KUDOS TO THE FORCES

The Kisthwar area is free of the most dreaded and hardcore terrorist group that had been active in the area for nearly a year. Kudos to our security forces and the Army personnel for their patience, perseverance and clinical precision in carrying out counter terrorist operations. The forces had been pursuing and tracking the group of seven hardcore terrorists of Jaish-e-Muhammad for about a year, who had infiltrated from Pakistan and were active in the area. Kudos to the locals for supporting the forces in carrying out the campaign against the terrorists with the help of intelligence inputs, which led to the killing of the remaining three terrorists of the group in Kishtwar. The point is that JeM is a Pakistan-based organisation and we had destroyed its main recruitment centre in Bhawalpur in Operation Sindoor. What more proof does the world need to know about Pakistan's ancestors as a terror-sponsoring state? The Kishtwar-Doda belt was carefully chosen by Pakistan for shifting terrorist bases from Kashmir due to its thick jungles. Today it is clear that the Indian Army will smoke these rats out of their hole.

BANGAR WEALTH

The government offices are some of the most unhygienic places and are full of clutter. The scene is an office, typically of several wooden or steel almirahs overflowing with dust-covered and silkfish-infested files and bulky furniture. Something is changing. It is interesting to know that the central government has earned more than Rs 200 crore from scrap disposal in the December-January period. This income has been generated by selling scrap in the railways and the Ministry of Coal. The campaign is part of the effort to create neat and clean workplaces in the government by ridding these of the useless fixtures – unused furniture, broken stuff, etc. The drive is underway in 5,188 sites across the country and helped free around 4.34 lakh square feet of office space in January alone. The move is being undertaken as the government digitises records and awareness about health hazards is growing.

India at the forefront of AI governance

Kalyani Shankar

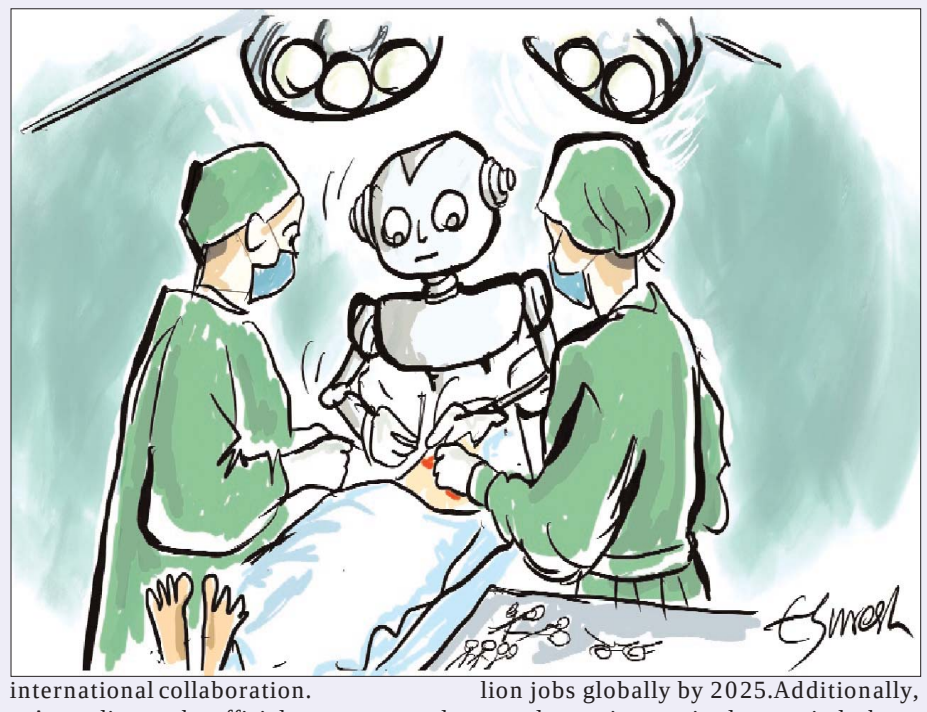
ndia's recent AI summit concluded with the New Delhi Declaration, engaging 88 nations and marking a major milestone in global AI regulatory efforts, highlighting India's growing influence on the international stage.

The declaration presents a global vision for "collaborative, trusted, resilient, and efficient" artificial intelligence, highlighting that its benefits must be shared by all of humanity to realise its full potential.

AI has become very popular in the last decade, especially in the past five years. It has many benefits but also poses risks, making the topic complicated. People around the world are worried about these risks.The recent summit was the first of its kind in the region and focused on these growing concerns about AI.India has signed an agreement to join Pax Silica, a US — led group focused on building a strong supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence (AI).

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted the alliance's significance for the semiconductor industry and stated, "" The U.S. delegation head at the AI summit added, "AI adoption cannot lead to a brighter future if hindered by bureaucracies and centralised control."The summit attracted major investments for India, with the Adani Group and Ambani each committing $1 billion and Microsoft investing `50 billion.

This summit highlights India's commitment to aligning its AI standards with global frameworks, with a focus on inclusion, responsibility, and international leadership in AI regulation.The summit brought together participants from over 88 countries, including leaders such as Emmanuel Macron and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. A strong US delegation and executives from companies such as Microsoft and IBM highlighted the importance of



international collaboration.

According to the official report, around 250,000 attendees, mainly under 30, participated in the exhibition.Technology Minister Vaishnaw believed that India's AI investments could increase to $140 billion.

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more integrated into daily life-from healthcare to entertainment — the need for regulatory oversight is growing. AI is a double-edged weapon. While it can help increase efficiency, there are also possible risks.What is AI technology, and why is the world concerned? There is cause for concern, as it is a double-edged weapon. There is fear that AI will take over the world.

AI can help improve patient care and resource management in organisations, but it raises ethical, privacy, and security concerns. There's also anxiety about job displacement and bias in credit systems and the criminal justice system, with predictions that AI could eliminate 85 million jobs globally by 2025.Additionally, people are increasingly worried about how data is handled and its consequences. Establishing common standards benefits everyone.

AI regulations vary worldwide: the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act imposes strict rules on high-risk systems, while the US adopts a fragmented approach, underscoring the need for a unified global regulatory framework.These differences highlight the need for a more unified approach, as international collaboration is essential for establishing universally adopted standards and best practices in AI.

The summit showcased India's expanding digital infrastructure and the government's proactive steps, including a comprehensive AI roadmap, to establish the country as a global leader in technology and AI development.The India AI Mission has allocated `10,372 crore to enhance the artificial intelligence ecosystem. Additionally, more than 38,000 GPUs have been integrated into a centralised computing facility, and 12 indigenous foundation models are currently under development. Consequently, India is positioning itself as both a developer and a facilitator in the emerging era of AI.AI is now a vital part of India's defence sector, according to Dr Chandrika Kaushik, Director General of DRDO.

Policymakers are worried that the lack of transparency in private markets, such as private credit and private equity, could hinder the identification of early warning signs of trouble.

India's challenges include striking a balance between innovation and government overregulation of AI. It could stifle creativity and hinder the development of groundbreaking technologies. At the same time, a lack of regulation could lead to dangerous results.Regulatory bodies need to engage with stakeholders across the AI ecosystem, including technologists, ethicists, and civil society organisations. This collaborative approach ensures that regulations are grounded in practical realities and adaptable to the fast-evolving nature of AI technology.

There is growing recognition of the importance of fostering ethical AI practices, including transparency, fair access, and user privacy, to reassure users that responsible development is a priority.As we acknowledge the potential of artificial intelligence, a balanced regulatory framework can help us maximise the benefits of AI while minimising its risks.

The way we regulate artificial intelligence (AI) in the future will greatly affect society. We must ensure that AI is used to help everyone. Many countries are worried that AI might take control of our world. The conference was a chance to promote transparency, which is important for reassuring people around the globe.

The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal.

CHEAP DRONES, COSTLY WARS

Ankit Abbott

Drones have captured global military imagination, dominating conflicts from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and creating the impression that mass and saturation now determine victory. Yet how wars actually end tells a different story. Some conflicts have de-escalated swiftly after decisive air campaigns, while others have dragged on despite extensive drone use. For India, this distinction is critical, shaping how future sub-continental conflicts may be fought and how swiftly they can be decisively concluded. At the heart of this debate is the distinction between Tier-1 and Tier-2 airpower.

Tier-1 airpower represents the pinnacle of military aviation: modern fighters, fused sensors, AI-enabled planning, and - crucially - doctrine, training, integration, and intent. It is designed to conduct air campaigns that target an adversary's decision making capacity, with precision, intelligence fusion, command and control, and escalation management as core attributes. Tier-2 airpower, by contrast, relies on mass - especially drones - for steady attrition. Despite its technological sheen, it mirrors World War-1 trench warfare in the air, producing prolonged conflicts, marked by rising costs rather than decisive outcomes.

Recent experience indicates that Tier-1 airpower is far more effective at compressing conflict timelines. Operation Sindoor illustrates this clearly. The campaign relied on precision air strikes, tight command and control, and careful escalation management. IAF fighters, employing precision stand-off weapons and electronic warfare, penetrated Chinese-origin Pakistani air defence systems to conduct deep strikes against terror camps and PAF bases. Instead of seeking marginal effects through low-impact drone attrition, Indian planners delivered a swift and sharp demonstration of capability that constrained the adversary's choices. Pakistan's drone and missile responses were neutralised by India's layered and integrated air defence network. Within four days, the conflict ended, with the regional military balance decisively signalled through airpower.

This logic echoes the Tier-1 airpower masterstroke of Israel's Operation Rising Lion against Iran. In a volatile region prone to escalation, Israel prioritised rapid air superiority through pre-emptive SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defences), using AI-sifted intelligence for hyper-precise strikes. Follow-on attacks targeted key nuclear facilities at Natanz and Fordow, while Iran's retaliatory drones and missiles were intercepted with a very high success rate. The outcome was a short and intense confrontation that conveyed strategic resolve without sliding into prolonged war. For India, facing nuclear-armed adversaries, the lesson is clear: speed, clarity, and control are strategic necessities, not optional advantages.

The contrast with the Russia-Ukraine war is stark. Despite ubiquitous drone use for reconnaissance, strikes, and harassment, neither side has achieved decisive advantage. Instead, the conflict has degenerated into a grinding contest of endurance, exposing Tier-2 airpower's fatal flaws as incremental gains are purchased at immense human and economic cost.

Global think tanks quantify Tier-1's edge with hard data. A 2025 CSIS study comparing Israel-Iran and Russia-Ukraine shows that Tier-1 forces like Israel achieved air dominance in four days with about 200 sorties, at an estimated cost of roughly $2 billion. By contrast, Russia has spent around $500 million per day for years with limited gains. SIPRI data further shows that prolonged wars drive exponentially rising military expenditure across entire regions, not just the belligerents.

The verdict is clear. Tier-1 airpower - precision and doctrine over drone deluges - doesn't merely prevail; it ends conflicts faster and at lower overall cost. Attrition-based, drone-heavy warfare may appear affordable per unit, but it becomes ruinously expensive over time. Prolonged conflicts drain national attention, slow economic growth, and heighten risks of horizontal or vertical escalation. World Bank and SIPRI studies show that long wars impose costs far beyond the battlefield - lost GDP, deferred development and reconstruction burdens. By contrast, short, decisive campaigns, even with high upfront investments, are typically cheaper across their lifecycle.

India's strategic calculus is clear. As a rising power seeking sustained growth and regional stability, it must not fall into the trap of a war of endurance. Its geography and threat environment already raise the prospect of a two-front contingency, where time matters as much as terrain. Tier-1 airpower addresses this challenge by shaping outcomes rapidly, limiting conflict duration, and preserving strategic flexibility. This does not render drones irrelevant.

They remain valuable, versatile and complementary enablers in modern warfare. However, drones alone do not deliver a strategic advantage; they lock adversaries in cycles of retaliation rather than compel resolution. Recent conflicts show that technology without doctrine prolongs war.

IRAN: GEO STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

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Iran's geography is the single most important driver of its national security strategy and its long, often volatile history of foreign interference. Its location at the "center of the world" bordering the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia makes it a natural fortress, an energy titan, and a target for global powers.

1. Geography as a Fortress

Iran's physical landscape acts as a massive "natural shield," which dictates how it defends itself and how foreign powers (like the U.S.) approach it. The Mountains: The Zagros Mountains (West) and Alborz Mountains (North) create a rugged barrier. Unlike the flat deserts of Iraq, Iran's terrain is a logistical nightmare for ground invasions, favoring guerrilla tactics and defensible narrow passes. The Central Plateau: Most of Iran is a high-altitude basin with harsh deserts (Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut), which further complicates internal movement for any foreign military. Strategic Depth: Iran uses its vast size and difficult terrain to hide sensitive infrastructure (like nuclear facilities) deep underground or within mountain ranges, making air strikes difficult to execute perfectly.

2. The Geopolitical "Windpipe": The Strait of Hormuz

This is Iran's most powerful geographic lever. Energy Chokehold: Approximately 20-30% of the world's seaborne-traded oil passes through this narrow 21-mile-wide strait. Political Leverage: Iran's control over the northern coast of the Strait allows it to threaten global energy markets. In response to U.S. sanctions, Iran has frequently used its naval presence here as a deterrent, knowing that a closure would cause global oil prices to skyrocket.

3. History of U.S. Interference

U.S. involvement in Iran has historically been driven by two geographic factors: Oil and Containment.

4. The "Axis of Resistance"

Because Iran is surrounded by U.S. military bases in Iraq, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf, it has developed a "Forward Defense" strategy. Proxy Geography: Instead of fighting on its own soil, Iran exerts influence in "near-abroad" regions like Syria and Lebanon to keep its adversaries at a distance. Encirclement: Tehran views the U.S. military presence in neighboring countries as a "geographical siege," which fuels its drive for a nuclear deterrent and long-range missile technology. To understand the current friction, we have to look at how Iran is physically "cornered" by geography and how the U.S. has used that to apply pressure.

As of February 2026, this tension has reached a critical boiling point. Below is the breakdown of the strategic borders and the long-running history of U.S. sanctions.

1. Strategic Borders: A State of Encirclement

Iran's geography is often described as a "fortress," but for the U.S. military, it is a target that is almost entirely surrounded. The Western Front (Iraq & Turkey): Iran shares its longest and most volatile border with Iraq. The U.S. maintains a presence here and in Turkey (a NATO ally), creating a permanent western "wall" against Iranian expansion. The Northern Buffer (Caspian & Caucasus): Bordering Russia and former Soviet states like Azerbaijan, this is Iran's "back door." The U.S. has recently increased diplomatic ties with Azerbaijan, which Tehran views as a threat of northern encirclement. The Eastern Gate (Afghanistan & Pakistan): After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, this border became more chaotic. Iran now faces a "sunni-extremist" threat to the east while the U.S. monitors the region from offshore assets. The Southern Choke Point (Persian Gulf): This is the "front line." The U.S. Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain, directly across from Iran's coast. In early February 2026, the U.S. deployed the USS Gerald R. Ford to the region to reinforce this maritime pressure.

2. Timeline: U.S. Interference & Sanctions

The U.S. has used "Economic Warfare" (sanctions) as its primary tool of interference since the 1979 Revolution.

3. Current Status (February 2026)

We are currently in a high-stakes "poker game" in Geneva. The Deadline: President Trump recently gave Iran a 10-to-15-day deadline (expiring in early March 2026) to agree to a new deal that includes "Zero Enrichment" and a total ban on long-range missiles. The Protests: Internal instability is high. Large-scale protests across Iran have weakened the government's negotiating hand, while the U.S. has signaled support for "regime change" if the violence against protesters continues. The Military Posture: The U.S. buildup at Al-Udeid base (Qatar) and the presence of mobile launchers are intended to show that if diplomacy fails this month, military strikes on nuclear sites are the next step.

As of late February 2026, the geopolitical situation between the U.S. and Iran has moved from high-tension diplomacy to what many analysts call a "pre-war footing."

The situation is currently split between a high-stakes meeting in Geneva and a cycle of internal unrest and military posturing.

1. The Geneva Negotiations (Feb 2026)

A third round of nuclear talks is scheduled for Thursday, February 26. The U.S. negotiating team, led by Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, is pushing a "Zero Enrichment" policy that would fundamentally dismantle Iran's nuclear infrastructure. The "Zero Enrichment" Demand. The U.S. Position: Washington is demanding that Iran stop all domestic uranium enrichment. This is a "red line" for the Trump administration, which argues that any enrichment capacity is a direct path to a nuclear weapon. The Iranian Counter-Offer: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has signaled that "zero" is impossible but has floated a "consortium" model. Iran would send half of its highly enriched uranium abroad, dilute the rest, and allow a regional group to oversee enrichment on Iranian soil. The "Token" Compromise: There are reports that the U.S. might allow "token" enrichment (very low levels for medical/scientific use) if Iran agrees to unprecedented, 24/7 "intrusive" inspections by the IAEA.

2. Trump's "10-15 Day" Deadline

On February 19, 2026, President Trump issued a blunt warning from the "Board of Peace" meeting in Washington. The Ultimatum: He stated that Iran has "10 to 15 days" to reach a "meaningful deal." The Threat: If a deal is not reached by early March, Trump warned that "bad things will happen," which is widely interpreted as a threat of a massive air campaign. Military Buildup: The USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group is currently moving into position. This follows a U.S. strike in June 2025 that reportedly "decimated" several Iranian nuclear facilities.

3. The 2026 Protest Movement

Internal instability in Iran is currently a major factor in the U.S. strategy. Washington believes the Iranian government is at its weakest point in decades. The Trigger: Protests erupted on December 28, 2025, after the Iranian Rial collapsed and inflation hit 60%. The Scale: What began as "Economic Grievances" turned into a nationwide uprising.

Human rights groups estimate that over 6,000 people have been killed in the crackdown, though some U.S. officials have cited numbers as high as 30,000. Current Status: As of this week (Feb 20-23), fresh protests have reignited in university campuses in Tehran, marking the end of a 40-day mourning period for those killed in January. U.S. Interference: The U.S. has used these protests to justify "Snapback" sanctions and has warned Tehran that any further executions of protesters would trigger immediate military strikes.