

## EDITORIAL

## Ensure world free from Malaria

Relentless dedication of healthcare professionals, researchers, policymakers and communities worldwide in the ongoing battle against malaria must be commended. Govt reaffirms its resolute determination and collaborative spirit in combating malaria, inching closer towards the shared goal of a malaria-free India. Luckily, with the right medical equipment and precautionary measures, the disease is highly treatable and preventable. India is a consistent driving force in the fight against malaria. For India, meeting its 2030 malaria-free goal will not be easy, but like India's success eliminating polio and smallpox, India can succeed. To do this, India must mobilize the political will to end malaria and expand proven models to further drive down malaria cases across the country. Remarkable leadership, innovation, and investments have made possible the progress-to-date in the global fight to reduce suffering and deaths from malaria, and will be even more critical as we work to end the disease. World Malaria Day is observed every year on April 25 with the aim of spreading awareness about malaria disease. The day also aims to raise awareness about diseases and their prevention in the world. Malaria is a potentially life-threatening infectious disease. Malaria significantly impacts people, causing a range of health problems from mild illness to death, this severe disease is causing death in numerous developing countries. World Malaria Day 2025 reminds people of the challenges associated with this disease and the efforts made to eliminate it. This year, the theme of World Malaria Day is "Malaria Ends with Us: Reinvest, Reimagine, Reignite." This year's theme aims to motivate people to invest more and stay committed to fighting malaria. World Malaria Day is observed to highlight the need for continued investment and sustained political commitment to malaria prevention and control. However, malaria cases are on the rise in many of the highest burden countries for the first time in over a decade, signaling the need to intensify efforts, increase funding to accelerate the development and delivery of existing and new life-saving tools, and identify greater efficiencies through increased and more strategic use of data. Newspapers, websites, and magazines, as well as television and radio stations, may use World Malaria Day as the chance to promote or publicize awareness campaigns about malaria. Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes. About half of the world's population is at risk of malaria, particularly those in lower-income countries.

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## Soft power in retreat

BY  
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*For decades, the US won hearts and minds not with tanks or fighter jets, but with scholarships, foreign aid, immigration opportunities, and cultural exchange. But Donald Trump has upended the soul of America*

Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment — Joseph Nye.

In diplomacy, not every war is fought with guns, and not every ally is won with treaties. Some of the most lasting alliances, perceptions, and influences are built in classrooms, libraries, hospitals, and open-minded immigration desks. For decades, America cultivated a compelling global image not just through its military might but through an unparalleled soft power apparatus — university scholarships, fellowships like Fulbright, technological partnerships, and student exchange programmes. But under Trump's leadership, this carefully crafted image took a sharp U-turn. His decisions to defund Ivy League institutions,

restrict prestigious fellowships, cut down on foreign aid, and slam doors on immigrants have not just changed policies — they've dented America's soul in the eyes of the world.

From the end of World War II to the close of the 20th century, the US balanced hard power with soft persuasion.

After Pearl Harbour and the end of the Monroe Doctrine's inward-looking policy, America stepped decisively into the global theatre. Initially, it flexed its military muscle — from Hiroshima to the Cold War nuclear stand-offs — but soon realised that tanks and warships couldn't alone win hearts. The next American invasion came with books, food aid, hospital care, and university scholarships. PL-480 food assistance, USAID, cultural exchanges, NASA tie-ups, and the brain-drain corridor became tools of soft power that made America an aspirational ideal, especially for the Global South.

But Trump's reign of ultra-nationalism, ultracapitalism, and ultra-conservatism diluted this global goodwill. His administration's decision to roll back funding to elite educational institutions — many of which had been incubators of international leadership and liberal thought — sent shockwaves through academic diplomacy. Places like Harvard, MIT,

and Stanford weren't just American educational brands; they were world laboratories of innovation, cross-cultural dialogue, and diplomacy by proxy. For many young minds across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, getting into an Ivy League school was akin to getting a golden ticket — not just to education, but to enlightenment.

When Trump questioned the utility of such universities and threatened to cut their funds, he wasn't just aiming at liberal professors or elite academia; he was hacking away at the roots of America's global intellectual tree. The Fulbright Programme, which since 1946 had created a global network of US-educated thinkers, diplomats, artists, and professionals, saw restrictions and stagnation under Trump's regime. This wasn't just about budget lines; it was about breaking bridges that had taken decades to build.

The shift wasn't limited to academia. Trump's "America First" translated into America alone. US foreign aid took a hit, including humanitarian and development assistance that had long been a lever of influence in fragile regions. Aid wasn't just charity — it was strategy. Whether it was reconstructing post-war Europe via the Marshall Plan, aiding countries during natural disasters, or investing in public health abroad, American

dollars often bought American goodwill. Cutting this lifeline left a vacuum often filled by rival powers, notably China.

Perhaps the most damaging was the policy on immigration and visas. By clamping down on H-1B visas, Trump stifled the inflow of skilled professionals — especially from India. This move hurt not only the American tech industry but also tarnished its reputation as a land that rewards merit. India, a nation that sent scores of doctors, engineers, and nurses to serve in the US found itself at the receiving end of arbitrary bans and changing visa goalposts. Indian nurses in particular, known globally for their compassion and professionalism, were once the unsung heroes of the American healthcare system. They became unintended victims of a policy that seemed more guided by xenophobic rhetoric than economic sense.

It's ironic. America gained its comparative cost advantage and global dominance in various sectors precisely because it welcomed the world's best minds. The openness to foreign students and workers was not just humanitarian — it was deeply pragmatic. When America opened its doors, it got the world's top scientists, engineers, teachers, and healthcare professionals. This influx didn't just boost the economy; it exported

American values when these individuals returned home as brand ambassadors of the American dream. Trump's decision to erect barriers where bridges once stood was not just bad economics — it was terrible diplomacy.

Soft power, unlike hard power, does not rely on fear, force, or finance alone. It thrives on attraction. A country that welcomes, educates, and employs foreigners becomes a hub of admiration. The world's image of America, diverse, democratic, and dynamic — was always more powerful than any military base. That image is cracking under the weight of Trump's authoritarian tendencies wrapped in an elected regime. The global message is clear: this is not the America we used to know.

The consequences are already visible. International student applications to American universities have dropped. Countries that once looked to America for inspiration are now turning elsewhere. China's Confucius Institutes, European Union scholarships, and India's neighbourhood outreach are stepping into the vacuum left by the US. And this matters. In a world of multipolar influence, losing moral and cultural leadership is as fatal as losing a war. The tragedy of Trump's approach is that it reverts America to a pre-globali-

sation, fortress-like nation. This stands in sharp contrast to the post-Pearl Harbour awakening that pushed America into internationalism. Back then, it learned that isolationism was not just impractical but dangerous. Trump's policies drag the country back into an atmosphere of division — racially, religiously, and ideologically. His emphasis on Christian identity, his anti-immigration posture, and his trade protectionism all add up to an authoritarian flavour, coated in electoral legitimacy.

When nations drift towards ultra-nationalism and away from global collaboration, they don't just lose allies — they lose identity. The America that helped rebuild Japan and Germany, which welcomed Einstein and later Sundar Pichai, is being replaced by an America that shuts doors, silences debate, and shuns difference. In the end, Trump's war is not just on liberals or foreigners or aid budgets. It's a war on America's most valuable diplomatic currency — its image. And once that image is broken, no amount of tanks or tariffs can fix it.

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## WAVES 2025: Redefining global media diplomacy

BY  
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*WAVES weaves together storytelling, technology and international cooperation to reshape the global media and entertainment. This summit marks a decisive leap into a future where India leads with innovation, cultural capital and strategic foresight*

Come May 1st, India has truly arrived with the WAVES Entertainment Summit being held in Mumbai from 1st to 4th of May 2025. The summit echoes the vision envisaged in 2019 by PM Modi in his speech at the inauguration of the National Museum of Indian Cinema; highlighting Indian cinema as a powerful medium of global outreach and soft power, calling it a "silent force" that shapes global perceptions and connects cultures. He emphasised cinema's potential to promote film tourism, inviting international filmmakers to explore India's diverse landscapes. The design of WAVES is an unusual convergence of like-mindedness of M&E stakeholders; individuals or institutions that think alike in carving out a landscape that will be suited for the global fraternity responsible for creating content and its consumption.

WAVES 2025 brings a bold new phase of soft power diplomacy, focusing on transformative and technology-driven partnerships. Innovation in this segment is bound to create a new buzz for foreign policy tie-ups, carried forward on the wings of emerging tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and immersive content ecosystems. The diverse participation at WAVES will open unprecedented avenues for multilateral cooperation and dialogue across critical areas of knowledge sharing, media engagement, storytelling ecosystems, and digital co-productions. It provides India with an unparalleled opportunity to assert global leadership in the creative domain; by fusing its creativity quotient, strategic foresight, and cultural capital into a soft power matrix that fosters goodwill and purposeful international collaboration.

At the heart of WAVES 2025 lies its evocative tagline: "Connecting Creators, Connecting Countries", a bold declaration of India's intent to reposition itself as a global M&E powerhouse. As a summit that seeks to reimagine communication diplomacy, one of its most awaited outcomes is the WAVES Declaration, a visionary charter that could reshape the media discourse globally.

Rarely has a platform attempted to knit together creativity, business, leadership, and soft power into a cohesive global identity. But WAVES seeks to do just that, with a Global Media Dialogue, a declaration of shared values, and a structured roadmap for the M&E industry that reflects the ethos of a borderless, tech-enabled, cre-

atively interconnected world. The declaration will place communication-clear, coherent, and collaborative-at the centre of a new global information order, founded on equity, access, equality, and participation.

WAVES has quietly but effectively given a new meaning to soft power diplomacy wherein all constituents that create charisma associated with knowledge sharing and storytelling play a critical role in bilateral or multilateral cooperation. It would be appropriate to mention that diplomacy will adorn new wings of change based on creativity, innovation and the spirit of collaboration. WAVES will truly be the "Mahakumbh" of ideas, opportunities, experiences and knowledge sharing.

The philosophical underpinning of WAVES 2025 can be distilled into the 7 Cs of Communication: Clarity, Conciseness, Correctness, Coherence, Completeness, and Courtesy. These seven pillars not only ensure effective storytelling but serve as diplomatic principles guiding cross-border media collaboration. They offer a timeless framework as we enter an era where communication is the new currency of power, diplomacy, and development.

With narratives shaping geopolitics, trade, and international perception, there is a pressing need for a Global Media Charter, a binding commitment from nations to protect freedom of creative expression, foster diverse storytelling, and ensure ethical media practices. WAVES 2025 can be the birthplace of this

transformative shift. In a world increasingly governed by digital influence and algorithmic reach, a unified declaration will help navigate the ethical dilemmas of deepfakes, information disorder, and cultural homogenisation. It's not just about content anymore; it's about cultural continuity, technological responsibility, and global unity through creative collaboration.

WAVES isn't just about short-term buzz, it's about building something lasting. It understands that media and entertainment (M&E) isn't a quick fix but a long-term strategic play. At its heart is a clear goal: to make India the global content hub and a net exporter of stories. With its rich cultural diversity and languages, India has all the ingredients to build a strong intellectual property base that resonates worldwide.

The summit also aims to increase India's global market share in media, attract major investments, and encourage co-production between Indian and international players. By bringing together creators, investors, and policymakers, WAVES offers a shared space to build partnerships and grow ideas. Platforms like WaveXcelerator and WAVES Bazaar will help startups and innovators scale up and plug into global markets.

WAVES 2025 is designed to be a complete experience. The Global Media Dialogue brings together ministers and top policymakers from around the world to exchange ideas. The Thought Leaders Track will host key sessions exploring future trends and chal-

lenges in media.

In the Exhibition Zone, companies will showcase the latest in gaming, animation, VR, and AI. The WAVES Bazaar will act as a meeting ground for buyers and sellers to find the right collaborators. WaveXcelerator will give startups a chance to pitch live and attract investors.

The Bharat Pavilion will spotlight India's storytelling journey; from folk tales to futuristic formats. The CreateSphere will feature masterclasses, creators' meet-ups, and the grand finale of the Create in India Challenge. And finally, a series of cultural performances will bring together talent from across the globe, blending tradition with innovation.

WAVES is expected to drive real outcomes, from new content partnerships and global investments to job creation and policy support. It will help position India as a creative and tech-savvy media partner for the world.

With cutting-edge tech on display, including AI tools and immersive experiences, the summit will also show how India is shaping the future of media.

By promoting co-productions, content exchanges, and new distribution deals, WAVES could help Indian stories travel further. It also gives international stakeholders a chance to build real connections with Indian creators—paving the way for shared growth and innovation. Most importantly, it sets the stage for India to lead the way in global media diplomacy.

The timing couldn't be better. According to the EY-FICCI 2025 M&E

Report, India's media sector grew to INR 2.5 trillion in 2024 and is expected to touch INR 2.7 trillion in 2025.

Digital media now makes up 32% of total revenue, with digital ads growing fast. OTT platforms grew by 18%, driven by regional stories finding global fans. The report projects that the sector will hit INR 3.1 trillion by 2027, powered by gaming, animation, and immersive tech. WAVES gives these numbers real meaning, by turning data into action, partnerships into policy, and content into soft power. It's where the industry meets diplomacy and the future is co-created.

India is no longer on the sidelines of the global media conversation, it is setting the agenda. With WAVES 2025, India is articulating a bold creative vision for the world: one that transcends platforms, breaks silos, and builds coalitions of creators. WAVES 2025 isn't just another summit, it is a cultural declaration, a geopolitical realignment of media narratives, and a commitment to connect not just creators, but countries, cultures, and communities.

By placing communication at the heart of global partnerships, WAVES brings together not only markets but also minds and meanings. The world is watching, and India is ready to lead.

*(The writer is former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)*