

Why a real estate titan chose the camera?

Reinventing Life at 75: A first-generation entrepreneur embraces acting and storytelling, proving ambition and curiosity don't retire with age

RITWIK MUKHERJEE

KOLKATA's skyline is dotted with PS Group landmarks, yet of late you seem equally visible on the silver screen. Your latest Hindi film marks your fourth outing as an actor. What drew you into cinema at this stage of life?

Films, for me, began not as a career shift but as an extension of education. We started making films primarily to give students of iLEAD—especially those in filmmaking—a real, immersive exposure. Classroom cameras and simulated projects can only take you so far. A professional film set, with expensive equipment, seasoned technicians and real deadlines, offers an education no textbook can.

The second, equally important objective was to tell stories with a message. Every film we made carried a social purpose. My first film was deeply personal, drawn from my experience of watching my mother battle cancer. Doctors advised that treatment would cause more pain than relief. We chose palliative care, and she lived two peaceful, meaningful years. I wanted people to understand that blind medical intervention is not always compassion. Families often exhaust their savings and subject patients to needless suffering while fighting a battle already lost. That truth needed to be told.

Your latest film, releasing nationally, has a very different theme—justice and resistance. Could you tell us about it?

This film is about a 75-year-old ordinary man—whom I play—whose entire family is killed by a politically connected criminal. Society assumes that someone of that age, without power or resources, cannot fight such forces. The film challenges that assumption. It is about will-power, courage and perseverance. If you have the resolve, you will find a way, regardless of age or circumstance.

The film, shot largely in West Bengal and the Sundarbans, features many local actors. It was

important for us to give regional talent and our students national exposure. Students participated in every department—cinematography, costumes, makeup, pre-production, post-production—making it a holistic learning experience. It releases on January 9 in around 150 theatres across India.

You often say that acting was something you were once told you could never do. Why did you decide to prove that wrong?

When I was in school, someone bluntly told me, "Mr. Chopra, you can't act—don't even try." For nearly seventy years, I believed that. Yet I constantly tell my students that the greatest joy in life is doing what you were told you couldn't do. At some point, I realised I had to practise what I preached.

So I acted in the first film—and discovered I wasn't bad at all. Veteran actors like Zarina Wahab and Mushtaq Khan told me my performance felt natural, not theatrical. Recently, after a premiere in Mumbai, senior actors and directors said they couldn't believe I wasn't a professional. That reaffirmed my belief: age is just a number, and self-imposed limitations are often the biggest barriers.

How does it feel to reinvent yourself publicly at 75, knowing audiences will judge your performance?

It feels liberating—and inspiring, I hope, for others. Too many people believe life ends at retirement. I tell them: today is the first day of the rest of your life. Whatever you couldn't do earlier, start now. You're never too old or too young to learn something new. All you need is intent, courage and willpower.

Has this philosophy guided your business journey as well?

Absolutely. I am a first-generation entrepreneur. My father was in service and left me no capital. When I did my first real estate deal, I didn't even have ₹100 in my pocket. Yet I signed a

₹20-lakh deal and made ₹8 lakh without investing a rupee. Our first housing project on Chakrabheria Road was built with negative capital.

We created a model based on joint ventures with landowners and advance sales. People told me real estate was impossible without money. Today, PS Group has completed over 200 projects and nearly 20,000 apartments—the highest in Kolkata. Any significant land deal in the city still comes to us first, largely because of trust.

Was that early success luck, or business acumen?

It was a mix of luck, courage and insight. Luck brought the opportunity. Courage allowed me to take the risk. Insight



helped me execute it. Opportunity favours those who understand their subject deeply.

What advice would you give young entrepreneurs today?

Never pursue an idea that everyone approves of. If everyone agrees, competition will be fierce. The best ideas are those people say are impossible. That's where opportunity lies. I entered industries others dismissed—whether real estate without

capital, exporting granite to Germany, or creating an education model centred on wisdom, not just knowledge. Being the first mover makes all the difference.

That philosophy also shaped iLEAD, didn't it?

Yes. People said creating institutions like Harvard or Oxford in India was impossible. I wanted to prove them wrong—not by copying them, but by reimagining education. Knowledge alone isn't enough. Life requires wisdom and life skills—how to handle failure, disappointment, setbacks.

Our campus walls speak. They carry quotes and ideas that can transform lives. Each classroom is dedicated to a visionary—Charlie Chaplin, Bill Gates,

projects and nearly 20,000 homes. He defies every convenient label. Builder, teacher, actor, technologist, dreamer—he is all of these and more. At an age when many slow down, he accelerates, reminding us that the most powerful reinvention is not of careers, but of mindset. In a free-wheeling interview with Bizz Buzz, Pradip Chopra, Founder, Chairman, iLEAD Institute and PS Group, explains how at seventy five (75), he is continuously reinventing himself and delves at length on films, failure, first Principles and the future

ers. Creating human capital has far greater societal impact.

You seem deeply engaged with emerging technologies—AI, AR, VR—at an age when many shy away from them. Why?

I am not technology-driven; I am dream-driven. Technology is merely a tool to realise dreams. With AI and augmented reality, we can recreate history, bring monuments alive, transform education and healthcare.

Imagine Newton teaching physics in a classroom, or Charlie Chaplin explaining acting. We are already doing this at iLEAD. We are building AI-driven films on Indian mythology and history, museums that use immersive technology, and even exploring AI-based healthcare solutions for remote areas where doctors refuse to go.

Some fear AI will destroy jobs. Your response?

Every transformative technology has faced that criticism. Computers did, too. AI will create more jobs than it destroys. It won't replace humans; humans proficient in AI will replace those who aren't. You can hate it or fear it, but you cannot ignore it. As I often say, no army can stop an idea whose time has come.

Looking back, which role have you enjoyed the most—builder, educator, or filmmaker?

I've enjoyed every phase. Building PS Group was about creating a company with values. Education was about shaping lives. Films, museums and technology projects are about leaving behind ideas and inspiration. At this stage of life, I'm pursuing what I once postponed. Money is no longer the motivator—meaning is.

Finally, what keeps you going at 75?

Curiosity. Dreams. And the belief that life is a continuous journey of reinvention. As long as I can imagine a better way of doing something—and find the courage to try—I feel young.

AI can help reduce drownings

MICHELLE O'SHEA

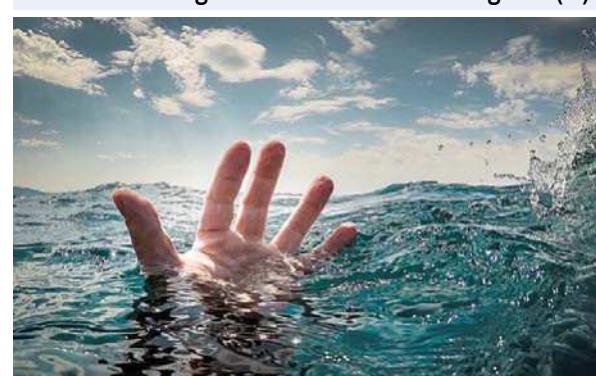
THIS year, Australian drowning deaths reached their worst level in three decades. Tragically, 357 drownings were reported between July 1 2024 and June 30 2025, with many more non-fatal incidents. Australian drowning fatalities have surged because of "crisis-level" declines in swimming skills, especially among regional, remote and migrant communities. Swimming at unpatrolled beaches and inland waterways that typically don't have lifesaving services has also contributed to these deadly trends. So too has rock fishing. With people now off work and enjoying the summer holidays, drowning risk is even higher than normal. Education and awareness remain tried and tested ways to reduce drowning fatalities. For example, this summer, Surf Life Saving Australia's virtual "Beach Passport Campaign" is enabling the public to easily locate patrolled beaches. But water safety experts are also partnering with computer scientists to harness the power of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) to help save lives.

High-tech watchtowers

Surveillance AI for lifesaving is one key advancement. Cameras at coastal hazard sites (selected based on historical incident data) capture continuous video feeds. These are then analysed by AI to identify emergency events. The advantage of AI drowning detection is in reducing emergency response times in dynamic environments. For example, if a rock fisher was washed off the rocks and into the water, AI identifies the event and alerts emergency services (within seconds) so they can validate the emergency and deploy rescue resources.

Smartphones and citizen scientists

Water safety experts are also partnering with computer scientists to harness the power of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) to help save lives



Rip currents are strong, narrow, fast-flowing currents of water that occur on many beaches and are difficult for swimmers to identify. Thousands of images containing rip currents are needed to train an AI-based model. Australian researchers are leading this endeavour with a huge repository of images collected through CoastSnap—a community-driven initiative where beach goers can take an image of the beach with their smartphones. In partnership with Surf Life Saving Australia, RipEye is helping train lifeguards in rip detection and lifeguards are helping train AI. A smartphone app available to the general public is also being developed for the future. At a beach location users can capture real time wave movements and currents with the app signalling if swimming conditions are safe.

Designing information for the human brain

To work effectively, an AI-powered alert system must consider several basic human-centred questions. For example, what information should be shown? Too much detail overwhelms; too little is ignored. How should the information be presented? Visual cues (such as text, shapes, colours, icons, motion, flicker) or audio tones, or subtle vibrations each have advantages and drawbacks. Where should alerts appear?

On a smartwatch, a wall display, augmented-reality glasses? Poor placement can block vision or pull attention away from other incidents. When should alerts appear? Too early and people may attend to other things; too late and the chance to intervene is lost. These design decisions matter because drowning detection is a vigilance task—a type of attention known to decline rapidly under fatigue or stress.

Not a perfect solution

The advantage of AI drowning detection is in reducing response times in dynamic pool and beach environments. However, this requires nearby and available rescue resources. Many of the technologies involve camera-based image analysis, which can also introduce privacy concerns. Another issue is that AI drowning detection is imperfect. It sometimes produces false alarms and fails to detect people in distress.

To overcome this, it's important that people are not just properly trained in how to use AI to detect drownings, but also that an AI system clearly explains how an assessment was made, and adapts when errors occur so that lifesavers work with the system as partners and not simply as responders.

The benefit of AI alerts depends on human operators' ability to interpret, trust and act. So the question isn't just whether AI can detect danger—it's whether the information it delivers is cognitively digestible when lifesavers need it.

But AI-powered lifesaving methods are no substitute for swimming skills. So if you do cool off with a swim this summer, always remember: never swim alone, swim between the flags, listen to lifesavers and be vigilant around the water.

IMF's orthodoxy set to consign Pakistan to a low-growth trap: Report

NEW DELHI

Since 2022, the installed government has imposed, under the watch of the IMF, "a crushing burden on ordinary Pakistanis via austerity policy"



loyalties towards the making of a new political order, it argues. In the process, the entire burden of adjustment has been placed on ordinary Pakistanis and tax-compliant firms.

As a result, the country is experiencing permanent economic 'scarring', with businesses shutting down, unemployment surging, and nearly one out of every two Pakistanis now estimated to be below the poverty line," writes Sherani.

For example, a cumulative fiscal adjustment of 5.5 per cent of GDP has taken place, the largest over a similar period in Pakistan's history. Much of this adjustment has come from new taxation measures. The government

has imposed taxes and levies totalling over Pakistani rupee 50.4 trillion since 2022-23 (including federal as well as provincial taxes and the petroleum levy). "This is equivalent to the cumulative tax collection over the 17-year period prior to 2022.

Repeating the past pattern of failure, the additional taxation has not come through tax broadening but by placing demands on existing taxpayers," said the report.

The 'development' spending, a surrogate way of handing out taxpayer money to ruling coalition politicians, has surged from Rs 1.9 trillion in 2022-23 to a budgeted Rs 3.1 trillion in 2025-26 for embarrassingly large delegations to different parts of the world, lavish spending on offices and official residences, etc, is on top of the foregoing," the report mentioned.

The report further stated that either the "IMF is a witting party to this regime-supporting and system-legitimising operation, or it has been completely negligent in its fiduciary responsibility to ordinary citizens of a member country. Either way, it should be held accountable".

Why Zomato sacks close to 5,000 gig workers a month?

NEW DELHI

CEO Deepinder Goyal reveals that those who choose to leave the platform consider gig work as a temporary job



ZOMATO sacks close to 5,000 gig workers a month due to cases involving fraud, while another 150,000 to 200,000 workers leave the fast food delivery platform on their own, its parent firm Eternal's founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal said.

In a video podcast with YouTuber Raj Shamani, Goyal said that those who choose to leave the platform consider gig work as a temporary job. Several gig workers operating on quick commerce and food delivery platforms, including Zomato, had gone on a flash strike during New Year's Eve, in support of their demand for high wages, better working conditions and security coverage.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has published the draft rules for the four labour codes, which also bring gig workers on board for various benefits such as minimum wage, health, occupational safety and social security coverage. The government has invited feedback from stakeholders on these draft rules and aims to finally roll out the entire package of four labour codes across the country from April 1.

Under the draft rules, in order to be eligible for the benefits, a gig or platform worker must be associated with an aggregator for at least 90 days in a financial year to qualify for social security benefits created by the Centre. If a worker is engaged with more than one aggregator, the minimum requirement is fixed at 120 days.