

Geopolitical tensions, oil surge challenge IT recovery

INDIAN IT companies will kick off their earnings season from Friday. While fourth-quarter (Q4FY26) results for most firms are expected to be broadly in line with the third quarter, investors will be keenly watching management commentary on growth prospects for FY27.

There is little doubt that the past financial year was challenging for the global technology industry, with Indian IT companies feeling the impact. The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI), along with new tools and plugins from generative AI leaders like Anthropic, OpenAI and others, added to the uncertainty. Although enterprise-scale adoption of many AI tools is still evolving, their emergence alone made investors nervous.

In addition, Indian IT firms faced another major pressure point during the year. US President Donald Trump imposed a 50 per cent punitive tariff on India. While services were not directly impacted, the move dented investor sentiment by raising uncertainty around a potential India-US trade deal.

Unsurprisingly, IT stocks witnessed a sharp correction during FY26, with many falling 30-50 per cent. The Nifty IT index underperformed for yet another year. Conditions began to improve slightly with progress on a trade deal with the US and easing fears of AI-led disruption, leading to a modest recovery in IT stocks.

However, fresh geopolitical tensions emerged toward the end of February with the Iran-US-Israel conflict. The resulting surge in crude oil

prices has had a cascading effect across sectors. As we enter FY27, global stability remains a key concern for the Indian IT industry. In just one month of conflict, global supply chains have been disrupted across several industries. Downstream sectors reliant on crude oil and its derivatives are beginning to show signs of stress, an important concern for the global IT outsourcing industry.

Oil lies at the heart of the global economy, and any disruption in its supply or pricing affects nearly all sectors. From oil and gas, manufacturing, and retail to banking, insurance and technology, multiple verticals within the IT industry have felt the impact over the past month. Rising inflation is also beginning to strain consumer spending. However, there is a silver lining amid the volatility. The United States, one of the largest markets for Indian IT firms, is relatively less dependent on West Asian oil supplies, which could limit the impact on IT spending.

In contrast, Europe remains heavily dependent on oil supplies from West Asia. Given that Europe contributes roughly 30 per cent of revenue for most Indian IT firms, any slowdown in the region could pose a significant growth challenge.

Against this backdrop, the recent ceasefire announcement between the US and Iran offers some relief. However, its sustainability remains uncertain, making it difficult to form a clear outlook on the growth prospects of the Indian IT industry in FY27.



A democracy needs opposition—but not this one

When opposition loses direction, democracy pays the price



INDIA today lives in a near-permanent election cycle. Every few months, one state or another goes to the polls, and with that comes a familiar spectacle: a collapse of serious political discourse into noise, accusation, and manufactured outrage. What should be a contest of ideas has increasingly become a contest of narratives—many of them unverified, exaggerated, or plainly false. Instead of original thinking, there is an overdependence on rhetoric, and increasingly, on the misuse of artificial intelligence to amplify half-truths. It is as though original intelligence has been outsourced, leaving behind a hollowed-out political conversation.

At the centre of this decline is a troubling pattern within sections of the opposition, particularly the INDIA bloc led by the Congress. Rather than articulating a coherent alternative vision, much of its energy appears consumed by a singular obsession: opposing Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Opposition is the lifeblood of democracy, but when it becomes an end in itself—divorced from policy, perspective, or national interest—it risks degenerating into negativity for its own sake. In that process, the line between criticising a government and undermining national confidence is often blurred.

Equally disconcerting is the tendency of some opposition leaders to make statements that appear disconnected from geopolitical realities. Casual or exaggerated remarks about countries like Pakistan, or claims of

backchannel "mediation," raise more questions than they answer. Diplomacy is a serious business, conducted through established channels, not through political soundbites. When leaders speak loosely on such matters, it not only undermines India's foreign policy credibility but also reflects a worrying lack of strategic depth.

There is also a persistent misconception that minority communities can be mobilised through simplistic narratives or rhetorical positioning. Electoral behaviour in India has evolved significantly. Muslim and Christian voters, like all other citizens, are discerning and driven by local issues, governance performance, and leadership credibility. Treating them as monolithic vote banks is both outdated and politically counterproductive. Ground realities repeatedly show that voters cut across identity lines when making choices, and political parties ignore this complexity at their own peril.

Recent campaign trends in states such as Assam illustrate how political discourse can slip into dangerous territory. Allegations made by Congress media department in-charge Pawan Khera made particularly those targeting Rinki Bhuyan Sarma, wife of Assam Chief Minister Hemanta Biswas Sarma backfired. It led to subsequent escalation into legal battles and political theatrics forcing Khera to go to Hyderabad to avoid his arrest by Assam police in Delhi.

The language employed by some senior leaders like AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge during his campaign in Kerala has also raised serious concerns. He said, BJP and RSS are like snakes, unless you beat them and kill them, you will have no existence. Is this the definition of Rahul Gandhi's Mohabbat ki Dukhan?

Political rhetoric has always been sharp, but there is a grow-

ing coarseness that crosses the boundaries of democratic decency. Kharge tried to dehumanise opponents and insult Gujaratis which reflects a deeper malaise. Kharge said, "Kerala's educated voters cannot be fooled unlike illiterate people in Gujarat and elsewhere." There was another leader Mahua Moitra of TMC who said Gujaratis never participated in freedom struggle. It seems she forgot the origin of father of nation Mahatma

"One Nation, One Election" framework—need to be implemented at the earliest.

Questions also arise about leadership and consistency within the opposition. The absence or low visibility of key figures at crucial moments creates a vacuum that is often filled by discordant voices. Campaign slogans and political branding exercises, however well-crafted, must be backed by sustained engagement and credible action.

India's relentless election cycle has turned political discourse into a battleground of noise, not nuance. Sections of the opposition, instead of offering credible alternatives, appear trapped in a cycle of rhetoric, personal attacks, and manufactured narratives. From irresponsible statements on national security to divisive language and legal theatrics, the larger concern is clear: without discipline, coherence, and respect for facts, the opposition risks weakening not just itself, but the democratic fabric it claims to defend

Gandhi and the 'Iron Man of India' Sardar Vallabhai Patel. Such comments make one feel it is time for the government to get the one nation one election bill passed.

When leaders resort to such language, they not only diminish their own stature but also lower the standards of public debate. Democracy thrives on disagreement, but it cannot sustain itself on contempt. Reducing them to regional one-upmanship reflects a narrow political mindset that is out of step with the aspirations of a united India.

The frequent elections themselves are not without consequence. The constant campaign mode leaves little room for governance and encourages short-term thinking. It also incentivises sensationalism over substance, as parties seek quick electoral gains. In this context, the idea of synchronised elections—often debated under the

Otherwise, they risk being seen as mere optics, disconnected from ground realities.

The situation in West Bengal further underscores the challenges facing India's democratic processes. Incidents of violence, intimidation, and administrative failure during election periods are deeply troubling.

Holding seven-judicial officers including three women for about seven hours and non-response of DGP, Chief Secretary and police forces who were said to be about 300 metres from the BDO's office and the apparent breakdown of law and order raise serious concerns about institutional integrity. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee conveniently claimed credit for arresting the man who incited violence but abdicated her responsibility when the officers were attacked saying state was under control of CEC which is factually incorrect.

The responsibility for maintaining order even when the election code is in force ultimately rests with the state machinery. Any perception of abdication weakens public trust.

The interactions between political parties and constitutional bodies like the Election Commission also merit attention. Disagreements are natural, but the manner in which they are expressed matters. The TMC ministers and leaders went to the office of the Chief Election Commissioner Gyaneshwar Kumar's office. O'Brien called the interaction a "shame" and challenged the ECI to release audio or video of the meeting.

Reacting to this, the CEC sources said that they did not ask the delegation to go out. The commission said Derek O'Brien was "shouting" at the commissioners and told the CEC not to speak, violating the decorum of the commission.

Later, in a post on X, the ECI stated that it delivered a "straight-talk" to the TMC, promising that the 2026 Assembly elections in West Bengal would be "fear-free, violence-free, intimidation-free, inducement-free" and without booth or source jamming.

The ECI accused the TMC of attempting to influence Block Level Officers (BLOs) and reaffirmed that electoral processes are governed by law, urging the state to ensure a transparent process.

What emerges from these trends is a larger concern about the direction of political discourse in India. The opposition has a crucial role to play—not just as a critic of the government, but as a credible alternative. That requires discipline, coherence, and a commitment to facts. It also demands a shift from personality-driven politics to issue-based engagement.

(The author is a former Chief Editor at The Hans India)

The slopoganda storm: How AI is rewriting war narratives

Viral deepfakes and symbolic content are reshaping public opinion faster than facts can catch up

MARK ALFANO

IN early March, a week after the first US-Israeli strikes on Iran, the White House posted a video of real American attacks mixed with clips from popular movies, television series, video games and anime. Iran and its sympathisers responded to the strikes by flooding social media with outdated war footage allegedly from the current conflict alongside AI-generated content depicting attacks on Tel Aviv and US bases in the Persian Gulf. More recently, viral video clips reportedly created by a team of Iranians depict Donald Trump, Jeffrey Epstein, Satan, Benjamin Netanyahu, Pete Hegseth, Ayatollah Khamenei, and others as Lego figurines. Welcome to the brave new world of slopoganda.

The rise of slopoganda

Late last year, in a paper published in Filisofiska Notiser, we coined the portmanteau "slopoganda" to refer to AI-generated slop that serves propagandistic purposes. By propaganda we mean communication intended to manipulate beliefs, emotions, attention, memory and other cognitive and affective processes to achieve political ends. Add generative artificial intelligence and the result is slopoganda. The slopoganda situation has since become far worse than we expected. In October 2025, US President Donald Trump posted an AI-generated video depicting himself piloting a fighter jet while wearing a crown and dumping faeces on American protesters. More recently, he posted an AI-generated video envisaging his presidential library as an enormous gaudy skyscraper, complete with a golden elevator. Lego-themed Iran-created slopoganda is just the latest example. The material isn't just videos. It can also be images, text, or whatever else AI can generate.

How slopoganda slips through our defences

What is the point of all this slopoganda? We have several answers so far. First, through repeated exposure in both legacy and social media, slopoganda can penetrate our usual mental defences. It works when it is attention-grabbing, emotionally arresting typically in a negative way and delivered to a distracted audience, such as people scrolling social media or switching between browser tabs. Second, it is a very effective way of diluting the epistemic environment of the world of what we think we know with falsehoods and half-truths. As



philosophers have argued, ChatGPT and other generative AI tools can be machines for bullshit, in the sense of content that is indifferent to truth. Slopoganda can be understood as a special kind of AI bullshit, but its unique features become clearer when we look at its use in campaigns such as the Iranian Lego videos. This is not just bullshit. No one is misled into thinking Trump can pilot an F-16 and drop faeces out of it. No one (we hope) believes plastic Trump Lego figurines are in cahoots with a plastic Satan figurine. Rather than aiming for accuracy, the slopoganda is expressive and emblematic of feelings and emotions, and meant to create an association. The intended linkages are something like Satan is associated with Trump while the United States is associated with evil, and so on.

What slopoganda means for shared truth

A third point is that some slopoganda is indeed misleading. This may be by design, or because a joke or trolling escapes its intended context and is misunderstood as serious as a phenomenon scholars call "context collapse". Misleading slopoganda, including deepfakes, can be generated quickly during conflicts, crises and emergencies, when people want information but authoritative sources are scarce. Once misleading information or a particular association enters someone's mind, it can be hard to shake. Because slopoganda can reach huge audiences, even a small misleading effect in the general population may have significant consequences. State actors, corporations, and private individuals can potentially influence group beliefs and decisions, including election results, protest movements, or general sentiment about an unpopular war. Fourth, the prevalence of slopoganda may make us doubt everything else. People will no doubt become better at spotting this kind of material, but they will also become more likely to misidentify authentic content as slop. As a result, public trust in genuinely trustworthy individuals

and institutions may also fall. When this occurs, the overall effect is likely to be a general lowering of public trust in genuinely trustworthy individuals and institutions, leading to a kind of nihilistic doubt in really knowing anything. When it's hard or impossible to identify trustworthy sources, you can choose to believe whatever you find comforting, invigorating or infuriating. In increasingly polarised societies struggling with interlocking economic, political, military and environmental crises, the breakdown of shared sources of truth will only make things worse.

Ways to stave off slopogandapocalypse

What can be done about the slopoganda shitstorm? In our paper, we discuss interventions at three different levels. First, individuals can become more digitally literate, for instance by looking for telltale signs of AI in text, images and video. They can also learn to check sources rather than merely glancing at headlines and other content, as well as to block sources that routinely spread slopoganda, rather than attempting to evaluate each piece of content in a vacuum. This will help them avoid falling for slopoganda while still trusting authentic sources of news and other information.

Second, industry and regulators can implement technological fixes to watermark AI-generated content. Some content may even need to be removed from platforms where people see news and other important information. Third, large tech companies such as OpenAI, Google and X can be held accountable for what they have made. This could be done through taxation and other interventions to fund both regulatory efforts and education in digital literacy. Slopoganda is probably here to stay. But with sufficient foresight and courage, we may still be able to adapt to it and even control it.

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How Artemis II learned to see the moon differently

Astronauts combine classroom science and rugged fieldwork to decode lunar landscapes

GORDON OSINSKI

THE Artemis II crew has now broken the record - previously held by Apollo 13 - for the farthest distance any humans have ever travelled from Earth. The crew also completed a flyby of the moon's far side and sent back some amazing images of the lunar surface. I am a professor, an explorer and a planetary geologist, specializing in the study of meteorite impact structures. I am also a member of the First Artemis Lunar Surface Science Team and have been supporting NASA in developing the geology training for Artemis astronauts.

The flyby was particularly exciting as it offered a stunning new perspective of the lunar surface. It also provided the first operational test of a new science team and evaluation room at Mission Control in NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. And it was fantastic to see the Artemis II crew conduct observations and take photographs of geological landforms on the moon's surface - putting their training with me at the Kamestastin Lake impact structure, on the territory of the Mushuau Innu First Nation in northern Labrador, into practice.

A new view of the moon

Unlike the Apollo missions, that orbited at approximately 110 kilometres above the surface of the moon, Artemis II was at a much higher altitude - around 6,545 kilometres above the lunar surface. This greater distance allowed the crew to view the moon as a full disk, including regions near both the North Pole and South Pole. The crew was also able to take targeted photographs of various geological landforms on the lunar surface as part of the Artemis II science program. One of the primary goals of these investigations is to inform



One of the highlights of NASA's livestream during the mission has been the direct conversations between two good friends: Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen and science officer Kelsey Young. Science officers are the senior flight controllers responsible for lunar science and geology objectives during Artemis missions. They act as the main interface between the wider Mission Control team and the Artemis II science team, which is located in a totally separate room called the Science Evaluation Room (SER)

future missions, including the planned first journey back to the lunar surface with Artemis IV as soon as 2028.

A new science team

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A crash course in lunar geology

If you listened to NASA's livestream and heard any of the geological descriptions the astronauts were giving, I hope you were impressed - I certainly was! Their know-

ledge is a testament to the geology training that NASA has provided the crew in the months and years since they were selected for the Artemis program. First, the crew participated in a crash course in lunar geology called "Lunar Fundamentals." This week-long, classroom-based training offered them the basics to understand lunar geology and the processes that shape the moon's surface - primarily impact cratering and volcanism. However, as somebody who has been teaching for more than 20 years, I know the best place to learn about geology is in the field. That's why NASA also took the Artemis astronauts to a series of field sites in the United States, Iceland and Canada. Early in their training, in September 2023, three of the crew members - Hansen, Christina Koch and back-up crew Jenni Gibbons - undertook geology training at the Kamestastin Lake impact structure in northern Labrador. Then the entire crew travelled to Iceland in August 2024.

Kamestastin Lake training expedition

I was honoured to play a leading role in the Kamestastin Lake training. This location was chosen because it offers a similar landscape to the surface of the moon. The Kamestastin Lake crater was

formed approximately 35 million years ago by the impact of an asteroid between one and two kilometres in diameter. Not only are rocks like breccias and impact melt rocks produced by the asteroid's impact well preserved here, but the crater also formed in a rock called anorthosite - the exact same rock that makes up the lunar highlands. In addition to participating in the geology training itself, I was largely responsible for the logistics for this expedition. Kamestastin is in a remote part of northern Labrador, so we flew in via Twin Otter aircraft and established a temporary base camp. From tents to pots and pans and food for 16 people, there was a lot to take care of. We then used zodiac boats to travel around the crater.

Sacred Innu stories of the moon

Kamestastin Lake and the surrounding region are on the territory of the Mushuau Innu First Nation. A key part of my role in the training was liaising with the First Nation, which has been following Hansen on this historic mission. A highlight for me was sitting around the fire on one of our last nights with Innu Guardians from Natuashish and hearing about how sacred the moon is to them - as it is to many Indigenous Peoples around the world. They also told us the story of Tshakpehsh, an Innu hero who teaches that with courage, hard work and perseverance, one can always overcome difficulties. As the Artemis II crew return from its journey, I am struck by the parallels. The crew has shown the world what can happen if we work together towards a common goal with courage, hard work, perseverance and humility.

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