WEEKENDER

JULY 2025 - ISSUE 147

A New Chapter in Human Spacefligh. Four Flags. One Mission.



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BRIDGING THE IMPOSSIBLE LONG FORM FEATURE



An Exclusive with Prof. T.G. Sitharam, The Mind Behind the World's Highest Bridge



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



BRIDGES, BALLOTS & BEYOND

Dear Reader,

This month, Weekender travels from the depths of civic unrest in Los Angeles to the heights of the Chenab Bridge and the edge of Earth's orbit with Axiom Mission 4.

We spotlight moments where borders blur, between nations, between people, and between what was once thought impossible and what now defines the future. From exclusive conversations with visionaries like Prof. T.G. Sitharam to sharp takes on elections shaping Poland and South Korea, this issue is about motion, technological, political, and emotional.

Wherever you open this magazine, we hope you find something that challenges you, and maybe even changes you.

Until next time, Ava Ramirez Editor-in-Chief Weekender Magazine

INSIDE THIS ISSUE













THE CONTRIBUTORS



Clara Varga **Politics Contributor**

Clara is a political analyst and columnist based in Warsaw. A graduate of Sciences Po Paris and the University of Warsaw, she specializes in Central and Eastern European democratic movements. Her reporting on Poland's political shifts blends data with deep social insight-voices.



Elijah Brooks

Civil Movements

Elijah is a freelance journalist and photographer covering race, protest culture, and public policy in urban America. His work has appeared in The Atlantic, VICE, and now Weekender. With a background in sociology from UCLA, he brings a street-level perspective to LA's ongoing push for equity and reform.



Poonam Gupta

South Asia Contributor

Poona Gupta is a public affairs commentator specializing in South Asia's intersections of policy, identity, and innovation. With over a years of experience reporting for outlets like Afternoon Dispatch, BBC, TNW and The Diplomat, her storytelling spans grassroots movements, Luxury and infrastructure.



Min-Jae Choi

Culture Writer

Min-Jae is a Seoul-based tech journalist known for her sharp commentary on South Korea's digital democracy, youth activism, and innovation trends. A former correspondent for Asia Times, she now writes independently, combining tech literacy with cultural nuance to decode a fast-changing society.

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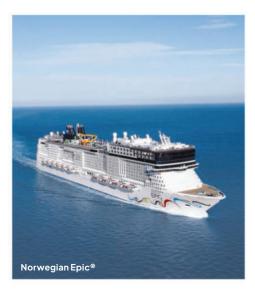
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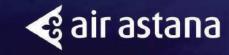


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A NEW ERA OF GLOBAL SPACE COLLABORATION

A Space Station Without Borders: Inside the Ax-4 Mission's 14-Day Scientific Sprint, Where Astronauts from Four Nations Conduct Over 60 Experiments for 31 Countries.

By Clara Varga

On June 25, 2025, the pre-dawn stillness at NASA's Kennedy Space Center was broken by the thunderous ignition of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, its engines blazing a brilliant trail through the Florida sky.

This wasn't just another launch; it marked the liftoff of Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4), a defining chapter in the unfolding story of international space collaboration. Strapped inside the Crew Dragon capsule "Grace" a cutting-edge spacecraft on its maiden voyage, were

four astronauts from four distinct nations: the United States, India, Poland, and Hungary. Together, they formed one of the most geopolitically diverse crews ever to travel to space.

Their destination was the International Space Station (ISS), but their mission carried meaning far beyond orbit. These astronauts didn't just represent their agencies or governments—they embodied the aspirations of billions on Earth, signaling a future where space is no

longer the exclusive playground of global superpowers. This launch marked India's first astronaut on the ISS, and the return of Poland and Hungary to human spaceflight after more than four decades. It was also the first time astronauts from all three nations traveled aboard a single mission to the orbital lab.

The Ax-4 mission, organized by Axiom Space in partnership with NASA and SpaceX, was more than a private commercial venture—it was a diplomatic

and cultural milestone. In an era where global headlines often focus on conflict and competition, this moment offered a powerful counter-narrative: that space exploration can be a bridge, connecting people, nations, and ideas across political and geographical divides. The symbolism was profound, four individuals, launched aboard an American rocket, inside a privately operated capsule, destined for an international laboratory in the sky, working side-by-side as representatives of Earth, not just their homelands.

As Crew Dragon "Grace" soared above the planet, it carried not just high-tech instruments and scientific experiments, but the weight of a new era, one where access to space is becoming more democratized, where partnerships across borders are central, and where humanity's journey to the stars is powered as much by collaboration and shared purpose as it is by engines and algorithms.

Commanded by the indomitable Peggy Whitson, one of the most accomplished astronauts in human history, Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4) assembled a crew that was both symbolically and substantively historic. Whitson, a former NASA chief astronaut and the first woman to command the International Space Station, brought unparalleled experience to the mission, having already spent 665 days in space, more than any other American astronaut. But it was the three other crewmembers who turned Ax-4 into a landmark in global human spaceflight.

From India, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla stepped into history as the first Indian astronaut to visit the ISS, and only the second Indian ever to travel to space after Rakesh Sharma's 1984 mission aboard the Soviet Soyuz T-11. Representing the Indian Air Force and sponsored by ISRO, Shukla's presence was deeply symbolic, a signal that India, now a major spacefaring nation.

As I floated above Earth aboard the ISS, I realized that I wasn't just representing India, I was carrying the aspirations of young scientists, engineers, and dreamers from every small town back home.



LIFT-OFF FOR A SHARED FUTURE

How India's Microgravity Organ Studies, Hungary's Biomedical Research, and Poland's Al-Powered Space Tech Are Turning the Ax-4 Mission Into a Launchpad for Global Space Leadership.



Aboard the ISS, the Ax-4 team begins global research collaboration.

For India, it was not just a return to space, but a precursor to Gaganyaan, the country's upcoming indigenous human spaceflight program. Shukla's participation marked a transitional moment, bridging the past legacy with the future promise of Indian astronauts flying aboard Indian spacecraft.

Accompanying him was Sławosz
Uznański-Wiśniewski, an ESA-backed
engineer from Poland. His journey
marked Poland's first human spaceflight
mission since 1978, when Mirosław
Hermaszewski flew as part of the Soviet
Interkosmos program. Uznański wasn't
just carrying Polish hopes into orbit—he
was reigniting his nation's space legacy
after decades of dormancy. His inclusion
represented Poland's growing commitment to space innovation within
the European framework, and also the
country's belief in science diplomacy as
a path to international prestige.

Rounding out the crew was Tibor Kapu from Hungary, another first-time astronaut and the face of Hungary's emerging HUNOR (Hungarian to Orbit) astronaut program. Kapu became Hungary's first astronaut to reach the ISS, reviving national space aspirations not seen since 1980, when Bertalan Farkas flew with the Soviets. A mechanical engineer by

training, Kapu embodied the intersection of engineering talent and national ambition. His flight was not just about science—it was a cultural reawakening for Hungary's place in international exploration.

For India, Poland, and Hungary, the Ax-4 mission was more than a scientific expedition. It was a deeply emotional and aspirational moment—a rare convergence of history, pride, and hope. Flags that had been absent from the space stage for generations now fluttered on the suits of astronauts working together in Earth orbit. Their journeys to space weren't solo feats, but national milestones, celebrated by millions back home and watched by the world as evidence that space, at its best, can uplift nations and inspire the globe.

During their 14-day tenure aboard the International Space Station (ISS), the Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4) crew is undertaking a rigorous and wide-ranging scientific program—over 60 experiments representing the scientific interests of 31 nations. This makes Ax-4 not only a showcase of space diplomacy but also a dynamic floating laboratory at the edge of Earth's atmosphere, where gravity loosens its grip and new frontiers of knowledge unfold.



For the first time in decades, astronauts from nations like India, Poland, and Hungary are not just watching history, they're making it. This mission reminds us that space is no longer the arena of competition.

The scope of research spans critical domains such as human physiology, materials science, artificial intelligence, and Earth observation—fields vital to the future of long-duration space missions and planetary sustainability. These studies aim not only to expand scientific understanding but also to create technological and biomedical insights that can be applied here on Earth.

For India, the mission has significant strategic relevance. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is using Ax-4 as a proving ground for seven advanced microgravity experiments, each designed to explore how the absence of gravity affects vital human organs, such as the heart, lungs, muscles, and brain. The results from these studies are expected to directly inform protocols, safety measures, and health countermeasures for astronauts aboard Gaganyaan-India's upcoming indigenous crewed spaceflight mission. It is a critical opportunity to gather real-time biological and behavioral data, bridging India's astronaut selection and training efforts with hard evidence from the ISS environment.

Hungary, through its national HUNOR space program, is focusing on the impact of space conditions on human health. Their scientific payloads are investigat-

ing immune system responses, stress regulation in low-gravity environments, and the long-term viability of biological materials in orbit. These insights will help Hungarian researchers better understand the challenges posed by deep space travel and explore solutions applicable to remote medical care back on Earth. It also sets the foundation for Hungary's ambition to become a full-fledged participant in Europe's space exploration initiatives.

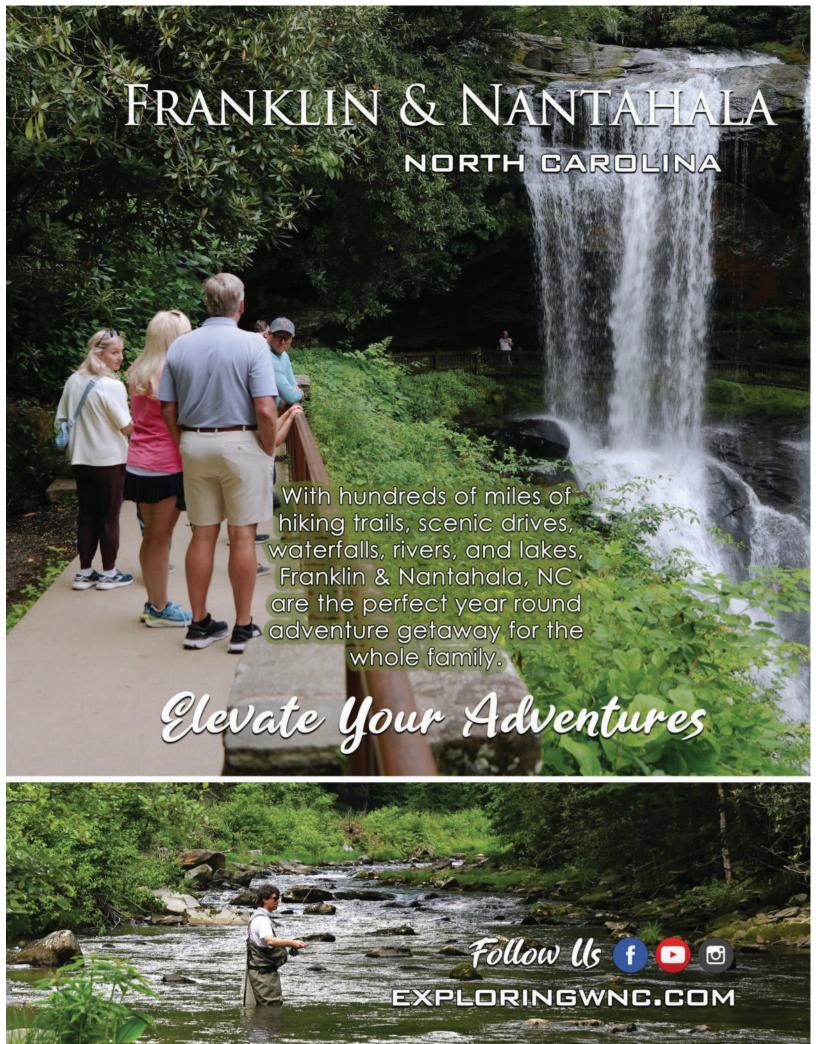
Meanwhile, Poland's contribution is at the cutting edge of computational space science. The Ignis project, carried aboard Ax-4 by astronaut Sławosz Uznański-Wiśniewski, is testing artificial intelligence and autonomous data processing algorithms under microgravity and radiation-heavy conditions. By training these systems to handle, analyze, and make decisions on environmental and sensor data in real time, Polish scientists are exploring how machine learning can enhance mission autonomy—especially important for future missions to the Moon, Mars, or deep space, where communication delays make real-time input from Earth impossible.

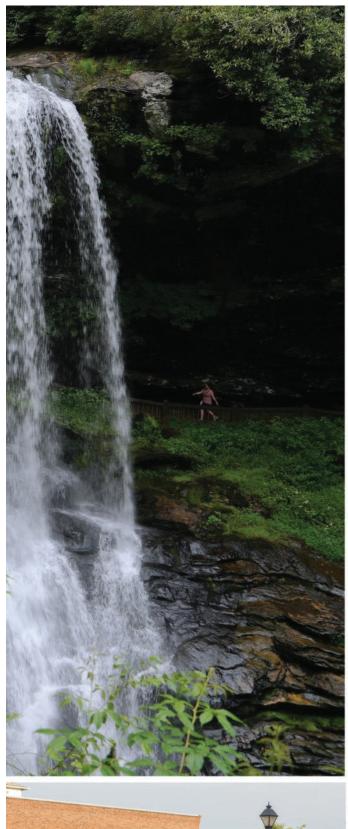
Beyond the individual national experiments, the collaborative mission showcases how commercial platforms like Ax-4 are opening doors for countries without their own launch capabilities or permanent space infrastructure. With data being shared among scientists across continents, Ax-4 has become a multinational hub of research and innovation, offering not just orbital access, but a seat at the table of next-generation science.

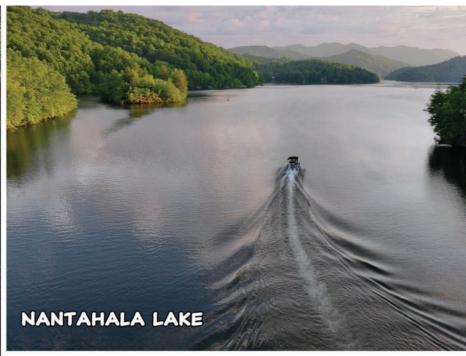
In essence, the Ax-4 mission transforms the ISS from a symbolic international partnership into a truly global research station, where science serves as the common language uniting nations in pursuit of knowledge, resilience, and possibility—both above the clouds and back home on Earth.

The mission also includes ambitious educational outreach. Through live Ham radio sessions, the astronauts are connecting with students worldwide, answering questions and sparking curiosity about STEM careers. This real-time engagement reaffirms that space exploration isn't just about distant galaxies—it's about inspiring minds right here on Earth.

Beyond science, Ax-4 embodies a new model of space exploration where government and private entities, like NASA, SpaceX, and Axiom Space, work in.















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A NATION AT A CROSSROADS

Torn Between Laws and Humanity: How the Los Angeles Protests Challenged America's Self-Image as a Nation of Immigrants

By Elijah Brooks

The June 2025 protests in Los Angeles have carved out an unignorable place in contemporary American history, emerging as a pivotal chapter in the country's enduring struggle with immigration enforcement, the reach of federal authority, and the defense of civil rights.

Triggered by a wave of sudden and forceful raids conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the situation rapidly escalated beyond a law enforcement operation into a full-

blown societal upheaval. What started as targeted actions in immigrant-heavy neighborhoods soon inflamed public anger, mobilizing thousands across the city in what became an explosive movement fueled by fear, solidarity, and resistance. As streets filled with demonstrators—some marching peacefully, others clashing with authorities—the protests morphed into a citywide crisis and eventually spread to other parts of the country. The government's controversial deployment of military forces

to quell the unrest only deepened the outrage, casting a national spotlight on questions long simmering beneath the surface: How far can federal power go in the name of security? What protections exist for vulnerable communities? And who holds the right to dissent in the face of perceived injustice? Far from being a localized disturbance, the Los Angeles protests exposed the fault lines in America's social and political fabric, reigniting critical debates about immigration, civil liberties, and the right of

communities to push back against state overreach.

The spark that ignited this unrest was a wave of coordinated ICE raids that commenced on June 6, 2025, targeting immigrant-dense areas such as the Fashion District and Westlake neighborhood. Conducted with little public notice, these raids led to the detention of numerous individuals suspected of lacking legal immigration status. Eyewitness accounts described scenes of ICE agents storming small businesses, cornering individuals in public parks, and operating in ways that created widespread panic. Within hours, local immigrant communities, backed by civil rights organizations, community leaders, and concerned residents, poured into the streets to protest what many saw as an unjust and inhumane crackdown.

The response was immediate and immense. Peaceful demonstrations

quickly spread across the city, drawing thousands into streets, civic centers, and government buildings. But as the days progressed, tensions escalated. Violent confrontations erupted near the Edward R. Roybal Federal Building and in neighborhoods like Compton and Paramount, where protestors and law enforcement clashed. LAPD and ICE agents deployed tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades in efforts to disperse crowds. Protesters, in turn, blocked major freeways, set vehicles ablaze, and hurled projectiles at officers. Despite city leaders' calls for calm, the violence continued to surge, deepening the public's outrage and dividing political leaders.

What pushed the crisis to a new level was the federal response. President Donald Trump, in a televised address on June 9, announced the deployment of the California National Guard to "restore law and order," framing the protests as a threat to national security. Under

Joint Task Force 51, 2,000 Guard troops were immediately sent to Los Angeles, followed days later by another wave of 2,000 troops and 700 active-duty Marines. Critics, including California Governor Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, condemned the move as a gross federal overreach and an affront to California's autonomy. "We will not be ruled by military intimidation," Governor Newsom stated. The presence of uniformed troops in the streets of L.A. evoked haunting memories of previous civil unrest in the city and ignited a national firestorm over the militarization of domestic protest response.

Despite the show of federal force, the protest movement only evolved. Demonstrators adopted creative, persistent, and nonviolent tactics aimed at disrupting ICE operations without inciting police retaliation. One such tactic, dubbed "No Sleep for ICE," involved nightly gatherings outside hotels.



We are not just resisting deportation, we are defending the idea of America as a home for all.", Protester during the ICE Raids Demonstration, Downtown L.A.

BATTLE FOR AMERICA'S SOUL

From Streets to Statehouses: How the 2025 Uprising Exposed Deep Divisions in Political Leadership and Federal-State Relations



Protesters fill the streets outside the Edward R. Roybal Federal Building

Protesters used drums, loudspeakers, chants, and music to disturb the agents' rest and pressure hotel management to evict federal personnel. The tactic spread like wildfire, not just throughout L.A., but to cities across the country— New York, Chicago, Dallas, and beyond— where grassroots groups organized similar noise-based demonstrations in solidarity. The movement was now national.

Economically, the ripple effects were felt

deeply in the immigrant-heavy neighborhoods that ICE had initially targeted. The Fashion District, once bustling with activity, became eerily quiet. Shop owners reported drastic drops in customer turnout, with some calling the area a "ghost town." Parents kept children home from school, workers avoided commuting, and entire communities seemed to vanish indoors out of fear. Notably, the fear gripped not only undocumented immigrants but also legal residents and citizens, due to the



perceived racial profiling and indiscriminate nature of the raids. Small businesses, especially family-run stores and food vendors, suffered immense losses, prompting warnings from economists and local officials about long-term harm to the city's economy.

As the protests entered July, tensions remained high. Several dozen protesters and law enforcement officers had been injured, and arrests continued on both sides of the clashes. Protesters began wearing protective face shields, a move that later led to the indictment of some activists under new federal crowdcontrol statutes. Meanwhile, Fourth of July celebrations across Los Angeles were cancelled out of safety concerns and fears of renewed ICE operations during public gatherings. Public opinion remained sharply divided. For supporters of the raids, the protests were viewed as unlawful and disorderly; for opponents,

they were a moral imperative in the face of institutional brutality.

At the heart of the June 2025 Los Angeles protests lies a profound and unresolved tension that cuts to the core of American identity. The upheaval forced the nation to confront a series of foundational questions that have long simmered in policy circles, community forums, and kitchen-table conversations but rarely with such urgency or clarity: Are we, as a country, primarily a nation of laws or a nation of immigrants? Can these two identities truly coexist, or are they on a collision course when the machinery of federal enforcement directly targets the very people whose stories have helped shape America's ethos?

The federal government's justification for the ICE raids, enforcing the law, was met with fierce resistance. What happened on the streets of Los Angeles wasn't just a protest against immigration raids, it was a collective cry for dignity, for recognition, and for the right to exist without fear in the only country. many of us have ever



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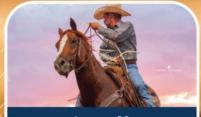


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SOUTH KOREA'S DEMOCRATIC RECKONING

A historic snap election born out of constitutional crisis and mass protests reshapes South Korea's democratic identity, marking the end of an era of authoritarian overreach and ushering in a renewed public mandate for accountable governance, institutional reform, and national reconciliation

By Min-Jae Choi

The 2025 South Korean presidential election was no ordinary electoral event, it was a watershed moment in the nation's democratic journey, shaped by an unprecedented convergence of political upheaval, constitutional breakdown, and ideological fragmentation.

What should have been a routine transition of power became a defining test of South Korea's institutional resilience and civic maturity. For months leading up to the election, the country had been embroiled in a deepening crisis of democratic governance, sparked by President Yoon Suk-yeol's shocking decision to declare martial law in December 2024. His abrupt and unilateral action, ostensibly taken to quell unrest and consolidate control, was widely condemned as a grave overreach of executive power, reminiscent of South Korea's darker authoritarian past.

The backlash was immediate and massive. Public trust in the presidency collapsed, and millions of citizens took to the streets in spontaneous, nationwide protests that echoed the candlelight demonstrations of 2016–17. Civic organizations, students, labor unions, and political opposition figures joined hands to demand accountability, culminating in swift action from the National Assembly

to impeach Yoon. The Constitutional Court's unanimous ruling in April 2025 to remove him from office set the stage for a snap election that few had anticipated but many saw as essential to restore democratic legitimacy.

On June 3, 2025, South Koreans turned out in record numbers, recognizing the gravity of the moment. This was not merely a vote for a new leader, it was a national reckoning. It was the most consequential election since the democratic transition of the late 1980s, a moment when the people reclaimed the right to shape their future through constitutional means. The stakes were extraordinarily high: the vote would determine not only who would lead the country but also how South Korea would define its political culture, restore its democratic institutions, and reposition itself on the global stage amid intensifying U.S.-China rivalry.

In the end, the election became more than just a mechanism of political succession. It served as a democratic reset, a collective act of recommitment to the values of constitutional governance, civil liberties, and accountable leadership. It redefined the trajectory of South Korea's democratic identity, reaffirmed the power of peaceful civic action, and signaled a shift in both domestic and for-



eign policy priorities. The 2025 election will be remembered not just as a political event, but as a turning point in South Korea's modern history.

The origins of the 2025 election lie in a profound constitutional crisis. In December 2024, then-President Yoon Suk-yeol, already embattled by political scandals and plummeting approval ratings, declared a state of martial law following large-scale protests against his administration's handling of corruption allegations and governance failures. The move, widely condemned both domestically and internationally, was perceived by many as an authoritarian overreach reminiscent of South Korea's pre-democratic past.

The National Assembly acted swiftly,

annulling the martial law decree and launching impeachment proceedings against Yoon. On April 4, 2025, the Constitutional Court ruled unanimously in favor of impeachment, removing Yoon from office and triggering only the second snap presidential election in South Korea's democratic history. The court's decision reflected a commitment to upholding the constitutional order, but the damage to public confidence was already done. Yoon's actions had left the nation bitterly polarized and craving stability, accountability, and democratic renewal.

The June 3 snap election thus became more than a race for the presidency—it was a national referendum on the direction of South Korean democracy. Turn-

out reached an extraordinary 79.38%, the highest since 1997, reflecting the electorate's acute sense of urgency and engagement.

Three major candidates emerged. Lee Jae-myung, the standard-bearer of the center-left Democratic Party and a former governor of Gyeonggi Province, stood as the leading opposition figure. Having narrowly lost to Yoon in the 2022 election, Lee positioned himself as a reformist voice of democratic restoration. He faced Kim Moon-soo of the conservative People Power Party, a figure close to Yoon, and Lee Jun-seok of the newly-formed centrist Reform Party, who appealed to younger voters seeking generational change.

Key issues dominated the campaign trail. Foremost among them was the martial law crisis, with each candidate offering starkly different visions of how to preserve democratic institutions. Economic challenges, including stagnating wages, inflation, and growing housing costs—were also central. Younger South Koreans demanded action on gender equality, affordable housing, and job security. Foreign policy debates intensified in light of rising U.S.-China tensions, ongoing North Korean provocations, and shifting global trade dynamics.



This election was not just about choosing a new president, it was about choosing what kind of democracy South Korea wants to be.



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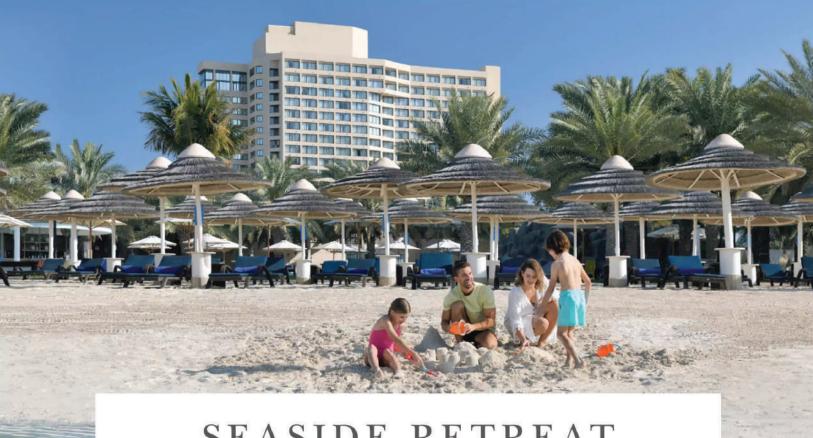












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KANANASKIS A SUMMIT IN SHADOWS

By Clara Varga





G7's 50th anniversary summit overshadowed by war, division, and Trump's early exit. Global crises and diplomatic rifts cloud G7's historic gathering in Canada.

The 2025 G7 Summit, convened from June 15 to 17 in the secluded and picturesque mountain town of Kananaskis, Alberta, was far more than a routine diplomatic engagement among the world's wealthiest democracies.

it was a moment steeped in symbolism, marking the 50th anniversary of the G7's founding. What began in 1975 as a modest meeting among six industrialized nations to coordinate economic policy had, over the decades, evolved into a crucial platform for shaping global governance. The golden jubilee summit was hosted by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose background in international finance and climate policy lent a technocratic, future-oriented tone to the proceedings.

The summit brought together the leaders of the Group of Seven: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union—represented by both the European Commission and European Council. But this year's gathering extended beyond its core membership. Invited guest nations included Australia, Mexico, and most notably, Ukraine, whose President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attended amidst the continuing war against Russia. Their presence signaled a more outward-looking, inclusive G7—one increasingly aware that its effectiveness hinges on engagement with

partners beyond the traditional Western bloc.

Despite the milestone it represented, the summit was anything but celebratory. It unfolded under the dark cloud of mounting global crises, including a dangerously escalating conflict between Israel and Iran, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, persistent instability in Gaza, and deepening fractures in the global economic and security architecture. These multiple crises didn't just dominate the agenda—they exposed the fragilities of the current international order, challenging the very foundations on which the G7 was built. What should have been a time to reflect on a halfcentury of cooperation became a sobering reminder of how complex, divided, and volatile the world has become.

A Summit Dominated by Crisis

What was initially envisioned as a reflective and forward-looking summit to celebrate five decades of G7 leadership swiftly morphed into a tense forum grappling with some of the gravest geopolitical challenges of the era. Chief among them was the spiraling confrontation between Israel and Iran. The conflict, already threatening to spill into a broader regional war, forced U.S. President Donald Trump to leave the summit early, underscoring the urgency and volatility of the Middle

Fifty years after its founding, the G7 came together in Kananaskis hoping to project unity and purpose, but what emerged instead was a portrait of strained alliances, urgent crises, and the sobering reality that even the world's most established democracies can no longer take consensus for granted.



Eastern situation. The Israel–Hamas war in Gaza, now stretching into its second year, added layers of complexity, with humanitarian concerns clashing against strategic alliances.

Russia's continuing war in Ukraine remained another centerpiece of attention. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, attending as a special guest, made impassioned appeals for sustained military aid, humanitarian support, and tougher sanctions against Moscow. The unity of the G7 on the Ukraine issue remained relatively intact, although fatigue and diverging domestic political pressures in member nations were increasingly evident. Several joint statements were issued condemning both Russia's aggression and the escalating violence in

the Middle East. Yet, the emotional tenor of these declarations could not mask the absence of concrete new strategies.

Beyond the battlefields, the global economy continues to face headwinds. High inflation, energy insecurity, and persistent supply chain challenges remained high on the agenda. The summit saw spirited debates on trade imbalances, particularly simmering tensions between the U.S. and its European allies over tariffs and subsidies related to electric vehicles, semiconductor production, and green energy investments. The European Union expressed concern over American protectionism embedded in the Inflation Reduction Act and its implications for transatlantic economic cooperation.

Despite marathon sessions behind closed doors, no major breakthroughs emerged. In a rare departure from tradition, the 2025 G7 Summit concluded without a final joint communiqué, a sign of unresolved disagreements. The lack of consensus on trade underscored how deeply national interests are diverging, even among allied democracies. It also highlighted the challenge of preserving multilateralism in an increasingly fragmented global landscape.

Yet amid the geopolitics and economic wrangling, climate change remained a central pillar of the summit. Prime Minister Carney, known for his background in climate finance and sustainable development, pushed for accelerated investments in clean energy, the decar-



bonization of supply chains, and climate adaptation funding for the Global South. The leaders reaffirmed their commitments to the Paris Agreement goals and endorsed a new "Climate Accountability Framework" designed to track member states' carbon emissions and climate spending.

The digital transition was another urgent area of discussion. The rapid development of artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI, sparked concern among leaders about governance, regulation, and the future of work. Germany and Japan led the call for the creation of a new multilateral Al oversight mechanism, citing the need to establish ethical norms, prevent abuse, and ensure that innovation does not outpace society's capacity to regulate it. Canada also proposed increased investment in secure digital infrastructure and cyber-resilience, especially in light of recent cyberattacks targeting democratic institutions and power grids.

The selection of Kananaskis as the host site was no coincidence. This remote alpine region of Alberta had once hosted the 2002 G8 Summit in the aftermath of 9/11, symbolizing both reflection and resilience. In 2025, it provided a quiet yet powerful stage for high-stakes diplomacy, away from the distractions of capital cities and media frenzies.

More importantly, this year's summit included a formal and public acknowledgment of Indigenous land and heritage. Prime Minister Carney opened the summit with a ceremonial welcome honoring the Blackfoot Confederacy and other First Nations, acknowledging that the summit took place on their traditional territory. Indigenous leaders were invited to participate in select cultural and environmental sessions, signaling a growing shift towards inclusive diplomacy and reconciliation.

In this sense, the summit's imperfections, its inconclusive outcomes, exposed tensions, and visible cracks, were not signs of failure, but of reality. Global governance is no longer about unanimity; it's about navigating complexity, managing disagreement, and keeping dialogue alive. The 2025 G7 Summit, despite its flaws, served as a timely and necessary wake-up call: the challenges ahead are immense, and without ongoing cooperation, even fractured, even tentative.







EXPLORE

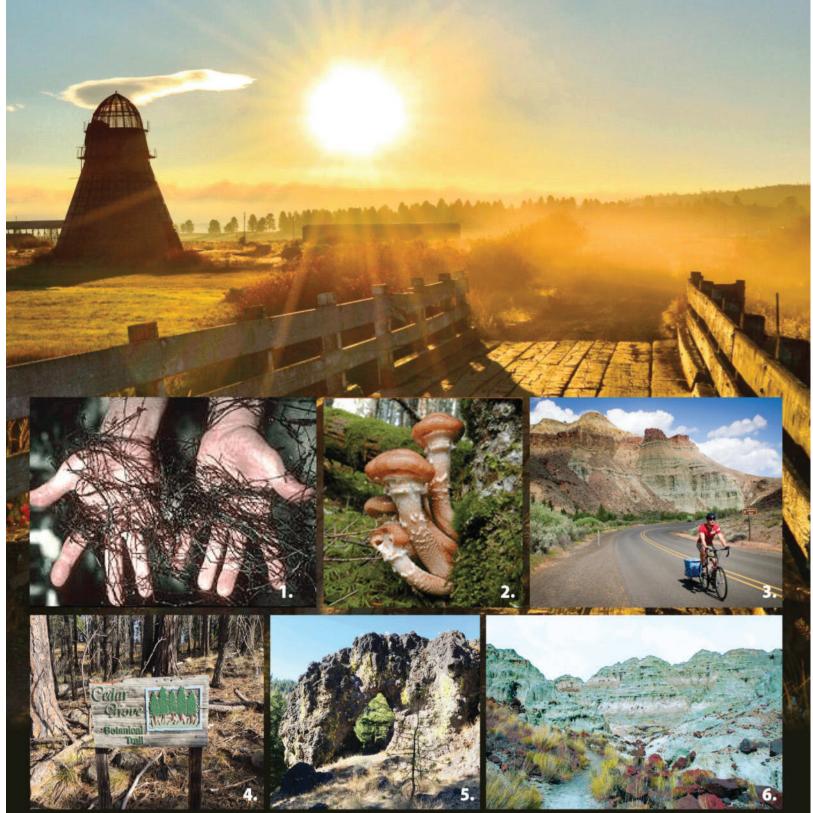
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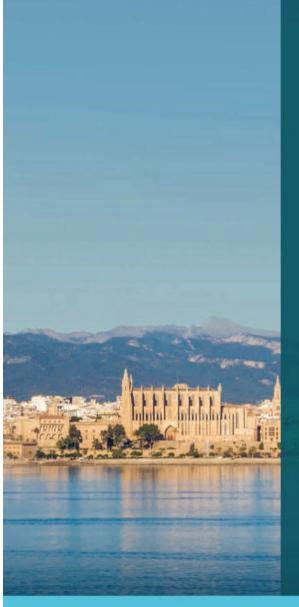
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POLITICAL GRIDLOCK AHEAD

By Elijah Brooks

This year's election is more than a political contest, it's a referendum on Poland's future direction. As conservative and progressive forces clash, the outcome could redefine civil liberties, media freedom, and the country's position.

This election isn't just about parties or politicians, it's about defining what kind of Poland we leave for the next generation. Are we a democracy rooted in openness, equality, and European solidarity, or are we turning inward, ruled by fear and division?



The 2025 Polish presidential election marked a turning point in the nation's democratic evolution—a moment saturated with political drama, emotional intensity, and global attention.

Unlike past electoral cycles, this was not a routine reaffirmation of democratic procedure but a high-stakes confrontation that exposed the ideological rifts running through Polish society. It was an election that did not simply ask voters to choose a president, but to take a stand on the very soul and future direction of their country. The campaign was dominated by competing visions of governance, history, and Poland's place in Europe, making it one of the most consequential elections in decades.

At its core, the election was a battle between two starkly different figures:

Rafał Trzaskowski, the progressive, pro-European mayor of Warsaw, and Karol Nawrocki, a conservative historian aligned with the Law and Justice (PiS) party. Trzaskowski represented a Poland that embraced liberal democracy, institutional reform, and deeper integration with the European Union. He appealed to urban voters, younger generations, and those disillusioned with years of right-wing governance. In contrast, Nawrocki symbolized a Poland rooted in tradition, sovereignty, and historical pride. With his academic background in post-communist memory politics and his reputation as a cultural conservative, he attracted support from rural regions, older citizens, and those wary of Western liberalism.

Their confrontation transcended policy

differences; it became emblematic of a deeper societal divide over national identity, judicial independence, social norms, and international alliances. The election was a stress test for Polish democracy, challenging the resilience of its institutions and the maturity of its political culture. In the end, this was not just an electoral contest—it was a mirror held up to a nation in transition, reflecting both its divisions and its democratic vitality.

The path to the presidency began on May 18, 2025, when a record-breaking field of 13 candidates vied for the highest office in the land. The crowded first round illustrated a political environment that was both fragmented and energized. No single candidate was able to command an outright majority, a result that had been widely anticipated but still reinforced just how fractured the Polish electorate had become. Rafał Trzaskowski emerged as the frontrunner with 31.4% of the vote, while Karol Nawrocki trailed closely behind with 29.5%. Despite the tight race, the first round revealed clear contours of the ideological battlefield: a center-left, urban electorate pushing for closer ties with Brussels versus a nationalist, conservative bloc focused on sovereignty, traditional values, and historical narratives.

The runoff held on June 1, 2025, was one of the most nail-biting moments in recent Polish political history. Early exit polls suggested a narrow victory for Trzaskowski, sparking celebration among his supporters and raising hopes for a liberal resurgence. However, as the votes were counted through the night, the tide shifted. By morning, Karol Nawrocki had edged ahead with 50.89% of the vote to Trzaskowski's 49.11%. The difference amounted to just 370,000 votes out of more than 20 million cast—a slim margin that underscored just how polarized the country had become.

Karol Nawrocki is no stranger to controversy or political symbolism. At 42, he had built his public persona not as a career politician but as a conservative historian with a focus on Poland's anti-communist resistance. As director of the Institute

dent wields veto power, can nominate judges, and holds influence over foreign and defense policy. This makes the presidency particularly potent when the government lacks a constitutional majority in the Sejm, the lower house of parliament.

This is precisely the situation in which Prime Minister Donald Tusk's centrist government now finds itself. Elected in 2023 on a platform of EU alignment and institutional reform, Tusk has been seeking to undo years of controversial PiS-era changes to the judiciary, media, and civil service. With Nawrocki in the presidential palace, however, Tusk's reform agenda faces a formidable obstacle. Nawrocki's victory restores the right-wing veto over legislation, effectively placing a check on the liberal ambitions of the Tusk administration. The result is a political landscape

marked by cohabitation, and potential confrontation.

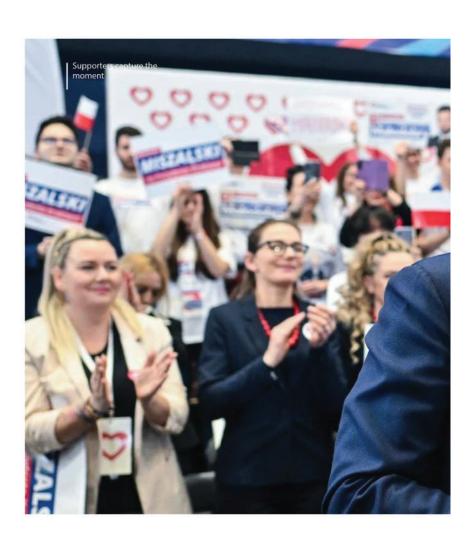
Nawrocki opposes liberalizing Poland's strict abortion laws, aligning with Catholic and traditionalist constituencies. This position is likely to deepen tensions with younger voters and urban liberals who have been demanding greater reproductive rights since the controversial court ruling in 2020 that further restricted access to abortion.

Nawrocki is likely to resist attempts to reverse judicial reforms enacted under PiS, which critics argue have eroded the independence of Poland's courts. His presidency could therefore maintain the current composition of key judicial bodies, frustrating EU efforts to enforce legal norms.

of National Remembrance, he became known for his unapologetic defense of Poland's right-wing nationalist legacy and for spearheading efforts to remove Sovietera monuments, a move that earned praise from domestic conservatives but provoked diplomatic ire from Russia. He is also a former amateur boxer, a detail that added a combative dimension to his public image.

Though technically an independent candidate, Nawrocki was effectively the standard-bearer for the Law and Justice party (PiS), which had dominated Polish politics for much of the past decade. Outgoing president Andrzej Duda's endorsement and the extensive support network of PiS lent Nawrocki the organizational muscle and ideological alignment needed to energize the party's base. For many voters in rural areas and small towns, particularly in eastern and southeastern Poland, he represented a continuation of policies that prioritized national sovereignty, traditional family structures, and a cautious approach to globalization.

In Poland's parliamentary system, the presidency is often described as ceremonial, but this characterization downplays the significance of the office. The presi-



Although broadly supportive of aiding Ukraine, Nawrocki is expected to emphasize "Poland first" rhetoric. He has suggested prioritizing aid for Polish citizens, particularly in housing and employment, over benefits for Ukrainian refugees. This signals a potentially more inward-looking stance that may complicate Poland's role as a key frontline state in the West's support for Kyiv.

While not openly Eurosceptic, Nawrocki's vision for the EU is based on national sovereignty and cultural conservatism. He is likely to clash with Brussels on matters of judicial reform, media freedom, and migration policy.

The 2025 election saw one of the highest voter turnouts in recent history, with over 71% participation in the runoff, a sign of how deeply invested the public was in the

outcome. But it also reflected how polarized Polish society has become. The divide between urban and rural, progressive and conservative, pro-EU and nationalist, was vividly on display throughout the campaign. Both camps mobilized intensely, and both believed the stakes were existential.

International observers, too, watched the election closely. Poland's strategic role in the European Union, its leadership in responding to the war in Ukraine, and its ongoing disputes with Brussels over rule-of-law issues made this contest a litmus test for Europe's political trajectory. The razor-thin result and initial confusion over the victor, exacerbated by exit polls that got it wrong, only added to the drama.

Accusations of bias, miscounts, and misinformation circulated widely before the Supreme Court finally confirmed Nawrocki's win, putting to rest any legal challenges but not the political tensions.

This ideological split now sets the stage for a complex and potentially contentious period of co-governance.

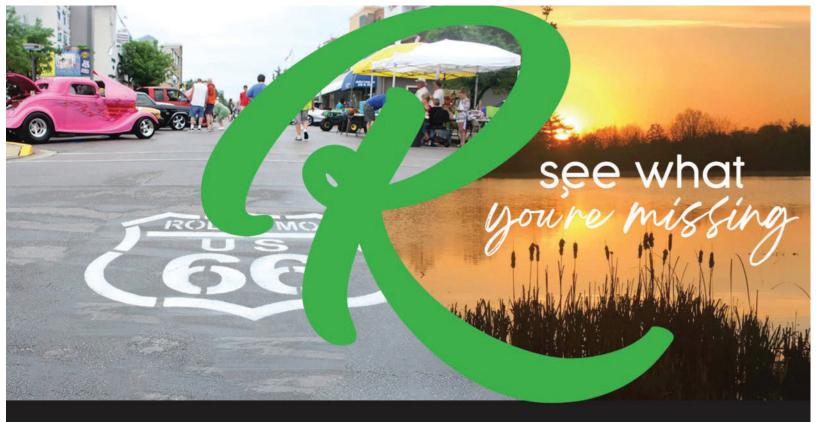
In essence, the 2025 Polish presidential election was more than a contest of candidates, it was a moment of national introspection. It exposed a country standing at a crossroads, torn between the comfort of continuity and the promise of change.

Whether Nawrocki's presidency will serve as a stabilizing force rooted in tradition, or as a roadblock to progress and unity, remains to be seen. What is undeniable, however, is that the consequences of this election will ripple across Polish society, influence the trajectory of EU-Poland relations, and shape the political consciousness of a new generation.

As Poland enters this uncertain chapter, the question is no longer who won or lost, but how the country will navigate its identity in a world that is increasingly complex, fragmented, and demanding. The story of this election does not end with Nawrocki's victory, it begins there.







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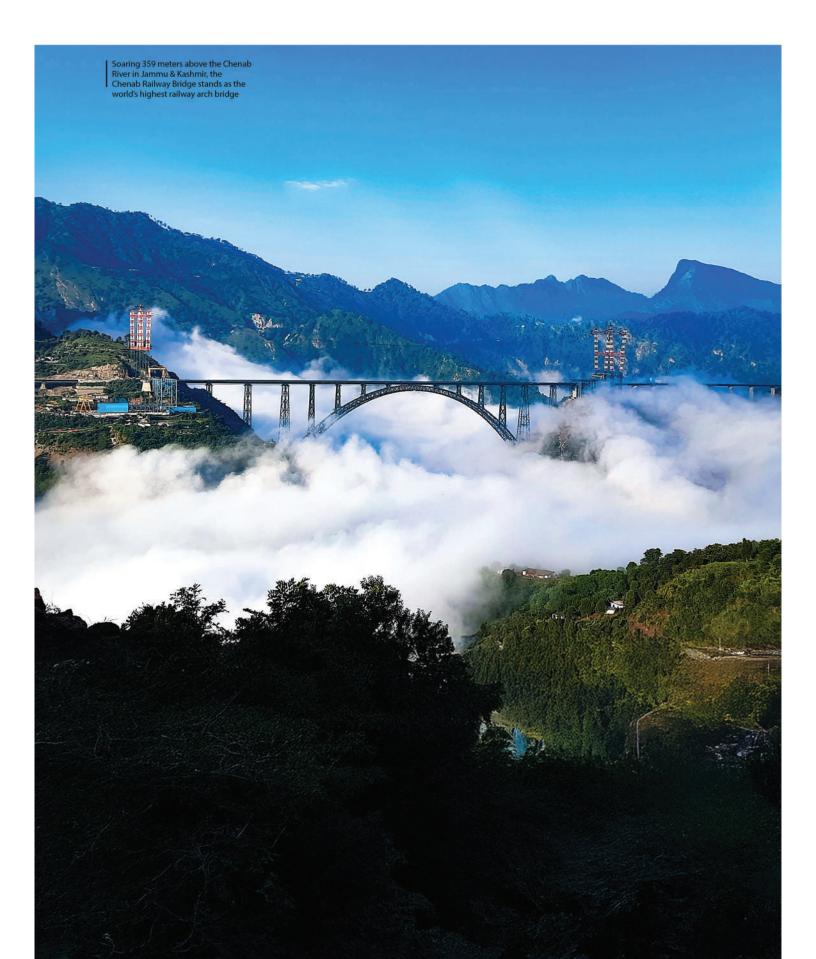




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tep off the sidewalk and into another world. Whether you're sipping champagne under the stars or pushing through a hidden bookshelf to a velvet-draped room echoing with jazz, today's nightlife scene is as much about the experience as it is about the cocktail. Rooftop bars, speakeasies, and piano lounges offer patrons something more than just drinks, they deliver atmosphere, story, and sometimes, even a little magic.

Across the U.S., these venues range from opulent to understated, from buzzing rooftops high above the skyline to moody corners beneath the city streets. Here are some of the best places to raise a glass – and your expectations – wherever your next evening adventure takes you.



CHENAB BRIDGE INDIA'S CROWN JEWEL OF ENGINEERING

Exclusive Interview Inside the mind of Prof. T.G. Sitharam, Chairman, AICTE and Geotechnical Consultant of the Chenab Bridge Project (2005-2020)

By Poonam Gupta

The Chenab Railway Bridge soars above the Eiffel Tower and along with the imposing Himalayan terrain, the bridge is not only the tallest arched railway bridge in the world, but it is the diamond in the crown of Indian Infrastructure revolution. This is a unique and in-depth interview with one of the principle thinkers behind the geotechnical engineering of the Chenab Bridge, Prof. T.G. Sitharam, as we explore in details the human side of the story, innovations, and the unstoppable spirit that made this national accomplishment possible.

During the interview, Prof. Sitharam talks about the journey he went through starting in 2005 when the project began till now when the bridge was completed, sharing some of the challenges that he and the team went through, some of the innovations they applied in real-time in the mountains of the Himalayas and the emotional experiences which made this an engineering saga spanning 15 years.

Come, get the story of the story behind the structure. Round, round, round the structure, but also behind it, a story of science, sacrifice and soul of a New India. Q1: The Chenab Bridge was inaugurated on June 6, 2025. What does this day represent in the journey of Indian engineering for you?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: June 6, 2025, will remain in history of Indian engineering. The opening of Chenab Railway Bridge by Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi was not a complete success story of the completed mega infrastructure project-but it was also a story of a bold idea that was too huge to conceive. With a height of 359 meters above the Chenab River, the structure is higher than the Eiffel tower and is the mark of the greatness of the human race, scientific accuracy and national determination. The Chenab Bridge is yet another bright spot of an Atmanirbhar Bharat being put to practice- where Indian skills, leadership and innovation prevailed in the development, implementation and conquest of extreme engineering marvels.

Q2: What personal reflections did you have as you stood beneath the steel arch of the completed bridge?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: And as I stood

under the steel arch and watched this colossal work of art shine against the rays of the sun, I was not only admiring its physical aspect, I was being overwhelmed by the vast pool of talent, endurance and technical innovativeness that brought it to this place. This bridge is not strands of webs and strands of strands it is the pencil marks and erasers that developed at midnight, the winds and winds fought on the job, the faces of trees cliffside chosen tentatively, and all those who worked day and night to get it erected.

Q3: Can you recount your earliest involvement with the Chenab Bridge project and your contribution to its design?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: I have gone to the site as early as January 2005 and remained actively engaged with the project even after more than 15 years and till the erection of the steel bridge started under the leadership of AF-CONS. My position fell mainly as a team leader in geotechnical design, where I was in charge of the stabilization of the slopes and foundation construction designs. These factors were especially

The Chenab Railway Bridge is not just a physical structure that connects two points, it stands as a profound symbol of what modern India is capable of achieving. It embodies the nation's unyielding resolve to dream big and execute even bigger.

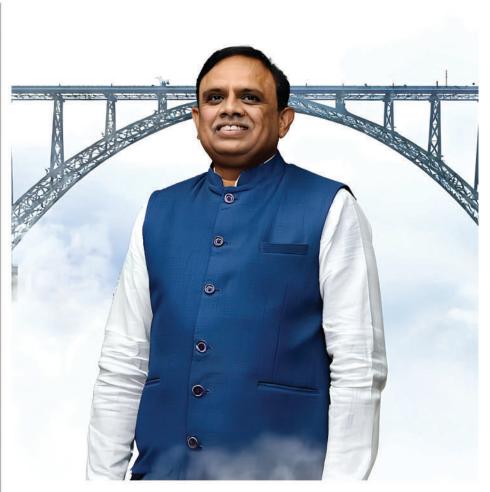
difficult with the very intricate topography in the Himalayas. I would like to thank the management of AFCONS to reposing their trust in my geotechnical field. I also want to sincerely thank all my friends and the numerous diligent students at IISc Bengaluru who cooperated with me in this project and helped us in this project tremendously on-site.

Q4: What does the successful completion of this bridge signify for the collective effort involved?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: I would like to take this opportunity and express my sincere thanks to all those people who participated in the construction of the Chenab Bridge. Their strong commitment, intense understanding and superior engineering expertise has left India with the largest railway bridge in the entire world; even more, it has become a source of national pride. This bridge is a bright example of what cooperation can fulfill with the help of vision and perseverance. It is sure to become the attraction among the people across the world not merely because of its size and design, but also due to the miraculous tale of how it was done.

Q5: How does the location of the Chenab Bridge in Jammu & Kashmir enhance its symbolic and strategic significance?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The selection of place is also very important, Jammu and Kashmir enhances this engineering art even more. It is cumbersome in terms of strategies and history that such a bridge in that region be constructed. We say there are crowns to head and in the most of the ways, Chenab Bridge is that crown itself a magnificent headpiece on the head of our country. This bridge is not just the bridge linking two sides of



Visual interpretation of Prof. T.G. Sitharam, symbolizing his 15-year journey as a core consultant in one of India's most iconic infrastructure projects.

a river; it is a bridge helping the hearts to connect, dreams to be conjoined and the vision of a new, progressive India.

Q6: Who were the key stakeholders and engineering visionaries who brought this project to life?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The unflinching strength and the leadership qualities of Mr. Subramaniam, the Executive Vice Chairman of Afcons Infrastructure Ltd must be commended, together with the hard work of the top officials of Afcons administration. The Indian Railways, in particular, the Northern Railway as well as the Konkan Railway Corporation Limited deserve equal credit as their engineers were the key persons behind the planning of this monumental project that was later made a reality by Afcons



Tunnel 31, one of the most critical passages on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), carves through the rugged Himalayan terrain

Infrastructure.

Q7: Can you explain why a parabolic arch was chosen and its scientific relevance to the project?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: They decided to have a parabolic arch, of course not only as an aesthetic or any structural feature but actually as a scientifically based solution, based on thousands of years of mathematical and engineering experience. The parabolas arch is an impressive shape, being self-supporting in nature. Consider a chain of some sort of elastic type suspended on a cable between to very high points. It takes a form of a catenary under its own weight. And when we consider this catenary when approximated by a parabola and render it solid we altogether have a form of a suspended chain inverted. When such a solidified parabolic shape gets gravity on it, the internal forces become completely compression. Inverting the whole structure now results in a load bearing arch whose compressive stresses are focused precisely on the centred axis of the arch.

Q8: How did this parabolic arch design enhance the bridge's ability to withstand natural forces? Prof. T.G. Sitharam: This stress superposition maximises structural effectiveness and stability. The enormous steel arch of Chenab Bridge (467 m) works in this rule, and the loads are simply distributed within the giant arch, as well as tremors and winds all over the mountains and rugged Himalayan region. The parabolic arches are not only beautiful but also very robust in that the forces are transferred by the arches to their foundations without the possibility of bending or torsion stabilizing forces that may cause instability to the structure.

Q9: Who were the technical reviewers and how did their role influence the bridge's resilience?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: This engineering reasoning got materialized in the form of hard work done by proof-checkers and review experts such as Mr. David Meckanzie of Flint & Neil and Mr. Philip Ward of AECOM. Such rigorous screening and checking of design calculations guaranteed not only a form but a working resilience the ability of the bridge to survive in a harsh environment, to resist the dynamic loads and the possible earthquakes

Q10: Who were the key project leads

and experts responsible for the erection of the bridge?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: Although the architectural masterpiece is depicted in the form of the iconic arch, the real strength of the bridge is embedded in the organization of people creating their own message through the construction. Mr. Subramaniam, Executive Vice Chairman of Afcons Infrastructure Ltd and Mr. Paramasivan Srinivasan, Managing Director, Afcons, with Mr. Giridhar Rajagopalan, Mr. Manivannan, Mr. Mandar Karnik and their teams in charge of operations at Afcons led the project. They had amongst other things extremely good freelance consultants like Mr. Andrew Faessler, Mr. S.B. Joshi, Mr. Sena Kumarasena and Mr. Khanolker, each of whom struggled with nature and terrain on a daily basis. These professionals championed in the construction of one of the most complicated cable cranes in the world, which covers a distance of 915 meters across the Chenab gorge. Through this engineering it was possible to install the arch ribs and deck bites at very great heights preciseness and millimetre accuracy.

Q11: What were the major geotechnical challenges faced during the construction and how were they addressed?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The slopes holding this wonder of engineering had to be stabilized and this demanded the expertise of the geologist. The geotechnical issues were unprecedented: broken dolomitic rocks, high natural slopes 43 o C to 77 o C and the imminent danger of rock fall and subsidence. My team members consisting of many of my colleagues and students in Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, under my leadership, have proceeded with slope stability of both abutments and foundation design of Chenab bridge. Our additions covered elements of slope optimization, analysis of wedge failures, examination of construction stage parameters, stabilization approach in general, confirmation of the design-as-you-go approach, evaluation of bearing capacities on jointed rock and also the use of consolidation grouting.

A MONUMENT OF MODERN INDIAN ENGINEERING



This bridge must serve not just as a structural landmark, but as a living classroom for young engineers. It teaches that the true strength of engineering lies not in textbooks alone, but in the courage to take on impossible odds.

Q12: Can you elaborate on the real-time innovations and construction methodologies that were adopted on-site?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: We went on the location and used a work initiation motion of design-as-you-go. This made real-time changes to geotechnical interventions. We used pre-splitting, advanced grouting, Dywidag tie rods and high-performance shotcrete with steel mesh. Under the circumstances in which the slope was required to resist both static loading and dynamic loading, the anchor blocks were anchored deep into the rocks so as to create stability. This methodology was translated and checked repeatedly in order to address the changing site circumstances.

Q13: Welding and wind engineering are often overlooked but critical. How were these challenges tackled in the Chenab Bridge?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The other important aspect was that of welding and wind engineering. Dr. Never an easy task of seamless welding of thousands of parts under





tough conditions, the Herculean effort was made by Suresh of Welding Research Institute, Trichy; Mr. A.K. Mandal, former RDSO Director, and the team of experts of Force Technology, Denmark. This was coupled with the aerodynamic work to combat the vibration induced by the wind especially the vortex shedding and the flutter that may cause damages to structures. Through their work, essential changes were made and the bridge is now resistant to the speedy winds in this area. The bridge is fitted with state-of-the-art structural health observing frameworks and basic sensors on the foundations.

Q14: Beyond the engineering, how important was team coordination and site management in delivering such a complex project?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: A main team that worked silently and successfully under the guidance of Mr. K. Subramanian was also an element that made the bridge to be successful. Such pillars of this team included Mr. Bhoem, Mr. V. Prasada Rao, Mr. R. Ananta Kumar, Mr. D.K. Kunar, Mr. V.J. Pai, Mr. VVRV Prasada Rao, Mr. K.M. Rao, Mr. Vishwa Murthy, Mr. Y. Tagore, Dr. Srinivas Mantrala, Mr. Shankar, Mr. Mandar Karnik, Dhanajaya Bhide, Mr. Umesh Kaul, and others, who made.

Q15: What role did quality control, safety, finance, and HR play in this engineering triumph?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: There were custodians of the process and people behind the numbers and nuts and bolts. Mr. The efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the ecosystem surrounding the bridge was taken care of by the close supervision of the quality processes by K.N. Pandey, the uncompromising adherence of the safety practices by Mr. Rama Krishna Rao, the astuteness of the financial management by Mr. S. Paramsivan and the humane head of human resources by Ms. Bhakti. They have worked on it but are invisible in steel but are branded in the soul of a project.

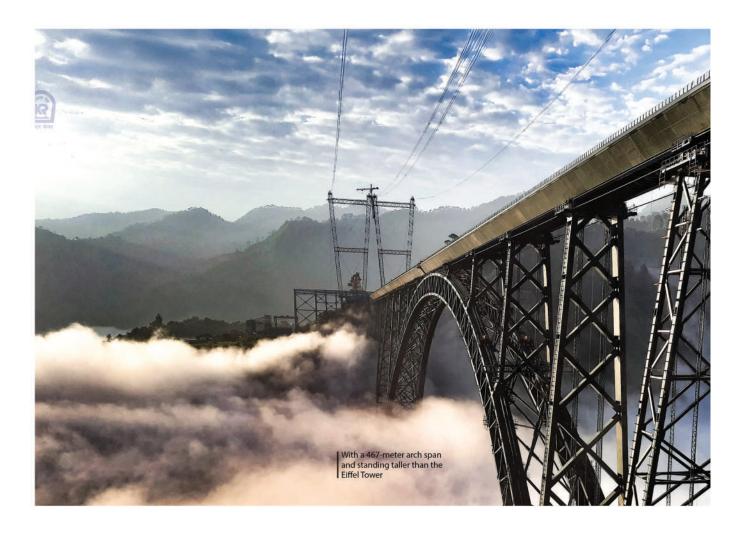
Q16: Is there a message you'd like to share for all those involved in the bridge's journey?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: Although I might have inadvertently left out the name of some people, I also give my utmost respect and sincere tribute to every single person that contributed—directly or indirectly towards the planning,



A conceptual representation of Prof. T.G. Sitharam emerging from the shadows

Engineering is not just about learning equations, it is about building legacies. The Chenab Bridge is one such legacy, and may it inspire generations to come to reach higher, dig deeper, and build stronger.





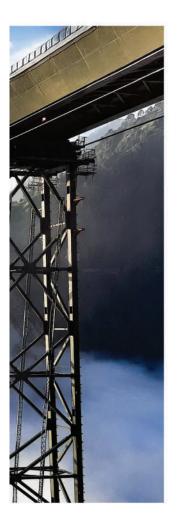
design, engineering, and constructions of this great bridge. Your hard work has managed to leave a mark that cannot be forgotten in history.

Q17: What does the Chenab Bridge symbolize beyond being just an infrastructure marvel?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The Chenab Railway Bridge not only serves as a transport corridor but a sign of national unity, scientific and engineering prowess. It re-establishes the power of what can be achieved when a country does dare to dream and when the engineers decide to make it happen.

Q18: What can young engineers and students learn from the Chenab Bridge project?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: To the students



ENGINEERING THE IMPOSSIBLE

In an exclusive interview, AICTE Chairman Prof. T.G. Sitharam reflects on his 15-year journey with the Chenab Bridge project, unpacking the vision, science, and leadership that redefined the boundaries of infrastructure in India.

The Chenab Bridge is not just World's highest railway bridge, it is a declaration of our technological maturity, national confidence, and the indomitable spirit of our people.

more, dig further and be stronger.

Q20: Any final thoughts on what this bridge means for India?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: The Chenab Railway Bridge is much more than an engineering triumph it is a proclamation of technological maturity, national confidence and winner spirit of the Indian people. The bridge makes a massive statement to the globe that India is no longer limited to its dreaming abilities but it can also undertake one of the most intricate and ambitious engineering projects using its own people and management. It remains proud and a symbol of hope, oneness, and indomitable spirit and especially to the residents of Jammu & Kashmir who now feel much close to the rest of the mother nation than ever before.

However, there is a deeper part of this

bridge than steel, concrete, equations, and that is the effort of hundreds of people who made it become a reality and allowed this dream to come true these were the people, engineers, workers, scientists, planners and administrators, who worked through day and night sometimes in harsh environments, to make this dream become a reality. Their sacrifice, passion and precision is the reason that made this project to be a national symbol.

Not only the building we can celebrate, but also those millions of people, who made it special: those who made some risk, thought outside the box, and stuck to the end. Chenab Bridge is their heritage and our pride. Jai Hind.

With the wisdom of Prof. T.G. Sitharam we not only get a window to the colossal technical requirements of the project but also an insight into the emotional and nationalistic pulse that propelled the project to near 2 decades of existence.

By the time India has succeeded in becoming a global engineering giant, the Chenab Bridge will be there literally towering over all the rest not only as the highest railway bridge in the world but an eternal reminder of what may happen when there is a meeting between fearlessness and competency. And I believe that this bridge can inspire the future generations to bridge their own chasms determinedly, wisely, united.

and young engineers all over India, this bridge should not only become a structural landmark, but also their classroom. It also makes us learn that the real power of engineering is not in textbooks, but in daring to run on impossible odds and being able to answer them, one calculation by calculation.

Q19: As Chairman of AICTE and someone deeply involved, what is your final message to the next generation of Indian engineers?

Prof. T.G. Sitharam: Being the Chairman of AICTE and one who has spent more than 15 years of his life being part of this cause, I want to say this to every engineer-to-be: Engineering is not all about study of equations-it is something about creating legacies. One of these legacies is the Chenab Bridge. May it stimulate the next generation to achieve



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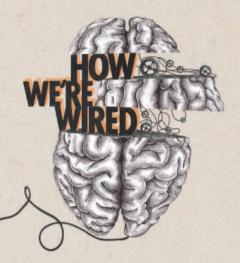
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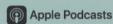
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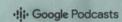
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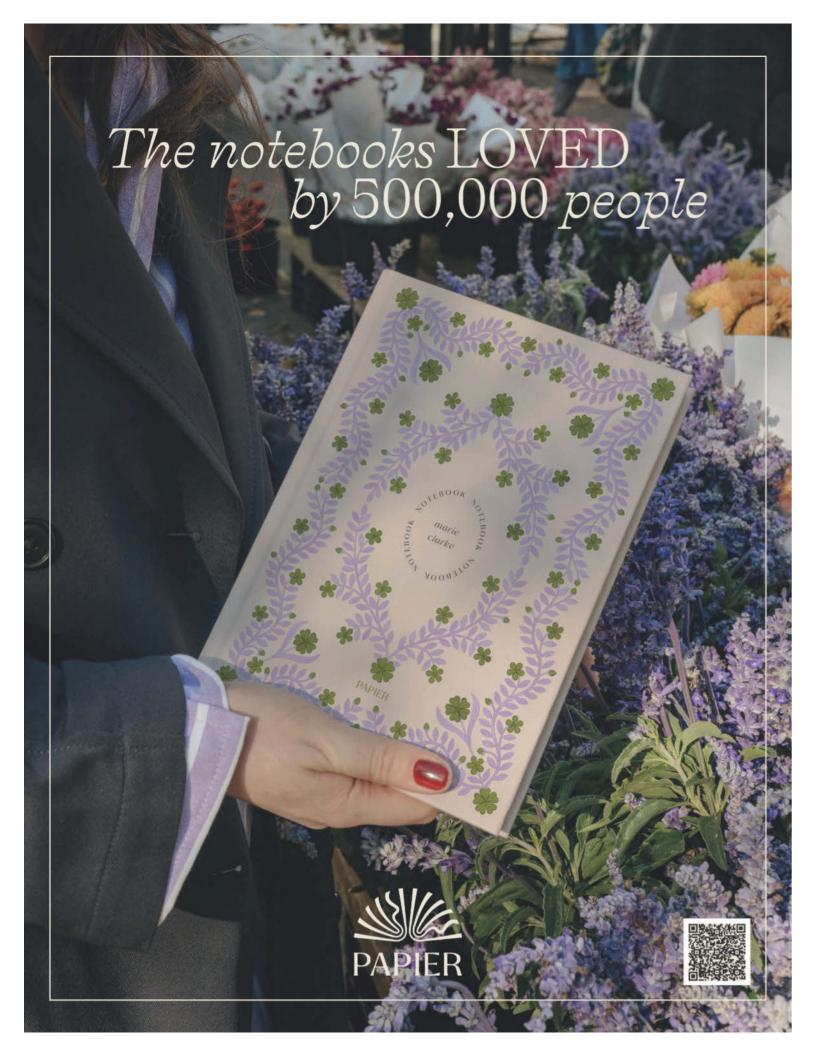
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