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புகழ்

வசையென்ப வையத்தார்க் கெல்லாம் இசையென்னும்
எச்சம் பெறாஅ விடின்.

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உலகத்தவர்க்கு அதுவே பழி என்று அறிந்தோர் கூறுவர்.

— சாலமன் பாப்பையா



TODAY'S ARTICLE

Not just one-horned rhino, Kaziranga Park also harbours a rich variety of insects, spiders

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, the world's safest address for the one-horned rhino, has revealed a rich community of insects and spiders.

A new rapid survey report documented 283 species of insects and spiders in a woodland habitat of the tiger reserve. It was conducted by entomologists with the Corbett Foundation, along with Kaziranga's frontline forest personnel.

The report and related information booklets were released on September 26 by Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, the MP representing the Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency, Khumtai MLA Mrinal Saikia, and Assam's Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Vinay Gupta.

The study recorded 254 species of insects and 29



Dazzling array: A jewel beetle (*Demochroa gratiosa indica*) and green snout lanternfly (*Pyrops viridirostris*) found in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

species of spiders, which forest officials said was a vital step toward understanding Kaziranga's "overlooked" biodiversity. They said the findings highlight the urgent need to take insect conservation seriously, especially as climate change threatens to accelerate species loss.

Butterflies and moths accounted for 85 species or 30% of Kaziranga's insects, while 40 species (14%) of ants, bees, and wasps, and

35 species (12%) of beetles were recorded.

"Conducted through visual estimation with photographs using scientific sampling methods, this landmark survey reveals the park's often-overlooked micro-faunal richness," Assam's Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Minister, Chandra Mohan Patowary, said.

He said the State government was committed to conserving all forms of bio-

diversity, including the smallest but crucial life forms.

"Worldwide, nearly 40% of insect species are in decline due to habitat loss, deforestation, and climate change. While Kaziranga is celebrated for its megafauna, this study shows that its resilience depends just as much on the small pollinators, soil aerators, and natural pest-controllers that keep the ecosystem functioning," Sonali Ghosh, the

Director of the tiger reserve, said.

Officials underlined the vital ecological role the insects and spiders play, facilitating seed dispersal, helping maintain soil health and regenerate plants, forming the very foundation of the food web that sustains Kaziranga's iconic wildlife.

"The findings highlight the park's status as a true hotspot of invertebrate diversity," Ms Ghosh said.

Kaziranga is better known for its Big Five species – the Indian rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, wild water buffalo, and eastern swamp deer.

The 1,307.49-sq. km tiger reserve has the most one-horned rhinos on earth, the last estimation recording 2,613 individuals. It also has the third-highest density of tigers (18.65 individuals per 100 sq. km), according to a 2024 report.

Context

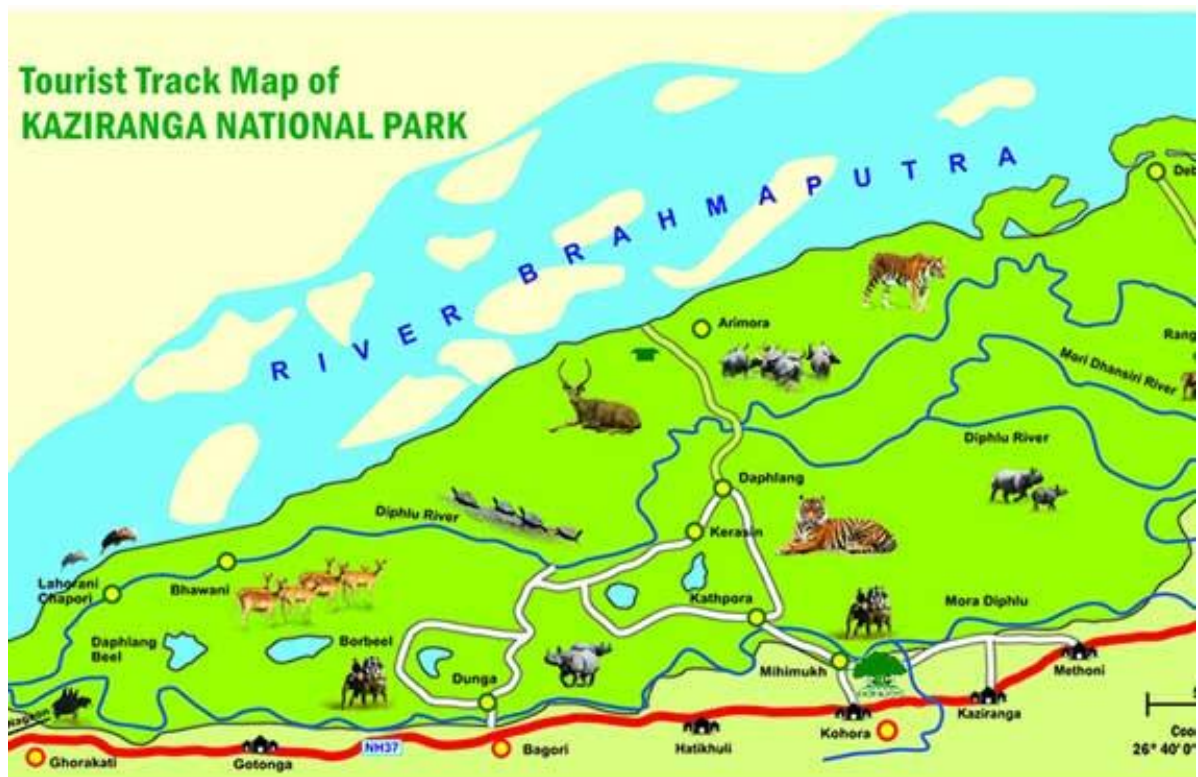
- A new rapid survey at **Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (Assam)** has documented **283 species of insects and spiders**.
- This highlights the park's **overlooked biodiversity** beyond its megafauna like rhinos and tigers.
- Officials stressed the role of insects and spiders in **pollination, soil health, seed dispersal, and pest control**, which are critical for the ecosystem's resilience.
- The findings underline that while Kaziranga is celebrated for its **Big Five** (Indian one-horned rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, wild water buffalo, and eastern swamp deer), its ecological balance depends equally on smaller life forms.

One-Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*)

- **Habitat:** Native to the **Indian subcontinent**, mainly in Assam, West Bengal, and parts of Nepal.
- **Status:** Listed as **Vulnerable** by IUCN.
- **Population:** About **3,700 individuals worldwide**; Kaziranga alone hosts over **2,600 (largest population globally)**.
- **Features:**
 - Single black horn (20–60 cm).
 - Thick, grey-brown skin with skin-folds → armor-plated look.
- **Threats:** Poaching for horn (mythical medicinal value), habitat loss, floods, invasive species (like Mikania climber).
- **Conservation Success:** From fewer than 200 individuals in early 20th century → now thousands, thanks to strict protection in parks like Kaziranga.

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Assam, on the banks of the **Brahmaputra River**.
- **Area:** 1,307.49 sq. km.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Site** (1985).
- **Significance:**
 - Known as the **safest home for the one-horned rhino**.
 - Hosts **highest density of tigers in India** (18.65 per 100 sq. km, as per 2024 report).
 - **Other faunal diversity:** elephants, swamp deer, wild water buffalo, and rich avifauna (Important Bird Area).
 - Now emerging as a **hotspot of invertebrate diversity**.
- **Conservation challenges:** annual floods of Brahmaputra, poaching, encroachment, and climate change.



UPSC Prelims 2013

Consider the following pairs:

National Park — River flowing through the Park

1. Corbett National Park : Ganga
2. Kaziranga National Park : Manas
3. Silent Valley National Park : Kaveri

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) None

Ans : d

What does Trump's latest H-1B directive state?

What will be the consequences for both American and immigrant workers? Do overseas workers displace Americans in tech jobs? What do surveys show? What are immigration lawyers saying? What are the trends likely to play out in the tech sector?

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

In September 19, U.S. President Donald Trump signed a proclamation increasing the fee for processing H-1B visas by about 60 times to \$1,00,000. The White House underlined that the objective was to help “curb abuses that displace U.S. workers and undermine national security”. A tentative calm returned when Washington clarified the revised fee would only be for new applications, starting September 21, and not for present visa-holders or those up for renewal.

What is the purpose of the hike?

The entire contestation revolves around the perception that the H-1B visa programme was leading to a “disadvantageous labour market for American citizens”. The H-1B programme seeks to help employers in the U.S. obtain crucial skills and abilities, not existing within the current local workforce, by authorising them to temporarily bring certain specialised talent from overseas to work in the U.S. However, the White House argues the programme has been exploited to make it challenging for U.S. STEM graduates to find jobs. This is because companies prefer to hire foreign workers at a “significant discount”. It has been misused to the extent where tech companies have fired their domestic workforce in favour of H-1B workers, the White House alleges.

What's the argument for legal migration?

In a survey conducted by the U.S.-based think tank Pew Research Centre in 2024, about 40% of respondents believed high-skilled workers should be given top priority for legal

Both Republicans and Democrats have maintained the need to reform the H-1B visa regime

immigration. About 60% of respondents said legal immigrants fill jobs that U.S. citizens do not want. Further, Daniel Aobdia, former professor of accounting information and management at the Kellogg School of Management (U.S.), had investigated these questions in 2016 with respect to H-1B workers hired as auditors. He observed that the workers, most of whom attended U.S. schools, took jobs in “less desirable offices or that [which] require highly specialised skills”. Thus, he inferred, “they complement – rather than displace – U.S. workers”. His research came across no evidence that hiring more H-1B workers lowered wages at these offices. However, he cautioned this may not be true for foreign-educated H-1B holders in the U.S. employed at outsourcing firms.

According to data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Amazon.com is the most prominent employer of H-1B employees, followed by the India-based Tata Consultancy Services, Microsoft, Meta and Apple. India was the top beneficiary of the H-1B programme in 2024, accounting for 71% of approved beneficiaries. The U.S. approved more than 2.8 lakh Indian H-1B workers, across varied sectors, at the end of 2024, according to data from the USCIS. The agency had given approval to approximately 4 lakh applicants during the period; of these, it approved only about 1.4 lakh applicants for initial employment. If the USCIS receives more registrations than the visas provisioned for the year, it runs a lottery to determine eligibility. Pro-immigration advocacy group American Immigration Council observes that the presence of skilled legal immigrants ensures that businesses expand their operations in the U.S. itself than searching for avenues overseas. Further, it also notes that immigrants are known to create new businesses and helping expand the labour market. Prominent examples being Elon Musk (South African and Canadian descent) and Sergey Brin (Russian migrant who founded Google with Larry Page). Additionally, H-1B holders are not just contributors to the more business-centric sectors but also civic essentials like medicine and health, as well as educational and scientific research. In a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem, post the directive, the American Medical Association (AMA) emphasised the “growing need for [a] larger physician workforce that the U.S. cannot fill on its own”.

Why is immigration a ‘problem’ in the U.S.?

In his order, President Trump quoted a 2017 study that stated that wages for native U.S. computer scientists would have been 2.6%-5.1% higher with employment being approximately

6.1%-10.8% higher (in 2001) in the absence of an immigration regime. It is interesting to note that the same study, authored by professors from the University of Michigan and University of Chicago, stated immigration helped lower prices and raised the output of IT goods by 1.9%-2.5%, benefitting consumers.

The story is, however, not that simple. Earlier this year, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) was learnt to be investigating Mumbai-headquartered TCS for discrimination in favour of H-1B workers.

Bloomberg reported last December that at least 33 former employees had filed complaints at the EEOC alleging they were fired in favour of hiring Indian workers. TCS dismissed the allegations as “meritless and misleading”. In fact, the U.S.-headquartered IT solutions provider Cognizant too found itself mired in similar allegations (in 2017). The company was also accused of firing non-South Asians at “disproportionally high rates”. It did not receive a favourable verdict and sought to challenge it at an “appropriate time”.

Reforming the H-1B programme to curb alleged misuse has traditionally had bipartisan support from both Democrats and Republicans. Democrats, including senator Bernie Sanders, have maintained the need to reform the regime to address “low-wage indentured servants from abroad”. “The cheaper the labour they hire, the more money the billionaires make,” he had said.

What lies ahead?

Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), in *The Hindu’s* ‘Parley’ podcast earlier this week, pointed out that the hike in visa fee makes it almost impossible for anyone to be hired, except top STEM graduates. “No U.S. company is going to take a risk given the vitiated political environment,” he observed. But Mr. Srivastava also pointed at a “little-known” clause in the directive, which allows for a waiver if the applicant serves in a project of “national importance”. Immigration lawyers say lawsuits to challenge the directive is inevitable. In a Facebook post, U.S.-based Immigration lawyer Karin Wolman said the proclamation was “drafted badly” and obfuscated processes. She argues that while the President has the power to execute a travel/entry ban, any collection of fees would have to be formally established as being “reasonably related to agency costs”. Further, they can only be put out with a formal notice supported by a consultation over a period before being instituted.

Mr. Trump’s directive comes against a larger backdrop of tariff-related tensions between the U.S. and India. Industry body Nasscom holds that with the revised fee effective with the next round of lottery expected in March, companies in the U.S. would have time to step up skilling programmes and enhance local hiring, which has already increased “tremendously”.



New rules: U.S. President Donald Trump signs order introducing a \$1,00,000 fee for H-1B visas at the White House on September 19. GETTY IMAGES

Context

- On **September 19, 2025**, U.S. President Donald Trump signed a proclamation to **hike the H-1B visa processing fee to \$1,00,000 (around 60x increase)**.
- Objective cited: *curb abuse of the programme that allegedly displaces U.S. workers and threatens national security*.
- Later clarified: applies **only to new applications**, not to renewals.
- This comes amidst **trade frictions** between the U.S. and India, since India is the **largest beneficiary of H-1B visas** (71% of approvals in 2024).

Background

What is H-1B?

- Non-immigrant U.S. visa allowing companies to employ foreign workers in *specialty occupations* (STEM, medicine, IT, research).
- Capped annually; if registrations exceed, a **lottery system** is used.

Why Controversial?

- **White House Argument:**
 - Programme misused by firms to hire cheaper foreign workers → displacement of U.S. citizens.
 - Creates “indentured labour” conditions and wage suppression.
 - Past allegations against TCS, Cognizant for bias towards H-1B workers.
- **Counter-Arguments:**
 - Skilled migrants **complement, not displace** U.S. workers (research evidence).
 - Immigrants fill jobs *Americans don’t want* or require niche skills.
 - High-skill migration drives innovation, lowers IT costs, and boosts U.S. global competitiveness.

India's Stake:

- **Top beneficiary:** ~2.8 lakh Indian H-1B workers approved in 2024.
- Indian IT companies (TCS, Infosys, Wipro, etc.) heavily dependent on U.S. market.
- U.S. tech giants (Amazon, Microsoft, Meta, Apple) employ large Indian diaspora.
- Fee hike → sharp cost escalation, hurting India's **IT exports (over \$150 bn annually)**.

Global Debate:

- Pew Research (2024):
 - 40% U.S. citizens favour priority for high-skilled immigration.
 - 60% say immigrants take jobs locals *don't want*.
- Bipartisan consensus in U.S. politics that H-1B needs reform.

Mains Focus Points

(For GS-II: International Relations, GS-III: Economy, Employment, Globalisation)

Economic Dimension

- **U.S. Argument:**
 - Protect wages and jobs for local workforce.
 - Prevent “cheap labour” exploitation.
- **India's Concern:**
 - Increased cost of placement → less outsourcing to Indian firms.
 - Hampers IT exports, India's **services sector growth**.
 - Indian professionals (STEM, healthcare, research) face higher entry barriers.

Bilateral Relations

- Adds to existing **trade tensions** (tariffs, agricultural imports, digital taxes).
- Could strain **India–U.S. strategic partnership**, especially in tech, defence, and digital economy.
- Contradicts U.S. narrative of building stronger ties with India to counterbalance China.

Human Capital & Migration Policy

- **Brain drain vs. brain circulation:** Restrictive policies may push Indian talent to other destinations (Canada, EU, Australia).
- Fee hike may limit opportunities to only *top-tier graduates*, narrowing migration.
- Ethical debate: Are immigrants scapegoated for domestic job insecurity?

Global Innovation & Competition

- Studies show H-1B regime **lowered IT prices, boosted productivity**.
- Immigrant founders like **Elon Musk, Sergey Brin** show long-term U.S. gains.
- Over-restriction may harm U.S. competitiveness vs. China in AI, IT, biotech.

Way Forward

- **For U.S.:** Balance protection of workers with global talent needs.
- **For India:**
 - Diversify outsourcing markets (EU, ASEAN, Africa).
 - Strengthen domestic skilling & startup ecosystem.
 - Use diplomatic channels to negotiate waivers (projects of “national importance”).
- **Globally:** Push for a more transparent, equitable migration policy.

How Israel used Azure to monitor Palestinians

What did Microsoft do after an investigation revealed that Israel's spy unit was using its surveillance software to gather information from Gaza and the West Bank? When did Unit 8200 begin the collaboration with Microsoft engineers? Aren't Palestinian networks independent?

John Xavier

The story so far:

In August, a joint investigation by *The Guardian*, *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call* revealed that Israel's military intelligence unit had built a cloud-based surveillance system using Microsoft's Azure to store audio recordings of Palestinians' phone calls. Unit 8200, which is considered Israel's equivalent to the U.S.'s National Security Agency, was reportedly uploading "audio files of millions of calls by Palestinians in the occupied territories" into a dedicated Azure environment.

What was Microsoft's initial response?

Microsoft's initial response downplayed any wrongdoing. The company said it had "found no evidence" that its tools were used to harm civilians and claimed to be unaware of how the cloud project was being used. But following the expose, the software giant launched an internal review. And on September 25, the company announced that its review had "found evidence that supports elements" of the reporting and that it had "ceased and disabled a set of services" to the Israeli defence unit involved.

How did this partnership begin?

The project was hatched in late 2021 when Unit

Israel will most likely shift workloads to Google or a combination of on-premises servers

8200's commander, Yossi Sarial, met with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in Seattle. Mr. Sarial pitched to move a huge portion of Israel's collected intelligence data onto Azure. Mr. Nadella reportedly agreed to a proof-of-concept plan and assigned a dedicated team of Microsoft engineers to work closely with Unit 8200 to build a secure, custom Azure deployment accessible from military bases. In Microsoft's internal view, this partnership was treated as "critical" to the company and even a "powerful brand moment" for Azure.

The military's reason was simple: the existing Israeli data centres could not hold vast volumes of intercepted phone traffic. Under Mr. Sarial's tenure, Unit 8200 had dramatically expanded its surveillance and integrated multiple databases of Palestinians. Previously, the unit could keep the calls of only some tens of thousands of individuals on its own servers. By moving to Azure, it suddenly had "infinite" storage. In effect, once the cloud project was approved, Unit 8200 could funnel nearly all phone intercepts into Azure and scale its watchlist from thousands of calls per day to millions.

How did the surveillance work?

The mechanics of the system hinged on cloud computing. Essentially, Unit 8200's field listening posts and telecom intercepts were piped into a dedicated Azure "instance". Microsoft and IDF engineers built a segregated Azure environment so that data from Gaza and the West Bank could be uploaded continuously and stored long-term. Because Azure offers elastic capacity and advanced AI tools, the unit could automate analysis on this content.

According to published reports, all intercepted voice calls and texts were transcribed and translated in the cloud. Advanced search indexes were then used to analyse the data to quickly decipher patterns. In short, Azure acted as both an enormous archive and an AI-driven search engine. *The Guardian's* investigation emphasised that the IDF's calls database was kept in "a customised and segregated area within the Azure platform," allowing it to be "analysed using AI-driven techniques". This kind of setup is enabled by

modern cloud features that are powered by multi-modal AI that can turn any data into searchable text. Once a phone call is converted by speech-to-text, it is treated like any document. In practice, such tools would allow an intelligence officer to input a query and quickly retrieve relevant conversation snippets or even link them to satellite imagery.

Where did phone usage data come from?

Crucially, none of this would have worked if Palestinian networks were independent. While, under the 1995 Oslo accords, Israel recognised Palestinians' right to build and operate their own communications systems, including mobile networks, in practice, Israel retained control over almost all telecommunications infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank. That means virtually every Palestinian cellphone call and data packet passes through Israeli-controlled switches.

As *The Guardian's* report notes, "thanks to the control [Israel] exerts over Palestinian telecommunications infrastructure, Israel has long intercepted phone calls in the occupied territories". Without an independent mobile backbone, Palestinians must use cellular services that are extensions of Israeli operators, so mass monitoring of local networks has long been routine. Multiple analyses stress that Israel's continued monopoly or de facto control of Palestinian internet and phone lines violates the spirit of Oslo's "separate infrastructure" provisions. Israeli bureaucrats often justify such surveillance on security grounds, but rights advocates warn that it amounts to mass spying.

Will the surveillance stop?

Microsoft's Azure was not the only cloud in use. Earlier investigations revealed that the Israeli military also tapped Amazon Web Services (AWS) for some of its data storage. Moreover, the IDF has a broader cloud strategy: it signed a \$1.2 billion deal, nicknamed "Project Nimbus", under which both Google Cloud and Amazon provide computing and AI services to the military. Even IBM subsidiary Red Hat has supplied cloud infrastructure, and Palantir, a U.S. defence tech firm, offers AI targeting tools to Israel. In short, besides Microsoft, almost all major U.S. tech firms have become entwined with Israel's digital war effort. What this means is that cutting off Azure does not leave Unit 8200 defenceless; it will simply shift workloads to Google or a combination of on-premises servers.



Spy in the cloud: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators protest outside the Microsoft Build conference in Seattle, Washington on May 19. AFP

Context

- A joint investigation (The Guardian, +972 Magazine, Local Call) in Aug 2025 exposed that **Israel's Unit 8200** was using **Microsoft Azure** to store and analyse **millions of intercepted Palestinian phone calls**.
- Microsoft initially denied misuse but later confirmed "evidence supporting elements of the reporting" and **disabled certain services** for Unit 8200 (Sep 25).
- The case highlights the overlap of **tech companies, surveillance, and human rights** in conflict zones.

Background

Unit 8200

- Israel's top military intelligence unit, often compared to the **U.S. NSA**.
- Specialises in cyber intelligence, phone/data intercepts, and large-scale surveillance.

Partnership with Microsoft

- Began in **2021**, when Unit 8200 chief Yossi Sarel met Satya Nadella.
- Goal: Shift massive volumes of intercepted communications to **Azure cloud**.
- Microsoft engineers worked with IDF to create a **custom, segregated Azure environment**.

Why Cloud?

- Israeli servers could store calls of only tens of thousands.
- Azure provided **elastic capacity + AI tools**, allowing scale from **thousands to millions of calls daily**.
- Enabled **real-time transcription, translation, indexing, and AI-driven search** of conversations.

Telecom Control

- Under the **Oslo Accords (1995)**, Palestinians had rights to independent telecom networks.

- In practice, Israel retains control → all Palestinian phone/internet traffic routed via Israeli switches.
- This enables **mass interception and monitoring**.

Other Cloud Providers

- Azure is not the only one: **AWS, Google (Project Nimbus), IBM Red Hat, Palantir** also supply cloud/AI services to Israel's defence sector.
- Even if Microsoft cuts access, workloads can shift to **Google/Amazon or hybrid servers**.

Mains Focus Points

(useful for GS-II: IR, GS-III: Security, Ethics/Essay)

Ethical & Human Rights Dimension

- Raises questions of **mass surveillance** and **privacy violations** in occupied territories.
- Contradicts principles of **Oslo Accords** → Palestinians' right to independent communications.
- Human rights groups call it **collective surveillance of an entire population**.

Role of Big Tech in Geopolitics

- Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Palantir, IBM are **deeply embedded in state surveillance/military operations**.
- Blurs lines between **commercial technology** and **military intelligence tools**.
- Tech companies face reputational risk: accused of **complicity in rights violations**.

Strategic Implications

- Israel gains **AI-enabled mass surveillance capacity**, strengthening control in Gaza & West Bank.
- For Palestinians: reinforces **asymmetric power relations**; telecom dependence → lack of digital sovereignty.

- Globally: Could set precedent for other states to adopt **cloud-driven surveillance at scale**.

International Law & Norms

- Surveillance of occupied populations clashes with **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** and **right to privacy** under international conventions.
- Raises debates: Can private companies be held accountable for enabling state surveillance?

What Next?

- Microsoft's suspension may have limited practical effect → Israel diversifies across multiple providers.
- Advocacy groups may pressure **U.S. government** or **UN bodies** to regulate tech-firm collaboration in conflict zones.
- Larger issue: **Should global cloud/AI infrastructure be treated like arms trade** (subject to export controls)?