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# Breaking the deadlock

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has persisted for over three years, causing immense devastation and reshaping global geopolitics. Recent reports indicate that US President Donald Trump has engaged in discussions with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, aiming to broker a deal that could potentially end the war. This development has sparked intense debate: Can Trump's diplomatic efforts genuinely bring peace, or is this yet another manoeuvre in the high-stakes political chessboard?

Trump's communication with Putin, along with upcoming meetings between Russian officials, the United States, and Saudi Arabia, suggests a renewed push for negotiations. While these interactions have raised hopes, the fundamental question remains: What will such an agreement entail? Previous diplomatic attempts in the early stages of the war failed to yield a sustainable resolution, and scepticism looms over whether this round of discussions will be any different.

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A major point of contention in this situation is Trump's direct involvement. Unlike the Biden administration, which has worked relentlessly to isolate Russia diplomatically, Trump appears more willing to engage with Moscow. His recent phone call with Putin and intentions to meet in Saudi Arabia signal a departure from the current US foreign policy strategy. Notably, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has

indicated that Trump and Russian officials have not been invited to the upcoming discussions, raising concerns about transparency and legitimacy.

European nations, which have contributed nearly \$140 billion in aid to Ukraine, also find themselves in an uncertain position. If Trump and Putin proceed without consulting European allies, it could undermine NATO's strategic unity and jeopardise the collective response to Russian aggression.

One of the thorniest issues in these negotiations is territorial sovereignty. Since the war began, Russia has claimed control over approximately 20% of Ukraine, including four additional regions that remain contested. Despite Russia's firm grip on occupied territories, Ukraine continues to resist any settlement that would legitimise these territorial gains.

A potential agreement could involve a phased resolution of these disputes over the next decade, allowing for a structured diplomatic framework. However, given Russia's history of territorial ambition, Ukraine remains wary of any deal that does not guarantee the full restoration of its borders.

Beyond territorial concerns, Ukraine's security remains paramount. Kyiv has long viewed NATO membership as a vital safeguard against Russian aggression, while Moscow perceives Ukraine's NATO ambitions as an existential threat. Trump's diplomatic approach suggests that he may explore alternative security guarantees, such as Ukraine joining the European Union while forgoing NATO membership. This compromise was reportedly discussed in the now-defunct 2022 peace talks and could resurface in current negotiations.

While this solution might appease Russia in the short term, it does little to address Ukraine's security needs. Without NATO protection, Ukraine would remain vulnerable to future military incursions, making any peace deal inherently unstable.

A sustainable peace agreement must include credible security guarantees for Ukraine. Presently, around 200,000 foreign troops are deployed in Ukraine to deter further Russian advances. However, Western nations are unlikely to sustain such a large military presence indefinitely.

Trump's role in these talks will be scrutinised heavily. If his engagement brings about a legitimate and lasting peace, it could reshape global geopolitics in unprecedented ways. If not, it risks becoming yet another failed attempt to end a war that has already cost thousands of lives and destabilised an entire region. The world watches as history unfolds—whether for better or worse remains to be seen.

comment



AAKAR PATEL

# AI: A contest between America & Asia

Last month, on January 22, three companies and President Donald Trump announced a \$500-billion project to build data centres and electricity plants and continue American dominance in artificial intelligence. Five days later, a Chinese AI chatbot named DeepSeek became the number one download on the applications stores. It has remained popular because it is excellent, as those who have used it know.

DeepSeek's success was unexpected because for several years now, US presidents have restricted China's access to the most sophisticated computer chips. While the skills of the Chinese computer scientists were acknowledged, it was felt that denial of access to the best hardware would keep them trailing.

Someone likened the emergence of DeepSeek as artificial intelligence's 'Sputnik moment', a reference to the space race. To understand whether this is a similar contest, this time between America and China instead of America and the Soviets, let's first take a look at the space race.

Sputnik went into orbit in 1957, after a decade in which German scientists captured by Russians and Americans continued their work on rocket propulsion. The most important of these captured Germans was a man named Wehrner Von Braun, who came to the Americans.

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Despite this lead, the Soviets were able to go into orbit under the leadership of a talented designer named Sergei Korolev, whose essential design is still used by Russian rockets in 2025.

After Sputnik began transmitting signals to earth round the clock, the Americans devoted an enormous amount

of resources to try and catch up. The Russians remained ahead for years however and put the first animal in orbit (1957), first human in orbit (Yuri Gagarin in 1961), first probe to Mars (1962), first woman in space (1963), first space walk (1965), first soft landing on the moon (1966) and even sent animals to orbit the moon and return safely in 1966.

However, the Americans came back with the most spectacular achievement of them all and that was the human landings on the moon in 1969. The budget of NASA, the US space administration body was at this time 4% of the total federal government's expenditure. After the Americans sent a few more crews to the moon, the public's interest waned. NASA's budget was cut and the enormous rocket developed by Von Braun, the Saturn V, was replaced by the space shuttle, which was less capable. The Soviets gave up on attempting to land on the moon after their own large rocket, the N1, failed and crashed a few times.

This was still a time before GPS and mobile phones and even television broadcasting was terrestrial. This meant that there were few people willing to invest in space and satellites and for decades this remained the case. So this then was the story of the space race.

The artificial intelligence race has a few things that are different. First, the primary drivers are not public interest, national pride or government spending. It is corporations who are pushing the advances here.

The corporates competing against each other in the United States are the ones that have the most resources to do this: Google, Facebook, Elon Musk, Microsoft and Open AI. The goal is to achieve human level intelligence and then let that intelligence improve itself. The second step is thought to be achievable very rapidly once the first step, that of arriving at human level intelligence, is completed.

This will give the company that gets there ahead of the others an enormous advantage. For this reason the spending on it will not be dependent on the things that ended the space race. The total spend on AI research is

many times more than what was spent on NASA and the Soviet space programme combined.

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Note that the European Union, while as economically powerful as the US and China, is not a serious competitor in this field. No other nation is, including Russia, which is a shadow of the technological giant it was 60 years ago. The race is between the US and its only peer competitor, China.

Unlike the space race, the race to develop super intelligence is not a side project. It touches the core interests of the companies and the countries in which the work is happening.

All nations other than these two global rivals can only look on and hope that the outcome is in some way favourable to them or, to put it more accurately, is less unfavourable to them. In the last two centuries, the technological gap between nations has narrowed.

The last time there was a significant gap, a major part of the world, including South Asia, North and South America, Australia and much of Africa, were colonised. Larger populations came into the control of smaller, more advanced ones. China suffered what it refers to as its century of humiliation, beginning in 1839 under the British. It is determined not to be forced into that position and has the capacity in 2025 to resist domination.

The AI race has one last difference over the space race. While both races were portrayed as being part of a larger rivalry between democracy and authoritarian systems, this current contest is also one between west and east. Democracies in developing nations like India might feel attracted to Trump's United States, but they will note that this is also a contest between America and Asia.

(Aakar Patel is a writer and columnist)

## Raising hope under Prez rule in Manipur

The imposition of President's rule in Manipur after the resignation of Chief Minister Biren Singh has reignited fierce debates about the State's future, exposing deep ethnic and political fault lines.

While Kuki-Zo-Hmar tribes have welcomed the move as a long overdue step toward stability, the Meitei community feel it as an unjustified intervention that could further marginalise them.

Whatever be the circumstances that led to this imposition, the President's rule must be taken as an opportunity to bring down the crisis and prepare the ground for a representative government.

The Governor, who must now play a crucial and bipartisan role in governance, must use this time to facilitate community engagement and encourage local leadership to participate in peace-building measures. The ultimate test, however, lies with the political masters in Delhi. If the BJP views Manipur through the narrow lens of political control, the region could soon witness the violence again.

But if the priority is stability over electoral considerations, President's rule could be the turning point for reconciliation. Manipur has suffered enough. The decision now is whether to rebuild trust and peace or allow another cycle of violence.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

## Rape verdict should serve as deterrent

Justice has finally prevailed as the District and Sessions Court,

Margao sentenced the 31-year-old accused to rigorous life imprisonment for the rape and murder of Irish-British national Danielle McLaughlin in 2017 bringing an eight-year-old legal battle for justice to an end.

The verdict will hopefully act as deterrence to such horrific acts in future. The verdict brings to mind the horrific gang-rape and murder of a student in Delhi in 2012. The victim died of internal injuries after being gang-raped in a moving bus. The four accused were convicted and hanged in the high-security Tihar Jail.

The Nirbhaya case caused outrage across India, brought thousands of protesters out on the streets made global headlines for weeks and led to new anti-rape laws in India. Recently a trainee doctor's body was found with severe injury marks inside the seminar hall of the State-run hospital in Kolkata. The accused was sentenced to life imprisonment and was fined Rs 50,000 for the rape and murder of the young doctor.

According to data, thousands of rapes take place every year and the numbers have been consistently rising over the years. Anti-rape campaigners say thousands of rapes and cases of sexual assault are not even reported to the police.

These rapists are everywhere, lurking in homes, playgrounds, schools and the streets, waiting for an opportunity to strike. There are horrific reports of vio-

lations which raises a pertinent question as to whether women are really safe in the country.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## Deportation of illegal immigrants

The US administration has been deporting illegal immigrants of Indian origin. The process started on February 5, and the deportees were sent onboard the US military transport aircrafts.

On the morning of February 16, the third batch of 112 immigrants landed at Amritsar, while the first and second batches had 104 and 116 immigrants (O Herald February 17 edition). So far, 332 people have been sent back, mostly young men followed by some women and children.

It was shocking to know that the men's legs were shackled and hands were cuffed as if they are hard-core criminals. The fetters were removed when they had to use the only washroom present on the aircraft. As per the Minister of External Affairs, this is a standard operating procedure by the American authorities and nothing can be done about it.

As the Indian Prime Minister and the American President are considered to be good friends, the former could talk to the latter and seek permission to send our airplanes to bring back the immigrants. During the deportation procedure, the American authorities could monitor the process. This way more immigrants could be returned to India

instead of in small batches and the cost would be borne by the Indian government.

Our government could ensure that the people are treated with dignity and not be chained and cuffed onboard the Indian aircraft.

Having lost their money, land and jobs and cheated by agents, the immigrants could land in India with some respect and not like convicts.

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

## Dominion via language

The Centre is leaving no stone unturned to impose Hindi on South Indian States though it has short-sighted the three-language formula in the New Education Policy 2020.

The Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has rightly argued that there is nothing wrong if a student in the State learns multiple languages, not necessarily Hindi.

English is a universal language and opens up opportunities for study and employment across the world, the same cannot be said of Hindi or Sanskrit, which the saffron dispensation is trying to force upon India. As part of this "nefarious" agenda, the government senior secondary schools in BJP-ruled Rajasthan have been ordered by the State Education Department to replace Urdu with Sanskrit as a third language from the next academic session.

To add fuel to the controversy, a minister alleged that many Urdu teachers secured jobs with

people's edit

## THE RACE TO NOWHERE: REFLECTING ON THE RUSH OF LIFE

JOHN MALVINO ALFONSO

I was waiting for the bus to Mapusa after completing my personal retreat at the Cloistered Carmelite Monastery in Chicalim. A few passengers stood with me at the bus stop, and as we waited, cars and bikes sped by, overtaking each other without regard for the narrow road.

One passenger, observing the scene, remarked, "Everyone is running!" His words lingered in my mind as I boarded the bus on my way to Panjim. It made me wonder: Why do people run?

When do we feel the need to rush? Often, it's because we want to get somewhere faster or avoid missing out on something. But this impulse isn't always straightforward. Sometimes, we rush into mistakes, thinking we're making the right choice, only to realise later it wasn't. We also rush to avoid things we fear, but why do we feel the need to rush at all?

We all have responsibilities, yet many times we rush to avoid them. When life gets challenging, some of us withdraw. Why do we do that? In a fast-paced world where everything is expected to happen quickly, we are often free to make decisions without reflecting on them. We don't even like making choices that set us apart from others. For instance, Princy was focused on her college studies while her father worked on a ship to support the family. Her parents found a potential match for her. They liked him, but Princy didn't know him.

"The marriage will happen whether you like it or not," her father insisted. Despite her initial resistance, Princy agreed to marry. But after marriage, she learned about her husband's true nature. His hopes for other women lingered, and even after marriage, he continued relationships with others. Princy realised her decision had been made in haste, trusting others instead of herself.

Sometimes, we rush simply because others are running faster. Many young people fall into this trap—they attend college because their friends do, or choose a major because their friends do. One young man enrolled in an Arts programme because his friend Shweta did, but while she passed with good marks, he failed his first year. This is the consequence of following others without reflecting on what's right for us.

When we make decisions too quickly, it becomes harder to change course later. What's wrong with taking the time to think through what's truly good for us? Rushing because others are running doesn't lead anywhere meaningful. Thoughtful decision-making is essential, and we need to recognise what suits us and what doesn't.

The attitude of "everything is exactly as we think" doesn't serve us well. Life decisions require reflection on both the past and future. Seeking guidance is wise, but ultimately, we must make our own choices. Similarly, the belief that "everything must go the way I want it to" is unrealistic. Life doesn't always unfold as planned. When things go wrong, we often seek quick answers, leading to frustration and rushed decisions without considering the consequences.

Patience is key. Instead of rushing into decisions, we must exercise thoughtful reflection. If we act too quickly, we might regret it later. If the choices we make today lead to tears tomorrow, we've missed the opportunity to pause and think. By taking our time to reflect, we can make decisions we won't regret.

fake degrees. This is a form of language jihad if one were to use the Sanghi term. What benefit in life will one derive from learning Sanskrit, how would it help a student secure a job or get ahead in life? It is very obvious that imposition/deletion of languages is just another step by the Modi government in pursuit of an illusory Ram rajya.

Anyone, who rightly opposes such regressive measures, is immediately branded as anti-national or is accused of playing politics. India should firmly oppose these despicable attempts by the Union government to establish dominion over India by using the tool of language.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

## Ban firearms at ceremonies

It is a shame that a two-and-a-half-year-old boy had to give his life as a result of a macho wedding celebration.

The toddler was killed when a man had allegedly opened fire to celebrate during a wedding procession. The bullet struck the child who was watching the procession from a balcony in Aghapur village near Noida on Monday.

Many gunfire accidents happened in the past during wedding celebrations. Stringent rules and punishments must be in place to ban the use of firearms in ceremonies. The use of firearms in a marriage ceremony originates from an ugly primitive practice of kidnapping a girl for marriage.

Such a practice is a sign of backwardness in a society which must be eradicated.

Sujit De, Kolkata