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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 8

War is waged as spectacle. We have devised new strategies of moral evasion

WHEN US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth spoke of causing "death and destruction from the sky all day long" in Iran, it was not simply an aggressive summons to havoc or an apocalyptic prophecy. Intentionally or not, it was a reminder of the utter global moral void of this moment.

All wars are terrible. But this Israel-US-Iran war, perhaps more than most, seems to have been unleashed with the sole objective of perpetuating its own fury. This war exists to achieve no aim. It is not a war to conquer or liberate. Even granting it the purpose of weakening Iran is granting it too much dignity. Its real aim is simply the continuation of its own violence. The war is about performance: An expression of power rather than an instrument for rational purposes. If it has a purpose, it is only this: To test the next generation of technology — missiles, AI, targeting systems, cyber warfare.

That is why the questions we are asking about this war miss the point. Did we learn the lessons of Iraq? Was there a plan for the day after? Why does the stated objective keep shifting: Is it denuclearisation, regime change, or the break-up of Iran? What can air power alone achieve? Did you anticipate that Iran would climb the escalatory ladder and try to impose severe economic costs on its neighbours?

These questions presume that the war has coherent purposes. But the modus operandi of the Trump administration has been the nihilistic display of power and

spectacle, shifting from one theatre to another. It will break every international law imaginable and flout hard-won precedents: Assassinating heads of state, sinking defenceless ships returning from goodwill missions without warning. The list will go on. The response will simply be the nihilist's version of that immortal line: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

The overweening nihilism of American and Israeli military power — we will strike anywhere and anytime with impunity — has met its counterpart in the nihilism of desperation embodied by the Iranian regime. The US and Iran have, to put it mildly, a complicated history. Iran became vulnerable in the way countries often do when they become the object of excessive American attention. It responded by cultivating proxies, pursuing a nuclear programme, and presenting itself as an ideological vanguard. The regime was politically odious. But it also converted its defensiveness and insecurity into a nihilism of its own. In retrospect, what is striking about Iran's strategy of survival is that it, too, failed to calibrate ends and means.

After Hamas's brutal attack on Israel, Iran turned out to be a power with all bark and little bite; for all its sound and fury, a country with a simulacrum of defence. Iran, it appears, was the perfect target, not because it posed an imminent threat, but because it was incapable of posing much of one at all. Its performative bluff had long been called out. The wars of



PRATAP
BHANU MEHTA

The modus operandi of the Trump administration has been the nihilistic display of power, from one theatre to another. It will break every international law imaginable and flout hard-won precedents

power that the US wished to wage did not need a reason. They only needed a pretext. Iran simply provided it. Iran has now responded, in a final act of desperation, by trying to raise the costs of war by drawing the rest of the world into the conflict. It has embraced the desperate version of "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

And then there is the rest of the world, with its own paralytic version of the same refrain. The moral stunting of the current crop of world leaders is astonishing. Watching Keir Starmer, Emmanuel Macron, and Friedrich Merz exude confusion about their stand on the war is like watching children trip over themselves because their shoelaces have been tied together. The Gulf monarchies are hardly better. Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and Mohammed bin Zayed in the UAE, after years of senseless proxy wars from Sudan to Yemen, have left their regimes ideologically hollow. Their mixture of ingratiating themselves with the West, while clamping down on their own civil societies since the Arab Spring, has produced leaders who no longer know what they stand for.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi does no better. This war has revealed the degree to which India has become a supplicant to American demands. If one believes that Modi's embrace of Netanyahu or India's tongue-tied silence has anything to do with protecting the Indian diaspora in the Gulf, one is simply in denial

about the vacuous reorientation of India's foreign policy. China, meanwhile, appears paralysed. Part of this may be quiet satisfaction at watching the US inflict another wound upon itself. But more likely, it reflects a deeper limitation: For all its power in a bilateral contest with the US, China still cannot lead an international coalition for peace, or against atrocity. The easiest adaptive preference becomes the same refrain: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

In the US, there is resistance within the Democratic Party. But it takes the easy refuge of procedural virtue, and debates over Congress's war powers. Perhaps the young have been chastened by the repressive powers of the state we saw deployed against protests last year. We have all devised new strategies of moral evasion.

The real obscenity of this moment is not simply the war itself; it is the normalisation of a world in which war has become performance. But if the great powers have chosen nihilism, the rest of the world still has a choice. The task now is not to take sides in this theatre of destruction, but to refuse the premise that the will to violence must dictate the terms of politics. What is required is states willing to say that aimless wars waged as spectacle, fought to test technologies, will not be legitimised by silence. Or else the chorus of this dying civilisation will be: "Frankly, my dear, we did not give a damn."

The writer is contributing editor,
The Indian Express

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

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Bracing for a crisis that goes beyond oil

IN 2022-23, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, India's current account deficit (CAD) hit a 10-year high of \$67.1 billion, amid skyrocketing global oil, fertiliser and food prices. But the situation was relatively manageable, thanks to net capital inflows of \$57.9 billion and some drawdown of official foreign exchange reserves. As international commodity prices eased and India started buying discounted Russian crude, the CAD narrowed to \$26.1 billion, even as net capital flows soared to \$89.8 billion, in 2023-24. The US-Israel versus Iran war offers no such relief. Capital flows fell to \$18 billion in 2024-25 and have turned negative (minus \$581 million) for the April-December 2025 period. India, thus, had a capital account problem before this war began: Foreign portfolio investors made net sales of \$18.9 billion in Indian equities last year and \$3.8 billion so far in 2026.

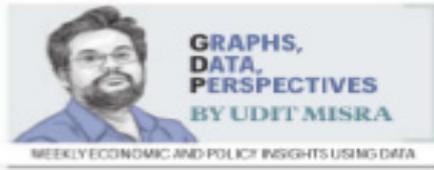
The current war, moreover, unlike Russia-Ukraine, is being fought far closer to home. India's exports of goods to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other West Asian countries were valued at over \$65.5 billion, and imports, mainly of petroleum and fertilisers, at \$154.6 billion in 2024-25. Further, there are nearly 8.9 million overseas Indians in the six GCC states alone and they account for some 38 per cent of the private remittances of \$135.4 billion received by the country during the last fiscal. The GCC countries have also emerged as a major source of foreign direct investment into India, across sectors, from energy and infrastructure to retail and data centres. Given the level of integration and flow of goods, labour and capital, any cataclysmic event in this region has huge consequences for India. The impact would be both on merchandise trade (especially from higher imported oil and gas prices) and invisibles (from lower remittance receipts), adding to the already weak capital flows.

India will seek to soften the blow for now by sourcing more Russian oil; that would have happened even without the 30-day "temporary waiver" from US sanctions. But this is a crisis that goes beyond oil, with the potential for dislocation far greater than from Russia-Ukraine. West Asia is today part of India's extended neighbourhood, vital to its energy security and hosting a massive diaspora contributing equally to the region's development and economic stability to families back home. India cannot afford to be indifferent. The Narendra Modi government must take the Opposition and Parliament into confidence, like it did during Covid and Operation Sindoor.

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New GDP series: Distance to \$5-tn target increases



LAST WEEK, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) came out with new GDP estimates. The GDP, the market price of all "final" goods and services produced within India, shows the economy's size. Broadly, the bigger the economy, the more prosperous a country is.

GDP estimates have to be refreshed from time to time because every economy goes through several changes—such as the prices people pay, the goods and services they purchase and use, etc. In the new series, 2022-23 is the new base year for GDP calculations. MoSPI has released the updated GDP for the years since and, in some time, will release the GDP of the year before the new base year. Here are the three biggest takeaways from the new GDP series.

Size of the economy

The existing estimates of India's GDP were bigger than the new ones. For instance, MoSPI now estimates that India's GDP for 2022-23 was Rs 261 lakh crore and not Rs 269 lakh crore. Similarly, for the current financial year, India's GDP is not Rs 357 lakh crore but Rs 345 lakh crore. This change has implications all around.

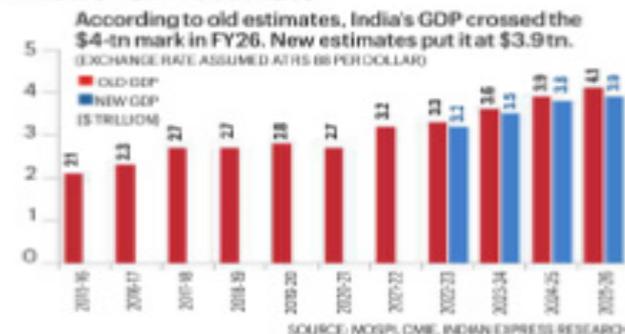
Average income

According to old GDP estimates, an average Indian's annual income in the current financial year was just over Rs 2.5 lakh. This is calculated by dividing the overall GDP by the size of the population. To be sure, Rs 2,51,393 as average income is quite low, both from a global as well as domestic perspective. The new GDP estimates find that the average annual income in India in 2025-26 is even lower at Rs 2,43,180. That's a monthly income of Rs 20,265.

The \$5-tn economy target

While nominal GDP is calculated in rupees, for global comparison, it is converted to US dollar terms by dividing the GDP by the exchange rate. The chart shows the growth of India's GDP in US dollar terms according to the outgoing estimates (shown in orange columns). According to the old estimates, India's GDP in 2025-26 had crossed the \$4 trillion mark. But with the new estimates pegging GDP at a lower level, and the fall in the rupee's exchange rate against the dollar, India's GDP is now at around \$3.9 trillion.

• Lower GDP estimate



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U.S. 'allows' India to buy Russian oil for 30 days

Oil from Russia may no longer be available at a discount, with Beijing competing for supplies

India has 25 days of crude oil in reserve, and 25 days of petrol and diesel each, sources say

Global oil supplies are currently constrained due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday issued an order that would "allow" India to import Russian oil for 30 days, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said while sharing the order on X.

Analysts say this will help mitigate the spike in the price of oil and delays in oil shipments to import-dependent India.

However, government sources confirmed that Russian oil may no longer come at a discount and that China was also competing for it. The government is currently studying the legal order, they added.

Mr. Bessent said the U.S. was granting India this reprieve to "alleviate pressure caused by Iran's attempt to take global energy hostage".

"This deliberately short-

term measure will not provide significant financial benefit to the Russian government as it only authorises transactions involving oil already stranded at sea," Mr. Bessent said.

The price of Brent crude has increased to nearly \$88 a barrel, a jump of about 20% in a week.

Global oil supplies are currently constrained due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and tankers avoiding the region due to the conflict.

This comes at a time when the Indian government has made assurances that the country has adequate amounts of crude oil, petrol and diesel in reserve. According to sources, India currently has 25 days of crude oil in reserve, and 25 days of petrol and diesel each.

Current status

A previous analysis by *The Hindu* of the latest preliminary data from the Ministry of Commerce and

Congress slams Centre over U.S. remarks

NEW DELHI Criticising the Centre over U.S. remarks, the Congress on Friday said it is "deeply humiliating for India's sovereignty". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on X, alleged that India's strategic autonomy and national sovereignty are under dire threat "because PM [Narendra Modi] is getting blackmailed on Epstein files and Adani case". » PAGE 5

Industry shows that India imported \$1.98 billion worth of crude oil from Russia in January 2026, the month before India and the U.S. issued a joint statement about an interim trade agreement between the two countries. This was the lowest in 44 months.

As a result of this, Russia's share in Indian oil im-



ports fell to 19.3% in January 2026, the lowest since December 2022. In comparison, Russia's share was 27.5% two months earlier, and 33% in May 2025.

Considering more than 55% of India's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, elevated price and delays will stretch India's oil bill (\$11.5bn/month) unless India ramps

up imports from Russia (19% currently versus 43% in July 2024)," JM Financial Services said in a note.

It added that, in the "extreme" scenario of Brent crude prices breaching the \$90 per barrel mark, India's current account deficit (CAD) could stretch to 1.4% of GDP, and the rupee could depreciate to ₹95 per U.S. dollar.

Consumers told to use cooking fuel judiciously

CHENNAI With restrictions placed on LPG supplies for both domestic and commercial consumers, the public has been advised to use the fuel judiciously. Single bottle domestic consumers will be allowed to make fresh bookings only after 21 days from the date of last booking. Commercial consumers using 19 kg cylinders were told they will not be given supplies, sources said. » PAGE 11

raise inflation, worsen the current account balance and complicate monetary policy as well as fiscal management if they lead to expanded subsidies to help offset the economic shock," Moody's said.

The sources in the government, however, said that Indian refiners have sourced more crude stocks from other parts of the world than what is currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz.

In his post, Mr. Bessent further said that "India is an essential partner of the United States", and that the U.S. anticipates that India will "ramp up" purchases of U.S. oil.

Data show that India has been increasing its imports from the U.S. over the past few months. That is, India imported \$11.6 billion worth of crude oil from the U.S. between April 2025 and January 2026, which is 32% higher than in the same period of the previous financial year.

Moody's also pointed out that India stands out among the large Asian economies that rely on crude and LNG from West Asia East due to its high share of West Asian crude among total oil imports, and pressure from the U.S. to cut its energy imports from Russia.

"Costly energy imports would weaken the rupee,

GS 2 : SOCIAL ISSUES

GS3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Balancing innovation with women's digital safety

The conversation around artificial intelligence (AI) has taken centre stage, and after the India AI Impact Summit 2026, in February, India's engagement with AI has heightened. While there is enough to appreciate how the world has transformed in terms of technology and innovation, on the occasion of International Women's Day 2026 (March 8), the need is to focus on "ethical AI" and women's digital safety.

With a steady rise in accessible Internet, women are continuously bearing the brunt of digital threats and humiliation. About 16%-58% of women have faced online harassment and abuse, a number that could rise further. Even as one in three women face physical or sexual violence, abuse against women has now crossed physical boundaries and geographies.

In the physical world, women can take a "degree of precaution", though never foolproof, to protect themselves. But in the digital world, protecting oneself from harm, doxing and abuse is significantly difficult. This is driven by technology's deep integration into daily life and the anonymity that the digital world affords the perpetrators of abuse.

This is the deepfake era

The rise of deepfakes and the recent Grok AI issue are a case in point. Deepfakes are digitally altered images, audio, or videos created using AI that appear as though someone has said or done something they never actually did. Grok AI, an AI chatbot developed by xAI, is being used to generate non-consensual sexualised images of women.

In India, women endure deep inequalities and widespread violence. With the use of AI and



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Ensuring the digital safety of women must guide AI development and its ethical use

access to deepfake technologies, the traditional and societal restraints of unacceptable behaviour melt away due to online anonymity. While one is not denouncing the use of AI and technology, the dialogue around the ethical use of AI is paramount now more than ever.

No women developers

One of the major concerns about AI and a lack of women's digital safety is the lack of representation of women at the stage of designing AI tools. According to a report by UN Women, many deepfake tools – mostly built by men – rarely work on images of men. According to the United Nations Development Programme, women make up only 22% of AI professionals and below 14% work at senior levels.

This lack of women's representation at the stage of AI development leads to fewer diverse viewpoints shaping innovation. Research suggests that with more women and diversity in AI development teams, the overall effectiveness and applicability of AI increases. It has been proposed by UN Women that if there are more women researchers in AI, then the unique lived experiences of women can "profoundly shape the theoretical foundations of technology" and open new applications of the technology. When this is achieved and diverse expertise is integrated in AI development, the hope is that AI supports and weaves in women as equal stakeholders in the digital world. This should help in creating safer online spaces and technologies, including swiftly removing harmful content and responding effectively to abuse at the source.

Stronger laws to ensure prompt investigations into the unethical use of AI are key to ethical AI use. While Indian legislation attempts to do its bit to address online abuse, implementation is far from prompt.

The new notification introduced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology directs that online intermediaries must take down reports of deepfakes within three hours of receiving a takedown notice. Notwithstanding the criticism of the new guidelines and the strong review process, the hope is that these guidelines are a step towards strengthening legislation to protect women from irreparable harm caused by unethical AI-like deepfakes.



INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY

Start young

A third way to address the unethical use of AI is to address the issue at the ground level. As one in three Internet users are children, one must accept that they are "digital natives" who are dependent on the web. Therefore, the emphasis on digital safety being taught at an elementary level to children is more crucial than ever. Children and young adults must be sensitised to the issue of digital abuse and AI misuse as seriously as the issue of sexual and physical abuse.

Resisting technological change, especially to AI, is futile and is not a sustainable solution as its integration into daily life is inevitable. However, on the occasion of International Women's Day 2026, prioritising women's digital safety and ethical AI use is essential so that women are not left bearing the brunt of advancement and technology.

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Boots vs Bots: the task of finding fighters for the new American war

NEWS ANALYSIS

Varghese K. George

A ceremonial event to honour American veterans at the White House, and the war of nerves between the Pentagon and AI giant Anthropic over the control and deployment of autonomous weapons systems amid the new West Asia war launched by the U.S. and Israel are connected by a shared question – where to find the fighters.

On March 2, three soldiers – Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Terry P. Richardson, honoured for saving 85 fellow soldiers under enemy fire in Vietnam; Master Sgt. Roderick W. Edmonds, posthumously recognised for shielding Jewish prisoners of war from Nazi guards in the Second World War; and Staff Sgt. Michael H. Ollis, posthumously honoured for absorbing a suicide bomber's blast to save a Polish officer in Afghanistan – were awarded the Medal of Honor by President Donald Trump.

However, the classic transfiguration of a soldier's death into an act of valour depends on a society willing to receive it. In the U.S., the cult of individualism is celebrated by the state and society alike. Social media has made the cost-benefit analysis of wars more democratic, and the loss of American lives is difficult to defend.

The question of who fights and who profits from wars has become an open public argument in the U.S. The manner in which war supporters were skewered by online influencers after many of them praised the sacrifice of the six Ameri-



All hands: An Uncle Sam American military recruitment poster used extensively in the World Wars to attract recruits. AFP

can soldiers killed in 'Operation Epic Fury' is instructive. The vertical propaganda of sacrifice for the nation – spoken by strategic elites in the name of national interest – is severely challenged, and there is no restoring that narrative in the U.S. In contrast, consider the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, who possibly wanted it that way: in Shia theology, revenge, sacrifice and martyrdom are integral.

Size of U.S. military

After the U.S. discontinued mandatory draft in 1973, the staffing of its voluntary military has gone through many policy questions and challenges. Currently, the size of the U.S. military is the lowest in its history – from 12.2 million during the Second World War to 1.4 million at the end of the Cold War to 1.1 million now. In 2018, a study estimated that 77% of young adults in the U.S. are ineligible to serve, disqualified by obesity, educational deficits, criminal records, or drug use. After several years of falling short of recruitment targets, the U.S. military had a good year in 2025, meeting them only after substantial pay in-

creases and the introduction of preparatory courses for recruits who could not meet baseline academic or fitness standards.

Among the measures the U.S. tried in order to work around its recruitment challenges was privatisation of war itself: more than half of the personnel the U.S. deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan were contractors – their casualties not even tracked by the Pentagon. The U.S. has long offered non-citizens an expedited path to naturalisation through military service; between 2011 and 2015, the Army would have failed its active-duty recruitment goals in nearly every year without non-citizen enlistments. As of early 2024, more than 40,000 foreign nationals were serving in active and reserve components of the armed forces, with an estimated 115,000 foreign-born veterans living in the U.S. From 2008 to 2016, under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest programme, the U.S. recruited non-citizens with critical language and medical skills from abroad in exchange for an expedited path to citizenship, enlisting over 10,000 before it was wound down on na-

tional security grounds.

Motivating people to give up their lives is no easy task, and capitalist societies find it harder than most. It is the lower end of the middle class who enlists, and it is poorer regions and communities that recruiters target. The richest are not sending their children to the battlefield. Religious warriors fight for the afterlife, currency that individualism lacks. Where the pursuit of individual happiness is both means and end, a soldier's work becomes, in material terms, just a job – like any other.

The mechanisms of war become a matter of public interest and domestic politics primarily through human casualties. This question – of American soldiers fighting wars they do not necessarily need to, or benefit from – has been central to the anti-war argument that now turns out to have been mere theatre in Mr. Trump's America First nationalism.

America First nationalism complicated the soldier identity in U.S. society by undermining non-citizen drafting. The fusion of citizen and soldier has been a classic American ideal, but capitalism had dealt with reality through its own mechanisms of reward – war contracting, and the drafting of non-citizens with the promise of citizenship. The prospect of machine soldiers offers the possibility of completely delinking the fighter from the domestic political process, making war a wholly technological, capitalist enterprise. Nobody will mourn for the machines; the President will not be required to read speeches in their honour.

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911 calls capture tales of tears, torment at largest detention facility in the U.S.

ICE operations across the U.S. have roiled communities, separated families and created a culture of fear; mass arrests have swelled detention centres; emergency calls at one such facility, Camp East Montana, reveal 'inhuman' conditions, the camp was 1,000% worse than a prison, a detainee says

Associated Press
EL PASO, TEXAS

The calls to 911 poured in from staff at Camp East Montana in Texas, the nation's largest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility, at a rate of nearly one a day for five months, each its own tale of pain and despair.

A man sobs after being assaulted by another detainee. Another bangs his head against the wall after expressing suicidal thoughts. A pregnant woman complains of severe back pain and also has coronavirus.

"Every day felt like a week. Every week felt like a month. Every month felt like a year," said Owen Ramsingh, a former property manager in Missouri, who spent several weeks in the camp before his deportation in February to the Netherlands. "Camp East Montana was 1,000% worse than a prison."

Fuelled by billions of dollars in new funding, ICE operations across the nation have roiled communities, separated families and created a culture of fear in pursuit of President Donald Trump's vow to rid the country of unauthorised migrants.

The mass arrests have swelled detention centres, and set ICE off on a national chase for space to warehouse those who have been apprehended. Far



Camp squalor: A satellite image shows the large white tents and steel fencing at Camp East Montana, an immigrant detention centre built by the Trump administration outside El Paso, Texas. AP

from the "worst of the worst" that Mr. Trump vowed to deport, the data from ICE show that 80% at the camp had no criminal record.

Camp East Montana looks like a pop up village, with six long tents along a stretch of the Chihuahuan Desert outside El Paso at the U.S. Army base Fort Bliss, once the site of an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War Two.

The detainees describe a camp where an average of about 3,000 people have lived per day in loud and unsanitary quarters. The centre will be closed to visitors until at least March 19 because of a measles outbreak, according to U.S. Representative Veronica Escobar.

Detainees struggle to obtain medication and health care, lose concerning amounts of weight because of a lack of food, and live in fear of security guards known to use force to put down disturbances. The ceilings in the windowless tents leak when it rains and they only see sunlight during brief outings once or twice a week to a cramped recreation yard.

Disturbing portrait

Like other detainees, Ramsingh said that between cleanings the rooms, restrooms and showers were often filthy and infested with insects. He said detainees stole others' food because everyone was hungry due to the small and sometimes inedible meals, which led to fights,

and the conditions took a toll on his mental health.

At one point he said he overheard a security guard talking about bets made among the staff over which detainee would be next to die by suicide. The talk was particularly jarring, he said, because he had contemplated suicide himself.

Mr. Ramsingh said he heard of the betting pool after January 3, when ICE said security guards responded after a 55-year-old Cuban man tried to harm himself and then used handcuffs and force to restrain him. A medical examiner ruled that Gerardo Lumas Campos's death was a homicide caused by asphyxia.

On January 14, staff reported that a 36-year-old Nicaraguan man died by

suicide days after he was detained.

In addition to those cases, detainees attempted to harm themselves while expressing suicidal ideations on at least six other occasions that resulted in 911 calls, according to records from the City of El Paso obtained under the Texas public information law.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the facility's medical staff "closely monitors at-risk detainees," provides mental health treatment and tries to prevent suicide attempts.

Mr. Ramsingh was a legal permanent resident brought to the U.S. at age 5, when his Dutch mom married a U.S. service member. He married a U.S. citizen in 2015. But at the age of 45, immigration authorities detained him. They cited a drug conviction from when he was 16 years old, for which he served prison time decades ago.

Other medical emergencies included seizures, chest and heart problems, according to a review of 130 calls made after the camp's opening in mid-August through January 20.

"It's not easy in here, psychologically," said detainee Roland Kusi, 31, who said he fled Cameroon in 2022 to escape political violence.

Immigration authorities arrested him in Chicago at an appointment with his wife, a member of the Ar-

my National Guard, to register their marriage in pursuit of legal residency for him.

A Cuban immigrant in his 50s said he requested to receive his medication for diabetes, high blood pressure and an enlarged prostate during a six-week detention at Camp East Montana but it never arrived. Desperate, the man said he once refused to leave living quarters when a cleaning crew came. An immigration official offered him Ibuprofen, and urged him to consider leaving for another country.

The detainees, mostly male, come from all over the world. Some have lived in the U.S. for decades.

The camp is intended for short-term stays. The average stay there is only nine days, according to ICE data, but some detainees have been kept for months amid court cases or logistical issues.

Advocates for detainees and some members of Congress have called for the camp's closure, citing inhumane conditions.

"This facility should not be operational. It feels like this contractor is reinventing the wheel, and people are losing their lives in their experiment," said Escobar, a Democrat from El Paso who has toured the camp several times.

(This story includes discussion of suicide. For those in distress, counselling is available at TeleMANAS-14416)