



## Razing impunity

Supreme Court's intervention may end arbitrary and targeted demolitions

**D**emolition of property as a punitive measure against alleged offenders amounts to wilful subversion of the rule of law. The bulldozer has emerged as a symbol of the state's eagerness to inflict collective punishment in recent times. Many such demolitions, cheered on one side by Hindutva proponents and passed off as removal of encroachments on the other by the government machinery, demonstrated a pattern in which a spell of communal tension was followed by the deployment of bulldozers and excavators. The Supreme Court of India has now ventured to put an end to this culture of impunity by laying down enforceable guidelines and directions to prevent demolition of homes and buildings without following due process. The verdict addresses issues that arose from the spurt in demolitions, beginning with Khargone in Madhya Pradesh and Jahangirpuri in Delhi in 2022, and several other places over the last two years. The Bench has recognised the obvious link between the fact that these homes and buildings belonged to those accused of offences that took place immediately before the demolition drive. It has ruled that this has a bearing on the rule of law and on the principle of separation of powers, as any such punitive use of the law against those accused or guilty of a crime amounts to executive authorities taking over a penal function. It also underpinned its order on the right to shelter, which stands breached, as the practice often unfairly targets family members of those allegedly involved.

The process laid down by the Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and K.V. Viswanathan rightly seeks to ensure public accountability of details regarding such demolitions and aims to prevent unscrupulous officials from backdating notices to create the impression that they were merely following up on previous eviction notices. The order calls for 15 days' notice, served on the owner by registered post, containing details of the violations as well as the grounds for the action to be taken. A personal hearing, a reasoned order and an inspection report signed by witnesses have also been made mandatory. The authorities should designate a digital portal within three months, where these notices, replies and orders will be uploaded. What is additionally significant is that the Court has decided to make officials accountable for any violations, effectively preventing attempts to backdate notices. The order exempts necessary demolition of encroachments such as those on waterbodies, railway lines and public spaces from this process. It is now up to the local body authorities to both adhere to the guidelines and ensure compliance, leaving little scope for politically motivated and communally targeted demolitions.

## Saving doctors

Lives of medical professionals should not be at risk from patients

**V**iolence, like poetry, is often the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but, unlike poetry, it is always ugly and, in most cases, self-destructive. While violence against members of the medical community is not new, more recently, cases have been rising with an eerie regularity. The recent case from Tamil Nadu where a doctor was stabbed multiple times by a patient's relative was dastardly and chilling. Balaji Jegannathan, an oncologist at the State-run Kalaignar Centenary Super Speciality Hospital (KCSSH), was stabbed by Vignesh, a young man whose mother was undergoing treatment for Hodgkin lymphoma, in the hospital. Contrary to initial media reports that the attack was perpetrated in a fit of rage, the fact that Vignesh brought a knife to a hospital makes it clear that it was premeditated. Notably, the patient, his mother, and her family had been counselled about the possible side effects of the chemotherapy that she was undergoing. She had also been admitted in a couple of private hospitals, but Vignesh had discharged her against medical advice, bringing her back to the KCSSH. He was furious about the treatment given to his mother, since her lungs had been affected as a result of the chemotherapy, and lashed out at the doctor, holding him responsible for his mother's suffering. The life of Dr. Balaji, who was on blood thinners for a previous cardiac condition, was saved only because he was in a super specialty medical institution where top surgeons serve, and therefore with access to the best care.

Violence on health-care professionals is as abhorrent as is negligence on their part. In a question of life and death, inflamed passions are possible, but it cannot be tolerated when frustration and fear of an impending decline in health or death lead to acts of violence against those who implement the treatment. It is important for doctors to display a good bedside manner, explaining to the patients and their family about the possible outcomes of treating a disease. In this case, notably, even this was communicated at all hospitals the patient had been in. While doctors struck work for a day in protest in the State, memories of the recent R.G. Kar rape and murder of a young doctor have compounded unrest among them. While human emotions under stress fall in the zone of the understandable, the presence of deterrence in health-care institutions — baggage scanners, CCTV monitoring, security checks, the obvious presence of security personnel — is the only way of ensuring that doctors remain safe.

# A 2024 election result that leaves many astounded

**"S**ince Plato's Republic 2,300 years ago, philosophers have understood the process by which demagogues come to power in free and fair elections, only to overthrow democracy and establish tyrannical rule. The process is straightforward, and we have now just watched it play out." — Jason Stanley, 'The End of US Democracy Was All Too Predictable'

India and the United States, two of the world's most prominent democracies, are facing significant challenges. India, despite being the most populous democracy, struggles with systemic issues that hinder its ability to function fairly and freely. On the other hand, the U.S., the most prosperous democracy, guarantees its citizens life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but still grapples with issues of race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation that undermine the true spirit of democracy. The recent U.S. presidential election has clearly exposed democracy's vulnerabilities, sparking concerns about its effectiveness when voters choose leaders with tainted records.

### Breaking down the voter demographic

Donald Trump's polarising personality may have captured the headlines, but it is the American electorate that has propelled him to victory. According to Pew Research Center, white voters without a bachelor's degree were more likely to associate with the Republican Party, with 63% identifying as Republicans. In comparison, 33% would align with the Democratic Party. This educational divide has become more pronounced over the past two decades, with white voters without a college degree favouring the Republican Party and those with a college degree moving toward the Democratic Party.

Mr. Trump's 2024 presidential campaign visibly resonated with millions, securing him another term in office. This outcome can be attributed to several factors, including his ability of creating a multi-ethnic working-class coalition, which proved successful as he made strides among Latinos and African-Americans, especially men. This raises important questions about the values and the priorities of the American people, and whether they are willing to overlook Mr. Trump's controversies in favour of his policy agenda.

The stakes of the 2024 U.S. election could not be higher, especially its make-or-break moment for American democracy. Trump's return to power has sent jitters across the globe, and for good reason. Many countries are anxious about the potential implications of his presidency, particularly when it comes to international relations and global stability. Within the U.S., non-white minorities, legal settlers, African-Americans, and undocumented immigrants are bracing themselves for the impact of hard right-wing policies driven by nationalist sentiment. The uncertainty surrounding the citizenship status of newborn children is a significant concern. The potential consequences



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of his presidency on global relations, domestic policy, and marginalised communities are indeed significant.

### Authoritarian rise

Moreover, we are witnessing a disturbing global trend where even robust democracies are buckling under authoritarian pressure. Hungary, once a beacon of democratic success in the post-Communist world, has evolved into the European Union's sole absolutism in just over a decade. Countries such as Turkey, Israel, or South Asian democracies have seen authoritarian tendencies rise over the years; 37 out of 104 democracies worldwide have experienced significant relapse since 2016. The red flags are clear: wearing away of democratic institutions, manipulation of information, and the rise of acrimonious politics. Experts warn that democratic decline is often incremental, with autocratic leaders exploiting democratic institutions to consolidate power.

Bertram Gross, a former presidential adviser, ominously warned, "As I look at America today, I am not afraid to say that I am afraid." His concern stems from America's alarming drift towards authoritarianism, fuelled by a deeply divided and distracted citizenry. The "Deep State" strategists have subtly erected the framework for tyranny, leveraging militarised law enforcement and bureaucratic repression. This alarming drift has persisted across the last five decades, outdoing party lines. Though this renders the resident of the White House relatively insignificant, there is a growing concern about the potential consequences of Mr. Trump's return.

Given his past actions, campaign promises, and the Supreme Court's decisions effectively granting him legal immunity, many fear his administration would target liberal democracy's core principles without any culpability. The Republican Party, the Senate, the House of Representatives and the judiciary are now in his firm grip, thereby cementing a G.O.P. trifecta. This could lead to a concentration of power and diminished checks on Mr. Trump's actions. The question to ask is: Will the U.S. follow Hungary's path, or will it find a way to strengthen its democratic foundations? The 2024 election, which seemed to be a pivotal moment in determining the answer, has left many astounded by the result.

Mr. Trump's statements and policy documents, including Project 2025, reveal a systematic plan of a demagogue to transform the government into an extension of his personal will, emulating the authoritarian approach of Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán. A key proposal is the revival of Mr. Trump's Schedule F order, which would allow the firing of about 50,000 career civil servants, undermining the merit-based civil service system. This move would grant Mr. Trump unprecedented control over the bureaucracy, enabling him to replace nonpartisan civil servants with loyalists. The stakes are high, as politicising the civil service would hinder essential government functions that millions rely on,

thereby paving the way for autocracy. His plans would degrade federal employment, and potentially lead to bullying tactics by hounding the minorities that he has throughout dehumanised or ruthlessly penalised those who have been his antagonists. With Mr. Trump's team prepared to implement these changes swiftly, the consequences for democracy and the civil service are alarming.

### A message for the democratic world

As is obvious from the election outcome, Mr. Trump's enduring grip on the American right is a phenomenon that has puzzled observers for nearly a decade. Despite the turmoil and the controversy surrounding his first term, culminating in his refusal to concede the 2020 election, Mr. Trump remained a formidable force throughout the current election. His unwavering appeal can be attributed to various factors, including his unapologetic stance on key issues. His campaign has consistently emphasised a "return" to fossil fuel dominance, pledging to boost oil and natural gas production, and roll back environmental regulations. This is broadly appreciated by voters seeking energy, independence and job creation.

To improve democracy's effectiveness, it is essential to address challenges and ensure that democratic governments prioritise citizens' welfare, equality, and accountability. The 2024 U.S. presidential election, particularly the Trump campaign, highlights his divisive rhetoric and policies that seem to have resonated with a specific demographic: disgruntled, underemployed or unemployed, and undereducated white males who feel threatened by immigration and societal shifts. Mr. Trump's popularity reveals a desire among many Americans for a homogeneous world order rooted in whiteness, bigotry, misogyny, and heterosexuality. Despite his pomposity, he has tapped into deep-seated anxieties and frustrations among certain segments of the population. His message of economic nationalism, immigration reform, and an "America First" rhetoric has struck a chord with many who feel left behind by globalisation and cultural shifts. A political landscape driven by contentious magniloquence has led many to feel that democracy under him will fail to deliver on its promise of inclusivity, equality, and protection for all citizens, regardless of race, colour, gender, or creed.

Donald Trump's rise to prominence exposes a concerning truth: many voters, particularly the mindless uneducated lot, may not fully understand the responsibilities of democratic citizenship or the risks of electing an unqualified leader, thereby emphasising that democracy as an idea might be flawed. This highlights the need for a socially aware and civically informed electorate, willing to look beyond personal biases and prioritise the greater good. It is time the American public saw the importance of reining in their runaway government, reclaiming their freedoms, and restoring justice in America.

Donald Trump's rise to prominence highlights a democratic flaw — the absence of a socially aware and informed electorate that focuses on the greater good

# Leverage similarity, complementarity in Nigeria



**Mahesh Sachdev**  
former Indian High Commissioner to Nigeria and the author of the book, 'Nigeria: A Business Manual'

**O**n November 16-17, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and second largest economy. Though on his first visit to that country, he may still find it familiar: from Airtel to Bajaj, Bollywood to Cipla and TVS to Tata, India is ubiquitous in Nigeria. Thanks to a shared Commonwealth legacy and similar challenges, the two multi-ethnic, large developing democracies face identical issues: improved governance, socio-economic development, terrorism and corruption. At the same time, they have complementarity in such strategic areas as hydrocarbons, defence, institution building, health care and education. Leveraging this milieu of similarity and complementarity can catapult the Abuja Summit from "successful" to "historic".

Substantive assets on the ground are available for this endeavour. There are more than 150 Indian companies with footprints in Nigeria with investments estimated at \$27 billion. With bilateral trade at \$7.9 billion, India is Nigeria's second largest trading partner. Nearly 50,000 Indians in Nigeria, the largest *Oyibo* (non-African) group in the country are well regarded for their low profile, professionalism and integrity. Nigerians flock to India for trade, medical treatment and education.

India's hard and soft power in Nigeria might look impressive, but it has lost ground over the past decade. The bilateral trade is half its peak a decade ago when India was Nigeria's largest trading partner. Despite being the top buyer of Nigerian crude, India has no upstream assets there. There are multiple reasons behind this stagnancy. To begin with, a more effective and comprehensive framework is indispensable for bilateral renewal and upgrading through frequent contacts. The Prime Minister's visit takes place after 17 years and the last meeting of the bilateral joint commission, this year, was after 13 years. Nigeria is too big and important a partner for India to channel its development assistance multilaterally through the African Union. India also needs to better leverage the local Indian

diaspora, Nigeria's second-largest employer. The two vibrant private sectors should be better empowered through a platform, preferably with financial and underpinning. With foresight and a judicious mix of ambition and sensitivity, India and Nigeria can forge a win-win synergy.

Nigeria, which is currently facing several economic and security headwinds, is looking for friends such as India for help. Since coming to power in 2023, President Bola Tinubu has acted with political courage. Unlike most of his predecessors who merely kicked the can of worms down the road, he has confronted long-standing national challenges. The measures taken include withdrawing petroleum subsidies costing \$10 billion annually, freeing the national currency, the Naira, of controls (leading to a steep depreciation and 32% annual inflation), and dismissing several functionaries including the Central Bank Governor, Head of Secret Service and military brass. These have upended the economy and caused public disaffection. In a recent speech, President Tinubu defended these stiff measures as necessary for national rejuvenation and assured the public that the worst was over.

### Where India could help

Despite the current eco-political conundrum, Nigeria retains its long-term attractiveness for India as a major hydrocarbon supplier, a large market with physical and social infrastructure deficit, and growth potential. While its occasionally stained reputation calls for due diligence and caution, macro-economic management is quite competent and the sovereign commitments are upheld.

The Nigerian leadership has high expectations from the Modi visit. Among its top concerns is upgrading its defence and security services to meet the terrorism and economic anarchy-related challenges such as Boko Haram, oil bunkering, Gulf of Guinea piracy, and a turbulent neighbourhood. Having overcome similar challenges at home, India is well experienced and

equipped to help Nigeria through a comprehensive package of defence supplies, training, and remote sensing. This can, in turn, boost India's defence exports and revive bilateral defence ties epitomised by seven Nigerian Presidents since independence in 1960 being trained in India as defence officers.

An equally urgent Nigerian requirement would be to seek India's help for economic stabilisation as it faces a critical foreign exchange shortage. India could best do so through some strategic initiatives such as partnerships for upstream hydrocarbons and infrastructure, a bilateral comprehensive economic partnership agreement and large financial facilitation through lines of credit and barter arrangements. India can provide the Nigerian requirements of petroleum products, foodstuffs (rice, wheat, milk powder), consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, compressed natural gas conversion kits, textiles and garments, agricultural inputs, and power equipment. The possibility of rupee-based trade can also be put on the table. Other complementarities to be leveraged would include importing palm oil, hides and skins, ginger, and Gum Arabic. Such moves would arrest the 29.7% year-on-year decline in India's exports in 2023-24 to \$3.6 billion. Moreover, it would help locate other drivers for bilateral trade as India now buys less Nigerian crude. Though less tangible, India's services exports in areas such as Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled services, banking, financial services and insurance, health care, skilling and education also deserve support.

### Half a millennium of shared history

A less-known but interesting historical snippet is about the first direct bilateral contact. A hazy legend traces it to the arrival around 1500 AD of Baba Ghor, a gem merchant from Kano (now in northern Nigeria) who settled down in Ratapur in Gujarat. He is still revered as a saint and for devising a method to polish agate stones. We need a similar impetus today to make the natural bilateral ties more lustrous.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A hail to 'bulldozer justice'

Though belated, it is appreciable that the Supreme Court of India has banned the draconian 'bulldozer form of justice'.

One wonders why the judiciary waited for so long and even after reasonable thinking people raised a hue and cry over such brutality (Page 1, "SC puts

brakes on 'bulldozer culture'" November 14).  
**Tharcus S. Fernando,**  
Chennai

The much heralded

bulldozer raj was a byword for lawlessness and anarchy. When Chief Ministers behave like feudal lords, it strikes at the root of democracy and trivialises

the criminal justice system.  
**Abdul Assis P.A.,**  
Kandassankkadavu, Kerala

Hospital incident  
The incident in Chennai,

where a doctor was stabbed, shows the many dangers staff face. Security checks should be in place.  
**S. Sankaranarayanan,**  
Chennai



# Should India continue to boycott cricket in Pakistan?



Sharda Ugra

Sports journalist with more than three decades of experience across newsrooms at The Hindu, MidDay, India Today, and Espricinfo



Sunil Yajaman

Joint Secretary, Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association, and former manager of the Indian Davis Cup side that travelled to Pakistan in February

## PARLEY

Last Saturday, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) officially communicated to the International Cricket Council (ICC) its decision to not send a team for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy to be held in Pakistan from February 19 to March 9. Global cricket is returning to Pakistan for the first time in nearly three decades, and the nation had hoped that India would make the trip across the border. But despite being assured of foolproof security and given a choice of venues, as well as the slight goodwill generated from External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's journey to Islamabad last month for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Council of Heads of Government meeting, India has decided not to travel. The BCCI prefers a hybrid model under which India will play all its matches outside Pakistan, an idea that the host is firmly against. Should India continue to boycott cricket in Pakistan? Sharda Ugra and Sunil Yajaman discuss the question in a conversation moderated by N. Sudarshan. Edited excerpts:

**Should India have travelled to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, especially given that Pakistan visited India for the World Cup in 2023?**

**Sharda Ugra:** It would have been great if the gesture was reciprocated, but 'India versus Pakistan' is rarely about sporting logic or fairness. Political events overtake even the best of intentions. The cricketing ties between the two countries are fractured and the Indian cricket establishment treated Pakistan in a hostile manner at the 2023 World Cup. But even if all these [incidents] had not been there, political events have always caught up, and that is what has happened.

**Sunil Yajaman:** Probably they [Indian team] should have tried [to go to Pakistan], especially since Pakistan travelled to India. Somewhere we have to keep some ties going and sport has to be above politics. But if it is a security issue, I would not comment on that. India is ready to play Pakistan elsewhere, right? At a neutral venue? Pakistan also came here. So it is definitely not about not wanting to have sporting ties.

**Pakistan did not host any international cricket for 10 years after the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan team in 2009. But since then, Australia, England, Sri Lanka, New Zealand have all visited Pakistan. Is India justified in seeking an exemption?**

**SY:** I don't know in what context India has



Sachin Tendulkar and Navjot Singh Sidhu cross for a quick single as the bowler, Aaqib Javed, looks on during a quarterfinal match between India and Pakistan in the 1996 Cricket World Cup, in Bangalore. V.V. KRISHNAN

refused to travel [to Pakistan]. If it is just about security, it is best left to the two governments. But otherwise, sports should go on. India even played the Davis Cup in Pakistan early this year [February] after 60 years. These are contests between the two countries, yes, but within the realm of sports. In all fairness, we should have nothing to do with politics.

It would be unfair to compare India's relationship with Pakistan with the ties other countries have with the country. But somewhere, we could have tried. There was a lot of scepticism ahead of the Davis Cup too. But ultimately, it went off well.

**SU:** Concerns about security are fair if the BCCI had dealt with all the other issues in a calm and logical manner. But I am afraid we are beyond that stage of talking. What is missing in this space is actually the Indian cricket board's ability to deal with the Pakistan cricket board in the spirit of fraternity and wanting the best for cricket. You can't help it if politics catches up, but it is a sense of fellow feeling that is absent. It is a position that India cannot bring itself to take for reasons beyond cricket.

**India co-hosted the 1996 World Cup with Pakistan and Sri Lanka and the final was played in Lahore...**

**SU:** Yes. In 1996, a joint India-Pakistan XI played a match [ahead of the World Cup]. It was not like there were no wars, no hostility, and no political pressure before. That sense of belonging to the same space has disappeared. It feels like they [Indian cricket establishment] are bigger than that and their money is bigger than that.

**India travelled to Pakistan for the Davis Cup (tennis), and Pakistan came to India for the**



All the other teams, be it tennis or blind cricket, are going [to Pakistan]. I accept that for cricketers to travel is different; they are bigger international stars and the stakes are higher. So, possibly, there is security fear. But the sentiment should be the same towards all sports.

**SUNIL YAJAMAN**

**SAFF Cup (football) last year. Is it fair for different sports to have different rules?**

**SY:** All the other teams, be it tennis or blind cricket, are going [to Pakistan]. I accept that for cricketers to travel is different; they are bigger international stars and the stakes are higher. So, possibly, there is security fear. But I feel that the sentiment should be the same towards all sports.

**SU:** Cricket has become emotional currency in both countries. In India, it is amplified – how we present the sport, talk about it, look at it on TV, and also how it is commented on. Why will they [cricket establishment] dial down on that if it fetches TRPs and ad revenue?

It is hypocritical to see other teams travelling across the border. But look at the environment that has been built around 'India versus Pakistan'. It has been made impossible to treat cricket as a sport.

**Is it possible to not let geopolitical tensions percolate into the sporting arena? And when they do, to what extent can you limit it?**

**SU:** It is not in our power to allow or disallow this. We have to accept it, simply because of the two countries' history. The only way it can get better is if you disconnect cricket from hyper nationalism, but how is that going to happen if it is the biggest sport in both countries?

About this hybrid model that is being spoken about... I feel it is a great idea. Obviously, Pakistan is agitated, but nobody is saying 'let's find a way to play'. At one point, we had Saurav Ganguly and Kamiz Raja, two Test captains, heading their cricket boards, but we didn't hear of any attempt to at least find a neutral ground and play that. That is sad.

**Mr. Yajaman, how was your experience travelling to Pakistan for the Davis Cup?**

**SY:** We were welcomed and Pakistan went out of its way to ensure that we were safe and comfortable. Hats off to them. For me, it was the second time in Pakistan. The first was in 2008

for two weeks of the ITF women's tournament. When we were there, the Mumbai terror attacks happened. But we never felt any threat. In fact, people were quite sympathetic. I am talking about the general public and those in the tennis circles. So, this time, when we had to travel to Islamabad, I was absolutely fine because I know that the people are nice there. The security we got was unprecedented. They announced that we were like State guests. One of the main reasons Pakistan did that was to convey to India, 'We can take care of you. Please come and play here'. They were so happy. Outside the tennis courts, players such as Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and our players are great friends.

**Do you feel the athletes, despite the camaraderie, are no longer stakeholders in this grand saga?**

**SY:** The players will feel that loss of camaraderie. They would love to go to each others' countries and spend time outside the field and have some fun. Players like Virat Kohli and M.S. Dhoni... Everybody in Pakistan talks about them. They are probably as popular as the Pakistan players.

Moving forward, it would be good for the two countries [to restart ties] in music, sports, and arts. But I would re-emphasise that if the government feels there is a security threat, then it is different. But it will be great to continue sporting ties. Will India not travelling to Pakistan help that?

**In a fantastic co-incidence, the Indian men's team has met Pakistan in every Champions Trophy, World T20, and ODI World Cup from 2013. The tie is a major money-spinner for ICC. In a scenario where the global custodian of the sport has a genuine financial interest in an India-Pakistan fixture, can it be expected to act impartially?**

**SU:** I call it 'Group Cooking'. In the FIFA World Cup, there is no compulsory match between Brazil and Argentina, right? Here it is like: 'no, our money will collapse'. Then maybe the marketing department is not working properly because the sport is terrific and there is talent everywhere. It is a very big sporting contest. But can we make it a level playing field? All that cricket talks about is 'it generated so much money and revenue'. This demeans the actual sporting contest. The ICC doesn't seem to have the administrative bandwidth to think 'what if an India-Pakistan match doesn't happen? What are the numbers we are looking at?' Will people stop watching the World Cup if India and Pakistan do not play each other? It is like the ICC is in a bad relationship; it has been abused by India-Pakistan and it cannot find a way out.

## NOTEBOOK

# The contrast between the U.S. and India on counting day

The Indian model of providing electoral results via the Election Commission works much better than the American one

Srinivasan Raman

Donald Trump has returned to power in the United States following a decisive win in both the popular vote and electoral college vote in the presidential elections. This emphatic win made it easy for journalists to cover the results. It was clear fairly early during the counting process that Mr. Trump was going to win the election and also sweep the 'swing States'.

This is in marked contrast to the 2020 election, which was full of controversies, both manufactured and real. A staggering number of Americans cast their ballots before voting day in that election, held during the COVID-19 pandemic; this stretched the counting process by days. Mr. Trump lost, but refused to concede the election to Joe Biden. The results were much closer than what the opinion polls had anticipated. The slow counting process strained the coverage.

In the U.S., on counting day, data is provided by the news agency, Associated Press (AP), and a few others. This means that the result is "called" by media outlets, which estimate the chances of a candidate winning a State based on trends that are available from this data. While the U.S. Federal Election Commission monitors implementation of campaign finance laws and the conduct of federal elections, it does not provide live electoral data. This is either collated by agencies such as AP, and released to subscribers via an Application Programming Interface, or is provided by each respective State, mostly by their Secretaries of State.

This is unlike the process in India, where the Election Commission of India (ECI) provides live counting data for each constituency, whether Assembly or parliamentary. Media outlets, especially television journalists, also use agencies or their own reporters to provide information on trends from counting centres. However, these are not always accurate. The slower and steadier trends that trickle in

from the ECI website, which are authenticated by polling agents at counting centres, give media outlets and the general public a clear picture on electoral trends. The structured manner in which the ECI presents its results also helps media outlets and data enthusiasts, such as those in *The Hindu*, to parse that information and present it separately with more granular information. This includes, for instance, data on rural and urban voting trends across States.

While U.S. news agencies and media outlets are efficient in presenting results, the situation in India is different: the information is not available to only a select few outlets, and is collated and displayed in a structured manner by the ECI for anyone to use. The ECI also presents 'deep-dive data' – for instance, information from polling booths on how voters choose their candidates. It also provides Assembly segment-wise data for parliamentary constituencies. While this information is uploaded onto the website after a lag – it can take a few weeks after results are announced – the fact that it is made available is useful for social scientists and journalists to analyse the results even further, long after the excitement over elections dies down.

For a data journalist, the Indian model of providing electoral results via a public authority works much better than the American one. In recent years, the ECI has received a lot of flak for various issues, such as the robustness of the Electronic Voting Machines (an overblown controversy), the patchy implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (a legitimate criticism), the dilation of the voting process in some States (unavoidable in a few cases), and the relative laxity in regulating campaign expenditure (which is becoming a problem). But what must be appreciated by publicly minded people in India is that the ECI releases structured voting data in a transparent, timely, and efficient manner.

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## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

### Paying homage to the sun god



Devotees offer prayers on the banks of the Ganga at Digha Ghat on the last day of the Chhath Puja, in Patna. Chhath Puja is a four-day festival in which devotees worship the sun. It is widely celebrated in Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Nepal. PH

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 15, 1974

### Arafat's call in U.N. for Palestinian State

United Nations, Nov. 14: Mr. Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, making an extraordinary appearance before the UN General Assembly yesterday, called for the creation of a single democratic Palestinian State where the Christians, Muslims and Jews can live in peace, justice and equality. Alternately acting and speaking like a

## The Hindu.

statesman as well as a guerrilla leader, the 44-year-old Palestinian warned, "I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighters' gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."

He said that a fifth West Asian war, the possibility of which has been talked about since the Arab and Israeli positions hardened, in the wake of the Rabat summit's naming of the PLO as the spokesman of the Palestinians, might end in a nuclear holocaust.

He said that Zionism was imperialist and racist and warned that like South Africa, Israel too could be suspended from the UN General Assembly.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 15, 1924

### Japan supports China

Geneva, Nov. 13: The upshot of today's proceeds of the Opium Conference is that China emerges unscathed, though the debate will be resumed tomorrow.

The essential feature of the French convention for the control of the sale of opium is the number of places of sale, prohibition of sale to minor, non-increase in the number of opium dens, prohibition of traffic and vigorous suppression of smuggling.



# The discovery of insulin and the 'Flame of Hope'

Sir Fredrick Banting's birth anniversary is observed as World Diabetes Day on November 14 every year as a tribute to the history behind the discovery of insulin, one of medicine's greatest breakthroughs; the eternal Flame of Hope burns in Canada to honour Banting's achievement

C. Aravinda

In human physiology, the endocrine glands act by releasing chemical messengers called hormones. They are produced in extraordinarily small quantities, ranging from  $10^{-9}$  to  $10^{-12}$  grams. They travel through the bloodstream to influence distant organs and tissues guiding bodily functions. Nervous and endocrine systems carry out a common mandate: to transmit the brain's instructions to peripheral organs and tissues. Unlike the nervous system, which operates through a network of neurons, the endocrine system executes the brain's orders across the body without an anatomical network.

The pancreas holds a unique position as both an endocrine and exocrine organ. It plays an important role in managing blood sugar levels through insulin.

Sir Fredrick Banting's birth anniversary is observed as World Diabetes Day on November 14 every year as a tribute to the history behind the discovery of insulin – one of medicine's greatest breakthroughs.

## Type 1 DM

Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) is an autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks insulin-beta cells in the pancreas, leading to high blood sugar resulting from insulin deficiency. Unlike type 2 DM, which is common in adults, T1DM often affects children and young adults. Globally, around 9 million people have T1DM. The incidence in India is 4.9 per 1,00,00 annually, per the information from PIB in 2022. The exact cause remains unknown, but genetic and environmental factors, including viral infections, are suspected.

Humans were fighting this illness till the last century without a clue. Symptoms of diabetes like, excessive thirst, frequent urination, and "sweet urine", were found in all major civilisations. It was not until the mid-19th century that meaningful progress began to decrypt the mystery. In 1869, Paul Langerhans discovered specialised clusters of cells within the pancreas – later known as the "islets of Langerhans" – and discovered the endocrine role in this organ.

In 1889, German physiologists Oskar Minkowski and Joseph von Merin experimented by surgically removing the pancreas from a healthy dog to investigate its role in digestion. Post-surgery, they observed that the dog developed symptoms characteristic of diabetes, notably, elevated blood sugar levels and the presence of sugar in the urine. This experiment established a direct link between the pancreas and blood sugar regulation. Despite these insights, between 1890 and 1920, several researchers tried, with many unsuccessful attempts, to discover the pancreas's role in diabetes.

## Climax at the University of Toronto

After serving as an orthopaedic surgeon in the First World War, Frederick Banting returned to Canada as a war veteran. Driven to pursue research, he approached John Macleod, head of the physiology department at the University of Toronto, in 1920, with the idea of identifying the pancreatic secretion responsible for carbohydrate metabolism. Macleod, though hesitant, provided laboratory space and assigned Charles Best, a medical student, to assist him. Together, Banting and Best conducted experiments on dogs, leading to the successful isolation of insulin from the islets of Langerhans.



Insulin is not a cure but a treatment, allowing people with diabetes to live near-normal lives. GETTY IMAGES

James Collip, a biochemist, played another important role in the practical application of insulin therapy. In 1921, he joined Banting and Best at the university. While Banting and Best had successfully extracted insulin, their preparations were impure and caused adverse reactions in patients. Collip developed a method for purifying insulin, removing toxic impurities, and ensuring its safety and efficacy, as the insulin was prepared mostly from dogs and cows. This was crucial as without Collip's efforts, insulin could not have been administered to patients, and Banting's discovery might have remained theoretical.

On January 11, 1922, Leonard Thompson, a 14-year-old boy with diabetes, became the first person to receive an injection of insulin. Unfortunately, the initial extract was impure, leading to an allergic reaction and minimal reduction in blood glucose levels. Recognising the need for improvement, Collip refined the purification process, producing a more potent and safer insulin extract. A second injection on January 23, 1922, resulted in a significant drop in blood glucose without adverse effects, marking a milestone for humanity. In 1923, the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to Frederick Banting and John Macleod for discovering insulin, in a rare instance of the prize being granted so soon after

**Symptoms of diabetes, like excessive thirst, frequent urination, and 'sweet urine', were found in all major civilisations; but humans were fighting this illness till the last century without a clue**

discovery. Macleod provided Banting with laboratory space and assigned an assistant. However, the award sparked controversy as Banting felt that Best, who had been instrumental in the research, deserved recognition instead of Macleod. Conversely, Macleod believed Collip, who refined the insulin extraction process, deserved credit. In response, Banting shared half of his Nobel Prize money with Best, and Macleod did the same with Collip. Decades later, the Nobel Committee acknowledged the oversight in not including Best, expressing regret for his exclusion from the original award.

Despite these conflicts, Banting, Best, Macleod, and Collip got to share their prize money among themselves. In a remarkable gesture, Banting sold the patent rights to the University of Toronto for just \$1, ensuring that insulin could be produced widely and remain affordable.

Collip's extraction techniques to purify insulin were viable for human use but not scalable for mass production. As diabetes

cases increased since then, it became clear that a more efficient method was essential. Enter recombinant DNA technology in the 1980s: scientists developed a method to insert the human insulin gene into *Escherichia coli* bacteria using plasmids – small DNA molecules capable of self-replication. This approach enabled bacteria to produce large quantities of insulin identical to that made by human bodies. The recombinant process allowed for mass production to keep up with the demand.

## Flame of Hope

In 1989, Queen Elizabeth kindled the Flame of Hope in Sir Frederick G. Banting Square, London, Ontario, Canada, to honour Banting's discovery of insulin. This eternal flame stands as a hope for millions affected by diabetes worldwide, representing the commitment to continue research until a definitive cure is found. The flame will remain lit until a cure is discovered. As we consider Banting's legacy, we realise that insulin is not a cure but a treatment, allowing people with diabetes to live near-normal lives. His spirits might be happier when the flame of hope is extinguished after discovering a cure.

(Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. The views expressed are personal. aravindaaiimsjr10@hotmail.com)



Weightlifting has been associated with building muscles, but its benefits are far more. GETTY IMAGES

## The science behind health benefits of heavy lifting

Nanditha

Weightlifting is not just for bodybuilders or athletes; it is a powerful form of exercise for everyone. From strengthening bones and muscles to preventing chronic diseases and improving mental health, weightlifting offers benefits that reach far beyond the gym.

For years, exercise was almost synonymous with cardiovascular activities like running, cycling, and swimming. But in recent decades, weightlifting or strength training has gained popularity, not only as a path to muscle strength but also as a powerful tool for long-term health.

## Beyond muscles

Weightlifting has long been associated with building muscles, but its benefits reach far beyond aesthetics or physical strength. According to research from the journal *Preventive Medicine*, weightlifting improves multiple aspects of physical health, making it a top contender for long-term wellness.

Here is how it impacts the human body: bone and muscle health. One of the most impressive benefits of weightlifting is its effect on bone health. With age, there tends to be a decline in bone

**Weightlifting or strength training has gained popularity, not only as a path to muscle strength but also as a powerful tool for long-term health**

mineral density (BMD), leading to osteoporosis, higher risk of fractures, and related mobility issues. Weightlifting could provide a powerful solution for this. Mechanical stress through weight lifting is said to increase BMD. This process is particularly valuable for older adults, to avoid the natural decline in bone density and strength. Furthermore, there is also a decline in muscle mass with age, termed as sarcopenia. Sarcopenia can have detrimental effects on metabolic health and physical fitness. Weightlifting helps to build muscle mass and prevent sarcopenia, even in the elderly.

It also has metabolic benefits, helping with weight management. While aerobic exercise is known to burn calories during the activity, weightlifting offers a unique metabolic advantage. After a weightlifting session, the body continues to burn calories even at rest, a phenomenon known as "excess post-exercise oxygen consumption". Building muscle also supports a higher resting metabolic rate. This effect helps with long-term weight management as well.

Believe it or not, weightlifting actually prevents joint injury, by strengthening the muscles around the joints. When muscle strength improves, it stabilises joints, reducing the likelihood of strains, sprains, and other injuries that often occur due to weak muscles and poor joint support. For athletes, people with physically-demanding jobs, or anyone looking to stay active even in later life, the joint-protective benefits of weightlifting are invaluable. (Dr. Nanditha is director and diabetologist at A. Ramachandran's Diabetes Hospitals, Chennai. She was also the gold medalist at the Chennai District Powerlifting event, 2021. dr.nanditha.arun@gmail.com)

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

## Pharmacists issue caution over online platform for drug delivery

R. Sujatha

A recent move to deliver medicines through a food delivery platform in Bengaluru has raised concerns of patient safety. While pharmacists are vociferously objecting to the move, even doctors are cautious.

The announcement has been met with stiff resistance from chemists and druggists' associations. They are flagging several issues, including violation of laws governing their trade. Chemists and doctors say the government must take a call on policies to govern operation of online pharmacies.

The Tamil Nadu Chemists and Druggists Association president S. A. Ramesh says such a move violates the Drugs and Cosmetics



Chemists and doctors say the government must take a call on policies to govern operation of online pharmacies. ISTOCKPHOTO

Act 1940. As per the Rules, medicine should be dispensed by a qualified pharmacist after verification of the prescription, he points out.

"We are against online sale of drugs. It is not as simple as

buying groceries. We are talking about life-saving medicines. The corporates are using this as a commercial exercise, which is wrong," he argues. "The neighbourhood pharmacist knows the family for several

decades and will ensure their wellbeing. The pharmacist's role is to instruct the patient on the method of taking the drug. We check for the authenticity of the prescription before dispensing a drug. In the case of such online platforms, how do we know if a pharmacist is dispensing the prescribed drug in the right dosage," he asks.

Abul Hassan, president of the Tamil Nadu chapter of the Indian Medical Association, says a drawback is lack of quality control of online pharmacies.

"At present the drug controller can pick up samples randomly from a pharmacy for quality checks, preventing chances of spurious drugs entering the market," he explains.

He flags concerns such as displacement of thousands of people employed in medical shops and abuse and misuse of prescription drugs without consulting a doctor.

On the flip side, online pharmacies would make drugs cheaper as the medicine will be directly distributed from the company. Also, drugs that are not available in the city can be procured online, helping patients, he points out.

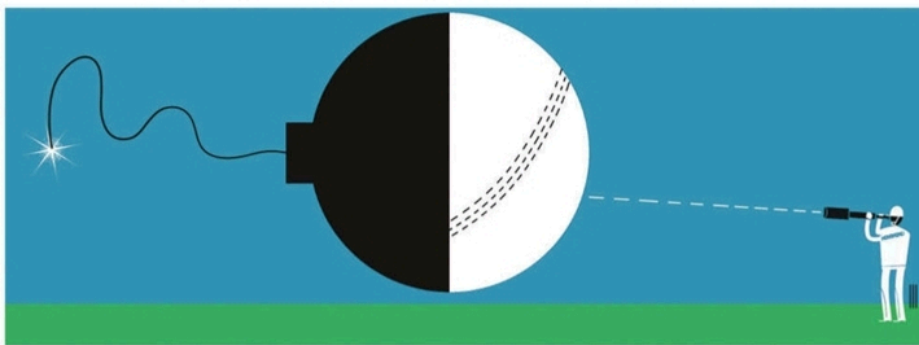
He cites the United Kingdom's model that requires a patient to upload the prescription to a centralised system. "Once the drugs are issued the prescription becomes invalid. A similar policy guideline would help in our country," he says. (sujatha.r@thehindu.co.in)



# THE IDEAS PAGE

**DIS/AGREE**  
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



The BCCI's decision to not send the cricket team to Pakistan for Champions Trophy raises a question: Should the political acrimony between the two countries impact sporting ties?

## Cricket & violence don't go together

India's stance is consistent — as long as there is Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, there cannot be a business-as-usual approach elsewhere



SYED ATA HASNAIN

GIVEN THE NATIONWIDE love for the game, India should play cricket anywhere and everywhere. As someone who employed cricket as a peace-making instrument in Kashmir through the organisation of the Kashmir Premier League (KPL) in 2011 and 2012, I retain confidence in the game's "beyond sports" credentials. KPL was all about restoring dignity and pride to the people of Kashmir once the situation came under control there. We were not building bridges but rather cementing relationships and trust.

So, if someone uses this analogy to suggest that cricket and the love for it among the people of India and Pakistan can make it an instrument of peace between our two nations, would I be tempted to fall for it? The answer is, not really. Because even while the people of the two nations have no real problem with each other, there is the looming presence in Pakistan of a deeper-than-most deep state. Its multiple layers lead to a grey zone with threat perceptions difficult to realistically estimate — peace and hostility may depend on the time of the day.

The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 (ODI) is being hosted by Pakistan from February 19 to March 9 next year. Only three venues are being used for the 15 matches being played — Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi. India has asked for a change from Lahore to Dubai for all its matches as the Indian government does not want our team playing in Pakistan. The ICC earlier accepted the hybrid model under which India played Pakistan in multi-nation tournaments only but in a third country. However, here there is a problem because of Pakistan's ownership of the tournament, its pride and more. Hence, the impasse.

these circumstances, would be an incorrect indicator of the internal security situation and the legitimacy of the government which has come to power by illegal suppression of the opposition. If India, suffering the travails of Pakistan's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism, is itself willing to re-establish sporting ties with it there would be no grounds for the international community to name and shame it.

Naming and shaming Pakistan for its support for terror has been India's constant endeavour and it has often succeeded but not always. Pakistan would get big power endorsement if India is seen as pursuing a line of normalising the bilateral relationship. Even External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar while at Islamabad last month, exercised full caution with his statements and body language. Displaying excellent diplomatic skills, he ensured no warmth was exuded by his presence which was purely a responsibility towards SCO.

The Pakistan government will obviously not take kindly to India's proposal to let the ICC allow it to follow the same old hybrid approach. It would seek a ban on India but for the fact that it is aware that India is the golden goose of international cricket which allows it to rule the roost. There is nothing wrong if that were to happen because the truth would then prevail and Pakistan's internal status of a state out of control would become evident.

India is correct in consistently maintaining its policy in the face of a continuum of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in J&K after the recent elections and in the context of the safety of the team when playing in Pakistan. We may forget all other things but the type of radicalised militant passion on Pakistan's streets cannot be ignored. All three cities hosting the tournament have a notorious history of sub-conventional violence. The ideological root centres of Muridke and Bahawalpur are close to Lahore and Rawalpindi. Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan is attempting to showcase its return, Jaish e Mohammed and the Jamat-ul-Dawa (erstwhile LeT) have also failed to make an impact with their networks in J&K and in the rest of India. All of these would be seeking big targets under one or more layers of the deep state. India's stance should convince the international community of the latent threats which exist under the façade of normalcy in Pakistan.

The writer is former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15th Corps. Views are personal

## Play in Pakistan. It weakens terror

This can only be achieved with reopening closed doors of cricket, cinema, trade and thousands of years of socio-spiritual fraternity



SUDHEENDRA KULKARNI

"SPORT FOR PEACE" has been a motto of the Olympic movement since its inception in 1894. The history of the Olympic Truce in the nineteenth century BC tells us that it was used by the warring kings in Greece to allow peaceful competition among athletes as a substitute for the actual conflict. By also allowing participation by spectators in the sporting contests, the kings implicitly conceded that people — that is, non-athletes — also have an important contribution to make in ending hostilities, enhancing mutual goodwill and promoting peace.

Sadly, when it comes to the cricketing contest between India and Pakistan, sport has metaphorically become an extension of the battlefield. The Indian government apparently believes that neither athletes nor non-athletes have any role to play in Indo-Pak peace-building. This is the only meaning that can be derived from its decision — conveyed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to the International Cricket Council (ICC) — that the Indian cricket team would not be allowed to travel to Pakistan to participate in the eight-nation Champions Trophy early next year.

New Delhi's reasons for this decision, although not yet officially spelt out, run along familiar lines. Pakistan continues to be a sponsor of terrorist activities in India. Therefore, "terror and sport" cannot go together just as "terror and talks" cannot. The Go's argument is right on facts but flawed on its conclusions. Let's first look at the facts. Pakistan has not stopped exporting terror to India. Pakistan-based terrorists have mounted several attacks on our security forces and civilians in Jammu and Kashmir after the successful conclusion of Assembly elections early last month.

However, Pakistan's support to terrorism is not new. It dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when it started bleeding India first on two fronts — by propping up separatists in Punjab (through Khalistani outfits) and Kashmir — and later by striking deeper into Indian territory in Mumbai, Delhi and elsewhere. Encouragement of religious extremism was an essential part of this evil design, which, nevertheless, has utterly failed in its strategic objective to weaken India. Instead, India has emerged stronger in recent decades.

The net outcome of this misadventure — also of the related policy of aiding and abetting jihadi terrorism in Afghanistan — was that Pakistan itself became a much bigger victim of homegrown terrorism and Islamist extremism. The resultant unsettled conditions domestically, and the opprobrium it earned globally as a hub of terrorism, caused many cricketing nations to avoid

touring to Pakistan.

But it is right to conclude from this that India should sever all its cricketing links with Pakistan? No. As a matter of fact, India continued to play cricket with Pakistan even after the 1993 terror attacks on Mumbai and the attack on Parliament in 2001, to cite just two of the most gruesome instances of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Test series were played on both Pakistani and Indian soils with the blessings of prime ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. The two teams have played even after Narendra Modi became prime minister, albeit in third countries such as the UAE and Sri Lanka. This demolishes the conclusion that "terror and cricket cannot go together".

What about the other conclusion that it is unsafe for the Indian team to play in Pakistan? Well, the government of Pakistan has made concerted — and successful — efforts to convince ICC members that it is safe to play Test, ODI and T20 series on Pakistani soil. In recent years, Pakistan has hosted teams from Australia, Bangladesh, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies. Spectators have obviously loved this turnaround, because it is a matter of national pride for a nation that is itself a major cricketing nation. Therefore, India cannot advance the "safety" argument to buttress its decision not to let its team travel across the border for the Champions Trophy. With Pakistan's national honour itself at stake, its government will surely make redoubled efforts to ensure the safety and security of all the participating teams. If the BCCI insists on moving the Champions Trophy games to Dubai, and if Pakistan turns down the demand, the only option left for India would be to boycott the competition. Jingoists might hail this as their victory, but what would India have gained except loss of face in the global sporting fraternity?

True, Pakistan needs to do a lot more than hosting the Champions Trophy to become a normal nation. The extent of the abnormality in its politics can be gauged from the fact that the greatest cricketer in its history — Imran Khan, who also became its prime minister — has been languishing in jail on flimsy charges. The sooner Islamabad and Rawalpindi cut all their ties to terrorism and religious fanaticism, the better it is for Pakistan's democracy, its deeply troubled economy and its global reputation.

New Delhi also must realise that its "big-nation arrogance", which all our smaller neighbours complain about, cannot succeed in isolating Pakistan globally. Better to weaken terrorism by strengthening bonds of friendship and mutual trust with Pakistani people. This is best achieved by reopening the closed doors of cricket, cinema, trade and thousands of years of socio-spiritual fraternity. Remember: The Olympic Truce of yore has endured not because of the kings' self-interest but because of the wisdom of peace-loving players and the people.

The writer was a close aide to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The solution lies in strict adherence to the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target through immediate, coordinated action. Time is running out, and every fraction of a degree matters."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

## Ratan Tata, Nano, MIT & IIT

Be it a car's shortcomings or finding technological solutions for social change, how Tata helped us learn



CHINTAN VAISHNAV

IT WAS EARLY 2012 when Ratan Tata engaged with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), repeating his famous confession: "When we made Tata Nano, we produced an affordable car but we failed to understand the consumer." His bigger point was that a typical engineer or manager is not equipped to think about the problems of resource-limited environments and building solutions for them. He wanted to change that.

By September 2012, the MIT Tata Center for Technology and Design was established to train graduate students across engineering, science, and management schools to understand the challenges confronting resource-poor communities and designing solutions for them. The journey that followed was not as easy as establishing the Center. In an environment like MIT, the emphasis of any graduate-level research is to stay at the global cutting edge and advance one's field of study. This meant that, even though we wanted the graduate students who received the Tata Center Fellowship to work on socially-relevant problems, their research could not be less rigorous than those who were working on more theoretical, classical problems.

Pursuing this dual bottomline of rigour and relevance required some innovation in what and how we taught. As such, top research universities have a well-developed structure to enable students to find good research questions from literature and answer them with rigorous research. What most don't yet have is the ability to invoke such questions from the field, that too about resource-poor environments. Consequently, we had to create a curriculum that placed as much emphasis on learning from the field as on learning from library research and lab experiments. The result was unexpected.

Learning deeply from resource-poor communities often changed the objective function of one's research altogether. Consider this example. A student who was interested in reducing leakage in urban water systems, was sent to Mumbai after receiving the Tata Fellowship to "hang out" with the municipal corporation crew that fixed leaky water pipes, just so he could understand it first-hand. Everyday, he woke up, got into his jumpsuit, and travelled with the crew six pipes. After about three months, when he returned to MIT, he declared that he no longer desired to work on reducing water leakage. At first, we were alarmed, thinking three months of investment in him were lost. What he told us, though, was eye opening: "If I were to hypothetically bring the leakage to zero in a city already experiencing water shortage, the poorest of people may have no water at all because their only source of water is the leakage! So rather than reducing leakage, I want to work on addressing problems that arise because of it, like the impurities entering leaky pipes and making people sick."

Ratan Tata's desire was to take the MIT Tata Center template and create a sister centre at IIT Bombay, which came into existence in 2014. Today, both experiments have created a template for teaching how to, one, deeply understand the challenges of resource-constrained environments; two, research them rigorously and arrive at a scalable solution, whether technology or policy; and three, create a practical implementation plan.

Together, these centres have trained over 375 graduate students, from 15 different disciplines, who have taken on problems in the areas of healthcare, education, water, agriculture, housing, energy, and environment, and have performed some 3 lakh hours of field work, cumulatively. Their work has resulted in more than 100 top publications, 80 patents, and 15 startups.

You might ask, where are these solutions? Expectedly, some have reached the market but most others are still on their way. While we have turned this journey from problem finding to creating research-based solutions into something of a science, we are yet to "crack the code" for taking solutions from lab to market. So far, we have discovered that the philanthropic cycle for transformational ideas, from problem to impact, can take a decade or more.

Consider this example: The journey of Takachar, the startup that won the million dollar Earth Prize for converting agricultural waste into biochar (bio fertiliser), has had numerous twists and turns in terms of the market to pursue, iterations to the final design, tweaks in the business model, and so on. This was even after they had developed a rigorous lab-level control over the technology involved — torrefaction, which is a thermal process of degrading organic material.

Takachar began by turning agricultural waste into pellets used for cooking. It turned out, however, that densifying waste took a lot of energy and was costly. People were not willing to pay for it as they had a substitute like firewood available. However, collecting and transporting agricultural waste was a logistical nightmare. After much experimentation, they found that if one could closely control the combustion process, there would be a byproduct that could be used as fertiliser that had much higher value for the farmer. Additionally, if the unit that performed such controlled combustion could be towed to the farm, the solution would become much more affordable and decentralised, thereby avoiding the unenviable step of having to transport the waste.

Such journeys go beyond the boundaries of a university. They take place in incubators, accelerators and startups, and at times in working with more established enterprises. Very few pockets of the world are building the ecosystem necessary for such processes. Building this continuum of platforms is what we owe to Ratan Tata.

All said, no matter how one looks at the Tata Nano endeavour, one cannot but salute Ratan Tata for accepting its shortcomings, learning from them, and committing to building a new chapter so desperately needed by engineering and management education. Learning from communities before we solve for them.

The writer was the first academic director of the MIT Tata Center. Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BULLDOZING JUSTICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bulldozing justice' (IE, November 14). The Supreme Court's landmark verdict against the bulldozer demolition of properties belonging to those accused of crimes has underscored that the state cannot become judge, jury and executioner. It cannot override the basic principles of the Indian Constitution. It is shameful that democratically elected representatives were castigated by the Supreme Court for forgetting their constitutional obligations and had to be reminded about the rule of law. Whilst the law has been laid down by the SC, its implementation rests in the hands of the executive. One must question whether this will be straightforward for those who were glorifying and branding this approach as a model of instant justice without due process.

I.R. MURTHY, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bulldozing justice' (IE, November 14). State governments have been attempting to justify bulldozer "justice" by citing illegality of the encroachments in question. The root cause, however, lies in the nexus amongst politicians, bureaucrats and police officers who turn a blind eye to such encroachments. The Supreme Court's decision, which declares such demolitions illegal, is indeed welcome. This ruling sets an important precedent. The law must be complied with, and the final orders and directions of the courts must be carried out. There should be no animosity towards any community or individual, and this aspect ought to remain foremost in the minds of law enforcement officers. Constitutional provisions should always be upheld.

Sushash Vaid, New Delhi

### THE FUNDING CATCH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A choppy market' (IE, November 14). The pressing need for global action to reduce global warming to sustainable levels. The accumulation of carbon dioxide emissions has wreaked havoc, causing abnormal temperature rises across the globe. Climate finance emerged as the primary agenda of the meeting. However, merely cutting greenhouse gas emissions in poor countries is insufficient to prevent further global warming. Countries must reduce their individual emissions and reset global goals. Fossil fuel use must be curtailed and substituted with renewable energy. Wealthy and oil-producing nations may not adhere to their commitments at COP29, many fear. It is essential to view climate action as an investment, not a cost.

SS PALL, Nadia



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## A CORRECTION

Slowing growth momentum, portfolio outflows drive market fall. Macro data, RBI, Fed meetings will shape investor sentiment

THE INDIAN STOCK markets have continued to correct. On Thursday, the BSE Sensex fell 110 points or 0.14 per cent. Since touching a high of 85,836 on September 26, the Sensex has fallen by around 10 per cent. The correction is not just limited to the larger companies. Shares of small and midcap companies have also fallen. Over the past month, the BSE small and midcap indexes have also fallen by 7.5 per cent and 8.8 per cent respectively. The Nifty VIX, a measure of market volatility, has also surged and is up almost 14 per cent over the past month.

There are several reasons for this market correction. Some foreign investors have opted to re-balance their global portfolios in favour of China on the back of steps announced by Chinese authorities in recent months to prop up the flagging economy, and attractive stock valuations compared to the elevated valuations in India. Higher long-term US bond yields, a strengthening dollar, and expectations about the direction of US policy under a second Donald Trump presidency are also playing a role. Net investments by foreign investors were \$11 billion in October, and around -\$2.5 billion so far this month (until November 13). To put this in perspective, net investments were -\$8.3 billion in March 2020. The second quarter corporate earnings season has also been disappointing for several companies, with the results pointing towards a slowing momentum in economic growth. Some FMCG majors have alluded to a "shrinking" middle segment and "softness" in urban demand. Auto sales too indicate sluggish demand. Data from SIAM shows that sales of passenger vehicles grew at less than 1 per cent in October. Sentiment has also been impacted by recent inflation data which showed that retail inflation had edged to a 14-month high of 6.2 per cent in October, surpassing the upper threshold of the RBI's inflation targeting framework. This has dashed hopes of policy easing in the near term.

In April, the Sensex was trading at a price-to-earnings ratio of almost 25. Multiples for several large companies, and even in the small and mid cap space were considerably higher. The Sensex now trades at a PE ratio of around 22. So far, the market correction does not seem to have dampened the enthusiasm of domestic retail investors. Monthly contribution through systematic investment plans rose to Rs 25,323 crore in October. However, this period of uncertainty is likely to continue. Greater clarity over the underlying economic growth momentum will possibly emerge when the National Statistics Office releases the GDP data towards the end of this month. Thereafter, attention will shift towards the December meetings of the RBI's monetary policy committee and the US Fed.

## SEVERE AIR AGAIN

Tackling Delhi's air pollution requires cutting-edge approaches such as AI-wedged management. Central agencies must step up

ON WEDNESDAY, The temperature in Delhi dipped below normal for the first time this winter. The onset of the cold weather was accompanied by a deterioration in the city's air quality. The city's air quality index (AQI) registered as "severe" for the first time this season — the most delayed arrival of the extreme polluting condition in the past 10 years. That, however, is no respite for the city's residents. Analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment has shown that while the peak particulate matter (PM) levels have fallen this season, the city's average pollution has risen. In other words, pollutant concentration remains a cause for worry. The average PM 2.5 levels, this year, are the highest in five years. Also, the fact that Delhi continues to experience bad air way past the crop residue burning season points to an imperative long highlighted by experts — a policy focus beyond a seasonal approach.

In recent years, Delhi's AAP government has experimented with smog towers and water sprinklers. Smog towers are supposed to act as giant air purifiers. However, by all accounts, their efficacy is restricted to the immediate vicinity, leaving the broader cityscape unaffected. There has also been no audit of the emissions from these machines. Similarly, the jury is out on cloud seeding and the use of drones, two measures that have found prominence in the Delhi government's recent list of solutions. Excessive emphasis on such questionable responses has detracted from building the institutional capacities required to clean up the city's air. This task, of course, cannot be undertaken in an emergency mode. But in the three years since it replaced the Supreme Court-mandated EPCA as Delhi's nodal pollution control agency, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has invested very little in data-driven, science-based solutions.

Farm fire incidents in Haryana and Punjab have been coming down in the past few years. However, reports continue to indicate high pollution levels in the two states. On Tuesday, Chandigarh recorded the second-worst air quality in the country. The city municipality's response to the crisis is similar to its counterpart's in Delhi — sprinkling water and using fogging machines. Joining the dots between local and regional pollution could be beyond the capacities and mandate of municipalities. This is where an agency such as the CAQM should step in. Solutions such as airshed pollution management — which zeroes in pollution hotspots in regions — require coordination between local and state-level agencies. The CAQM has largely been operating as a regulatory agency. The central government agency needs to step up and join the dots between local and regional pollution, beyond seasonal issues such as stubble burning.

## STILL UNFASHIONABLE

'The Devil Wears Prada' is getting a new life as a musical. That the terror of the workplace has resonance tells a sad tale

THE FAIRY TALE SHEEN of a glamorous job, the hidden ogre that is Monday mornings, bosses who keep one teetering on the edge of anxiety and inadequacy, and an out-of-sync work-life balance — of all the things that made Lauren Weisberger's 2003 *The Devil Wears Prada* a runaway success, chief among them was that it made its urban working reader feel seen. Three years later, when the film rolled in, Anne Hathaway's beleaguered Andy, assistant to fashion editor Miranda Priestly, could almost qualify as the working woman's guardian angel, championing happiness over success, chick makeover be damned. The renewal of the franchise nearly two decades later — a sequel to the movie is being planned and a Broadway musical with Elton John scoring the music opens on December 1 — points to a sad truth. That the corporate slave continues to be gaslit in the name of productivity and creative satisfaction.

Weisberger had based the book on her own brief stint at the American *Vogue* as assistant to editor-in-chief Anna Wintour (played by Meryl Streep), the glacial, constantly disapproving, high-achieving diva. Fresh out of college with a failing sartorial sense, the Louboutin-clicking, Versace-toting, size zero-championing statuesque world of high fashion and its bloated self-worth had left Weisberger winded. The book, satirising the toxicity she had survived, had been her coping mechanism. But when it had come out, the reviews had been unsurprisingly acerbic — *The New York Times* had termed it "bite-the-boss fiction". Wintour, it is rumoured, has never spoken to her since.

If the fandom has been a vindication of Weisberger's experience, there is also a lingering sense of discomfort at the thought that some of the workplace conversations of 20 years ago are still continuing. Gen Z's rebellion against the productivity trap might come from their having gleaned an important lesson from the millennials: Between the corner office and work-life balance, there can be only one winner.



DROUPADI MURMU

EVERY PERIOD of history has produced heroic sons and daughters of our motherland who have, by dint of their sheer genius, given expression to the spirit of India. Some have been like the stars in the Saptarshi constellation — they continue to guide us on the way. Bhagwan Birsa Munda was one the brightest stars in the constellation that illuminates the path of the nation.

As the nation begins the year-long celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of this iconic figure in the history of modern India, I bow in gratitude to his blessed memory. I also recall how, during my childhood, hearing the legends of Bhagwan Birsa Munda made me and my friends feel very proud of our legacy.

In a short life of only 25 years, the boy from Ulihatu in today's Jharkhand became the hero of the people's resistance against colonial exploitation. When the British authorities and local landlords were exploiting tribal communities, grabbing their lands and committing atrocities, Bhagwan Birsa rose against this social and economic injustice and led people to fight for their rights. Known as 'Dharti Aba' ('Father of the Earth'), Bhagwan Birsa organised the 'Ulgulan' or the Munda Rebellion against British oppression in the late 1890s.

The Ulgulan, of course, was much more than a rebellion. It was a fight for both justice and cultural identity. Bhagwan Birsa Munda's astute understanding brought together, on the one hand, the right of tribal people to own and cultivate their lands without interference, and on the other hand, the importance of tribal customs and social values. Like Mahatma Gandhi, his struggle was guided by a quest for justice and truth.

Nursing the sick was a passion for him. He was trained as a healer, and a series of incidents made people believe that God had gifted him with a healing touch. He urged people to bring to him anyone who was unwell, adding, 'If this is not someone I would myself come to visit the sick.' He went around villages, calling on the sick, and cured innumerable people with his skills and with his healing touch.



SUSHMITA DEV

AS WE APPROACH the state assembly elections, the BJP is raking up the issue of infiltration. Securing international borders, detection and deportation of foreigners are in the Centre's domain. Yet, it has become an issue in a state election. The loudest voice in this campaign is that of the CMA of a state which has been a laboratory for the BJP on the issue. There are important lessons from Assam that I hope the people of Jharkhand will keep in mind.

Infiltration sparks concern among citizens about resource depletion, marginalisation, and cultural dilution. These fears were at the root of the six-year-long agitation in Assam that culminated in the Assam Accord in 1985. The Accord struck a delicate balance in protecting the rights of those living in the apprehension of outsiders and those who feared becoming stateless for reasons beyond their control like Partition and the Bangladesh Liberation Movement.

As the BJP plays up infiltration in Jharkhand, it must realise that the Assam experience has shown the government's inability to resolve the issue and the serious challenges it poses for the people and those in power. Governments at the Centre, past and present, had to fall back on updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam to detect the non-citizens even though Assam with foreigners' tribunals and an entire police force deployed for the job together could not effectively resolve the issue.

Section 14A of the Citizenship Act 1955 empowers the central government to mandate citizen registration and issue national identity cards. However, the onus of providing legal documentation lay with individuals.

His aspirations — freedom, justice, identity and dignity — inspire the youth of our country

In a short life of only 25 years, the boy from Ulihatu in today's Jharkhand became the hero of the people's resistance against colonial exploitation. When the British authorities and local landlords were exploiting tribal communities, grabbing their lands and committing atrocities, Bhagwan Birsa rose against this social and economic injustice and led people to fight for their rights. Known as 'Dharti Aba' ('Father of the Earth'), Bhagwan Birsa organised the 'Ulgulan' or the Munda Rebellion against British oppression in the late 1890s. The Ulgulan, of course, was much more than a rebellion.

The saga of his sacrifice is also one of the crucial links in the history of great revolutionaries from India's tribal communities. Their struggles underline the unique tradition of this land, where no community is ever apart from the mainstream. Forest-dwellers, today subsumed under the category of the Scheduled Tribes, have always been part of the national collective.

There was a time when Bhagwan Birsa Munda and others were named among "unsung heroes" of history. In recent times, however, their valour and sacrifices have come to be appreciated in true light. During 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', we celebrated the glorious history of India's culture and achievements, which helped people, especially the youth, to learn more about the valiant contributions of great patriots who had remained lesser known earlier.

This new engagement with history received a fillip when the government in 2021 decided to celebrate Bhagwan Birsa Munda's birth anniversary, November 15, as 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas' to remember the contributions of the tribal freedom fighters. The commemoration of Bhagwan Birsa Munda's legacy puts the long underrepresented tribal histories at the centre of India's history.

These histories are all the more relevant today, as they teach the modern world crucial lessons in living in harmony with nature and conserving ecology. I well remember that when I was a child, I used to say my father seek forgiveness for hacking even dried woods which were to be used for fuel. Typically, tribal societies are content as they put far more premium on collective goodness than individual ambitions.

This distinctive feature of the tribal societies needs to be nurtured for a better future of humankind. That is the precise reason behind the broader effort of the government, launched during the last decade, to give due recognition to the importance of tribal communities in India's socio-cultural fabric. It has announced a series of programmes and

schemes with a view to take welfare beyond slogans and to the ground. For a more holistic approach to tribal development and welfare, the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan was launched last month to fill the gaps in social infrastructure in nearly 63,000 tribal villages. Moreover, the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JAN-NAYA) focuses on 11 critical interventions to make welfare initiatives more effective.

I believe that working relentlessly for the all-round development of ST communities is the real tribute the nation can pay to Bhagwan Birsa Munda and other freedom fighters from tribal areas. It is a matter of immense satisfaction for me that the Rashtrapati Bhavan too has taken new initiatives to reach out to the ST communities. It was my good fortune to inaugurate 'Janjatiya Darpan', a gallery in the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum, that provides a glimpse of rich art, culture and contributions of tribal communities in nation-building. During the Conference of Governors in August, I had the opportunity to emphasise the need for better resource utilisation for tribal welfare.

It was a humbling experience for me when I had an extensive interaction with representatives of 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) who were invited to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan. They shared with me their joys and sorrows. If there is one accomplishment I am proud of, it is the fact that our tribal brothers and sisters see me occupying the highest constitutional office as an unprecedented recognition for us all.

In celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda, we are celebrating a feeling which I am sure all of us share. I believe Bhagwan Birsa Munda's ideals are a source of pride as well as inspiration for the youth of not only tribal communities but of all communities, in every part of the country. His aspirations — freedom, justice, identity and dignity — are the aspirations of every youth.

The writer is President of India

## A BOGEY CALLED INFILTRATION

In raking up the issue in Jharkhand, BJP is hiding its failures in Assam

The Assam government selectively uses the NRC without fully validating it — the recent release of biometric data for those included in the updated NRC, after a five-year delay, is an example. This conundrum has put the government in a difficult position, leaving Assam in a state of citizenship limbo. The NRC's failure has exacerbated divisions in Assam, with the government creating various categories of citizens, like 'original inhabitants' and 'khilonjias'.

als, sparking protests once the NRC pilot phase began in 2010. Initially conceived in 2005 as a solution for Assam, the process didn't gain traction till the Supreme Court (SC) intervened in 2013 to monitor the process. Over 33 million residents of Assam faced the daunting task of submitting complex applications and numerous documents to prove their citizenship. This costly endeavour, exceeding Rs 1,600 crore, strained state government resources and left many vulnerable individuals who had lost their documents in natural calamities feeling helpless.

This process that spanned over five years was one of the lengthiest, costliest and most tumultuous administrative exercises. But it fell prey to politics. Six years have passed since the process was completed and yet the double-engine sark has kept it hanging.

The first question the BJP must answer is why it has abandoned the NRC in Assam. The NRC, finalised in December 2019, remains unofficial due to the Registrar General of India withholding its notification, defying both legal mandates and SC directives. The political significance lies in the number of exclusions. The initial draft, released in December 2017, excluded approximately 40 lakh individuals. Since then, "gushpethia" has become the BJP's pet word. With their party's eye on the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, it alleged that there were 40 lakh gushpethias in one state. The dampener, however, was the final list of the NRC released in August 2019 which brought down the number of people excluded to 19 lakh — most of them are reported to be from the majority community.

The house of cards collapsed immediately

— the state government as well as the Centre began to disown and discredit the NRC process. The SC-appointed coordinator, conducting the process, was accused of dereliction of duty. Several review petitions were filed in the Court asking to redo the process in certain districts sharing international borders which were rejected.

The NRC remains a contentious issue. The Assam government selectively uses the NRC without fully validating it — the recent release of biometric data for those included in the updated NRC, after a five-year delay, is an example. This conundrum has put the government in a difficult position, leaving Assam in a state of citizenship limbo. The NRC's failure has exacerbated divisions in Assam, with the government creating various categories of citizens, like "original inhabitants" and "khilonjias". To appease those seeking a solution to infiltration, the government has resorted to unconstitutional and communal measures.

The recent delimitation process, based on outdated data and without proper consultation, was designed to mask the NRC's failure rather than reflect population changes.

A failed NRC in Assam flies in the face of the hyperbole on infiltration in Jharkhand. The Assam CM has no answers other than creating smoke screens. As the people of Jharkhand go to vote, I hope they can hold the Centre as opposed to the state accountable for infiltration, if any, and raise valid questions on the failed NRC of Assam before voting on this issue of infiltration.

The writer is a TMC Rajya Sabha member



## NOVEMBER 15, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

## TAMIL NADU ASSEMBLY

THE TAMIL NADU Cabinet recommended to the Governor, S.L. Khurana, the immediate dissolution of the state Assembly. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) announced an agreement with the Congress — on Lok Sabha and Assembly seats. Under the agreement, the Congress will contest 26 Lok Sabha seats from Tamil Nadu and the lone Pondicherry seat.

## CHILDREN'S DAY

THE COUNTRY PAID homage to its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his 95th an-

niversary. Throughout the day, there was a constant stream of visitors at the samadhi. Devotional songs were also sung in the day. In the morning, President Zail Singh and Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, accompanied by his family, offered floral tributes at the samadhi.

## NEHRU AWARD 1984

THE JAWAHARLAL NEHRU Award for International Understanding for 1984 was awarded posthumously to Indira Gandhi. The chairman of the jury and Vice President R Venkataraman told newsmen that she had most eminently merited the award. Venkataraman said Indira Gandhi had pro-

vided outstanding leadership, stable and democratic government and vital stimulus for impressive progress within the country.

## VAJPAYEE ON CONGRESS

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY President Atal Bihari Vajpayee regretted that the ruling party had "not learnt anything from the past" and was pursuing the path of "divisive and partisan politics." He further said, "I have been receiving calls and letters asking whether the opposition parties had decided to boycott Indira Gandhi's funeral. The fact is that many prominent opposition leaders... were there, but the TV completely blacked out this fact."



# India's market correction, China's sub-par stimulus salvo

ANIL SASI  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 14

**THE UNFOLDING "correction" in India's stock indices — the Nifty50 has shed a tenth of its end-September peak — has been linked to the build-up to the Chinese government stimulus to boost its flagging economy.**

An index is said to be in a "correction" phase when it falls more than 10% from its last peak level. A more-than-20% fall signals a "bear market" phase.

After being announced its first stimulus package in late September, foreign investors offloaded Indian shares to pick up Chinese equities that were trading at much lower price-earnings multiples (making Chinese stocks more attractive from a valuation perspective).

The slide in the bourses has persisted — even though domestic money has continued to pour into India's stocks. Last week, the Chinese government announced a second booster shot for its economy.

Some other global factors too, are responsible for the current sell-off in the Indian markets — these include the anticipated protectionist turn in the United States under Donald Trump, the impact of high tariff barriers on the policy stance of the Federal Reserve, and the expected rate hike by the Bank of Japan in its December meeting, which has triggered an unwinding of yen carry-trade positions across markets.

However, the impact of the two Chinese stimulus packages on investors and markets has been underwhelming so far. So why this reaction by India's indices?

**Chinese stimulus packages**

On September 24, China's central bank, the People's Bank of China, unveiled measures to boost the economy, which included cutting the amount of cash banks must hold in reserve, smaller down payments for home purchases, and tax incentives for new home buyers. The PBO's sell-off in the Indian markets began soon afterward.

On November 8, the Chinese government approved a massive 10-trillion-yuan (\$1.4 trillion) plan to revive its domestic economy and enable provincial governments to refinance piled-up debt.

These measures appeared even more relevant after Trump's election last week — and have triggered anticipation of an even bigger stimulus package.

Should the President-elect follow through on his campaign promise of imposing a 60% tariff on Chinese goods, more than 2 percent age points could be shaved off China's growth over the next year, analysts believe.

**A \$1.4-trn disappointment**

The two economic stimulus measures announced in the space of six weeks, however, did little by way of offering direct support to catalyse consumer spending. A property downturn, surging government debt, and rising unemployment and falling consumption, have slowed down China's growth since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The plan announced on Friday is merely a form of debt relief for local governments. A lot of the growth in China in recent years has been driven by real estate sales, and the collapse of the property market a couple of years ago cut off that source of funds for local governments. Since these governments have traditionally invested heavily in infrastructure, they are struggling with the interest on the accumulated debt. Local authorities have now been allowed to create new bonds and consolidate their debts to bring down the servicing cost.

However, there has been no new measure to directly boost domestic demand so far. This has been a challenge for China's policymakers as consumers have become increasingly spending-averse. While the Chinese have traditionally had a very high savings rate, the returns on those savings, mostly tied up in property, have plummeted. Following crises such as the bankruptcies of real estate giants like Evergrande, consumers are now reluctant to spend. Boosting consumer sentiment would need more of a direct, spending-focused stimulus than the two packages announced so far.

**Chinese stocks over India's**

So why are PFIs dumping stocks in countries such as India and lining up for China? There could be three broad reasons.

**MORE BOOSTERS LIKELY:** China's Finance Minister Lan Fao said on November 8 that more stimulus was on the way, amid speculation that Beijing may not want to exhaust all its firepower before Trump enters the Oval Office in January. Nomura anticipates the eventual scale of China's fiscal stimulus package to reach 2-3% of GDP annually over the next several years.

According to a report by the *Financial Times*, Trump has asked trade hawk and protectionist Robert Lighthizer to return as US Trade Representative, the position from which he led the first Trump administration's trade war against China. The consolation for Lighthizer is that he will be able to co-lead the new Department of Government Efficiency, which is likely to be something of a middleman for US-China business relations, given his significant exposure to the Chinese market through the operations of his company, Teal, there.

**POOR INDIA INC. EARNINGS:** PFIs would also be looking at India's high stock valuations and the disappointing recent earnings season.

From higher prices of commodities to rising expenses on employees, operating margins of Indian companies have come under strain at a time of muted revenue growth. Revenues of a group of 424 companies (excluding banks, financials and oil marketing companies) that announced results for Q2FY25 grew at a modest 6% year-on-year. At the same time, total expenditure rose by 7%, leading to an 80-basis-point fall in operating margins year-on-year.

Also, as interest costs increased by more than 10%, net profits were up just 4% year-on-year for these companies.

**TRUMPONOMICS:** Trump 2.0 could mean a challenge for India to balance its growth stability amid trade and tariff wars, supply-chain disruptions, and heightened foreign volatility.

Trump's proposed tax-relief, tariff-hike, and immigration-control measures could stoke inflation in the US and disrupt the Fed's rate-cut agenda. This would impact the trajectory of India's monetary policy. If the Reserve Bank of India decides to resolve the uncertainties before undertaking any significant action, analysts have said a December rate-cut is pretty much ruled out — and the 14-month-high retail inflation in October could mean any such action could be pushed further into the next year.

**EXPLAINED ECONOMICS**

**Climate change and trade**

Countries such as China and India have pushed back against climate change-related trade measures at COP29. Trade restrictions on grounds of promoting climate objectives are expected to trigger many more battles, and result in greater protectionism and disruptions in global supply chains

driven by several other economic, strategic, and security-related considerations.

So, US President-elect Donald Trump's promise of imposing tariffs on imported goods — at a higher rate on those coming from China — is not cloaked in climate imperatives. But it does play on US fears about energy security, which is threatened by the concentration of renewable energy supply chains in China.

In fact, the dominance of China in the control of resources and technologies related to new energy sources — solar, wind, batteries, and critical minerals — far exceeds that of oil-producing countries in the fossil fuel era. This too has been facilitated by climate change that is forcing a global energy transition.

Also, the experience during the Covid-19 pandemic has made the world suspicious and distrustful of global supply chains, especially those that are heavily concentrated in one country or region.

This has led to a growing trend of countries trying to gain as much control over key resources and production as possible, even though this goes against the logic of producing goods at a lower opportunity cost compared to others, which can benefit everyone.

It might still be possible to produce and trade in products such as clothes, footwear or simple toys on these principles, but more sophisticated products, particularly those involving electronics, are likely to face increasing scrutiny.

A study by Asia Development Bank Climate published this February showed that measures such as CBAM would likely have minimal impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to some other emissions trading options that are available.

But the climate change crisis does offer a convenient excuse for countries to meet their economic or strategic objectives.

**Climate disruptions to trade**

There are other ways in which climate change could be reshaping global trade. Global supply chains, with footprints spread over a large number of countries, face a larger risk from the increasing frequency and ferocity of natural disasters induced by climate change.

Disruptions in supplies and large-scale economic losses due to these natural disasters are pushing countries to reduce their dependence on such networks. This is leading countries to encourage "nearshoring" (moving production closer home) or "reshoring" (moving production back home).

**EXPLAINED CLIMATE**

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## DURING PANDEMIC, AMERICANS BEGAN DRINKING MORE. THEY STILL ARE

AMERICANS STARTED drinking more as the Covid-19 pandemic got underway. Two years later, the trend had not abated, researchers reported this week.

The percentage of Americans who consumed alcohol, which had risen from 2018 to 2020, inched up further in 2021 and 2022. And more people reported heavy or binge drinking.

Early on in the pandemic, we were seeing an enormous surge of people coming in to the clinic and the hospital with alcohol-related problems," said Dr Brian Lee, a hepatologist at the University of Southern California and the principal investigator of the study, published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. ("Trends in Alcohol Use After the COVID-19 Pandemic: A National Cross-Sectional Study")

"People assumed this was caused by acute stress, like what we saw with 9/11 and Katrina, and typically it goes back to normal after these stressful events are over," he added. "But that's not what we're seeing."

Alcohol can be addictive, "and we know that addiction doesn't go away, even if the initial trigger that started it has gone away," he added.

The surge in alcohol consumption was one of several lingering legacies of the pandemic, along with school absenteeism, lags in educational attainment, a rise in overdose deaths and a surge in mental health problems.

**Across groups of people**

The new study was based on data from the National Center for Health Statistics' National Health Interview Survey, carried out from January 2022 through the end of the year. A total of 26,806 people ages 18 and over were asked about their drinking habits in the past year.

Because the survey was based on self-reports, and did not include members of the military or institutionalised adults, the results may underestimate the problem, Lee and his colleagues cautioned.

The increases in alcohol use were found in both sexes; in every age, racial and ethnic group; and in every geographic region. Overall, 69.3% of Americans said they had consumed alcohol at some level in the past year, up from 69.03% in 2020 and 66.34% in 2018.

More important, the number of Americans who reported consuming alcohol at levels defined as heavy drinking increased to 6.29% in 2022, up from 6.13% in 2020 and 5.1% in 2018, the study found.

Heavy drinking for men is consuming at least five drinks in a day or at least 15 per week, and for women at least four drinks a day and at least eight per week. Binge drinking is defined as having four to five drinks in a roughly two-hour period.

The increases were found in every group except Native Americans and Asian Americans, where the percentages of people reporting heavy drinking declined.

**Whites, those in their 40s**

White Americans were most likely to be heavy drinkers among racial and ethnic groups, with 7.34% reporting heavy drinking, up from 5.69% in 2018 and 7.11% in 2020.

Adults in their 40s reported the highest levels of heavy drinking. A total of 8.23% of Americans ages 40 to 49 said they had drunk heavily in 2022, up from 6.49% in 2020 and 5.14% in 2018.

Among those aged 50-64, 7.15% reported heavy drinking, up from 5.65% in 2018 and 6.95% in 2020.

And among women of all ages, 6.45% said they had drunk heavily — exceeding the rate among men, 6.12%.

More women than men reported binge drinking in 2018 as well; 5.01% of men, compared with 5.19% of women. Both sexes reported an uptick in heavy drinking in 2020: 6.19% of men and 6.08% of women.

The stresses of the pandemic may have been especially burdensome for women, said co-author of the study, Dr Divya Anyala-Somayajula of Sidney Kimmel Medical College in Philadelphia.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

**EXPLAINED CLIMATE**

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# Why Australia is planning a law to keep teenagers off social media

ANONNA DUTT  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 14

THE AUSTRALIAN government has announced that it will bring legislation to keep children under the age of 16 off social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said last week that a bundle of "world-leading" measures would be introduced in Parliament soon. The proposed law will put the onus on social media platforms to show they take "reasonable steps" to prevent access to children, with no penalties for the users, he said.

While the text of the draft Bill is yet to be released by the government, the announcement has set off debates on such a ban's efficacy and need, as well as the larger impact of social media on adolescents.

**What could the law propose?**

Earlier this year, the state of South Australia undertook an independent study to examine the framework for a restrictive law. A former Chief Justice of Australia's High Court (the country's apex court), Robert French, led the study, which proposed a draft law called the Children (Social Media Safety) Bill 2024. This could provide the basis for the nationwide law.

The South Australia draft put the onus on "providers of social media service" to prevent anyone under 14 years from accessing the platforms, and allowed access to 14- and 15-year-olds only with parental consent.

A regulator was also proposed for finding providers for non-compliance. The fines will constitute a Children's Online Safety Fund that can help in the implementation of the Act, discretionary payment to children who have suffered mental or physical harm, and other uses.

**How can users' ages be verified online?**

One of the biggest challenges in implementing such bans is age verification. While platforms like Instagram have age limits at present, they simply ask users about their date of birth and do not require verification. As a result, many children enter false information to access platforms. Country-specific age requirements can also be bypassed through Virtual Private Networks (VPN), which can show the internet being accessed from a different jurisdiction.

The South Australian report took note of age assurance methods already being used/ tested by platforms in Australia. These include requiring details of government-issued IDs or credit cards, and using facial recognition technology to identify potential underage users. However, with data related to minors being shared with compa-

nies, serious privacy concerns have been raised over these measures.

**How exactly does social media impact adolescents?**

Studies show problematic social media use — inability to control usage, experiencing withdrawal, and neglecting other activities to use social media — has been on the rise around the world. It has been associated with lower mental well-being, higher levels of substance abuse, and less sleep.

Dr Yatan Bhalara, a professor of psychiatry at AIIMS New Delhi, said, "Social media in itself is not the problem. It allows people to connect with others... The challenge is that adolescents, whose brains are not yet fully developed, may not be interacting with it in the healthiest of ways." He added: "Many adolescents evaluate their worth

based on what people say about them online or how many likes they get."

There is a fear of missing out, with constant social media use also making in-person communication difficult. "In that sense, there is a logic to restricting access and use of social media," he said.

While the pandemic led to increased time spent online, problematic social media use was on an upward trajectory earlier as well. "In fact, social media played a positive role in keeping people connected," he said. Online forums can also provide information and a sense of community for issues teens may struggle with, such as mental health and understanding diverse gender or sexual identities, and have been cited to argue against outright bans.

Dr Bhalara said responsible use should be advocated. Parents should be very mindful when allowing digital access to their children, and discuss healthy use with them. Last year,

US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released an advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health for various stakeholders. It said: "POLICYMAKERS: Age-appropriate health and safety standards should be developed, requiring higher standards of data privacy for children. Policymakers should pursue policies that limit access of children to social media and support the development of digital literacy curricula in schools."

**COMPANIES:** Social media companies should be transparent, and share potential risks of online interactions, take steps to prevent misuse, ensure default settings for children are set to the highest safety and privacy standards, and enforce age limits.

**PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS:** Create a family media plan, encourage children to foster in-person friendships, model responsible social media behaviour, empower kids to be responsible, and report any cyberbullying or online abuse.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Bulldozer justice quashed

The SC strikes down 'bulldozer justice,' mandating strict accountability for officials involved in illegal demolitions

The Supreme Court of India has delivered a landmark judgement against the practice of 'bulldozer justice,' emphasising that officials who engage in illegal demolitions will now be held personally liable to restore properties and pay damages. The judgement is a response to the growing concern over arbitrary demolitions used as punitive measures, often targeting properties associated with individuals accused of crimes. The judgement introduces strict procedural requirements and enforces personal accountability for officials. This liability includes covering the cost of restoring the demolished properties and compensating affected parties. This measure is designed to deter officials from disregarding due process and underscores the responsibility that comes with exercising state power. The Supreme Court has established mandatory procedural guidelines to prevent arbitrary demolitions—A 15-day prior show-cause notice is



required, along with a personal hearing; a detailed final order justifying why demolition is the only viable action must be provided and a 15-day grace period post-final order allows the affected party to seek legal recourse or vacate the premises.

The Supreme Court has mandated real-time updates on a digital portal for all demolition notices and orders to prevent arbitrary actions and foster transparency. Additionally, the entire demolition process must be videographed, with a list of officials involved to ensure accountability and adherence to procedure. Officials violating these directives risk contempt proceedings and prosecution, underscoring the Court's commitment to upholding the rule of law. The judgement holds far-reaching implications for governance, rule of law and individual rights in India. By restricting demolitions carried out as a form of punishment, the Supreme Court reinforces the fundamental legal principle that the executive cannot act as judge and enforcer. The decision underscores the judiciary's role in protecting individuals' rights against arbitrary state action, affirming that everyone is entitled to due process before facing punitive measures. The decision is laudable because it is tough on arbitrary demolitions, which often infringe on the right to shelter, impacting families and communities and safeguards citizens' fundamental rights, emphasising that actions targeting individuals suspected of crimes must follow legal due process. The judgement must come as a relief to many families who dread the demolition as one of them might have been on the wrong side of the law. However, the judgement falls short of putting onus on the political masters of the bureaucrats on whose behest such actions are often taken. Nevertheless, it would rein in the erring officers who go out of way to please their political masters. It is a bold move that could reshape administrative conduct.

## PICTALK



A crow quenches its thirst by drinking water from a fountain, in New Delhi

## India's cricket boycott is a safety issue, not politics



BHOPIINDER SINGH

As the deadliest year in Pakistan's recent history unfolds, calls for separating sports from safety concerns overlook the urgent realities facing the nation

Global Terrorism Index 2024 reports that Pakistan had the highest recorded terror attacks of any country in the world. 490 attacks were formally recorded with spiralling instances in the fourth successive year of increased deaths and terror incidents. The US Department of State currently maps the situation at 'level 3' i.e., warning its citizens to 'Reconsider Travel'. Similarly, British authorities 'advise against all travels to parts of Pakistan' and note bluntly, 'No travel can be guaranteed safe'.

There are two dedicated Pakistani Army Divisions deployed to secure Chinese personnel and assets of the various Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) imperatives in Pakistan, yet the same gets targeted with seeming impunity and deadly consequences. Even royals from various Arab sheikdoms who used to descend into the Pakistani hinterland for the annual Houbara hunting season have desisted from the same, given the acute security concerns prevailing. Whereas India has rightfully slammed Pakistan for being the 'world's terrorism factory' for its nefarious record in fanning religious extremism and armed insurgency on Indian soil, since independence.

Stating that there is a grave security concern in Pakistan is not political statement but a statement of fact. The fact that it was featured prominently in the Grey List of the global anti-terror watchdog agency, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) till very recently, is also a fact. Amidst this undeniable security landscape in Pakistan, Pakistani authorities' poor-pool concerns of the Indian Cricket Board, i.e., BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India), to avoid sending the Indian Cricket Team to play in Pakistan owing to security concerns, is not political one-upmanship but the expected concern of any board towards the safety and welfare of its team. That several India-facing terror groups are thriving on Pakistani soil is a very old story that needs no reiteration, and that itself makes the threat to the Indian team especially severe. The official breakdown and



downgrading of diplomatic ties between Delhi and Islamabad since 2019, do not help mend popular mood or perceptions about India or Indians in Pakistan (or vice versa), either.

While it is certainly true that sporting ties between the two restive nations were always given to political 'point-scoring' and even positive leverage in the form of cricket diplomacy (to thaw bilateral freeze) — this time the security situation in Pakistan has deteriorated to such levels, that to suggest that it is the usual 'point-scoring' diplomacy is to live under a rock. The reality of the situation is even beyond the intellectual debate of allowing or disallowing sports between two 'enemy' countries. Sometime back, India did choose to conflate sports with other bilateral engagements owing to Pakistan's established role in sponsoring terrorism in India, but even if one were to delink the two, the security situation in Pakistan itself warrants a cautionary note from the Indian side.

Understandably the Pakistanis are miffed and embarrassed about what they perceive as a deliberate Indian affront, but deep down they know better given that 2024 has emerged as the deadliest year ever, from the perspective of terrorism in

PAKISTAN IS IN THE MIDST OF AN UNDENIABLE AND COMPLEX SECURITY CRISIS AND WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO RESUME EVENTS WITH INDIAN PARTICIPATION, ONCE THE GROUND SECURITY SITUATION CHANGES

Pakistan. However, coming from its imagined nemesis i.e., India, it is a bitter pill to swallow openly. Given that Pakistan's Interior Minister, Mohsin Naqvi, also double-hats as the Chairman of the Pakistani Cricket Board (PCB) — the Pakistani reaction to BCCI concern assumes a political reaction. He has cavalierly downplayed the 'Hybrid Option' (wherein India plays its matches in a neutral venue, while others can play in Pakistan) by countering, 'one of the options the government is mulling is that of asking the PCB to ensure Pakistan don't participate in the Champions Trophy', as a political face-saving comeback. He also fumed that the PCB ought not to be expected to 'carry on with their good gestures' of playing in India, as Pakistanis had earlier. This wounded statement misses the point of contrasting the security situation existing in India, vis-à-vis Pakistan, currently.

The Pakistani Government may be tempted to 'retaliate' optically and go as far as asking its team to desist from playing against India in any of the ICC or Asian Cricket Council tournaments, to negate the perceived sleight. Currently, the heavily invested narrative of a perennial 'enemy' in India leads to an instinctive ostrich-

like head in the soil, and denials by Pakistan. Situational irony is magnified by the chairing of the global body of cricketing governance i.e., the ICC, by the son of India's Home Minister (equivalent of Interior Minister in Pakistan), Jay Shah.

Pakistani social media is agog with memes of Kathik-calling-Karthik allusions and its questionable neutrality in handling the current situation. Fair as that concern might be from a Pakistani perspective in normal times, it still does not take away from the genuineness of security concerns in Pakistan. For Pakistan to give examples of the security cover afforded to India's Foreign Minister on a recent visit to Pakistan as an example of its preparedness to host matches with tens of thousands of spectators and other accompanying circumstances, is contrived and grossly stretched logic. Pakistan is in the midst of an undeniable and complex security crisis and will only be able to resume events with Indian participation, once the ground security situation changes. For now, it is clearly beyond political one-upmanship.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry; the views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## CLIMATE CRISIS

Madam — The editorial, 'Deliver tangible results' (November 13), should sensitise all the concerned. The COP29 is seen more as a ritual congregation than as producing anything tangible in the interest of humanity. The present economic order, marked by rabid chasing of capital for instant profits with its predatory character, knows no sentiments. As capital has gained such power over the policies of a government or even changed the government itself to make its course further smooth. In this background, Trump reining his political power grossly reduces the scope for any further positive developments in this affair. He is for outright support for faster exploitation for mines and oil wealth to enrich the rich at the cost of the very survival of the living beings.

The latest manifestations of climate change are serious signals to attend to the damages inflicted on the environment but have yet to be taken seriously by any country. COP 29 that meets periodically, discusses the issue, receives consents and commitments for its resolutions from members but utterly fails to put in practice to bring about any tangible improvements in the status. The Indian government is not different. The amendments brought in by the Forest Act last year will see more damage to forests and more men and material loss. Attaching more importance to money has its toll on living beings, which, under the present economic order, is very difficult to infuse a humane face to it.

A G Rajmohan | Anantpur

## VISTARA MERGED WITH AIR INDIA

Madam — The Indian full-service airline called Vistara Airlines has finally reached its merger completion stage with Air India. With this, it is now only the Tata Group-owned Air India in the country to manage the full-service flight facility in India. The ten-year-old Vistara, which is a joint venture between Indian and Singaporean companies, has finally flown its last flight from Delhi to Singapore with the code name UK. The premium Club

## Inflation on the rise



The inflation rate based on the consumer price index increased to 6.21 per cent in October, up from 5.49 per cent in September, according to the data released by

the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The increase was driven by the prices of food products, particularly the vegetables, especially tomatoes, onions and potatoes (TOP), rising above 42 per cent. The food inflation rose sharply to 10.87 per cent in October from 9.2 per cent in the preceding month. There is a greater need for the government to implement additional supply-side measures to stabilise food prices. A weakening of the rupee to an all-time low (November 13, rupees 83.40 against one dollar) against the dollar has also raised the spectre of India's oil import bill climbing, which could stoke inflation if retail fuel prices go up. Since this is man-made inflation, the government, which has virtually failed to check inflation, needs to make all-out efforts to check it to give a sigh of relief to the poor.

S K Khosla | Chandigarh

Vistara tickets and pre-booking orders of Vistara have already been shifted to the Maharaja Club of Air India.

Although this whole merger and amalgamation process of Vistara is quite heartening, as Vistara is renowned for its quality service, while Air India grapples with some service issues. Although Air India is in its process of transitioning, any comment with respect to its services quality and experience post merger with Vistara would be too early. Tata is the trusted group of India, and let's not forget that their airline's contribution holds a long history. They have been in national service in India since 1932, with the visionary mentality of JRD Tata. The expansion of Air India with the merger of Vistara will surely improve the aviation operations of Air India and also help the Air India group to focus more on customer-centric service with a memorable quality experience in every flight.

Kirti Hadwani | Kanpur

## PROMISES AND POLITICS

Madam — The political scenario is getting hotter as the stakes are very high in the

Maharashtra state elections. Honours are even and fighting for supremacy is gearing up in a fancy mood. Allegations and counter-allegations are mounting up and a war of words is now in a now-or-never situation. Freebies funds find routes in a big way, finding routes from the household items and electronic items.

As the manifestos are out, the realities come to light in the electioneering. In the public view, election manifestos are issued solely to sway voters, who know they will hear about these promises again only when the next election comes. People will have to simply wait and watch as mute spectators. If parties truly believe in the validity of their manifestos, they should allow voters to judge these promises on their own merits, rather than muddying the waters with divisive or defamatory statements. The real lies in cheating voters. Lies lay low in a political flow of fight between EVMs and electoral frauds.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Pathway to a knowledge rich, future-ready nation

By promoting multilingualism, skill development and character-building, NEP 2020 aims to empower students to tackle both national and global challenges



UMANG BAJAJ

On July 29, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 completed four years, a transformative framework that has reshaped the country's educational landscape by connecting contemporary needs with its traditional roots. NEP 2020 stands as the first education policy since independence that genuinely aligns with Bharat's ancient traditions, advocating for accessible, quality education with an emphasis on relevance and inclusivity.

The policy introduces a host of progressive features, such as flexible study options, multiple entry and exit points, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), credit transfer mechanisms, and a focus on online courses, aiming to create a seamless, adaptable educational journey for learners across the nation. A defining aspect of NEP 2020 is its commitment to the five foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. NEP 2020 brings traditional values, arts, languages and culture into the mainstream curriculum, underscoring



Bharat's ambition to reclaim its heritage as a knowledge superpower.

One of the most notable additions is the incorporation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), promoting the revival and research of traditional subjects such as Vedic mathematics, Ayurveda, environmental studies, linguistics, Yoga and other indigenous disciplines. This shift helps bridge the gap left by prior policies, which often neglected or excluded these areas under the influence of Western paradigms. The NEP also recommends a three-language formula, promoting multilingualism by including at least two Indian languages in school curricula. While this policy is intended to support India's linguistic diversity, it

faced resistance in some non-Hindi-speaking states, where concerns about linguistic hegemony and regional language preservation surfaced. The central government may need to address these concerns carefully, especially given education's status on the Concurrent List, to ensure a balanced approach that respects regional identities while achieving national integration. The policy's emphasis on Sanskrit, often regarded as a foundational element of Bharat's cultural heritage, is a major milestone. With Sanskrit included as an optional language under the three-language formula, both school and higher education institutions are encouraged to integrate it into their curricula. NEP serves as a turning point in Bharat's educational history, aiming to foster character development and national pride alongside academic excellence. NEP 2020 emphasises two overarching themes: nurturing Indian values and fostering character-building among students. This holistic approach is intended to develop responsible, ethical citizens ready to tackle both national and global

challenges. Despite allegations of 'safonisation', proponents argue that the NEP aims to realign the educational system with what benefits the nation and its people. Science and history, though based on facts, are often viewed through the lenses of time and place. A major thrust of NEP 2020 is skill development, with the objective of enhancing employability by integrating vocational training and practical learning into the curriculum. The inclusion of courses on data structures, programming, machine learning and artificial intelligence is intended to prepare students for a tech-driven future. NEP 2020 also encourages societal engagement through initiatives like internships and community visits, fostering creativity and real-world problem-solving skills. Institutions like NIT Uttarakhand have already embraced the NEP's multidisciplinary model, focusing on research and innovation to build a skilled and socially conscious workforce.

(The author is the BJP Councilor, New Delhi; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

UNVEILING THE SHAKTIS

Shakti forms are central to authentic spiritual practice. Nature's energies are accessible but require dedication



ASHWINI GURURJI

The creation is governed by certain Shaktis. As you progress in your sadhana, you can experience their forms. Every day, each one of the 365 days, is governed (sanchalit) by a specific shakti. That is why the importance of niyam and daily practice is insisted upon in yoga. If one misses the sadhana for even a single day, the shakti of that day is left behind and the sadhana of an entire year goes to waste because in Brahman, if a single thing goes missing then its effect is felt on everything – our body, the earth, as well as other planets and stars. Every Shakti has a day, but one need not perform rituals to access them. In yoga and tantra, there is no ritual, just the sadhana of Shakti. It is important to understand the shakti of each day and the Swarup of that shakti. There is a name for every form of Shakti, but at the present moment, we will only be discussing their forms. The names are taken only after generating the capacity in the body, through specific sadhanas. At a basic level, when you do dhyan with your guru, you can see certain forms in him/her, like the sun or even the moon. Ever wondered where these forms come from and what they represent? There are many sadhaks who have reported seeing the form of the sun in dhyan. What is so special about the Sun? If you look at the Sun at the time of Sunrise and Sunset, keeping the awareness of Manipoorak and chanting the mantra 'Ram', you will find a certain glow starts coming into the body and just within a month you will start looking very different (A word of caution here, for any yogic practice it is important to have a Guru who guides you as per your capacity). Just like the sun, the moon too is an extremely interesting energy. The moon merely reflects the light of the Sun, but with that light, it can attract the tides as well as the earth's surface on a full moon night. Have you ever thought about it – what is so special about the moon? Not just that, on a full moon night, animals become violent, the mentally unstable start behaving funny and accidents and fights are on the rise. Right now I am only discussing the basic aspects, to give you a hint that there is something different about these forms. What that is, is a subject of experience and you will get that experience with the correct practice of Saralan Kriya. The speciality of the Moon is that it looks calm and peaceful but it is more volatile than even the Sun. When you look at the moon under the guidance of a Guru, you will be able to see all the mantras in its form because you cannot see the sun, which channels that Shakti. There are certain shaktis which you cannot see and so there are certain other shaktis through which you can see and feel their effect, it becomes an experience for you. And till you have that experience, yoga is a waste for you, nothing can happen and nothing is possible. Experience is the basis of yoga. All the things that we see in the sky and on the earth, there are so many flowers of so many different kinds and colours, if you simply look at them without blinking your eyes under Guru Sanidhya, all the defects and imbalances in the body disappear. But there is a small problem... niyam. There should be no break in the practice, and the break will come if you do not have the capacity for that Shakti or if you don't have a Guru. Nature, everything that we see around us, has all the swarups of shaktis hidden in it and all these shaktis are very easily accessible. If one makes him/herself stir on these shaktis and accesses them properly, then they start following that person. The nine days leading to Diwali are especially powerful because of the congregation of specific shaktis during these days. Our ancestors prescribed observing the vrat of brahmacharya during these days to make the body strong enough to accept these Shaktis. (The writer is a spiritual guru; views are personal)

# AI revolutionises the beauty and wellness industry

As global demand for unique beauty solutions surges, the sector's embrace of AI reflects a profound shift towards customisation, efficiency and consumer satisfaction



Innovative products and services utilising new technologies are beginning to disrupt the beauty and wellness sector. As a result, traditional skills need to be strengthened and combined with modern technological skills such as artificial intelligence (AI), app development, augmented reality for try-on services, data analytics and enhanced customer engagement strategies. AI has made significant advancements in the beauty and wellness sector, particularly as the demand for customisation and personalisation has increased. This trend reflects diverse customer preferences, lifestyles, body types and genetic factors. Recent news about Maybelline's AI-powered 'makeup' filters for Microsoft teams has reignited discussions on AI's role in the beauty sector. It is crucial to explore how AI is transforming the industry and to stay updated on the latest developments. The global beauty industry market utilising AI was valued at \$216.12 million in 2020 and is projected to reach \$1.26 billion by 2027. An industry report indicates that the annual growth rate (CAGR) of AI in the beauty sector from 2021 to 2027 is expected to be 33.2 per cent. Several laboratories have developed AI-driven skin consultation tools that integrate augmented reality and artificial intelligence to analyse skin ageing. These tools can identify signs of ageing and assess skin strength, providing tailored skincare recommendations to prevent further deterioration. Their algorithms are based on 10,000 images and 15 years of dermatological expertise. Users can take a selfie and provide their age and skin type to receive an estimate of their skin condition along with a personalised analysis. They will then receive customised skincare prescriptions. AI assists in analysing skin conditions, recommending personalised skincare and wellness routines and even predicting trends, ultimately enhancing product development and customer satisfaction. Acne is a common concern worldwide, affecting 80 per cent of teenagers and 40 per cent of adults. With AI, a database of 6,000 images representing various ethnic skin types enables accurate analysis and personalised routine recommendations for those suffering from acne. This groundbreaking AI technology draws from a library of 10,000 authentic images evaluated by real dermatologists, achieving an accuracy rate of nearly 97 per cent across eight clinical parameters and a wide array of skin types. In the ever-evolving beauty and wellness industry, where innovation fosters confidence and self-expression, AI has become a powerful ally in creating more effective and personalised product formulations than ever before. By leveraging its diverse applications and capabilities, AI is driving a revolution that is changing how beauty and wellness products are developed, personalised, and marketed. From trend spotting to precise product formulation, AI is reshaping the beauty industry in exciting and groundbreaking ways. Integrating AI into the formulation process can also ensure product effectiveness. AI algorithms can simulate how ingredients are absorbed and metabolised by the skin, identifying potential unwanted interactions or side effects. This approach minimises the risks associated with bringing new products to market and ensures consumers achieve optimal results without compromising their wellbeing. Traditionally, skincare products have been developed with a one-size-fits-all approach, often failing to meet individual consumers' unique needs. AI changes this methodology by analysing various data points, including skin type, age, environmental factors and personal preferences. By using AI-powered tools, brands can create customised skincare products tailored to each customer's specific requirements. For instance, AI algorithms can assess a user's skin condition through photographs and questionnaires, recommending or formulating products with particular concentrations of active ingredients that address individual skin concerns. Additionally, AI can analyse molecular structures to predict how new compounds will interact with human skin, significantly reducing the time and cost of traditional trial-and-error methods. The AI system recommends suitable ingredients, products and skincare routines tailored to each individual's needs. It can also suggest branded products that address specific conditions in the beauty and wellness industry, aiming to connect deeply with each customer's preferences. As technology continues to evolve, it promises solutions that will enhance both appearance and wellbeing in the future. Importantly, your data remains private; it is not stored and only you can view the results unless you choose to share your information with others. A personalised experience is crucial for success in the beauty and wellness industry. AI technology plays a significant role in identifying each customer's unique preferences and addressing their individual needs. As technology advances, beauty companies are expected to introduce innovative services that enhance customer interaction and contribute to the global growth of the beauty market. Online services are evolving rapidly alongside these technological advancements. The importance of websites, engaging social media platforms and online marketplaces is increasing. The share of online revenue in the beauty and personal care sector, which was approximately 4.6 per cent in 2017, is projected to rise to 18.2 per cent by 2025. The future of the beauty and wellness industry will depend on an omnichannel experience that seamlessly integrates online and offline interactions, utilising a range of digital tools to enhance the consumer experience. Virtual try-ons and consultations have become standard in beauty retail; however, replicating the human connection remains a challenge. Online influencers and 'show me how' content are gaining popularity as consumers learn to master services that they previously sought from professionals. Additionally, live streaming on platforms like Facebook Live and Instagram significantly engages younger consumers. In India, the beauty and wellness industry is growing rapidly, expanding twice as fast as that of the United States and Europe. Greater consumer awareness and aspiration have led to increased spending on beauty and wellness products and services. Per capita spending on beauty and personal care products rose from Rs 854 in 2017 to Rs 884 in 2022, with a further increase projected to Rs 772 by 2025. Today's consumers demand unique experiences, making traditional approaches less effective. There is a growing preference for convenience and on-demand services, which have become essential in the fast-paced lives of working professionals. As a result, there is an increasing need for transferable skills within the workforce in the beauty and wellness sector, as customer service expertise becomes more in demand. (The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of Gol; the views expressed are personal)

# Cybersecurity: Safeguarding a digital future amid rising cyber threats

India must act swiftly to secure its digital future in an era where technological prowess is now essential for national security

Today, cyber-attacks impact every aspect of life, from government agencies and corporations to individuals' personal data and privacy. While the reach of cybercrime is vast, the underlying complexity remains poorly understood by many, with significant security consequences for nations that fail to address these threats adequately. Cyber-attacks threaten national security and underscore the vulnerabilities associated with our increasing dependence on digital infrastructure. Although the internet has revolutionised the world by providing incredible convenience, connection and comfort, these benefits come with the challenge of safeguarding critical data and



VINAY PATHAK

infrastructure. As cybersecurity becomes the essential defense for peace, prosperity, and privacy in the digital age, recent incidents such as the breach of 7.9 million customer records at India's stock-broking firm Angel demonstrate the necessity of strengthening digital protections. While the internet facilitates ease of access, it also introduces serious vulnerabilities that call for immediate,

concerted efforts. The recent cyber-attack on Iran marks a chilling advance in digital warfare, illustrating that no nation is immune to the risks of a hyperconnected world. As countries, corporations, and citizens expand their online presence, the scope for potentially devastating cyber-attacks rises dramatically. This incident serves as a reminder of the need for nations to address cyberspace's complex, escalating risks. India, for example, is undergoing a digital revolution with over 936 million internet users as of December 2023. These "Digital Natives" fuel a dynamic digital economy, supporting critical sectors such as healthcare, education, finance and agriculture. However, the rapid pace of digital adoption has outpaced India's cybersecurity measures, creating opportunities for cybercriminals to exploit these gaps. According to the 2024 Cisco Cybersecurity Readiness Index, only 4 per cent of Indian companies are fully prepared to counter cyber threats, exposing significant vulnerabilities within the nation's digital framework. These threats arise not only from criminal organisations but also from state-sponsored entities targeting India's economic and strategic assets. Moreover, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) enable more sophisticated cyber-attacks, including deepfake technology and disinformation campaigns, adding complex layers to cyber defenses. In today's world, technological prowess in fields such as AI and cybersecurity equates to national security, rivaling traditional military strength. However, India faces several challenges in coordinating an effective cyber defense. While initiatives like Cyber Surakshit Bharat have shown early progress, a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy is still missing, which limits effective threat response and assessment. A recent step forward has been the Prime Minister's Office's appointment of a cybersecurity oversight official, but gaps remain in the infrastructure needed to support comprehensive defence. Cyberspace's borderless nature complicates defence efforts, as attacks can target both military and civilian assets globally, bypassing traditional political and geographic constraints. India has implemented several initiatives to tackle cyber threats. For instance, the Cyber Fraud Mitigation Centre (CFMC) at the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre in New Delhi unites major players—including banks, telecom providers and law enforcement agencies—to combat online financial crimes. This initiative, exemplifying "Cooperative Federalism," enables swift responses to fraud. The government has also introduced the Samanyata Platform, a centralised repository of cybercrime data to foster interagency cooperation. Despite these initiatives, further action is required to establish a comprehensive cybersecurity framework. Without unified regulatory standards, gaps remain in protecting the public and private sectors, especially for small businesses that may lack the resources for robust cybersecurity protocols. This vulnerability could undermine both national security and public trust in India's digital infrastructure. Programs like Cyber Surakshit Bharat, the National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (NCCC), and CERT-In have all aimed to strengthen India's defences, with additional measures such as the Information Security Education and Awareness Project (ISEA) helping to create a culture of security consciousness among citizens. The 2023 Digital Personal Data Protection Act reinforces this commitment by aligning with global data security standards to improve transparency and accountability among companies. (The writer is an assistant professor, Indian Institute of Information Technology, Sonapat; views are personal)



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[ OUR TAKE ]

## Speaking to the State for citizens

The Supreme Court's order on demolitions is a welcome reminder to the executive to function as a custodian of constitutional values

That the executive needed to be reminded of its role is worrying, albeit not surprising. Given delays in investigation and the judicial process, retributive vigilante justice has always had an appeal to certain segments of the public. Governments should be immune to this—but not all are, and not all the time.

In recent years, especially, partly from a desire to appear decisive and responsive, and partly to pander to the public's demand for immediate retributive justice, several state governments have started subscribing to what they popularly term "bulldozer justice", the demolition of the properties of those accused of crimes (with the magnitude ranging from heinous ones to minor offences that disturb the peace). There have been voices raised in protest, pointing to the unconstitutionality of such demolitions which are a blatant display of overreach, but these have been ignored. The usual defence is that the property in question was illegal.

On Wednesday, following an order in September when it said it would issue guidelines for demolitions, the Supreme Court did so, specifying the details of the process that needs to be followed while demolishing even those properties that violate some laws or encroach on public land (which need to go, of course, but with due process).

The two-judge bench has unequivocally stated that "bulldozer justice" is unconstitutional, for it subverts the rule of law, violates the principles of natural justice and separation of powers of institutions, and the rights of individuals to shelter and a fair trial. As the judgment spells it out, it is for a court to declare a person guilty. Until it does, the accused is presumed innocent. And even when a person is guilty, the punishment has to be what is prescribed by law (which does not prescribe, in any case, demolition of property as a punishment). The bench was critical of the approach of the state governments, pointing out that the selective nature of demolitions made their actions appear retributive: Many of the victims were in the State's crosshairs for their political, and worse, in some cases, religious beliefs. Understandably, the apex court has held that such action "reminds one of a lawless state of affairs, where 'might was right'".

The apex court's directions on demolitions are elaborate and clear. And its judgment is an eloquent censure of the executive on its failure to uphold constitutional values. The court has done its job. Now, the executive has to fulfil its responsibility to function as a "trustee" of citizens.

## Civic bodies must be fiscally empowered

The country's pace of urbanisation—by 2050, the urban population will rise by more than 50% over the 500 million today—makes cities the focal point for spurring growth. This needs empowered and efficient city governments that have adequate finances to function. Against this backdrop, a just-released Reserve Bank of India (RBI) analysis of municipal finance paints a concerning picture. The share of own-source revenue (taxes and usage charges for services such as parking, and waste collection) in municipal finances has shrunk between 2016-17 and 2023-24 (budget estimates). And within own-source revenues, usage charges outweigh taxes, a more stable revenue source. The share of transfers from central and state governments increasing over the years raises temporal and autonomy risks for urban local governments' expenditure including delays and politicisation of transfers. The solution lies in increasing own-source revenue, which allows municipal corporations to strategise and respond to constituents' needs.

But this is easier said than done. There are low-hanging fruits, of course—better targeting for property tax recoveries (coverage in more than 90% of municipal corporations remains below 80%), dynamic pricing for usage charges such as parking, closing the gap between service delivery and usage charge through periodic review, and instruments such as municipal bonds. The long-term solution, however, lies in greater fiscal decentralisation—devolution of revenue streams from the state governments to municipal bodies. This calls for political will, not just at the state level but also at the Centre, since devolution can't be a mere "give-only" pathway at the state level; the state governments will need to be recipients of fiscal decentralisation as well.

## Ending digital divide among school goers

What if each student is given a computer? This would be much better than some of the schemes our political parties come up with

The current school system in India is failing us with learning outcomes as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) illustrates each year. This is truly tragic. One of the biggest gifts India can give to the ageing world in the coming decades is youth. But it is a gift only if the young it offers are educated. The statistics are telling: Average ages across the world are 19 in Africa, 29 in India, 40 in China and the US and over 44 in the European Union, South Korea and Japan—with Japan nearly 50, Italy nearly 48 and Germany nearly 46 being the highest. Therefore, the fact that young Indians suffer from poor learning outcomes is a matter of utmost concern not just for India but for the world. In fact, today, the total global population is 8 billion people. It will stabilise finally in 2072 at 10 billion. The additional 2 billion will come from South Asia and Africa.

It is not that improving the quality of schools in India is not a top agenda for the Indian central and state governments. The discussion around school education has not changed—teacher training, teacher attendance, teacher

salaries, more schools, and better facilities. We have over 1.4 million schools, but the ASER illustrates that in the 14-18 age group, more than half the children struggle with a division of a three-digit number by one digit. Clearly, outcomes are moving up very slowly.

At every age between 0-20, India has roughly about 20 million people and so, if we take the age group from 10-20, it will be around 200 million people. We all recognise that labour productivity in India is low and disguised unemployment in agriculture is high. While India can boast of the best digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world, witness our remarkable Aadhaar, unified payments interface, and DigiLocker to name a few. Our schools seem to be unaffected by the developments that are taking place in technology and generative Artificial Intelligence.

We recognise that the entire system needs a revamp. How might we embed the new developments in education? Imagine an individualised curriculum, people learning different subjects at their different levels, customised to their level of achievement. Identification of the best teachers and leveraging them more in a quality-starved system, embedding training in delivery by watching and doing, making dissemination broadcasts easier and using technology for delivering these broadcasts and engaging with them. But we all understand that achieving some-

thing like that will be harder than getting GST introduced. That took close to 17 years. India does not have that much time to waste: Its decade of opportunity will pass by then and it will not stay young anymore.

What is an experiment we may try to provide a chance to some of these children? I am reminded of a conversation I had more than a decade ago with Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar. I was on his industry advisory board then and, in a car ride, he mentioned that for Bihar you don't need to provide the solution. You just need to show them a prize in the distance over a rocky path and they will find a way to get there themselves. Just show them the prize and a gettable path.

Given that I believe what the HP India managing director is saying, an experiment is worth trying. Give every child in India a computer. Begin with the children in the ages 10-20 years of age. This would be a much better alternative than many of the other schemes political parties employ before elections. How might a scheme like this work and what good could it do?

I lay out an initial outline of a possible scheme for discussion:

One, every child gets a computer against an Aadhaar number. The manufacturers would compete for the order, and we should try to obtain a computer below ₹15,000. This computer may not be resold and it should be disabled if the fingerprint changes



Jannemaya Sinha



The hope is that with the brilliant learning programmes available today on the net, there may be a small percentage of self-motivated children who learn on their own and can get qualified to take open board exams

from the original allottee.

Two, in every village and every district, there should be a set of buildings with attached desks and benches that cannot be stolen. These buildings should have power 24 hours a day with a strong Wi-Fi connection with a pay-for-use option.

Three, at these locations, a representative of the computer manufacturer should be present or available virtually around the clock. The representative should be able to teach the kids how to use the computer—basic stuff.

Four, the representative should also be able to guide the children to qualified learning sites where they are not charged for data usage. For these qualified sites, they should be permitted unlimited usage without a data charge. Some gamification should be done so that there is a tournament with monthly prizes culminating in a yearly championship prize in different categories. Winners should be provided with digital certificates.

Five, watching other things on the computer should be allowed but would incur charges.

This scheme is not an alternative to the current schools and education system. It is a supplement. It will prevent digital apartheid and provide a chance for some motivated children to escape poverty and be productive additions to the workforce. The hope is that with the brilliant learning programmes available today on the net, there may be a small percentage (say 15%) of self-motivated children who learn on their own and can get qualified to take open board exams and improve their lot. This approach may also keep into the entire school system by observation and experimentation. I can almost hear the uplifting best of Eddy Grant's 'Apartheid-era' song 'Gimme Hope Yo'anna' being sung by all the disadvantaged children of India. Please let us give them hope!

Jannemaya Sinha is chairman India, BCG. The views expressed are personal

## How platform power shapes political choices

In his 2024 campaign, Donald Trump adopted a novel political strategy by aligning with powerful influencers like Elon Musk, Joe Rogan, and Peter Thiel. Unlike traditional political endorsements or party strategies, Trump's approach marked a significant shift in how candidates can reach audiences directly through influential figures who command large, loyal followings.

This strategy harnessed the reach of these influencers to engage new constituencies, especially younger and independent-minded voters, creating a "political D2C" model that bypassed traditional media and party structures. By leveraging these prominent voices, Trump not only revitalised support among his base but also expanded it to include groups that had not previously engaged with his campaign, including Latinos and some African-American voters.

For this campaign, Trump capitalised on the unique reach of individuals who have cultivated credibility with specific audiences. Joe Rogan, the host of the massively popular "The Joe Rogan Experience" podcast, engages millions of listeners with his direct, unfiltered discussions, which appeal to younger, individualistic voters who often view mainstream media with scepticism. By connecting with these audiences through Rogan, Trump was able to reach people who might otherwise feel disconnected from politics, let alone a candidate from a traditional conservative party.

Perhaps the most influential of these allies was Elon Musk, whose support on his own platform, X (formerly Twitter), reshaped how Trump's messaging reached the public. Musk's endorsement wasn't limited to states of support; he used his position as the platform owner to amplify Trump's message, sometimes even bypassing normal content limitations. This was a striking departure from 2021 when Trump was banned from Twitter during the final days of his term. He had over 88.9 million followers at that time.

Musk's involvement gave Trump a reach of over 200 million users (Musk's follower count is 203 million), enabling him to directly access a younger, tech-savvy demographic that values Musk's free-speech ideals and entrepreneurial perspective. This influence extended well beyond Musk's immediate followers, reaching millions who may not have sought out political content or even supported Trump initially. The fact that Musk owns the platform itself introduces complex questions about the power of private individuals over public discourse, as well as the influence of platform owners over elections.

And seemingly, it works both ways. Tesla's

**TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN DEMONSTRATED THAT TECH MOGULS, PODCAST HOSTS, AND INVESTORS NOW WIELD SUBSTANTIAL POWER OVER PUBLIC OPINION, OFTEN RIVALING THAT OF TRADITIONAL NEWS OUTLETS AND POLITICAL MACHINERY**



Lloyd Mathias

shares surged 12% during premarket trading, post the results, translating to around a \$109 billion bump up in market capitalisation. On Tuesday, Trump appointed Musk to lead a department of government efficiency.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of this influencer strategy was its effectiveness in reaching non-traditional conservative voters, especially within Latino and African-American communities. Trump's campaign, aided by this new "political D2C" model, delivered messages that addressed issues directly relevant to these communities, from economic opportunities to issues of individual freedom. Influencers offered a sense of authenticity and relatability that traditional political channels often lack, allowing Trump to attract minority votes in a way that was previously challenging for his campaign.

By bypassing conventional media, this D2C approach effectively mirrored digital marketing strategies used in consumer industries, where brands reach customers directly through trusted voices. This allowed Trump to connect with audiences who had historically been either indifferent or oppositional to his platform, creating new avenues for support within demographics that have felt overlooked by mainstream political messaging.

This growing influence of private individuals in politics raises significant questions about the future of the media landscape. As recently as 2018, a storm broke out on a revelation that Facebook shared data with Cambridge Analytica, which used the data to psychologically target voters during Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. The firm was also accused of interfering with the Brexit referendum.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified in front of the US Congress and the firm apologised for its role in data harvesting. Facebook was fined \$5 billion by the Federal Trade Commission due to its privacy violations. The firm also paid a \$500,000 fine to the UK Information Commissioner's Office for exposing the data of its users. Cambridge Analytica filed for bankruptcy. Clearly, all this water is under the bridge now.

Trump's campaign demonstrated that tech moguls, podcast hosts, and investors now wield substantial power over public opinion, often rivaling that of traditional news outlets or political party machinery. The intertwining of political support with digital platform ownership, as seen with Musk, points to a future where platform bias could shape election outcomes, prompting discussions on whether new regulations are needed to ensure fair political discourse.

The implications extend beyond the United States, as nations like India observe similar trends where influencers hold sway over public opinion. In regions with large youth populations or rapidly growing social media use, influencer-driven politics could redefine how campaigns engage with voters. To maintain a balance between free speech and fair political discourse, democracies worldwide may need to consider regulatory frameworks that prevent potential abuses of power by platform owners while safeguarding public opinion discourse.

As a 2024 campaign exemplifies how influencer endorsements and platform power are reshaping political strategy,

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[ DALER JUMA ] TAJIKISTAN'S ENERGY AND WATER RESOURCES MINISTER

Over the past 30 years, out of 14,000 glaciers in Tajikistan, more than 1,000 glaciers have disappeared. The rapid melting of glaciers is a serious threat in the global context of protecting water resources



## What COP29 needs to do on climate finance goals

The ongoing 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, has a critical decision to make on delivering finance. In 2010, at the Cancun round of the global climate talks, developed countries had agreed to provide developing countries \$100 billion per year by 2020.

However, ever since the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, developed countries have evaded their responsibility to provide "new and additional" climate finance to developing countries in order to enable them to undertake climate measures without compromising on their developmental priorities.

The 2015 Paris Agreement required the countries to define a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance before 2025. At Baku, there are three key issues in finance: quantum, sourcing, and access modalities of such financing.

On the quantum question, the second Needs Determination Report by the Standing Committee on Finance under the UNFCCC estimated that between \$5-7 trillion would be needed by 2020 to meet half the needs of 58 countries. It is no surprise, therefore, that developing countries, including India, have asked for commitments of \$1.2 trillion under the NCQG. The scale of financing required, it has to be predominantly from public sector sources. Going by the long-term trend of the leverage ratio between public finance and private finance (1:4), \$1.2 trillion must be sourced through budgetary allocations by developed countries to mobilise \$5-7 trillion in aggregate. However, that might not be enough given that quantum only meets half the needs of less than 100 countries out of 194 signatories to the UNFCCC.

In addition to the scale, however, the modalities of access to climate finance need bold political decisions. The limited ability of public finance in developing countries to unlock the potential of financial markets for climate action is well understood. COP27 had categorically underscored how high debt burdens of developing countries limited their ability to fully leverage the fiscal instruments to incentivise domestic private capital for climate action. Accessing \$1.2 trillion through debt instruments, therefore, isn't an option for developing countries. It would add to their fiscal and economic vulnerabilities, further deteriorating their adaptive capacity with regards to the climate crisis. One must also

keep in mind that the remaining quantum will eventually have to be sourced from the capital markets.

Clearly, a successful agreement on finance at COP29 goes beyond the quantum of climate finance. The ultimate objective is to strengthen the fiscal capacities of developing countries and financial markets for climate action. This would require reducing the debt burden of developing countries and ensuring that the financial markets begin to look at the risks and returns differently—in a manner that favours climate investment in developing countries. While instruments such as "debt swaps for climate" and "risk guarantees" have been proposed and indeed experimented with, the scale of the challenge would require bolder commitments.

The issue of prohibitively high lending rates in developing countries compared to developed countries, along with the bulk of global financial flows being restricted within the OECD countries, has been well documented. Hence, ensuring a flow of climate finance to developing countries at affordable lending rates is key. The success of COP29, therefore, should not be assessed only by the quantum of finance it agrees on but must also consider the scope of its influence on making the global financial markets favourable for climate action in developing countries. In order to ensure that the NCQG is adequate, predictable, and of quality, developed countries must not only commit public resources at scale but also put their economic credibility behind climate investments in developing countries. An institutionalised way of doing that would be to revisit countries' credit ratings. It would be wise to think of the potential that developing countries offer for averting the climate crisis, with timely investments as a measure of credit ratings in addition to the macroeconomic strength and political stability of these countries.

Ultimately, if timely climate investments are not made, the stability of the global economic order itself may be prone to climate-induced risks. The outcome of COP29 in terms of climate finance, therefore, could only be the beginning of the finance agenda. It better be firm and forward-looking.

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# Opinion

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2024



**PROMOTING FAIR PLAY**  
Union minister for sports Mansukh Mandaviya

Our athletes are the pride of the nation, and it is essential for them to have access to tools that support clean and fair competition

## Tightrope walk at Baku

The question is not just how much climate finance is needed, but how reliably it will be delivered

**A**S THE 12-DAY Conference of the Parties (COP29) gets close to its mid-point at Baku, Azerbaijan, much is being made out of India's low-key presence at such an important global event. A practical understanding of the same is that India continues to walk a tightrope. As the world ponders moving to greener energy pastures, India cannot do so just yet, as a growing population also demands more energy, which simply cannot be provided with green sources at present. India has already made its stand on the issue clear by stating that its goals will be prioritising accountability, green credit initiatives, fair financing, and achievable climate goals for developing economies.

COP29 sees two major aspects in its background — the re-election of Donald Trump, whose administration infamously pulled out of the Paris Accord in 2017 and who proudly embraces the motto "Drill, baby, drill," and China's increasing dominance over the deployment of renewable energy. While the US climate envoy John Podesta assured that Trump's victory "is not the end of our fight for a cleaner, safer planet", the US has historically under-delivered on its international climate programmes. As for China, while its contributions to deploy renewable energy technology are significant, its motives can be termed questionable, as was visible on day 1 when it submitted a proposal to discuss the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which held back COP29's agenda for a while.

Overall, developed nations have failed to deliver on the \$100 billion a year contribution decided in 2009. The lack of a formal agreement among the contributors as well as clarification on who will hand out how much has contributed to the inaction that COPs have gained infamy for. The New Quantified Collective Goal, the replacement of the \$100 billion contribution, is anticipated this year. Experts have estimated that it needs to be at \$2.4 trillion to combat rising temperatures, but with COP's historic inefficiency, it remains unclear.

As for India, it is at a unique position of being the third-biggest emitter after China and the US (8% of global emissions), but it is also at the receiving end of climate development funds, as it is still a developing country. To its credit, the Centre has managed to achieve two targets of the nationally determined contributions ahead of time — as of 2023, the emissions intensity of its GDP was reduced by 33% (target being 30-35%), and 43.81% of its cumulative electric power installed capacity came from non-fossil fuel-based energy. The targets have been subsequently updated for 2030. However, India remains the third-largest emitter based on the sheer size of its population and industry, and phasing out fossil fuels will be secondary to catering to the energy needs of the nation.

Combating rising temperatures is not up to two superpowers alone. However, global leaders have been seen to lack the urgency to commit to net zero transitions as the effects of climate change become glaringly obvious. Developing countries also need to play their part. For the sake of our future, it is hoped that COP29 should be able to agree to a mechanism which uses market-based instruments such as carbon credits to incentivise low-carbon development. As Arunabha Ghosh, CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, has said, COP29 should raise both the quantum and quality of climate finance. The question is not just how much is needed, but how reliably it will be delivered.

## China trade war is one Trump need not fight

**THIS ISN'T THE** same China that greeted Donald Trump after his first win in 2016. The economy, once widely believed on a course to knock the US off its perch as the pre-eminent commercial power, has since revealed some acute vulnerabilities that don't seem to be going away. And the president-elect seems to be gearing up for a trade war he no longer needs to fight.

Eight years on from the first Trump shock, the global picture is quite different. There's no longer envy of China, nor the belief in some secret sauce that made its performance superior. America is the contemporary star. Forecasts from the International Monetary Fund, released weeks before the election, showed a stronger outlook for the US. The projection for China was trimmed. Despite the dim view of growth and inflation that Trump propagated during the campaign, American leadership of the global economy is alive and well.

Beijing released some jarring statistics late last week. Foreign companies pulled out more money, the trade surplus has soared, and inflation is stuck worryingly close to zero. All point to anemic domestic demand. This isn't just a round of numbers that show stimulus is warranted; that kind of data has been around for a while, and officials have announced some efforts to juice growth. If the decline in investment continues, though, it will show the first annual FDI outflow since at least 1990. That was the year after the army crushed protests in Tiananmen Square, turning the nation into a pariah — for a while. It would be another decade before Washington greeted China's entry into the World Trade Organization, a development that turbocharged the expansion.

As that rapid growth has dissipated, China is now selling vastly more to the rest of the world than it buys. The surfeit is on track to reach almost \$1 trillion this year, according to Bloomberg calculations. In the first 10 months of 2024, exports outpaced imports by the most on record. For about two decades, Western financial ministers have urged China to rebalance its economy by relying less on shipping goods abroad and focusing more on home-grown demand. Beijing was sympathetic, too. But a crisis in the real estate industry — several key developers have failed — has eroded appetite among consumers even after some of the harshest COVID constraints were lifted. This malaise was aggravated by President Xi Jinping's efforts to rein in local businesses ranging from ride-hailing services to gamers and education companies.

China is far from washed up, as all big economies go through periodic downturns. The sense of exceptionalism, though, has been dealt a blow. In 2016, GDP increased by almost 7%. Yes, it was slowing, but from a stratospheric level. Growth this year will struggle to meet the official target of 5%. Pessimism surrounds its economy, despite the recent rollout of stimulus and a vow of more to come. Trump loves tariffs and has pledged more of them. That's an additional headache China doesn't need.

A sour mood prevailed when Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, too, though not so much regarding China. The US expansion became the longest on record, ended not by any of Trump's many mistakes, but Covid-19. The recession that the pandemic wrought was brutal — but also very short. Things look good now, even if many Trump voters weren't feeling it. The dollar was already having a pretty decent run before Trump's victory sent it into overdrive. In the past week, stocks jumped and bond yields climbed, surges that could easily be explained by Trump's intention to prolong the tax cuts and pare down regulation. Then there are his pledges to significantly ramp up tariffs on China and levy smaller, though still notable, charges on imports from elsewhere. Many economists say the measure will add to inflation — exit polls showed prices were a major concern for voters — and discourage the Fed from making deeper cuts in rates.

While far from perfect, the US economy is proving resilient and propping up global growth, the same positive vibes once ascribed to China. Let's hope Trump doesn't botch it by making unforgotten errors. The China he directed so much ire toward the first time around isn't the same place.



**DANIEL MOSS**  
Bloomberg

## RESHAPING GLOBAL ORDER

BY LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER, EMERGING MARKET ECONOMIES CAN ACCELERATE PROGRESS

# The rise of EMEs

**AMIT KAPOOR**  
Chair, Institute for Competitiveness

**I**N THE LAST two decades, the world's economic centre of gravity (WECG) has swayed towards the emerging market economies (EMEs), which now account for 30% of global economic activity and a quarter of the global trade. These economies — including Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey — have grown at an average rate of 6% while doubling their share in global GDP since 2000. Once considered peripheral players in the global economic system, these nations have now become powerful engines of growth, challenging the historical dominance of advanced economies. This transformation is therefore not just a matter of economics and numbers; it also reflects profound changes in the landscape — shifts in power, influence, and opportunity that are reshaping the future of the global order. What are the implications of this reorganisation?

EMEs are typically nations that are in transition and characterised by their rapid industrialisation, expanding consumer market, and a growing middle-class population while being closely integrated into the global market. Though they are undergoing rapid growth, the countries' infrastructure, financial systems, and regulatory frameworks are still in the early stages of development. This brings with it certain challenges and opportunities. Investments in these markets are usually characterised by a high level of risk, but also with a possibility of high returns. Emerging markets are volatile, but they offer the potential to share in the early stages of a country's economic growth. In the 1980s, emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) accounted for 37% of the global GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP), while advanced economies made up 63%. By 2007-08, the two blocs had equal shares of the global GDP. Since then, the share of EMDEs has gradually surpassed that of

advanced economies, reaching approximately 59% in 2023. International Monetary Fund projections for 2024-2028 suggest that this trend will continue, with EMDEs' share rising further while the proportion of advanced economies declines.

The liberalisation of trade, especially through integration in global bodies like the World Trade Organization, has boosted exports and attracted foreign investment, with China, India, and Vietnam becoming key players in the global supply chain. As per the estimates by the World Economic Outlook, 2024 spillovers and shocks from EMEs can account for up to 10% of output variation in other emerging markets and 5% in advanced economies after three years. Trade, particularly through global value chains (GVCs), has become a key transmission channel. Firms reliant on demand from G20 emerging markets see revenue growth from positive shocks, while those exposed to import competition may face revenue declines due to downstream spillovers. Technological leapfrogging, such as mobile banking in India and digital platforms in Southeast Asia, has enabled rapid growth especially in the fintech and service sectors. Meanwhile, young, growing populations in countries like India and Indonesia drive consumption and innovation, contrasting with the ageing demographics of developed economies. Political and economic reforms, such as Brazil's stabilisation plans and India's 1991 liberalisation, unlocked

growth potential, making emerging markets attractive to global investors.

This impressive rise comes with its own set of constraints and challenges and there is much the EMEs need to learn from each other. Balancing sustainability with economic growth poses a unique challenge. It calls for an alternative model of growth not driven by consumption. As these markets industrialise and urbanise, it puts pressure on natural resources. Air pollution in cities like New Delhi, deforestation in the Amazon, and water scarcity in parts of Africa are testament to the climate change versus development trade-off. The shared prosperity challenge seems to be looming large above these emerging markets. Latest estimates by S&P Global pointed out that despite anticipated growth, emerging markets are expected to reach only 37% of the per capita income of advanced economies by 2035, with a few exceptions. While emerging markets will contribute significantly to global growth, the per capita income gap suggests that their development may be uneven and slow, necessitating ongoing reforms and productivity improvements. Hence, despite differing political systems, cultural backgrounds, and economic structures, these countries share challenges.

By leveraging their collective experiences and strategies, EMEs have the potential to become a model of cooperation for other emerging markets, with the possibility of creating more sustainable, equitable, and resilient economic systems. China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses on massive investments in infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, and Europe, provides lessons on the scale and scope of infrastructure development. While countries such as Pakistan, Kenya, and Indonesia are already benefiting from Chinese-funded projects, they are also experiencing the long-term debt implications and environmental impacts of these investments. Other emerging markets can learn not only from China's success in building infrastructure but also from the potential pitfalls of debt overhang and environmental degradation. Similarly, India's commitment to expanding its renewable energy capacity, particularly solar energy, offers important lessons for countries struggling to secure energy access. Our scaling up of solar projects and investment in innovative technologies such as green hydrogen is a model for other countries, particularly those in Africa and Latin America, to diversify their energy mix and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

The rise of emerging markets is therefore more than just about economic growth — it is also about the exchange of ideas, strategies, and experiences across borders. Through South-South cooperation, these countries have the chance to share what works, learn from each other's mistakes, and adapt solutions to their own unique challenges. Such collaboration opens up the possibility for emerging economies to leapfrog some of the obstacles that developed nations have faced. By learning from each other in areas like governance, infrastructure, financial inclusion, social welfare, and sustainability, these countries can accelerate their own progress ensuring that the benefits of development are widely shared across populations, regions, and generations.

With contributions from Meenakshi Ajith, senior researcher, Institute for Competitiveness

## India and the US elections

**NIRVIKAR SINGH**  
Professor of economics, University of California, Santa Cruz

**I**NDIA'S leaders will have to work harder to keep its economy growing at a rate that will bring meaningful improvements in the lives of the bulk of its populace

**THE IMPORTANCE** of the recent US elections for India cannot be overstated. The political landscape in the US has shifted dramatically. Donald Trump is not just an America-first ideologue, though that has been a part of his thinking for decades. He is also driven completely by self-interest, and is totally transactional in his approach. He is also not someone who respects experts, especially those with scientific expertise. Perhaps these traits are common among autocrats — putting their own interests and egos above all else, with all their relationships and interpretations of the world around them being subordinated to the need to dominate, to be seen as correct in their decisions, and to demand adulation.

How will these traits play out in Trump's second term? He is already bringing in loyalists who share his personality traits, and who are more extreme than he is, because they carry more ideological baggage than he does. US institutions will weaken further, beyond what happened during Trump's first term. This weakening will be the result of the attrition or outright removal of expertise and ideals of objectivity, as Trump pursues retribution and personal power. In this kind of situation, some of the worst damage is done by those who achieve power through loyalty, rather than objective qualifications. The US is in for a rough ride in the next four years, and it remains to be seen how permanent the institutional damage will be.

For India, dealing with a Trump administration is likely to be more challenging than the last four years, in which a consistent strategic posture, still in the pursuit of US self-interest, allowed for the possibility of collaborations in areas such as technology and national security. While the Trump administration may be even more hawkish on China, it will also be unpredictable, and even if there are favourable personal equations in play, those can be subject to change. Meanwhile, the layers of bureaucracy that build sustained collaborations in complex areas such as technology and innovation may well be decimated under Trump. In some areas, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, the US is likely to retreat completely, leaving countries like India having to rely more on Europe and possibly multilateral institutions.

It is possible that US business leaders will still view India as an attractive investment opportunity and as a risk-reducing alternative to China. But there will be no overarching US foreign policy stance behind those private sector perspectives. In any case, if even some of Trump's plans for tariff walls are carried out, every developing country and the world economy will be harmed.

If even some of Trump's plans for tariff walls are carried out, every developing country and the world economy will be harmed

All of this means that India's leaders will have to work harder to keep its economy growing at a rate that will bring meaningful improvements in the lives of the bulk of its population. One irony of the US election results is that they came weeks after three economists — Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson — were awarded a Nobel prize for their work on the importance of the quality of economic and political institutions in promoting economic development. India's leaders may want to ponder on the lessons of this work. It is true that the case of India was not the best fit with these theories, and neither was China, for very different reasons. Some of the divergences have to do with size, which complicates treating a country as one unit, or magnifies unique features. But in broad terms, there is an intuitive appeal to an approach which recognises the value of balanced political and economic competition, which is what good institutions ideally promote.

One reason for the rise of Trump and what he represents has been the increasing diversity of the US over time, especially the last few decades, and the greater difficulty of achieving balance, especially in a world of rapid technological and cultural change. The US has absorbed people from all over the world, and the strains of that process have been showing in the rise of Trump and his cohorts. In contrast, India has been diverse for centuries, and its post-independence institutions were designed with that existing diversity in mind, although inevitably with imperfections. Retreating from that situation is very different from the process in the US, or even from European countries that have been handling similar strains.

One factor in the Democratic Party's loss in the US was supposedly "identity politics." But this claim is misleading. The Republicans had their own version of identity politics, which simply resonated better with a majority of voters. The real issue is how diverse identities, which have multiple dimensions (race, religion, gender, social class, and so on), are managed in a competitive political system. Evidence and intuition suggest that diversity promotes innovation and entrepreneurship, which contribute to economic growth, if politicians do not exploit the strains of increasing difference or create new strains.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Govt failed on inflation

Inflation based on the consumer price index rose to 6.21% in October, up from 5.49% in September according to data by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation. The increase was driven by prices of food, mainly vegetables (and among them tomatoes, onions, potatoes) rising above 42%. Food inflation rose sharply to 10.87% in October from 9.2% in September. There is a greater need for

the government to implement additional supply-side measures to stabilise food prices. A weakening of the rupee to an all-time low against the dollar has also raised the spectre of India's oil import bill climbing, which could stoke inflation if retail fuel prices go up. Since this is a man-made inflation, the government which has virtually failed to check inflation needs to make all-out efforts to curb it and give aish of relief to the poor.

—SK Khosla, Chandigarh

### Lower carbon footprint

Apropos of "COP29: A battle for more funds" (FE, November 14), that many world leaders decided to skip COP29 shows their lethargic attitude to discussing the climate crisis.

Countries like the US, which have exploited the planet's resources, are in no mood to atone. Donald Trump even backed out of the Paris Accord. The fact that neither India's Prime Minister nor any Cabinet Minister is

attending the event also shows a lack of seriousness towards a global crisis. The fact remains that targets set in the last COP have not been met and the funds pledged did not materialise. The 1.5 degree Celsius threshold has also been breached. The need of the hour is to make concerted efforts to reduce carbon footprint and save the planet from destruction.

—Gurnoor Grewal, Chandigarh



## Modest means

Local bodies must be strengthened

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has done well to initiate studies on the fiscal position of local bodies and publish the findings. The first such report on municipal corporation (MC) finances was published in November 2022. This was followed by a study of the finances of panchayat raj institutions. The RBI has now published a report on the fiscal position of MCs from 2019-20 to 2023-24 (Budget estimates, or BE). The study covers 232 MCs across the country. Local bodies in India often receive limited policy attention, partly due to the lack of data in a comparable format. It is to be hoped that accessible studies by the RBI will help bring the necessary policy attention and enrich public debate.

The need for strengthening local bodies cannot be overemphasised. In the context of MCs, it is worth noting that India is rapidly urbanising and needs to develop civic capacity. As things stand, about 60 per cent of India's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated in urban areas and over 50 per cent of its population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050. However, most MCs are not geared to handle the transition, largely because of a lack of resources. As the RBI report shows, MCs' revenue receipts are just about 0.6 per cent of GDP. Even this modest number is skewed in favour of a handful of MCs — 10 MCs account for nearly 60 per cent of revenue receipts. The MCs' expenditure, revenue and capital, was only about 1.3 per cent of GDP in 2023-24 (BE). Their own revenues include levies such as property tax, fees, and user charges. Property tax accounts for about 60 per cent of their revenue receipts.

However, MCs depend significantly on grants from the Union and state governments. Transfers by the state government, State Finance Commission grants, and flows under other heads constituted about 30 per cent of revenue receipts from 2019-20 to 2022-23. Transfers by the Union government were worth about 2.5 per cent of revenue receipts. MCs are also borrowing from the market, though the amount remains small, at just about 0.05 per cent of GDP. There is a strong case for strengthening the state of MC finances and enabling them to perform better. In most developed and developing countries, the share of local bodies in general government revenue and expenditure is much higher. Increased delegation of fiscal powers and social responsibility will help improve both economic and social outcomes. It is always easier for voters in democratic systems to hold their local political leaders to account.

To improve MC finances, interventions will be required at various levels. Most importantly, MCs will have to work on boosting their revenues. Property tax, for instance, needs to be reformed to reflect the rising valuations. It will also be necessary to use technology to improve the scale and scope of taxation. Besides, MCs will need to charge realistic levels of user fees. Overall, it will be vital to reduce dependence on higher levels of government. That will create predictability in revenue. One possibility is to give local bodies a share in goods and services tax after legal changes. This will not only help MCs plan development projects better but also enable them to raise debt on more favourable terms. Some MCs have approached the bond market. It is time India reimagined the role and state of local bodies.

## Trump trade wars

Effects on global growth and trade dynamics will be substantial

The election of Donald Trump as the next President of the United States (US) has rendered the future of world trade uncertain. Mr Trump has been an outspoken advocate of greater protectionism for longer than he has been in politics. He is convinced that the global-trade system has been set up to give the US, in particular, a bad deal. While he thinks that China has been the biggest offender in this respect, he has not been shy of accusing India and others of getting disproportionate benefits at the cost of the US, either. However, it is worth noting that Mr Trump's policies in his first term were somewhat milder than his rhetoric. Those that he did implement, such as tariffs on steel and an effective veto of dispute resolution at the World Trade Organization (WTO), were in fact implicitly carried on by his Democratic successor, President Joe Biden, as well.

In some ways Mr Trump's actions are reflective of the mainstream of the US political class's opinion about trade at the moment. It is possible that Mr Trump's trade policy in his second term will be more radical than in his first. The President-elect has said on the campaign trail that tariff is "his favourite word". He has specifically pledged a 60 per cent tariff on all goods coming from China and 10 per cent on those coming from other geographies. Whether this is compliant with WTO rules is another question. The question is what first- and second-order effects these tariffs, if introduced and enforced, will have.

Most estimates that the immediate effect on the Chinese economy — which is struggling with overcapacity — would be sharp. Chinese growth could be 1-2 percentage points lower in the year following the introduction of these tariffs, according to estimates. The knock-on effects of this slowdown on those Asian economies that are closely integrated with China's manufacturing supply chain will be intense as well. There will be two ways in which these economies will be hurt: First, directly, through China being less able to buy their exports; and second, because Chinese overcapacity will deepen and worsen the already extant problem of dumping goods in these economies. The Chinese authorities have some room to allow the yuan to depreciate in order to manage the fallout from a trade war. But its trading partners in Asia, some of which have significant dollar-denominated debt, may not have so much freedom to manoeuvre. The effect on their monetary authorities will also be to dampen any tendency towards relaxed money, so as to prevent depreciation. This will, again, depress growth impulses in the region.

India may not be the worst affected by this dynamic since it is not tightly integrated with the Chinese economy, and it has underperformed in terms of exports to the mainland. The question is whether New Delhi can successfully convince Mr Trump that for both geopolitical and economic reasons his tariffs can be effectively targeted against China with minimal collateral damage. There will then exist the possibility that India can be one of the countries seeking to take on China's role in exports to the West. To do that successfully, of course, a more ambitious agenda of domestic reform will be needed.



ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY

## A growing Union-state power imbalance

The exercise of legislative power by statutory regulatory authorities undermines federalism and needs to be corrected

The Constitution of India divides the work of the state into four parts: (a) The Union list, (b) the state list, (c) the concurrent list, which is a joint responsibility of the Union and the states, and (d) Schedules 11 and 12, which define the role of village and city-level governments. We often think that matters in the Union list are fully under the purview of the Union government and the Lok Sabha.

A moment's reflection will show that this is not the case. The Constitution envisioned a bicameral legislature. In addition to the Lok Sabha, there is also the Rajya Sabha. The Rajya Sabha is composed of "representative of the states" who are elected by the members of the states' legislative bodies. The Rajya Sabha is formed out of all state legislatures through a system of proportional representation.

Under the Constitution of India, conferment of coercive powers to government agencies must be authorised by Parliament. Other than Money Bills, all laws must be approved by both the Lok Sabha (which has direct elections) and the Rajya Sabha (which reflects the views of political parties of the states). In this sense, the Union does not stand pristine and aloof from the working of the states. The electoral structure of state legislative assemblies also shapes all parliamentary law.

The contours of Indian federalism were intensely discussed in the Constituent Assembly, leading to this system of checks and balances that was put into place to avoid the excesses that come from concentrated power.

Union level regulators changed this

In this setting, we saw the rise of statutory regulatory

authorities (SRAs). Today, there are over 20 SRAs at the Union level in India, each empowered by law to create and enforce law (called "regulations") in their respective domain.

For example, there are nearly 50 operational Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) regulations. They cover wide-ranging substantive issues, including listing obligations and disclosure requirements, regulation of portfolio managers, depositories, exchanges and more. In the absence of Sebi, such subjects would be governed by dedicated parliamentary legislation. Further, regulations are subject to frequent amendments. For example, the regulations concerning portfolio managers — issued in 2020 — have been amended four times in the last three years. Without Sebi, such amendments would be individually contingent on parliamentary approval.

Parliamentary legislation is a time-consuming and not entirely predictable process. Given that the issues in domains like securities markets need expertise and quick responses to market situations, Parliament created a

skeletal framework law called the Sebi Act, and this Act gave (un)elected officials in Sebi the power to write binding law. The same is true for most other Indian SRAs. The regulatory literature recognises the obvious democratic deficit in this design of SRAs. This emanates from the fact that SRAs exercise legislative powers that would otherwise have been exercised by democratically-elected legislatures. Increasingly, in judicial orders in the developed world, this deficit is coming under greater scrutiny. In some regulated areas in the US, this has even led to the rollback of regulatory powers of SRAs on the grounds of excessive delegation.



AARTHIKAM CHINTANAM

K P KRISHNAN

## Time to assess impact of procurement reforms

The first 15 years of this century witnessed rising decibels of protests from Indian industry about two specific issues in doing business with the government — hugely delayed payments and the infirmities embedded in the L-1 (lowest bidder) method of selection. On both counts, many businesses that were substantial suppliers to the government faced existential hurdles, and it is believed the country lost out on quality suppliers.

It is not that the government was insensitive to these issues. For instance, the PRAAPTI portal (Payment Ratification and Analysis in Power Procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of Suppliers) did much to track and improve the payments by electricity distribution companies to power generators, along with a series of hard-hitting consequences by the power ministry for delayed payments. From time to time, the government also attempted to improve payments to small and medium enterprises by a variety of directives and penalties.

However, the real systemic attack on this state of affairs happened under the leadership of T V Somanathan (now Cabinet secretary) during his tenure in the finance ministry. On October 29, 2021, the Department of Expenditure in the Ministry of Finance issued a notification incoincidentally titled "General Instructions on Procurement and Project Management." Unlike other government announcements on reforms, this was uncharacteristically understated and was indeed, a classic case of "reform by stealth".

At a general level, the 22-page note set out a plethora of desirable actions in government purchases for works contracts and services. But what should have drawn a cheer from the private sector was the tough stance taken on delayed payments. It mandated that "payments of not less than 75 per cent of eligible running-account bills shall be made within 10 working days of the submission of a bill. The remaining payment, after final checking of the bill, is to be made within 28 working days of the submission of the bill.

The final bill should also be paid to the contractor within three months after the completion of work".

Moreover, all project executing authorities implementing contracts involving aggregate payments of more than ₹100 crore per annum were instructed to have an online system for monitoring the bills submitted by contractors, with the facility for contractors to track the status of their bills online.

The rules for "selection" were also reset. For all consultancy bids, three methods of procurement had already been followed: QCBS (quality and cost-based selection), LCS (least cost system), and SSS (single source selection). The notification now introduced FBS (fixed budget selection), where the price is fixed, and selection is based on maximum merit.

For "works and non-consultancy services", the notification opened up the QCBS route, which was hitherto not generally allowed. This would henceforth be allowed under two conditions. One, where the project has been declared a QOB (quality-oriented procurement) by a competent authority, and two, for non-consultancy services where the estimated value of procurement does not exceed ₹10 crore. Under QCBS, the maximum weight of the non-financial parameters is to not exceed 30 per cent. So, finally the much-criticised L-1 (lowest cost winner) framework has been sought to be dismantled.

It also makes a serious break from past inhibitions by allowing single bids. Even when only one bid is submitted, the process should be considered valid, provided the procurement was satisfactorily advertised, sufficient time was given for submission of bids, qualification criteria were not unduly restrictive, and the bid was found to be reasonable vis-à-vis expected values.

There are still several shortcomings that need to be addressed. One, "goods" are currently excluded. But whether it is sophisticated medical equipment or drone purchases, the QCBS method needs to be made applicable to purchase of such sophisticated



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goods also — not just works and services.

Two, the limitation of a maximum 30 per cent weight for non-financial scores in QCBS shows a lack of boldness in propagating this format. Indian firms are quite accustomed to 80-20 (technical/financial) structures in specific bespoke bids, including those under the auspices of multilateral funding as well as commercial procurement.

Three, the document is silent on Swiss Challenge as a method of procurement.

Four, what is crucially missing is getting states and state-level public-sector units (PSUs) to adopt and implement these reforms. Currently, these are applicable to only central government entities and central PSUs. After all, states account for over 60 per cent of all public procurement.

The most impactful and authoritative aspect of the current notification, however, is that its provisions are now part of the General Finance Rules of the Union of India. This has set the cat among the pigeons in the finance department of central government procuring entities, because violations will now invite serious censure from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and the Central Vigilance Commission.

It is rather surprising that this major reform in public procurement did not get the attention it deserved from Indian industry, and even from analysts and economic commentators. Now, three years since the notification of October 29, 2021, it is instructive to ask: how much has it actually helped in doing business with the government? The jury is still out, and it is now essential for the finance ministry to commission an independent assessment of the outcomes of these reform measures.

Finally, India's private sector cannot appear to be smug about these historic measures taken. Various industry associations and chambers of commerce must actively have it actually helped in doing business across all levels and come up with their own impact analysis of these reforms.

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## Hyderabad's future in its past



## BOOK REVIEW

AKANKSHA ABISMURTA

It is a truth universally acknowledged that if one passes by the Cyber Towers in Hyderabad, one is bound to look back at it for another glance for its sheer beauty and design — more so after sunset when it glimmers with lights. With N Chandrababu Naidu's rigorous efforts to make Hyderabad more advanced than Bengaluru, the Cyber Towers were the first twin-tower to be constructed in the city for the promotion of information technology (IT). In his book *Beyond Biryani*, the science journalist and author Dinesh Sharma traces the transformation of the place from a "proto-colonial city in quasi-Mughal princely state" to "a modern and vibrant metropolis".

The book traces the history of scientific development from the days of the Nizams, who were open to Western medicine and encouraged learning English for students to excel in the field of medicine, to Mr Naidu's ambitious attempts to make Hyderabad a city at the forefront of scientific and technological advancement.

The book has three sections. The first meticulously showcases early-20th-century modern city planning and development following the devastating 1908 flooding of the Musi River. This project, led by India's foremost civil engineer M Vieswaraiah, gave the city a new skyline by raising a hospital and court on the riverfront. The second section deals with the development of various establishments beyond Osmania University for research and development as the city merged with post-colonial India. The third part shows the city's physiological change into an IT hub after liberalisation. The chapter features the establishment of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular

establishments, and the people involved. This can be intimidating to readers who were tempted by the title to look at the city beyond its famous cuisine that's travelled far and wide. Owing to his career as a science journalist, the author presents this comprehensive history in a matter-of-factly way, leaving his interpretations for the conclusion. He also sprinkles the book with anecdotes. It is interesting to note, for instance, that the early emphasis on teaching technology in local language in Osmania University led to a massive translation enterprise. The Darul Tarjum, or the Bureau of Translation and Compilation, was tasked with the preparation of textbooks in Urdu for all courses.

"The Chemistry of Life" in Section II is an interesting chapter on research work on the malaria parasite, chloroform testing, and the beginning of an indigenous electronics industry accelerated by the Indo-Pak War of 1965. The chapter features the establishment of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular

Biology (CCMB), headed by Pushpa Mitra Bhargava who returned from the US in 1958. He introduced a research culture that did away with the rigidity of specific working hours in the institute. He firmly believed that research cannot be constrained by time. It requires openness and flexibility.

Based on this, Bhargava also approached the construction of the CCMB building on Frank Lloyd Wright's principle of "form follows function." CCMB then became a space where any researcher could work at any time, in any space, with access to common recreational areas for discussion with their colleagues. It also became a residence for artists such as MF Hussain, Surya Prakash and JJ Yan at different times, which laid the ground for a wholesome creative environment.

Section III, "Two Couples and 20/20 Vision" is entertaining for it intertwines Mr Naidu's dramatic entry into politics, his character and his ambition for

Hyderabad. After all, he was one of the first politicians to appear in public with a laptop and was known for his PowerPoint presentations.

This book is a perfect resource and starting point for future chroniclers of Hyderabad. The city has made space for itself on international stage by remaining open to the possibilities of scientific discoveries and a better way of living. It has also been lucky to have leaders who were able to gather the best minds who had studied abroad and at home to brainstorm and establish labs, public sector undertakings, defence production units, central universities, training centres

research centres and technical education institutes. These impacted the private sector and led to many employment opportunities that boosted industrial growth.

However, this progress has come at a cost. There is a "digital divide" between the old city and Cyberabad, which creates a chasm between Hyderabad's history and the future. People from two ends of the city rarely interact. Mr Sharma states, "Those residing and working in Cyberabad were keen to point out the lack of necessity to engage with the old city, while people from the old city showcased their capabilities of navigating the digital and thereby minimising their need to travel beyond the vicinity of their places of work and residence." In the Ganga-Jamuni teliheze in its "cuisine, rehen-shehn festivals, lings, and the dhoti-wearing culture," the city has a rich history. But with the coming of migrants and social media, the exchange of cultural ideas is restricted to newer parts of the city.

*Beyond Biryani* leaves the reader with questions: Does history limit development? Can a balance between the new drawn for a better ecology? What are the answers, or are there? It is certain: This 430-year-old city is constantly growing, willing itself to higher glory by enterprising rulers and politicians.

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