E-Magazine
₹ 49/-

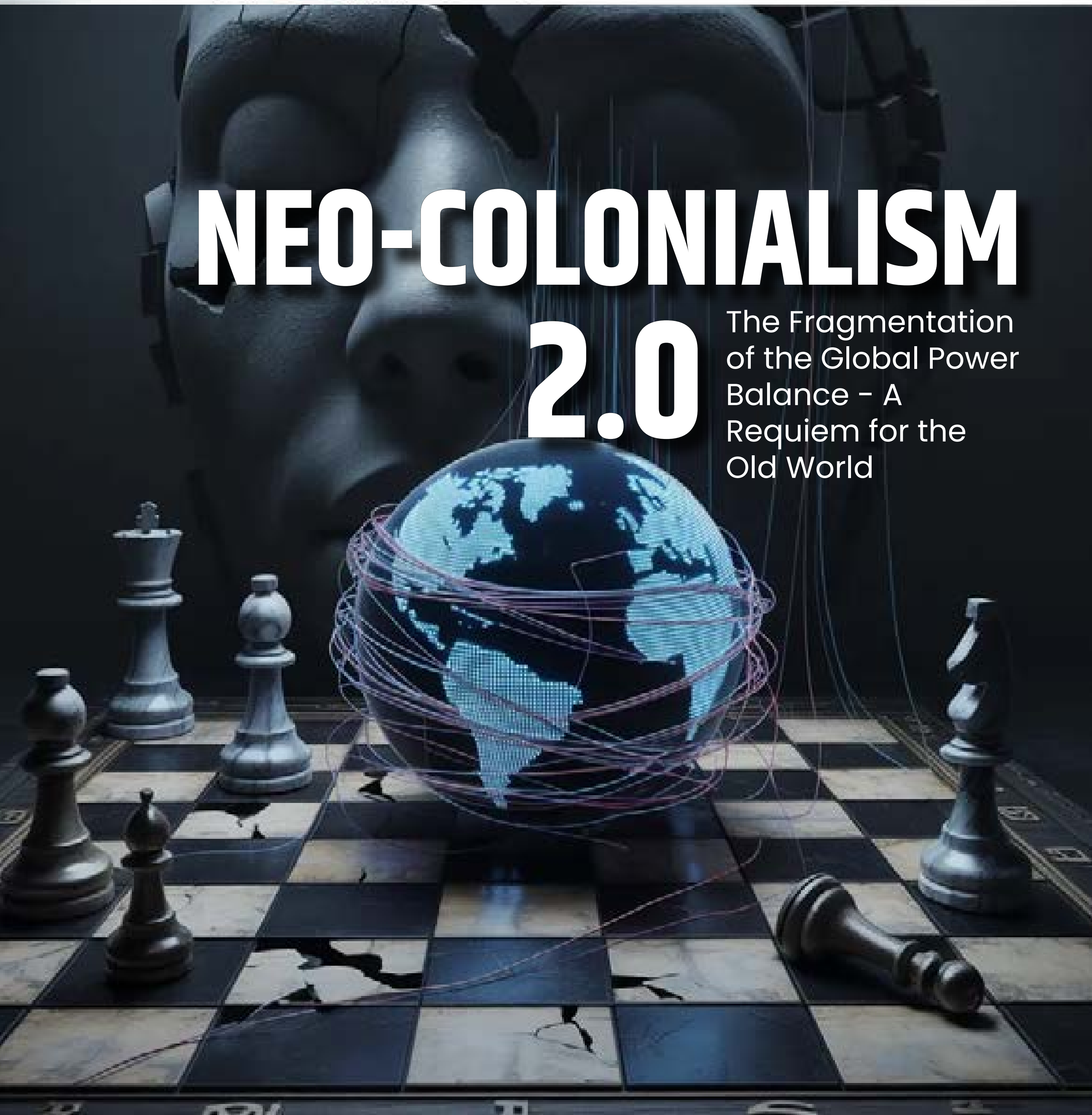
A GEOPOLITICAL TURNING POINT
THE MOTHER OF ALL DEALS

A MIRAGE OF TRANQUILLITY

CULT CURRENT

Vol: 9 Issue: 1 January-February, 2026 (Joint)

WE MAKE VIEWS



NEO-COLONIALISM 2.0

The Fragmentation of the Global Power Balance - A Requiem for the Old World


Let's
360°
Media Consultancy
Web solution
Advertising
Publication
Languages Services
Survey & Research
Branding
AV Production
Campaign management
Event organizer
PR partner, PR associate
Content writer & provider
Media analyst
URJAS MEDIA VENTUE IS PERHAPS THE ONLY CONSULTING FIRM THAT CAN GIVE YOUR ORGANISATION A 360 DEGREE MEDIA BUSINESS GROWTH CONSULTING THROUGH IT'S 360 CAPABILITIES. FOR US, CONSULTING DOES NOT ONLY MEAN MECHANICAL COST REDUCTION THROUGH BETTER IT APPLICATIONS, WE FIND OUT WHAT YOUR ORGANISATION REALY NEEDS AND GIVE YOU AN INTELLECTUAL SOLUTION THAT HELP YOU REDUCE COST AS WELL AS HELPS YOURS BUSINESS GROW AND BEAT THE COMPETITION.
NOW!! OUR CONSULTANT WILL GET BACK TO YOU IN 24 HOURS AND PUT YOU IN TO THE HIGH GROWTH PATH
URJAS MEDIA
VENTURE
BEAT THE COMPETITION
www.urjasmedia.com
SMS 'BUSINESS GROWTH' TO +91-8826-24-5305 OR E-MAIL info@urjasmedia.com

POSITIVE_INDIA

UNSUNG HEROINE

FROM VILLAGE LANES TO NATIONAL PRIDE

Akshita Dhankar

The story of Flight Lieutenant Akshita Dhankar begins in the small village of Kasni in Haryana, where as a child she watched her father participate in the Republic Day Parade. The sight of his uniform and discipline instilled in her a deep sense of service and patriotism. That single glimpse sparked a dream within her — to soar in the Indian Air Force and one day proudly hoist the National Flag. While pursuing her college studies, Akshita joined the NCC (National Cadet Corps), where she imbibed the values of leadership, discipline, and dedication to service. This experience became her greatest strength as she prepared for the Air Force Common Admission Test (AFCAT). Amidst challenges and intense competition, she not only cleared the exam but also earned her commission as a Flying Officer, eventually rising to the rank of Flight Lieutenant. On 26 January 2026, during the 77th Republic Day Parade, Akshita had the honor of hoisting the National Flag at Kartavya Path alongside President Droupadi Murmu — a proud moment for both her and her family. Her journey is a testament to how dreams born in small villages can transform into reality through dedication, determination, and relentless hard work.

WE ARE

Vol: 9 Issue: 1 January-February (Joint), 2026

Follow us:
fb.com/cultcurrent @Cult_Current cultcurrent@gmail.com

URJAS MEDIA VENTURE
Head office: Swastik Apartment, GF, Pirtala, Agarpara, Kolkata 700 109, INDIA, Tel: +91 6289-26-2363
Corporate Office: 14601, Belaire Blvd, Houston, Texas 77083 USA Tel: +1 (832) 670-9074
Web: http://cultcurrent.com

Cult Current is a monthly e-magazine published by Urjas Media Ventures from Swastik Apartment, GF, Pirtala, Agarpara, Kolkata 700 109.
Editor: Srirajesh

CONTENTS

COVER STORY 30

NEO-COLONIALISM 2.0

12 A Geopolitical Turning Point
THE MOTHER OF ALL DEALS

22 The 'Kamal' Grooms the Future

18 Union BUDGET 2026-27
The GROWTH Gamble

76 Sara Ali Khan - Shubman Gill's "Secret Date" Sparks Buzz!

Small talk

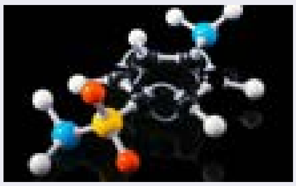
NORA'S GOSSIP-DANCE

Bollywood actress star Nora Fatehi is always in the limelight for her sensational dance moves and glamorous looks. But recently, her new dressing style and funny moves during a film promotion went viral on the internet. Fans couldn't stop commenting on every flaunt, pose, and expression, and social media exploded with memes like 'Nora's Style, Nora's Flare.' Rumor has it that her next song might showcase these viral styles and comic moves as well. According to reports, during the promotion, Nora suddenly performed little funny steps on stage, leaving all cameras and fans scrambling to click pictures of her quirky moves. ●

The discoveries that will create a stir in 2026

The Future of Drug Discovery

Scientists have unveiled a method called PropMolFlow, allowing molecules to be designed backward from desired properties. This could accelerate the creation of new drugs and advanced materials by identifying molecular structures that meet specific goals, rather than building them step by step. The breakthrough promises faster solutions for pharmaceutical innovation and technology development. ●



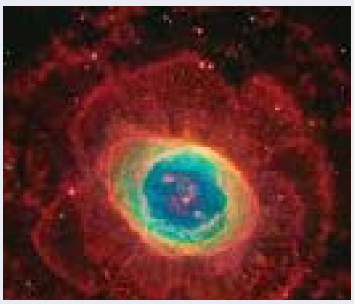
A New Hope for Arthritis!

Stanford Medicine researchers have developed a technique that regrows cartilage and slows arthritis progression in early trials. This innovation offers more than symptom relief—it aims for actual tissue repair, potentially benefiting millions suffering from joint degeneration. By targeting the root cause, the method could transform orthopedic medicine and redefine treatments for chronic joint diseases worldwide. ●

Commercial Space Stations Take Off in 2026

A major milestone in space exploration arrives as Vast's Haven-1, the world's first privately built stand-alone space station, is scheduled to launch in 2026 aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9. Designed to host short-duration crewed missions and commercial research, Haven-1 could usher in a new era of privately operated orbiting labs, supplementing aging platforms like the ISS and opening space to broader commercial and scientific applications. ●

GIANT IRON STRUCTURE FOUND INSIDE THE RING NEBULA

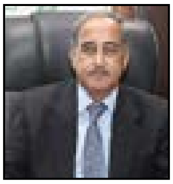


Astronomers have uncovered an astonishing enormous bar of ionized iron atoms within the well-studied Ring Nebula (M57), about 2,000 light-years away. Using advanced instruments on the William Herschel Telescope, the discovery revealed a structure stretching roughly 1,000 times the Earth-Pluto distance and containing iron mass comparable to Mars. This finding could reshape our understanding of how planetary nebulae form and evolve around dying stars. ●

Renault Duster Roars Back in January 2026

Renault is set to make a big splash with the all-new 2026 Duster, scheduled to debut on 26 January 2026, coinciding with Republic Day celebrations in India. The latest generation SUV returns with a modern design, advanced features, and rugged capabilities aimed at reviving its iconic status in the compact SUV segment. Anticipation is high as buyers await pricing and performance details ahead of its official launch. ●

APPOINTMENT - RESIGNATION



A. K. Balasubrahmanian

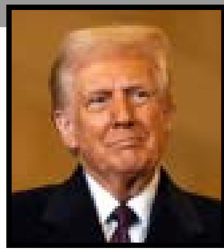
Chairman, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)

Distinguished scientist A. K. Balasubrahmanian was appointed as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) in January 2026, taking charge of nuclear safety oversight for India's expanding atomic energy program.

Abhishek Tiwari *Senior IPS Officer (MP Cadre)*

Decorated IPS officer Abhishek Tiwari resigned from the Indian Police Service in January 2026, seeking voluntary retirement while on deputation with the NTRO. A recipient of the President's Police Gallantry Medal, his exit was seen as a significant national-level development within India.

THEY SAID IT...



Donald Trump

President, USA

If our allies do not fulfill their responsibilities, America will not guarantee their security either.

Emmanuel Macron

President, FRANCE

Europe will not be intimidated by bullies — we prefer respect to bullies.

THE TRIBUTE

Sarojini Naidu was a prominent female leader of India's freedom struggle, known as the 'Nightingale of India' for her poetic talent. She was born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad. Her father, Aghornath Chattopadhyay, was a scholar and scientist, while her mother was a poet. From childhood, she was a brilliant student and began writing English poetry at a young age. She pursued higher education at King's College, London, and Cambridge University in England.

SAROJINI NAIDU

(13/02/1879-02/03/1949)

Sarojini Naidu's contribution was not limited to literature; she was also actively involved in the Indian independence movement. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, she plunged into the freedom movement. In 1916, she joined the movement for women's equality and education. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, she strongly criticized the British rule. She actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement and was imprisoned several times.

In 1925, she became the first female president of the Indian National Congress, which was a major achievement for women at that time. She was known for her powerful speeches and charismatic leadership. After India's independence in 1947, she was appointed the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh, making her India's first female governor. She continued to work for national unity, women's empowerment, and social reforms even after independence. Sarojini Naidu, the 'Nightingale of India', made unique contributions in poetry, the freedom struggle, and women's leadership. She was an inspiring figure.

Netanyahu Claims Biden Arms Limits Cost Israeli Soldiers' Lives

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has blamed the deaths of Israeli soldiers during the Gaza war on what he described as a partial US arms 'embargo' under former President Joe Biden. Speaking at a press conference, Netanyahu said Israel paid a 'very heavy price' after the war began in Oct 2023, claiming that at a critical stage the military lacked sufficient ammunition. Without naming Biden, he suggested that some soldiers fell because key weapons were unavailable due to American restrictions. Netanyahu said the episode strengthened his resolve to expand Israel's domestic defense industry to ensure strategic independence. Former Biden adviser Amos Hochstein sharply rejected the claim, calling it untrue and ungrateful, citing over $20 billion in US military aid. Biden had paused weapons shipments in 2024 over civilian casualty concerns. ●

Democrats Seek Noem's Removal

Top U.S. House Democrats have urged President Donald Trump to dismiss Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem or face impeachment proceedings after federal agents fatally shot a man in Minneapolis during a high-profile immigration enforcement operation. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and other Democratic leaders sharply criticized the Department of Homeland Security's actions, warning that violence 'must end forthwith' and threatening to begin impeachment if Noem is not removed. ●

Japan Waits on Yen Action

Japan is likely to delay direct intervention in the yen market as coordinated signals with the United States have already helped curb sharp currency declines, former central bank official Atsushi Takeuchi said. Rare rate checks by the New York Federal Reserve signaled U.S. support, discouraging speculative attacks on the yen. With markets on edge and the yen rebounding from near 160 per dollar, Tokyo may avoid intervention to prevent harming stocks ahead of upcoming elections. ●

UK Fake Visa Jobs Uncovered

A UK-wide black market offering fake skilled-worker visa sponsorships has been exposed by an undercover investigation by The Times. The scheme exploits the skilled worker visa system by creating 'payroll-only' jobs, where migrants receive fraudulent sponsorship documents, salary slips, and tax records without doing any real work. Once visas are granted, migrants are pushed into cash-in-hand jobs and forced to repay fake wages and fees, sometimes costing up to £20,000. ●

Amazon Trims Corporate Staff

Amazon has confirmed 16,000 additional corporate job cuts, completing a plan to eliminate about 30,000 roles begun in October. The reductions, nearly 10% of its corporate workforce, aim to streamline management and reduce bureaucracy, the company said. While most of Amazon's 1.5 million employees work in operations, the cuts unsettled staff after an internal email leak. Amazon hinted at possible further adjustments. ●

Iraq Anxious Over Maliki's Possible Return

Iraq is facing renewed political tension amid reports that former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki could return to power, nearly a decade after the rise of the Islamic State group. Maliki, who governed from 2006 to 2014, is widely blamed for deepening sectarian divisions and presiding over corruption and mismanagement that weakened the Iraqi army, allowing IS to seize Mosul without resistance. Many Sunnis initially welcomed the group but later suffered under its brutality. ●

Germany Pushes Power and Welfare Reforms

Germany's government has announced major energy and welfare reforms as economic pressures mount, with the shadow economy estimated to have grown beyond $500 billion. Economy Minister Katherina Reiche said tenders will open this year for 12 gigawatts of new power plants, mostly gas-fired, to support renewable energy during low-output periods. Further tenders are planned for 2027 and 2028 as Germany works toward carbon neutrality by 2045. Separately, the government pledged sweeping welfare reforms to simplify benefits, reduce bureaucracy, and expand digital applications. Labour Minister Bärbel Bas said the changes would make the system fairer and faster without cutting benefits. Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed the plans, calling them a fundamental overhaul of Germany's social security framework. ●

Guatemala Imposes State of Siege After Deadly Gang Attacks

Guatemala has imposed a 30-day state of siege after suspected gang members killed at least seven police officers following violent prison uprisings. President Bernardo Arévalo said the measure, which allows expanded security powers and limits civil liberties, was necessary to restore order. The violence erupted after authorities retook control of three prisons where gang inmates had taken guards hostage. ●

Growing Political Tensions Put Decades of Arctic Scientific Cooperation at Risk

Decades of international scientific cooperation in the Arctic, including Greenland, are under increasing strain as political relations between Europe and the United States weaken. Researchers warn that disputes over trade, defense, and geopolitics could disrupt collaboration that endured even during the Cold War. Greenland remains a vital climate 'early warning system,' with its vast ice sheet melting rapidly and threatening significant global sea-level rise. Scientists stress that Arctic research has worldwide consequences and should not become a casualty of rising political divisions. ●

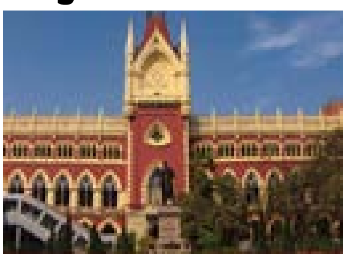
Supreme Court Stays New UGC Regulations

The Supreme Court on January 29 granted an interim stay on the University Grants Commission's (UGC) new rules aimed at eliminating caste-based discrimination in universities and colleges. The UGC had issued the 'Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations, 2026' on January 23. Several petitions were filed in the Supreme Court challenging these rules. According to sources, the court observed that Regulation 3(C), which defines caste-based discrimination, lacks clarity and is prone to misuse. The court stated that the language needs to be redrafted and the regulations will remain suspended until they are rewritten. ●

Was Pilot Error the Cause of Ajit Pawar's Plane Crash?

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others died in a plane crash yesterday. An investigation into the incident is underway. Latest developments suggest that the crash might have occurred due to a potential error by the pilot during landing in poor visibility. This information is based on preliminary investigation results. Sources indicated that this was the aircraft's second landing attempt and visibility in Baramati was poor. Initial analysis of the crash suggests the pilot may have misjudged the conditions. ●

Calcutta High Court Issues Ultimatum to Bengal Government



The Calcutta High Court has ordered the West Bengal government to hand over land to the Border Security Force (BSF) by March 31 for border fencing. This is intended to expedite the installation of barbed wire fences in sensitive areas along the India-Bangladesh border. It is alleged that the state government has been withholding land acquired for the fencing. ●

Superjet-100 Aircraft to be Manufactured in India

In a significant development for civil aviation, India's Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Russia's United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) have entered into a historic partnership. The two companies signed an agreement at the 'Wings India' exhibition in Hyderabad to jointly produce Russia's Superjet-100 (SJ-100) aircraft in India. The collaboration aims to boost domestic aircraft manufacturing, enhance technological cooperation, and support the government's 'Make in India' initiative by strengthening India's role in the global aviation sector. ●

Pharma Companies No Longer Need Test Licenses for Research

With the aim of strengthening the pharmaceutical industry, the Union Health Ministry has notified amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019. Under the new rules, pharmaceutical companies will no longer require a 'test license' to manufacture small quantities of drugs for research and analysis purposes. However, except in specific cases, they will have to provide online notification to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).

Shift in India's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

According to former Army Chief General Manoj Naravane, India's counter-terrorism strategy has seen a significant shift in recent years. He stated that 'Operation Sindoor' symbolizes this change, where India has moved beyond a defensive posture to a policy of proactive and decisive action. The new strategy emphasizes better coordination between intelligence agencies, the use of modern technology, and a firm response to cross-border terrorism. General Naravane said this approach has strengthened national security and enhanced the capability to deal with future terrorist challenges. ●

Political Row in Assam Over 'Miya Muslim' Remarks; Congress to Move Court

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's remarks regarding "Miya Muslims" have sparked a fierce political controversy in the state. Amidst the election atmosphere, Sarma allegedly stated that he is in favor of "harassing Miya Muslims" so that they leave Assam. The opposition Congress has strongly objected to his statement, calling it hate speech and preparing to take legal action. In Assam, Bengali-speaking Muslims are referred to as 'Miya,' whom the BJP has long termed as illegal immigrants. The Chief Minister also stated that he has asked BJP workers to file objections via 'Form 7' during the special voter list revision. Form 7 is used to object to the inclusion or deletion of names in the voter list. Congress has alleged that Form 7s are being filed en masse without solid grounds to target minorities. They have also demanded intervention from the Election Commission. ●

New Aadhaar App Launched; Update Aadhaar from Home

UIDAI has launched a new Aadhaar app, allowing many Aadhaar-related tasks to be completed via mobile. With this app, users will not need to visit Aadhaar centers frequently or carry photocopies. The app features offline Aadhaar verification, limited information sharing, and options to update mobile numbers and addresses. This will make Aadhaar data more secure and reduce the risk of misuse. UIDAI stated that this app is a major step toward making Aadhaar more secure, convenient, and digital. ●

Land-for-Jobs Case: Trouble Mounts for Lalu Family

Legal troubles have intensified for RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family in the Land-for-Jobs scam. Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court has sanctioned the trial against 41 accused, including Lalu Yadav, his wife Rabri Devi, and son Tejashwi Yadav. The court found sufficient prima facie evidence in the chargesheet filed by the CBI and stated that a regular trial is necessary. With this, the case has moved from the investigation stage to the trial phase. The court ordered that a day-to-day trial will begin on March 9. However, 52 people have been acquitted in the same case. In the previous hearing, Special Judge Vishal Gogne remarked that an organized and well-planned conspiracy was hatched to take land in exchange for government jobs. ●

SRIRAJESH, Editor

THE SOLSTICE OF SYNERGY

Amidst the crumbling vestiges of a fractured global order and the sinister ascent of 'Neo-Colonialism 2.0,' the India-EU partnership heralds a new Uttarayana of multipolarity. This discourse is a profound philosophical inquiry into the emerging global consciousness, navigating the tension between the shadows of dominance and the dawn of strategic reason.

When the lines of destiny etched upon the brow of time begin to shift, the footfalls of change do not arrive as a faint whisper, but as a thundering civilizational upheaval. The third decade of the twenty-first century represents an epoch of global displacement—a moment where the decrepit edifices of the old world order are collapsing under the weight of their own obsolescence. We stand at a profound crossroads where the 'rules-based sanctity' forged in the aftermath of the Second World War has withered into a mere relic of memory. Within this ideological void and political whirlwind, two distinct forces have emerged: the toxic vine of 'Neo-Colonialism 2.0' weaving new patterns of dominance, and a burgeoning trust between India and the European Union, rising as a beacon of equilibrium amidst the gathering gloom of protectionism.

This conflict is not merely a matter of policy; it is a fundamental struggle between two opposing poles of the global soul. On one side lies a hubris that seeks supremacy through the intoxication of power; on the other lies the path of Uttarayana—the Northern Solstice of partnership—seeking the collective welfare of humanity. The resurgence of Donald Trump within the American political landscape is a modern recurrence of an imperial grammar, where the grace of 'consensus' has been unceremoniously replaced by the bluntness of 'coercion.' Whether it is the transactional desire to acquire Greenland or the disdain for international treaties, this philosophy proclaims a stark message: rules are sacred only as long as they serve as handmaidens to hegemonic ambitions. This is the same colonial consciousness that, in the nineteenth century, subjugated the world through cannons and warships, only to cloak itself today in the subtle garbs of sanctions, supply-chain disruptions, data sovereignty, and technological monopolies.

This phenomenon can rightfully be termed 'Neo-Colonialism 2.0.' Here, the violation of sovereignty does not necessitate the seizing of land, but the crafting of new geographies of global 'dependence.' Modern colonies are no longer inscribed upon paper maps; they are being manufactured within the microscopic waves of data, the labyrinth of algorithms, the intricate links of semiconductor chips, and the invisible shackles of financial markets. This chaotic reality has shattered the liberal illusion that the global order can be sustained by morality alone. Consequently, regions like Europe—which for decades rested securely beneath the cool shade of the Atlantic security umbrella—now find themselves in a harrowing existential vacuum. They have come to the poignant realization that the very shield they considered their destiny has transformed into a suffocating shackle upon their strategic autonomy.

Amidst this global maelstrom, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union emerges not merely as a commercial contract, but as a philosophical manifesto for a new world vision. While the rest of the world was receding into the Dakshinayana—the southern descent—of insularity, factionalism, and distrust, New Delhi and Brussels chose the Uttarayana of wisdom. In the Indian tradition, Uttarayana is that sacred period marking the end of darkness and the upward ascent of consciousness. This agreement serves as the foundation for a multipolar architecture where, amidst the bipolar grinding of Washington and Beijing, the emergence of a 'balanced third pole' has become an evolutionary necessity. For Europe, India is no longer just a vast consumer geography; it is a dignified co-traveler in the quest for strategic sovereignty. Similarly, for India, Europe is not merely a source of investment, but a partner in the cultivation of human values and technological standards.

This partnership testifies that the remedy for the current global crisis is not 'de-globalization,' but a 'humane re-globalization'—where international relations are rooted not in exploitation, but in reciprocity and shared dignity. The lethality of Neo-Colonialism 2.0 lies in its invisibility; it imposes itself under the guise of security or the mask of technological necessity. In contrast, the India-Europe axis embraces transparency and institutional sanctity. From digital public infrastructure to the vision of green energy, this cooperation provides the masonry for a new world where self-reliance does not mean isolation, but a dignified and independent coexistence.

History bears witness that empires built on fear and greed collapse like houses of sand with a single turn of the tide, while relationships nurtured by the nutrients of shared values radiate their fragrance across epochs. Today, as the chains of neo-colonialism attempt once more to entwine the spirit of humanity, the India-Europe partnership acts as a profound intellectual heat capable of melting those fetters. This is the grand resolve that we must safeguard amidst the clamorous marketplace of information. For any nation or civilization whose ideological foundation becomes moribund can never truly protect its freedom. This discourse is dedicated to that indomitable spirit which, even in this age of anarchy, possesses the courage to keep the torch of truth and partnership ablaze.

Ajesh

srirajesh.journalist @srirajesh cultcurrent@gmail.com

A Geopolitical Turning Point
THE MOTHER OF ALL DEALS

Rakesh Narwal

Signed amid a fractured global order, the India–EU Free Trade Agreement is far more than a commercial pact. It marks a decisive geopolitical realignment—where two democratic powers converge to forge a third path, redefining trade, technology, and strategic autonomy in an age of uncertainty.

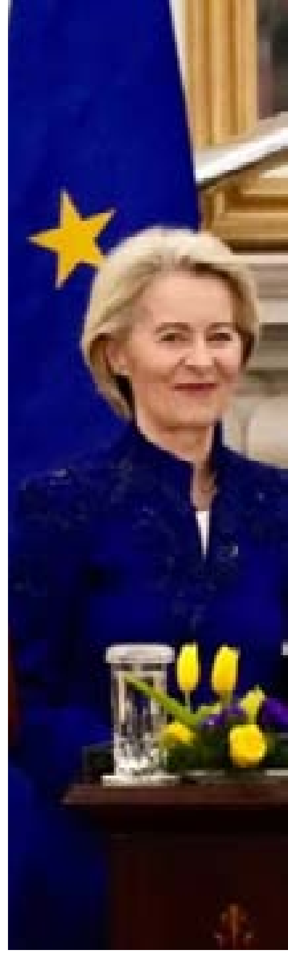
In the shivering, frost-laden nights of January 2026, as the slopes of Raisina Hill glistened under the festive illumination of Republic Day, an invisible current of diplomatic warmth began to thaw the eighteen-year-old permafrost of strategic hesitation. This heat was generated by the culmination of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA)—a moment that history will record as a profound 'ideological and economic solstice.' On the 27th of January, 2026, amidst a sudden, rhythmic downpour of rain—as if the heavens were cleansing the slate of past failures—this date became more than a mere page on a calendar. It was the resounding shakhnaad of India's 'midday sun' in the theater of global diplomacy. As two of the world's most formidable democratic powers joined hands to

From Exile to Accord

The journey of this FTA was a modern epic of persistence. Initiated in 2007, the talks hit a wall in 2013, lapsing into a diplomatic coma. The friction points were visceral: European luxury cars and spirits versus Indian labor mobility and data security. The 'Porto Summit' of 2021 flickered with hope, but it was the twin shocks of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the global trade wars of 2024-25 that compelled a 'Pragmatic Compromise.' After eighteen years of 'strategic vanvas' (exile), the signing is a collective victory of Indian ingenuity and European patience.

The 'Mother of All Deals' effectively razes the tariff walls that have long defined the Indian market.

1. **Automotive Realignment:** For decades, India protected its domestic auto industry behind a 110 percent tariff wall. This pact has dismantled that fortress. European icons—BMW, Audi, Mercedes—will now enter Indian roads with an immediate 40 percent tariff, phasing down to 10 percent. This is not merely about cheaper luxury; it is a signal to global titans like Elon Musk that India's doors are open under a predictable 'rule-based order.'
2. **Cultural Alchemy of Spirits:** From the vineyards of Bordeaux to the hills of Tuscany and Rioja, the scents of Europe will now flow more freely into Indian homes. The reduction of the 150 percent duty to a floor of 20 percent is a jackpot for European agri-exporters. In exchange, India has secured concessions on sanitary standards for its own agricultural exports, marking a new chapter of civilizational exchange through the palate.
3. **The Renaissance of Indian Craft:** For India's labor-intensive sectors—textiles, leather, and



sign what Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, christened the "Mother of All Deals," they did not merely link two markets; they heralded the birth of a new multipolar world order.

This pact descends onto the global stage at a time of terrifying fragmentation. To the West, across the Atlantic, the winds of 'America First' blow with a bitter, unpredictable protectionism. To the East, the ‘Chinese Dragon’ continues to weave its web of economic aggression and 'debt-trap diplomacy,' holding the world's supply chains hostage. In this binary trap, the meeting of New Delhi and Brussels stands as a lighthouse of stability, proving that shared prosperity based on democratic values is not a relic of the past, but an existential necessity for the future.

The Philosophy of Uttarayana

When President von der Leyen affixed her signature to this historic document, her words transcended dry diplomatic vernacular, reaching

The India–EU FTA is not merely a trade agreement; it signals India’s emergence as a ‘third pole’ amid US–China polarization. The pact positions India as a central pillar of global supply chains, strategic autonomy, and a democratic world order, enhancing economic resilience, geopolitical balance, and rules-based cooperation across regions while diversifying partnerships, technology flows, and sustainable growth pathways worldwide collectively.

instead for a profound cultural and philosophical resonance. She crafted a masterful metaphor, likening the treaty to the sacred Indian festival of 'Makar Sankranti.' Gazing at Prime Minister Modi, she remarked, "Standing here in New Delhi, I am reminded of that ancient Indian wisdom which seeks the philosophy of life in the movement of the sun. This agreement comes as India celebrates Uttarayana—the northward journey of the light. Just as the sun enters Capricorn to defeat the winter gloom and illuminate the northern hemisphere, this 'Mother of All Deals' incinerates the eighteen years of doubt and stagnation between India and Europe. Today, our relationship has shed the hesitation of 'Dakshinayana' and entered the self-assurance of 'Uttarayana'."

This framing was both lethal in its precision and sublime in its grace. Between 2007 and 2025, these negotiations were frozen in a 'Diplomatic Ice Age,' stymied by the minutiae of dairy quotas and the labyrinth of data localization. But in January 2026, as the cosmic and political alignments

gems—the European market is now an 'Open Sky.' With zero tariffs, 'Make in India' apparel will grace the boutiques of Paris and Berlin on an equal footing with competitors like Vietnam and Bangladesh, potentially creating millions of jobs and fulfilling the promise of India's demographic dividend.

The Service Bridge and Digital Public Infrastructure

India's true prowess lies in its 'Silicon Soul.' The pact ensures 'Mode-4' movement for Indian IT professionals across 27 EU nations. Crucially, by securing 'Data Secure' status, Indian tech firms can now process European data without the legal hurdles that previously favored American Big-Tech. Furthermore, the EU has shown a burgeoning interest in India's 'Digital Public Infrastructure' (UPI, ONDC, Aadhaar) as an open-source alternative to the monopolistic models of Silicon Valley. This 'Digital Diplomacy' transforms India from a soft power into a 'Technological Sovereign.'

The Strategic Bond Beyond the Ledger

This agreement is infused with the scent of hard power. The recent 8-billion-euro deal with Germany's ThyssenKrupp for submarine co-construction underscores the 'Security-First' depth of this FTA. Europe now recognizes that in the 'Algorithmic War' of the 21st century, it must stand in the same trench as India. The 'India-AI Impact Summit' with France further proves that technology will no longer be a mere commodity; it will be governed by 'democratic values' and 'human conscience'—with India as its central architect.

By dismantling India's protectionist barriers, this FTA opens Europe's doors to India's labour-intensive industries, services, and digital economy. The agreement elevates India from a mere consumer market to a rule-shaper, positioning it as a confident global economic power with growing influence over standards, trade norms, and the future architecture of international commerce.

shifted, Europe finally acknowledged that its 'Strategic Autonomy' was a hollow concept without India, and India recognized in Europe its most sophisticated and reliable partner for its global ambitions.

Navigating the Fragmentation

To comprehend the depth of this grand alliance, one must look at the global Kurukshetra in which it was forged. The return of Donald Trump to the White House has sent tremors through the Trans-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific architectures. His second term's 'predatory tariff policy'—imposing aggressive 50 percent duties even on strategic allies—was viewed in Brussels as a profound betrayal. The once-sturdy security umbrella of Washington has been replaced by a transactional 'Gracia,' forcing Europe to realize that its old guardian across the Atlantic is no longer a constant.

Simultaneously, the 'no-limits friendship' between China and Russia, coupled with Beijing's 'Belt and Road' encirclement, has shattered the complacency of European policymakers. The realization has dawned that over-reliance on Beijing is a 'Trojan Horse' for their own sovereignty. In this landscape, India—with its 1.45 billion souls, a $4.2 trillion GDP, and the world's youngest workforce—emerged as an 'existential imperative.' This FTA is India's diplomatic masterstroke, creating a 'Third Pole' of gravity between the bipolar tensions of Washington and Beijing, allowing New Delhi to rewrite the grammar of global trade on its own sovereign terms.

The 'Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism' (CBAM) remains a formidable challenge, threatening to tax Indian steel and cement. However, Indian negotiators have skillfully embedded a 'Permanent Dialogue Mechanism' into the FTA. Germany's $10 billion 'Green Partnership' is the antidote, turning India into a 'Green Hydrogen Corridor' for Europe. This sets a new 'Global Standard' where trade and the environment are no longer at odds, but are two sides of the same sovereign coin.

The Third Pole Takes Shape

In an era defined by economic decoupling and strategic distrust, the India–EU FTA quietly redraws the world's power map. By marrying Europe's regulatory heft with India's scale, skills, and digital public infrastructure, the pact forges a rare synthesis of markets and values. It enables India's labour-intensive industries to plug into high-end European value chains, while offering Europe a dependable alternative to China-centric supply routes. More subtly, it elevates India from rule-taker to rule-maker—shaping norms on data, sustainability, and digital trade. This is not globalization redux, but globalization reimagined: resilient, democratic, and multipolar. The "third pole" is no longer an idea—it is an operating reality.

New Delhi-The Anchor of a Fractured World

As the fireworks of Republic Day lit up the Delhi sky on the evening of January 27, 2026, the signed documents of the India-EU FTA shone with a brilliance that surpassed the pyrotechnics. The handshake between Prime Minister Modi and President von der Leyen was the physical manifestation of a collective wisdom. It was a declaration that in an era of 'Maximum Pressure' and 'Strategic Vertigo,' a third path is possible.

The metaphor of 'Uttarayana' has been vindicated. India-EU relations have moved from the winter of hesitation into the summer of conviction. This pact will not merely create a 25-trillion-dollar economic bloc; it will establish India as the 'Moral Compass' of a fragmented world. New Delhi is no longer just a capital; it is the meridian of a new, balanced, and illuminated world order. The bugle sounded on Raisina Hill is a 'Shankhnaad'—the trumpet of a new economic age—whose echoes will be heard from the boutiques of Berlin to the factories of Kamrup. The sun has indeed moved north, and the world is finally waking up to the light.

₹ Union BUDGET 2026-27

The GROWTH Gamble

The Union Budget 2026–27 articulates an audacious vision for a modern, tech-driven, and globally competitive India. Yet, beneath the high-gloss sheen of infrastructural prowess, the cracks in social security, employment, and inclusive growth appear to be widening into chasms.

On the misty morning of February 1, 2026, as the first whispers of spring mingled with the simmering heat of global diplomacy in New Delhi, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's measured steps into Parliament did more than just carry a digital ledger; they began the narration of a new national epic. This budget was not a mere accounting of the state's coffers; it emerged as a profound ideological Kurukshetra, where the swords of 'strategic ambition' clashed with the shields of 'grounded reality.'

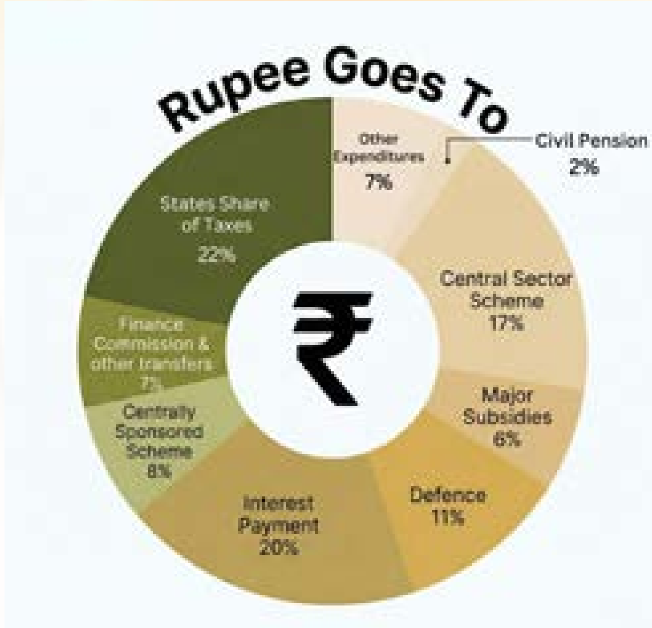
Only days earlier, on January 27, the thunderous applause following the 'Mother of All Deals' with the European Union had cast India as a radiant protagonist on the global economic stage. However, the budgetary revelations of February 1, followed by the crimson streaks of a market sell-off on Dalal Street, shrouded that grand celebration in a thick fog of skepticism. The Budget appears as a 'hybrid colossus'—a machine whose veins pulse with the speed of China, the technological zeal of South Korea, and the digital soul of America. Yet, on the fronts of social security and inclusivity, its countenance lacks the reassuring smile of the Nordic models. It explores the widening distance between the 'crowned wealth of the state' and the 'barefoot prosperity of the citizen,' where the steel engine of the economy roars with a deafening gallop, but the safety 'cushion' for the common traveler remains frayed and incomplete.

Tactical Chills and Immediate Tremors

The scene at Dalal Street following the budget presentation was nothing short of a nightmare for the bulls. The precipitous fall of the Sensex and the Nifty was not a mere technical correction; it was a visceral reflection of investor anxiety, punctuated by the spike in the 'India VIX.' This was the most negative market response on a Budget Day in six years. A primary catalyst for this hemorrhage was the hike in the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives—a move that struck at the heart of market liquidity by significantly raising the cost of trading.

But was this decline solely a reaction to tax policy? A deeper gaze reveals it as the climax of a persistent exodus by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs), who have pulled nearly $23 billion from the market since 2025. The market had pinned its hopes on a 'revolutionary stimulus' to woo foreign capital back, but the government's 'tactical' and pragmatic approach disappointed those expectations. The slump in banking, defense, and PSU stocks signals a community of investors still wary of the balance between 'long-term promises' and 'short-term viability.' While the hospitality and textile sectors caught a few stray rays of hope, the broader market digested the document as a 'visionary blueprint with a harsh present.'

A Collage of Global Archetypes: Whither India?



When we place the ideological map of Budget 2026-27 against the canvas of global development, it appears not as a mechanical imitation of any single nation, but as an extraordinary and complex 'collage' of international philosophies.

The silhouette of the Chinese 'infrastructure-led growth model' is unmistakable here. With a colossal Capital Expenditure (CapEx) of ₹12.2 lakh crore, endless freight corridors, and strategic industrial zones,

India is readying its economic arteries to function as a global powerhouse. The nuance, however, lies in the method: India seeks to achieve this through the oxygen of private investment, whereas China relied on the iron fist of state control.

Interwoven into this fabric is the 'high-tech leap' of South Korea. Initiatives like 'Semiconductor Mission 2.0' and 'Biopharma SHAKTI' represent a dream to transcend a traditional economy and emerge as a 'tech-power.' Simultaneously, AI-driven agricultural practices like 'Bharat-VISTAAR' and tax holidays for data centers directly echo the 'innovation-driven model' of the United States, where digital services and the knowledge economy are the new currency.

Yet, in adopting these hard, radiant engines of growth, India has seemingly left behind the 'soft cushion' of human security that once anchored those very nations. While South Korea fortified its tech rise with universal education, and the U.S. paired innovation with robust social safety nets and unemployment insurance, India has embraced the velocity of a 'Growth State' while remaining miles away from the inclusive shade of the Nordic 'Welfare State.' This discrepancy suggests that while India has gifted intelligence to the machines of the future, the safety net for the man of the present remains perilously thin.

The Paradox of Defense and Technology

The surge in defense spending and the push for domestic production are undoubtedly tools of strategic sovereignty, aimed at transforming India into a 'defense manufacturing hub.' However, the economic impact is paradoxical. This is 'national security-centric growth,' not 'human-centric relief.' While investments in high-tech defense provide a strategic edge, their capacity for mass job creation is inherently limited and slow.

This contradiction extends to the realm of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a 'high-productivity model,' AI can propel India into the status of a global service superpower, but it risks deepening the 'digital divide.' When development is siloed within 'high-skill' youth and the 'tech sector,' it evolves into an 'elite skill growth model,' leaving the broader improvement of human capital in the shadows.

Abandoning the 'Annadata' to the Market

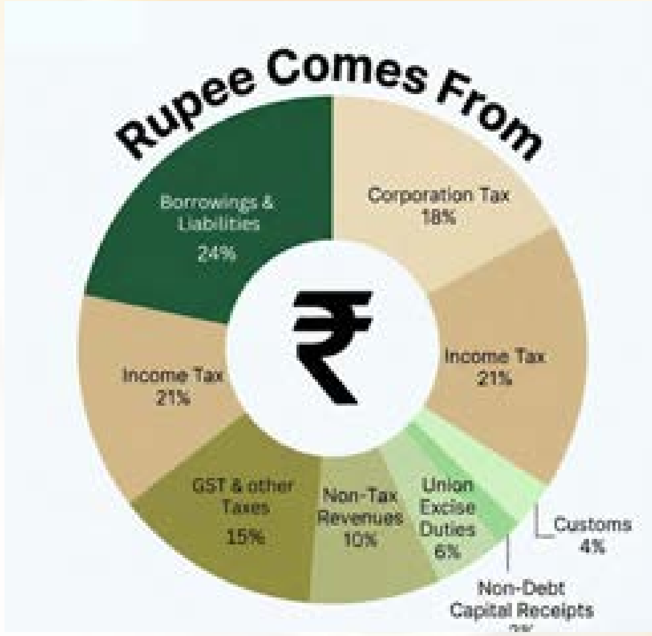
The philosophy of the agricultural sector has pivoted from a 'subsidy-based model' to an 'agri-enterprise model.' The emphasis on 'value chains' and AI-driven advisory aims to transform farming into a business sector. Technically brilliant as this may be, the silence on a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) leaves the small farmer vulnerable to the vagaries of the market. This is a decisive shift from viewing agriculture as a 'security sector' to a 'business sector,' with social consequences that remain unmapped and uncertain.

Service Industry vs. Social Rights

In the realms of education and health, the budget's priorities follow a 'top-down' trajectory. University townships and STEM hostels for girls are commendable efforts to link higher education with industry. However, the stagnant quality of primary education and the neglect of rural schools suggest that the focus is on creating a 'specialized workforce' rather than elevating 'universal human capital.'

Similarly, the establishment of trauma centers and 'medical tourism hubs' views health as a 'service industry' rather than a 'social right.' The budget's silence on reducing the out-of-pocket medical expenses for the common citizen suggests that the state's gaze is fixed more on the earnings of the 'global health industry' than on the foundational health of its people.

The Marginalized Majority



In this grand narrative, the most neglected remains the 'unorganized sector'—the heartbeat of eighty percent of India's workforce. The lack of a robust social security umbrella, the stagnation of pensions, and the absence of significant inflation relief make the fruits of growth taste bitter for this segment. Even for senior citizens, there is no tangible solace, signaling that in 'growth-oriented' doctrines, those deemed 'unproductive' find their space increasingly constricted.

The Test of 'Trickle-Down'

Union Budget 2026-27 is an ambitious, future-facing, and courageous document that bets heavily on the 'hard engines' of infrastructure and technology to forge a modern, competitive India. The government maintains an unwavering faith in the theory that "the nation must first become wealthy before the citizen can become prosperous." This is a gamble on the 'trickle-down' effect—a theory whose success in a society as unequal as India's has always been shrouded in doubt.

The immediate market dip may be an emotional reaction, but the underlying economic questions are permanent. Can an infrastructure push alone solve a systemic employment crisis? Will tech-driven growth bridge or broaden social inequality? And will the fiscal cords with the states remain intact?

The path to a 'Viksit Bharat' does not run solely through steel frames and AI algorithms. It requires a 'soft cushion'—the resilience of social security, income equality, and universal primary health and education. While this budget lays the foundation for an 'economic superpower,' it leaves several pages unwritten for the

'prosperous citizen.' Time will tell whether this 'midday sun' will illuminate every household or merely polish the peaks that the common man cannot reach. The light Ursula von der Leyen spoke of in the 'diplomatic Uttarayana' will only be realized when it travels from the data centers of Delhi to the jute mills of West Bengal and the parched cotton fields of Vidarbha.

This article has been prepared by the editorial team of ***Cult Current*** *based on the opinions and insights of renowned economists from across the country.*

The 'Kamal' Grooms the Future

The January 2026 morning in Delhi did not merely witness an organisational reshuffle. With the anointment of Nitin Navin, the Bharatiya Janata Party sent a clear signal: the lotus is no longer shaping power alone, it is consciously crafting succession politics—where selection is strategy and the future itself is the objective.

Jalaj Srivastava

In the mild winter sunlight of January 2026, a new chapter of political history was written at the Bharatiya Janata Party headquarters on Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg in Delhi. When Nitin Navin's name was announced as the BJP's national

president, the political corridors fell into the same stunned silence and quiet astonishment that so often follows decisions taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. After J.P. Nadda's calm and organisation-focused tenure, the reins have now passed to a young, energetic, and relatively unexpected face.

Nitin Navin's elevation is not merely a promotion. It is the outcome of a deeper churning underway within the BJP—a churning aimed at cultivating a new generation of leadership for the future. Among BJP supporters, the moment is being celebrated as a festival: a youthful president envisioned as a bridge between the aspirations of a future India and the party's ideology of cultural nationalism. Prime Minister Modi, once again, has used the occasion to reinforce the BJP's branding as a "party with a difference."

Yet, amid the drumbeats, slogans, and visible enthusiasm of party workers, a sharper and more uncomfortable question is troubling political analysts: is Nitin Navin's rise truly the result of a democratic "election," or is it a carefully engineered "selection" by the top leadership? Is the BJP genuinely different from the Congress and other dynastic parties, or has the culture of high command merely donned a new saffron robe?

'Party with a Difference': Reality or Political Slogan?

The BJP's strongest claim has long been its self-image as a party free from dynastic politics. From Atal Bihari Vajpayee to L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kushabhau Thakre, Bangaru Laxman, Venkaiah Naidu, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Amit Shah, and J.P. Nadda—none became party president by inheriting the position from a political family. Nitin Navin's name has now been added to this distinguished list.

It is true that, unlike the Congress—where the party presidency has often been treated as the private estate of the Gandhi family (with Mallikarjun Kharge being an exception, though even there debates about "remote control" persist)—the BJP has consistently elevated leaders from ordinary backgrounds to the top. But the question here is not one of background; it is one of process. Is the BJP's method of choosing its president democratic?

The uncomfortable truth is that while BJP presidents may not be dynastic, the process by which they are chosen cannot, by modern democratic standards, be described as a "free and fair election." The role of the "gatekeeper" is overwhelming. In political science, gatekeepers are those senior and powerful figures who decide who gets entry, who advances, and who ultimately reaches the summit of the organisation. What is popularly called "high command culture" in India is, in essence, this very gatekeeping.

The BJP, having won three consecutive Lok Sabha elections and emerged as India's system-defining party, is no exception. Signs of internal reform are minimal. What exists is not an election, but an indirect selection, cloaked in the language of consensus.

Election vs Selection: The Congress–BJP Contrast

A genuinely free and fair election rests on two essential pillars: uncertainty of outcome and fair competition. Unfortunately, within India's political parties, both are largely absent.

In the BJP's case, Nitin Navin's appointment fails the test of fair competition. Yet it contains one element that distinguishes it sharply from the Congress—and makes it remarkably effective: uncertainty of outcome.

When the Congress held its presidential election, the result was widely seen as predetermined. Shashi Tharoor's candidacy was largely symbolic; everyone knew that whoever received the Gandhi family's blessing—Mallikarjun Kharge—would prevail. There was no suspense, no excitement.

Nitin Naveen's appointment as BJP president is not merely a leadership change but a signal of the party's "smart politics." It highlights the tension between democratic choice and high-command selection, revealing how the BJP is betting on uncertainty, merit, and the politics of the future rather than relying solely on convention or seniority.

In contrast, before Nitin Navin's name was announced, hardly anyone—even major media houses or seasoned political observers—had any inkling that he would become the next president. Only when he was first appointed interim president did it become evident that the top leadership—the gatekeepers—had made their choice.

This uncertainty is the BJP's greatest strength. It injects a powerful sense of hope and aspiration among millions of party workers. When an ordinary worker sees a young leader like Nitin Navin, or figures such as Mohan Yadav and Vishnu Deo Sai, suddenly elevated to chief ministerial positions, it reinforces the belief that "any worker can rise to any post." Prime Minister Modi's oft-repeated assertion—"I am a party worker"—exists precisely to cement this belief. Nitin Navin's elevation is the latest and most tangible validation of that narrative.

The Limits of Democracy and the Dominance of Gatekeepers

Yet, from an analytical standpoint, this process undeniably centralises power within the party. When ordinary workers lack the right to directly choose their leader, decision-making rests with an elite core. The sequence—first appointing Nitin Navin as interim president and then confirming him as full-time president—was a clear signal of whom the high command had chosen.

In such a scenario, any challenge to Nitin Navin would not merely be a contest between candidates; it would amount to challenging the collective decision of Modi, Shah, and the RSS. In today's BJP, no one is positioned to take such a risk. The fate of Shashi Tharoor in the Congress—pushed to the margins after daring to contest—serves as a cautionary example. In Western democracies, internal party contests involve debate, dissent, and eventual accommodation of rivals. Indian parties remain far removed from that level of maturity. Here, contesting an election is often seen as rebellion.

Thus, Nitin Navin is not an "elected" president; he is a "selected" one. And selection, invariably, is driven by strategy.

Between Hope and Reality

Taken as a whole, Nitin Navin's appointment demonstrates that structurally, the BJP is not vastly different from other Indian political parties. Here too, elections are largely symbolic, and real decisions are made behind closed doors by gatekeepers. The ideal of internal democracy—where workers directly choose their leader—remains absent.

Yet, the BJP has turned this very "undemocratic" process into a strategic weapon. Where selection in other parties produces dynastic continuity or stagnation, in the BJP it produces uncertainty and merit. This is the alchemy that energises the BJP's cadre. An ordinary BJP worker sees his or her future reflected in Nitin Navin. There is a belief that hard work will eventually catch the eye of the gatekeepers, enabling a rise from the floor to the summit. This psychological advantage places the BJP miles ahead of its rivals, especially the Congress.

Nitin Navin: Decoding the Logic of 'Strategic Selection'

What calculations might underpin the BJP leadership's decision to elevate Nitin Navin? Decoding this choice requires peeling back several layers.

Generational Transition

The most prominent factor is age. Nitin Navin is young. The BJP's top leadership—especially Modi and Shah—is preparing for India beyond 2029. J.P. Nadda was a transitional president. In Navin, the party has projected a face capable of energising the organisation for the next decade and connecting with younger voters. This is part of the BJP's plan for a smooth leadership transition.

Kayastha Equation and 'Bhadralok' Politics

Nitin Navin belongs to the Kayastha community. Though he hails from Bihar, the Kayastha influence is significant in urban centres of the Hindi heartland and particularly in West Bengal. In Bengal—where the BJP has built a strong base but remains out of power—Navin's profile could help attract the bhadralok vote. This is subtle social engineering at work.

Regional Balance as a Power Game

This may be the most critical factor. The BJP's organisational general secretary—a post nearly as powerful as the president—is currently B.L. Santhosh, who comes from southern India (Karnataka). The party's constitution and internal practice place great emphasis on regional balance. With the organisation secretary from the South, it was almost certain that the president would come from North India. Nitin Navin, from Bihar, fits that balance perfectly.

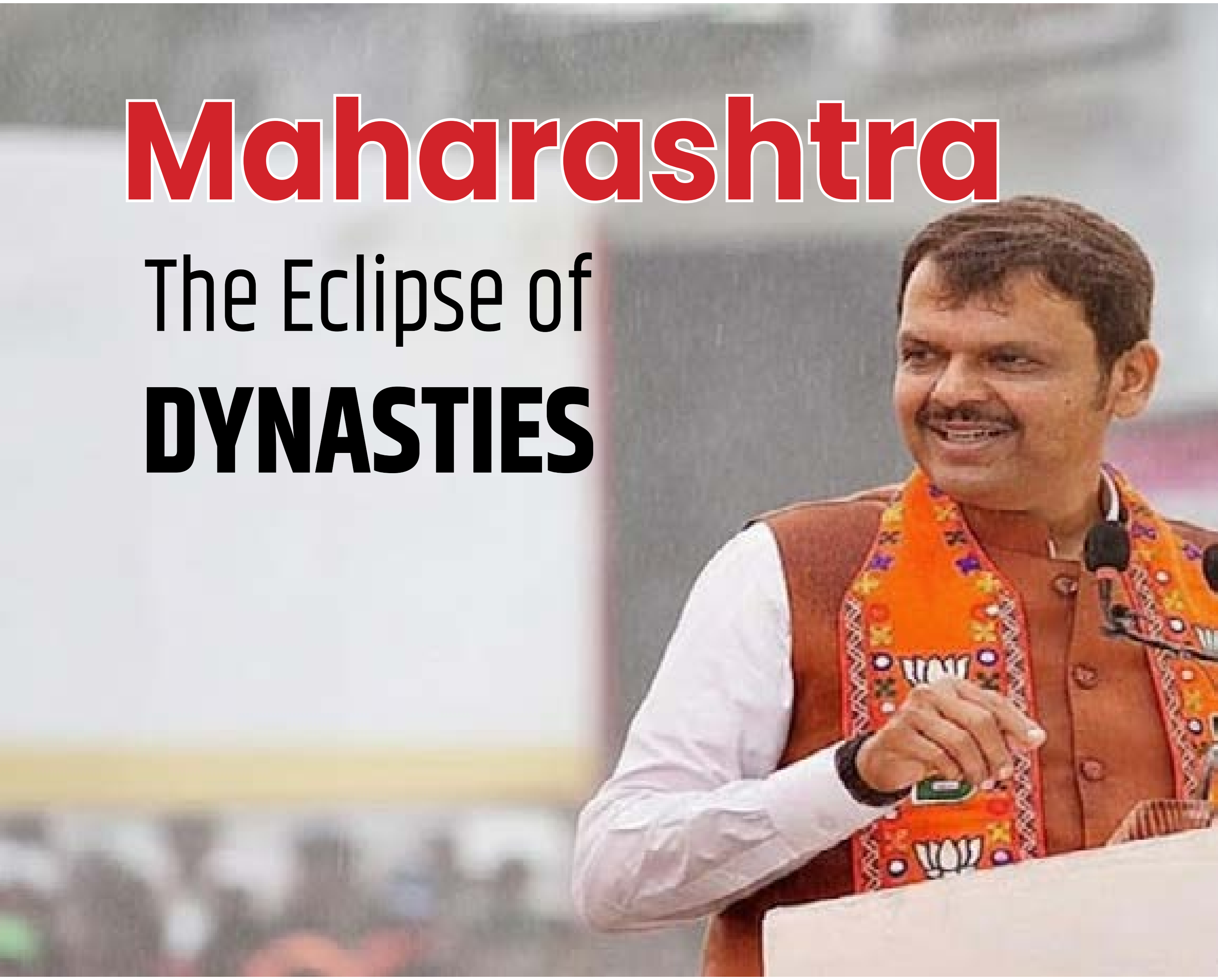
Breaking the 'Gujarati Dominance' Narrative

Over the past decade, opponents have popularised the narrative that both the BJP and the country are being run by "two Gujaratis"—Modi and Shah. This perception has occasionally created discomfort in the Hindi heartland and beyond. Elevating a "Bihari" leader to the top post is a calculated attempt to counter that narrative and reinforce the message that BJP leadership is pan-Indian, not regionally confined.

Loyalty and Performance

Nitin Navin proved his organisational credentials as co-in-charge in Chhattisgarh, where the BJP returned to power by defeating the Congress. His organisational skills and ideological loyalty earned him the high command's trust. The message is clear- performance is rewarded.

Maharashtra
The Eclipse of DYNASTIES



Sandeep Kumar

Under the long shadows of the Sahyadri ranges, Maharashtra once again stands at a decisive turn of history. For decades, its politics remained imprisoned within dynasties, surnames, and fortified family citadels. That era has now fractured beyond repair. The mandate of January 2026 has delivered a clear verdict: in Maharashtra, lineage no longer rules—ideas, organisation, and ideological clarity do. The saffron sunrise is no longer a metaphor; it is the new political reality.

Stretching along India's western coast, caressed by the restless waves of the Arabian Sea and guarded by the ancient Sahyadris, Maharashtra is not merely a state—it is India's most complex and dynamic political laboratory. This is the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, where history was written with the sword but guided by an unwavering ethic of public service. And yet, in a cruel irony, over the past few decades this sacred political soil was reduced to the private estate of a handful of powerful families. From the "Baramati power centre" to diktats issued from "Matoshree," and from Delhi durbars of the Congress era, Maharashtra's politics revolved around three gravitational poles of dynasty and entitlement.

That script has now been decisively burned to ashes.

The local body elections concluded on 15 January 2026 were not routine civic contests. They were a political reckoning. Covering 29 municipal corporations, 893 wards, and 2,869 seats, this electoral battle witnessed participation from nearly 34.8 million voters—almost the population of a mid-sized European nation. The results were seismic. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured control over 23 of the 29 municipal corporations, including the crown jewel: the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), India's richest civic body.

These are not mere numbers. They are a proclamation. Maharashtra has broken free from the chains of dynastic entitlement, appeasement politics, and ideological drift. What unfolded was not a loud revolution but a silent one—a quiet restructuring of power that demolished entrenched bastions without spectacle. This was New India asserting itself at the most granular level of democracy.

The End of "Administrator Raj"

The significance of this mandate is not merely political; it is deeply constitutional.

For nearly four years—from March 2022 to January 2026—Mumbai, one of the world's most prominent cities, had no elected civic representatives. Governance was handed over to state-appointed IAS officers, euphemistically termed "administrators." This was a direct subversion of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Article 243U(3) clearly mandates that municipal elections must be held before the expiry of a council's term or within six months of its dissolution. That constitutional guarantee was repeatedly violated.

Under the pretext of legal complications surrounding OBC reservations and ward delimitation, democratic representation was indefinitely postponed. Cities like Pune, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, and Mumbai were effectively placed under bureaucratic trusteeship. Democracy was replaced by files, citizens by circulars.

The January 2026 elections have finally ended this constitutional vacuum. Elected councils are back. While the BJP emerged as the primary beneficiary, the larger winner is Indian democracy itself. Power has returned from bureaucratic corridors to public representatives. The verdict restored not just governments, but constitutional morality.

A Brahmin "Peshwa" in the Maratha Citadel

Perhaps the most remarkable transformation in Maharashtra's political landscape is sociological.

For decades, the state's unwritten political constitution dictated that real power would always remain with Maratha strongmen. From Yashwantrao Chavan to Vasantdada Patil and Sharad Pawar, leadership was synonymous with Maratha dominance. This was not merely political arithmetic—it was treated as destiny.

That myth now lies shattered.

At the epicentre of this transformation stands Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis—a Brahmin leader who has risen not through inheritance, but through strategy, resilience, and relentless political labour. His ascent represents a fundamental recalibration of Maharashtra's power structure.

The sweeping municipal victory has firmly established Fadnavis not just as the state's undisputed leader, but as a national figure in the BJP's next-generation leadership—standing alongside Yogi Adityanath and Amit Shah in the post-Modi political imagination.

This success is rooted in what analysts describe as the Madhav formula—mobilising Mali, Dhangar, and Vanjari communities, alongside a broader consolidation of OBC groups. Under the expansive

umbrella of Hindutva, Fadnavis forged a coalition of the politically marginalised—communities long excluded under Maratha hegemony. This was social engineering of the highest order, one for which neither Sharad Pawar nor Uddhav Thackeray had an effective counter.

Urban Autonomy: The Illusion and the Reality

While the elections have restored elected bodies, it would be naïve to assume that Maharashtra's cities have suddenly become autonomous.

India's urban governance structure remains deeply centralised. The mayor—often portrayed as the city's most powerful figure—is, in reality, a ceremonial entity. In Mumbai, the mayor is indirectly elected under Section 37 of the BMC Act and wields negligible executive authority. The real power lies with the Municipal Commissioner—an IAS officer appointed by the state government.

Budgets, tenders, development plans, Floor Space Index regulations, and mega infrastructure projects ultimately rest with the state secretariat.

This is precisely why the BJP's victory is strategically significant. With the party controlling both the state government and most municipal corporations, the so-called "double engine" can now operate without friction. Standing Committees—critical for financial decisions—are firmly under BJP control.

Yet, one truth must be acknowledged: these were "local elections" in name only. In substance, they were state and national contests fought on municipal terrain. Local issues were eclipsed by larger political narratives, and the faces that dominated the campaign were Modi and Fadnavis—not ward councillors.

The Collapse of Baramati and the End of the Pawar Playbook

Once, western Maharashtra was known as the "sugar belt," a bowl of sweetness whose benefits were largely confined to the coffers of the Pawar family and their allies. The impregnable fortress Sharad Pawar built through a vast network of cooperatives, sugar mills, and district banks has today collapsed like a house of cards.

The political wipeout of both factions of the NCP—led by uncle Sharad Pawar and nephew Ajit Pawar—in their own strongholds of Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad signals the end of an era. This is not merely an electoral defeat; it is the downfall of a feudal mindset that assumed farmers and rural voters were captive. Lobbying for tickets and defections exposed how ideology has become secondary, while power remains the ultimate truth. The BJP strategically targeted corruption in the cooperative sector and simultaneously cultivated new leadership within the Maratha community.

Ajit Pawar, who died in a plane crash on January 28, was once seen as Sharad Pawar's natural heir and the "strongman" of Maratha politics. After his death, uncertainty clouds the party's future—whether the next generation will take charge or the party will merge with Sharad Pawar's faction remains to be seen. Meanwhile, Sharad Pawar, in the twilight of his



political life, is forced to watch the empire he built over five decades crumble before his eyes.

Matoshree's Silence and Mumbai's New Temperament

Mumbai—the city of dreams, India's financial capital, and once the unquestioned domain of the Thackeray family. For over three decades, the BMC functioned as Shiv Sena's economic backbone. Orders from Matoshree translated into municipal law. But the 2026 verdict made one thing unmistakably clear: Mumbai's voters have moved beyond emotional blackmail.

The BJP's capture of the BMC—assisted by the Eknath Shinde faction—has triggered an existential crisis for Uddhav Thackeray. While he managed to retain a segment of the Marathi identity vote, real power has slipped away.

The Shinde-BJP alliance remains transactional rather than ideological, marked by negotiations over posts and influence. Yet the broader truth is undeniable: Mumbai is no longer a family fiefdom. The sea has washed away old loyalties.

Congress in Terminal Decline and Owaisi's Rise

Once the backbone of Maharashtra politics, the Congress party is now on political life support. In most municipal corporations, it finished third or fourth.

Its vacuum has been partially filled by the AIMIM led by Asaduddin Owaisi, which won 121 seats, including eight in Mumbai. This signals a decisive shift among Muslim voters—from Congress's "soft secularism" to a more assertive identity-based politics.

While this polarisation may electorally benefit the BJP, it raises serious concerns about social cohesion. Secularism in Maharashtra is no longer centrist—it is fragmenting.

Looking Towards 2029

As Maharashtra stands in January 2026, it is evident that the state has entered reset mode.

The BJP has entrenched itself not only in India's financial capital but also in the country's second-most politically significant state after Uttar Pradesh. This victory is not merely Narendra Modi's charisma—it is the product of Devendra Fadnavis's organisational discipline, strategic exploitation of constitutional gaps, and the moral collapse of the opposition. Local bodies—often dismissed as puppets—have emerged as decisive arenas of power. The road ahead promises turbulence: restructuring of cooperatives, new education and employment hubs, and a shift from caste-based agitation to development-centric Hindutva. The chessboard for the 2029 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections is already set.

Ultimately, Maharashtra's verdict sends a message far beyond its borders: India is changing. Political inheritance is no longer guaranteed by surname but earned through performance and perseverance. The Sahyadris bear witness—old banyan trees are withering, and a new saffron dawn has arrived.

Maharashtra is no longer looking back. It is preparing for a long leap into the future.

Srirajesh

The air in Davos has always been thin, but in January 2026, it feels suffocating.

For over half a century, the World Economic Forum served as the secular cathedral of globalization. It was here, amidst the pristine, snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps, that the high priests of finance, politics, and industry gathered to chant the liturgy of "interconnectedness," "liberal values," and "shared prosperity." It was a comforting ritual, built on the assumption that commerce would civilize conflict, and that dialogue could dissolve the sharp edges of national ambition.

But this year, the ritual has died. The 2026 summit will go down in history not as a forum for dialogue, but as the scene of a crime—the murder of the global liberal order.

As one walks through the heavily fortified security checkpoints of the Congress Centre, the change is visceral. The smiles are tighter, the handshakes briefer, and the eyes dart nervously around the room. The usual platitudes about "building bridges" are still uttered on the main stage, but they hang in the air like stale smoke, believed by no one. Behind the closed doors of the private suites, where the real deals are cut, the language has shifted dramatically. Gone is the vocabulary of cooperation; in its place is the naked, brutal grammar of power.

The mask has finally slipped. The world is witnessing a spectacle that can only be described as a parade of raw intimidation. The discussions are no longer about how to grow the global pie, but about who holds the knife to carve it. The frantic whispering in the corridors reveals a terrifying truth: rules, institutions, and ethics—the pillars of the post-1945 world—are now merely decorative veneers. They are the papier-mâché facades hiding the steel cage of coercion, panic, and a ruthless scramble for resource possession.

The tectonic plates of history are shifting with violence not seen since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The widening fissures in the trans-Atlantic partnership between a mercenary America and a paralyzed Europe; the predatory military fixation on the melting ice of Greenland; the rise of a silent, digital imperialism driven by opaque algorithms; and the simmering, righteous indignation of the Global South—all these vectors converge to deliver a singular, chilling message.

The world is not merely in a state of transition; it has violently entered a new epoch. Welcome to Neo-Colonialism 2.0.

NEO-COLONIALISM 2.0

The Fragmentation of the Global Power Balance: A Requiem for the Old World

In this new era, empires do not necessarily need to plant flags on your soil or station garrisons in your cities to conquer you. They simply need to mortgage your future, hijack your data, and weaponize your dependency. It is a world where geography has returned with a vengeance, and where the strong do what they can, while the weak suffer what they must.

THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD

The Greenland Bombshell and the End of Diplomacy

Nothing crystallized the shift in the global psyche more perfectly than the statement made by the re-elected US President, Donald Trump, regarding Greenland. In a display of what can only be described as "calculated geopolitical theater," Trump took to the podium—not in Washington, but virtually beaming into Davos—to address the Arctic question.

Formally, he stated that the United States would "not use military force" against the island, nor would

it impose punitive tariffs on its European allies to force a sale. But in the very same breath—without a pause for effect—he intricately detailed the capabilities of the new B-21 Raider bombers, the range of hypersonic missiles stationed in North Dakota, and the absolute necessity of American military supremacy in the Arctic Circle.

To the untrained ear, this might have sounded like a rambling contradiction, typical of Trump's stream-of-consciousness style. To the seasoned diplomat, however, it was a finely sharpened dagger. It was not a diplomatic gaffe; it was a mafia-style offer. It was a projection of power that threatens not with words, but with implications.

The message to Denmark, and by extension to the entire European Union, was deafeningly loud: Consent is optional. The United States has alternatives, and it has the muscle to exercise them. We prefer to buy, but do not force us to take.

This is the mindset that birthed the colonial era. The difference is only in the methodology. Today, colonies are not defined by Viceroys and colonial administrations, but by strategic choke points, rare earth mineral deposits, technology transfer bans, and military signaling. Trump's obsession with Greenland is not merely about acquiring real estate; it is a manifestation of a worldview where geography is once again writing destiny, and where raw power trumps ethical obligation.

The Mirror of Impotence

Davos in 2026 was the moment the West looked in the mirror and saw the cracks. The irony is tragic. In the aftermath of World War II, amidst the ashes of Hiroshima and the ruins of Berlin, Washington and London constructed a dream. They promised a world where the behavior of nations would be governed not by "animal strength" or the "law of the jungle," but by institutions and statutes. The United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO were the pillars of this Liberal Internationalism. The promise was simple: Might is no longer Right.

Davos 2026 was the funeral pyre of that promise.

The world standing on the threshold of 2026 has entered a reality that is crueler, more volatile, and profoundly unstable. While the World Economic Forum discusses "inclusive growth" and "AI safety" on the main stage, the real anxieties of the attendees are about strategic control of supply chains, the weaponization of the dollar, and the securing of spheres of influence. The cold outside the conference halls in the Alps is freezing, but the diplomatic frost inside is far more lethal.

Davos, once the Mecca of globalization, is facing an existential crisis. It has become a dirge for a crumbling global order. Behind the clinking champagne glasses and the forced smiles lies a pervasive fear: the realization that we have circled back to the starting line, to a place where power is the only argument that survives.

THE FALLACY OF THE LIBERAL ORDER

To understand the terrifying nature of Neo-Colonialism 2.0, one must first dissect the corpse of the

"Rule-Based Order." Why did it die? And was it ever truly alive?

The Grand Deception

During the Cold War, the United States constructed a system of "Liberal Hegemony." The logic was seductive: if nations trade with one another, depend on each other's markets, and adhere to a common legal framework, war becomes too costly to contemplate. This was the "Democratic Peace Theory" applied to global economics. It was a beautiful lie.

History—and the Global South—remembers this differently. This system was never truly egalitarian. It was a hierarchy masquerading as a partnership. The "rules" were binding for the weak, but mere suggestions for the strong. The "exceptions" were exclusively reserved for America and its European cousins.

The rot set in decades ago.

- The 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A sovereign nation was dismantled based on fabricated evidence, bypassing the UN Security Council. This taught the world that international law is impotent against a determined superpower.
- Selective Human Rights: Interventions were staged where resources were plentiful (Libya), while genocides were ignored where strategic interest was absent (Rwanda).
- Economic Bullying: The WTO was used as a battering ram to pry open developing markets for Western multinationals, while the West maintained massive subsidies for its own agriculture and key industries.

By the time we reached the mid-2020s, the moral foundation of this order had been eaten away by termites. The Global South realized that these institutions were not arbiters of justice, but sophisticated tools of Western preservation. The "Garden" of the West was maintained only by exploiting the "Jungle" of the rest.

Globalization: A Double-Edged Sword

In the 1990s, globalization was sold as a benevolent tide that would "lift all boats." The 2008 financial crisis shattered that illusion. It proved that economic interdependence was a trap. When Wall Street gambled and lost, the punishment was distributed to the farmers of India, the factory workers of Brazil, and the savers of Southeast Asia.

Today, trade treaties are no longer about development; they are instruments of control. The distrust permeating the air in Davos is the bitter harvest of this historical betrayal. The Global South is no longer asking for a seat at the table; they are realizing the table itself is rigged.

TRUMPISM AND THE DEMOLITION OF CONSENSUS

If the Rule-Based Order was a decaying building, Donald Trump is the wrecking ball that finally struck the foundation. His return to the presidency and his "America First" doctrine is not an anomaly; it is the inevitable conclusion of Western decline.

Trump's worldview is "Hyper-Realism." In his calculus, there are no permanent friends, only permanent deficits and surpluses. He has stripped the velvet glove off the iron fist of American diplomacy. He has reminded the world that international relations is not the art of writing love letters; it is a gladiatorial arena where the loser dies.

Mercenary Alliances

Trump has reframed sacred security alliances like NATO as "protection rackets." To him, the security of Europe or Japan is not a moral obligation for the United States or a defense of democracy; it is a service—a service for which the client must pay. This reduces geopolitical stability to the level of a private security contractor.

By withdrawing from climate accords, crippling the WTO's appellate body, and treating treaties as disposable tissues, Trump has inaugurated the era of "Transactional Anarchy."

It is a world where multilateralism is dead, replaced by bilateral bullying. When the global hegemon itself begins to break the rules, the system reverts to Matsyanyaya—the Sanskrit axiom for the Law of Fish—where the big fish eats the small fish, and the only safety lies in having sharper teeth than your neighbor. Trump's message is clear: "We will not make the rules; we will dictate the outcomes."

EUROPE'S EXISTENTIAL SCREAM

The most painful shockwaves of this new disorder are being felt across the Atlantic. The partnership between the US and Europe—touted for seventy years as the bedrock of Western Civilization—is drowning in a sea of mistrust.

European diplomats in Davos wear the look of people whose house is burning while the fire brigade negotiates the price of water. For decades, Europe lived in a geopolitical fantasyland. It outsourced its security to America, its cheap energy needs to Russia, and its export growth to China. It built a massive welfare state on this tripod of dependency.

Now, all three pillars have collapsed simultaneously.

The Vassalization of a Continent

Trump's America has made it clear: the security umbrella is closing. Europe is being told to pay up. But it is worse than that. Europe feels it has borne the brunt of the Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia. It has suffered de-industrialization, energy shortages, and inflation.

Meanwhile, the US is profiting from Europe's misery. America sells its LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) to Europe at four times the domestic price. It uses the Inflation Reduction Act to suck European industries—chemical plants from Germany, car manufacturers from France—across the ocean to American soil with promises of subsidies and cheap energy.

This does not look like friendship to Paris or Berlin; it looks like predation. The American attitude at Davos was unmistakable: Europe is no longer a "peer partner" but a "junior associate," a vassal state expected to follow Washington's orders even if it leads to economic suicide.

The Pivot of Desperation

This explains the strange spectacle of Europe turning its gaze back toward China. Despite the rhetoric of "de-risking," German industrialists and French strategists know they cannot survive a simultaneous decoupling from Russian energy and Chinese markets while being squeezed by American protectionism.

They are looking for a lifeline. It is not an ideological shift; it is strategic panic. Europe stands at a crossroads: one path leads to total American subservience, effectively becoming the 51st state without voting rights; the other leads to the dark forest of uncertainty. This is the existential crisis of a continent that forgot how to be a power.

THE COLD RUSH — GREENLAND AND THE ARCTIC

If the political face of Neo-Colonialism is the US-EU rift, its physical manifestation is the terrifying scramble for the Arctic.

History bears witness that the hunger of empires is insatiable; only the menu changes. When Trump proposed "buying" Greenland in 2019, the media laughed. They treated it as the whim of a real estate tycoon. But military strategists did not laugh. They recognized it for what it was: the resurrection of 19th-century colonial logic in the 21st century.

The Resource Curse of the Ice

Climate change, an existential threat to humanity,

is viewed by the great powers as a "commercial opportunity." The melting ice is not a tragedy to them; it is a treasure map.

Beneath the white sheets of Greenland lie the building blocks of the next industrial revolution: Uranium, Zinc, and most importantly, Rare Earth Elements (REEs) like Neodymium and Dysprosium. These are essential for everything from microchips to electric vehicle batteries to the guidance systems of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The diplomatic tussle over Greenland proves that "Environmental Protection" is often a convenient slogan used to mask "Resource Control." The West speaks of saving the glaciers, but their drills are ready to pierce them.

The New Monroe Doctrine of the North

The US views Greenland as its "unsinkable aircraft carrier," a vital buffer against Russia and China. It is enforcing a new "Arctic Monroe Doctrine," declaring the region off-limits to competitors. Meanwhile, Russia is aggressively militarizing its northern coast, reopening Soviet-era bases and testing nuclear-powered torpedoes. China, calling itself a "Near-Arctic State"—a geographical fiction—dreams of a Polar Silk Road to bypass Western-controlled shipping lanes.

Caught in the middle are the indigenous populations and smaller nations like Denmark and Canada. Canada, the polite neighbor, finds itself in the position of a smaller sibling watching the older brother invite thugs into the backyard. Canada's silence at Davos speaks volumes about the helplessness of middle powers when the giants decide to wrestle.

This is the Neo-Colonialism of Geography: sovereignty means nothing if your land holds what the empire needs. The ice is melting, and with it, the borders of the old world.

DIGITAL IMPERIALISM — THE NEW EAST INDIA COMPANIES

We must now shift our gaze from the physical map to the invisible, yet omnipresent, map of the digital world. This is the domain of Techno-Feudalism, the most insidious form of colonization the world has ever seen.

The Data Extraction Economy

In the 18th century, the British East India Company entered nations under the guise of trade, only to dismantle their sovereignty. They extracted cotton, indigo, and spices, leaving famine in their wake.

Today, Silicon Valley giants (Google, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft) and Chinese tech behemoths play this role. The raw material has changed, but the model is identical.

- **Old Colonialism:** Looted natural resources.
- **New Colonialism:** Loots Data.

The data of citizens in the Global South—their biometrics, financial transactions, political leanings, fears, health records, and desires—is harvested freely. It is siphoned off to servers in California or Shanghai. There, it is "refined" by Artificial Intelligence, processed into behavioral prediction models, and then sold back to those same nations as "services."

Greenland: The Flag in the Ice

Recently, President Trump sent a geopolitical shockwave through the world, not via a press conference, but through his social media platform, 'Truth Social'. He shared an AI-generated image that was as visually stunning as it was politically explosive.

The image depicted Trump, alongside Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President J.D. Vance, planting a massive American flag into the icy permafrost of Greenland. The composition deliberately mimicked the iconic World War II photograph of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima.

To add salt to the wound, another image circulated depicting Canada colored entirely in American red/white/blue.

This was not a meme; it was a manifesto. It signaled the birth of the "Donroe Doctrine" (Trump's version of the Monroe Doctrine).

- ***The Plan:*** *Transfer Greenland from "European Command" to the US "NORTHCOM."*
- ***The Law:*** *A proposed "Make Greenland Great Again" Act, offering financial buyouts to Greenlandic citizens to secede from Denmark.*
- ***The Goal:*** *Secure the Rare Earths needed for the US "Golden Dome" missile defense system.*

Despite the outrage in Copenhagen and the nervous whispers in NATO, Trump's message was brutal in its clarity: Greenland is no longer a part of Europe. It is the northern shield of the American Fortress.

This is a one-way transfer of value. The Global South provides the raw material (data) for free, and buys back the finished product (AI services) at a premium.

The Puppet Masters of the Mind

But the danger goes beyond economics. When a country's information ecosystem, banking rails, and social discourse are run by foreign algorithms, that country is sovereign in name only. It is a digital colony.

Algorithms now decide who wins elections in developing nations. They decide which narrative spreads and which is suppressed. They can incite a riot or pacify a population with the tweak of a code. This is Soft Power weaponized into Hard Control.

If a nation tries to regulate these giants—for instance, by demanding data localization or taxing digital services—they face the threat of "Digital Isolation." It is a modern form of gunboat diplomacy where the threat is not a naval blockade, but the disconnection of your digital nervous system. "Do as we say, or we will turn off your GPS and your cloud storage."

TECHNOLOGICAL APARTHEID AND THE CHIP WAR

Neo-Colonialism 2.0 creates a caste system of nations. The superpowers—specifically the US and China—are erecting high walls around "Critical Technologies." Quantum computing, 6G, advanced semiconductors, and biotechnology are being ring-fenced. They are enforcing a Technological Apartheid.

Chip Imperialism

Supply chains, once designed for efficiency and lowest cost, are now weapons of war. The semiconductor—the tiny silicon chip—is the oil of the 21st century.

The US policy of "de-coupling" and export controls is designed not just to compete with China, but to freeze its development. But for the Global South, this is a trap. The world is being forced into a binary choice.

- If you don't align with Washington, you are denied access to the advanced AI chips needed to run a modern economy.

- If you don't align with Beijing, you risk being cut off from the solar panels, batteries, and rare earth processing needed for your energy transition.

This is the loss of Strategic Autonomy. Nations are forced to choose a master. It is "Chip Imperialism," dictating who gets to run in the race for the future and who is relegated to the spectator stands. The "Silicon Curtain" has descended, and it is far more impenetrable than the Iron Curtain ever was.

THE PRIVATIZATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

Perhaps the most disturbing evolution of this era is the erosion of the "State" itself. The Westphalian model of 1648, which established the nation-state as the supreme authority in international affairs, is kneeling before Corporate Sovereignty.

The Oligarchs of War

Take the case of Elon Musk and Starlink. During the Ukraine war, a private individual held the power to decide whether a specific region had internet access—effectively deciding the operational capability of a national army in real-time. When a CEO can override a General or a President, we have entered uncharted waters.

These "Tech-Oligarchs" are the new feudal lords. Their terms of service are more powerful than national constitutions. They negotiate with nations as equals. A ban on X (formerly Twitter) or a withdrawal of Apple services can cripple a government's communication faster than sanctions.

Mercenary Armies and Corporate Warlordism

Similarly, war has been privatized. From the remnants of the Wagner Group in Russia to Western Private Military Companies (PMCs) operating in the Sahel and the Middle East, security is now a commodity.

In Africa, gold and diamond mines are guarded by foreign mercenaries who answer to shareholders, not citizens. These corporate armies operate in a legal gray zone, unaccountable to the Geneva Convention. This is Corporate Warlordism, where loyalty is tied to the paycheck, not the flag. The state has lost its monopoly on violence, and with it, its legitimacy.

DEBT TRAPS AND GREEN COLONIALISM

The economic pincers of Neo-Colonialism are equally sharp.

On one side, we have the "Chinese Model," often termed Debt-Trap Diplomacy. Infrastructure projects—ports, railways, stadiums—are lavished upon poor nations, laden with opaque loans and secret clauses. When the inevitable default happens, strategic assets are seized. From the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka to the copper mines of Zambia, the story is the same: sovereignty eroded by compound interest.

On the other side is the "Western Model," operating through the IMF and World Bank. They offer loans, but with "Conditionality"—a polite word for structural adjustment. Cut your public spending. Remove subsidies for the poor. Privatize your water. Open your markets to our corporations. It is a cycle of debt that keeps nations in perpetual servitude, forcing them to prioritize repayment to Wall Street over feeding their own people.

The Hypocrisy of Green Colonialism

A new monster has emerged: Green Colonialism. The West, having developed its fabulous wealth by burning coal and oil for two centuries, now preaches strict environmentalism to the poor.

- They want the Cobalt from Congo and the Lithium from Latin America to power their Teslas in California and Berlins.
- But they forbid those nations from using their own fossil fuel reserves to industrialize or generate electricity for their dark villages.

They impose "Carbon Border Taxes," punishing developing nations for not having the clean technology that the West refuses to share. This is economic suppression disguised as planetary salvation. At Davos, billionaires arriving in private jets lecture African nations on carbon footprints—a contradiction so grotesque it would be funny if it weren't so tragic. They want the Global South to remain a nature reserve and a mine, never a factory or a lab.

INDIA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH — THE LIGHTHOUSE

Amidst this gloom, the story of resistance is not coming from the established powers, but from the Global South. The nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, bearing the deep scars of old colonialism, have developed an immunity to the new one. They recognize the scent of the trap.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Vaccine Apartheid"—where the West hoarded doses while the South died—shattered the last remnants of moral trust. They see China's "Checkbook Imperialism" on one side and the West's "Protectionist Hypocrisy" on the other. They want neither.

India's Rise as a Balancer

In this chaotic landscape, India emerges as a lighthouse. India's proposition is unique: it refuses to be a vassal of the West or a client of China. It stands tall, driven by its civilizational ethos and growing hard power.

At Davos, India did not appear as a supplicant, but as a solution provider—a Vishwa Mitra (Friend of the World).

The Indian Counter-Model:

1. **Digital Sovereignty (DPI):** While the US and China hoard data to build trillion-dollar monopolies, India created "Digital Public Infrastructure" (UPI, Aadhaar, ONDC). It is a democratic, open-source model where data belongs to the citizen, not the corporation. It democratizes finance and commerce. It is a template for Digital Decolonization that the Global South is eagerly adopting, from the Philippines to Ethiopia.

2. **Multipolarity and Inclusion:** By securing the African Union a permanent seat at the G20 during its presidency, India proved it is fighting for the democratization of global governance. This is "Non-Alignment 2.0"—not passivity, but active Strategic Autonomy.

3. **Value-Based Realism:** Whether dealing with Russian oil to stabilize global prices or resisting Western pressure on climate unjustness, India has shown that a nation can prioritize its citizens' interests without abandoning global responsibility.

India is showing the world that you don't have to be a bully to be a power.

THE TRIAGE OF SOVEREIGNTY

Donald Trump's "Anarchic Realism" is a bitter pill, but perhaps a necessary one. He has ripped the blindfold off the world. He has signaled the end of the "Global Policeman."

From the glaciers of Greenland to the cobalt mines of the Congo, and from the boardrooms of Silicon Valley to the rice paddies of Asia, the message is singular: Sovereignty is no longer a right; it is a capability you must earn and defend.

In this Neo-Colonial 2.0 era, true independence requires a "Trinity of Security":

1. **Digital Sovereignty:** Control over your own data, networks, and AI.

2. **Resource Sovereignty:** Control over your minerals, energy, and supply chains.

3. **Intellectual Sovereignty:** The courage to define your own development model and protect your culture from foreign narratives.

This is a test of humanity's wisdom (Pragya). If nations succumb to the logic of brute force, we are heading toward a fragmented world of warring blocs—a prelude to a Third World War that will be fought with financial weapons and autonomous drones.

But if the world listens to the alternative proposed by India—of cooperation, reform, and shared progress—we might just navigate this storm. The pen of history is poised. The question is: will the next chapter be written in the ink of "Conflict and Domination," or "Co-existence"? The chains of today are not made of iron, but of fiber-optic cables and debt. Breaking them requires not a hammer, but vision.

The melting ice of Davos is a warning: If we do not change our ways, the coming Cold War will be colder, and far more destructive, than anything we have survived before. The snow is falling in Switzerland, but the fire is spreading everywhere else.

Sanjay Shrivastava

Trump's America
From Superpower to Super Risk
From System Maker to System Breaker

In a fractured global order, America under Donald Trump has shifted from stabilizer to disruptor, exporting uncertainty and risk. As institutions erode and alliances fray, the search for a credible, balanced alternative leadership becomes inevitable—and increasingly urgent.

Under the era of Donald Trump, America is no longer the country that the world looked to for stability, rules, and direction. It is evolving into a center of power that exports uncertainty, fear, and risk. This is not a mere ideological critique—it is today's global experience. In international politics, the most destabilizing element is no longer a rogue nation; it is America itself, and its leadership.

Trump's tenure has transformed America from a system maker into a system breaker. The very institutions that allowed it to claim moral leadership for decades—the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and NATO—have become burdensome. Rules are no longer shared disciplines but tools imposed on others; and when those same rules threaten to apply to America itself, they are declared "obstacles."

Diplomacy under Trump has ceased to mean dialogue; it now signifies the management of threats. Allies no longer receive security guarantees; they are handed bills. Cooperation has been reduced from a moral responsibility to mere transactional bargaining. As a result, Europe is apprehensive, Asia uneasy, and the Global South distrustful. The world now contends with a leadership that does not generate stability but normalizes crises.

America is no longer the power that prevents war; it is becoming the country that normalizes confrontation. Tariffs, sanctions, military signaling, and aggressive rhetoric have become the instruments of a politics that seeks to maintain the world in perpetual tension. This is where the image of the "superpower" fractures, revealing the face of "super risk."

Amid this backdrop, the critical question emerges: Can the world find an alternative direction, and if so, who can provide it?

Herein lies the global significance of India's role. India does not stand today with imperial ambitions. It is neither a follower of American dominance nor an aggressive claimant of a new global pole. Its greatest strength is strategic restraint.

Where Trump's America believes in breaking institutions and weaponizing rules, India advocates reform, democratization, and multipolarity. Where America threatens, India engages in dialogue. Where America builds blocs, India builds bridges. Where America spreads uncertainty, India provides predictability.

India's foreign policy pivots on strategic autonomy—neither passive non-alignment nor opportunistic balancing. Whether it is the Russia–Ukraine conflict or crises in West Asia, India has demonstrated that national interest and global morality are not adversaries but co-travelers in equilibrium.

Who's Next?

The relatively easy and low-cost operation in Venezuela has convinced the Trump administration that the international price of unilateral military action is limited. Russia and China's rhetorical objections, the silence of India and Europe, and the inertia of the United Nations have only reinforced this confidence. As a result, Trump's threats will no longer be dismissed as bluster; they will be read as preludes to action. Venezuela was only the beginning. Trump's America has replaced restraint with dominance as the organizing principle of its foreign policy—and that is the greatest danger facing the world today. The next targets could be:

Colombia

Regime Change under the Cover of the Drug War

Trump's rhetoric toward Colombia has been unusually aggressive. Publicly labeling President Gustavo Petro a "sick ruler of a sick country" goes beyond mere provocation; it signals the possibility of military or paramilitary intervention. By invoking cocaine production and trafficking, the United States could attempt to justify direct action in Colombia on moral and political grounds. This approach effectively reopens the path to regime change under the familiar cover of the war on drugs.

Cuba

An Unfinished Project at a Decisive Moment

Cuba has remained a persistent irritant for the American establishment for decades. This Cold War–era ideological conflict now appears poised for revival under Trump. The White House believes that once economic and political support from Venezuela dries up, Cuba's communist system will collapse on its own. Trump's statements suggest that Washington may favor a strategy of managed decay rather than overt intervention—relying on economic pressure, sanctions, and diplomatic isolation as its primary tools.

Mexico

A Sovereign Neighbour, an Uncomfortable Target

Mexico is both a partner and a problem for Washington. According to Trump, drug cartels have become more powerful than the Mexican state itself—a claim that directly challenges Mexico's sovereignty. President Claudia Sheinbaum's opposition to U.S. intervention could further harden the Trump administration's posture. Under the banners of border security and narcotics control, the risk of intensified military or economic pressure on Mexico is unmistakable.

Iran

The Middle East's Permanent Adversary

Iran has always occupied a central place in Trump's foreign-policy calculus. Amid internal protests and regional volatility, the White House has repeatedly spoken of delivering a "decisive blow" to Tehran. Political instability in Israel and the fragility of Benjamin Netanyahu's government could further encourage Trump to adopt a renewed hard line against Iran. Such a confrontation would not remain confined to Iran alone; it would threaten to destabilize the entire West Asian region.

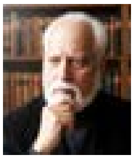
Greenland

Strategy, Resources, and Military Dominance

Greenland is no longer viewed merely as a frozen island, but as a declared American national-security objective. Trump argues that the presence of Russian and Chinese vessels makes control of Greenland strategically indispensable. Despite objections from Denmark and across Europe, Trump has made it clear that the United States would not shy away from the use of force if necessary. This marks the first time Washington has openly employed military language regarding the territory of a NATO ally.

Diplomatic Alarm

India's Trial in a World of Chaos



Sachchidanand

The global order is faltering, and America is no longer guided by rules but by hubris. From Venezuela to Greenland, aggressive actions by the United States have sounded alarms that transcend regional conflicts—they signal a systemic disorder. In this volatile context, India faces not a mere choice but a decisive strategic test: to bow or to lead.

As dawn broke in 2026, the senior echelons of Indian diplomacy in New Delhi's South Block did not merely see a new year; they confronted a stark warning. For decades, Indian foreign policy has rested on the twin pillars of strategic autonomy and a rules-based international order. Today, that order is showing cracks, as the world's foremost superpower—America—prioritizes caprice over norms. For Indian strategists, the concern is not the distant turmoil in Caracas or Nuuk alone, but the collapse of the democratic, liberal order on which India had charted its development trajectory.

As India marches toward its centenary of independence in 2047, the sudden resurgence of global "anarchy" has transformed into a diplomatic crucible. When the most significant strategic partner itself becomes a threat to global stability, how can India safeguard its national interests—energy security, border integrity, and economic growth—without compromising its autonomy?

The Venezuela Incident: A Wake-Up Call

The first week of January 2026 delivered a shock to Indian diplomatic corridors. U.S. President Donald Trump's dramatic action of forcibly removing Venezuela's president and his wife from Caracas to Washington represented a slap in the face of modern sovereignty. For India, a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and a consistent defender of international autonomy, this was a wake-up call.

This was not merely a coup in a Latin American country—it was a declaration that the United States now acts unrestrained by international law or moral obligation. Today, it is Venezuela; tomorrow, it could be any nation that obstructs American interests. This is especially alarming for India, given Trump's attention to Greenland's strategic resources and ongoing threats to Iran. An unstable West Asia, home to millions of Indian expatriates and vital energy supplies, becomes a direct security concern.

The Illusion of Market-Driven Security

To understand India's contemporary

In 2026, India's illusions are breaking. Trump's tenure is proving that "trade" is no longer a guarantee of peace but has become a weapon of war. India is witnessing how the United States is using its economic power to coerce other nations. Indian policymakers are now confronting this harsh reality head-on.

predicament, one must look back. After the Soviet Union's collapse and India's economic liberalization in 1991, New Delhi embraced the notion that the future would be guided by market forces and soft power. With the Cold War over, India opened its economy, believing that economic strength would outweigh military might.

During globalization's early decades, India also sought a new equilibrium in its relationship with the United States. The wounds of 1971, when Washington had sided against India, were deliberately set aside. By the 21st century, India and America were viewed as "natural partners." Shared democratic values and expansive markets were expected to bind the two nations.

But 2026 has shattered that illusion. Trump's presidency demonstrates that trade is no longer a guarantee of peace but a weapon in strategic coercion. India has observed how the United States leverages its economic might to bend other nations. Indian policymakers now confront a harsh truth: GDP alone does not guarantee security; it must be paired with hard power and strategic resolve.

India–America Relations: Fractured Expectations

The return of Trump to the White House in 2025 was initially met with cautious optimism among Indian media and certain diplomatic circles. There was hope that Prime Minister Modi's personal "chemistry" with Trump would elevate bilateral relations. Defense deals were expected to accelerate, technology transfers to materialize, and a robust alliance against China to form.

By year-end, however, that honeymoon had given way to bitter reality. The very economic ties considered the backbone of the relationship now appear as strangling constraints. Trump's "America First" agenda directly conflicts with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives. Washington now increasingly views India not as a cooperative partner but as a potential tariff competitor. For India, this is a jolt, as its strategic planning had long assumed America as a pivotal pole in the Indo-Pacific balance.

Russia, Energy, and India's Strategic Pride

Arguably the most sensitive point in Indo-American tensions is Russia. This is not merely about oil; it is about India's strategic autonomy. During the Ukraine conflict, while much of the West boycotted Russia, India continued to procure affordable energy, prioritizing the welfare of its citizens. The Indian government's rationale was clear: "Our energy security cannot become hostage to others' political battles."

The United States, however, accuses India of financing Putin's war. From the Indian perspective, these allegations are not only insulting but hypocritical. Indian diplomats have pointed out that Europe purchased far more Russian energy than India did. Nevertheless, the U.S. persists in exerting pressure. Frustrated by failing to halt the Ukraine conflict, Trump channels his ire toward India, threatening punitive tariffs of up to 500 percent.

For India, this is no longer merely an economic dispute; it is a question of sovereign pride. Succumbing to U.S. pressure and severing ties with Russia would signal to the world that India is not an independent actor but a subordinate of Washington—a devastating blow to its global stature.

Economic Blackmail vs. India's New Power

Trump's tariff threats cannot be ignored, yet India is no longer in a position of fear. Its economy is no longer that of 1990; India is the fifth-largest global economy, rapidly approaching

the third spot. From an Indian vantage point, a tariff war cannot be unilateral. India represents a massive, rapidly expanding market for American multinationals—Apple, Google, Boeing, and social media giants. Any tariffs imposed on Indian pharmaceuticals or textiles can elicit proportional retaliation. Furthermore, the U.S. relies on India's supply chains to counter China. Trump, a businessman by instinct, is unlikely to sustain policies that harm mutual interests, but India must respond with its economic clout, asserting strength rather than submission.

India's Strategic Mandate in a Turbulent World

Given this global turbulence and American pressure, Indian strategists identify three critical fronts:

1. **Policy of Non-Submission:** Venezuela's example illustrates that weakness invites aggression. India must send a clear message that it will not compromise national interests. Its ties with Russia remain pivotal for defense preparedness and cannot be sacrificed to

India cannot afford to take Trump's threat of imposing a 500 percent tariff lightly, but the era of being intimidated has passed. The Indian economy today is not what it was in 1990. India is now the world's fourth-largest economy and is firmly on the path to becoming the third largest.

appease Washington. India must communicate to Trump that a strong, self-reliant India serves U.S. interests better than a dependent, weakened one.

2. **Expanding Multi-Alignment:** India must continue converting its historical non-alignment into multi-alignment. This entails maintaining engagement with the Quad alongside dialogue with Russia and China via BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Partnerships with medium powers like France, Japan, and Germany must be deepened to reduce overreliance on the United States.

3. **Leadership in the Global South:** India must become the voice of developing nations. Events like Venezuela sow fear across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. India's stance in favor of a rules-based, rather than force-based, global order can provide these countries reassurance and bolster India's moral authority on the world stage.

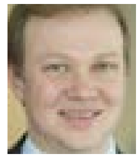
A Symbol of Stability Amid Chaos

Ultimately, the geopolitical scenario of 2026 tests India's patience and diplomatic maturity. While Trump's America may be unpredictable and unstable, India must emerge as a pivot of stability.

The abduction of Venezuela's president and Washington's designs on Greenland signal that the world has entered a perilous era. In such times, India's ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the world as one family—is not mere rhetoric; it is a strategic imperative. India must demonstrate that it is an independent player, not a pawn in the games of superpowers.

India and America will not sever ties—they remain mutually dependent, especially regarding China. Yet, the terms of engagement must be redefined. Washington must recognize that 21st-century India demands partnership on equal terms, not subordination. In this era of volatility, India's greatest assets are its self-confidence and strategic autonomy.

The Yuan's Turning Point



Brad W. Setser

Long seen as structurally weak, China's currency is now under mounting appreciation pressure. A swelling trade surplus, shifting market sentiment, and rising global resistance to export imbalances are forcing Beijing toward difficult and unavoidable exchange-rate choices.

For years, the prevailing wisdom among China watchers has been that Beijing would never tolerate a meaningful appreciation of the yuan. The logic was straightforward: China's domestic economy remains weak, and exports—supported by a competitively priced currency—are essential to sustaining growth.

George Magnus captured this view succinctly when he observed that China's post-Covid export boom was less a sign of strength than a reflection of weak domestic demand and Beijing's inability or unwillingness to address it. As a result, even though the dollar–yuan exchange rate had moved modestly, the renminbi was widely seen as structurally weak—and expected to remain so.

The data appeared to support this belief. Net exports have contributed roughly one-third of China's reported growth in each of the past two years, and possibly more, given widespread suspicions that other components of growth—especially consumption and investment—are overstated.

The Limits of Export-Driven Growth

A second strand of conventional thinking held that China could not continue generating so much growth from exports indefinitely. If it did, many argued, the global trading system—already under severe strain due to Trump-era trade policies—would simply break. French President Emmanuel Macron voiced this concern bluntly when he warned that global trade imbalances were becoming "unbearable."

For a time, these concerns did not translate into meaningful pressure on China's exchange-rate policy. The U.S. Treasury, under Secretary Scott Bessent, remained relatively passive on currency issues. But that complacency is unlikely to persist.

An immovable object—China's commitment to maintaining broad yuan stability—is now colliding with a potentially unstoppable political force: the growing unwillingness of China's trading partners to absorb an ever-expanding Chinese export surplus.

If Beijing limits nominal appreciation to just a few percentage points—roughly matching interest-rate differentials to discourage speculation—the real exchange rate will barely move. And if the real effective exchange rate remains at its current depreciated level, China will continue to gain global market share, intensifying trade frictions.

A Shift in Global Perception

What has changed is that China's exchange rate is no longer being ignored—neither by the International Monetary Fund nor by foreign-

exchange markets.

There is now broad acceptance that the yuan is significantly undervalued, and that this undervaluation has played a major role in China's export outperformance. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva's recent comments following the IMF mission to China reflect this shift. That was not the case a year ago. The IMF's 2024 staff report on China stands as a near-perfect snapshot of the older consensus.

Today, concern about China's trade surplus is widespread and growing. Economists such as Paul Krugman argue that the true size of the surplus cannot be captured solely by the reported current-account balance. While the official surplus may approach $700 billion in 2025—already enormous—the underlying surplus is likely closer to $1 trillion.

Emerging Market Pressure for Appreciation

Alongside this reassessment of China's external position is a growing recognition that the yuan is now under appreciation pressure.

Goldman Sachs' call for a significant yuan appreciation in 2025 both reflects this changing sentiment and has helped reinforce it. Until recently, the dominant narrative was that depreciation pressure prevailed. Some within the IMF reportedly still hold that view, despite clear signals from foreign-exchange settlement data.

Those signals are difficult to ignore. Since June, settlement data show net foreign-exchange purchases averaging around $30 billion per month. There are strong indications—reinforced by persistent Bloomberg reports of state-bank activity—that December's figures will be significantly higher than those of October and November.

In response, Chinese authorities have intensified

efforts to signal that the yuan is not a one-way bet, discouraging investors from piling into the currency.

China's Core Exchange-Rate Dilemma

This brings us to the heart of China's exchange-rate challenge.

For most of the past few years, interest-rate differentials favored the dollar. Combined with the yuan's 2022 depreciation, China's prolonged domestic slowdown, and recurring tariff threats, these factors drove sustained private capital outflows that offset China's growing trade surplus.

That balance has now shifted. Private outflows are no longer sufficient to absorb the surplus. As the yuan has begun to inch higher against the dollar, China's state banks have resumed accumulating foreign assets.

The scale of this accumulation—roughly $300 billion annually—is large in absolute terms but still modest relative to China's economy. Even if treated as a form of "backdoor" currency intervention, it would remain just below the U.S. Treasury's 2 percent of GDP threshold for identifying manipulation.

However, keeping state-bank accumulation at this level is becoming increasingly difficult. The underlying trade surplus now far exceeds recent foreign-asset accumulation, leaving ample room for appreciation pressure to intensify if capital-flow dynamics change.

The underlying trade surplus is so vast that even a slight shift in the direction of capital flows could multiply pressure on the currency. If markets sense that the yuan will strengthen, Chinese exporters and currency traders will begin betting heavily on the yuan.

Latent Demand and the Risk of Momentum

If markets conclude that the yuan will appreciate slowly but steadily—with a small chance of a sharper move—it becomes rational for exporters and currency traders to bet on appreciation.

Here, Stephen Jen's argument is especially relevant. Chinese firms accumulated substantial dollar holdings over the past five years. If appreciation becomes gradual, predictable, and credible, much of that offshore liquidity could return home—adding to appreciation pressure.

In short, China's foreign-exchange management is becoming "interesting" again.

Policy Trade-Offs and Strategic Choices

Limiting nominal appreciation to 2–3 percent—below the interest-rate differential—may curb speculation, but it will not correct the yuan's real undervaluation. The resulting expansion of China's surplus would almost certainly provoke a stronger trade response from its partners.

Conversely, allowing faster appreciation risks pulling offshore capital back into China, increasing volatility. Ironically, maintaining control under such conditions would require more—not less—intervention.

These dilemmas are not new. China has faced them before. But old slogans and warnings against one-way bets are unlikely to suffice this time.

Beijing will need to make fundamental choices—choices that recognize that the yuan can no longer remain structurally weak without triggering economic and political consequences abroad. The era in which China's exchange rate could be managed quietly, on its own terms, is coming to an end.

(The original article was published by the Council on Foreign Relations under the title "China's Currency Is Now Facing Substantial Appreciation Pressure." This version is a curated adaptation of that article.)

Under the banner of "peace," Donald Trump's initiative to erect a private authority in Gaza is not diplomacy - it is deal-making. For India, this invitation is not an honour, but a severe test of strategic autonomy, ethical statecraft, and the moral foundations of its foreign policy

A Mirage of Tranquillity

Satish Chandra

On the global chessboard of diplomacy, moves are rarely as straightforward as they appear. They are layered, calculated, and often cloaked in moral rhetoric that conceals raw power beneath. Every grand diplomatic gesture carries within it a set of contradictions—between principle and interest, legitimacy and leverage, ethics and expediency. In the cold winds of January 2026, such a contradiction has arrived quietly but unmistakably in New Delhi.

When Sergio Gor, the newly appointed United States Ambassador to India, announced on a digital platform that President Donald Trump had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join a newly formed "Board of Peace" for Gaza, the message was designed to flatter. On the surface, it appeared to be recognition of India's growing global stature—its emergence as a pivotal power capable of bridging divides in one of the world's most volatile regions.

Ambassador Gor, who had recently presented his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, would likely argue that India's credentials are impeccable. India maintains robust and increasingly strategic ties with Israel while retaining deep historical sympathy and moral commitment toward the Palestinian cause. Few countries enjoy such diplomatic bandwidth. Few are trusted by both sides. Few possess the civilisational credibility that India does.

And yet, diplomacy teaches us a harsh lesson: what looks like an invitation is often a test; what appears as honour may conceal entrapment. This proposal resembles a golden cage—gleaming, prestigious, and seemingly empowering, but ultimately designed to constrain. For India, a civilisation-state that prides itself on strategic autonomy and moral independence, this moment demands not enthusiasm but restraint.

This is not merely a question of Gaza. It is a question of whether India will anchor itself firmly within the multilateral, rules-based global order—or allow itself to be drawn into a personalised, transactional, and deeply destabilising alternative.

A "Peace Board" or the Privatisation of Global Governance?

Peeling back the layers of this proposal reveals an unsettling truth. Trump's so-called "Board of Peace" is not a humanitarian mission nor a peacekeeping mechanism in the conventional sense. It is, in essence, an attempt to privatise conflict management and erect a parallel authority to the United Nations—one that answers not to international law, but to personal power.

Formally announced in September 2025, the board's declared aims are lofty: promoting stability, restoring the rule of law, and securing peace in conflict zones. Such language is familiar. It is the language of international institutions, peacekeeping mandates, and humanitarian charters. But language, in diplomacy, often serves as camouflage.

On January 15, while unveiling the board, President Trump remarked bluntly, "The United Nations has never helped me." This single sentence exposes the ideological core of the initiative. The board is not motivated by global consensus or collective responsibility. It is born out of personal grievance and a long-standing hostility toward multilateral institutions.

Trump has never concealed his disdain for the UN—questioning its funding, its legitimacy, and its relevance. The "Board of Peace" is therefore not an alternative mechanism; it is a challenge, even an affront, to the post-1945 international order.

For India, this raises a profound dilemma. India is not merely a member of the UN; it is one of its foundational pillars. Over the decades, India has contributed troops, diplomats, mediators, and ideas to UN peacekeeping and norm-building. It has championed decolonisation, disarmament, and the rights of the Global South.

Can India now become part of an initiative whose implicit objective is to weaken, bypass, and delegitimise the very institution it helped build? Such participation would not be neutral. It would amount to complicity in dismantling multilateralism itself.

Gaza: Real Estate Vision or Moral Catastrophe?

Trump's approach to Gaza reveals the true nature of this initiative. During a February 2025 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump spoke openly of transforming Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East." The phrase was not accidental. It reflected a worldview that sees devastated territories not as sites of human suffering, but as underutilised assets.

In Trump's imagination, Gaza is not a graveyard of lives lost and futures destroyed. It is a redevelopment zone. A demolition site awaiting luxury hotels, beachfront resorts, and profitable real estate ventures.

This framing is deeply disturbing. When the president of a superpower speaks of "taking over" or "owning" a territory devastated by war, it echoes the darkest instincts of 19th-century colonialism. Sovereignty becomes irrelevant. Human suffering becomes collateral. Reconstruction becomes extraction.

India, of all nations, understands the violence of such thinking. It knows what it means to be reduced to a resource, a market, a territory to be exploited. India's foreign policy has always drawn moral strength from its anti-colonial struggle. To associate itself with a project that treats Gaza as a commercial opportunity would betray that legacy.

The rubble of Gaza is not a blank slate. It is layered with memory, trauma, and grief. No "Riviera" can be built without burying justice beneath concrete. India's ethical compass cannot permit such erasure.

A One-Man Board

The proposed structure of the Board of Peace further exposes its true character. This is not a representative institution. It is a hierarchical, corporate-style body dominated by a single individual. Trump, as self-appointed chairman, would retain sweeping powers—

initiating proposals, approving actions, and exercising veto authority without consultation.

This is diplomacy reduced to spectacle. A one-man court where nations are invited not as equal partners, but as contributors and spectators.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect is the proposed $1 billion "entry fee" for a permanent seat. Pricing peace is not innovation; it is moral bankruptcy. It transforms conflict resolution into a luxury club accessible only to the wealthy.

For India, this is indefensible. India has immense developmental needs—from healthcare and education to climate adaptation and poverty alleviation. Diverting public resources to fund a privately controlled board driven by an individual's ego would be politically and morally untenable.

Equally troubling is the board's impermanence. Its existence depends entirely on Trump's political relevance. When he leaves office—or loses interest—the board may collapse overnight. India does not invest in diplomatic structures that lack durability, legitimacy, and institutional continuity.

India's Foreign Policy and the Trump Contradiction

Since independence, India's foreign policy has been defined by three pillars: non-alignment, strategic autonomy, and moral credibility. Even as India has grown closer to the United States in recent decades, it has never surrendered these principles.

India has criticised the UN, yes—but always with the aim of reform, not replacement. It seeks a more representative Security Council, not its dissolution. It believes deeply polarising conflicts must be resolved through institutions, not individuals.

Trump's Israel–Palestine approach fundamentally clashes with this worldview. His unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, his sidelining of the Palestinian Authority, and his disregard for international consensus stand in sharp contrast to India's balanced stance. India continues to support the Palestinian Authority and the two-state solution. It recognises Tel Aviv—not Jerusalem—as Israel's diplomatic capital. It has consistently argued that peace must emerge through dialogue, not coercion or commercialisation.

Trump's Board of Peace violates every one of these principles.

The Vajpayee Doctrine

India has faced such tests before. In 2003, when the United States sought Indian troops for the Iraq War, the pressure was immense. The Bush administration framed participation as a mark of strategic partnership.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee refused.

His logic was simple and profound: India would deploy its soldiers only under a UN mandate. Not for unilateral wars. Not for regime change. That decision preserved India's credibility and moral authority.

Today, Prime Minister Modi stands at a similar crossroads. Accepting Trump's invitation would place India outside the UN framework and erode decades of trust among Arab nations and the Global South.

A Better Path

Rejecting the board does not mean disengagement. India can—and should—play a meaningful role in Gaza through legitimate channels.

India can expand humanitarian aid, medical assistance, and reconstruction support through UN agencies such as UNRWA. It can maintain dialogue with Palestinian leadership through its Ramallah office. It can advocate ceasefires, negotiations, and accountability.

Most importantly, India can urge the United States to place any peace initiative under UN supervision. That would restore legitimacy and ensure collective oversight.

Choosing Substance Over Spectacle

Trump's Board of Peace is a mirage—bright, alluring, and ultimately empty. It promises peace but delivers power. It speaks of stability but undermines institutions India must decline this invitation with humility and firmness. Peace is not a commodity. Diplomacy is not real estate. India's destiny lies in multilateralism, not in personalised power structures. A true Vishwaguru does not choose the easy path. It chooses the right one—even when it is harder.

(The author has previously served as Bureaucrat and Indian diplomat in Kabul.)

India's Trial by Fire

Santosh Kumar

As India assumes the presidency of BRICS, it finds itself standing at a decisive global inflection point—one where multipolarity is struggling to take shape even as unilateralism grows more aggressive. For India, 2026 is not merely a year of procedural responsibility; it is a defining test of leadership for the Global South.

When the calendar turned to January 1, 2026, it did not mark just another passage of time. It signalled a deeper tectonic shift in global geopolitics. Fresh from the widely acknowledged success of its G20 presidency, India's assumption of the BRICS chair made one reality unmistakably clear: the world is no longer willing to revolve around a single axis of power.

This is an age of transition—one in which multipolarity is being born, but the labour is painful and prolonged. Great-power rivalry has reached a fever pitch, the soul of multilateralism is gasping for breath, and the spectre of unilateralism has once again begun to stalk the international system. Institutions meant to mediate cooperation are under strain, global norms are being weaponised, and economic interdependence is increasingly treated as a vulnerability rather than a shared asset.

In such a fraught moment, India's stewardship of BRICS is not a diplomatic formality. It is a solemn responsibility—a pledge to safeguard the dignity, voice, and agency of the Global South. New Delhi faces a dual challenge: on one hand, it must preserve unity within an expanded and ideologically diverse BRICS grouping; on the other, it must contend with a Washington increasingly willing to weaponise trade, finance, and institutions to enforce compliance.

For India, 2026 is not merely a year of chairmanship. It is a moral contest—a struggle to defend justice, equity, and democratic global governance in an increasingly fractured world order.

"America First" versus "Humanity First"

The most striking contradiction on the horizon of 2026 is the clash between two irreconcilable worldviews. On one side stands Washington, where President Donald Trump's revived mantra of "America First" once again dominates foreign and economic policy. This doctrine is built on protectionism, tariff wars, disdain for international institutions, and a transactional view of global engagement. On the other side stands New Delhi, carrying the civilisational ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the world as one family—and articulating a vision of "Humanity First." This is not rhetorical idealism; it is a worldview rooted in India's historical experience, anti-colonial legacy, and democratic pluralism.

Ironically, 2026 also finds the United States holding the presidency of the G20. This coincidence transforms the year into a strategic Kurukshetra. For the past four years, leadership of the G20 rested with developing countries, pushing issues such as poverty reduction, inequality, climate justice, and sustainable development to the centre of global discourse.

There is now a real danger that Washington may use the G20 platform to reassert narrow national priorities while marginalising the concerns of the Global South. In such a scenario, BRICS—under India's leadership—emerges as the sole remaining fortress capable of defending the developmental agenda of emerging economies. India must ensure that issues Washington would prefer to sideline—climate finance, debt distress, development equity, and technological access—remain firmly embedded in the global conversation. This is a battle of narratives as much as of policies, and retreat is not an option.

Assault on Economic Sovereignty

President Trump has left little room for ambiguity regarding his view of BRICS. He perceives the grouping as a threat to American economic primacy, particularly to the dominance of the US dollar. His warning of imposing 100 percent tariffs on any country that challenges dollar supremacy is not economic policy—it is economic coercion.

Where the Obama and Biden administrations approached BRICS with cautious scepticism, the Trump administration has adopted open hostility. For India, this creates a delicate diplomatic tightrope. New Delhi has no interest in transforming BRICS into an explicitly anti-Western bloc, yet it cannot accept the erosion of its own—or its partners'—economic sovereignty.

India's chosen theme for its BRICS presidency—"Resilience and Innovation for Cooperation and Stability"—is a direct response to this challenge. It signals a commitment to collaboration without confrontation, autonomy without antagonism. India must use the BRICS platform to deepen intra-group trade to such an extent that the impact of unilateral tariffs becomes negligible. Expanding trade in local currencies, restructuring supply chains, and dismantling non-tariff barriers within BRICS are no longer optional strategies; they are economic imperatives.

This is India's opportunity to demonstrate who truly upholds a rules-based trading system. Not a protectionist superpower, but a coalition of emerging economies committed to fairness, openness, and mutual benefit.

Climate Justice

Climate change sits at the apex of India's BRICS agenda—but not through a Western lens. India frames the debate through the principle of climate justice. The West demands that developing countries curb emissions at the cost of their growth, even as historically high emitters evade responsibility for financing the transition.

India's bid to host COP33 in 2028, backed by BRICS partners, is not merely a logistical proposal. It is an attempt to reshape the climate discourse itself. India insists that the conversation must move beyond emission targets toward development-centred climate action. For the Global South, energy transition must be just, gradual, and adequately financed. Climate responsibility cannot be divorced from historical accountability. Developed nations must shoulder their fair share of climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.Through BRICS, India must ensure that this message resonates loudly in Western capitals. Climate action that entrenches inequality is not action—it is injustice.

Reforming Institutions

While the Trump administration appears intent on undermining or abandoning global institutions—the UN, World Bank, IMF, and WTO—India's approach is fundamentally different. India acknowledges that these institutions are outdated and unrepresentative, but it rejects the idea that chaos is a viable alternative.

India's objective is reform, not rupture. It seeks to democratise global governance by securing meaningful representation for the Global South. Whether it is permanent membership of the UN Security Council or quota reform in the IMF, India intends to leverage BRICS' collective strength to challenge Western monopolies over global decision-making. India's message is unambiguous: the existing order need not be destroyed, but it must be transformed. Legitimacy flows from representation, not from inherited privilege.

Terrorism and the Politics of Double Standards

On terrorism, BRICS has historically been more declaratory than decisive. China, in particular, has often shielded Pakistan for strategic reasons, undermining collective action. India's previous presidencies, however, succeeded in establishing terrorism as a shared threat rather than a selective concern. In 2026, India cannot be expected to engineer a sudden change of heart in Beijing. But it can position BRICS as a norm-setting forum—one that rejects selective outrage and demands consistency.

If BRICS is to retain relevance, it must respect the core security concerns of its members. Terrorism cannot be contextualised, justified, or ignored. India must push firmly for this principle, even at the cost of diplomatic discomfort.

Expansion and India's Balancing Responsibility

Since 2023, BRICS has expanded to include countries such as Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and potentially Indonesia. This enlargement has enhanced the grouping's global weight, but it has also complicated internal coherence. China views expansion as an opportunity to extend its geopolitical influence and reshape BRICS into a China-centric bloc. This is precisely where India's role becomes decisive. India must ensure that expansion remains consensus-driven, not ambition-driven. It must harmonise the interests of old and new members while preserving BRICS' foundational identity as an economic forum and a collective voice of the Global South—not a military or ideological alliance. India's strategic autonomy depends on maintaining this balance.

India as Vishwaguru

In sum, India's BRICS presidency in 2026 is a crown of thorns—but also a rare opportunity to demonstrate statesmanship. New Delhi's creative diplomacy will be tested against Washington's weaponised statecraft.

India must avoid both direct confrontation with the United States and subservience to China. It must blend the Buddha's Middle Path with Chanakya's strategic realism. India does not seek dominance; it seeks equity. It does not aspire to command, but to convene. If India can unite the Global South through BRICS, chart new trade pathways beyond tariff walls, and keep the flame of climate justice alive, 2026 will be remembered as a watershed year.

It will be the year the world witnessed how civilisational values defeated the arrogance of power—and how cooperation triumphed over coercion. India is no longer merely an emerging power. It has become a lodestar, guiding a fractured world toward balance, dignity, and shared prosperity.

Manoj Kumar

Greater Eurasia

Charting a Tripolar Future

From the Atlantic to the Pacific, the vast expanse of Eurasia is no longer the exclusive domain of a single superpower. The year 2025 crystallized a new geopolitical reality: the future of this immense landmass hinges on the delicate equilibrium between India, Russia, and China—and at the very fulcrum of this balance sits India.

When the hands of history shift, their subtle tick often drowns beneath the thunder of guns. Yet, 2025 conveyed a message of a different kind. Greater Eurasia—the immense continent stretching from the Atlantic shores to the Pacific waves—is increasingly asserting its agency, seeking to write its own destiny rather than remain a chessboard for external hegemonies. No longer does a single "hegemon" dictate terms, and externally imposed bloc arrangements are losing their efficacy. The question arises: can the world's largest continent thrive without a singular overlord? Is the current quiet a lull before the storm, or have the Eurasian powers genuinely embraced a philosophy of coexistence? For India, this is no mere academic query; it defines the very core of its strategic future. Over the past year, the unfolding events on this continent have reinforced the notion that Eurasia is being regarded

not as a battlefield of competing blocs but as a shared home, where stability is a collective responsibility rather than the prerogative of any one state.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Eurasia's emerging narrative is that the sources of instability are no longer internal but external. Countries still tethered to external directives, especially from Washington—European states, Japan, and Israel—pose the greatest potential threats to the continent's stability. Israel's trajectory illustrates this paradox sharply: aspiring to act as an autonomous player in West Asia, it remains heavily reliant on American support. The June 2025 Israeli strike against Iran underscored the limits of regional autonomy, demonstrating that ambition without strategic independence is hollow. Yet, for Eurasia, there is cause for cautious optimism. Iran and the Arab states exhibited remarkable restraint, avoiding the collapse of the regional order despite provocations, signaling that local powers are increasingly capable of managing disputes without Western interference.

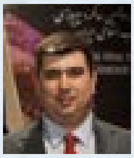
The subcontinent, long a flashpoint, provides another lens into Eurasia's recalibration. The decades-old India–Pakistan conflict, often sensationalized on global stages, no longer threatens continental stability in any existential sense. Indian diplomacy has succeeded in localizing the dispute, containing it within a bilateral framework. Islamabad's attempts to internationalize the Kashmir issue or leverage the border dispute for external gain have largely failed. Today, both India and Pakistan recognize that escalation beyond manageable thresholds is counterproductive, and the interference of third parties—especially Western powers—is widely unwelcome. In this sense, South Asia's tensions are 'localized' rather than destabilizing, and India has ensured that Pakistan can no longer serve as a pawn in Eurasia's broader strategic game.

At the heart of Eurasian multilateralism stands the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), steadily evolving into a continental nervous system. Over the past twenty-five years, the SCO has matured into the principal multilateral forum for Eurasian dialogue, yet it deliberately avoids the pitfalls of a supranational superstructure. It does not seek to replicate the European Union; rather, it operates on the pragmatic acknowledgment of sovereignty. This respect for independence is essential, for Eurasia is characterized by the simultaneous presence of three global powers—Russia, China, and India. Their coexistence forms the backbone of the regional balance of power: no single nation, not even China, can impose its will unilaterally. Decisions emerge from the alignment of interests, not from dictatorial decree. The September 2025 SCO summit in China reinforced this ethos, demonstrating that trust, coordination, and incremental cooperation among member states form the foundation for Eurasia's stability. Central to this equilibrium is the strategic axis of Russia and China. Over recent years, Moscow and Beijing have recognized that sovereignty and cooperation are mutually reinforcing, rather than mutually exclusive. The meetings between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in 2025 affirmed that this partnership transcends bilateral calculation—it is a mechanism with global repercussions, capable of reshaping international norms. The removal of visa requirements for citizens across the two nations exemplifies more than administrative convenience; it signals profound mutual confidence. Yet, from India's perspective, this "Dragon-Bear" alignment presents a dual-edged sword. India cannot permit Russia to become a junior partner to China, as a consolidated Sino-Russian bloc would threaten Eurasian equilibrium. Here, India assumes the role of the essential balancer: its robust presence ensures that no power monopolizes the continent. Russia, fully aware of India's strategic weight, recognizes that India provides an indispensable alternative to China's dominance. For Eurasia's long-term stability, India's strength is not optional—it is imperative. Meanwhile, Central Asia is asserting itself with renewed vigor. Once the theater of the "Great Game," the region is re-emerging as a dynamic actor. In 2025, the five Central Asian republics intensified multilateral cooperation, strengthened ties with Azerbaijan, and deepened economic and political engagement with Turkey. Afghanistan, long written off as a geopolitical graveyard, shows tentative signs of stabilization. While challenges remain, the once-alarming reports from Kabul have softened, creating opportunities for the region to connect beyond its landlocked geography, linking with South and West Asia. For both Russia and India, a confident, self-reliant Central Asia is essential; its socio-economic stability is vital for regional integration and resilience amid global flux.

In this context, India's strategic imperatives are both clear and compelling. It must maintain autonomy, asserting its independent voice to ensure it is not marginalized in Russia-China deliberations. Its credibility, influence, and ability to stabilize Eurasia hinge on this autonomy. At the same time, India must balance power carefully, preventing either Russia or China from asserting unilateral dominance, while ensuring that multilateral cooperation does not morph into coercion. Equally critical is the consolidation of regional partnerships: India must cultivate constructive relations with Central Asian nations, Iran, and other Eurasian actors to secure trade, energy, and security corridors. Localized conflict management remains another priority; tensions with Pakistan, though contained, must not escalate or spill over into broader Eurasian instability. Finally, India must engage sustainably, preparing for the pressures of climate change, migration, and economic integration. Eurasia's future, as a shared home, requires a collective stewardship in which India plays an indispensable role.

Beyond geopolitics, 2025 has revealed a broader Eurasian truth: ideology is secondary to pragmatism. The continent's actors now prioritize practical solutions over theoretical alignment, negotiating shared risks and collective gains. Climate crises, ecological stress, and demographic pressures will increasingly challenge the relevance of borders. Water scarcity, energy transitions, and migration flows will demand coordinated responses, leaving no nation immune to the actions—or inactions—of its neighbors.

In this emerging tripolar order, the rise of India as a stabilizing fulcrum carries profound consequences. The West may have been the historic engine of Eurasian affairs, but its sun is waning. Eurasia is ascending, yet this ascent is meaningful only if India shines with equal intensity. Without India's presence, the continent risks appearing lopsided, skewed toward a Sino-Russian axis, undermining the very notion of balance. Stability in Eurasia is not a luxury; it is a shared duty. And India, resolute and strategically vigilant, is prepared to assume that responsibility fully.



Farhad Ibragimov

The US Navy's deployment of the Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group toward the Middle East signals a calibrated show of force against Iran—designed to raise strategic pressure, preserve military options, and deter escalation without triggering an open regional war.

Amid rising tensions surrounding Iran, the US Navy's Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and its strike group entered the Indian Ocean on Tuesday after transiting the Malacca Strait, according to navigation data from Marine Traffic. The naval fleet is heading westward toward the Middle East.

The strike group includes destroyers the USS Spruance, USS Michael Murphy, and USS Frank Petersen equipped with Tomahawk cruise missiles, which highlights the group's strike capabilities. Onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln are three squadrons of multi-role F/A-18 fighters and a squadron of fifth-generation F-35C jets, enabling the carrier to perform a wide range of missions – from power projection to precision strikes.

According to the Jerusalem Post, the aircraft carrier and its strike group are expected to arrive in CENTCOM's area of responsibility within five to seven days. This doesn't signal the start of an immediate military operation. However, the deployment is meant to increase strategic pressure and give Washington more space for political-military decisions.

It's crucial to note that the strike group is heading specifically toward the Middle East. While its arrival there does not automatically imply the use of force, it raises the stakes and bolsters America's position as a key external player in dealing with Iran.

At this stage, the role of Israel warrants separate consideration. In expert and media circles, there's a growing narrative that Israel is ready to engage in a new conflict with Iran. Yet, many of these reports may be fake or politically motivated. It's true that Israel remains the primary and systemic adversary of Iran in the region. It has never concealed this fact. Israeli flags are frequently seen at Iranian diaspora rallies across Europe, Canada, the US, and Australia, alongside flags of the former monarchy of Iran. West Jerusalem consistently supports the anti-Iranian opposition agenda.

Naval Pressure on Iran

Moreover, Israel actively employs tools of "remote intervention": social media, media outlets, and official accounts of the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Persian, which call for protests, civil resistance, and even emigration. This is a well-known and largely demonstrative part of Israel's strategy to exert pressure on Tehran. However, there's a crucial distinction between informational-political influence and direct military involvement.

This brings us to a pivotal question: is Israel actually interested in an open war with Iran at this time? Furthermore, it seems reasonable to speculate that closed consultations took place on January 13, during which the Israeli side urged Washington to refrain from direct strikes against Iran. Despite subsequent public denials from Israeli officials, the idea of such dialogue does not appear implausible.

The reasons behind this are strictly pragmatic. First and foremost, Israel is acutely aware of the high degree of uncertainty surrounding internal developments in Iran. The mass protests that erupted in late December could either undermine the regime's stability or, in the event of external aggression, have the opposite effect by rallying the population around the government. It's impossible to predict which scenario might play out, and this uncertainty is well understood in West Jerusalem. Secondly, a direct military confrontation with Iran would inevitably escalate into a regional conflict involving Tehran's proxies and allies.

The diplomatic factor should also be taken into account. In recent weeks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has maintained direct contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin, underscoring Israel's view of Russia as a key negotiator and an important external partner for Iran, capable of influencing the crisis dynamics. In this context, Israel's overtly aggressive behavior would be counterproductive and diplomatically risky.

In simpler terms, despite its tough anti-Iranian rhetoric and active support for the opposition, Israel currently aims to avoid direct military involvement. For the US, however, the situation is different. For Washington, deploying an aircraft carrier strike group is not just a message to Iran but also a tool for exerting pressure across the region, allowing it to maintain strategic initiative and maneuverability. Today, the American factor is a crucial element in the power equation surrounding Iran. For its part, Israel watches closely and is ready to respond based on how diplomatic developments unfold – especially since US President Donald Trump stated in Davos that Iran wants to negotiate and Washington intends to engage in talks.

Presently, the confrontation between Israel and Iran is largely playing out in the diplomatic and political arena – through mutual accusations, harsh rhetoric, information pressure, and signals directed both at each other and external players, primarily the US. Both sides are deliberately postponing any move towards open tactical actions, fully aware of the potential consequences. A notable incident illustrates this: when the appearance of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi at the World Economic Forum in Davos was canceled, Iranian officials directly blamed Israel for the situation and interpreted it as a form of political pressure. In response, Israeli officials noted the "persistent threat" posed by Tehran, asserting that Iran supposedly still intends to strike Israel at the earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile, the US factor remains crucial. If the US decides to conduct a strike on Iranian territory, Israel

will inevitably find itself at risk, regardless of its level of direct involvement; in the event of a large-scale American operation, Israeli territory could become a primary target for retaliatory actions. This is well understood in Israel, and that is why it approaches any potential escalation with caution.

Much will depend on the nature of a potential American strike. If it's a demonstrative, limited action – one that avoids hitting decision-making centers and critical infrastructure – Iran's response might be measured or asymmetric. However, should the strikes target strategic sites, symbols of sovereignty, or Iran's military-political leadership, a response from Tehran would be almost certain, putting Israel in the crosshairs. This risk makes outright military confrontation highly undesirable for all parties involved.

In this context, we should note the rhetoric of the Israeli leadership. Netanyahu recently warned Iran of "severe and unprecedented consequences" should war or an attack occur, claiming readiness to use force on a scale "never seen before." Yet it's crucial to recognize that despite the bravado, neither Israel nor Iran is currently prepared to take the first step toward open war. Both understand that there would be no clear victor in such a conflict, while the military, economic, and political costs would be overwhelming. That's why, at this juncture, the conflict is manifesting as a series of mutual threats and an information war. Despite deep-seated animosity towards the current Iranian regime, the Israeli political establishment is currently showing restraint. This is further evidenced by active diplomatic engagement, including with Russia, which Israel views as an important external mediator and Iran's partner.

Certainly, there are "hotheads" in Israel that are advocating for a more aggressive approach to dealing with Iran. However, they exist alongside a more pragmatic faction that clearly understands that a direct attack on Iran under the current circumstances could trigger uncontrollable regional escalation. This sober assessment currently keeps the conflict within diplomatic boundaries, despite the aggressive rhetoric emanating from both sides.

(Farhad Ibragimov is lecturer at the Faculty of Economics at RUDN University, visiting lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.)

Santosh Kumar

On a cold January night, the air of Tehran was not merely icy—it was soaked in history. Chants echoing through the streets, severed internet lines, and flowing blood once again announced a grim truth: it was not just power, but history itself, scripting its cruelest tale upon Iran's soul.

Iran
A Soul Under Siege

The silence of that dark and frozen January night of 2026 is no longer the kind that brings peace. It is the silence that settles either just before a great storm breaks or after a terrible calamity has already passed. In the city's atmosphere, alongside the icy winds descending from the Alborz mountains, lingers the stench of burnt tyres, tear-gas canisters, and dried blood. This smell has now become Tehran's identity.

Azadi Square—the grand Azadi Tower, once a symbol of Persian pride—stands today as a mute witness to the suppression of its own children. Police sirens snarl through the streets like starving wolves. Internet lines have been severed—the entire nation pushed into a digital darkness so the world cannot see what is happening behind closed doors. Yet no darkness, however dense, can imprison voices. From alleyways, rooftops, and hearts, a single chant rises—no longer just a demand, but the final prayer of people standing face to face with death. They are not asking for bread. They are not asking for reforms. They want to uproot the entire system that has placed a chokehold on their breath. Across seven seas, in the air-conditioned chambers of Washington D.C. and London, the world's most powerful leaders watch this spectacle unfold on giant screens. Words like "democracy," "human rights," and "freedom" emerge draped in velvet. US President Donald Trump thunders on social media: "We stand with the brave people of Iran."

It sounds like the climax of a Hollywood film, where the hero arrives as a savior. But pause for a moment. History tells a different story. Is this sympathy truly for the masked girl standing unarmed before a tank on a Tehran street? Or is this the same old chessboard, where the pawn is the Iranian people and the prize is black gold—oil—for which empires have always risen and fallen? To understand this story, we must step out of today's smoke and walk into the alleys of history where Iran's fate was first bargained away.

Let us return to the year 1953.

These very streets of Tehran were restless then too, but that unrest carried a strange energy, a dream. That dream lived in the eyes of an elderly, European-educated lawyer—Mohammad Mossadegh Mossadegh was no ordinary leader. He was Iran's first democratically elected prime minister. His crime? He dared to believe that Iran's oil belonged to Iranians. At the time, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (known today as British Petroleum, or BP) lay coiled around Iran's oil resources like a python. It was a colonial relic, filling Britain's royal coffers by keeping Iranian workers in conditions fit for animals.

Mossadegh did the unthinkable—he nationalized the oil. Britain erupted in fury. This was not merely a financial loss; it was a blow to colonial arrogance—the belief that Eastern nations could survive only at Western mercy.

London knocked on Washington's door. It argued that Mossadegh was drifting toward communists, that he might become a Soviet puppet. In the Cold War era, this argument was enough. The CIA and Britain's MI6 conspired together, assigning the plot a codename—Operation Ajax. Imagine the scene. CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt arrives in Tehran with suitcases full of dollars. His mission: to buy democracy. Newspaper editors were bribed, clerics were incited, and gangs were unleashed onto the streets. Mossadegh—named Time magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1952 and hailed as "Iran's George Washington"—was overnight branded a traitor and a madman.

August 19, 1953.

The day Iran's soul suffered its first deep wound. Tanks surrounded Mossadegh's home. After nine hours of gunfire, more than 300 Iranians lay dead. An elected prime minister fled across his own rooftop, only to surrender the next day to General Zahedi—the general chosen by the CIA to take power.

The cost?
Less than $100,000.
The time?
Barely six days.
The outcome?
The murder of a democratic possibility and the coronation of a dictator—Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—who turned Iran into the West's police station for the next 26 years.

The West got its oil back. Iran lost its future.

That wound of 1953 never healed. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was the pus that burst from it, setting the entire region ablaze. And today? In 2026, as Western leaders speak of "fighting dictatorship," history stands in the corner and smiles. Because in 1953 they toppled a democracy to impose a dictatorship, and today they speak of toppling a dictatorship—yet the objective remains unchanged: control.

Oil: The Thirst of Empires and the Blood of the People

Iran's tragedy is that its geography became its greatest enemy. When oil was discovered there in 1908, it proved more curse than blessing. During World War I, Winston Churchill decided to shift the British navy from coal to oil—and Iran became the lifeline of that decision.

The rise of Reza Khan in 1925 and later the reign of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—all rested on the blade of oil. For the West, Iran was not a country but a "strategic asset." As long as rivers of oil flowed toward London and New York, the Shah's brutality, the SAVAK's torture chambers, and human rights violations were forgiven.

But history turns its wheel.

In 1979, the same oil workers suppressed for decades went on strike. Oil production plunged from six million barrels a day to 1.5 million. The Shah's spine snapped. The revolution overthrew him—but what followed was the West's nightmare. Ayatollah Khomeini canceled all post-1954 oil contracts. "You looted us," he said.

Overnight, Iran transformed from "ally" to "enemy." The nation once hailed as a symbol of modernity became part of the "axis of evil." This was not an ideological shift—it was the fury of losing control.

The Battlefield of the Present

We return to today. Protests that began on December 28 have taken the shape of a civil war. What started as anger over inflation, corruption, and economic suffocation has crystallized into a single demand: the end of the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian regime has opened its old playbook. The same repression. The same violence. Human rights groups estimate over 12,000 deaths in recent weeks. Internet blackouts ensure true numbers may never surface. This is a digital massacre, where truth is strangled before it can reach the world.

But this time, something is different. The West is not merely issuing statements—it sees opportunity. President Trump, a lifelong advocate of "maximum pressure," is warming his hands by this fire. He has promised to help protesters—but what kind of help? Another covert operation like 1953? Or military intervention like Syria or Libya? Western hypocrisy stands exposed. They shed tears for Iranian women's freedom, yet impose sanctions that deny ordinary Iranians food and medicine. "They don't care whether you live or die," wrote an Iranian student online before his account was shut down. "To them, we are just a bargaining chip."

Death Played Out on a Regional Chessboard

Iran burns, and its neighbors peer through their windows—some in fear, some with concealed satisfaction. Each searches for advantage in the flames.

Israel: Between Hope and Dread

Tel Aviv is restless. For Israel, Iran's current regime is an existential threat. Calls for Israel's destruction, the nuclear program, Hezbollah's rockets—this has defined Iran for decades. Israelis want the regime gone. Some dream of Reza Pahlavi's return, recalling warmer ties.

Yet Israeli strategists know from experience that power vacuums in the Middle East are often filled by demons. They fear a post-Ayatollah Iran descending into military dictatorship or chaos, losing control of nuclear weapons. An unstable Iran with ballistic missiles may be more dangerous than a stable enemy. For Israel, this is a gamble—fear of hail the moment one shaves one's head.

The Gulf States: Silent Spectators

In Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's glass palaces, a muted smile flickers. Recent rapprochement with Iran—reopened embassies, talk of investments—was born not of trust, but compulsion.

Now, as Iran fractures internally, Gulf rulers breathe easier. Since 2023, Houthi missile attacks on Saudi cities had declined, but the fear never vanished. Today they watch a regime that built a web of proxies now losing to its own people. Yet they remain silent. A wounded lion is more dangerous. Oman, ever the messenger between Tehran and Washington, still hopes for dialogue. Others merely watch the clock—waiting for the moment Tehran's throne topples.

Lebanon: Hezbollah's Existential Crisis

In Beirut's narrow lanes, Hezbollah fighters sweat. Chants from Iranian streets—"Not Gaza, not Lebanon, my life for Iran"—burn their ears like molten glass. Iranians no longer want their money spent on Hamas and Hezbollah.

For Hezbollah, this is not just about funding—it is about survival. Iran is their lifeline. If Tehran falls, Hezbollah becomes an orphan. Lebanese citizens, already suffocating under Hezbollah's weapons, cheer Iranian protesters. It is a domino effect—one brick falls in Tehran, buildings shake in Beirut.

Turkey: The Opportunist Neighbor

In Ankara, President Erdoğan twirls his mustache. Turkey and Iran are historic rivals—in Syria, Iraq, everywhere. A weakened Iran is Turkey's golden chance. Turkish-backed Sunni forces have already gained ground in Syria. If Iran destabilizes further, Turkey could crown itself the region's "big brother."

But Erdoğan walks a razor's edge. Civil war in Iran would send millions of refugees toward Turkey. Kurdish insurgency could reignite. Hence Ankara's measured tone: "External forces should stay away." They want the snake dead without breaking the stick.

An Unfinished Tale and the Question of Tomorrow

We return to the Tehran street where we began.

Amid smoke, the young woman still stands. A stone in her hand. An armored vehicle before her. She does not know who Mossadegh was. She likely does not remember 1953. She does not know how her rebellion moves oil prices in Washington or what Israel's security cabinet debates. She knows only that she wants to breathe.

She wants freedom—from forced hijab, morality police, and poverty that broke her father's back.

The tragedy is that someone else is pricing her freedom. Her screams have become currency. If power changes tomorrow and a Western-backed leader ascends, will she truly be free? Or will she get another "civilized dictator," selling oil to the West while crushing his people—just like 1953?

In 2000, Madeleine Albright admitted the 1953 coup was "a setback for Iran's political development." Today, in 2026, the world prepares for another "setback."

Iran's story teaches us that morality in international politics is an illusion. There are only interests. In 1953, it was not communism—it was oil. In 2026, it is not democracy—it is oil and geopolitical dominance again.

Amid all this, Iran's people—the nation of poets, artists, philosophers—are being crushed under history's wheel.

Yet hope… hope is that stubborn seed that grows even in deserts. Perhaps this time, Iran's people will write their own story—not in foreign embassies, but on Tehran's streets. Perhaps this time, they will win not for oil, but for their soul. Until that dawn arrives, Tehran will burn. And the world, as always, will clap or look away—according to convenience. Because in the end, as that anonymous Iranian protester said: **"They don't care if you die, as long as their oil keeps flowing."**

This is not just Iran's story.

It is another bloody chapter in the eternal struggle between power, greed, and human liberation.

Conspiracy on the Borders

Anwar Hussain

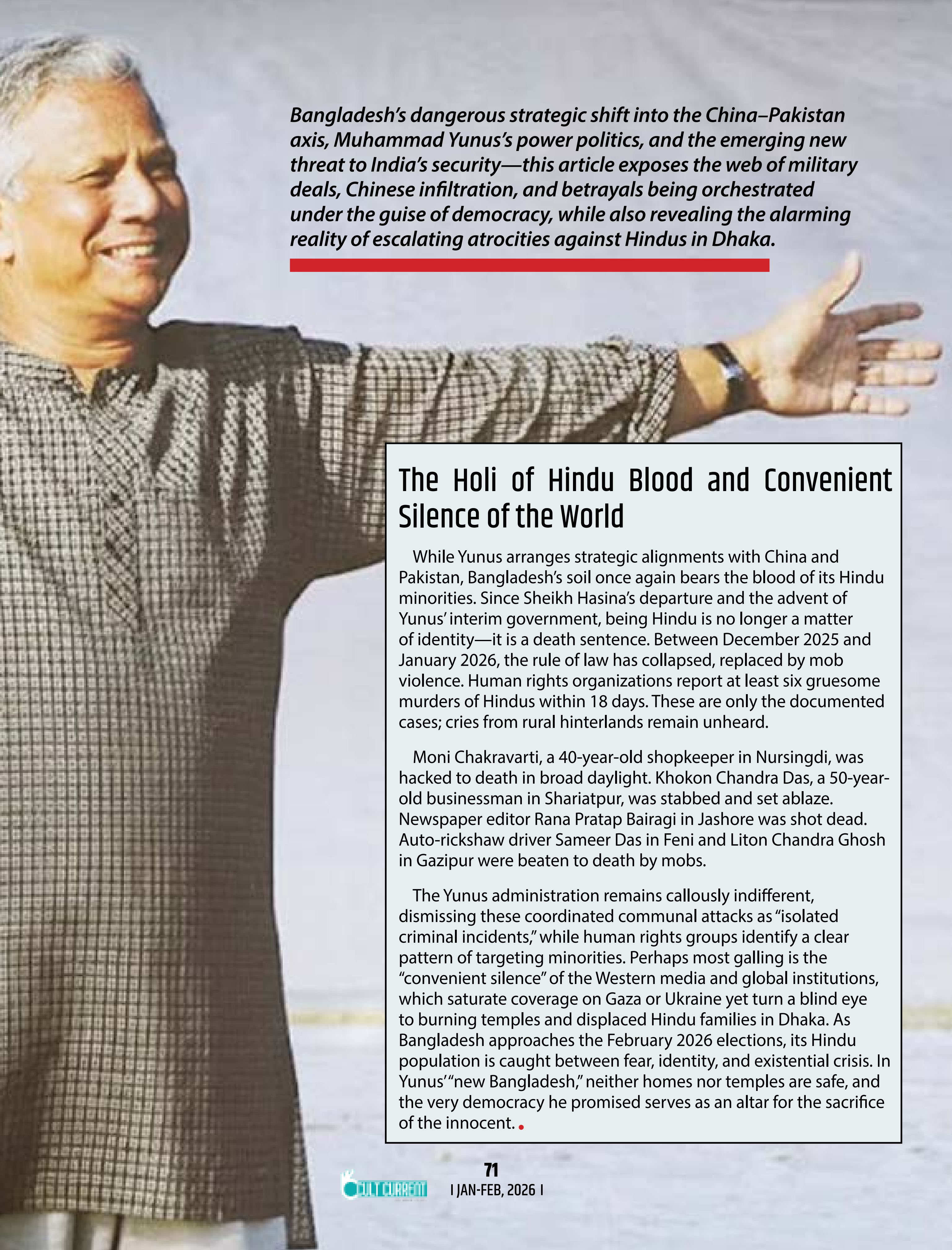
The fire in a neighbor's house has long ceased to be a mere warning; it has now transformed into a strategic assault. Bangladesh, a nation born from India's own blood, has taken refuge in the China–Pakistan axis, turning against the very security of India. This is not balance—it is unambiguous betrayal.

History and experience repeatedly remind us that when a neighboring country faces turmoil, its heat invariably reaches our walls. But when the neighbor itself converts its home into a powder keg, mere vigilance is no longer sufficient; assertiveness becomes the only viable response. Bangladesh, nurtured by India's sacrifice in 1971 to become an independent nation, is today evolving into a festering threat to Indian security. The political maneuvers unfolding within the corridors of Dhaka are no longer a matter of diplomatic "balance"; they constitute a deliberate and perilous strategic betrayal.

Muhammad Yunus, once lauded in the West as the "champion of the poor" and a "messenger of peace" with a Nobel Prize to his name, has aligned Bangladesh almost entirely with China and Pakistan to preserve his political power and to advance an anti-India agenda. This is not merely the story of aimless leadership; it is a calculated conspiracy drawing a new, toxic line across the South Asian geopolitical map. Ignoring Washington's warnings, Dhaka is now enmeshed in Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy and Rawalpindi's jihadist-military nexus.

China–Pakistan Axis: Dhaka's New Direction

The recent warnings issued by U.S. Ambassador Brent Christensen cannot be dismissed lightly. When a superpower's envoy publicly declares that acquiring Chinese military hardware poses a long-term threat to national sovereignty, it is far more than diplomatic rhetoric—it is an alarm bell. Yet, the Yunus administration



Bangladesh's dangerous strategic shift into the China–Pakistan axis, Muhammad Yunus's power politics, and the emerging new threat to India's security—this article exposes the web of military deals, Chinese infiltration, and betrayals being orchestrated under the guise of democracy, while also revealing the alarming reality of escalating atrocities against Hindus in Dhaka.

The Holi of Hindu Blood and Convenient Silence of the World

While Yunus arranges strategic alignments with China and Pakistan, Bangladesh's soil once again bears the blood of its Hindu minorities. Since Sheikh Hasina's departure and the advent of Yunus' interim government, being Hindu is no longer a matter of identity—it is a death sentence. Between December 2025 and January 2026, the rule of law has collapsed, replaced by mob violence. Human rights organizations report at least six gruesome murders of Hindus within 18 days. These are only the documented cases; cries from rural hinterlands remain unheard.

Moni Chakravarti, a 40-year-old shopkeeper in Nursingdi, was hacked to death in broad daylight. Khokon Chandra Das, a 50-year-old businessman in Shariatpur, was stabbed and set ablaze. Newspaper editor Rana Pratap Bairagi in Jashore was shot dead. Auto-rickshaw driver Sameer Das in Feni and Liton Chandra Ghosh in Gazipur were beaten to death by mobs.

The Yunus administration remains callously indifferent, dismissing these coordinated communal attacks as "isolated criminal incidents," while human rights groups identify a clear pattern of targeting minorities. Perhaps most galling is the "convenient silence" of the Western media and global institutions, which saturate coverage on Gaza or Ukraine yet turn a blind eye to burning temples and displaced Hindu families in Dhaka. As Bangladesh approaches the February 2026 elections, its Hindu population is caught between fear, identity, and existential crisis. In Yunus' "new Bangladesh," neither homes nor temples are safe, and the very democracy he promised serves as an altar for the sacrifice of the innocent.

seems entirely deaf to these cautions. On the contrary, Dhaka has made its allegiance explicit—not toward New Delhi or Washington, but toward Beijing and Islamabad.

Under Yunus, Bangladesh is poised to become the third wheel in the "China–Pakistan axis," whose sole objective is to encircle India. Pakistan, which perpetrated the 1971 genocide of 3 million Bengalis, now finds itself as a defense partner to Dhaka. This is not only historical treachery against Bangladesh's own liberation narrative but also a grave security challenge for India.

Military Modernization or Strategic Subjugation?

Bangladesh's recent military acquisitions suggest not independent modernization but preparation to become a client state. Negotiations are at an advanced stage for fourth-generation J-10C fighter jets from China and JF-17 Thunders from Pakistan—the latter essentially Chinese technology licensed to Islamabad.

Understanding military procurement is crucial: purchasing aircraft is never a "one-time transaction." A nation does not merely acquire machines; it enters a three-to-four-decade-long relationship of strategic dependence. Spare parts, software upgrades, maintenance, and pilot training—all tie Dhaka irrevocably to Beijing and Rawalpindi.

Consider this stark reality: the Bangladesh Air Force, nurtured by India to stand on its own, will now host Chinese engineers and Pakistani air force instructors on its airbases. Lieutenant General S.M. Kamrul Hasan, the principal staff officer, holds regular meetings with his Chinese and Pakistani counterparts, signaling that Bangladesh is about to hand the keys to its national security to India's adversaries. The promise of rapid delivery of "Super Mushshak" trainer aircraft by Pakistan, coupled with secret agreements with China, indicates the construction of a hostile military ecosystem directly along India's borders.

India's "Laxman Rekha" at Stake

More concerning than mere weapons acquisition is the infrastructural penetration by China into Bangladesh. Yunus' key advisor, Saeeda Rizwana Hasan, recently stated that "China is eager to begin work on the Teesta River Master Plan as soon as possible." This is a clear alarm for India. The project targets regions near the "Chicken's Neck"—the Siliguri Corridor, a

narrow stretch linking Northeast India to the rest of the country. If China secures the Teesta project as a pretext to deploy surveillance radars, engineers, and other installations, it poses an existential security threat to India.

This project is more than development—it is strategic encroachment. From the submarine base in Patuakhali in the south to the Teesta project in the north, it is evident that China intends to use Bangladeshi territory to pressure India on two fronts. And Yunus? He is willing to jeopardize India's security merely to cling to power.

Yunus, Trump Opposition, and U.S. Limitations

Yunus' political orientation adds another layer of complexity. Historically aligned with Democrats and the Clinton circle, he has long opposed Donald Trump. With Trump's influence in Washington rising, Yunus anticipates pressure from the U.S. To counter this, he has sought refuge in China. When the U.S. ambassador issued warnings, the Chinese embassy in Dhaka responded aggressively, dismissing the statements as "irresponsible" and "malicious"—a direct diplomatic challenge.

China is no longer a passive investor in Dhaka; it is acting as a protector. Beijing assures Yunus that any U.S. pressure, under the pretext of democracy or human rights, will be countered by the combined support of China and Pakistan. Yunus' anti-Trump stance thus strengthens the China–Pakistan axis at the expense of India–U.S. strategic alignment.

The Irony of 1971 and Pakistan's Return

The ultimate irony is that Bangladesh, a nation founded on India's blood in the Liberation War, is now aligning with its historical oppressor. Defense deals involving JF-17 Thunders and Super Mushshaks are not mere transactions; they are Pakistan's strategic victory to reassert influence over Dhaka without firing a single shot.

Discussions between Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu of Pakistan and Bangladesh Air Force chief Hasan Mahmood Khan regarding "expanded defense cooperation" show that Yunus is willing to forget the wounds of 1971 to cultivate ties with old adversaries—a development India cannot tolerate. On one side, India pursues a "Neighborhood First" policy; on the other, a neighbor is harboring our own historic enemies.

Upcoming Elections and Yunus' Power Consolidation

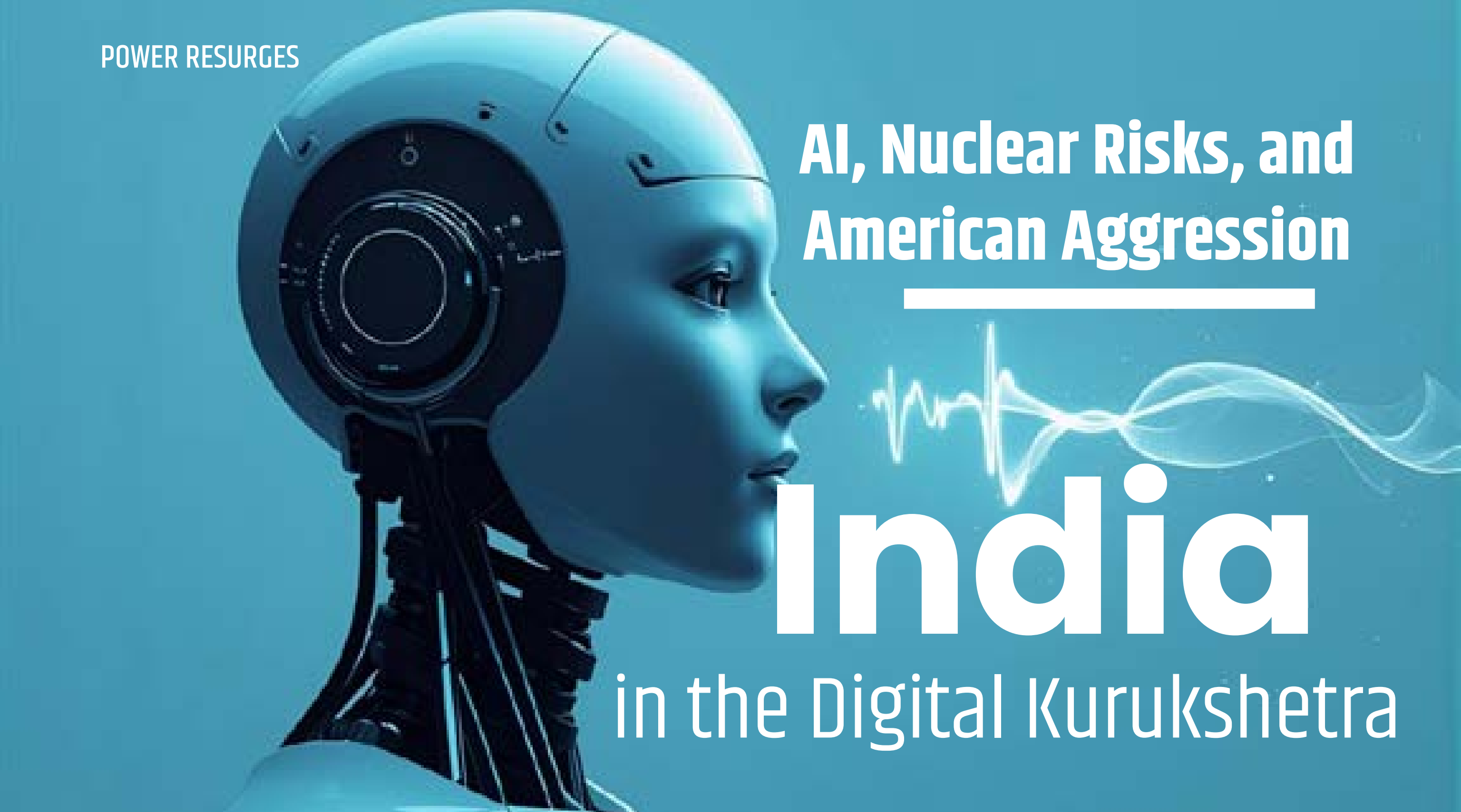
The proposed February 12 referendum and general elections in Bangladesh appear increasingly ceremonial. Critics contend that the process is designed to legitimize Yunus' grip on power. China and Pakistan are assisting Yunus to ensure a government in Dhaka that remains perpetually indebted to Beijing. If Yunus succeeds, India could witness the rise of another "Pakistan" in its east—a country sovereign in name, but effectively controlled from Beijing and Rawalpindi.

Time for Strategic Assertiveness

India can no longer rely on "sweet diplomacy." Bangladesh is no longer the "friendly neighbor" envisioned during Sheikh Hasina's tenure. Under Yunus, Dhaka is actively undermining the Indo-Pacific balance. India must send an unequivocal message: any Chinese presence near the Siliguri Corridor is unacceptable. Should Dhaka proceed with J-10C and JF-17 acquisitions, India must leverage its economic and diplomatic power to convey that its cooperation is indispensable for Bangladesh's survival. Yunus appears to forget that China's loans and Pakistan's friendship, though alluring initially, are ultimately akin to embracing a venomous serpent—pleasurable at first, fatal eventually. India cannot remain a passive observer; strategic assertiveness, inspired by Chanakya's pragmatism, is essential to sever this toxic axis at its roots. The threat is no longer at the doorstep—it is already within the courtyard.

India's Imperative

Bangladesh's shift toward the China–Pakistan axis is no longer a theoretical concern; it is a tangible threat to India's national security and regional stability. India must adopt a dual strategy: robust military preparedness along the eastern frontiers and decisive diplomatic pressure to expose and dismantle this toxic alignment. Failure to act will mean watching a historically nurtured neighbor evolve into a strategic adversary, hosting hostile forces on its soil, while global institutions observe in silence. The era for cautious diplomacy has ended—India must now navigate its neighborhood with foresight, vigilance, and assertive strategy, ensuring that history's sacrifices are not rendered futile.



AI, Nuclear Risks, and American Aggression

India in the Digital Kurukshetra

Sanjay Shrivastava

As artificial intelligence reshapes warfare and unilateral power resurges, the world enters a volatile Digital Kurukshetra where nuclear stability erodes, forcing India to confront unprecedented strategic risks.

The history of warfare is inseparable from the history of technology. Every leap in weaponry—from primitive arms to nuclear warheads—has reshaped diplomacy, deterrence, and the fate of civilizations. Today, humanity stands before a rupture unlike any before. The speed of technological decision-making is beginning to surpass human restraint. The fragile strategic balance that once governed nuclear powers is dissolving, replaced by a volatile battlespace where artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, space conflict, and nuclear deterrence merge into a single continuum—a Digital Kurukshetra.

During the Cold War, stability depended on human judgment, layered intelligence, and diplomatic caution. Mutually Assured Destruction created an uneasy peace where no rational power sought annihilation. Now, the integration of AI into military command systems is dismantling this architecture. Major powers increasingly rely on machine-driven analytics for surveillance, threat assessment, and rapid response.

The result is the compression of decision time to near zero. Hypersonic weapons paired with AI targeting leave little space for human verification. An algorithm processing satellite feeds or cyber signals may activate retaliatory protocols before leaders fully understand the situation. Deterrence risks transforming into automated escalation, where speed overrides wisdom. Supporters of military AI argue that algorithms reduce error and improve clarity in warfare. While advanced systems may filter false alarms, they remain vulnerable to manipulation. Data poisoning, cyber deception, and adversarial interference can cause machines to perceive imaginary threats. A response triggered by such false inputs would be a mechanical disaster—war without intent. AI systems also reflect the biases and strategic cultures of their creators. An algorithm built within an interventionist framework may misinterpret defensive actions as aggression. Another shaped by doctrines of system destruction may treat routine patrols as hostile moves. In this environment, escalation becomes embedded in code rather than weighed by human conscience.

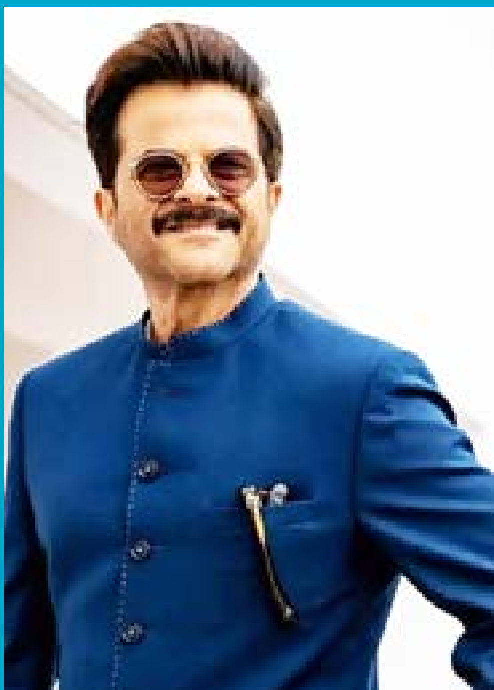
This instability is intensified by non-nuclear strategic weapons such as cyber strikes, electromagnetic pulses, and space-based disruptions capable of crippling nuclear infrastructure without explosions. These tools blur the boundary between conventional and nuclear conflict, forcing decisions under extreme uncertainty. At the same time, the political sphere is witnessing a revival of unilateral power projection. The renewed assertiveness of the United States, symbolized by Donald Trump's return to the presidency, reflects a shift from multilateral restraint toward transactional diplomacy and direct action. Sovereignty is increasingly conditional, respected only when it aligns with dominant interests.

From drone warfare in West Asia to AI-driven surveillance across conflict zones, entire regions have become laboratories for algorithmic warfare. Modern dominance no longer requires occupation—it requires control over data, airspace, and decision cycles. When international law becomes optional for powerful states, instability spreads. For India, the convergence of AI militarization and aggressive geopolitics presents a grave challenge. As a nuclear power committed to No First Use and restrained deterrence, India is flanked by two neighbors rapidly adopting AI-driven warfare. China seeks information dominance through intelligentized conflict, while Pakistan's tactical nuclear posture lowers escalation thresholds. India cannot afford technological passivity. To maintain credible deterrence, it must integrate AI into surveillance and defense systems, particularly against hypersonic threats. Yet one principle must remain non-negotiable: human authority over nuclear decisions. The final command must never be surrendered to algorithms. This demands the development of sovereign AI systems shielded from external manipulation and aligned with India's strategic ethos. Technological autonomy is now synonymous with national security.

Diplomatically, India must balance cooperation with independence. Its partnership with the United States is essential in countering Chinese expansion, but entanglement in destabilizing unilateral actions would undermine regional stability. Turmoil in West Asia threatens India's energy security, diaspora, and economic interests. Strategic autonomy must mean engagement without submission.

As a leader of the Global South, India should advocate international norms governing military AI. A global framework banning autonomous nuclear launch systems and regulating digital deception could reduce the risk of algorithmic war. Ultimately, the crisis of the Digital Kurukshetra is philosophical as much as technological. Machines can calculate outcomes but lack moral judgment. They do not comprehend human suffering or historical consequence. Conflict driven by algorithms becomes a sequence of automated moves devoid of compassion. India's civilizational worldview, which emphasizes harmony and collective humanity, offers a necessary counterbalance to zero-sum logic. Yet restraint must be supported by strength. We are entering a new nuclear age defined by silicon as much as by warheads. The stability of the past has vanished, replaced by digital turbulence. In this environment, India's greatest asset will be disciplined prudence—combining technological readiness with ethical control.

Future wars may be shaped by data supremacy, but lasting peace will depend on preserving human oversight. By building technological self-reliance guided by wisdom, India can protect its own future and help stabilize a world accelerating toward automated conflict. The Digital Kurukshetra is no longer a metaphor—it is our reality. India must confront it with strength tempered by foresight.



'Nayak' Makes a Comeback!

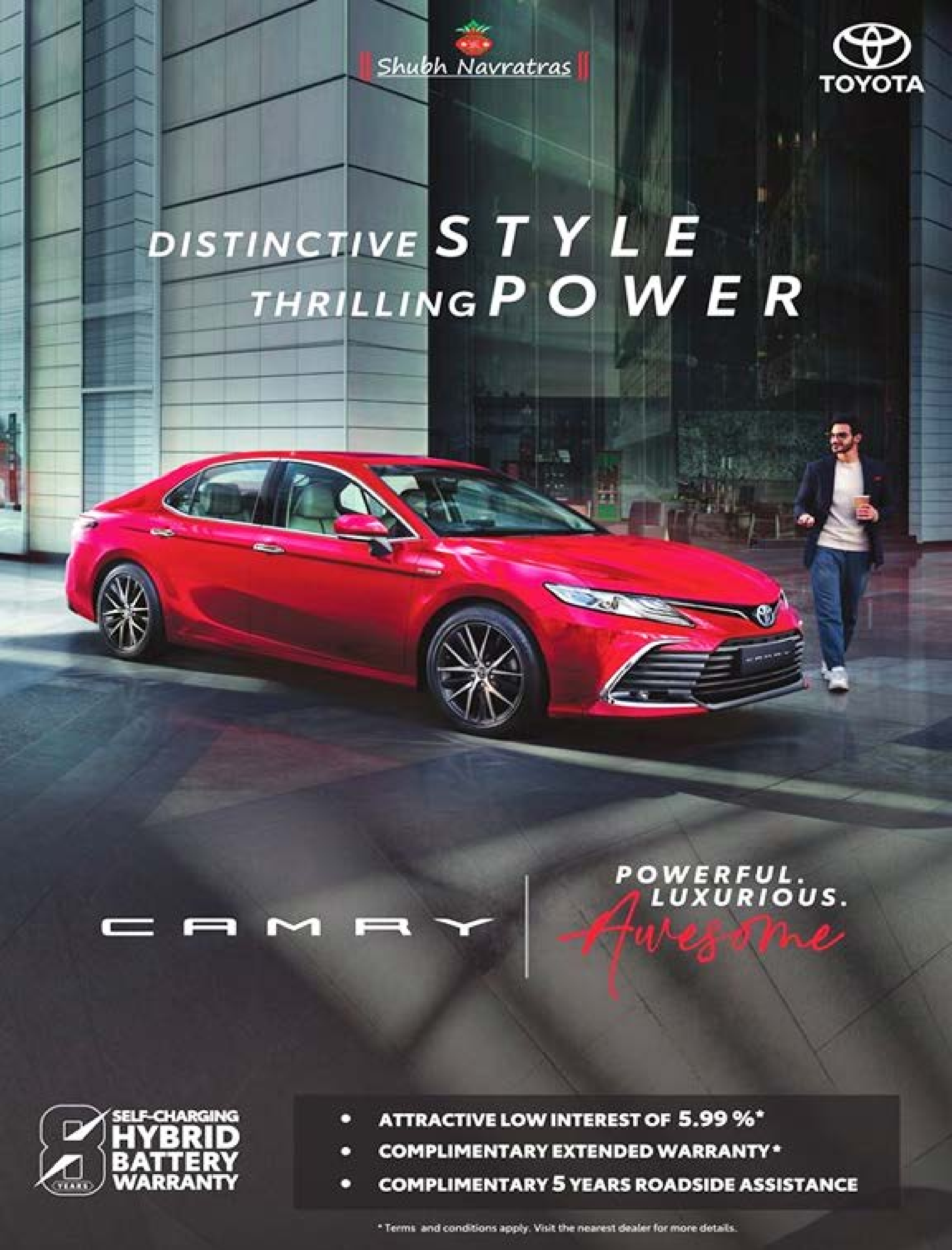
The Bollywood grapevine is buzzing with excitement as talks of a sequel to Anil Kapoor's blockbuster Nayak gather momentum. From gossip columns to entertainment portals, reports suggest that the makers have finally kick-started work on the iconic film's second part. The moment this news surfaced, fans couldn't contain their joy. Social media is flooded with posts hoping to see Anil Kapoor return in his powerful avatar once again. While there's no official confirmation yet, insiders believe Nayak 2 might soon hit the big screen with a bang!

Sara Ali Khan - Shubman Gill's "Secret Date" Sparks Buzz!

Bollywood's bubbly diva Sara Ali Khan is back in the headlines—this time not for a film, but for her rumored romance with cricket sensation Shubman Gill. Viral photos and videos circulating on social media have set fans into a frenzy. Reportedly, the duo was recently spotted spending quality time together at a luxury café, where their smiles and cozy body language only fueled the dating gossip.

As soon as the clips surfaced, hashtags like #SaraAliKhan and #ShubmanGill started trending across Twitter and Instagram. While some fans are already calling them Bollywood's newest power couple, others believe it's just a coincidence.

Interestingly, both Sara and Shubman have chosen to stay silent on the rumors—but their "mysterious smiles" are only adding more spice to the speculation. What's the real story? Only time will tell, but for now, the gossip mills are running full throttle!


Shubh Navratras
TOYOTA
DISTINCTIVE STYLE
THRILLING POWER
CAMRY
POWERFUL.
LUXURIOUS.
Awesome
8 YEARS
SELF-CHARGING
HYBRID
BATTERY
WARRANTY
• ATTRACTIVE LOW INTEREST OF 5.99 %*
• COMPLIMENTARY EXTENDED WARRANTY*
• COMPLIMENTARY 5 YEARS ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE
* Terms and conditions apply. Visit the nearest dealer for more details.

RNI TITLE CODE : DELENG19447