

# Toxic water, corporate lies: Why Erin Brockovich is still relevant

A chilling story about toxic water, corporate negligence and one woman's refusal to look away

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IT starts on a rather comical note. Erin Brockovich, played by Julia Roberts, an unemployed single mother of three trying to survive after losing a car accident lawsuit. The early courtroom scenes are funny in a rather messy, awkward way. When Erin mentions she has \$17,000 in debt, the lawyer asks if her husband doesn't support her. Erin replies, "Which one? There are two."

At first, the film feels light. Erin barges into rooms, argues with lawyers, wears clothes that make offices uncomfortable and refuses to shrink herself to fit professional expectations. But slowly, the film shifts into something much heavier.

Based on the real case against Pacific Gas and Electric Company over contaminated groundwater in a California town, the story moves from legal comedy into a sharp examination of corporate negligence, environmental damage and the quiet ways institutions protect themselves when things go wrong.

That shift arrives when Erin says, "They dream about being able to watch their kids swim in a pool without worrying that they'll have to have a hysterectomy at the age of 20 like Rosa Diaz, a client of ours; or have their spine deteriorate like Stan Bloom, another client of ours." There's anger in the way she says it, but it doesn't feel performed. It feels like someone who has spent too much time listening to the families explain how their lives slowly fell apart while the company hid behind technical language, internal reports and legal strategy.

The contamination at the centre of the case is hexavalent chromium, a toxic chemical linked to cancers and severe illnesses. In the film, families speak of tumours, miscarriages, respiratory diseases, chronic nosebleeds and deteriorating health after years of consuming

**What makes the movie resonate beyond America is how recognisable its systems are. Whether it is contaminated groundwater near industrial belts in Hyderabad, air pollution crises in Delhi or chemical waste concerns around manufacturing zones across India, the story is too familiar: investigations continue, reports are reviewed and responsibility gets diluted while affected families wait for answers**



toxic water. The horror is not only the illnesses themselves, but the possibility that the company knew far more than it admitted publicly.

Julia Roberts plays Erin with restless energy. She interrupts people, loses her cool, walks into rooms carrying too much at once. The film never lets you forget she's broke, exhausted and trying to hold things together while taking on one of America's biggest utility companies.

"So before you come back here with another lame-ass offer," Erin says, "I

## BIG TICKET

want you to think real hard about what your spine is worth."

Something changes in the room after that. The negotiation stops sounding corporate and suddenly everyone has to think about actual people dying from diseases tied to toxic water.

That's what still makes the film relevant. It understands how corporations and institutions often respond during a crisis. Meetings happen, statements get drafted, liability gets assessed, PR teams shape messaging, and lawyers minimise exposure. And in all this, the people affected slowly disappear from the centre of the conversation.

Erin's grit becomes the emotional engine of the film. She keeps showing up despite being underestimated in every place she enters. Lawyers dismiss her because she lacks formal education, executives dismiss her because of the way she dresses and speaks, but Erin survives through persistence. She drives across towns collecting medical records, knocks on doors until residents trust her, memorises details others overlook and refuses to let the victims become anonymous case files.

Erin's tattooed biker neighbour George is one of the few stable people in her life, helping care for her children while she's engrossed in the case. There's an early scene where Erin

**More than two decades after Erin Brockovich released, its story still feels relevant in India, where industrial pollution and groundwater contamination continue to affect ordinary communities. From the pharmaceutical pollution crisis in Patancheru to recurring concerns over toxic foam and polluted water bodies in Delhi, the film's portrait of corporate denial, delayed accountability and public health damage feels familiar**

walks into the office of lawyer Ed Masry, played by Albert Finney, demanding a job after losing her case. "We don't have anything for you," he tells her. "You don't have anything for me?" she shoots back.

Later, when a lawyer attempts to dismiss her understanding of the case, Erin snaps back, "Don't talk like I'm an idiot, okay. I may not have a law degree, but I have spent 18 months on this case, and I know more about these plaintiffs than you ever will."

The film is honest about how corporate cover-ups and scandals like this usually happen. Reports get diluted, warnings are ignored, problems are delayed because fixing them is expensive. Legal handles liability, finance looks at numbers, PR manages reputation, and nobody feels fully responsible for the damage. Meanwhile families live with the consequences. One resident says quietly, "I got no lawyer." The film doesn't linger on the line, but it explains the entire story. When people don't have money, access or influence, the system rarely comes looking for them. And then Erin does; not because she fits the room, but because she kept listening when everyone else stopped.

Erin Brockovich | Directed by Steven Soderbergh | Streaming on Netflix | Based on a true story

# India great partner & US ready to expand energy ties, says Rubio

Rubio looks forward to meet Quad leaders as the US Secretary of State for the first time in New Delhi

WASHINGTON

THE US is ready to sell as much energy as India is willing to buy, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday, ahead of his maiden visit to New Delhi.

Rubio, interacting with reporters in Miami, described India as a "great partner" and said his visit was important as it would give him an opportunity to meet with ministers from the Quad nations.

"Well, we want to sell them as much energy as they'll buy. And obviously, you've seen I think we're at historic levels of US production, and US export," Rubio told reporters in Miami as he embarked on the trip to Sweden and India.

Rubio will be in India from May 23-26 and will visit Kolkata, Agra, Jaipur and New Delhi.

"We want to be able to do more. We were already in talks with them to do more. We want them to be a bigger part of their portfolio. We also think there are opportunities with Venezuelan oil," Rubio said.

He was responding to a question about India being affected by high energy prices due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Rubio described India as a "great partner" and said his visit to New Delhi was important as it would also give him an opportunity to meet with ministers from the Quad nations.

"They are a great ally, a great partner. We do a lot of good work with them. And so it is an important trip. I'm glad we're able to do it because I think there'll be a lot for us to talk about," Rubio said.

"We'll also meet with Quad there, which is important. I think my first meeting as Secretary of State was with the Quad. I'm glad we are able to do it now in India and we're going to do one later in the year as well," Rubio said.

Rubio said the acting President of Venezuela



Delcy Rodriguez was also scheduled to visit India next week and there will be many opportunities to work with New Delhi. "In fact, it's my understanding that the interim president of Venezuela will be travelling to India next week as well. So, there's opportunities. There's a lot to work on with India," Rubio said.

The Quad meeting is planned for May 26, and it is scheduled to be attended by Rubio, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu, with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar presiding over it. Rubio's visit to Kolkata will be the first by a US Secretary of State in almost fourteen years. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Kolkata in 2012.

The US Consulate General in Kolkata is America's second-oldest consulate in the world.

On November 19, 1792, US President George Washington appointed Benjamin Joy of Newburyport as the first American Consul to Kolkata.

Marco Rubio's upcoming India visit comes amid

growing strategic convergence between New Delhi and Washington on trade, technology, defence, and Indo-Pacific security. The four-day trip will be his first official visit to India after taking charge as US Secretary of State.

The visit assumes significance at a time when both countries are looking to deepen economic and geopolitical cooperation amid rising global uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, and tensions in key maritime trade routes.

India and the US have substantially expanded their partnership over the past decade, with cooperation spanning: Defence and military coordination, semiconductor and critical technology partnerships, energy trade, including crude oil and LNG supplies, supply chain resilience initiatives and Indo-Pacific maritime security.

Energy is expected to be a major focus area during Rubio's visit. The US has emerged as one of India's important energy suppliers, particularly after global crude trade patterns shifted following the Rus-

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sia-Ukraine conflict. Washington is keen to increase exports of crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India.

Trade issues are also likely to figure prominently in discussions. India and the US are aiming to further expand bilateral trade, which has crossed \$190 billion in recent years. Both sides are exploring ways to reduce trade barriers and strengthen investment flows in sectors such as manufacturing, clean energy, and digital technology.

Rubio's India trip is also being viewed as part of the broader US outreach to key Asian partners as Washington recalibrates its strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

# India, Cyprus upgrade ties to strategic partnership, to double bilateral trade in next five years

NEW DELHI

INDIA and Cyprus on Friday elevated their ties to a strategic partnership and set up a joint task force to facilitate deeper cooperation in sectors such as infrastructure and shipping as Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides for wide-ranging talks.

The two leaders also deliberated on the West Asia crisis as well as the Ukraine conflict, with PM Modi saying New Delhi supports all efforts for an early end to the hostilities.

"Over the past decade, investment from Cyprus to India has nearly doubled. Trust between the two countries has increased, and with the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement, numerous new possibilities have



emerged," Modi said in his media statement.

Taking advantage of this, we are targeting to double this investment again in the next five years, he said. "And to realise this resolve, today we are elevating our trusted relationship to a strategic partnership," he added.

The prime minister also noted that the friendship between India and Cyprus

is both "strong and futuristic" as he elaborated on various aspects of his talks with Christodoulides. "We also discussed global issues. Whether it is Ukraine or West Asia, we will continue to support efforts for the early end of the conflict and for peace," Modi said.

"We are also unanimous on the view that reform of global institutions is urgent

**PM Modi noted that the friendship between India and Cyprus is both "strong and futuristic" as he elaborated on various aspects of his talks with President Christodoulides**

and important for resolving the growing global challenges," he said.

The prime minister said the two countries also decided to expand cooperation in areas of maritime security and counter-terrorism.

In his remarks, Christodoulides said India and Cyprus decided to set up a joint task force for cooperation in key sectors such as

infrastructure and shipping. Prior to the meeting, the two leaders warmly greeted each other and even took a selfie together.

Earlier in the day, President Christodoulides paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also called on President Christodoulides and expressed appreciation for his positive sentiments and guidance for the bilateral ties and cooperation between India and the European Union.

Following the meeting, EAM Jaishankar in a posted on X, "Delighted to call on President Christodoulides of the Republic of Cyprus in New Delhi today. Value his positive sentiments and guidance for strengthening our bilateral ties and India - EU cooperation."

# India diversifying energy sources, deepening global strategic ties

NEW DELHI

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's multi-nation tour highlights India's accelerating efforts to diversify energy sources, deepen strategic partnerships, and position itself as a key bridge between the Middle East and Europe in an increasingly fragmented global order, according to a news article.

Prime Minister Modi's recent visits to the Netherlands and Sweden constitute part of India's wider European outreach, which included Norway and Italy, at a time of shifting alliances in the geopolitical landscape amid the dramatic change in US foreign policy under Donald Trump's presidency, The Times Kuwait newspaper reported.

The Prime Minister's visit to Abu Dhabi, on his way to Europe, came in the backdrop of the UAE's recent decision to exit the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quota system, a move that allows the Gulf nation greater flexibility to increase oil production and pursue bilateral supply agreements with key partners such as India, the article said.

India and the UAE signed a number of strategic energy agreements, including an expanded arrangement between the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to increase the UAE crude supply for India's strategic reserves to 30 million barrels.

Additional agreements between Indian Oil Corpora-



tion and ADNOC strengthened long-term liquefied petroleum gas supply commitments, while both sides also agreed to explore the development of strategic gas storage facilities in India.

Apart from hydrocarbons, cooperation between the two countries is also expanding into emerging sectors such as ports development, green hydrogen, and civil nuclear energy, signaling a broader strategic alignment between New Delhi and Abu Dhabi.

Prime Minister Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at their bilateral meeting agreed to promote new initiatives for a comprehensive energy partnership.

The two leaders welcomed the announcement of \$5 billion in investment into India by UAE entities. This includes investment of \$3 billion by the Emirates New Development Bank (ENDB) in the RBL Bank of India, \$1 billion by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) with the National Infrastructure and Investment Fund of India (NIIF) in priority infrastructure projects in India, and \$1 billion by the International Holding Company in Sam-

maan Capital of India. These investments underscore the UAE's sustained and long-term commitment to India's growth story, while strengthening the bilateral strategic investment partnership.

The other agreements signed during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the UAE include the signing of an MoU between Cochin Shipyard Limited and Dubai-based Drydocks World for setting up a Ship Repair Cluster at Vadinar in Gujarat, including offshore fabrication, under the Maritime Development Fund Scheme launched by the Indian government, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

The two leaders also reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and welcomed the deepening of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership across multiple sectors, including energy, trade, investment, defence, security, fintech, infrastructure, education, culture and people-to-people ties. They acknowledged the success of the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has led to bilateral trade scaling new heights.

# Playing the long game in India, says Airbnb CEO Chesky

SAN FRANCISCO

AIRBNB will continue to invest and play the "long game" in India, one of the fastest-growing global markets that is driven by rising middle class and travel-hungry Gen Z, according to its CEO Brian Chesky.

Chesky, who is also the company's co-founder, outlined a long-term vision for the Indian market, highlighting the company's continued investments in the region to cater to a growing base of domestic travellers. "My approach in India is to play the long game, to really invest in the

country, to invest in the community, and let everyone in India know that Airbnb's here to stay. It's one of the (markets) I'm most focused on. It's one of those I expect to grow the fastest. And I think one day it will be one of the biggest markets in the world on Airbnb," Chesky said.

Noting that the young population naturally gravitates towards the platform's offerings, he added, "We index very highly with Gen Z... and India's got a very large Gen Z population. I don't think many young people in India are as predisposed to travelling (staying) in a hotel the



traditional way... I think it's going to be a major part of our story for the next 10-20 years."

Highlighting that India already houses Airbnb's largest corporate office outside the US, Chesky affirmed that the country is poised for heavy future investment as the platform

takes the market "very, very seriously".

He observed that 80 per cent of the platform's business in the country is driven by domestic travel. Because many Indians are first-time travellers compared to those in the western markets with centuries of cross-border travel history, they place a particularly high premium on quality and safety.

Airbnb's focus on India aligns with its broader global strategy to evolve from a core home-sharing platform into a one-stop shop for travel.