

THE AGE OF COERCIVE AMERICA BY BRAHMA CHELLANEY • INDIA'S RARE EARTH BOOST
THE LIFE AND POLITICS OF AJIT PAWAR • RETHINKING THE SECURITY PLAYBOOK IN JAMMU

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INDIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AMP UP THEIR PARTNERSHIP IN A WORLD UNSETTLED BY TRUMP

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 For February 3-February 9, 2026
 Total no of pages 68

CONTENTS

3
THE BIG PICTURE

6
OPENINGS

15
OPINION
 Colonial cousins at war
 By Minhaz Merchant

16
SOFT POWER
 Brave new republic
 By Makarand R Paranjape

18
COMMENT
 For whom the bells toll
 By Rahul Shivshankar

20
OPEN ESSAY
 The age of coercive America
 By Brahma Chellaney



26 **A DEAL FOR THE TIMES**
 The free trade agreement signed by India and the European Union
 validates trusted partnerships and global trade when Donald Trump's
 tariffs have brought the international order to breaking point
 By Rajeev Deshpande

32 **THE ULTIMATE BARGAIN**
 The India-EU deal is likely to raise bilateral trade to
 \$200 billion and reduce economic uncertainty
 By Siddharth Singh

38 **IN IT TOGETHER**
 India and the EU can access the untapped economic
 potential of their relationship at last
 By Harsh V Pant and Shairee Malhotra

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

BJP's decision to elevate Nitin Nabin as party president is a clear signal that it has begun laying the groundwork for the next Lok Sabha elections well in advance ('2029 on Modi's Mind', February 2, 2026). By bringing in a relatively younger leader with grassroots experience, BJP appears keen to refresh its leadership image while retaining firm control from the top. Nabin's rise also suggests that the party is doubling down on discipline and internal cohesion. BJP has long believed that strong organisation wins elections as much as charismatic leaders, and this appointment reinforces that belief. It sends a message to party workers that loyalty and consistent work will be rewarded. At the same time, the appointment underlines BJP's emphasis on collective leadership and coordinated decision-making. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark that Nabin would now be "his boss" was a lighthearted but telling signal of the authority and respect attached to the role. Nabin is expected to work closely with the central leadership to translate broader strategies into action on the ground.



Shubhendu Hazarika

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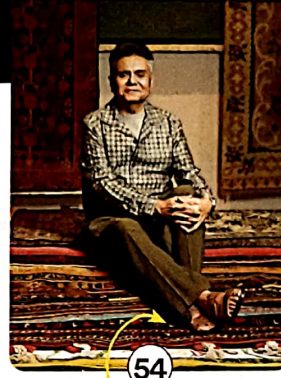
A PAWAR VACUUM

The death of Ajit Pawar in a plane crash raises questions about the future of his party and the likelihood of the two NCP factions reuniting
By Lhendup G Bhutia



A RARE FEAT

India is steadily increasing its production of rare earth elements to emerge from China's shadow
By Moinak Mitra



LIVING THE DREAM

Pioneering designer Pinakin Patel gets a fitting retrospective in his home city of Mumbai
By Shaikh Ayaz



RETHINKING THE GRID

The counter-terror playbook needs to be updated after the mixed success in repeated encounters in the Jammu region
By Rahul Pandita



QUICK SILVER

A perfect storm of supply shortages, soaring tech demand, and Trump's tariffs has driven the metal's price to record highs
By Madhavankutty Pillai



PEAK PALATE

Chef Prateek Sadhu is putting the Himalayas and regional ingredients on the global fine dining map
By Noor Anand Chawla



STARGAZER

By Kaveree Bamzai

61

THE SOFT BOIL
Just the right heat
By Suvir Saran

62

PLAYTIME WITH BORIA MAJUMDAR
Hit wicket

63

TECH TALK
Doubts about WhatsApp encryption
By Madhavankutty Pillai

64
WATCH PARTY

Cover by SAURABH SINGH

THE GREAT SHIFT

History is now rebalancing itself ('Thunder from the East', by Minhaz Merchant, February 2, 2026). After centuries of Western dominance built on science, industry and, more importantly, conquest, the world is moving back towards Asia where economic and technological gravity once resided. By 2050, China and India will anchor the global economy, even as the West struggles with the moral and material costs of its own rise. The coming revolution in AI, science and space will dwarf past transformations. China's ambitions, especially over Taiwan, will test global stability, while India's ascent stands out for what it has not done—colonise, enslave or conquer overseas. The real reckoning won't be technological but civilisational: how nations account for the means by which they became powerful.

Nikhil Chatterjee

AIR THAT KILLS

Delhi's air pollution is no longer just an environmental concern but a daily public health emergency that shapes how people live and work ('Breathing Death', February 2, 2026). When residents plan seasonal exits, seal themselves indoors or rely on machines to breathe safely, the city has already failed them. What is most troubling is how this crisis deepens inequality. For the affluent, polluted air is an inconvenience mitigated by purifiers and flexibility. For the poor, it is an inescapable occupational hazard that shortens lives. The rise in pollution-linked illnesses and deaths demands urgency. India has the policy tools and global examples to act decisively, yet inertia persists. Clean air cannot be a private commodity; it must be treated as a basic public good, protected by the state.

Rohit Malviya

A QUIET GOODBYE

Saina Nehwal's retirement marks the end of an era in Indian badminton ('Farewell to a Prodigy', February 2, 2026). She was not only a champion player but also a pathbreaker who changed how the sport was viewed in India. Before Saina, badminton rarely occupied the national spotlight. After her, it became a genuine career option for young athletes. What stands out most about Saina is her resilience. She fought injuries, form slumps and constant expectations, yet continued to compete at the highest level. Even when younger players overtook her, she remained relevant through sheer determination. Her retirement also reminds us how demanding individual sport can be, especially for women athletes in India. Saina leaves behind a legacy that goes beyond titles. She may be stepping away from competition, but her impact will last.

KT Gopalakrishnan