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STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY

CULT CURRENT

Vol: 8 Issue: 6 June, 2025

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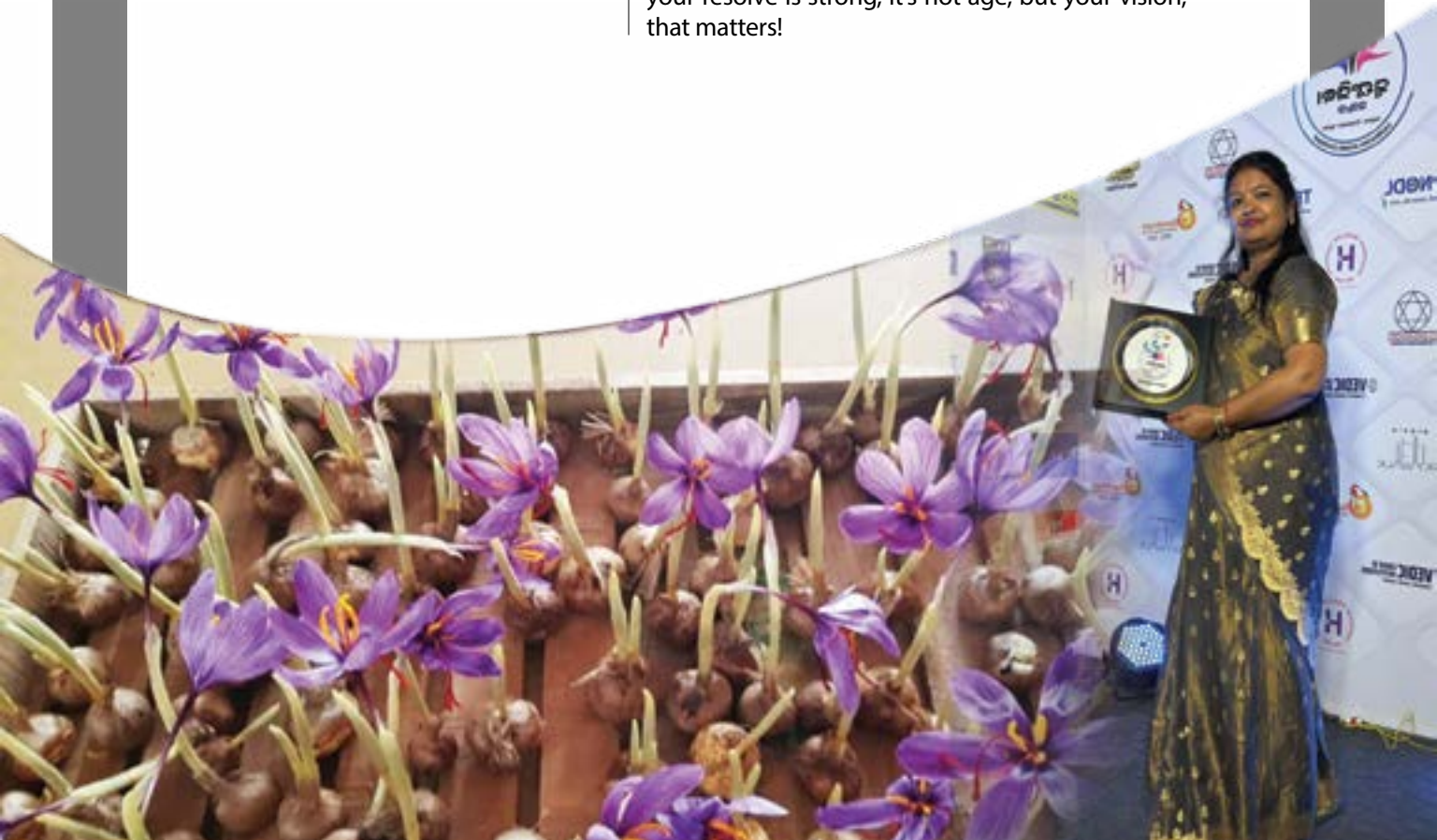
UNSUNG HEROINE

GRANDDAUGHTER'S INVENTION FOR GRANDFATHER



Shalini Kumari

While most 12-year-olds are playing with toys, Shalini from Patna was inspired by her grandfather's struggles to create something truly special. Seeing his walker become useless when he faced stairs, Shalini decided to take action. She developed an Adjustable Walker, incorporating technologies like a hydraulic mechanism, clutches, and a lever locking system. This innovative walker allows the elderly and people with disabilities to navigate stairs with ease and confidence. Shalini's invention earned her a national award, and with the support of the National Innovation Foundation, it was patented. Today, it's available in the market through the company Vissco. Shalini's story proves that when your resolve is strong, it's not age, but your vision, that matters!



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"Rejected Fifty Times and Still Rising"

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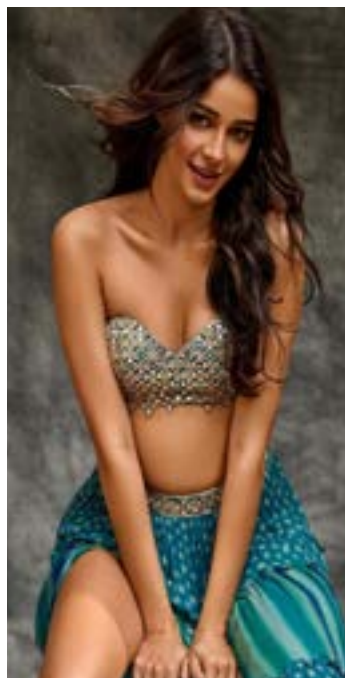
Staying Grounded

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Small talk



HOPELESS ROMANTIC AT HEART: ANANYA

Having completed six years in the industry, Ananya Panday is earning praise for her role in the recently released *Kesari: Chapter 2*. Known for her performances in films like *Gehraiyaan* and series like *Call Bae*, Ananya reflects on her journey, admitting that the early years of her career weren't easy. "I've been a hopeless romantic ever since I was a little girl," she says candidly. "I want love, marriage, a husband, kids—everything in life. And it's not just me—most of my friends feel the same way about love and relationships." ●

The discoveries that will create a stir in 2025

Bold Bedbugs That Changed History!

60,000 years ago, a few daring bedbugs abandoned bats and crawled onto Neanderthals—marking the beginning of the bedbug-human relationship. A study from Virginia Tech reveals this deep evolutionary link. While the bat-associated bedbug population declined after the Ice Age, the human-adapted ones flourished. Published in *Biology Letters*, the study suggests that bedbugs may have been the world's first urban pests. ●



Quasar Attack in Space!

For the first time, astronomers have observed one galaxy striking another with a powerful beam of radiation. Published in *Nature*, the study reveals that the energy from the attacking galaxy—powered by a quasar—dampens the star-forming ability of the target galaxy. Using advanced telescopes like VLT and ALMA, scientists conducted a detailed investigation into this rare cosmic event. ●

Move Your Body, Sharpen Your Mind!

According to a study published in *The Lancet*, physical activity plays a key role in keeping the brain healthy. Endurance training and overall fitness significantly reduce the risk of dementia and promote brain vitality. Even low levels of daily activity can slow down brain aging.



SOLID-STATE BREAKTHROUGH: FASTER CHARGING AHEAD!



Solid-state batteries are widely seen as the future of energy storage. Now, researchers at the Technical University of Munich have developed a new material made of lithium, antimony, and scandium. This innovation enables lithium ions to move 30% faster—paving the way for quicker charging and more efficient batteries. The future of high-speed, reliable energy may be closer than we think! ●

Tata Altroz Facelift: The Premium Hatchback Reimagined

Tata Motors has launched the 2025 Altroz Facelift at a starting price of ₹6.89 lakh (ex-showroom). This premium hatchback is available in petrol, diesel, and CNG variants. Packed with modern features like a 10.25-inch touchscreen, 360° camera, 6 airbags, and ALFA architecture, the new Altroz offers both style and safety. Buyers can choose from four trims: Smart, Pure, Creative, and Accomplished. ●



APPOINTMENTS



Dr. Ajay Kumar

Chairman, UPSC

On May 13, 2025, President Droupadi Murmu appointed former Defence Secretary Dr. Ajay Kumar as the new Chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

Resignation

N. Chandrashekharn,

Chairman & Director,

Tata Chemicals

On May 29, 2025, Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran stepped down from his roles as Chairman and Director of Tata Chemicals. The company's board has appointed S. Padmanabhan as the new Chairman.



Emmanuel Macron

President of France

“If we shift our focus solely to the Indo-Pacific and China, ignoring the war in Ukraine, we risk losing on both fronts.”

THEY SAID IT...



Vladimir Putin

President of Russia

“Russia is ready to end the conflict—but only if Ukraine remains a neutral nation and permanently abandons its ambition to join NATO.”

THE TRIBUTE

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was one of India's greatest sons—a scholar, visionary leader, and fearless patriot who laid down his life to ensure that Jammu & Kashmir became an integral and inseparable part of India. A fierce opponent of Article 370, he often thundered in Parliament that this provision was a step toward the “Balkanization of India.”

In a massive rally in Jammu in August 1952, he made a solemn pledge: “Either I will ensure the application of the Indian Constitution in Jammu & Kashmir, or I shall sacrifice my life for this cause.” To fulfill this promise, Dr. Mookerjee

undertook a journey to Jammu & Kashmir in 1953 without a permit—defying the state's special entry regulations. Upon arrival, he was arrested and later died under mysterious circumstances in custody on June 23, 1953. His untimely death shook the nation and led to the abolition of the controversial permit



SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE

(06/07/1901-23/06/1953)

system. He gave a clarion call for national integration with the famous slogan: “Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do Pradhan, aur do Nishan—nahi challenge!” (“In one country, two constitutions, two prime ministers, and two flags—will not be tolerated!”) Upon his death, his mother Yogamaya Devi said: “The death of my son is the death of a son of Mother India.”

Dr. Mookerjee was born on 6 July 1901 into a distinguished family. His father, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, was a celebrated educationist and intellectual of Bengal.

After graduating from the University of Calcutta, Dr. Mookerjee became a member of the university senate in 1923. Following his father's death, he enrolled as an advocate at the Calcutta High Court in 1924. In 1926, he left for England, and in 1927, he qualified as a barrister from Lincoln's Inn.



Judicial Setback to U.S. Tariff Policy

On May 28, the U.S. Court of International Trade delivered a significant ruling, declaring certain special tariffs imposed by former President Donald Trump as unlawful. The Trump administration had introduced these duties under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, a law that grants the President special powers during national emergencies. However, the court held that the IEEPA cannot be used to justify such long-term and broad economic interventions. This verdict has raised serious questions about the legal foundation of U.S. trade policy and has challenged the protection extended to domestic industries under these tariffs. Following the ruling, global markets exhibited volatility, and pressure increased on the United States' trade relations—particularly with the European Union and several Asian nations. ●

RBI to Review Liberalised Remittance Scheme



The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a review of the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS), which currently allows Indian residents to remit up to \$250,000 per financial year for overseas investments and expenditures. So far in FY 2024–25, over \$30 billion has been remitted—a record high. This surge has put pressure on the Indian rupee and strained foreign exchange reserves. The RBI is now considering tightening the rules, with a policy review expected in June. ●

Student Protests Erupt in Bangladesh

In Dhaka's Shahbagh Square, a youth-led group called "Students Against Discrimination" staged massive protests demanding a ban on the ruling Awami League, which has been in power for years. The demonstrators accused the party of electoral fraud, repression, and widespread corruption. Following the protests, the government imposed partial restrictions on the party's activities, and the Election Commission suspended its registration. ●



Pro-Democracy Uprising in Mali



This month, Mali witnessed massive protests against the country's military-led government. In power since 2021, the junta recently dissolved all political parties and announced an extension of President Assimi Goïta's term until 2030. In response, civil society groups, students, and opposition activists staged widespread demonstrations across the country, including in the capital, Bamako. Several protests turned violent, and numerous arrests were reported. The international community and UN has expressed concern over the escalating crisis. ●

Demand for Restoration of Monarchy in Nepal



At the end of the month, thousands gathered in Kathmandu demanding the restoration of Nepal as a Hindu nation and the return of a constitutional monarchy. The rally was led by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) along with other right-wing groups. Protesters argued that the current democratic system has failed to address issues like economic inequality, unemployment, and cultural erosion. ●

Anti-Corruption Protests in Mongolia



Massive protests erupted in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, against corruption and growing economic inequality. Public outrage intensified after photos surfaced showing the lavish lifestyle of Prime Minister Luvsannamsrain Oyun-Erdene's son. Protesters demanded the Prime Minister's resignation and accused the government of widespread corruption. In response to the political turmoil, the ruling Mongolian People's Party expelled the Democratic Party from the governing coalition. ●

End of Humanitarian Parole Policy in the U.S.



The U.S. Supreme Court has granted former President Donald Trump the authority to terminate humanitarian parole protections for over 500,000 migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The ruling has placed nearly one million immigrants at risk of deportation. In tandem, the Department of Homeland Security released a list of over 500 crisis-prone regions that could now be denied federal funding. Additionally, the Trump administration has tightened visa procedures for foreign nationals studying at prestigious institutions like Harvard University. These measures have sparked intense debate in the U.S. over immigration, human rights, and higher education policies. Critics argue that the move reflects a harsh stance toward migrants and forms part of a broader electoral strategy. ●

Establishment IAC in Hong Kong



China has set up a new international arbitration center in Hong Kong to boost its global dispute resolution role. Representatives from 20 countries, including Pakistan and Indonesia, attended. The center will handle conflicts involving nations and individuals. However, analysts warn of potential bias, especially in Belt and Road Initiative cases, raising doubts about the center's neutrality and its impact on fair international arbitration. ●



Influence of 'Preman' Gangs on Foreign Investment in Indonesia

Foreign investment in Indonesia, particularly in the electric vehicle sector, has been disrupted due to 'preman' (local gangs) and systemic corruption. Companies like China's BYD and Vietnam's VinFast were reportedly forced to pay large "compensations." Prime Minister Prabowo Subianto has set targets of 19 million jobs and 8% economic growth, but gang activities have heightened investor insecurity. The government formed an anti-thug task force and arrested 4,000 people. However, analysts believe real reform is difficult due to deep-rooted ties between politicians and gangs. ●



Air Force Chief Raises Concern Over Delays in Defence Projects

Indian Air Force Chief, Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh, on Thursday expressed serious concern over repeated delays in defence projects while addressing the 2025 CII Annual Business Summit. He remarked bluntly, "Timelines are a major issue... not a single project has been completed on time." In the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, he questioned, "Why do we make promises we cannot keep?" He also raised doubts about contract implementation, stating that many deals are clearly unrealistic even at the signing stage. He cited delays in key defence projects like the delivery of Tejas Mark 1A and the absence of a prototype for Tejas Mark 2A. ●

Delhi HC Suggests Policy for Stray Dog Rehabilitation



The Delhi High Court has directed the Delhi government and other relevant authorities to consider formulating a policy for the rehabilitation of stray dogs in the national capital. Observing the need for a policy-level decision, Justice P. K. Kaurav referred the matter to the Chief Secretary of Delhi. According to legal news portal Live Law, the court stated, "It is directed that a policy decision be taken by the stakeholders to ensure institutional provisions for the rehabilitation of stray dogs." ●

India to Become the Fourth Largest Economy



NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani expressed confidence on Monday that India will become the world's fourth largest economy in 2025-26, surpassing Japan. He said, "The data will be released in April 2026. Sometimes it comes a bit earlier in February or March, but we can expect international confirmation only in 2026." He added, "I am fully confident that our forecast will prove correct in 2025-26." ●

Indian Private Companies to Manufacture Fighter Jets

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday approved the framework for manufacturing the country's most advanced stealth



fighter jet. According to the Defence Ministry, the aircraft will be a fifth-generation, twin-engine fighter jet. The statement said, "This execution model provides equal opportunities to both private and public sectors on a competitive basis. They can bid independently, as joint ventures, or as consortia." ●

Arts and Commerce Students Can Now Become Pilots



The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has approved the proposal to revise the educational eligibility criteria for commercial pilot training in India. With this change, students who have passed 12th grade in Arts and Commerce streams will also be eligible to obtain a Commercial Pilot License (CPL). For the past 30 years, only students passing 12th with science subjects were allowed to undergo CPL training. ●

DMK Leads Preparation for 2026 Assembly



The ruling party of Tamil Nadu, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), is accelerating its preparations for the 2026 assembly elections by appointing seven zonal in-charges. Party President and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin will present the election strategy at the party's General Council meeting on June 1. According to senior leaders, DMK had already started election work in December 2024 and finalized the list of candidates by March 2025. ●

Delhi Cracks Down on Illegal Immigrants; Over 700 Bangladeshis Deported



Following the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Delhi Police launched an extensive operation to identify and deport illegal immigrants in the capital. So far, 470 illegal Bangladeshi nationals and 50 foreigners overstaying their visas have been identified. They were flown from Hindon Airbase to Agartala and then sent back to Bangladesh via the land border. The Home Ministry had ordered this campaign late last year to identify illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. Between November 15, 2024, and April 20, 2025, about 250 immigrants were caught and handed over to FRRO. Police are also investigating who aided these immigrants in settling in India and who is involved in forging documents. ●

Stingless Bees to Boost Agricultural Yield



A report published in the International Journal of Farm Sciences and other national and international journals highlights the benefits of stingless bees. Researchers from Nagaland University's Entomology Department, including retired Professor H.K. Singh and Dr. Imtinaro L., conducted an extensive study on stingless bees found in the state. They identified two species which can enhance crop production. ●



CDS Chauhan on Indo-Pak Skirmish: Early Errors, Decisive Response

In a recent interview at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, India's Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, acknowledged that India suffered early setbacks during the recent military clash with Pakistan due to strategic errors. He admitted that the Indian Air Force faced initial losses but emphasized that the key issue was understanding why the aircraft were lost. General Chauhan noted that India quickly corrected its mistakes and launched a powerful counterattack two days later, striking Pakistani airbases from a long range. He rejected Pakistan's claim of downing six Indian jets as false.

**SRIRAJESH**, Editor

NEXT STOP, TOP 3

INDIA'S \$4 TRILLION TRIUMPH

Overtaking Japan, India's economy hits \$4 trillion, claiming the fourth spot globally. Now, with ambitious reforms and robust growth, the nation sets its sights on the top three.

Recently, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam announced in a press briefing that India has overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy. India's economy has now reached \$4 trillion, trailing only the United States, China, and Germany. Citing data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Subrahmanyam stated that if plans continue to progress in the right direction, India could become the third-largest economy within the next three years. This achievement not only underscores India's rapid economic growth but also signals its readiness to play an even more prominent role on the global stage.

India's economic ascent is the result of a confluence of factors. Government-backed policies, structural reforms, and the efficient use of domestic resources have all fueled growth. Initiatives such as "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Skill India" have not only boosted the economy but also spurred job creation and innovation. The NITI Aayog CEO also mentioned that a new round of the government's asset monetization plan is being prepared, with an announcement expected in August. This move is expected to be critical in mobilizing financial resources and bolstering infrastructure development, further accelerating economic expansion.

Economists project India's GDP growth rate for 2024-25 at 6.5%, the highest among major economies. This rate showcases India's economic resilience despite uncertainties in the global economy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also reiterated his vision of transforming the country into a developed nation by 2047. This ambition is driving India to make its economic and social policies more inclusive and sustainable.

India's rise comes at a time when it is negotiating trade agreements with major economies like the US and Europe. The Indian government is eager to leverage these agreements to boost its exports and strengthen its position in global trade. Indian regulators are also preparing the ground for growth, including the central bank's cut in key interest rates in April. While this measure aims to stimulate economic activity and attract investment, it also presents the challenge of managing inflation.

While the Indian economy continues to expand, analysts have noted that the current growth rate is significantly lower than the previous year's 9.2% increase. This slowdown can

be attributed to factors such as global economic headwinds, high inflation, and geopolitical tensions. Anand Mahindra, Chairman of the Mahindra Group, noted on social media, "Even as we celebrate, we should remain discontent." He believes that India's next leap should focus not only on surpassing Germany's GDP but also on improving per capita GDP, as this is what will truly improve the living standards of its citizens.

It is true that India still faces considerable challenges. Problems such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment need to be addressed urgently. Furthermore, increased investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure is essential to ensure that all citizens benefit from the country's growth. Strengthening skill development, job creation, and social security schemes is also crucial to leaving no one behind.

To further strengthen and make its economy more resilient, India will need to continue to implement structural reforms, including reforms in areas such as land, labor, and taxation. Land reforms will increase agricultural productivity, labor reforms will promote industrial development, and tax reforms will improve revenue collection. It will also be necessary to increase investment in infrastructure, education, health, and research and development. Promoting the digital economy, strengthening e-governance, and ensuring that the benefits of growth reach all citizens, especially poor and marginalized communities, will also be necessary. Promoting sustainable development and protecting the environment should be a primary goal. Renewable energy and environmentally friendly technologies must be promoted to mitigate the effects of climate change.

India's ascent to become the fourth-largest economy is a significant achievement, but it's just the starting point. India still faces many challenges in making its economy stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable. With the right policies, investments, and approach, India can certainly achieve its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047. This would be a pivotal moment not only for India but for the entire world. India's success will give a new direction to the global economy and create new opportunities for growth. India's rise could be an important step towards a multipolar world order, in which different countries will have the opportunity to demonstrate their potential.

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Ambitious Yet Achievable?



Anirban Sarma

Just like the earlier race for 5G technology and today's race for AI, the competition for dominance in 6G has also begun. It may seem like a premature effort, as 5G technology is still in the process of evolving.

During his 2023 Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India was preparing to enter the 6G era, building on its existing achievements. Beyond being among the world's five largest economies, India boasts some of the most affordable internet and mobile data plans globally. Furthermore, it has seen one of the fastest and largest-scale 5G rollouts in the world. The Prime Minister stated that 6G telecommunications services would lead to exciting new directions, highlighting how India has already begun working to make this a reality.

But what exactly is 6G, and why does it matter so much?

Understanding 6G

6G, or sixth-generation wireless, is poised to become the next standard in mobile communication. Expected to surpass 5G in the early 2030s, it promises a revolutionary leap in connectivity. Building upon 5G's capabilities, 6G networks aim to deliver unprecedented data speeds, ultra-low latency, massive device capacity, and seamless integration with advanced technologies like big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), extended reality (XR), and multi-site sensing.

As Bell Labs puts it, "6G networks will fuse the digital, physical, and human worlds, opening doors to extra-sensory experiences. Intelligent knowledge systems will be combined with powerful computation capabilities, blurring the roles of networks, applications, and processors."

Research and development on 6G are still underway. However, the ongoing efforts by organizations like the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) to define 6G standards and frameworks, along with other advancements, suggest that 6G networks could be commercially viable and

5G

Comparison of 5G and 6G

Features	5G	6G (expected)
Peak Data Rate	~10 Gbps	Up to 1 Tbps
Latency	~1 millisecond	<0.1 milliseconds
Bandwidth	mmWave (24-100 GHz)	THz (100 GHz –10 THz)
Connectivity to AI	Fractional	Inborn and permanent
Connectivity Density	~1 million devices per square KM	10 million+ devices per sq km
Energy Efficiency	Better than 4G	Notable attention

Source- Compiled by the author himself from various sources

ready for adoption within the next five years.

The Race for Dominance

Like 5G and AI before it, 6G has already sparked a race for dominance. While it may seem premature, given that 5G is still being developed – with approximately 320 5G networks worldwide by the end of 2024, reaching around 55% of the global population – the push for 6G is both visionary and strategic. It has the potential to elevate technological, economic, and geopolitical power to new heights.

By the 2030s, 6G will likely become a global baseline for wireless telecommunications. As a result, the country or coalition that leads its development will have the opportunity to set international technical standards, much like Huawei's influence on 5G standards. Such countries can ensure that the technology aligns with their own companies and technologies. Indeed, global adoption of a country's 6G ecosystem would create long-term global dependence and increase its geopolitical influence. Moreover, the emphasis on next-generation industrial applications like robotics, autonomous systems, smart manufacturing, and extended reality means that 6G dominance will give leading countries a competitive edge in key economic sectors. 6G dominance would also mean a national security advantage in defense technology and cyber operations.

China and the United States are already

fiercely vying for leadership in 6G. In November 2020, the Chinese government launched the world's first 6G satellite, designed to explore ultra-high frequency bands and assess 6G satellite internet service. Chinese telecommunications providers like China Mobile, Huawei, and ZTE are pioneering 6G technology, and since 2023, numerous Chinese and foreign telecom and smartphone companies have conducted trials on the country's 6G experiments and technical aspects. Overall, China appears to be emerging as a leader in 6G.

As a recent article in the UK's The Telegraph stated, "Only American leadership can prevent a Chinese 6G disaster." The US, having appeared sluggish and fallen behind during the rise of 5G, is keen to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the new telecommunications war. The US's primary 6G program, "Next G Alliance," is led by the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS). ATIS, whose members include tech giants like Apple, Google, Microsoft, Intel, AT&T, and Qualcomm, is implementing a roadmap for 6G that emphasizes network reliability, global

6G



competitiveness, and sustainability. In addition, the US Department of Defense runs 6G research and development programs, investing in 6G military measures and dual-use mediums like secure edge computing and battlefield communication.

The European Union (EU) is also providing substantial financial assistance for 6G research and innovation through its 'Horizon Europe Initiative'. The European initiative on 6G research, "Hexa-X", supported by Nokia, has brought together 25 cooperating industrial companies to build frameworks, AI-powered networks and new spectrums for 6G. '6G BRAINS' focuses on furthering factory automation and Industry 4.0. 6G BRAINS is a European Union-funded program working towards incorporating artificial intelligence and sensing into 6G.

In another part of the world, Eastern Asia, the 6G capacity of Japan and South Korea is developing rapidly too. Both countries are running solid research and development programs and also conducting experiments.

A Quiet Competitor

Away from the rivalries between the superpowers, India is also steadily working toward becoming a leading country in the 6G space. As the country's Communications Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia, states: "It is our belief and our commitment that India, which followed the world in 4G and went hand-in-hand in

5G, will lead the world in 6G."

Although it is still early to assess progress, India is actively laying the foundation for its 6G ecosystem. To this end, visionary policies are being created and strategic investments are being raised in accordance with them. Partnerships are also being fostered between the government, academics, and industry. In March 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the 'Bharat 6G Vision Document', a roadmap for 6G development, emphasizing 6G's three principles - affordability, sustainability, and ubiquity. The Vision Document emphasizes multi-stakeholderism (making decisions by cooperating among all groups, people or organizations affected by the technology). It was prepared by an innovation group on 6G (TIG-6G), which included representatives from ministries, research institutes, standardization bodies, telecommunications service providers, and technology companies. The main purpose of this Vision is to ensure that India not only develops 6G technology, but also becomes a major contributing country in its progress. Alongside this, India has also launched the '6G R&D Test Bed' as a





6G research and development is being focussed on by establishing 100 dedicated auxiliary laboratories and attracting research facilities of foreign technological companies. India is also working on increasing its share in the global 6G patent pool. Currently, India has over 200 patents related to 6G and the government aims to gain at least 10 percent of total global 6G patents by 2030.

Conclusion

This race for 6G is not a premature ambition, but a strategic need. However, in this race, it should not happen that technologically developed powers try to gain an advantage by harming each other. From China's state-of-the-art 6G experiments and the dedicated programs of the United States and the European Union to Eastern Asia's high-impact test-experiments and the efforts of the rapidly developing Indian market with its emerging base - this shows that no one country can create the future of connectivity alone. Clearly, multilateral bodies and member countries must work together to create international standards, agree to uniform access to the spectrum, and promote inclusive research and development (R&D) mechanisms. Public investment should be done in such a way that long-term innovation and capacity building is given importance over short-term economic gains. Not only this, policies should be made with complete sensitivity and solutions should be sought for concerns related to privacy, cyber security, ethics, environmental impact and the coordination with old generation networks.

In the 6G era, people's demand will not be to the extent of the speed and scale of the Internet, but will be even greater, for which vision and responsibility will be needed. In such a situation, 'World Telecommunication and Information Society Day' (WTISD) is a suitable opportunity to remind governments, businesses and others that we should think beyond 'winning' and explore new avenues for collaboration.

(Anirban Sarma is the Director of the Centre for Digital Societies at the Observer Research Foundation and this article is part of the Nation, Network and Narrative: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2025 series.)

platform for academics, industrialists and startups for testing and verifying emerging 6G technologies. This is expected to help accelerate 6G innovation, capacity building, and its rapid adoption. Furthering the multi-stakeholder thinking, the government has also formed the 'Bharat 6G Alliance' (B6GA), whose members are working on the design and use of 6G technology, which will not only be affordable but also in line with international standards. In this campaign to standardize the standards, over 100 domestic and international research proposals on 6G have been approved, and B6GA has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Europe's '6G Smart Networks and Services Industry Association' (6G-IA) so that projects can be carried out together, knowledge sharing programs can be run, and standards can be prepared.

In addition, high-level

Starlink in Bangladesh A Gamble or a Need?

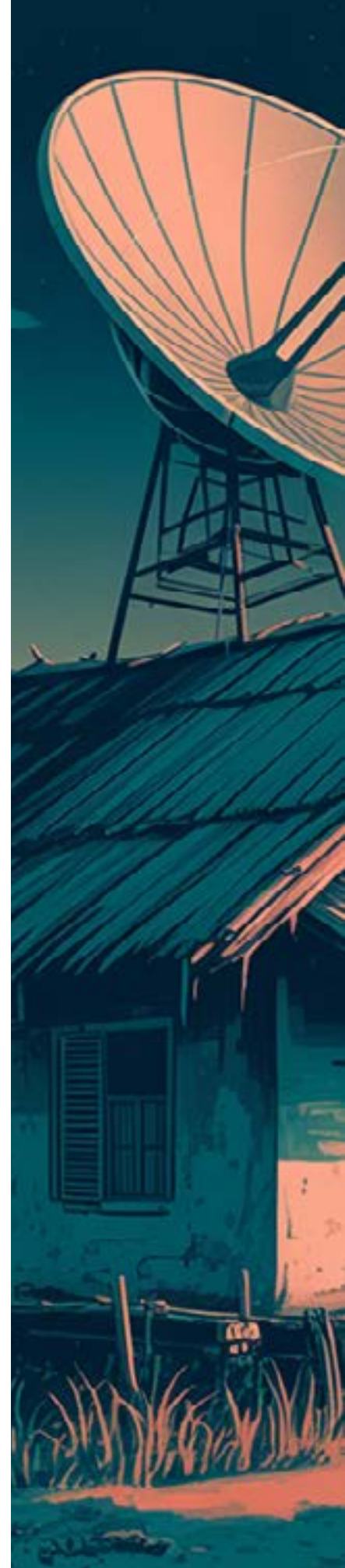


Chaitanya Giri

By hastily launching Starlink services, the government of Bangladesh has heightened the risk of satellite-powered conflict in a region already plagued by poverty.

Bangladesh, under the interim government led by Chief Advisor Mohammad Yunus, has taken decisive steps to introduce Starlink. On May 20, 2025, Faiz Ahmed Taiyeb, Special Assistant (with the rank of State Minister) at Bangladesh's Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, announced the launch of Starlink in the country. Two service packages have been introduced: Starlink Residence, available for 6,000 Bangladeshi Taka (approximately 4,200 Indian Rupees) per month, and Starlink Residence Light, costing 4,200 Taka (about 3,000 Rupees) monthly. There's also a one-time Starlink setup equipment cost of 47,000 Taka (approximately 38,000 Rupees). Clearly, these internet services are quite expensive and don't align well with Bangladesh's socio-economic realities.

Notably, Bangladesh levies some of the highest taxes on internet services in the world. Unlike India, where telecommunications services are subject to an 18% tax, the Bangladeshi government imposes an 18% VAT (Value Added Tax) and then a 21% tax on the telecommunications sector. In terms of corporate tax, public telecommunications service companies are taxed at 40%, while non-publicly traded companies face a hefty 45% tax. The Bangladeshi telecommunications sector has long struggled with significant revenue





STARLINK IN INDIA: Progress or Peril?

The agreement between India and Starlink promises transformative internet connectivity, reaching even remote areas and boosting sectors like education and healthcare. However, granting a foreign private entity extensive access to India's digital infrastructure raises crucial questions about data privacy, cyber sovereignty, and national security. While the government has outlined conditions, their strict enforcement is paramount.

The future of indigenous digital infrastructure projects like BharatNet and BSNL also hangs in the balance. India must ensure that technological advancement doesn't lead to digital dependence and the marginalization of local enterprises.

While Starlink offers the potential for digital empowerment, India must prioritize its sovereignty and strategic autonomy. The pursuit of progress should not inadvertently pave the way for a new form of techno-colonialism. Robust policies safeguarding India's interests are essential to navigate this digital frontier responsibly.



On May 20, 2025, Faiz Ahmed Tayyab, Special Assistant (rank equivalent to State Minister) in the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of Bangladesh, announced the launch of Starlink in the country.

shortfalls. Since 2015, companies in the sector have experienced an average revenue loss of 56% per customer. Currently, the average revenue per user (ARPU) is just \$1.3 USD, among the lowest in the world. Furthermore, with only 44% of the population having internet access, the telecommunications sector's contribution to the Bangladeshi economy remains very small.

A Society Marked by Poverty

Bangladesh's socio-economic indicators are also cause for concern. The World Bank's Bangladesh Development Update indicates that 7.7% of the population was extremely poor in 2024, rising to 9.3% in 2025. The World Bank also predicts that the national poverty rate will increase from 20.5% in 2024 to 22.9% in 2025. According to Bangladeshi poverty indicators, a family is considered poor if it cannot spend 3,822 Taka per month on basic necessities. In this context, the Starlink Residence Light service is more expensive than about a quarter of Bangladesh's population can afford. Considering the demands of the Bangladeshi market and its socio-economic reality, Starlink's



Starlink's internet plans, costing up to 6,000 Taka monthly with a 47,000 Taka setup fee, are too expensive for most in Bangladesh. These high costs clash with the country's economic conditions, raising concerns about accessibility and affordability.



arrival at such high prices doesn't seem logical. The interim government has rapidly introduced satellite communication (SATCOM) internet services to fulfill US objectives, without properly considering the market and socio-economic factors.

Yunus is not unaware of the realities of the telecommunications sector. He is the founder of Grameenphone, a telecommunications service company in Bangladesh. It was launched in 1997, with Norway's service company Telenor holding a large stake. Grameenphone's business has declined over the past three to four years, primarily due to actions taken by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), especially during the Hasina government. In 2022, the commission banned Grameenphone from selling both old and new SIM cards, citing its failure to provide quality services to customers. The latest action by the Hasina government against Yunus was related to Grameenphone itself, where he was accused of allegedly embezzling \$2 million USD from the company. The BTRC's investigation seemed accurate when Grameenphone reported a 53% loss in net profit in the first quarter

of 2025. Given the continuous decline in mobile and internet usage, Grameenphone decided to leverage its distribution network and start selling mobile handsets in May 2025. It now exclusively sells mobile handsets from Shenzhen-based Transsion Holdings. This same Grameenphone distribution network could be used to sell expensive Starlink user terminals in Bangladesh.

Information Warfare

In his letter to US President Donald Trump on April 7, 2025, Yunus assured him of "eliminating certain test-related needs; rationalizing packaging, labeling, and certification needs; and easing customs procedures and standards." Has the BTRC tested or certified these devices with regard to the telecommunications security of Bangladesh and its neighbors? This remains unknown. This assurance was given "to facilitate Starlink's entry into Bangladesh within 90 days from February 2025."

This assurance has been respected, and the tariff threat that was already looming over the Bangladeshi industry has been successfully averted. Considering that the interim government has been lenient towards terrorist groups, but not towards its political opponents, Starlink services in Bangladesh will undoubtedly create security challenges within the country and throughout the region. The Starlink terminal seized in Manipur in December 2024 belonged to the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its armed unit, the People's Liberation Army, which are active in Sylhet. If this terminal was smuggled in from terminals kept in Bangladesh, the start of Starlink services will allow signals to reach these terminals and they will start working. This will lead to terrorist groups using them in the border areas of neighboring countries. With the official start of Starlink in Bangladesh and its use by Myanmar's rebels, the conflict between US and Chinese supported groups in the Padma-Irrawaddy river valleys will be fought on the information front, which will perhaps be the world's first information war using satellite-operated services. Starlink will certainly increase digital connectivity in the swamps of the Sundarbans and the hilly forests of Chittagong, but it is terrorist groups and nation-supported groups that will make unlimited use of this connectivity.

(Chaitanya Giri is a Fellow at the Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology at the Observer Research Foundation.)

PFI

RISING AGAIN?



Kanchan Lakshman



File Photo

The March 2024 arrest of SDPI chief MK Faizy exposed the complex financial networks linked to the banned PFI and emerging political fronts, which have become a key focus for security agencies.

In a significant development this March, India's Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested MK Faizy, the national president of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), on charges of money laundering. This case is deeply intertwined with the banned organization, the Popular Front of India (PFI), with the SDPI widely considered its political arm. Faizy, a PFI member until 2009 and SDPI's General Secretary that same year, and its National President since 2018, embodies the



umbilical link between the two groups. The SDPI isn't merely a political front for the PFI; it serves as its organizational vehicle, facilitating the spread of radical Islamist activities, a role formerly fulfilled directly by PFI activists before the ban.

The ED alleges that Faizy, as SDPI's national president, wielded his authority to misappropriate funds collected for nefarious purposes. These funds, originating both domestically and internationally, were intended for large-scale criminal conspiracies orchestrated by the PFI. Faizy allegedly not only received these funds but was also a beneficiary of

this illicit income, fully aware that the PFI's money stemmed from a deeply rooted criminal conspiracy intended to finance unlawful activities, incite violence, and support terrorist endeavors within India. The ED estimates that at least ₹4.04 crore was earmarked for such criminal activities. Following Faizy's arrest, the ED conducted raids across 12 locations in 10 states, furthering the investigation into PFI's financial network. Their investigation has revealed that the organization received over ₹62 crore between May 2009 and May 2022 across 29 accounts, with over half of this sum deposited in cash. The organization reportedly maintained



thousands of active members in Gulf countries, enabling the generation of substantial financial resources.

The investigation has starkly demonstrated that PFI controlled and funded SDPI's activities, monitoring its operations closely. Leaders and cadres within the SDPI and PFI are largely interchangeable, reflecting the reality that the former is merely a political front for the latter. SDPI was reliant on the PFI for its day-to-day operations, policy formation, selection of candidates for elections, public events, cadre training, and other related activities. Intelligence agencies suggest that former PFI activists are increasingly joining the SDPI to continue their activities in the aftermath of the ban. As such, SDPI is striving to expand its presence, showing signs that the banned organization is attempting to regroup under the banner of SDPI and its various affiliate organizations. Any surge in SDPI activity would undoubtedly bolster the morale of former PFI cadres.

Recent trends indicate a rise in SDPI's activities, particularly in Southern states and Maharashtra. Intelligence agencies suggest that the SDPI has launched a new youth wing aimed at recruiting former PFI members. SDPI and its affiliates have reportedly leveraged the "Palestine issue" to rally

The SDPI is working to expand its membership drive and aims to establish its presence in as many states as possible. Its influence has already been observed in more than 10 states.

support and recruit new members. In recent weeks, the SDPI has also actively mobilized support against the Waqf Amendment Act. Some speculate that the ED's renewed action against the organization was prompted by SDPI's strong opposition to the Waqf Amendment Bill.

SDPI is actively expanding its membership drive and seeking to establish a presence in more states. Its influence is already felt in over 10 states, and its new youth wing is slowly establishing units in states such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, while maintaining a strong presence in Kerala and Maharashtra. This new youth wing is seen as part of a broader strategy, providing former PFI cadres an avenue to continue their extremist activities.

Despite its poor performance in recent elections, the SDPI is striving to strengthen its support base in preparation for future contests. Electoral

success is seen as a critical pathway for the SDPI to propagate its ideology and gain legitimacy. In its August 2024 meeting, the SDPI national committee made a major decision, outlining a decade-long plan to begin electoral campaigns for upcoming assemblies. As part of this ambitious plan, the SDPI decided to select at least one assembly constituency in every district across the country to field its candidates. Kerala, where the SDPI is at its strongest, has led the state committee to decide to select three such constituencies from every district for the 2031 assembly elections, despite the next Kerala assembly election being scheduled for 2026. While national-level success has eluded the SDPI,

members who were accused of murdering RSS leader Sreenivasan in the Palakkad district of Kerala in 2022. Overall, out of the 500 PFI cadres arrested in 19 cases filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), over half have been granted bail, mostly from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. These bails have raised hopes for other imprisoned cadres, and for PFI's remaining leadership, they offer a basis to challenge arrests and seek bail in other states. A lack of digital evidence has also made it difficult for courts to prove that those arrested are indeed active PFI members.

More than two and a half years after its initial imposition on September 28, 2022, signs indicate that the PFI is being cautiously revived. Former PFI activists and remaining leadership, after an initial period of dormancy, are slowly regrouping, operating either under the SDPI banner or through various affiliate organizations, most of which are based in Southern states. Some PFI activists have joined other radical Islamist organizations, including Wahdat-e-Islami (WEI), itself a front for the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).



its current efforts are focused on increasing its representation in local bodies. Currently, the SDPI has 103 elected members in local bodies across the country.

As the PFI fights its ban legally, several of its leaders and activists arrested after the ban have received bail. For example, on March 28, the Bombay High Court granted bail to Advocate Sheikh Sadiq Isak Qureshi, arrested by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) for being a member of the banned organization. Additionally, on April 2, the Kerala High Court granted bail to 10 accused PFI

Given the restrictions imposed by the ban, these organizations cannot conduct their activities systematically. Intelligence reports suggest that former PFI activists are reconnecting through mosques, social gatherings, and online platforms. In Kerala and other states with a PFI presence, former cadres have created new organizations to mitigate organizational losses and recruit vulnerable youth. It is understood that the PFI's strategy is to maintain a decentralized structure, as creating a new organization with the same name in all states would arouse suspicion and invite action from security agencies. This strategy of establishing new organizations under

different names was previously adopted by the PFI's predecessor, SIMI, after it was banned in September 2001.

Former PFI members have also resumed their activities on a limited scale. Clandestine meetings are being organized to formulate strategies. Since the organization was banned, PFI leaders and members have remained engaged in socio-political activities and welfare work, allowing them to maintain a public presence. While the ban has negatively impacted PFI's funding, with reduced financial assistance, efforts continue to raise funds through its affiliated organizations in the Gulf region. In cyberspace, former PFI members are using alternative online platforms and encrypted messaging apps for communication and ideological propagation.

Police sources report that a shadow leadership

Outside India, PFI-SDPI and related organizations are not openly visible. Since the ban on PFI, they have been operating their activities at a covert level.

may be gradually emerging in Kerala, the heartland of PFI activities. The PFI has reportedly established numerous fronts and organizations in the state to sustain itself. PFI leaders are establishing connections with mosque committees and madrasa activists to garner their support. In Kerala, social media groups affiliated with former PFI cadres continue to propagate their ideology.

After Kerala, West Bengal is gradually becoming a hub for PFI activities, particularly in the Murshidabad district, where a significant number of its cadre are based. It is said that local conditions in parts of West Bengal facilitate PFI activities, with its presence bolstered by the region's demographics. In Tamil Nadu, former PFI activists are attempting to reorganize in parts of Coimbatore, Salem, Erode, Theni, Ramanathapuram, Madurai, and Tirunelveli

districts. In Assam, former PFI cadres have sought to inspire youth with examples of Hamas militants challenging a major power like Israel. Outside of India, the PFI-SDPI and its affiliated organizations are not operating openly, and since the PFI ban, they have largely operated covertly, although efforts to reorganize under new banners, propagate their ideology, and engage in anti-India activities persist.

With more than two and a half years having passed since the PFI ban was imposed, the organization is slowly and cautiously reviving itself. Many former PFI cadres have joined SDPI and other fronts to continue their extremist activities. With some PFI members having received bail, the impact of the ban may be gradually waning. The Indian Muslim diaspora in the Gulf will play a key role in



revitalizing PFI's activities. PFI's strengthening would further increase the influence of Salafism in the community. Most importantly, the Indian Muslim community in the Gulf can help PFI overcome the severe financial crisis it is currently facing and help it raise funds. The PFI-SDPI will seek opportunities to strengthen itself in parts of South India and West Bengal. However, stringent actions by law enforcement agencies, particularly against the SDPI, may hinder its reorganization.

Kanchan Lakshman is a security analyst specialising in issues such as terrorism, radicalisation, left-wing extremism and internal security. This article was first published in ORF.



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Operation Sindoor showcased India's military strength and marked a key shift in global arms trade and diplomacy. From May 7–10, 2025, India neutralized American, Chinese, and Turkish weapons used by Pakistan. President Trump's claim of brokering peace may have been more political posturing than actual diplomatic success.



Srirajesh

There's a saying in Hindi - "Gaye Chhabe banne, Dubey ban kar laute," meaning "tried to become a hero, but ended up a zero." This often holds true in diplomacy, and it's nothing new. Before delving into a detailed analysis of this event, it's essential to look at the background. Recently, in response to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam on April 22, India launched 'Operation Sindoor' and attacked nine terrorist hideouts located in Pakistan on May 7, 2025. Pakistan considered this an attack on its sovereignty and tried to retaliate. This "action"

escalated and lasted for four days. During this time, India's precise strikes not only destroyed 11 Pakistani air bases but also shot down five of its fighter jets, including JF-17s and F-16s. Additionally, the Chinese air defense system HQ-09 and the American AWACS system were also neutralized. The Indian indigenous air defense system 'Akash' destroyed Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones, and the Russian-supplied S-400 destroyed Pakistani fighter jets and Shaheen missiles before they could cross the border. This not only showcased India's military capabilities but also had a profound



impact on the global arms market and international diplomacy. The announcement of a ceasefire between India and Pakistan by US President Donald Trump after this operation, and the subsequent rhetoric, strained India-US relations. In a way, this "ceasefire" was actually a "misfire" for Trump.

Operation Sindoor is a significant strategic victory for India, but the world witnessed and enjoyed the victory celebrations taking place in Pakistan. Throughout this entire event, not only did India successfully target terrorist hideouts located within Pakistan, but it also exposed the weaknesses of Pakistan's military capabilities. During this operation, India achieved significant milestones: exposing Chinese weaponry. In the operation, India shot down China's JF-17 Thunder fighter jets and PL-15E missiles. This places a major question mark on the capabilities of Chinese-made weapons. This incident is a major blow to the Chinese arms industry as it casts doubt on the reliability and effectiveness of their equipment. This has also raised concerns in countries that currently rely on Chinese weapons or are considering buying them in the future. Simultaneously, by neutralizing American air defense systems, India also disabled America's AN/TPS-77 multi-role radars and air defense systems, raising doubts about the reliability of US defense technology. The AN/TPS-77 is a state-of-the-

art radar system used for aerial surveillance and target identification. India's ability to disable this system is a concern for the American defense industry as it demonstrates that their systems are not impenetrable. During the Russia-Ukraine war, Ukraine extensively used Turkish Bayraktar drones, but during Operation Sindoor, Turkish Bayraktar drones seemed to pale in comparison to India's indigenous defense system 'Akash,' and claims of Turkish superiority in drone technology were weakened. This is a major blow to the Turkish defense industry, as the Bayraktar TB2 drone is one of their most successful export products. This incident may reduce drone sales and raise questions about Turkey's defense capabilities. In this operation, India successfully used its indigenous weapons, taking a significant step towards self-reliance. The Indian government has been focusing on promoting indigenous defense production for the past few years. The successful use of indigenous weapons in Operation Sindoor is a testament to the success of this strategy. India also effectively used Russian and French-made weapons, further strengthening India's defense relations with these countries. Russia and France are India's major arms suppliers. The successful use of their weapons in Operation Sindoor will further strengthen their defense ties with India.

After Operation Sindoor, the shares of AVIC

Chengdu Aircraft, the Chinese company that manufactures the J-10 fighter jet, fell by approximately 11.50%. Meanwhile, after reports surfaced of the Indian Army neutralizing American weapon systems during "Operation Sindoor", Lockheed Martin's shares fell by approximately 3% on May 14. However, the company came out and clarified that the decline in share price was not due to Operation Sindoor, but rather due to the company's internal financial issues and announcements made by management. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to directly link the decline in share value to "Operation Sindoor." But whatever explanation the company gives, the impact of Operation Sindoor cannot be ignored. This event shows that the impact of military action is not limited to the war zone but can also affect the global economy and stock markets.

To understand President Trump's 'Misfire', it is necessary to first look at the significant changes coming in the global arms market after Operation Sindoor. India has challenged America's dominance in the global arms market by exposing the weaknesses of American weapons. This is a wake-up call for the US defense industry, as it demonstrates that their systems are not impenetrable. America must now work hard to ensure that the quality and reliability of their weapons remain high. While Russian weapons performed excellently in this operation, maintaining their reliability. Many questions were raised about the performance of Russian weapons during the Russia-Ukraine war, but Operation Sindoor has helped to re-establish their credibility. Simultaneously, the effectiveness of French weapons has made them more attractive in the global market. France has been working to promote its defense industry for the past few years. The successful and accurate use of French weapons, especially the Rafale, in Operation Sindoor will further boost their efforts. By proving the capabilities of its indigenous weapons, India has also inspired other countries to focus on indigenous weapons development. Many countries are keen to reduce their dependence on foreign weapons and develop indigenous defense industries. Operation Sindoor has shown that this is possible.

The failed performance of Chinese weapons has raised serious questions about their quality and reliability. Although it has been a common perception regarding China that Chinese technology is developed by putting together 'bricks from here and there', hence its quality has always been under question. However, one thing to note is that Turkish Bayraktar Drones were at least tried and tested by Ukraine, but China's weapons had no testing in any war anywhere. In such a situation, it is only natural for questions to be raised about the reliability of Chinese weapons.

As of the writing of this article, the demand for India's indigenous defense system Akash and other weapons Pinaka, in addition



to the BrahMos jointly developed by India and Russia, has increased rapidly. Approximately 20 countries have expressed interest in purchasing these weapons. This is a great opportunity for India as it can promote its defense industry and become a major exporter of weapons.

If we look at the global level, the financial value of the global arms trade is currently estimated to be between approximately \$111.6 billion and \$138 billion. This figure is the highest level since the Cold War. The major arms exporting countries include the United States (43%), France (9.6%) and Russia (7.8%). Whereas, the major arms importing countries include Ukraine and India. India imports the most weapons from France, which accounts for 28% of French arms exports.

The financial value of the global arms trade has consistently increased from 2014 to 2024. In 2024, this value reached \$111.6 billion. This increase is due to the conflict in Ukraine and other



geopolitical tensions, which have led countries to increase the purchase of weapons to strengthen their military capabilities.

Pakistan possesses advanced weapon systems and air defense systems acquired from various countries, most of which have been obtained from China. These include the HQ-9P/HQ-9BE long-range air defense system, the LY-80/LY-80EV medium-range air defense system, JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, J-10C fighter jets and PL-15 series missiles. In addition, Pakistan also possesses Bayraktar TB2 and Akinci drones acquired from Turkey. The AN/TPS-77 multi-role radar and F-16 acquired from the US are also part of Pakistan's air defense system. Operation Sindoor has shown that despite these weapons and air defense systems, Pakistan is not capable of competing with India. This is a cause for concern



India's New Anti-Terrorism Policy

India's new anti-terrorism policy rests on three solid pillars, signaling a shift away from a traditional defensive stance towards an aggressive, proactive, and self-reliant strategy. This policy reflects a revolutionary change in India's security approach, where proactivity and prevention, rather than mere reaction, are prioritized in the fight against terrorism.

Pillar One: Precise and Decisive Action

The first pillar of the new policy is the ability to take firm and targeted action. The goal is to strike directly at the sources of terrorism and target terrorist leaders. India demonstrated this capability through Operation Sindoor on the night of May 6-7, 2025. Although Pakistan continues to adhere to its policy of lies and denial – as it did after 26/11, despite clear evidence like Ajmal Kasab – India has made it clear that it will no longer just wait, but will also strike.

For the successful implementation of this policy, strong intelligence networks and advanced investigation skills are essential. India is now fighting an enemy that is skilled in conspiracies, propaganda campaigns, and creating international confusion. Pakistan's strategy, in which it repeatedly blames India by calling terrorism a "political weapon," is now considered irrelevant by India.

Pillar Two: No Submission to Nuclear Blackmail

The second pillar reflects India's commitment not to be intimidated by Pakistan's nuclear weapons threats. From the 1998 nuclear tests to the 1999 Kargil War and the surgical and air strikes of 2016-2019, India has repeatedly proven that it will not hesitate to give a conventional military response even in the face of nuclear threats.



for Pakistan's defense, as it shows that there is a need to improve the quality and reliability of their weapons.

According to Global Firepower rankings, India ranks 4th and Pakistan ranks 12th. India's defense budget is approximately nine times higher than that of Pakistan. In 2025, India has allocated ₹6.8 trillion for the defense sector, while Pakistan has allocated ₹2.12 trillion. This difference indicates a significant gap in the military capabilities of the two countries. After Operation Sindoor, the Indian government has allocated an additional ₹50,000 crore to strengthen defense preparations. This shows that India is committed to further strengthening its defense capabilities.

Operation Sindoor has highlighted the importance of self-reliance in India's defense strategy. The Indian government has focused on promoting indigenous weapons production under the "Make in India" initiative. The aim is to reduce dependence on foreign weapons and make India a major weapons exporter.

India has developed several indigenous weapon systems in recent years, including the BrahMos missile, Tejas fighter jet and Arjun tank. These weapons have

strengthened India's defense capabilities and made the country more capable of dealing with external threats.

Now if we talk about India-US relations again, the US is putting pressure on India to buy F-35s to maintain a balance of trade with India. However, India has not yet made a final decision on this proposal. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports are even suggesting that the deal may slip out of America's hands and India is also considering the Russian Su-57. Anyway, India buys weapons from the US as well as from Russia and France, ensuring that its defense supplies remain diverse. India has historical relations with Russia and Russian weapons constitute the largest share of weapons included in the Indian fleet. Russia has been a reliable partner to India in this regard.

Whereas, the US and Pakistan have long-standing military ties. The US has played a significant role in equipping Pakistan with military hardware. However, Operation Sindoor has raised questions about these relations as India has proven its military superiority by defeating American weapons. This is a challenge for

the US as it now has to decide how it balances its relations with both India and Pakistan.

Operation Sindoor has proved to be a turning point for India. It has not only demonstrated India's military capabilities but has also strengthened India's position in the global arms market. India has enhanced its defense capabilities through the development of indigenous weapons and the effective use of Russian and French weapons. This operation has exposed Pakistan's military weaknesses and raised questions about the reliability of weapons from countries such as China, the United States and Turkey.

In the future, India should focus on promoting indigenous weapons production, strengthening Russian and French defense cooperation, and maintaining a balanced defense strategy. This will ensure that India is always ready to deal with external threats and emerge as a major power globally. In addition, India should also focus on strengthening its cyber security capabilities, improving its intelligence gathering capabilities, and modernizing its armed forces.

Talking about Trump's 'Misfire', it is clear that his rhetoric has created tensions in India-US relations. However, it is unlikely that this tension will be long-term. India and the US have many shared interests, including combating terrorism, promoting regional stability, and ensuring free trade. It is expected that both countries will continue to strengthen their relations based on these shared interests.

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh's declaration in 2025 that Pakistan is a "rogue nuclear nation" and his demand that its nuclear arsenal be placed under international supervision underscores the clarity of this policy. This message was conveyed not only to Pakistan, but to the entire world: nuclear weapons cannot be a shield for terrorism.

Pillar Three: Terrorists and Their Supporters - All the Same

The third and decisive pillar is that there is no distinction between terrorists and their protectors. India has made it clear that attacks on terrorist structures located in Pakistan are attacks not only on the terrorists but also on the state-sponsored support they receive. The MOD's press release on May 7, 2025, indicated that India did not target military installations, but if Pakistan involves its army in retaliation, India will respond at every level.

Pakistan's considering terrorists as "strategic assets" – whether it's the plan to spend 140 million on Masood Azhar or the decision to rebuild Lashkar headquarters – makes it clear that terrorism is part of its state policy.

Global Context and India's Position

Prime Minister Modi has linked the Pahalgam attack to global terrorism, like 9/11 and the London bombings, in order to build an international narrative against terrorism. Despite Pakistan's habit of denying its involvement, it is necessary to repeatedly remind the world that havens for terrorists like Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed were in Pakistan.

Although Pakistan may receive international relief such as an International Monetary Fund bailout, it has repeatedly deceived these bodies in the past. The impact of pressures like the Indus Waters Treaty will be seen late, and the Pakistani army will continue to use these resources in its preparations.

Under this new policy against terrorism, India must continuously upgrade its strategy. Self-reliance, technological superiority, rapid and multi-layered response are now key to success. Operation Sindoor showed that India can fight a decisive battle against terrorism on the strength of domestic capabilities.

The essence of this policy is this: India will no longer wait. It will respond to each attack on its own terms – solid, clear, and justified in global contexts. Prime Minister Modi's message is clear: India is no longer just fighting terrorism, it is changing its definition.

Ultimately, India's three-pronged policy is not only a strategic shift but a global message - that India will not tolerate terrorism and will take every step with political will, military strength, and global moral standing to defeat it.

When US President Donald Trump took credit for convincing India and Pakistan to "ceasefire" and publicly threatened to sever trade relations with both countries if they didn't comply, his statements were not only unexpected for New Delhi, but the insensitive manner in which he made them stunned Indian diplomats.

Once again, India was being placed in the same category as Pakistan – a comparison that New Delhi finds distasteful and has made relentless diplomatic efforts over the past two decades to escape. Now, just when things seemed to be going well for India, Trump suddenly poured cold water on this perception. For Indian policymakers, these statements were not merely a diplomatic blunder, but a sign of a deeper

problem: one that forced India to reconsider the long-term stability and reliability of its relationship with the United States.

Subsequently, defense experts and foreign policy analysts flooded the landscape with questions: Where did Indian foreign policy go wrong? Has India returned to the point where it is weighed on the same scale as Pakistan? What happened to India's broad and global partnership with the United States? Was this partnership just an empty promise? European allies, leaders from the Middle East, and the Global South also promptly called for de-escalation. But when the going got tough, none of them offered support. This indifference forced India's strategic community to consider whether India's approach to

Unease in India - US Relations

Rising Tensions, Shifting Priorities



Seema Guha

The recent tensions in India-US relations signal a deeper issue, stemming from conflicting interests, divergent priorities, and geopolitical compulsions between the two nations. India needs to remain vigilant in its relationship with the US, focusing on maintaining its strategic autonomy, fostering stability in its neighborhood, and strengthening its economic prowess. Only then can India become a true global power, capable of safeguarding its national interests and making positive contributions to international affairs.

multilateralism and global diplomacy is truly fruitful, or merely an illusion. Former German Ambassador Gurjit Singh says, "India received sympathy and support for the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. But 'Operation Sindoor' was often viewed as an issue between India and Pakistan regarding Kashmir." He further adds, "We need to intensify our efforts to explain our perspective. We need support to bring 'The Resistance Front' (TRF) under the purview of the UNSC 1267 Committee. We need to activate anti-terrorism dialogues with our strategic partners." Singh's words illustrate the complexities of Indian foreign policy and the challenges of effectively presenting India's interests on the international stage.

Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tremendous international reach, his frequent travels around the world, and his warm friendships with global leaders such as Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, personal relationships did not come into play during the current crisis. Everyone condemned the Pahalgam attack, but refrained from pointing fingers at Pakistan. This was in stark contrast to the time when, during his visit to Islamabad in 2000, then US President Bill Clinton reprimanded President Pervez Musharraf. This contradiction raises questions about a fundamental aspect of Indian diplomacy: Is conducting foreign policy based on personal relationships sustainable and effective in the long run?

Former Indian Ambassador to the United Nations Ashok Mukherjee says, "This crisis was a terrorist attack in which innocent civilians were killed. We should assess the diplomatic response on this basis, not on the basis of India-Pakistan relations." He further adds, "If we focus on combating terrorism, we should expect the US to show its solidarity with India by dismantling Pakistan's terrorist infrastructure, stopping its funding, and imposing sanctions on it." Mukherjee's response reflects the sentiments of ordinary people in India and their disappointment at

Trump treating India and Pakistan equally. This disappointment is compounded by the fact that India has consistently supported the US in the fight against terrorism, and in return has received only superficial support and indifference.

Many Indians view the American action as a betrayal. After all, the Modi government had left no stone unturned in trying to woo Trump. Public sentiment against Pakistan is at an all-time high after the Pahalgam massacre. To the point that Indian tourists are even refusing to visit Turkey and Azerbaijan for supporting Pakistan during the crisis. This public outcry has increased the pressure on the Modi government to reconsider its relationship with the United States.

Older generations remember America's past friendship with Pakistan, and also remember the time when the US openly supported Islamabad in the Bangladesh War. At that time, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sent emissaries to Washington and European capitals to inform them about t h e

atrocities committed by the Pakistani army in East Pakistan. In the end, she signed a treaty of friendship with Russia before sending the Indian army to help the Mukti Bahini and create an independent Bangladesh. However, that was a long time ago. This historical perspective highlights the deep layer of mistrust and suspicion embedded in India-US relations.

Today, despite this hiccup in relations – caused by Trump's habit of speaking without thinking and his hunger to take credit for everything – Delhi and Washington will not let their relationship deteriorate. Both countries have strategic concerns about the rise of China. A major reason for Washington's current inclination and warmth towards India is to counter China's growing political and economic power, which may challenge America's superpower status in the coming years. For India, friendship with the US is like insurance against China in Asia. Currently, India is certainly annoyed, but in the coming weeks the US administration will try to appease it. Then both sides will have to work towards improving bilateral relations. This process will take a few months until a trade agreement is finalized, which those involved in the negotiations say could happen by the end of the year. The US also has its eyes on India's vast market, while India is looking to the US for high-tech cooperation. These factors will continue to play a key role in maintaining relations. It will take some time for India-US relations to return to the status quo ante. Despite these economic and geopolitical factors, India needs to be cautious about its relationship with the United States.

Joanna Spear of the Elliott School of International Affairs in Washington says, "I think the foundation of the relationship is strong, but President Trump is too influenced by changing events and creates short-term policies that underestimate the strength of relationships. India is a key partner in the region and the US wants it to help balance against China. Therefore, damaging relations would be against US geostrategic interests." Spear's comments indicate that the US views India as a strategic tool that can be used to curb China's influence. This transactional approach raises serious questions about India's sovereignty and autonomy.

India did not directly confront Trump. Instead, it focused on rejecting the American narrative for its

"This crisis was a terrorist attack in which innocent civilians were killed. Our diplomatic response must be assessed on that basis, not through the lens of India-Pakistan relations."

-Ashok Mukherjee, Former Indian Ambassador to the United Nations

domestic audience. India says that Pakistan chose a ceasefire after its airports across the country were attacked and damaged. The Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that US officials had telephone conversations, but also explicitly denied that trade was mentioned during the conversations. Eliminating the possibility of third-party intervention in India-Pakistan issues, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar announced this week: "Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify our position. Our relationship with Pakistan, our conduct will be bilateral, and only bilateral. This has been our national consensus for many years." Pakistan has always tried to raise its disputes with India on the international stage and seek peace from a third country. This stance reflects India's commitment to maintaining strategic autonomy in its foreign policy.

When Prime Minister Modi came to power in 2014, he launched his government's 'Neighborhood First' policy. Leaders of all South Asian countries, including then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, were invited to his swearing-in ceremony. On December 25, 2015, Modi took the unexpected step of stopping in Lahore on an unscheduled visit to wish Sharif a happy birthday while returning from an official visit to Afghanistan. There was hope for peace in the air. But with the terrorist attack on Pathankot Air Force Station on January 2, 2016, all hopes of establishing peace were dashed. After that, the situation continued to deteriorate with the terrorist attacks in 2016 and 2019. Modi's trust was completely broken and India formulated its new policy of 'terror and talks cannot go together.' The abrogation of the special status of Kashmir further worsened relations. The terrorist

attack in Pahalgam on April 22 proved to be the final nail in the coffin for any hope of improving relations. New Delhi has repeatedly stated that 'Operation Sindoor' has only been paused, meaning that any action by Pakistan-based terrorists will be met with a befitting response. These events have made it clear that any initiative for peace with Pakistan is doomed to fail due to the constant challenge of terrorism.

But the rest of the world sees the issue from a different perspective. Ali Mamadov of George Mason University says, "Kashmir is one of the world's most dangerous hotspots. It is one of the most militarized regions on the planet, and its proximity to China adds another layer of strategic risk. Furthermore, the adjacent Ladakh region – where India and China share their disputed border – further complicates the situation. The kind of clashes we have seen in recent years show how quickly locally arising tensions can escalate." These geopolitical realities create a complex security environment for India, in which it has to face not only the challenge of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, but also balance the growing influence of China.

Even though India is making its place on the global stage, its position in its neighborhood is still shaky. There have been many ups and downs in its relations with neighboring countries. Modi's popularity was at its peak in Nepal when he first visited the country in 2014. But it did not last long, as it was followed by a constitutional deadlock and the blockade of the country by India. Bangladesh, which was India's closest ally until Sheikh Hasina was ousted from power, has now become almost a hostile neighbor. India's relations with both Maldives and Sri Lanka have seen many ups and downs. China's growing economic strength and its presence in India's neighborhood has given smaller countries an option they did not have before. This regional instability has created even more challenges for India's foreign policy and security strategy.

After the 1991 economic reforms, India opened its markets to the world, and along with this, New Delhi's relations with the US and Western countries began to change. The defeat of communism and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union helped the country to abandon the socialist mindset of

the Nehru era and the non-aligned foreign policy that dominated in the years immediately after independence. New Delhi's support for liberation movements around the world also decreased. The Narasimha Rao government improved relations with Israel, while New Delhi's support for Palestinian affairs gradually decreased. India was one of the first non-Arab countries to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. A PLO office was established in Delhi in 1975. PLO chief Yasser Arafat was a close friend of India at that time. Today, India's support for Israel has largely replaced its previous sympathy for Palestinian affairs. This change not only reflects the ideological shift in India's foreign policy but also shows how much importance India now gives to its economic and strategic priorities.

Since the historic civil nuclear agreement was signed by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush in 2005, successive governments in India and the United States have steadily built closer ties. During Joe Biden's tenure, India benefited a lot and stood by its old friend Russia during the Ukraine war and managed to buy oil at subsidized rates despite the tough sanctions imposed by Washington on Moscow. The Biden administration has had very little engagement with Pakistan. But with the unpredictable Trump, nothing can be taken for granted. His attitude is sometimes warm and sometimes cold. He is practical and can change his stance if circumstances do not suit him. New Delhi needs to learn some lessons from this current crisis. It is necessary to draw its Lakshman Rekha (red line) on issues of national interest, even at the cost of antagonizing any unstable American president. Remaining silent or ignoring Trump's comments will not help. To reiterate Jaishankar's words on foreign policy, "I think for the foreign policy ahead we need to think big, think long, and think clever." India should focus on thinking cleverly and strengthening its economy, because in this unstable world, economic strength matters the most.

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Our Weapons Unleash HAVOC



Sanjay Srivastava

Under "Operation Sindoor," the Indian Army showcased a futuristic high-tech warfare strategy that has left many nations stunned and reassessing their own military preparedness.

Operation Sindoor, and all the success thus far, stands as a testament to outstanding defense technology and the skill with which it was deployed. During this operation, the army obliterated terrorist bases across the border without actually crossing it, and when a frustrated Pakistan launched dozens of drones, missiles, bombs, etc., against our military bases, border, and other areas, we neutralized them all – before they could cause any damage – with our technical capability and efficiency. Indeed, the most important aspect of the Sindoor operation was its technology-driven execution: for the first time, the Indian Army used technology-driven weapons and advanced defense systems on such a large scale in a defense operation. For striking across the border from within our own territory, the indigenous Global Positioning System 'NavIC' was used to pinpoint targets, ISRO's Cartosat satellite provided real-time images, the DRDO's UAVs Rustom and Netra recorded ground movements, and the Stratospheric Airship Platform provided excellent reconnaissance, intelligence gathering, and Artificial Intelligence provided a precise and untainted path. Communication services remained unhindered through SIGINT, while the enemy's radars were jammed with the Spectra Jamming system to prevent them

Weapons That Displayed Their Mettle

Of the weapons, aircraft, and defense systems that particularly showcased their mettle in this operation, some were indigenous while others were imported.

Indigenous Suicide Drone Nagastra-1

Developed by Alpha Design and Elbit Systems, suicide drones like 'Nagastra-1' are now included in the Indian Army. These are capable of attacking in swarms, patrolling enemy territory, and providing real-time information. With a range of 100 kilometers and a 40 kg warhead capacity, these drones silently launch precise attacks. Military experts consider this to be the beginning of the 'sensor-to-shooter' era.



Self-Guided Hammer Bombs

Safran's HAMMER bomb is designed to penetrate strong fortifications. Equipped with GPS/INS navigation and infrared/laser guidance, it accurately targets at a distance of 15-70 km. Able to be launched from several aircraft, including the Rafale, each Hammer bomb costs ₹84,000 and can penetrate six targets simultaneously, making them capable of destroying medium-range targets.



Scalp Missiles

The France-British made SCALP cruise missile, deployed on the Rafale, is a "fire and forget" capable missile with a range of 500 km. It accurately targets by evading radar at subsonic speed. After reaching the target, it aligns and penetrates targets like bunkers head-on. Priced at ₹8 crore, this missile has been used in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Ukraine.



Air Defense System S-400, Sudarshan Chakra

The success of the Air Force's aerial attacks in Operation Sindoor has been commendable. In this operation, Pakistan's China-acquired Air Defense System HQ-9 completely failed, while the Russian-made Indian Air Defense System 'Sudarshan Chakra' successfully intercepted and destroyed Pakistani aircraft and missiles. This is proof of the superiority of the Indian Air Defense System.



Stratospheric Airship Platform

The 'Stratospheric Airship Platform' developed by DRDO was successfully tested in Madhya Pradesh. Before Operation Sindoor, this balloon-like espionage system helped gather intelligence and formulate accurate strategies.





from detecting movement, and they were confused by sending fake signals through spoofing. During this, Lightening Munition, Kamikaze drones, and decoy flares put on a fantastic display of evading enemy security, keeping Pakistani air defense systems in the dark about where the attack was happening or about to happen.

Many multi-role aircraft equipped with state-of-the-art technology such as the Mirage 2000 and Rafale took to the skies and carried out stand-off attacks from within our borders with Rafael Meteor, Scalp missiles, Crystal Maze missiles, guided Hammer bombs, Spice 2000 bombs, Israel-manufactured Paveway-2 Sudarshan laser bombs, which are electro-optical guided bombs and use infrared or light sensors to reach the target.



Frustrated by this simultaneous attack on nine terrorist hideouts and their destruction, Pakistan sent more than 50 drones across the border, intending to detonate them, but the army grounded them using L-70 guns, ZU-23MM, Shilka systems, and other anti-drone techniques. The Indian Air Defense System Sudarshan Chakra i.e. S-400 not only shot down several JF-17 jet aircraft of Pakistan but also demolished their China-made air defense system HQ-9 in Lahore. Meanwhile, the aircraft carrier warship Vikrant, stationed in the Arabian Sea, demonstrated its state-of-the-art missile launch technology by causing a massive explosion in Karachi, while the highly capable and lethal suicide drone Harop made in Israel also displayed amazing skill in this conflict. Apart from this, many technical methods were used by the Indian Army in this operation. Such technical intensity has never been seen in military operations launched by India against Pakistan till date.



Due to friendship with countries like China and Turkey, Pakistan has also made progress in military technology, so the traditional enmity between the two countries has now taken the form of a technical war. But the truth is that Pakistan cannot compete with Indian capability in military and defense

technology in any situation. We have more technical resources, a very large economic capacity, and global-level military and defense partnerships related to technology and science. Apart from DRDO, a dozen organizations, institutions, and companies are engaged in the development of the most modern armaments and defense systems. Besides this, defense startups and domestic construction are also on the rise in the country. India is one of the world's top five military powers in terms of expenditure on military force, weapons, and defense technology. Pakistan's number in this list is very low. Pakistan can only match India in the number of nuclear weapons. It is miles behind in terms of the number of soldiers, military resources, aircraft, ships, weapons, and weapon systems. The way high-precision weapons were used in 'Operation Sindoor' and the scale at which the government is paying attention and emphasizing the procurement of arms and weapons for all branches of the army will, within the next decade, create so much distance between the military capabilities of India and bankrupt Pakistan that even with the open help of China and Turkey, it will not be able to reach even a quarter of it, let alone bridge it.

India's campaign was so accurate inch by inch that it destroyed only the targeted target without deviating, without any undue civilian damage. The credit for this spectacular accuracy and precision goes to the combined efforts of the armies, military skills, courage, valor, power along with new war technology, amazing performance of modern weapons and weapon systems. With this demonstration, the Indian Army has made it clear that the definition of war has now changed to become a battle of technology more than of strength. In order to remain at the forefront of this, it will further develop and use amazing defense technology in the future. 'Operation Sindoor' and its aftermath are not only a befitting reply to Pakistan, but also a demonstration of the high-tech warfare strategy of the future that has scared the rest of the countries who think ill of the country.



INDIA'S INTEL EDGE

OUTSMARTING PAKISTAN



Archishman Goswami

Operation Sindoor proved India's intel edge over Pakistan. To hold it, Delhi now needs deeper regional ties, a counter-disinformation strategy, and covert action.

On 12 May 2025, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi addressed the Indian people. In a speech that notably declared any further Pakistani sponsorship of terrorism to constitute an act of war against India, the PM not only highlighted the resilience and unity of the Indian people during Operation Sindoor – India's calculated response to the terrorist attack abetted by Pakistan in Pahalgam over two weeks prior—but also openly expressed his appreciation of the role played by the nation's intelligence services.

As the dust settles, a growing body of evidence points towards the stellar role played by India's intelligence services during Operation Sindoor. These achievements have augmented India's strategic advantage over Pakistan and paved the way for the country's security agencies to maintain long-term pressure on Islamabad and build upon their successes in recent weeks.

Akashteer and the successes of Indian intelligence.

The success of India's Akashteer air defence system during Operation Sindoor illustrates the growing sophistication of India's technological intelligence (TECHINT) capabilities. Informed in real-time by India's network of Cartosat satellites, the Akashteer systems reportedly achieved near-perfect success rates when deployed against waves of Pakistani drone swarms targeting civilian infrastructure along the border and within the hinterland. More than just a testament to India's growing technological prowess, the engineering and operational performance of the Akashteer system in active conflict underscores the seamless integration between higher-level strategic intelligence (exemplified by the collection and processing of real-time satellite imagery) and immediate tactical application. The result has been fewer civilian casualties than might otherwise have been expected, and negligible grounds for the Pakistani military to





claim even a semblance of success.

More importantly, however, the success of the Akashteer air defence systems captured India's growing autonomy as an intelligence actor. In stark contrast to the 1999 Kargil War, when the United States actively degraded the accuracy of India's non-military GPS receivers through the policy of 'selective availability' for political leverage, Akashteer utilised the indigenously developed NAVIC navigation system. This significantly diminished the capacity of external actors such as the US to play any meaningful operational role in the conflict. By the early hours of 10 May, the Indian Air Force had struck PAF Base Nur Khan in Rawalpindi – located a short distance away from the secretariat of Pakistan's nuclear command authority, the Strategic Plans Division – thus successfully re-establishing the deterrence objective that lay at the heart of Operation Sindoor.

Counterintelligence: Into Uncharted Waters

Since 11 May, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) have made numerous arrests across India of individuals suspected of aiding Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The backgrounds of those detained shed light on Islamabad's evolving intelligence priorities in India while also highlighting the steps that India's counterintelligence services must take to meet these emerging threats.

The arrest of Jyoti Malhotra – a social media influencer – suggests a greater focus by the ISI on recruiting agents of influence to disseminate disinformation in both peacetime and wartime, as suggested by police sources. Such efforts are likely to continue alongside the ISI's traditional focus on recruiting those in lower-level managerial positions with access to information of strategic value, as well

as underpaid civilians in strategically sensitive areas of the country. Past examples include ex-Brahmos engineer Nishant Agarwal and Mujeeb Rahman, arrested for impersonating a government official to gather intelligence on the movements of INS Vikrant at the height of Operation Sindoor.

Early indications suggest that India's counterintelligence services recognise these challenges and have begun taking steps to counteract them. Some of these efforts appear to be bearing fruit already—for instance, the recent arrest of an 18-year-old man in Gujarat on charges of 'cyber terrorism' and for abetting Pakistani cyberattacks against government websites during Operation Sindoor. In parallel, Indian authorities have also taken action against the amplification of Pakistani disinformation by third-party states, treating this as a counterintelligence concern of the highest order. Indian authorities have banned social media profiles of Chinese and Turkish state media outlets, given their role in promoting ISI-aligned narratives during the conflict.

Intelligence Liaison: Scope for expansion

It is equally vital that India take advantage of the ongoing suspension in active hostilities to derive the greatest strategic advantage possible through intelligence liaison with partner countries. In recent days, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar has spoken to Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi – the first official call between the two since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in 2021. National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval has also spoken with his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Ahmadian. Both countries have a shared mistrust of Pakistan and its destabilising role in the region – ties between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban are at an all-time low, and Iran has a history of both border skirmishes as well as spying on Pakistan. A mutual recognition of shared concerns may be conducive to the expansion of existing liaison frameworks, allowing New Delhi to exert greater pressure on Pakistan and preclude its ability to employ terrorism as a tool of state policy. However, any intelligence-sharing agreement with these countries must carefully account for the risk of classified information being compromised via Pakistan's access through China, given both Afghanistan's and Iran's increasing alignment with Beijing in recent years. Indeed, Operation Sindoor has



provided a brief window of opportunity for India to expand its influence as an intelligence liaison partner to key allies. It is an advantage that could be leveraged for immediate diplomatic or economic benefits. The debris of intercepted Chinese PL-15E missiles and Turkish drones employed by Pakistan provides India with the opportunity to understand both Chinese and Turkish weapons systems—intelligence that may be used by New Delhi or traded with interested global partners. Sources suggest that countries such as France and the member-states of the Five Eyes alliance (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the US) have already expressed interest in acquiring such intelligence.

Challenges and Next Steps

However, much more remains to be done within the intelligence space if India is to cement the gains achieved in deterring Pakistan through Operation Sindoor. While the specific details of each strategy will vary depending on its context and objectives, an offensive posture—encompassing gathering intelligence through both human and technical sources, as well as the active deployment of deception and kinetic operations—may be best suited to sustaining the deterrence recently established against Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism.

A key component of deterring Pakistan against future misadventures involves developing a clearer understanding of its longstanding strategic alignment



establishment of the NIA two years later to primarily address counterterrorism issues and to liaise between India's various security agencies, a dedicated counter-OSINT agency may help achieve a similar goal against disinformation. Lessons may be drawn from Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, established in 2022 to counter the threat posed by Russian and Chinese disinformation campaigns. A similar Indian agency could potentially working closely with sister services such as the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO, India's primary signals intelligence agency, which played a critical role during Operation Sindoor), or even collaborate with private sector initiatives, such as the task force formed by the Data Security Council of India to examine the nature of and vulnerabilities targeted by Pakistani digital threat actors during the conflict.

with both Turkey and China, which Operation Sindoor brought into sharper public focus. As such, India must expand intelligence collection efforts aimed at mapping where and how the three countries' interests converge or diverge, particularly concerning Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism. This may require dedicating increased resources to intelligence collection in third-party geographies—where Islamabad's, Beijing's, and Ankara's interests and activities most visibly intersect. In particular, Central Asia and the Caucasus are critical regions, given that both Turkey and China have expanded their economic and political footprint here, and that Pakistan has recruited and trained anti-India terrorists here in the recent past. Identifying where Pakistan's interests and policies most closely align or differ from those of its two closest strategic partners may provide Indian policymakers with a fuller picture of key vulnerabilities that may be exploited through an array of means, both overt and covert, to preserve the long-term deterrence sought at the outset of Operation Sindoor. While liaison with regional partners may help pursue this strategy (as noted previously), intelligence collection priorities must also emphasise unilateral operations, given the internal security vulnerabilities of many regional governments and their growing geopolitical alignment with both Turkey and China.

It is similarly recommended that counter-OSINT (open-source intelligence) capabilities be prioritised, given the corrosive effect of Pakistani disinformation, often augmented by Turkish and Chinese state media. Just as the 26/11 attacks resulted in the

Equally, Indian intelligence agencies can preserve the gains made during Operation Sindoor through the sustained pursuit of covert action—both in counter-deception and kinetic operations. The targeted neutralisation of Pakistani terrorists may not only serve to decapitate the leadership of such groups, but also signal the futility of relying on the generosity of a state incapable of ensuring their physical security. Proactive steps by Indian counterintelligence services to address Pakistan's efforts to recruit agents of influence through the creative use of deception and counterespionage – perhaps in coordination with the abovementioned, hypothetical counter-OSINT services – could significantly increase confusion within the adversary's strategic circles. Such an approach will serve to constrain any gains made through the recruitment of Indian citizens for spying.

India's intelligence services have undoubtedly played a vital role in aiding the achievement of its strategic goals under the banner of Operation Sindoor. However, to ensure that these successes are not reversed, a more proactive strategy—built on the momentum of recent gains—must be prioritised. A combination of patience, confidence, strategic clarity, and a healthy dollop of scepticism may go a long way in helping India maintain the deterrence that it has established in recent weeks.

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INDIA

INTERNAL THREATS

INVISIBLE WAR



Sandeep Kumar

India is fighting an invisible war, where the enemy is not across the border but lying in wait within. These enemies are spies, hate-mongers on social media, and cybercriminals. Combating them requires vigilance and advanced technology.

India faces a multi-faceted threat – not only from external forces but also from "snakes in the grass," those who live among us, speak our language, use our resources, and pursue anti-national agendas. These enemies manifest as spies, spread hate on social media, or act as puppets in the hands of foreign powers.

Today, the danger to the nation's security isn't limited to enemies stationed at the border. It arises from networks that are hollowing out our society from within through information, ideas, and digital means. In this invisible war, we must fight not only with guns but with our thoughts and awareness.

A series of arrests by national security agencies in 2024 and the early months of 2025 have peeled back the layers of this insidious web. Jyoti Malhotra, a YouTuber from Hisar with 385,000 subscribers, had traveled to Pakistan three times. She was found to be in contact with Danish, a Pakistani diplomat who was expelled by the Indian government. Her travels, video content, and activities are now under investigation.

Individuals like Gazala and Yamin Mohammad are also caught in this suspicious net. They received money from Pakistani contacts and shared sensitive information. These individuals were gathering information for foreign agencies through social media or fake documents. In a similar vein, Devender Singh, a student from Patiala, was arrested for sending pictures of a military cantonment. Armaan and Tarif from Nuh (Haryana) are accused of providing SIM cards and sensitive information at the behest of agents from the Pakistani embassy.

Shahzad from Rampur established ties with Pakistan under the guise of smuggling spices and clothes, and

engaged in espionage. Mohammad Murtaza Ali, an app developer, himself created mobile apps and leaked data for espionage through technical means. Sukhpreet Singh and Karanbir Singh from Gurdaspur were arrested for leaking military information related to 'Operation Sindoor.'

The apprehension of Satender Siwal, working in the Indian Embassy in Russia and leaking information related to the Ministry of Defense, indicates that this threat is no longer limited to any class, caste, or identity. Sakur Khan Mangaliar in Rajasthan, Nauman Ilahi in Uttar Pradesh, and many other ordinary-looking people are also under investigation. All these cases expose a grave reality: the threat to internal security is omnipresent.

These arrests raise the question: can the country's security be limited to borders alone? Do intruders only come from across the border? In the interrogation



held in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, 51 suspected Bangladeshi and Rohingya citizens were caught. In Delhi, 520 illegal Bangladeshi citizens were arrested after the Pahalgam attack. Many of them were found to have fake documents, bank accounts, and information on availing government benefits. These were not just migrants - they were part of an organized network.

This crisis has also affected India-Bangladesh diplomatic relations. When India returned 13 illegal infiltrators to the border, Bangladesh refused to take them back. These people are now stranded on the 'Zero Line' - neither India can accept them, nor Bangladesh. This is not only a humanitarian crisis but also an example of the complexity of border security.

This invisible war going on in India has now penetrated the digital domain as well. Platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, YouTube, and Facebook are no longer just mediums of communication, but have become laboratories for weaponizing ideas. Radical ideologies, fake news, communal incitement videos - all of these are being used to break India's social harmony. This is a digital battlefield where every click is a potential weapon.

The economic fulcrum of this digital war is: cryptocurrency, the dark web, and foreign funding. People engaged in anti-national activities no longer need banks to transfer money; crypto wallets and Bitcoin are enough. NIA and ATS have reported several such transactions that directly go to anti-India organizations. This economic terrorism is a new way of hollowing out the country's roots.

imperative to further empower the country's intelligence agencies. Today, institutions like NIA, RAW, IB, and state-level ATS are more vigilant than ever before. They have conducted dozens of operations and dismantled several networks. But they have limited resources, technical support, and legal scope. We need to equip their cyber capabilities, data analysis efficiency, and ground intelligence with modern technologies.

It is also necessary that state police forces be given special training in cyber crime, sensitive information monitoring, and digital forensics. Coordination between the police and intelligence agencies must be further improved so that information can be shared and action can be taken in time. This coordination can become our greatest strength in this invisible war. In this context, India should learn from countries like Israel and the United States. In Israel, every citizen is a guard of security - they do not hesitate to report suspicious individuals. The models for cyber surveillance and digital forensics that the US and UK have established are exemplary for India. We must learn from them and adapt them to our context.

India needs to develop a 'security-culture' in which every citizen is vigilant, and every institution is alert. Because the defense of the nation is not only on the border - it is in ideas, in behavior, and in civic consciousness. We, as a nation, must remain aware every moment.

If we remain silent today, the soul of the country will be wounded by our silence tomorrow. And then, the enemy will win not with guns, but with our mistakes. This is a war we cannot lose. We must fight unitedly, vigilantly, and with a spirit of patriotism. Only then will we be able to protect our integrity and sovereignty.

To combat these threats, it has
b e c o m e



Pakistan's rising defense budget (₹2.5 lakh crore) is mired in controversy, even as the country grapples with an economic crisis. Amid tensions with India, an 18% increase in defense spending, reduced allocations for education and healthcare, and questions surrounding the military's commercial empire (Milbus) are raising concerns. Are Pakistan's priorities in the right place, or is the country heading towards economic collapse?

Rifles Over Progress: PAKISTAN'S Skewed Priorities



Jalaj Srivastava

Pakistan's recent defense budget increase of 18%, bringing it to over 2.5 trillion rupees, is sparking considerable controversy and raising serious questions about the nation's financial priorities. This decision comes at a time when the country is grappling with a severe economic crisis, marked by soaring inflation (over 38%), widespread unemployment, and significant social unrest. In such circumstances, the allocation of such a substantial amount to defense spending calls into question the rationale of Pakistan's economic policy and highlights the deeply entrenched power of the military establishment and the neglect of civilian welfare.

The 18% surge in defense expenditure in the 2025 budget is not merely coincidental. Pakistan found itself embroiled in a military conflict following a terrorist attack in India's Pahalgam in April 2025 and the subsequent 'Operation Sindoor' launched by India in response. Even though it was not a full-fledged war, this four-day 'low-intensity war' compelled Islamabad to lean towards armaments, especially after India reportedly neutralized air defense systems acquired from China and the US and grounded several of its fighter jets.

But is this decision a reaction solely to immediate geopolitical circumstances, or does it reflect a deeper, long-standing military-centric policy? When hospitals lack essential medicines, schools are short of qualified teachers, and millions of citizens struggle to meet basic needs, how can this massive increase in the defense budget be justified?

GDP vs. Priorities: A Skewed Balance. Pakistan's defense spending for the fiscal year 2025 constitutes approximately 2.3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This figure is higher than that of India (1.9%), China (1.7%), and even the European Union average (1.5%). This disproportionate allocation is particularly alarming given Pakistan's precarious economic situation.

In contrast, crucial sectors like education and health receive a mere 2% and 1.3% of the GDP, respectively. This stark disparity clearly illustrates how Pakistan prioritizes its military establishment at the expense of the basic needs and well-being of its citizens. This skewed allocation perpetuates a cycle of underdevelopment and social inequality.

'Milbus': A Parallel Economy. In Pakistan, the military's influence extends far beyond traditional defense activities; it operates a vast and pervasive business empire. This system is often referred to as "Milbus" (military business), extensively detailed by Ayesha Siddiqi in her acclaimed book, "Military Inc."

Institutions like the Fauji Foundation, Bahria Foundation, Army Welfare Trust, and the DHA (Defense Housing Authority) are not merely charitable trusts. Instead, they are multi-sector commercial enterprises directly controlled by the military. This control spans various sectors, including banking, education, agriculture, media, construction, and real estate.

Estimates suggest that the military controls approximately 12% of Pakistan's land. These military-run industries benefit from tax exemptions and preferential government treatment, crowding out the private sector. The opacity of these operations also shields them from accountability, further exacerbating economic distortions.

Foreign Debt and the Illusion of Self-Reliance. Pakistan's economic vulnerability is underscored by its heavy reliance on foreign debt and aid. According to the IMF, Pakistan's debt-to-GDP ratio is around 73.6%, and its foreign exchange

reserves barely cover three months of imports.

In 2024, Pakistan's trade deficit reached a staggering \$25 billion, and even the \$7 billion bailout package from the IMF comes with stringent conditions. Despite these financial constraints, there are no apparent restrictions on the military's infrastructure, budget, or expansion projects.

This glaring contradiction suggests that Pakistan's defense policy is not primarily driven by genuine "national security" concerns but rather by the vested interests of the military establishment in maintaining its power and economic dominance. The nation's limited resources are strategically diverted to sustain the military's financial empire.

Terrorism: A Boon for the Military or a Bane for the Public? The persistent issues of terrorism and extremism within Pakistan's borders paradoxically strengthen the military's position. Recurrent terrorist attacks and the subsequent military responses allow the armed forces to portray themselves as the nation's "protectors," preventing civilian governments from asserting genuine control.

The military has



frequently leveraged incidents in Indian Kashmir and heightened Indo-Pakistani tensions to justify increases in the defense budget. This pattern suggests not a "crisis-management strategy" but a "crisis-creation strategy," where ongoing security threats are strategically used to consolidate military power and resources.

Social Decay and Youth Despair. Pakistan's youth, who constitute 64% of the population (under 30 years), are consistently facing unemployment, soaring inflation, and inadequate access to education. This demographic, which could have been a significant demographic dividend, has been turned into a demographic burden by the misguided priorities of the government and the military.

Schools lack teachers, hospitals are unable to provide adequate healthcare, universities are underfunded for research, yet the military consistently secures funds for new projects and expansion. This creates a deep sense of frustration and despair among the younger generation, who see their opportunities diminishing while the military's influence grows.

Is This Model Sustainable? History provides ample evidence that military might alone cannot guarantee a nation's long-term success and stability. The Soviet Union, Myanmar, and even modern-day North Korea serve as cautionary examples. A nation's true security lies in the well-being of its citizens, not solely in its





military strength. If a nation's people live amidst hunger, illiteracy, and rampant inequality, its perceived security is merely an illusion.

Unless Pakistan undertakes a fundamental re-evaluation of its defense budget and the Milbus system, its economic situation will continue to deteriorate, and its internal stability will face increasing threats. A significant shift in priorities is essential for Pakistan's survival.

Conclusion: Let School Bells Ring Louder Than Gunfire. Pakistan's current priorities are not only economically unsound but also morally flawed. A nation that allocates a disproportionate share of its budget to the military while neglecting healthcare, education, and social welfare is effectively undermining the future of its own citizens.

Choosing to engage in an arms race with India instead of addressing escalating tensions through peace, diplomacy, and regional stability will make neither Pakistan safer nor more prosperous.

To become a modern, democratic, and inclusive nation, Pakistan must adopt a paradigm shift—"investing more in books and medicine than in rifles." Only by prioritizing the well-being of its citizens can Pakistan truly build a secure and prosperous future; otherwise, the risk of national disintegration looms, whether guns are fired or not. As repeatedly emphasized by the World Bank and the IMF, a balanced approach that prioritizes human capital over military expenditure is necessary for sustainable peace and development.

This analysis is not merely a critique of Pakistan's policies but also a plea to prevent the voice of humanity and development from being drowned out by the din of militarization. A re-evaluation of national priorities is crucial for the nation's survival.



In an effort to examine the United States' strategic outlook in the context of the recent India-Pakistan conflict and the disposition of President Donald Trump, Sanjib Kumar Barua conducted an interview with Michael Kugelman, a distinguished South Asia analyst based in Washington, D.C., originally published in The Week. As the discussion provides critical insights into American perceptions of India's strategic posture, we are republishing the interview in this edition of Cult Current to facilitate broader scholarly engagement and public discourse.

Trump's Remarks Don't Reflect US Policy: Kugelman

Interviewer: Sanjib Kr Baruah

Q. India has reacted to President Trump claiming credit for the Indo-Pak ceasefire. What do you think is guiding him? What is his Indo-Pak strategy?

A. I am not sure the approach is that strategic. This is likely a case of Trump being intrigued by the complexity and intractability of India-Pakistan relations, and wanting to crack the code so to speak. He is, after all, someone who likes to be seen as the ultimate dealmaker. When he talks of a thousand-year crisis, the hyperbole likely conveys his sense that it's a serious challenge that he would like to take a stab at fixing.

Q. There is also a feeling that Trump is undermining India. What is your take?

A. Certainly, Trump's comments won't go down well in New Delhi because of Indian sensitivities about external involvement in its bilateral crises, and

especially involvement that goes public. The question is how Delhi will react. If it simply shrugs this off as a 'Trump will be Trump' moment and a reflection of his unpredictability and tendency to say things off the cuff that don't reflect actual policy, then the damage should be minimal. But if he keeps making these comments and the administration actually makes active efforts to push the sides to hold talks, then the relationship could face some turbulence.

Q. There is a dominant feeling that President Trump's recent pronouncements have hyphenated India and Pakistan. New Delhi says the perpetrator and the victim cannot be equated. Is there is a thinking behind this in Washington?

A. It doesn't appear that Trump's recent comments have hyphenated India and Pakistan, something that indeed has not happened for several decades in terms of US policy. However, I would argue that what Trump has said does not at all reflect US policy. We should read Trump's recent comments as off-the-cuff remarks. The US policy is not likely to change; we are not likely to see re-hyphenisation. Much of President Trump's comments reflected the fact that he doesn't know that much about the context of India-Pakistan relations in US policy. It is quite notable that we have not seen or heard any other US official say anything relating to what Trump has said. That makes it clear that US policy has not changed in the sense that the US will pursue its relations with India and Pakistan on separate tracks even when we are seeing some tensions having crept into US-India relations while there is a surprising boost in US-Pakistan relations. It appears that we will soon see a reversal to the norm in the sense that the US-India relations will be bolstered and the US-Pakistan relations will

remain 'workable but a limited relationship'. There are so many strategic and commercial imperatives from the perspective of both Washington and New Delhi to ensure this partnership endures. Now if Trump were to double down or were to repeat his comments on Kashmir-related issues, certainly that





The Quad is an entity whose strength lies in the shared strategic objective of countering China. It will not be affected by recent crises or Trump's latest remarks.

would make things more difficult for New Delhi.

Q. There is also a feeling that the US is treating its friends and foes in a manner alike. The tariff issue, for instance. China has scored much more with its defiance than what India has achieved by negotiating.

A. It should be very clear to all that Trump is a maverick. A very unusual and unconventional type of US leader. He does not treat allies and partners and rivals and competitors with the same kind of rigid system that you would see with most US presidents. While it is true that he sees China as a competitor, he has at many levels intensified competition with China. While he has, like his predecessors, seen Iran as a competitor, there clearly has been differences in other cases like with Russia.

Indeed, President Trump has indicated that US relations with allies in Europe and East Asia are not necessarily sacrosanct as they might seem. President Trump is someone who doesn't believe in the notion of strategic partnerships. For him everything is transactional, and that helps understand the way he looks at the world. His foreign policy is driven by transactional considerations and that suggests that whether you are an ally or a rival, on many levels, particularly when it comes to commercial considerations, there is not necessarily that sharp dividing line between friend and foe. We have seen it on the tariffs issue. Indeed, we have seen some of America's closest partners getting hit hard with tariffs. That is because President Trump believes that doing so can help secure America's economic interests. He sees the transactional value there.

Q. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, too, did not take a proactive stand during this conflict. Therefore, what is Quad's future?

A. The Quad will be fine. It's an entity that derives its

Trump does not believe in the traditional notion of strategic partnerships. For him, everything is based on transactions, and this perspective shapes his understanding of the world. His foreign policy is driven by deal-making principles, meaning that whether a country is a friend or a rival of the U.S., the lines between ally and adversary often blur—especially on trade and economic issues. Trump's approach focuses more on benefits and outcomes than on long-standing diplomatic ties or ideological alliances, emphasizing what America gains from each relationship, regardless of historical or strategic context.

strength from a shared strategic goal in countering China. That won't be impacted by the recent crisis or Trump's recent comments.

Q. President Trump is seen as having a mercurial streak. Is it a cultivated image?

A. That image can be helpful for Trump, as it keeps both US allies and adversaries on their toes. For a leader who is all about using leverage to pursue transactional goals, that can be very helpful.

Q. Will the policy towards Pakistan change?

A. We shouldn't mistake Trump's recent comments for some type of policy shift. At the end of the day, the US and India line up on the same side a lot more than the US and Pakistan do. The US will continue to pursue limited cooperation with Pakistan, but its equities with India run so much deeper.

This interview has been published on the Bangladesh-based portal weeklyblitz.net.

ISKP v/s BLA

A Geopolitical Vicious Cycle



Sandeep Kumar

The ISKP's declaration of war against the BLA in Balochistan has further complicated Pakistan's internal dynamics. This clash between radical Islamists and ethnic nationalists poses a serious security challenge for both the country and the region, raising fears of escalating instability.

The recent declaration of war by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) against the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which is fighting for the independence of Balochistan, further complicates Pakistan's internal situation. This is not merely an internal conflict; it has far-reaching geopolitical implications, especially in the bordering regions of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Afghanistan, and Iran. Pakistan, already grappling with political instability, economic crisis, and the challenges of terrorism, stands at a new and dangerous juncture. This development not only poses a challenge to Pakistan's security but could also escalate instability throughout the region. Analyzing this complex situation requires considering Pakistan's existing security landscape, the ideological and strategic differences between the two organizations, and the role



of regional and global powers. This article attempts to unravel the layers of this intricate situation and assess potential future directions.

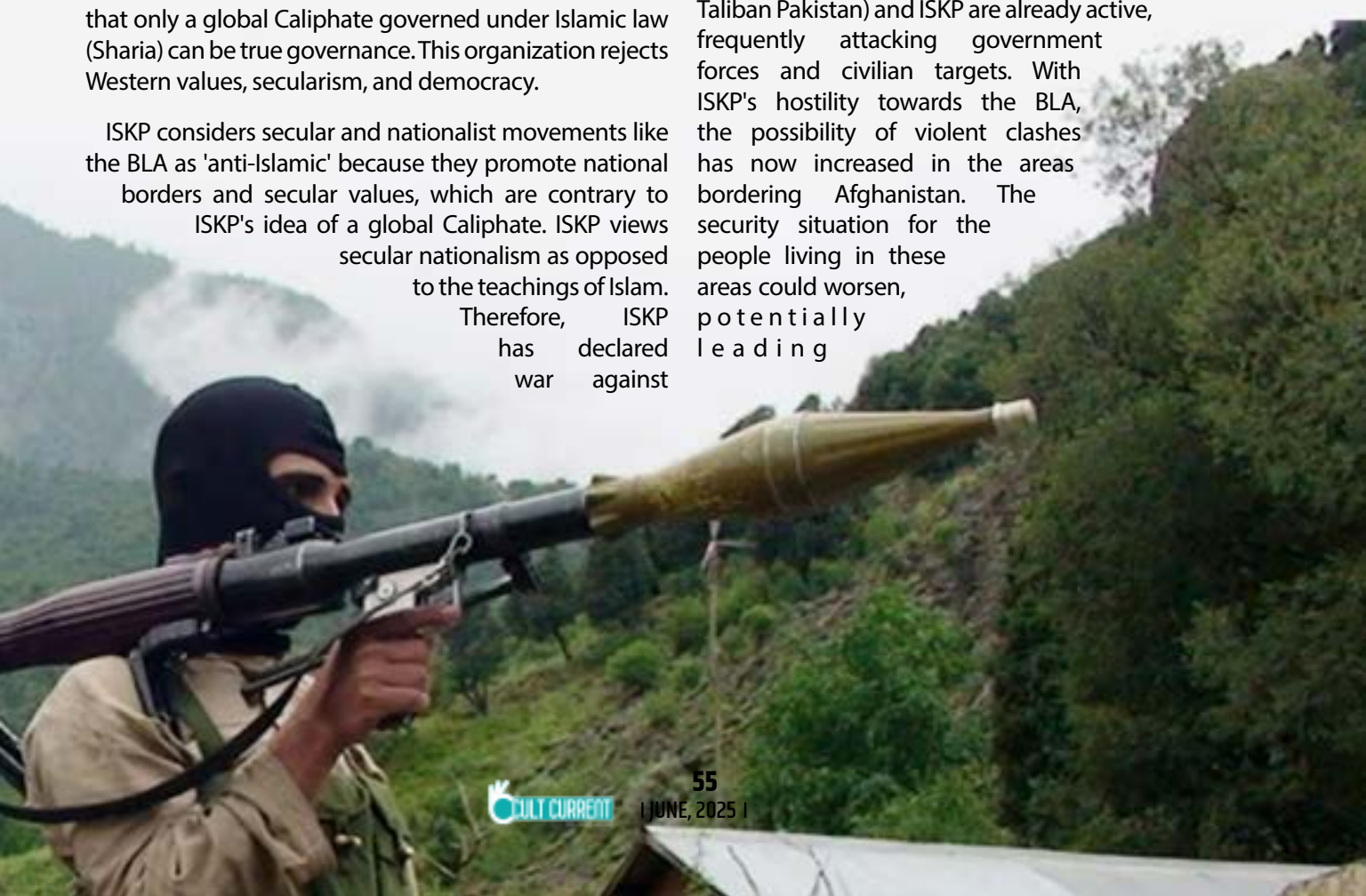
Indeed, at the root of this conflict lies the clash of two opposing ideologies and organizations with diametrically opposed beliefs and objectives. The struggle between the BLA and ISKP is not just a regional dispute but a deep ideological war between secular nationalism and radical Islamist ideology. The BLA (Baloch Liberation Army) is a secular, nationalist organization that demands autonomy or complete independence for Balochistan. This organization opposes the Pakistani military and Chinese investment (especially CPEC projects), which they consider as exploitation of Baloch resources and a threat to cultural identity. The BLA's primary objective is to establish control over Baloch identity and resources, and they claim to protect the rights of the people of Balochistan. The rise of the BLA is a reaction to the long-standing discrimination and political marginalization in Balochistan. On the other hand, ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province) is a radical Islamist organization whose aim is to establish a 'Caliphate'. This organization considers not only the Pakistani government as its enemy but also the Taliban, the Shia community, Sufis, and now Baloch nationalists as enemies of Islam. ISKP believes that only a global Caliphate governed under Islamic law (Sharia) can be true governance. This organization rejects Western values, secularism, and democracy.

ISKP considers secular and nationalist movements like the BLA as 'anti-Islamic' because they promote national borders and secular values, which are contrary to ISKP's idea of a global Caliphate. ISKP views secular nationalism as opposed to the teachings of Islam. Therefore, ISKP has declared war against

the BLA, which they consider a religious duty against the "enemies of Islam." ISKP sees the BLA as a puppet organization supported by Western powers.

This declaration of war by ISKP will bring a new wave of unrest to Pakistan's two major sensitive provinces—Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—further deteriorating the already unstable situation in these regions. Balochistan and KP are strategically important provinces for Pakistan, but they have long been plagued by instability and violence. The conflict between ISKP and the BLA will exacerbate the complex security challenges already present in these areas. Balochistan is already facing challenges from the Pakistani military and Baloch separatist organizations like the BLA and BRA. Additionally, Chinese projects (CPEC) are already targets of attacks, as Baloch nationalists consider these projects as exploitation of their resources and harmful to local communities. Now, the presence of ISKP could open a third front, which is not only challenging from a military perspective but could also further deter foreign investment. This region could become a battleground for regional and international powers, further complicating the situation.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, both TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) and ISKP are already active, frequently attacking government forces and civilian targets. With ISKP's hostility towards the BLA, the possibility of violent clashes has now increased in the areas bordering Afghanistan. The security situation for the people living in these areas could worsen, potentially leading





to a humanitarian crisis. Instability in KP could spread throughout the region.

This will force the security forces to face a two-pronged conflict—on one side, radical jihadist organizations determined to establish an Islamic Caliphate, and on the other side, separatist nationalist movements fighting to protect their resources and rights.

The conflict between ISKP and the BLA could have serious implications for Pakistan's security and political situation. Pakistan is already facing numerous internal and external challenges, and this new conflict will further destabilize the country.

ISKP and the BLA operate with different strategies and networks, potentially creating a war-like situation on two fronts simultaneously for the Pakistani military. The army will have to divide its limited resources to deal with both organizations, which could reduce their effectiveness. Managing this conflict will be a major challenge for the army.

The government's position is already fragile due to a weakened democracy, inflation, IMF conditions, and political divisions. Internal conflicts could worsen this situation, posing further challenges for the government. The government may face difficulties in keeping the country united and maintaining law and order. Political instability could further reduce foreign investment.

ISKP's fight with the BLA might appear as an immediate relief for the Pakistani government, as it pits two hostile

forces against each other. However, in the long run, it will cause more instability as it could exacerbate ethnic and sectarian tensions in the region. Additionally, if the government supports one group, it could further radicalize the other. This strategy of the government could undermine long-term stability in the region.

The conflict between ISKP and the BLA could also have significant regional implications. Pakistan's neighboring countries are likely to be affected by this conflict:

ISKP also has deep roots in Afghanistan and remains a significant challenge for the Taliban government. The ongoing conflict between ISKP and the Taliban has continued to strain relations between the two countries, especially if Pakistan demands joint operations against the Islamic State. The Taliban considers ISKP a serious threat to its rule but may be reluctant to cooperate with Pakistan, as it views this as a violation of its sovereignty. Instability in Afghanistan has the potential to spread throughout the region.

Balochistan borders Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, where separatist movements are already active. ISKP's presence could increase Iran's concerns, as this organization might try to expand its influence across the border. Iran considers instability in Balochistan a threat to its national security. Border security cooperation between Iran and Pakistan could become more complicated.

On the other hand, CPEC and Gwadar Port are located in Balochistan, and the BLA has already targeted these



projects. ISKP's activity could pose a double threat to these projects, as they would face danger not only from the BLA but also from another terrorist organization. China considers CPEC a crucial part of its Belt and Road Initiative and might expect Pakistan to make further efforts to ensure the security of these projects. Increasing Chinese intervention could create more tension in the region.

As for India, it has been critical of Baloch human rights and Pakistan's repressive policies. The ISKP-BLA conflict will give Pakistan a pretext to accuse India of having an 'external hand,' which will further increase diplomatic tensions in South Asia. Pakistan has consistently accused India of fomenting instability in the region, which could worsen the already strained relations between the two countries. This region could become a zone of competition between India and Pakistan.

Several scenarios could emerge for the future in this complex situation. It is difficult to say which direction this conflict will take, but the following three scenarios indicate potential future paths: In the first scenario, the conflict between ISKP and the BLA intensifies, leading to widespread anarchy in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan might try to exploit this situation, but this strategy could lead to adverse consequences. The civilian population will be caught in the crossfire, and a humanitarian crisis could arise in the region. This scenario could be the worst-case situation for Pakistan.

In the second scenario, the BLA and other Baloch

groups could form a new 'alliance' through mutual cooperation, standing not only against ISKP but also against the Pakistani government and its policies. This could create an even more powerful and united rebel force in the region, which could become a major challenge for Pakistan. This scenario could pose a long-term security challenge for Pakistan.

In the third and final scenario, Pakistan adopts a "proxy war" model by using these organizations against each other. This strategy could create even more instability and chaos for Pakistan. This scenario could trap Pakistan in a deep vicious cycle.

The declaration of war between ISKP and the BLA is a serious geopolitical and security challenge for Pakistan. This is not just an internal conflict; it will also have a profound impact on Pakistan's regional credibility, investment climate, economic stability, and international relations. Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are no longer just peripheral provinces but have become geopolitical battlegrounds where the triangle of jihad, nationalism, and power struggle is questioning Pakistan's integrity and future. For Pakistan, a comprehensive and coherent strategy is needed to deal with this situation, integrating military, political, economic, and social aspects. Pakistan also needs to strengthen regional and international cooperation to promote peace and stability in the region. If Pakistan fails to meet this challenge, it could lead to devastating consequences for the country.



Trump's Tech Push: India's Moment?



Anwar Hussain

Despite pressure from Trump, Apple's \$1.5 billion investment in India is reshaping global geopolitics. Is this merely a business decision, or part of a broader U.S. strategy to shift away from China? For India, this is a golden opportunity—if it focuses on technological advancement. The question remains: can India truly seize this moment?

Since Donald Trump's return to the American presidency, his unpredictable policies and controversial statements have consistently captured the global media's attention. From tariff wars to immigration disputes, Trump's every move has sent ripples across the international stage. Most recently, during a trip to the Middle East, he pressured Apple CEO Tim Cook to promote manufacturing within the United States. Trump openly warned that if Apple sold products made in India within the US, they would face substantial tariffs of up to 25%. This episode wasn't simply a business suggestion; rather, it was a carefully considered strategy to reshape



following Trump's pressure, Apple announced a significant \$1.5 billion investment in India. This investment is dedicated to establishing a display module manufacturing plant by Foxconn in Oragadam, Tamil Nadu. This move not only solidifies India's crucial position within Apple's global supply chain but also clarifies that Apple's strategy isn't simply to yield to political pressure but is instead based on a long-term strategic vision.

Trump explicitly stated, "I told Tim Cook I want iPhones to be made in the United States – not in India, not anywhere else." Despite this straightforward statement, Apple's firm commitment to continuing its investments in India is testament to the fact that the company values strategic factors that make India more attractive than manufacturing in the US. Experts believe that this decision is entirely commercially rational from the perspective of cost-effectiveness, labor availability, and a robust supply chain.

For years, Apple's production has been largely reliant on China. Key products like the iPhone are manufactured in massive factories

like Foxconn's in Shenzhen. However, due to the escalating trade war between the US and China, the US has been determined to reduce the technology supply chain's over-reliance on China. Apple was pressured to manufacture in the US during Trump's previous term as well, but the company took limited steps in that direction. With Trump back in power, that pressure has intensified.

India is now rapidly emerging as a viable alternative to China for Apple. Major companies like Foxconn, Pegatron, and Wistron have already established their manufacturing units in India. In 2023, Apple produced approximately \$14 billion worth of iPhones in India,

the global technological landscape. In this narrative, India is no longer just an observer but an emerging key player. The central question is whether Trump's pressure will present an unprecedented opportunity for India, or if India will once again be relegated to the role of a pawn in the global power balance.

Concurrently, amidst ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan, Trump attempted to intervene as an unsolicited mediator, seeking to claim credit for a ceasefire, a move promptly rejected by the Indian government. This intervention certainly damaged Trump's credibility. However, amidst these geopolitical shifts, it's noteworthy that immediately



which is not only economically significant but also strategically crucial for India.

Apple's decreasing dependence on China as per American policy is a golden opportunity for India. Manufacturing costs are significantly higher in the United States, while India is emerging as a suitable alternative with its affordable labor force, political stability, and pro-US foreign policy. This creates a favorable scenario for India to progress towards becoming a global manufacturing hub.

Apple's decision has the potential to place India prominently on the global map of electronics manufacturing. However, to fully capitalize on this opportunity, India must not only focus on production but also make significant investments and improvements in crucial areas such as research and development, supply chain management, and workforce skills. India

needs to develop a comprehensive ecosystem that encourages innovation and meets global standards.

Apple's continued investment in India clearly demonstrates that global companies are not viewing India as a temporary alternative but as a long-term strategic partner. This is a golden opportunity for India, which can be fully leveraged through sound policies and efficient execution. To achieve this, the government, industry, and academia must work together to create an environment that fosters technological advancement and economic growth.

Trump's strategy is not only economic but also ideological. He wants American tech companies not only to make profits but also to be the means of America's technological self-reliance and economic revitalization. This is the era of 'technological sovereignty,' where data, chips, smartphones, and artificial intelligence



have become symbols of a nation's power. Trump's perspective indicates a new global order where technological dominance is a crucial determinant of geopolitical power.

India must understand that it cannot be content with simply being a 'low-cost manufacturing hub' but must also strengthen its grip on technological policy, innovation, and research. Only then will it be able to play a permanent and effective role in this global restructuring. India needs to create an ecosystem that encourages research and development, attracts talent, and fosters innovation.

If India continues to provide a strong foundation of logistics, policy support, and a local supply chain to companies like Apple, it can become a key pillar of America's strategy of 'decoupling from China.' India must create a favorable environment that attracts foreign investment and helps domestic industries grow.

Trump's pressuring of Tim Cook is part of a larger global strategy. It symbolizes the American policy that is redefining the technology sector to suit its geopolitical interests. India must be prepared to play a decisive role in this strategy, not just be an observer.

India must adopt a proactive and strategic approach to strengthen its position in the global technology landscape.

The new plant being established in Tamil Nadu will create 14,000 jobs in India and can make the country a hub in the global electronics supply chain. Additionally, Foxconn has received a subsidy of ₹2,450 crore (approximately \$295 million) under the Indian government's Production Linked Incentive scheme for 2023-24, which makes the investment even more attractive.

The Indian government's Production Linked Incentive scheme, improvements in ease of doing business, and closer bilateral relations with the United States can be helpful in this direction. But for this, India must rise above the mindset of a 'developing country' and play the role of a 'technological leader nation.' India must adopt an approach that prioritizes innovation, research and development, and builds a skilled workforce.

In conclusion, amid Trump's pressure and Apple's decisions, India must develop a clear understanding of its long-term interests. This is the time to be proactive—to play a decisive role, not just be an observer. India must develop its capabilities and adopt a strategic approach to play a significant role in the global technological landscape.

Anwar Hussain is a senior journalist and lecturer.



China's Shadow Over US Security

China is pursuing a multi-dimensional strategy to undermine the U.S.'s extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Through narrative-building, economic coercion, grey zone tactics, military buildup, and diplomatic isolation, China aims to erode American credibility and shift the regional balance of power in its favor—casting a shadow over U.S. security commitments.



Manoj Kumar

The strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific is undergoing a significant shift, driven by China's comprehensive campaign aimed at eroding the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. This doctrine, which commits the United States to defending its allies against aggression, potentially with nuclear weapons, is viewed by Beijing not as a stabilizing force but as a tool designed to contain China's ascent and limit its rightful sphere of influence. In response, China has adopted an asymmetric warfare strategy, meticulously crafted to diminish U.S. power and influence without provoking a direct military confrontation. This approach manifests in several key interconnected areas.

Firstly, China actively challenges the established narrative, consistently portraying the United States as a destabilizing force within the region. Accusations of



interference and bullying are strategically deployed to undermine the moral authority on which U.S. alliances are built. Concurrently, Beijing promotes the idea that Asia should manage its own security affairs, implicitly excluding the United States from a role in the region's strategic architecture.

Secondly, economic leverage is skillfully employed to influence allies. The allure of lucrative infrastructure projects offered through the Belt and Road Initiative is juxtaposed with the imposition of trade restrictions and boycotts on those who strengthen ties with the U.S. or adopt policies seen as contrary to Chinese interests. This economic coercion represents a powerful tool in Beijing's arsenal.

Thirdly, China actively engages in what can be

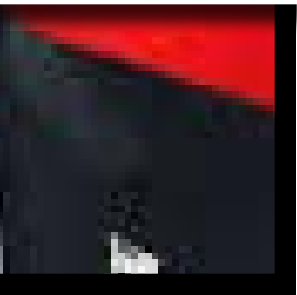
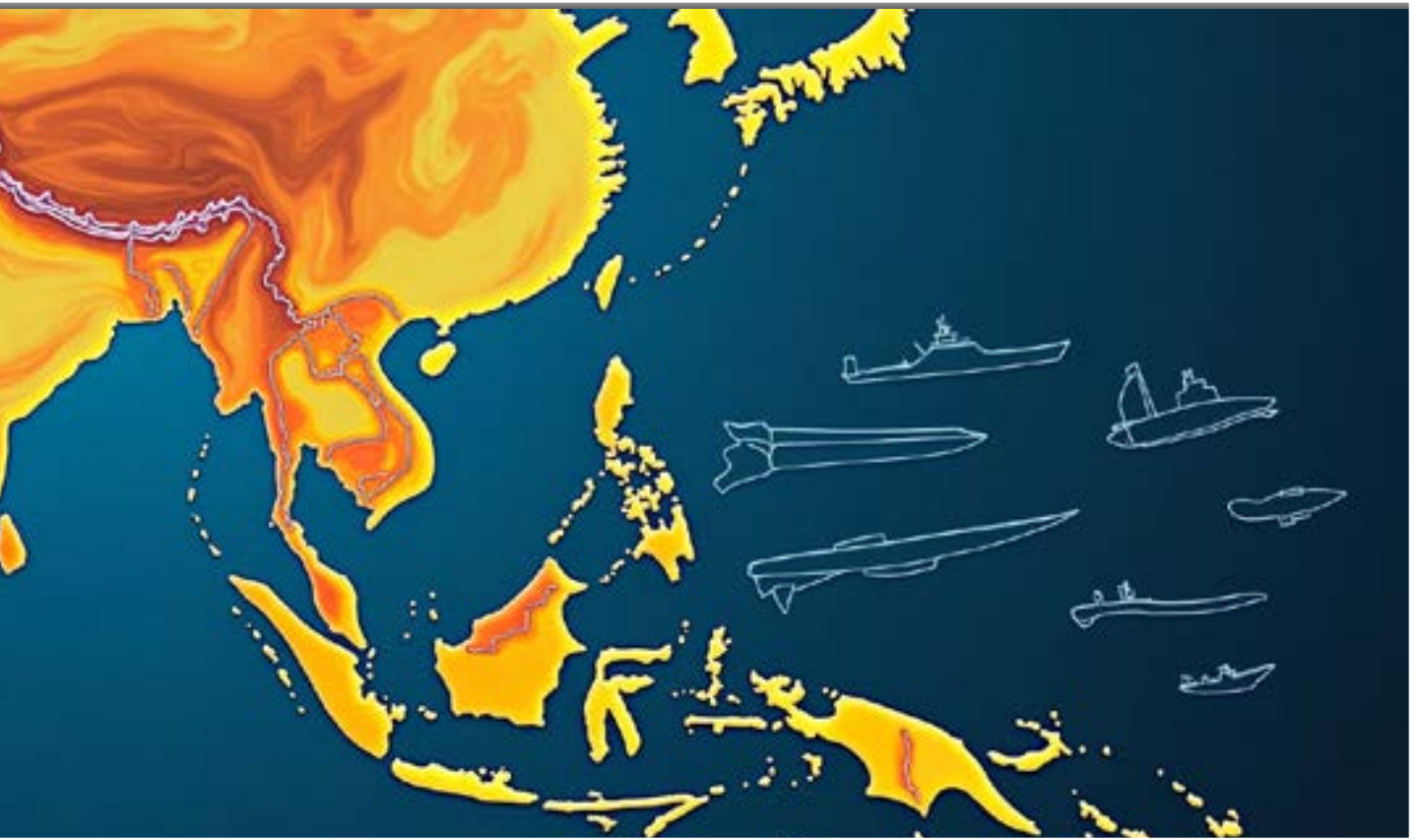


described as gray zone warfare. This strategy is particularly evident in the maritime and cyber domains, where the Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militia are deployed to harass allied vessels in the South China Sea. Cyberattacks targeting critical U.S. infrastructure serve as a coercive instrument, demonstrating Beijing's capacity to inflict damage and deter intervention.

Fourthly, China is undertaking a rapid and far-reaching military buildup. The nation is investing heavily in conventional and nuclear weapons, as well as in advanced capabilities in cyberspace and space. The goal is to achieve

regional military dominance and, crucially, to deter U.S. intervention in contingency scenarios, most notably a potential conflict over Taiwan. The conduct of wargaming and exercises that simulate attacks on US Allies are further designed to undermine the confidence of the US to engage militarily.

Finally, China actively seeks to diplomatically isolate the United States. This involves vocal criticism of alliances such as AUKUS and plans to deploy intermediate-range missiles in the region. Simultaneously, Beijing strengthens its strategic partnership with Russia, sharing a common



objective of undermining U.S. hegemony and promoting a multipolar world order.

The implications of China's multi-pronged strategy are substantial. If successful, it could erode the strength of U.S.

alliances, embolden regional actors to pursue their interests independently of Washington, and ultimately shift the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific in China's favor. The challenge for the United States lies in effectively countering China's asymmetric warfare strategy while carefully managing the risks of escalation.

To effectively respond, the United States must proactively shape the narrative, defending its role as a stabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific and exposing China's aggressive actions. This includes drawing attention to Beijing's military buildup, its use of economic coercion, and its violations of

international law. The U.S. must also strengthen its alliances and partnerships through enhanced security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and promoting resilience against cyberattacks and disinformation. Moreover, new military concepts and capabilities are needed to effectively counter China's gray zone tactics without escalating to full-scale conflict. Reinforcing deterrence is essential, demonstrating U.S. resolve to defend its allies and interests, including through the deployment of additional military assets and the conduct of joint exercises. Finally, it is crucial to address the growing security cooperation between China and Russia, working to counter their coordinated efforts to undermine U.S. security guarantees.

The future of U.S. extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific hinges on its ability to effectively respond to China's multi-faceted campaign to undermine it. Failure to do so would have profound consequences for U.S. power, influence, and overall security in the region.



India's Arctic Thaw

A Strategic Opportunity



Manish Vaid

Once a frozen frontier, the Arctic is rapidly transforming into a geopolitical and geoeconomic focal point. Melting ice is exposing vast reserves of critical minerals, hydrocarbons, and strategic shipping routes. As the West advances through NATO's northern reach, a sanctioned Russia

is turning to trusted partners to unlock its Arctic potential.

For India, this shift offers a rare strategic opportunity. With rising energy needs, critical mineral ambitions, and a desire for multipolar engagement, India can enter the Arctic not as a competitor, but as a partner to



All these photos are for illustrative purposes only.



Russia, guardian of over half the Arctic coastline and its richest untapped resources.

India's pursuit of energy security and cleaner fuels finds a strategic match in Russia's Arctic LNG (liquefied natural gas) ambitions. While Yamal LNG has proven operationally successful, the Arctic LNG-2 project, long hindered by Western sanctions, now stands at a potential turning point. The renewed thaw in US-Russia relations following Donald Trump's second term, as noted by Oxford Energy, has opened possibilities for easing restrictions on key Arctic energy assets.

For India, this shifting landscape offers a timely opportunity to deepen its role in Russia's polar pivot, by investing in Arctic LNG infrastructure, securing long-term gas supplies, and positioning itself as a critical partner in shaping the emerging Arctic order.

The Yamal LNG facility, operating at 20% above capacity since 2023, has firmly anchored Russia's

Arctic presence, producing over 100 million tonnes of LNG since 2017. For India, this has translated into energy security gains, with GAIL securing long-term contracts for 2.85 MTPA through Gazprom Marketing & Trading Singapore. Despite EU restrictions on transshipment, deliveries continue uninterrupted, aligning with India's strategy of diversifying supply sources to hedge against global volatility and fuel its gas-based economy.

Yet the real test lies in Arctic LNG-2. Once 59% complete in 2021, the project stalled under heavy Western sanctions. By 2025, only limited operations resumed. India has maintained official distance, but quiet negotiations persist as Russia courts Indian buyers with steep discounts and DES (Delivered Ex-Ship) terms, mirroring its crude oil outreach. The recent easing of US-Russia tensions after Trump's re-election offers a potential breakthrough: if secondary sanctions are lifted, Indian firms may finally step in, unlocking a significant Arctic energy axis.

India's Arctic engagement also aligns with its "Act Far East" policy and 2022 Arctic policy. ONGC Videsh's \$8.4 billion legacy in Sakhalin and Vankorneft provides operational experience and political capital that could be redeployed in the Arctic, though harsher environments and geopolitical stakes differ sharply.

As Russia aims to capture 20% of global LNG exports by 2030, India's energy calculus must



adapt. For New Delhi, the Arctic offers more than LNG, it's a new corridor linking Russian resources with India's infrastructure and strategic aspirations.

As Russia pivots to the Arctic amid Western sanctions, India finds strategic opportunity in emerging polar logistics. The Northern Sea Route (NSR), offering a 40% shorter passage than the Suez Canal and cutting transit time by 16 days, is becoming central to Indo-Russian Arctic cooperation. In 2023, NSR cargo traffic hit a record 36.254 million tonnes, with Moscow targeting 200 million tonnes by 2030. India's growing stake is evident, by early 2023, it accounted for 35% of cargo at Russia's Murmansk port, largely driven by rising coal imports.

Complementing this is the Chennai-

Vladivostok Maritime Corridor (EMC), launched in late 2024, which directly links India's eastern seaboard to Russia's Arctic gateway. Trade along the EMC has surged as coal shipments rose 87% and crude oil by 48% in FY 2024-25. This corridor not only facilitates India's access to Russia's vast Arctic and Far East resources but also strengthens its maritime footprint. India is positioning its ports and shipyards as vital nodes in Arctic logistics, proposing joint production of \$750 million worth of Russian icebreakers. Together, the NSR and EMC mark India's emergence as a serious player in Arctic connectivity, where geoeconomics and strategy now converge.

Russia's Arctic frontier, stretching across the Kola Peninsula, Norilsk, and Yakutia, is a treasure trove of critical minerals vital for India's green and digital ambitions. The Kolmozerskoye deposit holds nearly 19% of Russia's lithium reserves, Lovozerskoye is the



country's largest rare-earth element (REE) source, and Norilsk supplies over 40% of global palladium. Backed by state giants like Rosatom and Nor Nickel, Russia is fast-tracking development. Nor Nickel plans to triple cobalt output to 3,000 tonnes annually by 2025, while Rosatom's Polar Lithium JV prepares to exploit Kolmozerskoye's lithium for global markets.

For India, dependent on imports for 100% of its lithium, cobalt, and nickel, access to these resources is a strategic imperative. With China dominating 60–90% of global critical mineral supply chains, Russia offers India a rare diversification opportunity. Ambassador Denis Alipov has highlighted mutual interests in Arctic mineral cooperation. India's \$15 billion investment in oil and gas projects in Russia, and the Chennai–Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, operational since 2024, lay the groundwork for secure

logistics and collaborative mining ventures.

Russia's Arctic holds an estimated 658 million tonnes of rare metals, including 29 million tonnes of REEs, crucial for India's EVs, renewables, and defence technologies. India is also eyeing technology transfer for processing projects like Tomtor, the world's third-largest REE deposit. A proposed Centre of Excellence on Critical Minerals could partner with Russian institutes such as Gipro Nickel Institute to advance extraction methods.

Though Western sanctions complicate financing, India's 2030 target of \$100 billion in bilateral trade provides a framework for structured deals. For India, Arctic minerals are not just economic assets, they are pillars of strategic autonomy. By anchoring itself in Russia's resource-rich, sanction-insulated Arctic, India can strengthen its supply chains, hasten its green transition, and reduce dependence on China, all while asserting influence in a rapidly evolving polar landscape.

India's Arctic engagement extends beyond economics, grounded in scientific inquiry and climate diplomacy. Since gaining Observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, India has actively contributed to initiatives like the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative and the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group. Its most prominent scientific asset is the Himadri Research Station in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, operational since 2008 and managed by the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).

Himadri supports year-round studies on glaciology, ocean-atmosphere interactions, and the Arctic's impact on the Indian monsoon, with over 200 Indian scientists participating in research missions.

India's capabilities offer scope for deeper collaboration with Russia, especially through space-based technologies. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), using its Cartosat and RISAT satellites, can aid in Arctic mapping, environmental monitoring, and tracking activity along the NSR.

India and Russia's longstanding space partnership, dating back to their first agreement in 1962, offers untapped potential for Arctic collaboration in energy, shipping, and strategic monitoring. While current Arctic-specific projects remain limited, future joint space applications could enhance maritime domain awareness and infrastructure development in the polar region.

India's Arctic push is a strategic leap, linking energy security, mineral access, and scientific strength with Russia's resource-rich north. As the Arctic reshapes global power corridors, India is no longer a bystander but a rising stakeholder. With logistics in place and a \$100 billion trade vision, the polar frontier offers India more than resources, it offers resilience. In the ice of the Arctic, India finds new ground for strategic autonomy.

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Gulf Evolving Beyond STEREOTYPES

President Trump's Gulf visit acknowledges the profound social, economic, and geopolitical transformations underway in the region. This trip recognizes the modernization efforts being driven internally by the Gulf countries, challenging outdated Western perceptions about the area.



Santu Das

President Trump's recent visit to the Persian Gulf, superficially appearing as a routine diplomatic endeavor punctuated by commercial agreements and ceremonial displays, carries a deeper significance: a long-overdue acknowledgment of the transformative forces reshaping the region. Trump's public endorsement of these societal, economic, and geopolitical shifts lends credence to what many within the Gulf have long recognized – the region is actively redefining modernization within the Muslim world, challenging long-held Western perceptions.

For too long, the Gulf has been viewed through a narrow lens, characterized by oil wealth, religious conservatism, and authoritarian governance. This limited perspective, perpetuated by Western policymakers and media outlets, reduced the region to a caricature of petro-monarchies resistant to change. However, this image is now outdated. Since Trump's initial visit to Saudi Arabia in 2017, the region's commitment to economic





diversification and innovation has accelerated, with this recent visit formally recognizing and validating these efforts on a global stage. To truly grasp the transformations underway, a critical examination of the key players and the driving forces behind them is essential.

Saudi Arabia, under the guidance of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, exemplifies this transformative spirit. Vision 2030, a comprehensive blueprint for socio-economic reform, is dismantling previously unthinkable barriers. The introduction of concerts, cinemas, female drivers, public festivals, and the increased presence of women in governmental and corporate leadership positions are rapidly normalizing. This transformation extends beyond superficial entertainment liberalization or enhanced female workforce participation; it fundamentally reshapes the national ethos.

While significant challenges remain, particularly concerning political dissent and freedom of expression, the scale and direction of these reforms are undeniable, promising a new dawn for the Kingdom. Trump's endorsement signals a profound understanding that meaningful change within deeply traditional societies must emerge organically, not as a foreign imposition. The reforms unfolding in Saudi Arabia and neighboring states are conceptualized, financed, and implemented

by the region's own leadership, often in collaboration with a burgeoning, change-eager youth demographic. This bottom-up approach ensures greater acceptance and long-term sustainability.

While Saudi Arabia spearheads internal reform, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) serves as a testament to the potential accomplishments of these reforms. Dubai and Abu Dhabi have become synonymous with futuristic urban development, advanced technology-driven public services, and cutting-edge innovation. The UAE's successful mission to Mars solidified its position as a pioneer in space exploration, and its substantial investments in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital governance have established it as a global trendsetter. The UAE's transformation transcends mere technological advancement; it represents a strategic vision to diversify its economy and cultivate a knowledge-based society.

Furthermore, the UAE has cultivated a thriving ecosystem for global talent, becoming a haven for startups, multinational corporations, and international diplomacy. Trump's visit highlighted the country's strategic importance, not only as an economic powerhouse but also as a key diplomatic player in a volatile region. The UAE's pivotal role in brokering the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations with Israel,



signifies a shift toward a more pragmatic foreign policy approach less rooted in outdated ideologies. This bold step underscores the UAE's commitment to regional stability and its willingness to forge new partnerships based on mutual interests.

Qatar, despite its smaller geographical footprint, has also undergone a remarkable transformation. The successful hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup served as a powerful statement of national ambition and capability, exceeding expectations and showcasing a modern, polished image to a global audience. While the event faced criticism concerning labor rights and cultural conservatism, it undeniably elevated Qatar's international standing.

Beyond sports, Qatar has strategically positioned itself as an indispensable mediator in regional and international conflicts, from Afghanistan to Lebanon. Its role as a facilitator and peace broker, amplified by Al Jazeera's global media reach, has enhanced its diplomatic credentials and secured its place as a crucial

voice in the Middle East. Trump's acknowledgment of Qatar's growing diplomatic influence reflects the nation's rising profile on the world stage. Qatar's ability to navigate complex political landscapes and facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties underscores its commitment to peaceful conflict resolution.

Underlying these transformations is the significant contribution of the returning diaspora of educated youth. Thousands of students from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, having pursued higher education abroad through government scholarships and support programs, are bringing back not only academic degrees but also fresh perspectives and best practices from around the globe. These young professionals are injecting new energy and expertise into government ministries, startups, NGOs, and educational institutions.

What distinguishes this wave of returnees is not just their technical knowledge but also their sense of purpose and commitment to national development. Gulf leaders have recognized the value of these young



validated the region's agency. This recognition, while seemingly simple, is significant. It signals that Gulf nations are not merely subjects of international policy but architects of their own future. It underscores the importance of understanding the unique context of the region and allowing it to evolve at its own pace.

One of the most diplomatically significant moments of Trump's trip was his meeting with Syrian leadership, facilitated by Saudi Arabia. The announcement of lifted sanctions suggests a potential shift in U.S. policy and highlights the Gulf's growing role in shaping the future of the Middle East. Rather than relying solely on Western frameworks, countries like Saudi Arabia are actively facilitating regional dialogues, aiming to foster stability and curb radical ideologies. This proactive approach demonstrates a commitment to regional ownership and a willingness to take responsibility for the region's future.

This role as stabilizers and reformers is crucial at a time when extremist ideologies continue to exploit disillusionment in other parts of the Muslim world. By promoting coexistence, innovation, and pragmatic purpose, the Gulf states offer a compelling counter-narrative, challenging the insidious forces of radicalism. The economic opportunities, social freedoms, and commitment to education and technological advancement offered in the Gulf present an attractive alternative to the despair and hopelessness that fuels extremism.

Ultimately, Trump's visit may be remembered less for specific agreements and policies and more for what it represents: a turning point in the global recognition of the Gulf's ongoing transformation. Critical analysis and caution are essential when evaluating any nation's reform agenda, but a genuine acknowledgment of progress is also necessary. The Gulf states are not perfect, and their reforms are not complete, but they are moving forward in a direction that offers hope for the region and the world. If the international community can move beyond outdated assumptions and meet the Gulf on the changing ground it occupies, a new era of cooperation, understanding, and progress may be within reach. A more nuanced and open-minded approach to the Gulf, acknowledging its progress and engaging with its evolving dynamics, is essential for fostering a more stable and prosperous future for the region.

professionals, entrusting them with strategic roles and granting them a genuine stake in the future of their nations. This show of confidence in the youth signifies that change is not merely cosmetic but becoming deeply structural.

However, skepticism persists in Western capitals, where reforms in the Gulf are often dismissed as public relations exercises or superficial veneers concealing ongoing repression. Critics argue that without genuine political liberalization, these changes are hollow and lack substance. This binary thinking – the notion that a society must choose between full liberal democracy and authoritarian rule – overlooks the complexities of regional governance and cultural transformation. The Gulf states are charting their own path, seeking to balance economic progress with cultural preservation and gradual political reform.

Trump's visit helped challenge this narrow narrative. His public acknowledgment that the reforms are internally driven, not dictated by external forces,





Born in Odisha and raised in Chicago, Lisa Mishra has been striving to make her mark in the entertainment industry for the past seven years. She has covered numerous Bollywood songs and, following her hit "Call Me Bad," she has now appeared in the web series "The Royals."

Lisa Mishra

"Rejected Fifty Times and Still Rising"



Q : *Lisa, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. To begin, could you tell us a little about your background and upbringing?*

A: It's a pleasure to be here. I was born in Berhampur, Odisha. Both my parents are from Odisha. My father was a dedicated employee at the State Bank of India, and my mother was a respected professor at the university. When I was just six years old, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and around that same time, our family made the significant move to Chicago. While my extended

family remains in Odisha, it was just my parents, my older sister, and myself who relocated. I spent a formative eighteen years in the United States. However, I must emphasize that despite perhaps appearing American on the surface, within the walls of our home, my family and I remained deeply rooted in our Indian culture. It was very important to my parents that we never forgot our origins.

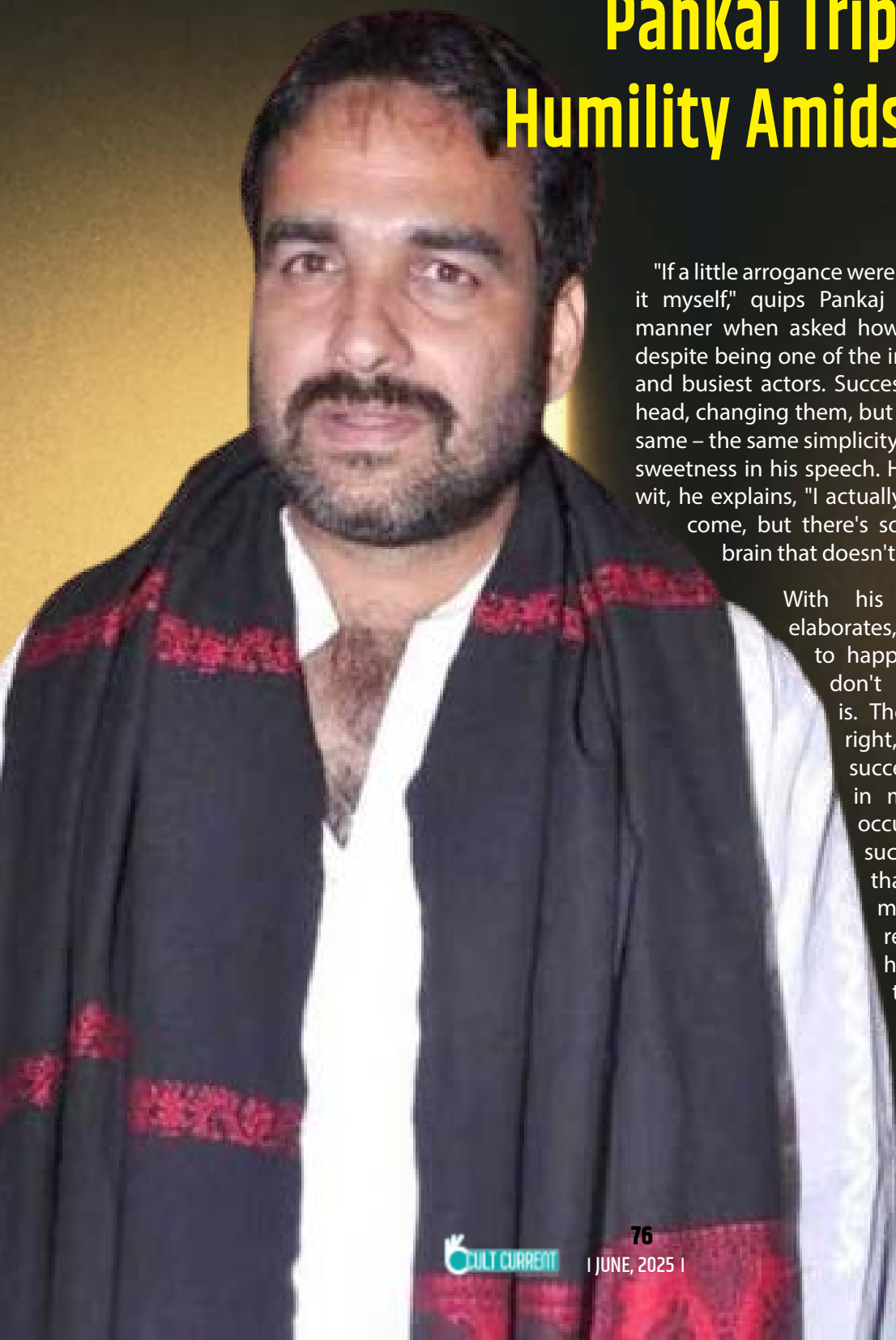
Q: *You eventually transitioned to singing Hindi songs and have made a mark in Bollywood. What has your experience navigating*

the industry been like, particularly in terms of the initial struggles?

A: The journey into Bollywood, like for many aspiring artists, inevitably involves the rigorous process of auditions. I've been through countless auditions, and I've faced rejection probably dozens upon dozens of times. But honestly, I don't view that as a negative experience. For me, each audition, each callback or lack thereof, has been a crucial part of my training. It's through these experiences that I gain valuable insights into my strengths and, more importantly, my weaknesses.

Staying Grounded

Pankaj Tripathi's Humility Amidst Success

A portrait of actor Pankaj Tripathi. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, a mustache, and a beard. He is wearing a white shirt and a black shawl with red borders. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

"If a little arrogance were to creep in, I would manage it myself," quips Pankaj Tripathi in a lighthearted manner when asked how he remains so grounded despite being one of the industry's most sought-after and busiest actors. Success often goes to a person's head, changing them, but Pankaj Tripathi remains the same – the same simplicity in his personality, the same sweetness in his speech. How? With his characteristic wit, he explains, "I actually wish some change would come, but there's some chemical glitch in my brain that doesn't register that I'm successful."

With his ever-present smile, he elaborates, "I do want some changes to happen, but they just aren't. I don't know what the problem is. There should be something, right, that makes me feel like I'm successful? It should register in my mind. It doesn't even occur to me. I actually want success to go to my head so that I can then control it with my thoughts and wisdom, reminding myself to remain humble, acknowledging that this is the pride of success. But that very feeling isn't coming, and that's the problem – why isn't it? A little bit should come, shouldn't it? There's some chemical locha."

Shubh Navratras



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