessed images that shook every Indian to their core. Indian citizens, their hands and feet bound in chains, moving towards an American military aircraft. They were not dangerous criminals, but undocumented immigrants who had set foot on American soil in search of a better life. They were

sent back, bound in chains like animals during a hours-long flight.

This was a stark display of Trump's radical "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) ideology, for which the demonization of immigrants is an electoral necessity. It was a cruel play of his domestic politics, staged at the cost of India's pride. Anger erupted in India. The opposition protested in Parliament wearing handcuffs, questioning why New Delhi couldn't halt this "inhumane" and "humiliating" treatment of its citizens if Trump was such a good friend of Prime Minister Modi.

This incident became a tough diplomatic puzzle for the Modi government. On one hand, there was the question of its citizens' dignity, and on the other, the risk of displeasing an unpredictable leader like Trump. The government attempted to defend itself in Parliament by stating that this was an old American procedure, but this argument failed to convince anyone. The truth was that Trump was prioritizing his domestic politics above any friendship or strategic partnership. He had sent a clear message that pleasing his voter base was more important to him than caring about relations with India. This was the first major blow, revealing how hollow the foundation of this "bromance" was, and that it could be sacrificed to Trump's political interests at any moment.

### The Myth of Friendship

If the images of chains had created a crack in the relationship, Trump's next move transformed that crack into a deep chasm. After the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, in April 2022, India and Pakistan became embroiled in their largest military confrontation in decades. India launched "Operation Sindoor," and both nuclear-armed nations stood on the brink of war. When the ceasefire between the two countries occurred on May 10, the world breathed a sigh of relief.

But then Donald Trump made a claim that sent shockwaves through New Delhi. He began asserting, repeatedly, over 30 times, that he had brokered the ceasefire. He reiterated it so often that in India, he was jokingly referred to as Mr. Ceasefire. He stated, "I told both countries to either stop the war, or trade would stop." He presented himself as a great peacemaker, whose single gesture halted two nuclear powers from fighting.

This was a direct assault on India's sovereignty

and its decades-old foreign policy. India has always maintained that all its disputes with Pakistan are bilateral and there is no room for third-party mediation. Trump's claim was not only false, but it was an attempt to portray India as a weak nation incapable of making its own decisions. Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar vehemently refuted this on every platform, from Parliament onwards. They clarified that there had been no conversation between Modi and Trump during the ceasefire, and trade had nothing to do with it.

But Trump stuck to his falsehoods. For him, it wasn't a matter of truth, but an opportunity to burnish his image. He saw himself as a contender for the Nobel Peace Prize. This episode made India even more uncomfortable because, at precisely this time, the Trump administration was increasing its proximity with Pakistan. The Pakistani Army Chief was given an unprecedented welcome at the White House, whom Trump described as "extremely effective" in establishing peace. This was a double blow for India: on one hand, its closest strategic partner was undermining its sovereignty, and on the other, it was embracing its biggest rival. The mask of friendship had now completely fallen away, clearly revealing a purely transactional, self-centered face behind it.

### The Great Tariff War

The final nail in the coffin of this relationship was hammered in by Trump's economic 'Brahmastra'. The reason: India's old and time-tested friendship with Russia. After the Ukraine war began, when Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia, India, considering its energy security needs, continued to purchase crude oil from Russia at discounted rates. This was a natural extension of India's policy of "strategic autonomy." The Biden administration had understood this compulsion and had never directly pressured India.

But for Trump, this was unacceptable. He wanted to pressure Russian President Putin regarding peace talks in Ukraine, and India appeared to him as an easy scapegoat. He began accusing India of financially supporting Russia's "war machine." Trump's allies, such as Stephen Miller and Peter Navarro, publicly blamed India.

What followed was unprecedented. In late July, Trump imposed a hefty 25 percent tariff on Indian imports. But he didn't stop there. He announced that







*Once adorned with “Howdy Modi” and “Namaste Trump” moments, India-US relations have dramatically deteriorated during Donald Trump’s second term. Within six months, the humiliation of Indian immigrants, Trump’s misleading claims on “Operation Sindoor,” and steep tariffs on India’s Russian oil purchases shook the foundation of a decades-long strategic partnership. This article explains how the golden dream of friendship turned pale under the ink of distrust and pressure, pushing bilateral ties to decades-low levels and examining its impact on global geopolitics.*



if India did not cease purchasing Russian oil, this tariff would be doubled to 50 percent. This was not how one treated a strategic partner; this was economic warfare waged against an enemy.

India reacted sharply. The Ministry of External Affairs called it "unjust, unfair, and illogical" and stated that India would take all necessary steps to protect its national interests. India also pointed to the double standards of Western nations, highlighting that Europe itself was trading far more with Russia than India, and America too was importing fertilizers and chemicals from Russia.

The decline in relations with India is not just

a concern for New Delhi but has also begun to echo within Washington's political circles. Several decisions taken during US President Donald Trump's second term have shaken the foundation of a strategic partnership built over decades. As a result, many prominent American figures are now openly criticizing these moves. Former UN Ambassador and Republican leader Nikki Haley described the Trump administration's action of deporting Indian immigrants in chains as "inhumane and shameful." She argued that this not only hurt the Indian-origin community but also damaged America's moral credibility. Similarly, John Kerry, Secretary of State during



the Obama administration, and Susan Rice, former National Security Advisor, also termed Trump's anti-India tariffs a "strategic blunder." According to them, punishing India was weakening America's own Indo-Pacific strategy instead of pressuring Russia.

Not just Democrats, but several Republican think-tanks and policy experts also believe that alienating a democratic ally like

India indirectly benefits China. Critical voices resonating in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee indicate that the rift in India-US relations is being seriously felt within American politics as well.

Indeed, the partnership once called the "Defining Relationship of the 21st Century" during the Obama era is now in crisis due to Trump's short-sighted policies. This discontent is not limited to diplomatic circles but extends to American media, human rights organizations, and business lobbies. It is clear that the deterioration in relations with India has put Trump in the dock of criticism in his own country.

The biggest question was why America targeted India but spared China, which was buying the most oil from Russia? The answer lay in the complex economic dependence between the US and China. America is so dependent on China's rare earths and its vast supply chain that it could not risk a full-blown trade war with China, especially just before the Christmas season. It had no such compulsion with India. This selective action made it clear that Trump's policy was based on convenience, not principles.

The impact of this tariff war was immediately visible. In Surat, Gujarat, where 90% of the world's diamonds are cut, the industry virtually came to a standstill. The US is the largest buyer of Indian diamonds. Due to the tariffs, orders stopped, factories began to close, and thousands of artisans became unemployed. Diamond artisans like Ajay Lakum, who had spent their entire lives in this work, suddenly found themselves on the streets. This was not just an economic statistic; it was a direct attack on the livelihoods of millions of people.

On the other hand, the decision to

impose massive tariffs of up to 50 percent on India proved to be a severe blow not only for New Delhi but also for the American economy. This step was taken at a time when American industries were already grappling with inflation, supply-chain crises, and an ongoing trade war with China. Such a huge barrier on products coming from India multiplied the costs for American importers and retail companies. From textiles to diamond processing, auto parts to pharmaceuticals, American consumers had to pay higher prices in many sectors.

The diamond and gem-stone industry, in particular, centered in New York and Los Angeles, was directly affected. Tariffs on imports from Surat broke the backbone of businesses, endangering thousands of jobs. The pharmaceutical industry, which relies on affordable generic drugs from India, also saw prices suddenly rise, putting an additional burden on the average American's pocket. Consequently, the Consumer Price Index recorded a surge, and concerns were raised within the US Federal Reserve itself.

Trade lobbies and business councils warned the White House that imposing harsh tariffs on India was causing American companies to lose competitiveness and weakening their market position. Discontent also emerged within the Republican Party, as groups traditionally supporting business interests considered it a "self-defeating" move. The result was that instead of putting pressure on China, the tariffs plunged America's own domestic industries and consumers into a fire of inflation and instability.

### The Precarious Equation of Geopolitics

This upheaval in India-US relations was not merely bilateral. Its tremors were felt across the entire spectrum of global geopolitics, diplomacy, and economy.

- **Geopolitical Shift:** The biggest

and most ironic consequence of Trump's actions was that it inadvertently pushed India closer to Russia and China. The main pillar of America's Indo-Pacific strategy was to position India as a strong counterbalancing power against China. But by isolating and punishing India in this manner, Trump did precisely the opposite. He forced India to take trilateral platforms like Russia-India-China (RIC) more seriously. At a time when America most needed a partner like India to counter China, Trump's policies pushed that very partner towards the camp of its rivals.

- **Diplomatic Distrust:** This entire episode sent a dangerous message to American allies around the world. The message was that "strategic partnership" with the US meant nothing if your leader came in the way of President Trump's domestic political agenda or his momentary anger. It put a deep question mark on America's credibility. The rules-based world order, which America had advocated for decades, now appeared to be transforming into a "deal-based disorder," where the rules were whatever Donald Trump decided.

- **Economic Uncertainty:** This tariff war created a new wave of uncertainty in the global economy. Pressure on the Indian rupee and bond market increased. Global supply chains, already grappling with the pandemic and the Ukraine war, were further disrupted. It proved that when the world's two largest economies and democracies clash in this manner, the impact is not just on them, but on overall global economic stability.







*It has now become clear that India must reduce its dependence on the United States and make its foreign policy more robustly independent, so that it does not become a follower of any single bloc and can safeguard its national interests. Donald Trump's "America First" and "Make America Great Again" policies have posed a significant challenge to India's strategic autonomy.*

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Searching for the Future Amidst the Debris of Friendship

From the chants of "Howdy Modi" to the threat of 50% tariffs, this journey of India-US relations is a bitter lesson. It is a lesson that in international relations, personal chemistry and slogans of friendship cannot be relied upon, especially when dealing with a leader like Donald Trump. This story is not just about the breakdown of a relationship between two leaders, but it is the story of profound structural changes that are shaping global politics today.

Today, India stands at a crossroads. Trump's second term has made it clear that America cannot be blindly trusted. What is the way forward? Can this relationship get back on track? Perhaps yes, but it will never be the same again. India must understand that the path to the future lies in more firmly establishing its "strategic autonomy." It must keep its options open – partnering with the West, and maintaining dialogue with countries like Russia and China.

The old protagonists have left the stage, and a new play is being performed with new characters. In this play, India must write its own script. It must ensure that it does not remain a supporting character in someone else's story. That Taj Mahal of friendship, which once seemed so grand and strong, has today turned into ruins. Now, instead of mourning amidst this debris, India must erect a new, self-reliant, and strong edifice of its foreign policy, whose foundation rests not on the personal relationships of any leader, but on India's own unwavering national interests. This is the greatest truth of this era and the only path to the future.

# WILL TRUMP'S INDIA TARIFFS AFFECT A CRITICAL U.S.

## PARTNERSHIP?



**Kenneth I. Juster**

**T**ump tends to approach issues with other countries primarily with a bilateral focus and largely in the context of a particular set of concerns. He also believes deeply in the concept of reciprocity. From the president's perspective, the economic relationship between the United States and India has been out of balance for many years. He is concerned about India's high barriers to trade and the significant U.S. trade deficit with India. The administration's 25 percent reciprocal tariff on Indian imports is designed to put pressure on India to take further market opening measures and agree to a trade deal.

The White House has also threatened to impose an additional 25 percent tariff beginning August 27 if India does not eliminate its sizable imports of Russian oil. In this case, the president's concern is that payments for the large volume of Indian oil imports provide critical financial support for Russia's war against Ukraine and the killing of many innocent civilians. Trump's objective, if he moves forward with this second tariff, is to indirectly pressure Putin to agree to a plan to end the war by cutting off some of Russia's financial resources. Trump could also be trying to incentivize Modi to appeal directly to Putin in this regard. However, following Trump's meeting

On July 31, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a 25 percent "reciprocal" tariff on Indian imports. The move aimed to pressure New Delhi into reducing trade barriers for American goods. Subsequently, Trump signed an executive order imposing an additional 25 percent duty on India, effective from August 27, citing India's continued purchase of Russian oil. This extra 25 percent tariff—essentially a punitive measure—represents the highest tariff ever levied on any U.S. trade partner and marks the first time in decades that India-U.S. trade tensions have reached such a serious level. The Indian government strongly opposed these tariffs, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed his commitment to protect domestic producers at all costs. Despite the tensions, both countries have maintained diplomatic dialogue in pursuit of a potential agreement. To better understand this complex situation, CFR spoke with Kenneth I. Juster, a distinguished fellow and former U.S. ambassador to India during Trump's first term. Given the ongoing relevance of this issue, we are republishing the discussion to assess the current state of affairs.



with Putin, there are reports that he could suspend the implementation of this additional tariff. Of course, this situation could change depending on Trump's assessment of progress in the Russia-Ukraine talks.

Ultimately, the high tariff rates on India appear to me to be part of a negotiation. This is a similar tactic to what the president has used in other deals, including the trade agreements with Japan and the European Union. Nonetheless, Trump's rhetoric and public threats could well make it more difficult domestically for Modi to take the desired measures.

I do not believe that Trump approaches these trade issues as part of a broader Indo-Pacific strategy, or as inconsistent with U.S. and Indian joint strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. It would therefore be a mistake—and certainly premature—for the government of India to view these tariffs as fundamentally undercutting the strategic partnership that the two countries have developed over the last twenty-five years. I believe the president still has a strong interest in the U.S.-India partnership and enjoys his good relationship with Modi. But he also favors the use of tariffs to try to rebalance the economic relationship and, if he imposes the additional tariff, to help close another deal—one between Russia and Ukraine—for an end to hostilities.

The reaction in India has been multifaceted. Initially,

because the government of India felt the parties were close to announcing a trade deal, the reaction was one of surprise that there were additional issues to address. When the level of rhetoric from the White House increased by labeling India's tariffs "obnoxious" and calling the Indian economy "dead," there was a sense of indignation among Indian commentators. This was exacerbated by the president's repeated statement that he had brokered a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, which the Indians have publicly disputed (thereby irritating Trump in the process).

More recently, when the president announced the threatened imposition of a 25 percent additional tariff on August 27, India's Ministry of External Affairs called this action "unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable," and asserted that India "will take all necessary steps to protect its national interests." Modi also vowed not to compromise the welfare of India's farmers, dairy sector, or fishermen, and stated that he is personally ready "to pay a heavy price for it." Regrettably, respected voices in India are now questioning the value of their strategic partnership with the United States.

The United States, however, is India's largest and most important trading partner. Almost 20 percent of India's total merchandise exports go to the United States. Even though the reciprocal tariff exempts some key sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, and





energy—which account for approximately 40 percent of India’s total merchandise exports to the United States—the detrimental impact of the tariff will still be significant, especially in sectors such as textiles, gems and jewelry, and auto parts.

Given the vibrant political discourse in India, Modi needed to respond publicly and firmly to the new tariffs. But he should also be careful not to paint himself into a corner and to remain open to discussing ways to resolve the current trade dispute. I understand that the two leaders are trying to arrange a meeting in the United States in late September, when both plan to attend the UN General Assembly.

The steady progress in U.S.-India relations over the past twenty-five years, through changes in government on both sides and across political parties, has been extraordinary. This includes Trump’s first term, when he and Modi developed a warm friendship. However, the economic component of the bilateral relationship has always underperformed relative to its potential.

While there have been trade disputes in the past between the United States and India, this one is more acute though still solvable. Despite the initial rhetorical flourish by both sides, Washington and New Delhi are keeping open lines of communication and, hopefully,

beginning to discuss constructive ways to close a trade deal. Ultimately, the planned meeting in September between Trump and Modi is probably needed to resolve outstanding issues and get the relationship back on track.

Continuation of this trade dispute would inevitably have a negative impact on certain sectors of India’s economy, as the tariffs affect over 55 percent of Indian shipments to the United States. For example, in the textile and apparel sector, India competes with Vietnam and Bangladesh, which each have a lower reciprocal tariff rate. If American companies shift their sourcing away from India and toward these other countries, the damage to India in terms of lost business and jobs would be significant. In the estimation of some experts, the loss of export trade could lower India’s domestic growth by approximately 0.5 percent or more, depending on how long the high tariffs last.

The tariffs will also impose costs on U.S. companies and consumers. To the degree that U.S. companies incorporate Indian parts or components into their products, the cost of these inputs will increase (or substitute inputs will need to be found where possible). And U.S. consumers of Indian products will have higher costs and less choice in sectors such as textiles, gems and jewelry, auto parts, and certain foodstuffs. The



impact in both countries will depend on a combination of factors, including product differentiation, demand, quality, and contractual arrangements.

Beyond these economic issues, the failure to conclude a deal could cause spillover collateral damage to other aspects of the bilateral relationship, including in defense and technology cooperation. The weakening of the U.S.-India relationship would inevitably be of strategic benefit to China—and that is not in the interest of either the United States or India. Both Washington and New Delhi should recognize that their bilateral relationship is more significant and impactful than any arrangement either of them can work out with China, which remains a strategic challenge for both countries.

The United States and India need to address two issues: The 25 percent reciprocal tariff related to a trade agreement and the possible additional 25 percent tariff related to India's oil imports from Russia.

Regarding the potential tariff relating to Russian oil imports, India's initial position seems to be to wait and see what the impact will be of the talks between Trump and Putin. While an early resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict would eliminate any tariff on Russian oil imports, this protracted conflict is unlikely

to be settled soon. Accordingly, while it would probably be impractical for the Indians to terminate all oil imports from Russia, they may wish to quietly lower their level of Russian oil imports and substitute them with more energy imports from the United States. Some reports indicate that this process could already be starting. If so, that would enable New Delhi to request Washington to delay any implementation of the threatened tariff. And if Trump and Modi can resolve outstanding trade issues when they meet in late September, perhaps the United States will agree to drop the extra 25 percent tariff altogether, even if the Russia-Ukraine conflict has not been resolved.

Regarding the 25 percent reciprocal tariff, Trump's imposition of this is, in my mind, a negotiating tactic rather than a desire to jettison the U.S.-India strategic partnership. Under these circumstances, New Delhi should avoid the temptation to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. imports, which would likely be counterproductive. Fortunately, I see no evidence that India is planning to take such action. However exasperated the Indian government may be by recent events, it should try to be as creative as possible in presenting further ideas for discussion with its U.S. counterparts. Perhaps the Indians can carefully review other U.S. trade deals to see if there are elements that they could borrow to enhance what they have already put on the table. This could include pledges of further investment by Indian companies in the United States, the allowance of duty-free access for certain agricultural items such as cotton and blueberries, and the acceptance of some other items under limited quotas. I also recall during Trump's first term that the two countries had outlined a proposal for limited U.S. dairy imports. Perhaps that could be resurrected. Based on my experience, Modi is an extremely skillful interlocutor and is well suited to a high-stakes meeting with Trump. The prime minister would likely want to emphasize the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship and his appreciation for the good rapport between the two leaders over time. While Modi should be prepared to provide ideas on how to sweeten India's offers on trade, procurements, and investments, he could also reference his own constraints as the head of a democratic government and the areas where he will need some U.S. understanding and flexibility.

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*Kenneth I. Juster served as the 25th U.S. Ambassador to India from 2017 to 2021.*

# DHAKA'S

## New Turning Point



Santu Das

*General Wakar-uz-Zaman's emphasis on secularism in Bangladesh was not merely a statement, but a reflection of deep concern. The end of Sheikh Hasina's administration has created a political vacuum, into which extremist forces and the military are once again being drawn. This turmoil poses a serious challenge to stability along India's eastern border and will shape the future of the entire region.*





**W**hen on August 17, 2025, Bangladesh's Army Chief, General Wakar-uz-Zaman, firmly reiterated the importance of secularism in the country and the army's role in maintaining peace, it was not merely a formal statement. It was a manifestation of deep concern, an attempt to gaze into the soul of a nation once again grappling with the ghosts of its past. Caught between deteriorating law and order, escalating attacks on minorities, and the uncertainty of elections scheduled for February 2026, Bangladesh stands at a dangerous crossroads. The army, which had been on a path to becoming a professional institution during the last 15 years of political stability, is now, albeit reluctantly, being dragged once again into the quagmire of the country's politics.

The end of Sheikh Hasina's long 15-year rule, which had forged a fragile yet effective civil-military balance,

has created a vacuum that radical forces and old ideologies within the military are once again attempting to fill. This story is not merely about Bangladesh's internal crisis. It is also a grave strategic warning for India, as the future of a stable, secular, and friendly neighbor on its eastern border hangs in the balance. This analysis delves into the historical roots of Bangladesh's complex civil-military equation, the paradoxes of the Hasina era, and the dangerous vacuum that emerged after her fall, which will define not only Dhaka's future but also the stability of the entire region.

### Shadows of the Past

Bangladesh's tragedy is that despite its liberation in 1971, it could not entirely eradicate the culture of Pakistani military intervention from its politics. The period from the 1970s to the 1990s is a grim chapter of bloody military coups, political assassinations, and weak democratic institutions. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1975), the counter-coup and assassination of Brigadier Khaled Musharraf, General Zia-ur-Rahman's seizure of power and his subsequent

assassination, and finally, General H.M. Ershad's coup—all are parts of the same story: an army deeply divided by ideologies, which politicians attempted to use for their own interests, and ultimately fell victim to the same.

This period created an enduring distrust, where civilian leadership viewed the army as a threat and the army considered civilian leaders incompetent and corrupt. The restoration of the parliamentary system in 1991 and the rivalry between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia strengthened civilian leadership but also institutionalized factionalism within the military, where both parties promoted their loyal officers.

### Hasina's Paradox

When Sheikh Hasina returned to power in 2009, she was fully aware of this bloody legacy. She forged a new, unprecedented, and contradictory balance with the army, which could be likened to a 'golden cage.' This was the foundation of her 15 years in power.

To make the cage 'golden,' Hasina pursued a comprehensive policy of appeasing the military. She vastly expanded the army's budget, equipped it with state-of-the-art weaponry, provided lucrative construction contracts, and increased their participation in UN peacekeeping missions, a major source of prestige and income for officers. She also turned a blind eye to the army's illegal trafficking networks and widespread corruption. It was a clear bargain—as long as the army stayed out of politics, it would be rewarded economically.

But at the same time, she also strengthened the bars of that cage. The 2009 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny was a pivotal moment in this strategy. In this rebellion, in which radical organizations like Jamaat-e-Islami and Hizb-ut-Tahrir were allegedly complicit, Hasina chose a political solution rather than allowing direct military intervention. She utilized forces under the Home Ministry, thereby preventing deeper divisions and bloodshed within the army. India's strong support during this crisis also strengthened her hand against the military.

Subsequently, Hasina systematically disempowered the army. In 2011, she abolished the provision of a 'caretaker government' through the 15th constitutional amendment—the very provision the army had used to seize power in 2007. In 2013, she handed down death and life imprisonment sentences to hundreds of soldiers and officers involved in the Bangladesh Rifles mutiny, sending a harsh message to the military.



She promoted her loyalists to top positions through "note sheet promotions," which allegedly included the appointment of her relative, General Zaman, as Army Chief. Concurrently, she used civilian agencies like the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to crush opposition and dissent, effectively eliminating the army's role in domestic politics.

From India's perspective, this 'golden cage' model was a strategic boon. Hasina's rule not only brought economic stability to Bangladesh but also cracked down on anti-India militant groups and promoted a secular agenda, which was crucial for New Delhi's security interests.

### The Shattering of the Cage and the Era of Uncertainty

So why did this balance break? The nationwide student protests of 2024 shattered this delicate equation. Initially, the army supported the government by cracking down on protesters. But as the movement gained popularity and became nationwide, the army made a crucial calculation. Further supporting Hasina would mean widespread bloodshed, which would not only tarnish their professional image but also directly drag them into the political quagmire they had avoided.



"the army is for national defense, not policing," reflects this very frustration. Meanwhile, Islamist forces have strengthened, attacks on minorities have increased, and the crisis of civilian leadership has deepened. With Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League out of the political landscape, and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia in poor health, the country faces a dangerous political vacuum.

## Delhi's Dilemma

For India, this situation is like a strategic nightmare coming true. A period of 15 years of stability has now turned into uncertainty and instability. New Delhi faces several serious concerns:

**Rise of Radicalism:** A weak and unstable Bangladesh provides fertile ground for radical Islamic groups, which could directly impact India's internal security, especially in West Bengal and the northeastern states.

**China and Pakistan's Influence:** The political vacuum offers China and Pakistan a golden opportunity to expand their influence in Bangladesh, potentially diminishing India's strategic advantage in the region.

**Economic and Connectivity Projects:** India has invested heavily in connectivity and trade with Bangladesh. Political instability could jeopardize all these projects.

**Security of Minorities:** Any attacks on Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh have political and social repercussions in India.

The upcoming elections may not be a solution to this crisis, but rather the beginning of its next chapter. A weak civilian government, regardless of which party is in power, will increase its dependence on the military, further enhancing the army's influence. If the elections are violent or their results disputed, the risk of direct military intervention will increase even further.

The conclusion is that the end of the Hasina era in Bangladesh is the end of an epoch. The 'golden cage' she built has shattered, and now the ghosts of 1975 are once again peeking out from the barracks. For India, this is not just a crisis in a neighboring country. It is the biggest test of its 'Neighborhood First' policy. New Delhi will have to strike a very delicate balance—supporting stability without intervention, and being prepared for a long period of uncertainty and instability to once again begin on its eastern border.

for 15 years. This could also lead to deep divisions within the army.

Therefore, the army chose the path of self-preservation. They avoided direct intervention by convincing Hasina to step down and by supporting an interim government.

However, this step has inadvertently opened a 'Pandora's Box.' The vacuum created by Hasina's departure is now filling dangerously. The interim government has altered the civil-military equation in two ways. First, divisions within the army are once again increasing. Officers with radical Islamic leanings are reportedly being promoted to higher positions. Approximately 300 convicts from the 2009 mutiny have been released. General Zaman has announced an investigation into atrocities committed under the Hasina regime, which could signal a purge of loyalists within the army. Growing security cooperation with Pakistan is likely to further embolden Islamist and anti-India elements in the military.

Second, the army is now reluctantly involved in maintaining law and order and domestic politics, creating palpable frustration. General Zaman's statement that



## US TARIFFS

# Threaten Indian Pharma Exports



Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

***US President Donald Trump has indicated that over the next 18 months, special tariffs of up to 250% could be imposed on Indian pharmaceuticals. This move would not only drive up drug prices but also profoundly impact global health security and the balance of trade between India and the United States.***

Indian pharmaceutical firms are currently exempt from tariffs imposed by the United States (US), but this insulation may not last. Duties on Indian imports currently stand at 25 percent but may double to 50 percent with US President Donald Trump announcing an additional levy earlier this month, citing India's import of Russian oil. As of now, the pharmaceutical sector falls outside the ambit of US tariffs. However, in a recent interview, Trump indicated that he plans to introduce pharma-specific tariffs that could reach 250 percent over the next 18 months. Estimates indicate that a 25 percent pharma tariff would add US\$51 billion a year to US drug costs, potentially increasing drug prices by 13 percent.

### Tariff Tensions and the Section 232 Review

The US-India bilateral trade relationship has been strained, with the Trump administration announcing plans to place additional tariffs on imports from India as a penalty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil, placing the total tariffs at 50 percent. Pharmaceuticals have thus far been positioned out of the tariff ambit, while India places a duty between 5-10 percent on American pharma products. In April 2025, the US commenced a Section 232 review of its pharma imports under its Trade Expansion Act, 1962. The results of this investigation – expected by March 2026 – will determine whether the

US President will impose duties on imports that are deemed a national security risk. Previous application of tariffs to steel and aluminium, under Section 232, adversely impacted US productivity and its trade relations with its partners. India will present its case at the World Trade Organization (WTO), arguing that the new tariffs on steel and aluminium are not compliant with WTO safeguard measures, whilst reserving its right to pursue retaliatory tariff countermeasures.

## US Tariffs on Pharma: Current Status

In the case of pharmaceuticals, the US recently placed 15 percent tariffs on pharma imports from the EU and Japan, and 10 percent on those from the UK, marking a notable departure from the long-standing tradition of insulating pharma products from trade disputes due to their public health importance. The future of these tariffs is uncertain as they will be subject to the outcome of the Section 232 investigation. Trump indicated that any new tariffs will be introduced incrementally over the next 18 months to secure the US drug supply chains and bring production back to American shores.

This plan, however, assumes tariffs will make imported drugs more expensive, push consumers toward domestic options, and spur US pharmaceutical manufacturing and job growth. These assumptions fail to account for the nuances of the American healthcare system and overlook the economic and operational aspects of onshoring. Firstly, 90 percent of US health expenditure is attributed to chronic diseases, which are managed through prescription drugs comprising both branded drugs and generics. The US is the world's largest pharmaceutical market, importing products worth US \$ 212.67 billion in 2024. Ninety percent of prescriptions dispensed in the US are for generic drugs, but they account for only 20 percent of spending, indicating that a considerable amount of drug spending goes

towards patent-protected medicines.

## Reliance on Indian Generics

The US healthcare system is heavily reliant on India; India supplies 47 percent of its generics and is instrumental in ensuring access to vital medicines at affordable prices. Indian-made generic Rosuvastatin illustrates this — after its entry into the market, the number of Americans who were able to afford the drug doubled between 2016 and 2022. Tariff pressure on generics – above 10-15 percent – can cause Indian manufacturers to exit the US market due to 'razor-thin profit margins' or even compel cost-cutting measures that compromise drug quality. The result of the tariffs, therefore, poses a direct threat to US public health security by triggering drug shortages and raising drug costs for American patients.

## Supply Chain Vulnerabilities

Further, pharma supply chains are complex, with vulnerabilities arising due to a heavy reliance on China for critical materials. This is primarily due to dependence on China for key starting materials (KSM) and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) that are essential to drug manufacturing. 40 percent of global API needs are supplied by China. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted India's vulnerabilities and prompted Production-Linked-Incentive (PLI) schemes for the promotion of KSMs and APIs. Despite this, India imports 70 percent of its API needs from China. If tariffs are imposed on Indian pharma products, it will disincentivise Indian drug manufacturers from producing APIs. Instead, drug manufacturers, to minimise losses and to preserve cost-margins arising from tariffs, will likely increase their purchases of APIs from cheaper Chinese sources – at least in the interim – thereby undermining Indian and US efforts to de-risk pharmaceutical supply



***The threat of US tariffs looms over Indian pharmaceuticals, potentially rising up to 250%. This would not only make medicines more expensive but also destabilize the US healthcare system, which relies on India for half of its generics, potentially compromising quality and increasing dependence on China.***

chains from China. This would place both Indian and US health security at risk by deepening API dependency on China.

### Onshoring Challenges

The second nuance to US healthcare is that ramping up US pharmaceutical manufacturing is complex and, according to estimates, will take at least 5-10 years. Tariffs may incentivise manufacturers of branded drugs with a high profit margin to bring manufacturing to American shores, either through the acquisition of existing infrastructure or through the construction of new production units. However, aside from the time and large-scale investments needed for setting up these plants, American manufacturing efforts will require consideration of i) the US's steel and aluminium tariffs, which will impact construction costs, ii) the US's stringent regulatory measures, and iii) the need for a highly-skilled workforce.

### MFN Drug Pricing and Innovation Risks

A compounding factor to pharma imports is the Trump administration's new drug pricing policy. Introduced through an Executive Order – 'Delivering Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) Prescription Drug Pricing to American Patients' – in May 2025, the policy benchmarks prices for certain innovative drugs to the lowest prices paid by a basket of other developed countries. The basket of developed countries here is defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services as the lowest price in an OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country with a GDP per capita of at least 60 percent of the US GDP per capita. Seventeen pharma companies received letters from Trump outlining steps that need to be taken to ensure reduced drug prices for American patients under MFN and were given a 60-day window to respond.

While price control strategies may generate short-term gains, they will result in lowered profitability, severely reducing investments into research and development (R&D). This will hamper innovation in the pharmaceutical space and disincentivise companies from investing in US-based manufacturing. This would be inopportune as it could render the US and other states dependent on China — which is closing the innovation gap — for access to novel drugs and cutting-edge therapies, creating further health security concerns. While the policy is aimed at reducing the 'global freeloading' of American patients by lowering the cost of innovative drugs to that



of economically comparable countries, it runs the risk of severely hampering innovation and undermining global health security. Attempts to introduce drug price control policies were made during Trump's first presidency, but were met with legal challenges and resistance from various stakeholders.

## Industry Response

The looming threat of pharma tariffs and MFN has cast uncertainty in the pharmaceutical industry and has even caused American hospitals and pharmacies to stockpile certain medications. On the industry front, the reactions have been mixed; the possibility that tariffs could be renegotiated has made companies uncertain over whether they should relocate production facilities to the US or not, while some major stakeholders have begun to make considerable investments in boosting US manufacturing capacity. US pharmaceutical leaders including Eli Lilly, Johnson & Johnson, AbbVie, Bristol Myers Squibb, Gilead, and Regeneron—alongside Switzerland's Roche and Novartis, Japan's Takeda, France's Sanofi, and the UK's AstraZeneca—have pledged a combined investment of nearly US\$320 billion over the next five years to bolster and expand their American industrial and manufacturing capacity.

Indian drugmakers are hedging against the tariff risk by expanding their facilities in the US. Zydus Lifesciences will acquire the manufacturing facilities of Agenus Inc. — a US-based biotech company dedicated to producing immune therapies against cancer — marking its entry into the global biologics CDMO (Contract Development and Manufacturing Organisation) business. Syngene International Limited acquired its first biologics manufacturing site in the US, which focuses on monoclonal antibody manufacturing. SunPharma acquired Checkpoint Therapeutic earlier this year, which has been heralded as a strategic move by industry experts. Through this acquisition, Sun Pharma gains Unloxcyt, the first FDA-approved therapy for advanced cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma (cSCC), strengthening its leadership in immuno-oncology for skin cancer. These efforts enhance market access, contribute to health security by diversifying company portfolios and production locations, and align with India's imperative to strengthen its research and development of new drugs.

## Way Forward

Prioritising alternatives to tariffs is crucial for the



***Trump's tariff policy could make the US drug supply chain even more dependent on China, putting global health security at risk.***

pharmaceutical industry. To reduce the dependence on American revenue sources for innovation in drug-making, European pharma chiefs from Novartis and Sanofi have called on Europe to raise its drug prices to encourage innovation and to act as a counter to US tariff threats. Tax incentives or subsidies could promote US manufacturing and could be applied as instruments to encourage greater transparency over drug pricing and supply chains. Tariffs on pharma, including Indian generics, will raise US drug prices, trigger shortages, and spur reliance on Chinese APIs. Instead, negotiations can centre on securing manufacturing commitments from India without raising costs, with the possibility of further expansion to US sites for drugs with high profit margins.

## Conclusion

US-India pharmaceutical trade is vital for global health. High US tariffs on Indian generics could raise drug costs, threaten innovation, destabilize supply chains, and increase dependence on China, risking health security

*Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is an Associate Fellow with the Health Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation.*

# INDIA@2047



Sanjay Srivastava

## Fortress of Strategy

### Strength, Security & Confidence

***US President Donald Trump has indicated that over the next 18 months, special tariffs of up to 250% could be imposed on Indian pharmaceuticals. This move would not only raise drug prices but also profoundly affect global health security and the trade balance between India and the United States.***

The third decade of the 21st century is being defined by a geopolitical upheaval where decades-old rules of global trade are fracturing, and economic priorities are increasingly subjugated to strategic imperatives. Punitive tariffs imposed by President Trump on imports from India and across the globe, the shifting energy supply chains post the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the evolving, often unpredictable, dynamics between the US and Russia – all these events are brewing a global storm in which every nation is scrambling to keep its boat afloat. Amidst this churn, India is no mere spectator; it is charting its own course with a conscious and ambitious strategy.

This strategy marks a decisive departure from the traditional export-led growth model. It is a 'fortress' strategy – a policy designed to first render its internal foundations impregnable against external shocks, enabling it to engage with the world on its own terms from this position of strength. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan of 'Kam Daam, Dam Zyada' (low cost, high strength/value) is not merely an economic dictum but a symbol of this new national psyche: a vision of India that will not merely produce at low cost, but will carve

out its global niche based on the 'strength' of quality, innovation, and self-reliance. This analysis delves into this multi-faceted 'fortress' strategy, which intertwines the philosophy of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) with the goal of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' (Developed India 2047), seeking to understand if this approach can establish India as a leading power in this uncertain era.

#### External Pressures and India's Strategic Pivot

To grasp the essence of India's strategic pivot, it is crucial to understand the external pressures shaping it. Trump's so-called 'Liberation Day' tariffs were not just a symbol of protectionism but a stark example of the weaponization of trade, where economic policies are wielded to achieve geopolitical objectives. India, with its significant trade surplus with the US, found itself directly in the crosshairs of this policy. This situation compelled India to rethink its export dependence and to view the domestic market as the primary engine of growth. Similarly, the Russia-Ukraine conflict reshaped global energy politics. Importing energy at discounted rates from Russia became an economic necessity for India, especially as traditional suppliers diverted their focus



towards Europe. However, this decision placed India in a complex diplomatic quandary. Amidst pressure from the US and the EU, India asserted its 'strategic autonomy,' arguing that its energy imports were essential, while the West's trade with Russia continued in non-essential goods. The burgeoning Russia-India trade, reaching up to \$65 billion, underscored India's compulsion for energy security but also brought it within the periphery of Western sanctions. These external shocks forged a consensus in New Delhi: India cannot entirely entrust its economic destiny to global forces; it must build its intrinsic strengths.

### **Building the 'Fortress' and Pillars of Self-Reliance**

India's response is not merely defensive but a well-considered, proactive, and multi-dimensional constructive effort. The foundation of this 'fortress' rests on India's vast and growing domestic market. With over half its population projected to be under 30 by 2025, and private consumption contributing 61.4% to its GDP, India possesses a unique strategic cushion that can absorb the shocks of global recessions and trade wars. The projection of 75 million middle-income and 25 million affluent households by 2030 will create a consumer base that will not only fuel domestic growth but also provide Indian companies with the necessary scale to compete globally.

The most crucial instrument in building this 'fortress' is the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. This differs from traditional subsidy models as it doesn't just encourage investment but directly rewards production and sales. Having already attracted investments worth 1.76 trillion rupees, this scheme incentivizes companies not just to manufacture in India, but to sell from India to the world. It is the practical manifestation of the 'Make in India' and 'Make for the World' philosophies. This strategy aims to integrate India into global supply chains, not as a mere importer, but as a value-added manufacturer.

This strategy is not limited to a few industrial sectors but is a national campaign for self-reliance and capacity building across every facet of life. The use of indigenous weaponry in initiatives like 'Operation Sindoor' and a policy of 'intolerance' towards terrorism demonstrate India's accelerated reduction of external dependency for its security. In the energy sector, a thirty-fold increase in solar capacity, 10 new nuclear reactors, and deep-water oil/gas exploration underscore India's ambition to transform from an energy importer to a self-reliant

energy power. In technology, the National Critical Minerals Mission and the establishment of six new domestic semiconductor units are steps to ensure India is not vulnerable if future battles are fought over chips and minerals. Gaganyaan and over 300 space startups symbolize India's technological leap. This 'fortress' is not merely of concrete and machines, but of people too. Extending social security to 250 million people through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), promoting women's entrepreneurship through 'Lakhpati Didi' (Millionaire Sister) initiatives, and generating employment under the 'Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana' (Developed India Employment Scheme) ensure that growth is inclusive and strengthens the nation's human capital.

### **Challenges and the Way Forward**

This ambitious strategy is not without its challenges. Within the walls of this 'fortress,' several vulnerabilities still need to be addressed. Inadequate infrastructure, complex regulatory processes, and a shortage of skilled labor still pose significant hurdles to large-scale industrialization. Digital successes like UPI and the JAM Trinity demonstrate India's innovation potential, but replicating this success in the complex manufacturing sector will hinge on the sustained and efficient implementation of policies. Crucially, self-reliance must not be synonymous with isolationism. India must strike a delicate balance between protectionism and global competitiveness. The 'Vocal for Local' slogan cannot afford to overlook global quality standards and the necessity of foreign investment.

### **The Grand Strategic Gamble of 2047**

India's current economic and foreign policy is not a short-term reaction; it is a grand strategic gamble to achieve the goal of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. It is preparation for a world that will be less integrated, more competitive, and far more unpredictable. The essence of the 'fortress' strategy is that in an unstable world, your most reliable ally is your own internal strength. This strategy endeavors to position India such that it can withstand global storms, maintain its strategic autonomy, and ultimately reach a point where it does not merely accept global rules but also plays a significant role in shaping them. The success of this 'fortress' will hinge on how swiftly India addresses its internal weaknesses and sustains the pace of innovation. If successful, it will present a new development model not just for India, but for a multipolar world order – a model that balances national interests with global engagement.



# INDIA'S **AI** BOOM

## Where Are the **ADIVASIS?**



Sandeep Singh

*India's digital revolution is reaching new heights, yet its indigenous communities remain marginalized. This story highlights the stark contrast between technological aspirations and social realities.*

**A**s India aspires to become a global technological superpower in the 21st century, as its cities emerge as hubs for Artificial Intelligence (AI), Information Technology (IT), and Fintech, and as Mumbai's Dalal Street dictates the nation's economic pulse, a fundamental and uncomfortable question arises: where do India's indigenous people, its Adivasis, stand in this new digital economy? This narrative is one of profound contradiction. On one side stands India's 8.6% Adivasi community, residing on land rich with trillions of dollars in mineral resources, and on the other, a digital revolution whose vocabulary – Nifty, algorithms, startups – is miles removed from the reality of their lives.

Despite carving out identities in politics, sports, and arts, the Adivasi community remains almost entirely invisible in India's modern economic mainstream, especially in knowledge-based sectors like AI and IT. This is not merely economic backwardness but the result of a structural, cultural, and historical chasm that is widening further in the digital age. This analysis delves into the complex reasons why the Adivasi community remains a silent spectator rather than a participant in India's AI revolution, and it attempts to explore whether this gap can be bridged.

## Roots of Economic Exclusion: From 'Jal, Jangal, Zameen' to the Digital Divide

The alienation of the Adivasi community from AI and IT is not an accidental phenomenon but a modern extension of centuries-old struggles and exclusion.

**Historical Conflict's Modern Form:** The fight for 'Jal, Jangal, Zameen' (water, forest, and land), which began with the Hul Rebellion of 1855, remains central to Adivasi life today. Their economic existence still hinges on unorganized sectors such as agriculture, forest produce collection, and daily wage labor. The community that gifted the world the art of iron smelting (the Asur tribe) is now struggling for its very survival. When a community's energy is consumed by the struggle to preserve its fundamental identity and resources, expecting it to be proficient in the language of stock markets and coding is a cruel irony. They are yet to be fully integrated into the



old industrial economy, making their participation in the knowledge-based economy seem like a distant dream.

**Cultural and Philosophical Differences:** According to renowned economist Jean Drèze, the structure of the market – where one owner profits and the rest work for wages – runs contrary to the Adivasi ethos. Their social system is based on communalism, cooperation, and co-existence with nature, not on individual greed and wealth accumulation. This does not mean they do not desire economic progress, but rather that the aggressive and individualistic model of modern capitalism does not align with their life philosophy. This is why concepts like the stock market, based on risk and speculation, are not only unfamiliar but also culturally alien to them.

**Digital Divide: A New Weapon of Exclusion:** While India may be one of the world's fastest-growing digital economies, this growth is uneven. Most Adivasi regions still lack reliable internet connectivity, digital devices, and digital literacy. When online education, e-commerce, and digital financial services are out of reach, it is difficult even to imagine skill development in advanced fields like AI and machine learning. This digital divide is a new and powerful form of exclusion, pushing them further away from modern opportunities.

### The Maze of Policies: Good Intentions, Failed Outcomes

It is not that the government has entirely overlooked this problem. Institutions like the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) provide financial assistance to Adivasi entrepreneurs for business and higher education. According to data, loans worth 16,650 crore rupees were disbursed over the last five years (2020-25). But behind these impressive figures lies a disheartening truth.

**Lack of Reach to the Real Beneficiaries:** Dr. Ashish Kant Chaudhary of Banaras Hindu University explains that these funds often go to intermediaries or non-governmental organizations working 'for' Adivasis, rather than directly to them. He cites examples of how intermediaries buy Chironji (forest produce) from Adivasis for 100 rupees per kg and sell it in the market for 1200 rupees, with the real profit going into their own pockets.

**Government's Contradictory Role:** Dr. Vasavi Kido of the Tribal Chamber of Commerce raises another serious question about the government's role. According to her,



the government buys forest produce (like Chironji) from Adivasis through cooperative societies for 30 rupees per kg and then sells it at higher prices in auctions to large companies. In this process, the government, which should have been their protector, itself begins to act as a 'new moneylender,' exploiting their resources for profit.

**Ground-Level Failure of Schemes:** There are also significant flaws in the design and reach of schemes. The example of Andhra Pradesh is striking, where not a single Adivasi woman applied for the NSTFDC's 2 lakh rupee women's empowerment scheme in the last five years. This shows that either information about the schemes is not reaching them, or the process is so complex that they cannot avail of the benefits, or they are simply not capable of taking that level of risk.

### Education: Solution or Another Barrier?

Education is often seen as the ultimate solution to bridge this gap. The low literacy rate in the Adivasi community is certainly a major obstacle. Dr. Rajkumar Singh Gond of Allahabad University explains that even those Adivasis who have been educated and moved to cities prioritize securing a stable job rather than investing in risky areas like the stock market. Their previous generations painstakingly achieved stability, and they do not want to lose it.





PM-JANMAN and other schemes.

**Culturally Relevant Education:** Subjects like AI, coding, and digital finance must be incorporated into the education system, but they should be taught in their own languages and cultural contexts so that they can easily adopt them.

**Promoting Community-Based Models:** As suggested by Jean Drèze, promoting cooperative models instead of individual entrepreneurship can be more effective. AI and IT can be used to add value to local resources in sectors like animal husbandry, herbal processing, and eco-tourism. This will empower the community, and



NSTFDC provides loans for higher education, and approximately 6 lakh students have benefited from it in the last five years. This is a positive sign. But merely acquiring a degree is not enough. The quality of education, the relevance of the curriculum, and the inclusion of digital skills are critically important. If education only prepares them for traditional jobs, they will again be left behind in the race for AI and IT.

### **The Way Forward: A Holistic Approach is Needed**

Including the Adivasi community in India's AI and IT revolution requires a multifaceted and sensitive approach that goes far beyond mere financial assistance.

**Building Digital Infrastructure:** The first step is to ensure reliable and affordable internet connectivity in Adivasi-majority areas. Digital connectivity should be given top priority in infrastructure development under

profits will remain within the community.

**Eliminating Middlemen and Direct Market Links:** The government should create technology-based systems that directly connect Adivasi producers with national and international markets, preventing middlemen from exploiting their profits.

The words of Roshan Hembram, a successful Adivasi entrepreneur from Jamshedpur, are important: the community must focus its energy on education and economic development. But this responsibility is not solely that of the community. It is also the responsibility of the government, industry, and civil society to create an inclusive ecosystem where the benefits of India's AI revolution reach the last person in the country. If this does not happen, we will build a digital world that is technologically advanced but socially as divided and unjust as the old world was.



# Modern Warfare

## The Dark Side of AI



मनोज कुमार

*The bright face of artificial intelligence showcases human progress and economic opportunities, while its dark side is creating lethal autonomous weapons on the battlefield. This article examines this duality and its global risks.*

**A**I has not one, but two faces. One face is what world leaders, such as those gathered at the 2025 G7 Summit, prefer to see and showcase—a bright, optimistic, and symbolic face of progress. This face views AI as an engine of economic growth, an enabler of public services, and a revolutionary tool for solving humanity's complex problems. It is the face that announces multi-billion dollar funds for energy solutions.

But AI also has a second, darker, and overlooked face, one that is taking shape far from the glittering tables of diplomats, amidst the dust and smoke of battlefields. This face is autonomous, calculative, and lethal. It is the AI that identifies targets, directs drones, and makes



life-and-death decisions without human intervention. While G7 leaders in Canada were discussing the civilian benefits of AI, this other AI was quietly and permanently transforming the doctrines of warfare from the Middle East to Eastern Europe. This article analyzes this dangerous duality—on one side our public aspirations and on the other, our covert military realities, and how in the dazzle of the former, we are overlooking the existential threat posed by the latter.

## The G7's Economic Prism

The G7's 2025 agenda indicates that the world's largest economies primarily view AI as an economic opportunity. The European Union's comprehensive AI Act, the world's first major attempt to regulate the civilian use of technology, symbolizes this approach. Similarly, the UK's estimation of £45 billion in annual savings from AI use in public administration and Canada's announcement to integrate AI into public services are all driven by this economic rationale. This perspective is natural, as AI possesses immense potential to boost productivity, revolutionize healthcare, and solve complex scientific problems.

However, there is a strategic oversight in this economic optimism. It overlooks the fact that military technological development runs parallel to, and often at a much faster pace than, civilian technological development. The explicit exemption of defense and national security matters in the EU's AI Act is the prime example of this problem. This exemption sets a dangerous precedent, where the most lethal applications of technology remain entirely outside regulatory scrutiny. The G7, being primarily an economic bloc, may not be the most suitable forum for military regulation, but as a group of the world's most powerful democracies, it has a moral responsibility to address this issue. By failing to do so, the group is tacitly endorsing the development of weapon systems that could

fundamentally alter the nature of future warfare.

## The New Reality of the Battlefield

The AI-powered arms race is no longer a future apprehension but a present reality. From the Middle East to Eastern Europe and South Asia, conflict zones have become testing grounds for AI-powered warfare systems.

### Middle East

Israel's use of AI systems like 'Habsora,' 'Lavender,' and 'Daddy' in the Gaza Strip is a chilling example of how decision-making in warfare is being delegated to machines. These systems analyze vast repositories of intelligence data to identify potential targets for airstrikes. Reports indicate that these systems made serious errors in target identification and contributed to an unacceptable number of civilian casualties. Here, the biggest ethical question arises: when a target suggested by an algorithm is attacked, whose responsibility is it—the programmer's, the commander's, or the machine's itself? This is a situation of 'human-out-of-the-loop' warfare, challenging the very foundations of international humanitarian law.

### Russia-Ukraine War

This conflict is the first major war in modern history to be partially driven by AI. It is a vivid example of drone warfare, where both sides are continuously developing and deploying new autonomous systems. Ukrainian naval drones have successfully targeted Russian warships in the Black Sea, altering the dynamics of traditional naval power. Meanwhile, both armies are using AI for target identification, electronic warfare, and intelligence analysis. This war is proof that AI is no longer just an auxiliary technology, but a central element of military strategy.

### India-Pakistan Conflict

The India-Pakistan crisis of



***Reports indicate that these systems have made serious errors in target identification, contributing to an unacceptable number of civilian casualties. The key ethical question arises: when a target suggested by an algorithm is attacked, who bears the responsibility?***





2025 made it clear that AI-powered drone warfare is no longer limited to superpowers. In this conflict, for the first time, both nations extensively used drones for cross-border attacks alongside traditional military operations. India's use of Israeli-made Harop drones and indigenous Nagastra-1 was aimed at neutralizing Pakistan's Turkish-made drones. This conflict also underlines a significant shift in India's defense strategy—moving away from reliance on foreign imports to emphasize the development of indigenous platforms like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's Combat Warrior and swarm drone systems. This trend signals a regional AI arms race with far-reaching geopolitical consequences.

## Multilateral Failure

Despite the rapid pace of military AI deployment, the response from multilateral forums has been slow, fragmented, and largely ineffective. Even significant initiatives like the EU's AI Act keep the defense sector outside their purview. Consequently, these revolutionary changes are occurring in a policy vacuum, where no oversight or international standards exist.

However, some efforts have certainly been made. Summits on 'Responsible Use of AI in the Military' (REAIM) held in the Netherlands (2023) and South Korea (2024), the role of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), and forums like the AI Action Summit in Paris have fostered dialogue on this issue. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for legally binding rules on autonomous weapons by 2026, and the 'Pact for the Future' in September 2024 also suggested regular assessment of risks associated with military AI.

The problem is that all these initiatives are voluntary and lack enforcement power. Powerful groups like the G7 cannot shirk their responsibility by being absent from

these discussions or merely offering formal support. These countries possess the economic and political power to lead the integration of these fragmented efforts into a robust, global regulatory framework.

## The Immediate Need for a Dual Path

The G7 Summit of 2025 symbolizes the world's dual and contradictory approach to AI. On one hand, we view AI as the next stage of human progress, capable of bringing economic prosperity and social welfare. On the other hand, we are using the same technology to create more lethal and autonomous warfare systems that could pose an existential threat to humanity.

Focusing solely on economic benefits is a short-sighted and dangerous strategy. Leaving the military use of AI uncontrolled will not only increase global instability but also erode the trust essential for widespread societal adoption of any technology.

It is time for the G7 and other international bodies to adopt a dual approach. They must continue to promote the positive applications of AI, but simultaneously take urgent and concrete steps towards creating a robust, binding, and verifiable international treaty to control its military use. This could include legally establishing the principle of 'human control,' imposing a complete ban on certain types of autonomous weapons (such as systems targeting based on facial recognition), and establishing export control regimes to prevent the proliferation of the technology.

The future of artificial intelligence will be determined not just by the algorithms we create, but also by the ethical and legal boundaries we build around it. If we keep the battlefield out of this discourse, we risk losing the fight for a responsible technological future.

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# Tanks, Tradeoffs & Tomorrow's Wars



Karthik Bommakanti

*In a previous article, the author emphasized the importance of mobility and suggested that India's future-ready combat vehicles (FRCVs) should prioritize it in their design. However, focusing solely on mobility is necessary but not sufficient for developing a main battle tank (MBT). The Indian Army (IA) must integrate the FRCV in a manner that allows it to operate in coordination and synergy with other assets of the emerging Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs).*

**T**his point, though seemingly obvious, directly impacts three fundamental characteristics of tank design: mobility, protection/survivability, and firepower. Additionally, the aspect of maintainability is crucial. The Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted the benefits of Western armor, demonstrating a positive correlation between protection (in the form of heavy armor) and maintainability. This comparison will be instrumental in understanding India's warfare doctrine, especially its maneuver warfare and tank-mobility-centric Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs), which, capable of combined arms operations, offer mobility and protection while offsetting the inherent weaknesses of Indian

***For future wars, should the Indian Army prioritize mobility or protection in its tank strategy? Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the evolving needs of the IBD are shaping this crucial balance, where the weight of heavy armor can impede mobility.***





tanks. A key takeaway for Indian planners from the Russia-Ukraine war is maintainability. While, as the author has previously argued, mobility should be prioritized in the FRCV (Future Ready Combat Vehicle) design, India's current medium-weight armored forces sometimes compromise on protection. This is precisely where Combined Arms Operations (CAO) become decisive, maximizing the effectiveness and survivability of tanks in achieving specific mission objectives. CAO will also guarantee the operational mobility of the FRCV.

Armor will play a critical role within Indian IBGs. Currently, two distinct types of IBGs are envisioned: one for China (PRC) and another for Pakistan. In November 2024, the Indian Army sought government approval for the formation of these IBGs, a request that remains pending. Each IBG is projected to comprise approximately 5,000–6,000 troops, primarily integrating mechanized infantry, artillery, armor, air defense, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

However, in late July 2025, the Indian Army decided to establish two Rudra Brigades. These brigades broadly foreshadow the potential IBGs and represent a transformation of some single-arm brigades (approximately 3,000 troops each) into multi-arm units, incorporating UAVs, infantry, mechanized infantry, anti-tank units, tanks, artillery, and Special Forces (SF). The Rudra Brigades will be deployed in selected border areas of India, but their importance is currently transitional.

They are likely to serve as testbeds for future IBGs.

Future IBGs will undoubtedly be significantly larger, better equipped, and specifically trained for combined arms operations compared to the Rudra Brigades. The Modi government needs to expedite their formation. IBGs

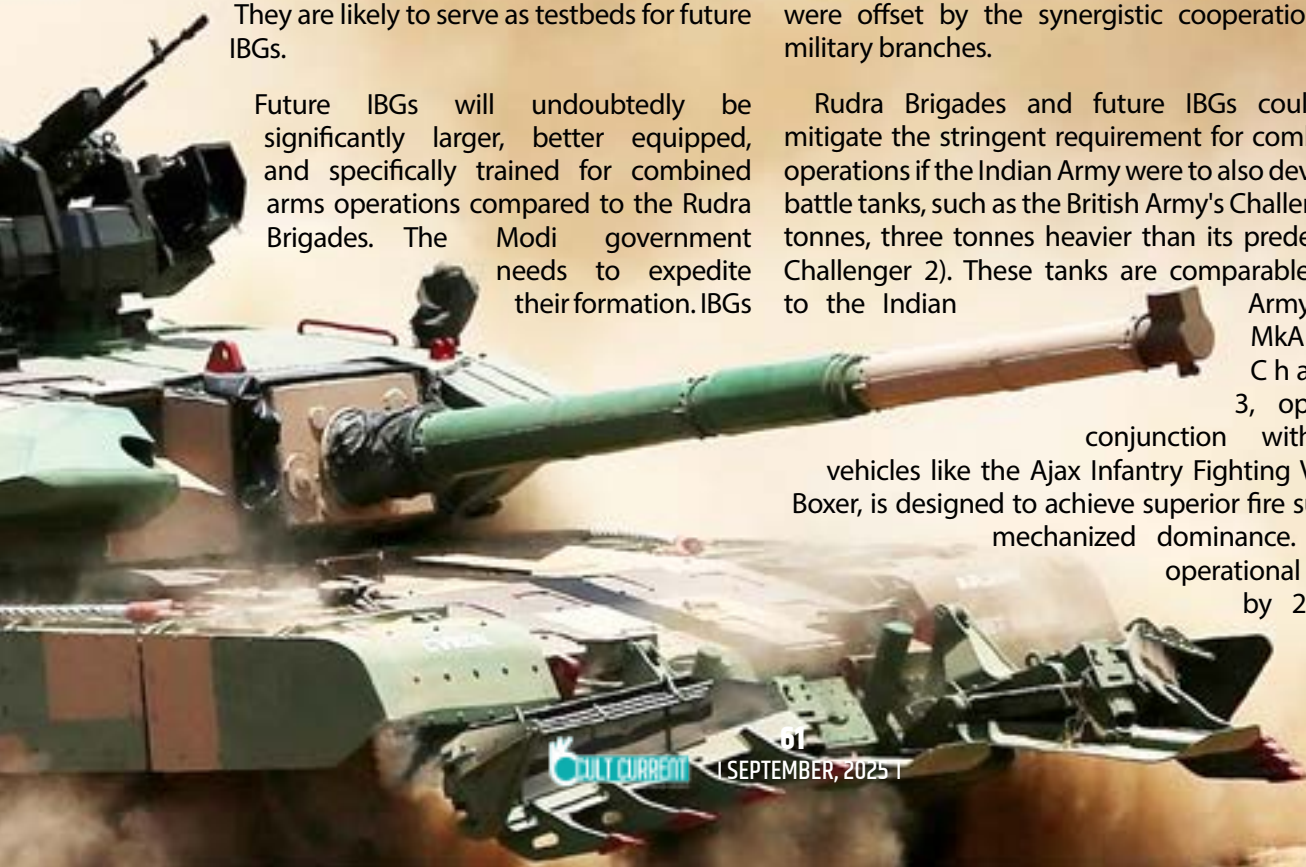
are a direct evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), which, though acknowledged, remains undeclared officially. The CSD aims for rapid mobilization and deployment of forces, something that was previously challenging due to the long mobilization times for India's three strike corps, historically used in offensive operations against Pakistan. These ground assaults, supported by the Indian Air Force, sought to pre-empt Pakistani defensive preparations or to restore the status quo ante by seizing enemy territory in response to an attack on Indian soil, similar to the 1965 India-Pakistan War.

Conversely, China-centric IBGs will feature a different structure. They will incorporate two new models of Light Battle Tanks (LBTs), alongside existing T-90s and older T-72s. These China-centric IBGs will be relatively lighter and reinforced with robust air support.

India's historical war experience, particularly with Pakistan, demonstrates the successful execution of armor-based maneuver operations. For example, during the Battle of Basantar in the 1971 war, the Centurion tanks of the 16th Armoured Brigade decisively defeated Pakistan's Patton tanks. This success was attributed to excellently trained tank crews, effective close fire support, and the successful navigation of minefields with the assistance of artillery and engineer regiments. This stands as a superb instance of combined arms operations, where the inherent vulnerabilities of tanks were offset by the synergistic cooperation of other military branches.

Rudra Brigades and future IBGs could partially mitigate the stringent requirement for combined arms operations if the Indian Army were to also develop heavy battle tanks, such as the British Army's Challenger 3 (66.5 tonnes, three tonnes heavier than its predecessor, the Challenger 2). These tanks are comparable in weight to the Indian

Army's Arjun MkA1. The Challenger 3, operating in conjunction with combat vehicles like the Ajax Infantry Fighting Vehicle and Boxer, is designed to achieve superior fire support and mechanized dominance. Upon full operational capability by 2027, these systems





will also incorporate advanced sensors and boast enhanced maintainability and modularity.

Britain's prioritization of heavy tanks stems from their focus on attritional warfare, where protection is paramount over mobility. Heavy tanks facilitate easier repair and recovery, crucially preserving the lives of trained crews. A damaged tank can have its surviving crew immediately redeployed into a new vehicle. However, replacing killed or severely injured trained crews is challenging due to the time required for extensive training. Hastily deploying inexperienced crews can exacerbate tactical situations, slow down the pace of operations, and potentially prolong wars or lead to defeat.

Despite these advantages of heavy armor, India's experience has been mixed, and at times, unsuccessful. For instance, heavy tanks like the Arjun have not been deployed in high-speed offensive operations against Pakistan. Even if they were, their sustainability and logistical footprint would be prohibitively heavy.

Transporting the Arjun tank via Heavy Equipment Transporters (HETs) presents significant deployment challenges. The Indian Army, to date, lacks any combat experience with the Arjun. Moreover, the Arjun's inherent mobility limitations would pose a significant impediment even in defensive operations within the desert terrain of Rajasthan, its probable deployment area.

Regarding the Arjun, logistical shortcomings and the repair of damaged parts during wartime present a serious

challenge. Studies on its peacetime deployments have consistently revealed frequent issues with spare parts availability and repair difficulties. India has committed to high-speed offensive operations as part of its IBG strategy, a domain in which the Arjun has no practical role. In the event of armored operations with Pakistan, the Arjun's utility would be confined to mobile or blocking defensive actions—i.e., logistically sustainable defensive deployments. This was the role performed by British Challenger and American Abrams tanks against Iraq, first in deterring an Iraqi assault on Saudi Arabia, and subsequently facilitating the Allied offensive that liberated Kuwait. However, it is crucial to note that the logistical and supply burden in offensive operations—in terms of ammunition, fuel, and spares—is considerably higher. Furthermore, a significant factor in American and British success was the limited resistance they encountered from Iraq. India is unlikely to be afforded such an advantage against Pakistan.

Thus, the 68.5-tonne Arjun MkA1, being two tonnes heavier than the Challenger 3 currently under development, presents an excessively heavy logistical and maintenance burden. Consequently, India has no alternative but to prioritize mobility over protection, especially in projects like the FRCV. This prioritization is essential for effectively executing mobile offensive





operations within its Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD) and achieving the limited military objectives of the IBGs.

The Challenger 3 example vividly underscores the criticality of maintainability in modern warfare. This challenge is further exacerbated for India's current tank fleet, including the T-90 and T-72, which are primarily designed for mobility rather than robust protection. The Russia-Ukraine war has unequivocally demonstrated that tanks like the T-90 are sustaining significant damage due to inadequate protection against both aerial and ground-based anti-tank threats, coupled with inherent maintenance vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, a distinct advantage of medium-weight tanks is their superior logistical sustainability compared to heavy tanks. India's adversaries, be it China or Pakistan, are not projected to deploy extensive heavy armored forces. However, some analyses indicate that a side opting out of heavy tank deployment might incur greater losses if the opponent chooses to employ them.

This particular risk would emerge if Pakistan, in the long run, decides

to field a heavy tank force with Chinese assistance. Despite Russia's devastating losses in Ukraine, it is not feasible for India to fundamentally reorient its current and future armored forces beyond the framework of medium and light tanks (T-72, T-90, LBTs, and FRCV).

Conversely, the Indian Army and DRDO, along with their development partners, arguably missed a critical opportunity to pre-emptively acknowledge the benefits of heavy armor, especially within combined arms operations against Pakistan. With the Arjun MBT's failure to meet expectations, this strategic avenue is now largely closed. This constitutes yet another vital lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war.

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*This article draws its references and analytical perspectives from the research paper 'Indian Battle Tanks: Medium or Heavy Armour in Combined Arms' by Karthik Bommakanti, Senior Fellow in the Strategic Studies Programme at the Observer Research Foundation.*





# Pakistan's Deluge Disaster

Md. Saifuddin &  
Krishna Pratap Gupta

***The 2025 floods in Pakistan are not just a deluge of water—they are a catastrophe of human suffering. Where climate change meets mismanagement, millions are rendered homeless and crops perish. The swelling Ravi crosses boundaries, reminding us how grim a divided future can be amidst shared waters.***

Pakistan is once again confronting one of history's most devastating natural disasters with the 2025 floods. Hundreds of villages in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) have been submerged, thousands of homes swept away, and millions displaced. According to a World Weather Attribution (WWA) study, this year's floods are the result of 10-15% more rainfall than the usual monsoon patterns, directly linked to anthropogenic climate change. This is not merely a natural phenomenon but a complex question echoing the neglect of global climate justice, state policy failures, and a lack of regional water management. The overflowing Ravi River also created a dangerous situation in Punjab (India), making this catastrophe a shared crisis across borders. This latest devastation serves as a painful reminder of the severe floods of 2022, raising serious questions about whether any lessons were learned from



past disasters.

## The Vast Canvas of Human Tragedy

It is difficult to encapsulate the flood's devastation in mere statistics, as these numbers tell a story of countless broken hopes and struggles. According to The Guardian (August 30, 2025), over 800 deaths and approximately 1,400 villages were submerged in Punjab province alone. Across Pakistan, these figures have risen to over 2,000 fatalities and nearly 30 million affected people. These statistics are just the beginning, as the true situation in remote areas could be far more dire.

As per AP News, approximately 300,000 people sought refuge in relief camps, and over 2 million were forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods for safer locations. Life in these camps is no less challenging for the displaced, with severe shortages of food, clean water, sanitation, and health services.

The health crisis in flood-affected areas is another grave dimension. A World Health Organization (WHO) report indicated that over 30,000 cases of diarrhea and cholera were recorded within two weeks of the floods. Additionally, water-borne diseases like typhoid, hepatitis E, and malaria spread rapidly, overwhelming an already fragile healthcare infrastructure. This situation proved particularly fatal for children and the elderly.

Over 60% of Pakistan's population relies on agriculture, which has been severely impacted by the floods. Approximately 2.5 million hectares of crops in the rice and cotton fields of Sindh and Punjab were destroyed. This is not just a loss for farmers but a significant threat to the nation's overall food security. It has not only increased the risk of local famine but also placed a heavy burden on the national economy, which was already grappling

with challenges.

## Climate Change's Direct Hit

The WWA study explicitly stated that Pakistan's current floods are not merely a 'natural phenomenon' but a direct consequence of climate change. This is a clear example of how anthropogenic activities are altering global weather patterns, leading to an increase in extreme weather events in vulnerable regions.

**Temperature Rise:** The average temperature in South Asia has risen by approximately 1.1°C over the last 100 years. This increase not only gives rise to extreme heatwaves but also enhances the atmosphere's capacity to hold more moisture. Consequently, when rainfall occurs, it is more intense and concentrated than before, increasing the likelihood of flash floods.

**Changes in Rainfall Patterns:** During the 2025 monsoon season, the northern and eastern parts of Pakistan received 40% more rainfall than normal. However, it is not just the quantity of rain but the change in its pattern that is more destructive. Excessive rainfall in a short period, especially simultaneously in mountainous and plains areas, causes rivers to overflow and overwhelms drainage systems.

**Glacier Melt and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):** Glaciers originating from the Karakoram and Himalayan ranges, often referred to as the 'Third Pole,' are melting rapidly due to rising global temperatures. This leads to the formation of glacial lakes, and their outburst results in devastating events like 'Glacial Lake Outburst Floods' (GLOFs), which exacerbate the water levels in rivers already swollen by monsoon rains. Northern Pakistan is highly susceptible to such threats. Pakistan's geographical location makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The country is situated in arid and semi-arid regions, where water resource management is already a critical concern.





## The Endless Saga of Mismanagement

Pakistan's Think Tank Journal has aptly termed this disaster 'Climate Chaos Meets Human Neglect,' a precise depiction of the country's administrative and policy failures. This is not merely a consequence of climate change but also the result of decades of mismanagement and short-sightedness.

**Inadequate Infrastructure:** For decades, Pakistan has suffered from a severe lack of investment in essential flood control infrastructure. Old dams and reservoirs are insufficient, and many levees are in a dilapidated state, unable to withstand heavy water flows. Drainage systems are either underdeveloped or blocked, leading to severe waterlogging issues in both urban and rural areas. Even after the devastating floods of 2022, there has been no significant progress in strengthening these structures or initiating new projects.

**Lack of Administrative Preparedness:** Agencies like the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) have consistently faced severe shortages of resources (human and financial) to combat disasters. Instead of a proactive approach to disaster management, a reactive one has prevailed. Early warning systems are inadequate, and their communication networks are weak, making it difficult to inform communities and evacuate them to safe locations in time. A lack of political will and pervasive corruption have also been major contributing factors to these failures.

**Unplanned Urban Expansion:** Unplanned construction and encroachments around major cities like Lahore, Multan, and Karachi have blocked natural drainage pathways. Illegal settlements along riverbanks and floodplains have not only exacerbated flood risks but also severely hindered evacuation and relief efforts. A chronic lack of solid waste management clogs drainage systems, turning even moderate rainfall into devastating urban floods.

**The Vicious Cycle of Reliance on International Aid:** Pakistan has consistently relied on international aid after disasters. Even after the 2022 floods, sufficient steps were not taken to implement structural reforms and develop long-term resilience, leaving Pakistan once again dependent on global relief. This is a vicious cycle where immediate relief is provided after a disaster, but the root causes are never permanently addressed, thus continually setting the stage for the next catastrophe.



## Geopolitical and International Perspective

Pakistan's flood catastrophe has once again brought the critical issues of climate justice and regional cooperation to the forefront on the global stage.

**Loss and Damage Fund:** The announcement of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP28 (Dubai, 2023) to compensate developing countries for 'loss and damage' from climate change impacts was a significant step. According to Pakistan Today, Pakistan is now claiming \$5 billion in aid from this fund. This fund offers a ray of hope for countries that, despite historically low emissions, are bearing the brunt of climate change's worst consequences. However, the actual disbursement, transparency, and adequacy of this fund remain questionable. The concept of climate justice will remain incomplete until developed nations acknowledge their historical responsibility and provide adequate funding.

**India-Pak Water Relations and Indus Waters Treaty:** Under the Indus Waters Treaty (1960), the distribution of river waters between India and Pakistan is established. This treaty has provided a stable framework for water management between the two nations for decades, despite ongoing political tensions. However, increasing climatic pressure has exposed the limitations of this treaty. The treaty primarily focuses on water sharing, not on comprehensive flood management or the coordinated disposal of excessive water flows. When glaciers melt and monsoons reach extreme levels, both countries require a shared and coordinated approach, which is not fully reflected in the existing treaty.

**Regional Instability:** Climate disasters lead to internal displacement, food insecurity, and economic





crises, which in turn can foster social unrest and geopolitical instability. In a nuclear-armed country like Pakistan, such a situation could have profound regional and global implications, further exacerbating existing security challenges.

### The Ravi's Outcry: A Cross-Border Impact

The impact of Pakistan's floods extended across borders to India, particularly with the overflowing Ravi River presenting a grim picture of a shared crisis.

**Impact on Punjab (India):** In August 2025, the overflowing Ravi River most severely affected the Gurdaspur and Pathankot districts. The floods in Pakistan's Punjab province impacted the low-lying areas of Indian Punjab, clearly demonstrating that rivers recognize no borders.

**Displacement and Damage:** According to Punjab government statistics, over 70 villages were evacuated, and approximately 50,000 people were forced to seek refuge in temporary camps. Just like in Pakistan, here too, people lost their land, homes, and livelihoods. The floods damaged over 10,000 hectares of paddy and maize crops, inflicting severe economic hardship on Indian farmers as well.

**Infrastructure Collapse:** Roads and bridges along the border were cut off, disrupting not only local movement but also significantly hindering relief and rescue operations. This presented an identical challenge for both countries.

**Joint Challenge, Political Walls:** This shared disaster had a profound impact on farmers, traders, and border communities in both India and Pakistan. The suffering of

the people was identical, but political tensions virtually eliminated the possibility of any joint relief effort. In such a situation, even a humanitarian crisis is viewed through a geopolitical lens, which deepens the tragedy and obstructs effective solutions. This is clear proof that effectively addressing climate change is impossible without robust regional cooperation.

### Invisible Wounds and Shattered Hopes

Floods not only bring physical devastation but also tear apart the social fabric and leave deep psychological wounds. People's testimonies are often more poignant than mere statistics. The Guardian quoted a woman: "The water took everything—our home, our crops, and even our children's books. What will we live on now?" This is not the story of one person, but of millions whose hopes were tragically washed away.

**Women and Children Most Affected:** Approximately 60% of the displaced consist of women and children. For them, healthcare services, safe shelter, and education provisions have virtually collapsed. In relief camps, women face severe challenges related to hygiene, safety, and dignity. Children's education is disrupted, and the risk of malnutrition and diseases increases. Psychological trauma, fear, and uncertainty leave a profound and lasting mark on their future.

**Cross-Border Difficulties and Shared Suffering:** Border villages in both India and Pakistan share identical suffering. People on both sides have lost their homes, farms, and future. But divided politics separates rather than unites them. Cross-border humanitarian aid, data sharing, or joint monitoring could perhaps have saved thousands of lives, but political obstacles rendered it impossible. This is a tragic commentary on the human spirit and the absolute necessity of cooperation.

### The Way Forward

Pakistan's current floods have made it unequivocally clear that a multi-faceted and coordinated approach is essential to tackling future disasters. Regional Water Management Mechanism: India and Pakistan must move beyond the limitations of the Indus Waters Treaty and develop a climate-based shared water management mechanism. This should include real-time data sharing, developing joint flood forecasting models, and engaging in discussions for the coordinated operation of dams and reservoirs in the upper and lower reaches of rivers between both countries.

# Tech will be the savior



Sanjay Srivastava

*Is anyone truly in control of cloudburst disasters? In the face of nature's fury, all are helpless, and relief is often limited to post-disaster aid. The truth is that science and advanced technology hold the key to minimizing losses and securing the future—and this is the only way forward.*

**N**ews of cloudbursts from hilly states is common during the monsoon season. Several regions are prone to this disaster—parts of the Western Ghats like Kerala, Maharashtra, and

occasionally Jharkhand—but these incidents are almost a regular feature every monsoon in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh. Northeastern states of India, including Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland, are also frequently severely affected. Other countries are not immune to this natural calamity—Pakistan, Nepal, China, Afghanistan, and Japan frequently experience similar events. Pakistan's Buner and Afghanistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have recently been troubled by them. While less common in Europe or America, they too occasionally fall victim.

Nowhere are cloudburst incidents as common as in India, especially in the Himalayan regions.



According to data from the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), over 150 major destructive cloudburst incidents have been recorded in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh alone in the past decade. These incidents have swept away entire power projects, hundreds of homes, entire villages, hotels, roads, bridges, trees, and claimed hundreds of lives. In this context, the future appears even more ominous because, firstly, the factors exacerbating damage after cloudbursts and flash floods are more pronounced here compared to other regions; and secondly, the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction concludes that the frequency and destructive potential of these events are increasing every year.

Cloudbursts are extremely sudden and highly localized events, beyond human control, and precise weather forecasting in small geographical areas is inherently difficult. However, this by no means implies that everyone is helpless against nature's fury and that nothing can be done for protection. The truth is that with the help of science and technology, along with government and public efforts, while it may not be entirely prevented, the damage can certainly be significantly minimized. Undoubtedly, the only reliable solution for tackling future cloudburst disasters will be the development and proper utilization of new technology. Technologies such as radar systems, information and communication technology (ICT), satellites, artificial intelligence (AI), various types of sensors, satellite imaging, and cloud computing can become a strong shield against devastation in this domain.

When the likelihood of such events in the Himalayan regions between July and September is considered established; when it's a known fact that approximately 70 percent of cloudbursts during this period occur in areas between 1000–2000 meters above sea level; and when it's also clear that intense rainfall and cloudbursts are more frequent in regions with lower monsoon rainfall; furthermore, when we have already identified the correlation between humidity, temperature, and rainfall equations—  
t h e n

analyzing the patterns of all these factors and the affected areas to pre-identify high-risk locations is not very difficult. If such vulnerable locations can be identified and proactively monitored, the damage occurring before and after a disaster can be minimized.

Indeed, forecasting cloudbursts hours in advance or providing long-term warnings is not feasible. Nevertheless, with the help of modern radar and satellite technology, its likelihood can be sensed one to two hours beforehand. We possess advanced Doppler Weather Radars and several ISRO meteorological satellites capable of detecting heavy rainfall and cloud formation. Their high-resolution imagery allows for monitoring small-scale cloud activity. They help estimate which areas are prone to cloudbursts, and by analyzing all this data, warnings can be issued a few hours in advance, allowing for the safe evacuation of people from disaster-prone areas. AI-based models can record real-time data on heavy rainfall patterns, humidity, and temperature with greater accuracy, minute by minute. Analysis of this data can provide immediate detection of potential threats. Cloud computing-based data processing greatly aids in quick decision-making. If automated rain-gauge networks with sensors that instantly transmit rainfall data to a central server are established in every village in high-risk Himalayan regions, the capacity for issuing local-level warnings will increase. GIS mapping via drones can identify vulnerable villages even before the monsoon. This can also be used to map settlements, bends, and obstructions on sensitive slopes and riverbanks, enabling solutions to be sought for impending problems before flash floods occur. In this era of AI and communication technology, it is easy to develop community radios and mobile apps in high-risk areas, in addition to siren systems, that broadcast warnings in local dialects.

India possesses adequate basic infrastructure and technology in the field of meteorology. There are 37 Doppler radars and ISRO satellites for providing real-time data on cloud movement and humidity. Warnings for unexpected heavy rainfall can be issued 2 to 6 hours in advance through 'nowcasting'. There are also systems for disseminating information via mobile, radio, TV, and the internet.

# Illusion of PEACE

***Alaska Meet: Trump-Putin — Illusion of Peace or Strategic Move? Trump's hasty diplomacy and Putin's patient strategy have opened a new chapter in the Ukraine conflict, revealing how this 'peace façade' actually advances Russia's objectives while leaving the core issues unresolved.***



Anwar Hussain

**W**hat transpired on August 15, 2025, amidst the cold Alaskan winds and in the corridors of power in Washington D.C., was not conventional diplomacy; it was a carefully orchestrated performance. Shrouded in secrecy, the summits between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin created the illusion of a peace process that was far from reality. Trump's over-ambitious 'shuttle diplomacy,' driven by his personal legacy and a desire for a Nobel Peace Prize, has generated a diplomatic mirage that, instead of resolving the core issues of the conflict, has primarily served Vladimir Putin's long-term strategic objectives. This analysis explores how Trump's transactional style, Putin's patient strategy, and Zelensky's constrained position have together created a complex equation where talk of peace abounds, yet the prospects of a prolonged war have

become even stronger. This was not merely a meeting of two presidents, but a high-stakes geopolitical game being played out between a dealmaker, a strategist, and a survivor.

## The Dealmaker vs. The Strategist

At the heart of this diplomatic drama are leaders with starkly different worldviews and operating styles, and this asymmetry is shaping the outcomes of the process.

## Donald Trump: The Dealmaker President

For Trump, the Ukraine war is not a complex historical struggle for national existence but a real estate deal that can be closed at the right price. His diplomacy is transactional, where everything has a cost. His





as proposing joint projects in the Arctic or allowing Exxon Mobil to return to the Sakhalin-1 project—to keep Trump engaged and feeling 'victorious.' These are low-cost investments, in exchange for which he seeks a much larger prize: US acceptance of Russian dominance over Ukraine and the avoidance of new sanctions, in which he has already succeeded.

This imbalance—Trump's urgency versus Putin's patience—is the pivot of this entire process, which Putin is skillfully turning to his advantage.

## Two Impossible Equations

Trump's diplomacy rests on two pillars that are inherently contradictory: 'land swap' and 'security guarantees.' The meaning of these terms is so different for both sides that any middle ground is almost impossible.

## The Land Swap

US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff called it the 'centerpiece of the deal,' but this is no simple transaction. For Ukraine, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Crimea are not mere parcels of land but symbols of national sovereignty, identity, and thousands of sacrifices. Ceding these territories to Russia would be political suicide for President Zelensky and a betrayal of the national resolve that has withstood Russian aggression for over two years. Ukraine's constitution also makes any such transfer almost impossible.

For Russia, these territories are strategic assets and bargaining

goal is a quick, tangible, and headline-grabbing 'peace agreement' that he can present as his greatest achievement before the Nobel Prize announcements on October 10. His language is replete with terms like 'deal,' 'agreement,' and 'rapprochement.' He has simplified the conflict's most complex issues—'land' and 'security'—as if it were a matter of asset division between two companies. His sudden shift from emphasizing a ceasefire to a full peace agreement symbolizes this haste. He wants an outcome he can sell, no matter how shaky its foundations.

## Vladimir Putin: The Patient Strategist

On the other hand, Vladimir Putin operates like a chess player, thinking several moves ahead. He perfectly understands Trump's personal ambitions and impatience and is exploiting them to his advantage. For Putin, time is no constraint; he faces no electoral pressure nor significant domestic opposition. He knows that Trump's presidency is a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' for Russia to reset relations with the US on its own terms. Therefore, he is offering small, reversible concessions—such





chips. Putin has hardened his stance by integrating these regions into Russia's constitution. He is using his battlefield gains to pressure Ukraine, signaling that if Kyiv does not accept his terms, it stands to lose even more territory. Thus, 'land' is an issue where neither side has flexibility, making it the biggest impediment to peace.

### Security Guarantees

This second pillar is equally unstable. When Ukraine and Europe speak of 'security guarantees,' they mean 'NATO Article 5-like protection'—a credible military commitment that future Russian aggression will be met collectively. Without this, any peace agreement would merely be a temporary ceasefire.

But for Putin, 'security guarantees' mean precisely the opposite: Ukraine's complete demilitarization and permanent neutrality. He desires a Ukraine that can never join Western alliances and poses no threat to Russia. In this context, Trump's approach is extremely vague and ineffective. He talks of selling weapons to Ukraine but refuses to deploy US troops. This position neither provides Ukraine with genuine security nor is it acceptable to Putin, as it keeps Ukraine militarily capable.

Thus, Trump's diplomacy is trapped between these two fundamentally incompatible concepts, rendering any meaningful progress impossible.

### The Price of the Performance

The biggest beneficiary of this diplomatic performance has been Russia. Putin has secured several significant gains without making any major strategic concessions:

**Break in International Isolation:** High-level summit talks with a US president have re-established Putin as a key player on the global stage, undermining Western efforts to isolate him.

**Shifting Terms of Negotiation:** Putin has successfully shifted the discourse from Ukraine's demands (immediate ceasefire and Russian troop withdrawal) to his preferred terms (a comprehensive peace agreement that legitimizes Russia's territorial gains).

**Cracks in Western Unity:** Trump's unilateral approach marginalizes European allies, who have a much more direct stake in this conflict than the US. This creates fissures within the Western alliance, which





has always been a primary goal for Putin.

This entire process is creating a situation where Zelensky is under increasing pressure to accept an impossible peace deal, while Putin gains more time to consolidate his position.

### Conclusion

Donald Trump's 'shuttle diplomacy' in Ukraine may be a bold and ambitious endeavor, but it is built on deeply flawed foundations. It disregards the historical complexities of the conflict, fails to understand the fundamentally different motivations of the key players, and sacrifices long-term stability for a quick personal win.



***The core differences between Russia and Ukraine run so deep that no summit's charm can resolve them. Neither the U.S. and Europe possess enough leverage to force Russia's terms, nor has Russia fully succeeded in bending Ukraine.***

The fundamental disagreements between Russia and Ukraine are so profound that they cannot be resolved by the charisma of a summit. Neither the US nor Europe possesses sufficient leverage to force Russia to accept their terms, nor has Russia fully succeeded in subjugating Ukraine. Amidst this stalemate, Trump's diplomacy is creating a diplomatic fog that obscures the harsh reality: this war is destined to be a long and grueling struggle. Any hope for peace, unless it is based on realities on the ground, will prove to be a mirage—an illusion woven by one leader's hunger for legacy and another's strategic cunning.

# From Damascus to Kandahar

## Change or Repetition?



Santu Das

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's nearly three-decade grip on Damascus has jolted the geopolitical chessboard. Into the vacuum steps Ahmad al-Shara—better known by his nom de guerre, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani—the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Once branded a terrorist by Washington, al-Shara is now being cast by the West, along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as a “harbinger of change.”

The irony is hard to miss. Until recently, HTS was a pariah, formally listed by the U.S. as a foreign terrorist organization. Today, the group's leader is being groomed as Syria's future. His sudden rise says less about Syria's quest for stability and far more about the way outside powers recycle old solutions in new packaging.

### Déjà vu in the Middle East

Al-Shara is not the first jihadist to inherit a state. A glance eastward to Afghanistan reveals a telling parallel. After two decades of war and nation-building, Washington and its allies could not do better than to replace Mullah Omar's Taliban with Hibatullah Akhundzada's Taliban.

This is the pattern: external interventions topple one order only to empower another equally fraught. Extremist ideology remains intact, instability endures, and only the names change. In Syria, Assad's departure

may look like revolution. In reality, it risks becoming repetition.

### The Euphoria and the Vacuum

When the Assad clan fled and al-Shara entered Damascus uncontested, celebrations erupted. For Syrians weary of decades of brutality, even a former al-Qaeda operative seemed preferable. Liberation, however paradoxical, outweighed moral contradictions—at least in the short term.

But the real shock was geopolitical. Assad's ouster meant the rollback of Iran and Russia, both of which had invested heavily—militarily and politically—in his survival. Yet Moscow has not fully left the stage. Damascus's new foreign minister was quickly received in Moscow by Sergei Lavrov, and even granted an audience with Vladimir Putin. Russia still wants a stake in Syria, if not to regain its grip, then at least to shield its interests. Al-Shara, for his part, must now dance between patrons.

### A High-Stakes Balancing Act

His challenge is stark. Can Syria avoid becoming the next Iraq—hollowed out by the tug-of-war between Washington and Tehran? Iraq's fate is a cautionary tale: external rivalries feeding domestic



fragility until the state itself unravels.

Al-Shara knows he cannot govern on ideology alone. He must strike a precarious balance: engaging Moscow, placating Tehran, wooing Arab capitals, and keeping the West onside—all while promising Syrians sovereignty and stability. It is a high-stakes gamble, with little room for error.

## Lessons From Kabul

The new Syrian regime has not gone unnoticed in Kabul. In 2021, HTS fighters in Idlib waved Taliban flags, hailing the U.S. withdrawal as a model. Their statement was revealing: the Taliban's "victory" was not just Afghanistan's—it was an inspiration for jihadists elsewhere.

For Western policymakers, the message should be sobering. These movements are not isolated silos; they watch, learn, and borrow from each other's playbooks.

Meanwhile, the Taliban have survived—and even thrived—despite sanctions, pressure, and internal rifts between Kandahar's hardliners and Kabul's more pragmatic operators like Sirajuddin Haqqani. Between 2021 and 2024, they logged more than 1,300 public diplomatic engagements across 80 countries. China led the way, positioning itself as the Taliban's anchor, followed closely by Iran and Turkey.

Al-Shara's Syria has already gone further, boasting over 1,500 declared diplomatic contacts, with Turkey and Qatar leading. The numbers suggest a shared ambition: to normalize themselves through sheer engagement, regardless of their pasts.

## Pragmatism and Paradoxes

Like the Taliban, HTS may find that pragmatism buys breathing room. Central Asian states chose commerce over confrontation, engaging the Taliban in exchange for border security. Yet Afghanistan's other frontiers

show the paradoxes of jihadist rule.

Pakistan, once the Taliban's ideological cradle, is now one of its most bitter critics. Kabul's refusal to rein in Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has pushed tensions to the brink. Ironically, Islamabad may have had steadier borders under the governments of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani than under the movement it helped install.

The lesson is clear: even ideologically aligned movements fracture when national interests collide. And if Damascus becomes another Kabul, the costs will not be Syria's alone.

## Tehran, Damascus, and the Taliban: Pragmatism Amid Paradox

On its western frontier, the Taliban face Iran—a state that neither supports them ideologically nor politically, but is pragmatic enough to recognize their relevance. Since the September 11 attacks, the U.S. invasion that followed, and George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in January 2002, Tehran has cultivated a functional relationship with the Taliban. For both sides, survival in a hostile geopolitical neighborhood demanded it.

Today, the American withdrawal from Afghanistan is seen in Tehran as a strategic windfall. With U.S. troops gone, Iran no longer worries about Western militarization on its eastern flank just as tensions with Israel intensify to the west. The shift allows Tehran to reallocate resources where it matters most.

## Bargaining With Power

Internationally, the Taliban have been just as pragmatic. The Haqqani network has kept Hibatullah Akhundzada and his Kandahar-based clerical circle at arm's length from foreign policy, leveraging security guarantees as a bargaining chip with China, Russia, the United States, and Europe.



A man and a woman are walking hand-in-hand on a grassy lawn. The woman is wearing a bright red, long-sleeved, floor-length dress and is looking towards the man. The man is wearing a light purple kurta and white trousers, looking back at the woman. They are surrounded by lush greenery, including bushes and trees. A large banana leaf is visible on the right side of the frame.

# Elvish-Mahira Reel or Real?

In the world of reality TV, rumors are never in short supply. Recently, 'Bigg Boss OTT 2' winner and YouTuber Elvish Yadav shared a cute video with 'Bigg Boss 13' fame Mahira Sharma, fueling his "Romantic Rao Sahab" image. In the video, the duo recreated the song *Diwaniyat* from the upcoming film *Ek Deewane Ki Diwaniyat* starring Harshvardhan Rane and Sonam Bajwa. Walking hand-in-hand in the garden, giving flowers, and showcasing their undeniable chemistry, they set social media on fire. Fans immediately began speculating: Are these two dating?

But hold on! It was all just a promotional reel. Elvish Yadav himself took to Twitter to put the rumors to rest. Without directly mentioning the video, he wrote, "It's a promotional reel, friends. Don't take it so seriously." Still, the tweet likely disappointed some fans, as Mahira looked stunning in her red ethnic outfit and Elvish in his grey kurta, making their on-screen pair truly adorable.

Harshvardhan Rane, the lead actor of *Ek Deewane Ki Diwaniyat*, also thanked Elvish for the promotional reel, making it clear that it was all part of the film's marketing. Elvish Yadav, who recently won *Laughter Chefs Season 2* with Karan Kundra and has been a gang leader on *MTV Roadies XX*, is once again in the limelight. Meanwhile, Mahira Sharma, who rose to fame with *Bigg Boss 13*, continues to make her presence felt.

For now, the "Romantic Rao Sahab" story of Elvish and Mahira is limited to the screen, but their chemistry has certainly made fans wish it were real!



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