

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[ OUR TAKE ]

## Court's pivot on social justice

Reservations in appointments and promotions for apex court staff positions is a welcome step

Caste-based reservation in employment is an important feature of the social justice architecture envisaged in the Indian Constitution. It covered the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the early years after Independence, and was extended to the other backward classes (OBCs) after the Centre accepted the Mandal Commission in 1990. Meanwhile, political mobilisations provided the thrust to the making of a legislative climate favourable to the introduction of laws mandating quotas in various public institutions. The judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, supported these moves and, in fact, nurtured the vision that some form of affirmative action is necessary to realise the Constitutional ideal of building an egalitarian democracy through judgments that fine-tuned the reservation policy. Ironically, the Supreme Court, which is authorised by the Constitution to set its own rules on its functioning, had forgotten to implement this vision in its institutional structure, though multiple high courts had introduced reservations.

Which is why Chief Justice of India Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavi's June 24 curricular, first reported in HT, that introduced a formal policy of reservation in the direct appointment and promotion for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) staff working in the apex court, is historic. To be sure, the policy does not extend to the appointment of judges, though the collegium is trusted to ensure that the judiciary is representative of the larger society. Nor does it extend to OBCs. The lack of compatibility between state and central lists make extending reservation to the OBCs a tricky affair, but surely, the Court will work its way around the problem.

Importantly, Justice Gavi's initiative to adopt a reservation-in-promotion policy for the apex court will have a bearing on other public institutions as well. Legal and procedural complications had stymied affirmative action in promotions leading to skewed representation in higher posts. The establishment of a model roster and an updated register are steps that should help ensure internal accountability in promotions. The Supreme Court's experience could offer a template for other institutions, which have been reluctant to crack the glass ceiling in promotions.

Besides cementing the legacy of Justice Gavi, only the second Dalit CJI, the initiative has sought to address a major incongruence in the working of the Constitution's social justice vision. Representation is an essential feature of constitutional democracy in India. It's a welcome step when it aligns the apex court with that vision.

## Right policy to build a sporting power

India dreams of becoming a major sporting power but at the moment, the road to achieving that goal is littered with roadblocks. The infrastructure is lacking, the coaches are not world class and there is a technological gap that gives the world's best a clear edge. And we haven't even got to the athletes yet.

To overcome this, India needed a new framework which is exactly what the new National Sports Policy provides. It lays out a clear path to achieve Olympic glory, ensure mass participation in sports, strengthen grassroots, school, and university-level sports and reform sports governance with accountability and transparency. In a sense, the new policy is the building block upon which India hopes of becoming a modern sports nation rest; a nation where sports isn't an afterthought but very much a part of life itself.

But the key to accomplishing the goals will lie in execution. Too often have we seen sports administration fall into the self-defeating trap of self-preservation. The new policy will require professionalism — not just from the government and the administrators but also from the athletes.

For years, Indian sport has worked on an ad-hoc basis and individual genius, but for enduring success in the sporting arena, systems are the need of the hour and the new policy promises to focus on building "world-class systems for training, coaching and holistic athlete support". If India wants to truly host the Olympics, it needs to find the right athletes and turn them into world beaters by 2036. It is a long journey but this is where it can and should begin. There has to be a coming together of resources, talent, and structure to ensure that the stated goals of the policy don't just become a footnote in Indian sports' perennial story of underachievement. The new policy could be transformational, but only if the cards are played right.

## Beijing returns to the geopolitical centrestage

Quad remains resilient. But coalitions to counter China are fraying and everyone wants to be friends with Beijing again

Quad took a significant step in its long journey to shed ambiguity and reveal its true purpose on Tuesday in Washington DC. The US, India, Japan, and Australia signed on to a joint statement that was more pointed and critical of Chinese actions in the maritime domain than in the past. Quad also categorically called out China's economic coercion, price manipulation, supply-chain disruptions, and use of market principles to concentrate production in critical minerals. In classic diplo-speak, the statement did all of this using the passive voice without attributing actions to the agent.

To be sure, each edition of Quad has witnessed the introduction of a more critical narrative against Beijing and an additional layer of tech, economic, or security cooperation with the subject of countering China. But this week's Quad meeting was much sharper in its focus. It also narrowed down cooperation to maritime security, economic security, critical and emerging technologies, and humanitarian assistance. The advantage of this sharp approach is that the fluff is out, and all sides are discussing real actionable items. The disadvantage is there is drastic dilution of the agenda and many valuable items of cooperation may get lost. But the Quad state-

ment is significant because a strong diplomatic rebuke of China has become rare. Indeed, the big geopolitical picture of the moment is that China is on the geopolitical comeback trail after five years.

The onset of Covid-19 in early 2020 woke the world to the dangers of opaque systems that can suppress information with globally devastating consequences. China's weaponisation of its overwhelming advantage in manufacturing woke the world to the need for diversified supply chains. China's inroads into eastern Ladakh alerted New Delhi to the dangers of a belligerent neighbour that was willing to violate India's sovereignty. China's continuous aggression in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and around Taiwan made the region aware of Beijing's territorial and maritime ambitions. China's predatory economics made Global South nations conscious of the downsides of Chinese dependence and investment flows. China's stunning technological, military, and economic strides awoke the US to its 'peer-level competitor'.

Under the first Donald Trump administration, the Joe Biden administration, and under a set of Indo-Pacific leaders worried about Beijing, there was a concerted approach to take on the Chinese machine. American export controls on chips were meant to slow down China's progress. The US began building stronger countervailing coalitions in the Indo-Pacific. It encouraged plurilaterals, trilaterals, and strengthened bilaterals to shape the environ-

ment around China. The US married strategic and defence imperatives with business opportunities and innovated with new tech partnerships. It expanded its developmental, climate, and security footprint in neglected regions such as the Pacific Islands.

This period saw China's internal vulnerabilities get more pronounced. Beijing's Covid-19 crackdown boomeranged. Its real estate and infrastructure-fueled boom created a crisis. Its domestic consumption paled in comparison to its production excess. Its demographic policies generated social fissures and policy pressures. It seemed relatively friendless in the region. And theories about how China had peaked gained traction. That 2020-2024 era of rising global estrangement with China is over. It may well be the year when everyone wants to become friends with China again.

The effort to construct a bridge between Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres has faltered. Even in Russia and China work more closely together, the US is now doing little to bridge the gap between NATO and Indo-Pacific allies and is instead pressuring both simultaneously to step up on defence. The Australian, South Korean, and Japanese heads of government decided to stay away from the Nato summit in The Hague. European countries, both collectively and separately, are seeking to cut deals with China. To many in Europe, a closer working relationship with China seems safer than putting their eggs in the unpredictable American basket.

America itself is sending signals of



Prashant Jha



Trump, to lead retrospective coherence to a badly thought out tariff policy, made it all about China in April.

wanting a deal with China. Trump, to lead retrospective coherence to a badly thought out tariff policy, made it all about China in April. As soon as markets responded negatively and inflationary concerns became real, he did a deal by mid-May. When the deal showed cracks and China imposed restrictions on exports of rare earths, the US showed a willingness to lift restrictions on exports and visas. Nikei now reports that Trump is exploring a visit to China with a major business delegation. China's dependencies are real. Beijing is far more keen to do a deal than it publicly lets on, and no one is discounting either the structural rivalry or US advantages. But, in this entire episode, China has imposed cards too and held its own to a large extent, while American vulnerabilities have become visible.

And then you have China's neighbours. Despite Japan's fundamental security contradiction with China, Trump has made life so difficult for Tokyo that it cancelled a 2+2 ministerial dialogue with the US and is engaged in a public acrimonious fight on auto tariffs — any such rift plays to China's advantage. South Korea's new government is all about a more balanced approach to foreign policy compared to its pro-US conservative predecessor.

Australia is struck by the Pentagon's review of the AUKUS pact and Trump hasn't even met Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

And India is sending public signals of rapprochement with China — despite China being the force behind Pakistan's military response during Operation Sindoor. India's own border tensions, the trade asymmetry that emanates from Chinese manufacturing dominance, and Beijing's efforts to construct a hostile architecture in South Asia. New Delhi's political troubles with the US due to Trump's false claims on peacemaking, mediation, and trade could only have made China happy. And in smaller countries in the region, American instruments of influence in the form of foreign aid, foreign trade, and liberal visa policy have all but gone, leaving the ground open for more Chinese presence.

Neither was China about to collapse or get isolated in the past four years, nor is it about to take over the world now. But there is a shift that suits Beijing. As the next Quad chair, India's challenge is framing a credible and strong agenda that takes into account this adverse diplomatic environment.

Prashant Jha is a political analyst. The views expressed are personal.

## The Emergency: A political battle and a personal story

I write this as India marks the 50th anniversary of the 1975 Emergency, during which the Constitution itself was weaponised to create a dictatorship.

My father, Arun Jaitley, is remembered as amongst the most eloquent leaders of the nation, a staunch nationalist, astute politician, lawyer par excellence and a unique consensus builder, who worked relentlessly to ensure collaborative process till the result was something that every member could at least accept, if not support.

Curious, I once asked how he had much forbearance for the diametrically opposite views of others. He responded with lessons learned from the Emergency. He said that what he had cost to safeguard the right to voice an opinion different from that of those in power.

In 1973, it became evident that the government led by Indira Gandhi had neither the intention nor the ability to alter its economic policies that had led to high inflation and mass unemployment. My father was at this time, an aspiring law student and Delhi University (DU) Students Union president.

Noting the change in political winds and the wave of student agitation inspired by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), my father convened a rally in the DU campus which JP addressed. The rally witnessed an unprecedented turnout, grabbing the attention of the Congress leadership. Within the year, Mrs Gandhi lost her position as MP pursuant to the *Raj Narain* case, mounting pressure for her resignation. This led to declaration of the Emergency in the intervening night of June 25-26, 1975. Articles 14, 19, 21 and 22 also stood suspended.

The same night, Opposition leaders were arrested, and the police arrived at my father's home. My grandfather, a lawyer, asked the police for documents supporting such detention, ensuring that my father escaped in the interim. No newspapers were delivered on June 26 as electricity to Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, where most newspapers were situated, having been disconnected. My father's efforts to ascertain the gravity of the situation were in vain. Undeterred, he arrived at the DU campus with a plan to deliver a speech against the Emergency and then escape with the help of a friend who owned a scooter.

Such was the terror of the Emergency however, that even strong friendships wavered, and when my father arrived at the location, he found neither vehicle nor friend. He was arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and lodged in Tihar Jail.

My father took great pride in being the first *satyagrahi* against the Emergency. While my father was transferred to Ambala central jail after a week, his family was in the dark. Some rumours suggested that he had been sent to Kala Pani (Andamans), and others that he had been killed.

My grandmother was overcome with grief and her health took a turn for the worse. My grandfather, torn between anguish and duty to hold the family together, used every resource to locate my father, and thereafter, ensure his transfer to Delhi. He filed petitions to enable my father to write his final

year examination from jail. However, these were rejected on the ground that he was a threat to public order. He thus lost an academic year during his 19-month imprisonment.

The loss was insignificant when compared to what his family endured. With my grandmother debilitated and my grandfather dedicating himself to ensuring my father's survival, it fell to his eldest sister Madhu, to manage her own home in Bikaner, as also that of my grandparents. She would travel by train weekly, for three days, cook as much food as possible and depart, to repeat this every fourth day. She recalls meeting my father in jail for a few minutes each month when she would carry food for him. On one occasion she received a message that he had requested Chinese food from Majnu Ka Tila for 15 persons, and momentarily she smiled, relieved that the foodie in him was still alive.

Her other memories are more sobering. She recounts the day my grandfather received a phone call, informing him that my father had had an accident and was breathing on his last at AIIMS.

My grandfather, who until then had maintained composure through insurmountable moments of anxiety, could bear it no longer and suffered a heart attack. The rumour was untrue, but neither the first nor the last of its kind. Relatives would describe the torture of political prisoners in excruciating detail, which caused family members to withdraw. Friends quickly distanced themselves, fearing consequences, and loyal staff quit, as police constantly circled the house, tormenting those who offered support. "No one," he said, "No one wanted to be associated with us."

Eventually, political prisoners began to be released on the pre-condition of a written apology to the government. However, my family never got their hopes up, knowing that this was against everything my father stood for.

With their own lives at a standstill, they took solace in the fact that my father was with like-minded people. My father later said that prison is a state of mind. If one allowed oneself to be overwhelmed, it would result in depression and traumatic experiences. But if you were thinking of fighting the Emergency, you felt fine.

Gradually, international pressure mounted, which led to snap elections being announced on June 18, 1977. The short timeline was aimed to debilitate the Opposition, as the plan was to release prominent leaders only post elections.

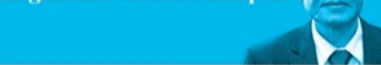
My father was released on January 25, 1977, and he went on to play a pivotal role in the general election. The Janata Party won a resounding victory, alleviating fears of the polls being farcical. This led my father to believe that democracy lies in the hearts of the people.

When it dies there, no Constitution can save it, and no judge can protect it. Until then, it is safe and as immortal as India is.

Rohan Jaitley is advocate, Supreme Court and president, Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA). The views expressed are personal.

[ PENPA TSERING ] PRESIDENT, TIBETAN GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE

We strongly condemn China's usage of the reincarnation subject for their political gain and will never accept it



## How basic structure doctrine protects constitutional rights

The Constitution of India enshrines a vision of justice — social, economic, and political — and a commitment to equality in status and opportunity. But history has shown us that these ideals are often contested terrain.

In the early decades after Independence, as India grappled with urgent demands for land reform, social equity, and economic stability, the pillars of democracy — the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary — often stood at odds.

From the 1950s until the 1970s, India was crying out for reforms — agrarian and economic. Land redistribution was key, but it clashed directly with the constitutional right to property — then a Fundamental Right under Articles 19 and 31.

After years of wars, economic disparities, and political turmoil, public pressure on the government was mounting, and so the government moved to abolish the zamindari system by acquiring private property. But this clashed with the Fundamental Right to Property under Articles 19 and 31 of the Constitution. These powers were challenged in courts; some were struck down. In response, Parliament passed the First Amendment in 1951, introducing Article 31A, Article 31B, and the Ninth Schedule to shield such laws from judicial review.

Shankari Prasad v. Union of India (1951) was the first case to test this. Shankari Prasad Singh Deo, a zamindar, challenged the State after Shankari Prasad, a Jalandhar-based family, which owned vast farmlands, reopened the same questions. This time, the Punjab Security and Land Tenures Act, 1953 was challenged. Once again, the spotlight was on a single, seismic question: Could Parliament rewrite the Fundamental Rights? In *Golaknath*, the Supreme Court — by the slimmest of margins, 6:5 — drew the line. Fundamental Rights are "transcendental" and "immutable" — and therefore are beyond the reach of Parliament. This sent shockwaves through political corridors.

Riding on a landslide victory in the fifth Lok Sabha elections, the government wasted no time in testing the limits. Within weeks, Parliament bulldozed through the 24th Amendment, expressly granting Parliament the power to amend any provision of the Con-

stitution and tied the President's hands by mandating assent to any constitutional amendment bill.

The battle wasn't over. The clash between Parliament's desire for reform and the judiciary's role as guardian of the Constitution was about to reach its biggest showdown in the history of India — *Kesavananda Bharti v. State of Kerala* (1973). *Kesavananda Bharti* challenged the limit of property one can hold under the Kerala Land Reforms Act. The question — can Parliament amend Fundamental Rights — rose again.

The courtroom witnessed the finest from the Bombay Bar — Nanal Palkhivala, Palki Nariman and Solicitor-General — defending the petitioner and a determined HM Seervai represented the government in what would become India's longest argued case with the largest constitutional bench ever assembled.

The Supreme Court overturned the *Golaknath* verdict, ruling that while Parliament has the power to amend any part of the Constitution, it cannot alter its "basic structure". That structure — a democratic, secular, federal republic which preserves separation of powers — is the very DNA of India. It gave birth to the basic structure doctrine, a safeguard against unchecked parliamentary power.

But, this legal victory was only the beginning. Two years later, the judiciary faced the same questions at a time when India's political waters churned with unrest. Severe fiscal and oil crises resulted in bold economic reforms. An electoral triumph in light of powerful social movements led a presumptuous government to take drastic steps to cling to power. On June 25, 1975, a national Emergency was declared. Civil liberties were suspended, dissent was crushed, and the very essence of democracy was threatened.

The Emergency was more than a political crisis — as the government suspended fundamental rights, the Constitution's basic structure was once again under assault. As we mark 50 years since that day, the lessons remain urgent. The "basic structure" isn't just a legal doctrine — it's the first and last line of defence. The memory of this dark day urges us to protect judicial independence, civil liberties, and tolerate dissent — because without checks, freedoms, and the liberty to speak out, democracy is just a word.

Insiah Vahanvati is an author and journalist and Ashish Bhardwaj is professor and dean of BTL's Law School. The views expressed are personal.



## THIS WORD MEANS

### GADEN PHODRANG TRUST

What is the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which the Dalai Lama has said will find his reincarnation?



The spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama, speaks in Dharamshala on Monday, ahead of his 90th birthday on July 6. AP

VARINDER BHATIA  
CHANDIGARH, JULY 2

The 14TH Dalai Lama announced on Wednesday "that the institution of the Dalai Lama" will continue and that the Gaden Phodrang Trust shall be the "sole authority to recognize the future reincarnation" of the Dalai Lama.

"No one else has any... authority to interfere in this matter," he said.

The "Statement Affirming the Continuation of the Institution of the Dalai Lama" came four days before the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists turns 90. It is consistent with the statement that he made on September 24, 2011, that if he was decided at a future date "that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should continue and there is a need for the Fifteenth Dalai Lama to be recognized, responsibility for doing so will primarily rest on the concerned officers of the Dalai Lama's Gaden Phodrang Trust".

What is the Gaden Phodrang Trust, and what is its mandate?

#### Meaning of the name

The term Gaden Phodrang refers to the residential quarters of the Dalai Lama lineage from the second Dalai Lama onward at Drepung Monastery in Tibet. After the Potola Palace was built (by a decree of the fifth Dalai Lama), the Dalai Lamas moved away from these quarters, and stayed at Potola Palace in winter and Norbulingka (built by the seventh Dalai Lama about 100 years after Potola) in summer. This tradition was followed until the 14th Dalai Lama's escape from Lhasa to India in March 1959.

#### One of three institutions

The Gaden Phodrang Trust is one of three institutions associated with the Dalai Lama. Penpa Tsering, Sikyong (President) of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), said:

"There are three registered institutions that have the Holiness of the Dalai Lama. There is Gaden Phodrang Trust, which is a registered body in India and operates from the office of His Holiness [in Dharamshala], there is another Dharmapala, which [too] is a non-profit organisation, and the third is Gaden Phodrang Foundation, which is registered in Zurich."

The Gaden Phodrang Trust was registered in 2011 in Dharamshala with the aim of recognising the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. It is based in the office of

the Dalai Lama, and is managed by the former Kalon Tripa (head of the CTA) Prof Samdhong Rinpoche, a senior monk and a close confidant of the 14th Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama heads the trust, whose members include some other aides of the spiritual leader.

"What His Holiness reiterated today is that the institution of the Dalai Lama shall continue as per the traditions and practices of Tibetan Buddhism. There will be a 15th Dalai Lama, a 16th Dalai Lama and so on," Rinpoche said.

#### Gaden Phodrang Foundation

The foundation is a tax-exempt Swiss nonprofit with its registered office in Zurich, and is supervised by the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs. It is funded by charitable contributions made by the founder and the public.

The Dalai Lama is the founder and president of the foundation, and Tseten Samdup Chhoekeyapa (India), Kelang Cyaltsen (Switzerland), and Jamphel Lhundup (India), are itsco-vic-presidents.

The foundation says on its website that its aim is to maintain and support the tradition and institution of the Dalai Lama, and to promote basic human values, mutual understanding among religions, peace and non-violence, and protection of the environment.

While it works to preserve Tibetan culture and support the Tibetan people, the foundation also helps others in need, regardless of nationality or religion.

It seeks to promote better understanding between science and religion, supports efforts to provide access to knowledge from Buddhist science and philosophy, and funds a wide range of publications and translations.

#### The Dalai Lama Trust

The Dalai Lama Trust is a non-profit charitable organisation founded by the 14th Dalai Lama in 2009. It is headquartered in New Delhi but works with a range of partners internationally, too.

The purpose of the trust is to support the welfare of the Tibetan people and to promote human values, interfaith harmony, and world peace, which have been key elements of the Dalai Lama's lifelong mission.

The objectives of the trust are to support Tibetan students and scholars and fund schools and educational institutions, particularly those that preserve Tibetan culture and language, and to encourage secular ethics and compassion through global programs and initiatives.

VIDHATRI RAO  
NEW DELHI, JULY 2

IN TWO key copyright cases last week, US courts ruled in favour of tech companies developing artificial intelligence (AI) models. While the two judgments arrived at their conclusions differently, they are the first to address a central question around generative AI models: are these built on stolen creative work?

At a very basic level, AI models such as ChatGPT and Gemini identify patterns from massive amounts of data. Their ability to generate passages, scenes, videos, and songs in response to prompts depends on the quality of the data they have been trained on. This training data has thus far come from a wide range of sources, from books and articles to images and sounds, and other material available on the Internet.

There are at the moment at least 21 ongoing lawsuits in the US, filed by writers, music labels, and news agencies, among others, against tech companies for training AI models on copyrighted work. This, the petitioners have argued, amounts to "theft".

In their defence, tech companies say they are using the data to create "transformative" AI models, which falls within the ambit of "fair use" — a concept in law that permits use of copyrighted material in limited capacities for larger public interests (for instance, quoting a paragraph from a book for a review).

Here's what happened in the two cases, and why the judgments matter.

#### CASE 1: Writers vs Anthropic

In August 2024, journalist-writers Andrea Bartz, Charles Graeber, and Kirk Wallace Johnson filed a class action complaint — a case that represents a large group that could be/were similarly harmed — against Anthropic, the company behind the Claude family of Large Language Models (LLMs).

The petitioners argued that Anthropic downloaded pirated versions of their works, made copies of them, and "fed" these pirated copies into its models. They said that Anthropic has "not compensated the authors", and "compromised their ability to make a living as the LLMs allow anyone to generate — automatically and freely (or very cheaply) — texts that writers would otherwise be paid to create and sell".

Anthropic downloaded and used Book3 — an online shadow library of pirated books with about seven million copies — to train its models. That said, it also spent millions of dollars to purchase millions of printed books and scanned them digitally to create a general "research library" or "generalised data area".

Judge William Alsup of the District Court in the Northern District of California ruled on June 23 that Anthropic's use of copy-

## EXPLAINED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

# AI & copyright law

Are generative artificial intelligence models built on stolen creative work? The first two judgments addressing this question in US courts have sided with tech companies. But the matter is far from settled

### WHAT COURT SAID IN THE TWO CASES

#### ANTHROPIC CASE

■ Senior District Judge William Alsup said Anthropic's use of books was "fair use", arguing that the firm used them to create one of the most "transformational" technologies.

■ Judge Alsup also noted that like any reader aspiring to be a writer, Anthropic's LLMs "trained upon works" to "create something different".



#### META CASE

■ District Judge Vince Chhabria identified the potential harm of AI models, and said companies like Meta should compensate copyright holders.

■ However, as the authors failed to provide "meaningful" evidence on market dilution due to Meta's AI models, Judge Chhabria ruled in favour of the company.

### THE CASE AGAINST OPENAI IN INDIA

In 2024, news agency ANI moved a copyright infringement suit against OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. Other parties such as Federation of Indian Publishers and the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA), Indian Music Industry (IMI) too have moved applications in the suit, seeking to be made parties.

OpenAI, during the course of hearings, has made the following arguments.

■ That it is not storing data directly, and that there is no general prohibition on the use of data under copyright law, likening such use to "reading a book";

■ That Indian courts do not have jurisdiction on the matter since

OpenAI has no office in the country, the pre-training processes take places outside India, and training data is stored on foreign servers;

■ That OpenAI has refined its models to prevent regurgitation, and following the pre-training phase, OpenAI's models do not have access to the original training data — meaning the responses a user generates on ChatGPT do not directly take from copyrighted material; and

■ That OpenAI is not a material rival of ANI; it linked the sources of information from which it generated data.

It is yet to be seen how judgments in the US will play out in Indian courts. The next hearing on the matter is scheduled for July 4.

righted data was "fair use", centering his argument around the "transformative" potential of AI.

Alsup wrote: "Like any reader aspiring to be a writer, Anthropic's LLMs trained upon works not to race ahead and replicate or supplant them — but to turn a hard corner and create something different. If this training process reasonably required making copies within the LLM or otherwise, those copies were engaged in a transformative use."

#### CASE 2: Writers vs Meta

Thirteen published authors, including comedian Sarah Silverman and Ta-Nehisi

Coates of *Black Panther* fame, filed a class action suit against Meta, arguing they were "entitled to statutory damages, actual damages, restitution of profits, and other remedies provided by law".

The thrust of their reasoning was similar to what the petitioners in the Anthropic case had argued: Meta's Llama LLMs "copied" massive amounts of text, with its responses only being derived from the training dataset comprising the authors' work.

Meta too trained its models on data from Books3, as well as on two other shadow libraries — Anna's Archive and Libgen. However, Meta argued in court that it had "post-trained"

its models to prevent them from "memorising" and "outputting certain text from their training data, including copyrighted material". Calling these efforts "mitigations", Meta said it "could not go as far as to generate more than 50 words and punctuation marks..." from the books of the authors that had sued it.

In a ruling given on June 25, Judge Vince Chhabria of the Northern District of California noted that the plaintiffs were unable to prove that Llama's works diluted their markets. Explaining market dilution in this context, he cited the example of biographies. If an LLM were to use copyrighted biographies to train itself, it could, in theory, generate an endless number of biographies which would severely harm the market for biographies. But this does not seem to be the case thus far.

However, while Chhabria agreed with Alsup that AI is groundbreaking technology, he also said that tech companies who have minted billions of dollars because of the AI boom should figure out a way to compensate copyright holders.

#### Significance of rulings

These judgments are a win for Anthropic and Meta. That said, both companies are not entirely scot-free: they still face questions regarding the legality of downloading content from pirated databases.

Anthropic also faces another suit from music publishers who say Claude was trained on their copyrighted lyrics. And there are many more such cases in the pipeline.

Twelve separate copyright lawsuits filed by authors, newspapers, and other publishers — including one high-profile lawsuit filed by The New York Times — against OpenAI and Microsoft are now clubbed into a single case. OpenAI is also being separately sued by publishing giant Ziff Davis.

A group of visual artists is suing image generating tools Stability AI, Runway AI, Deviant Art, and Midjourney for training their tools on their work. Stability AI is also being sued by Getty Images for violating its copyright by taking more than 12 million of its photographs.

In 2024, news agency ANI filed a case against OpenAI for unlawfully using Indian copyrighted material to train its AI models. The Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA), along with some of its members, which include The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, and NDTV, later joined the proceedings. Going forward, this is likely to be a major issue in India too.

Thus, while significant, the judgments last week do not settle questions surrounding AI and copyright — far from it.

And as AI models keep getting better, and spit out more and more content, there is also the larger question at hand: where does AI leave creators, their livelihoods, and more importantly, creativity itself?

# Punjab's land pooling policy & its criticism

### KANCHANVASDEV

CHANDIGARH, JULY 2

A LAND pooling policy, meant to acquire more than 40,000 acres of farmland for housing purposes, has triggered protests in Punjab. Here's why.

#### The policy

The Land Pooling Policy, 2025 is a flagship initiative of the Punjab government with the stated aim of promoting "planned urban development". Unlike in traditional land acquisition, where the state simply acquires land for compensation, the pooling initiative is meant to be voluntary.

The policy seeks to check the proliferation of illegal colonies and arrest haphazard urban growth, while ensuring landowners

remain stakeholders in development, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has said.

For every 1 acre of land pooled, landowners will get a 1,000 sq yard residential plot and a 200 sq yard commercial plot (1 acre=4,840 sq yards). In the case of larger contributions, for every 9 acres of pooled land the landowners will get 3 acres of developed land, 50 acres for group housing, for 50 acres pooled, they will get 30 acres of developed land.

The policy is currently being rolled out in 27 cities across Punjab, in districts such as Ludhiana (24,000 acres targeted), Mohali (6,000 acres), Amritsar (4,464 acres), Jalandhar, Patiala, Bathinda, and Sangrur.

#### The politics

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government

in Punjab is looking to generate roughly Rs 20,000 to 25,000 crore from the land pooling. With state elections set to take place by March 2027, the government has roughly a year-and-a-half to rule before the model code of conduct kicks in.

### EXPLAINED POLITICS

Forcible land acquisition is a long process susceptible to arduous legal wrangling. The government anticipates that the voluntary pooling route will cut short the time for land acquisition while simultaneously helping generate funds for the cash-strapped state, sources said.

These funds, sources indicate, might be used to finance the AAP government's ambitious pre-pol promise of paying a monthly sum of Rs 1,000 to all women in the state.

Experts, however, argue that the policy

needlessly diverts fertile agricultural land for urban use. "By diverting almost 40,000 acres from agriculture to cities, we will lose almost 1.50 lakh tons of paddy production. Unfortunately, in most parts, the land is fertile," one expert told *The Indian Express*.

Punjab BJP Chief Sunil Jakhar has called this a "ponzi scheme", and accused the government of exploiting farmers with false promises. SAD President Sukbir Singh Badal has announced statewide protests against the move, calling it a "land-grabbing scheme" designed to raise Rs 10,000 crore through bribes and benefit private developers.

Critics say that the policy, based on the Punjab Regional Town Planning and Development Act, 1995, lacks the safeguards for compensation and resettlement provided under the Central Land Acquisition Act of 2013.

# SC to decide: Are guidelines for obtaining caste certificates discriminatory?

### AMAAAL SHEIKH

NEW DELHI, JULY 2

THE SUPREME Court last month flagged the lack of guidelines for issuance of Other Backward Classes (OBC) certificates for children of single mothers.

What is the case about? And how have courts ruled on similar cases in the past?

#### The case

A Bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and N Kottiswar Singh was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) challenging the Delhi Revenue Department's existing guidelines on the issuance of OBC certificates.

Current guidelines require a copy of the father's (or other paternal blood relatives') OBC certificate to be attached to the application form. This, the petitioner submitted,

stands in violation of a child's fundamental rights to equality and personal liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. She argued that children raised by single mothers must be allowed to inherit her caste.

Additional Solicitor General S D Sanjay, appearing for the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, informed the apex court that these guidelines were based on the SC's 2012 judgment in *Rameshbhai Dabhihi Nafli vs State of Gujarat*.

This case pertained to the caste status of children born from inter-caste marriages, specifically between Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) and non SC/ST partners.

The SC had held that while each situation must be assessed based on its facts, as a general principle, a woman who marries a man of a different caste cannot take on the caste of her husband, although a child born

from such a marriage would typically inherit their father's caste.

"...There may be a presumption that the child has the caste of the father. This presumption may be stronger in the case where, in inter-caste marriage, the husband belongs to a forward caste. But by no means the presumption is conclusive or irrebuttable..." the SC had held.

The primary exception to the presumption was a situation where a couple is separated or divorced, and the child is solely raised by a mother belonging to the SC/ST community.

"...It is open to the child of such marriage to lead evidence to show that he/she was brought up by the mother who belonged to the scheduled caste/scheduled tribe," the Court had held in 2012.

### EXPLAINED LAW

#### Other rulings

A single judge Bench of the Delhi High Court, in *Rumy Chowdhury v The Department of Revenue, Government of NCT Delhi* (2019), heard challenges to the Delhi Government's guidelines on issuance of a caste certificate that requires the applicant

to produce a certificate of a paternal blood relative.

The petitioner, an Indian Air Force officer, from the SC community had had two sons from her marriage with a forward caste man. But since she had been her children's sole caregiver, the petitioner claimed that her sons were entitled to an SC certificate. The Executive Magistrate rejected her request, and the Delhi HC upheld this order.

This decision was appealed in 2020, wherein the division Bench of the Delhi HC

determined that for children to inherit the mother's caste, they have to produce cogent evidence of being subjected to deprivation and disadvantages.

Since the mother in this case could provide a decent life to her kids, the court held that "issuance of a caste certificate... would result in depriving a genuine SC person of an opportunity to claim entitlement to the limited number of SC seats reserved in higher education and in service, thereby causing a setback to the equality goal enshrined in the Constitution".

In 2024, the Gauhati High Court in the case of *Smti Moonsoon Barkakoti v The State Of Assam* declared the validity of a Junior Grade officer's OBC certificate which she had inherited from her mother, even though her father was from the general category.

In this case, the Gauhati HC upheld the

enquiry report that verified that the officer was born in the community of her mother, and consequently suffered from disadvantages while growing up. The court reaffirmed that caste identity in inter-caste scenarios depends on actual lived experience and community integration, not just paternal lineage.

Given that High Courts have differed on the matter, and existing guidelines laid down by the SC in *Rameshbhai Dabhihi Nafli* have left scope for ambiguity, the apex court once again has a decision to make. It will have to determine whether existing guidelines are indeed discriminatory and against fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution, and provide clarity on how these rules should be framed going forward.

The matter has been listed for a detailed hearing on July 22.



## Wither vanity metrics

Start-up investors are becoming even more demanding for all the right reasons

**F**UND MANAGERS HAVE been tightening their purse strings over the last couple of years, investing in only those ventures they felt would be able to turn profitable sooner rather than later. But they are becoming even more demanding on targets and timelines, as a report in this newspaper showed on Wednesday. Investors are not just willing to go by a promoter's estimate of revenue potential, they want to be convinced the brand is a good fit for the market and that customers will be sticky. They are also poring over spreadsheets to make sure the financial forecasts aren't flaky. A consumer tech start-up needs to have ₹16-20 crore in annual revenues to be able to raise Series A money; two years ago, it could have done so with half the revenues. Vanity metrics like gross merchandise value are out of the window. So, unless a promoter can prove he has a sound business model and can deliver the numbers, he's unlikely to get a cheque.

Indeed, the data on investments is sobering. In June, venture capital flows into start-ups tickled down to \$460 million. That's the smallest sum in 12 months, according to data from Tracxn. In fact, the first half of 2025 has seen funding falling a sharp 25% year-on-year to just \$4.8 billion. Private equity (PE) investments too appear to be slowing. The combined PE and venture capital (VC) inflows plummeted more than 40% in the first half of 2025 to just under \$15 billion, data from Venture Intelligence shows. Fintechs appear to be cornering a fair share of the pickings while AI startups are the other favourites. The many down- rounds are also an indication of how investors are taking a good hard look at valuations; some businesses are now valued at a tenth of the original amount.

It's no surprise investors are waking up to smell the coffee. Too many ventures that looked promising have lost their way. It's not just the more high profile names like Byju's, but many others that are waiting to implode. With investors insisting the molder cash burn to stop, companies have been compelled to cut back on expenses, even if that has meant a slower top line growth. In FY24, for instance, India's top unicorns reported a growth in revenues of just 5.5%, way below the growth of 32% in the previous year. That helped narrow the losses sharply to about ₹15,000 crore from nearly ₹23,000 crore in FY24. That's good going, but it is early days, and we need to how these start-ups fare in the days ahead.

Nonetheless, with much of the exuberance having evaporated, we can hope for some promising plays valued reasonably. At least a dozen start-ups are readying to debut on the bourses, armed with clearances from the regulator. Their offerings are likely to get a good response from investors. To be sure, the performance of listed start-ups has been somewhat mixed—PayTm trades at half its IPO price while Ola's value has eroded by more than 40% from the IPO price. But investors of Eternal have been handsomely rewarded. By one estimate, the market cap of VC-backed start-ups should double to about \$200 billion in two years with 38 more listings. That may not be a very big share of India's total market cap of \$5.4 trillion, but it's been just a few years since start-ups have been going public.

## Stablecoins are waking up Wirecard-scarred Germany

**GERMAN FINANCIAL REGULATOR** BaFin doesn't seem to be hyped up when it comes to stablecoins—blockchain issued cryptocurrencies designed to mimic the dollar—whose potential in payments has whipped up enthusiasm on the stock market. After a first warning against a Frankfurt-based stablecoin issuer called Ethena, which BaFin accused of serious organisational shortcomings and breaches of European Union crypto rules, the regulator last week instructed it to wind up business.

No doubt BaFin is trying to make up for the spectacular collapse of payments processor Wirecard AG five years ago, the biggest fraud in German history. Back then, BaFin was very much in a hyped-up mood, defending a national financial technology darling instead of digging into whistleblower allegations about its operations that proved correct. The regulator's new boss has been cracking the whip since, and not just in stablecoins: Its 2023 pressure on France's Wirecard SA for failing to take action against fraudsters is still reverberating today as the company faces a probe in Belgium over new allegations (though it has denied wrongdoing).

Whether rooted in muscle-flexing or not, BaFin is right to send up a warning on enforcement as a racy technology promises to revolutionize how we pay and disrupt the old guard of payments firms. The past decade's increased shift to a cashless economy has hooked us on the speed and convenience of 24/7 tapping, swiping and shopping online—all fueling growth of fintech firms like Adyen NV that help shuffle electronic money from A to B—but it's also exposed us to increasingly sophisticated online hacks, heists and fraud amounting to over £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) a year in the UK alone. Fraud rates are generally low at around 0.1% of card spend, yet regulators have faced pushback when trying to prioritise safety over speed, such as via extra authentication.

Stablecoins have similar tradeoffs, despite the reassuring name. Fictitious expectations that this market could soar to \$1.6 trillion by 2030 are fueled by optimism over its speed, low cost and 24/7 availability in cross-border payments. Yet a Bank of Canada paper in 2022 warned faster and cheaper didn't necessarily mean safer, with stablecoins "the your own bank" philosophy meaning victims of fraud are less protected than if paying by Mastercard or account-to-account payments. Not to mention the risk of stolen funds and hacks that comes with the crypto territory. The majority of illicit activity on the blockchain is through stablecoins, according to money-laundering watchdog FATF, which pointed out last month that criminals too want to reduce costs and maximise profits. At what point do perceived speed and efficiency become self-defeating?

As seen in stablecoin firm Circle Internet Group Inc's exuberant stock price, the hope is that mainstream adoption will come with regulation. Payments company Stripe Inc. is launching stablecoin-funded accounts in over 100 countries and partnering with Visa Inc., while banks are discussing whether to enter a market that hopes to eat their lunch.

But this requires regulators to be on top of their game in a stablecoin world that University of Lausanne Professor Garen Markarian describes as the "Wild West." Not all signs are reassuring. In the UK, the payments regulator has been folded into the Financial Conduct Authority to favor growth and reduce regulatory "congestion." Meanwhile, in the EU, the fragmented nature of regulatory means that BaFin's crackdowns look very different to the digital-quick-currency regulatory approvals seen in Malta, described by one executive as "like ordering food in McDonald's." And all this in a world where Tether Holdings SA, the biggest issuer of stablecoins, with a \$150 billion circulation, is based in El Salvador and has yet to be fully audited.

Let's hope there won't need to be another Wirecard to serve as a digital-payments wake-up call.



LIONEL LAURENT  
Bloomberg

**F**OR ANYONE WHO is plucked by US President Donald Trump's deceptive diplomacy, where 'strategic ambiguity' is a policy choice, his volte face on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) offers key insights. During the recently-held NATO summit in The Hague, perhaps the biggest development was Trump's metamorphosed views that NATO remains relevant for the US. A strong signal from the NATO countries that its European members have reached a near union on spending close to 5% of their GDP on defence, compelling a change of heart in Trump. In what has been seen as very encouraging by member countries, Trump referred to NATO as not a 'rip off' anymore and reaffirmed US' commitment to it. These developments provided a positive appraisal of the transatlantic relations, especially against the stark background of a consistent broadside since the beginning of the second Trump administration, inflicted by Vice President JD Vance's Munich Security Conference speech earlier this year. Whether this sentiment from the Oval Office will remain consistent for the remainder of Trump's term may be anyone's guess but the Hague summit's new promise on burden sharing across the Atlantic is historic and marks a new era in NATO's evolution as a leading collective security organisation.

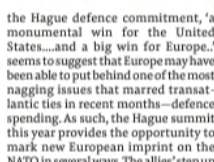
The Hague defence commitment this year promises to increase defence spending by NATO member countries to 5% of GDP by 2035, out of which 3.5% will be allocated to core defence needs and the rest to related aspects of security such as infrastructure, intelligence, cybersecurity, etc. By the end of this year, NATO expects all allies to meet or exceed at least 2% of GDP expenditure on defence. These commitments are broadly distributed

## HARSH V PANT VIVEK MISHRA

Respectively vice president: studies and foreign policy and fellow, Americas, ORF

across three domains—deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. Perhaps the single most important trend coming out of the Hague summit was how Europe's intentions to spend more on collective defence resonated with global spending trends. Beside political signalling and repercussions for transatlantic ties, the NATO summit this year is reflective of a broader trend—the surge in global defence spending. Compared to the Cold War period between 1970-1990, global defence spending as a percentage of GDP halved from 3.6% to 1.9% between 2010-2019. This trend, however, is reversing rapidly, with global military expenditures crossing \$2700 billion in 2024. In 2024, global defence spending, which increased by more than 8% and was backed by augmented European commitments, is likely to scale further. While much of this trend has been churned and fuelled by the ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East, the former's aim for an ambitious defence package through its ReArm Europe or Readiness 2030 plan and the US' decision to increase its defence budget to almost \$1 trillion may hasten the end of the 'era of the peace dividend'.

Trump's report card that the summit was 'a very historic milestone' and



Over the next decade, efforts to consolidate transatlantic security are likely to reverberate along opposing axes

the Hague defence commitment, 'a monumental win for the United States... and a big win for Europe.' seems to suggest that Europe may have been able to put behind one of the most nagging issues that marred transatlantic ties in recent months—defence spending. As such, the Hague summit this year provides the opportunity to mark new European imprint on the NATO in several ways. The allies' step up in their financial commitments towards boosting collective defence may be Europe's moment of renaissance in restoring the transatlantic politico-security equilibrium. Besides, the ability to spend more by NATO members could also mean greater leverage in deciding the course of such expenditure. For instance, in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, Europe's trajectory would have been completely different, had NATO members been spending at 5% of their GDPs on defence. The major question for Europe, as for the US, is managing fiscal sustainability and nursing high levels of public debt internally alongside increased spending on defence and security.

Despite a positive appraisal by Trump and increased defence spending, Europe's woes are far from over. The Hague defence commitment takes

a long time in seeking to achieve the stated 5% mark with some countries like Spain and Italy remaining somewhat sceptic. Riding on these concerns is Trump's inconsistency and unpredictability, which could hyphenate Washington's other impediments apropos of Europe, with its collective security commitments and the lack thereof, bringing ties back to the drawing board.

The Hague summit spurred a critical moment in the evolution of NATO and collective security. Trump's ire, after all, is not seen as a negative development for Europe entirely, but rather a jolt that Brussels needed. However, by aligning itself with the world more closely with increased defence spending, Europe may well be on its course to change its image as a peaceful continent—an image led by a vibrant economic union like no other.

At the global level, these changes converge with NATO's emerging intent to pivot eastward and deepen engagement with countries in the Indo-Pacific, albeit not directly in the realm of defence and security. While Trump may have framed NATO's budget realignments as a victory for the US, the political, security, and economic recalibrations underway within the alliance could significantly reshape NATO's profile, particularly from a European standpoint. Over the next decade, efforts to consolidate transatlantic security are likely to reverberate along opposing axes, with China, Russia and North Korea coordinating strategies to counter the West. NATO's growing defence expenditure is poised to intensify a range of geopolitical dynamics in the years ahead—chief among them being escalating great power competition, rapid innovation in defence and technology, and the deepening fracture of the world order.

## Holding firm on agri red lines



### N CHANDRA MOHAN

The writer is an economics and business commentator based in New Delhi

**FARMER UNIONS** ARE restive over the trade deals being negotiated by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government and seek consultations before they are inked. Their opposition is not just to the current deals being negotiated, but all the major deals that have been signed in the past, like the ones with Sri Lanka and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—they led to the dumping of cheap commercial crops like tea, coffee, pepper, and rubber that adversely impacted farmer incomes. The dairy industry's apprehensions regarding stiff competition in milk and milk products from Australia and New Zealand were responsible for India walking out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) at the eleventh hour.

For such reasons, India's trading stance has been defensive, and it has not seized the emerging opportunities. Farmer unions are concerned about the relentless pressure from the US to open up the country's agricultural sector. It is a very big red line for the government, as it scrambles to ink an interim deal with the US for averting the threat of reciprocal tariffs. The worry is that it may capitulate to American demands. As the ongoing talks enter the final stretch, this is indeed a sensitive issue—especially the US' demand for lower duties on genetically modified (GM) maize and soybean which are not allowed under Indian regulations. On this, progress has

hit a roadblock. Farmer unions are apprehensive that allowing greater market access for US soybean, for instance, could adversely impact small and marginal farmers. Around 6 million farmers who cultivate this crop will be affected with soybean prices of US origin, currently ruling around \$390 per tonne as against our minimum support prices of \$620 a tonne, according to an article in the *Financial Express*. Cheaper imports at lower tariffs will thus affect domestic cultivation. This is why the red line for the government is not to expose the country's agricultural sector to imports from large US farms whose size averages 466 acres, as compared to less than 2.7 acres for our small and marginal farmers.

The question naturally is whether India can ink any free trade agreement (FTA) or interim deal without agriculture being on the table. It is mostly unlikely, as our most favoured nation tariffs on agricultural goods is 39.6%—which is eight times higher than what the US charges—and the US secretary of commerce, Howard Lutnick, has clearly indicated that India's tariffs must come down and that flexible strategies, including setting quotas, could be adopted to address sensitivities. Experts like Ashok Gulati argue that

the sector is not as vulnerable as popularly believed, as 40% of India's agriculture is reasonably competitive. On sensitive items like wheat and dairy items like skimmed milk powder, India could negotiate tariff rate quotas to provide greater access for US produce.

Any trade negotiation entails a process of give and take for greater access to each other's market. Freer trade in farm and dairy produce is no exception, although it is a no-brainer that the interests of small and marginal farmers must be protected. But what is it that we can export to the US in return for allowing more access to our market? Gulati suggests that we must push the US on preferential market access for high-value horticultural products such as bananas, mangoes, grapes, and pomegranates, which have long faced regulatory hurdles in the US. In return, we can lower duties on walnuts, apples, cranberries, and blueberries, which we do not produce or so in limited quantities.

Being a demander in negotiations suggests a different construction to opening up India's agricultural sector than reflexively defending it at all costs. The sector has shown resilience and is an important part of the country's growth story. Agriculture registered growth of 4.6% in FY25, with a

decadal expansion of a similar magnitude. Official expectations are that 5% growth is feasible and vital for India becoming a developed nation by 2047. Union agriculture minister Shriya Chouhan has stated that the nation aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy, agriculture must contribute \$1 trillion, up from the current levels of \$637 billion.

Faster agricultural growth, in turn, has been associated with a rising share of the non-crop sectors like livestock (with milk production remaining dominant), fishing, and aquaculture in the overall gross value output for agriculture and allied activities. Although the share of the crop sector has declined, it still remains the largest contributor—comprising cereals, pulses, oilseeds, other field crops, and horticulture. The former are grown in 92% of gross cropped area and by a vast majority of farmers in the countryside. High-value horticultural crops like fruits and vegetables (and spices) have rapidly gained ground and are as important as cereals in the crop sector's output.

Consulting with farmer unions and getting them on board is a recipe for successful trade negotiations as opposed to presenting the deals to them as a fait accompli. Farmer unions have vowed to put up a united front against the deals being currently negotiated as they fear that their interests may be hurt if the red line does not hold.

Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Digital India: The road ahead

Apropos of 'A decade of Digital India' (FE, July 2), since its inception in 2015, Digital India has revolutionised the way citizens interact with services. Digital transactions, especially via United Payments Interface (UPI), have become a part of daily life for millions, with India now leading the world in real-time digital payments. Public services such as education,

healthcare, and banking have become more accessible and transparent, showcasing the true potential of technology in governance. However, the benefits are not evenly distributed. A significant digital divide persists—recent data indicates that a large number of women in villages still do not own mobile phones, limiting their participation in the digital economy. Moreover, digital infrastructure in schools remains inadequate, with less than 60% having

access to computers or internet connectivity. In its next decade, Digital India must bridge these gaps. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### Privatising discoms

Apropos of 'Benefits of privatising discoms' (FE, July 2), the UP government's decision to privatise two of its four electricity distribution companies draws mixed responses. The loss-making entities, under efficient private management, will get

proper governance and efficient distribution which may turn the tides. The unnecessary subsidies will be cut off, costs will be reduced, and the public will benefit from better power supply. At the same time, a monopoly may be created by the bidders. The UP government is shrewd by keeping 49% of the stakes. The new model may give the desired result. —N R Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at [feletters@expressindia.com](mailto:feletters@expressindia.com)



## BRICS as growth catalyst

India Inc must deepen its participation in the bloc

Manish Singhal

The BRICS grouping — comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran — continues to emerge as a key force shaping a more equitable global order.

Representing nearly 55 per cent of the global population and nearly 40 per cent of the world's GDP, exceeding that of the G7, BRICS has emerged as a formidable bloc for political and diplomatic coordination among Global South nations.

For India, BRICS is a vital economic conduit to reshape global economic governance. Indian industry plays a central role in this transformation, using BRICS-led initiatives to expand market access, influence regional value chains, and tap into innovative financing through institutions like the New Development Bank. BRICS directly complements India's long-term agenda of sustainability, digital leadership, and inclusive growth, making Indian enterprise a key driver of the bloc's future direction.

As BRICS evolves into a more structured and action-oriented platform, Indian industry must deepen its participation. While currently led by select organisations, there is a growing need for broader and more inclusive industry participation across all BRICS Business Council working groups.

### STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

By participating in BRICS mechanisms and platforms, India gains a platform to advocate for a more multipolar world order and reforms in global institutions like the WTO, IMF, and UN. A stronger voice in global governance benefits Indian industry by ensuring fairer trade rules, better dispute settlement mechanisms, and more balanced development policies.

BRICS cooperation encourages regional and inter-regional value chains, reducing over-dependence on Western supply chains — especially as Europe and the Americas account for nearly 32 per cent of India's imports.

With global trade dynamics evolving, BRICS provides Indian exporters access to diverse and expanding markets beyond traditional Western partners. This holds value for sectors like agri-tech, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, IT services, and



BRICS. A vital platform for Indian industry. GETTY IMAGES

textiles. Deliberations on sustainable food systems, rural livelihoods, and infrastructure development reflect India's broader vision for enhancing its role in global value chains and promoting inclusive economic growth. To promote financial resilience and reduce over-reliance on dominant global currencies, BRICS nations are exploring mechanisms for enhanced intra-BRICS trade settlements in neutral currencies or through bilateral/multilateral escrow arrangements. India, with its growing trade footprint within BRICS, stands to benefit from such initiatives which can lower transaction costs and enhance trade predictability. The current intra-BRICS trade stands at more than \$600 billion, with significant potential to grow beyond this value.

A harmonised BRICS customs ecosystem — including Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), streamlined documentation, and the elimination of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) — is essential to facilitate smoother trade flows. Indian exporters, especially SMEs, will greatly benefit from simplified compliance and predictable market access across BRICS economies.

With growing global disillusionment around the effectiveness of climate negotiations under the COP framework — especially in light of waning commitment from developed nations — the BRICS bloc must consider a self-driven climate fund and action agenda. India can champion collaborative climate resilience projects, green finance mechanisms, and technology sharing to meet mutual sustainability goals within BRICS, aligning with its own Panchamrit targets.

The BRICS Business Forum 2025, to be held on July 5 in Rio de Janeiro, offers a vital platform for Indian industry to lead dialogue, drive partnerships, and influence policy direction.

The writer is Secretary General, ASSOCHAM

# Fragility in current account surplus

RED FLAGS. Vulnerabilities visible in merchandise trade, capital inflows, and domestic demand



DHYANJAY SINHA

India's balance of payments (BoP) recorded a \$13.5 billion current account surplus in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2025 (Q4FY25), equivalent to 1.3 per cent of GDP. This surplus, driven by robust services exports and remittances, paints a picture of external sector strength.

However, it conceals significant vulnerabilities in merchandise trade, capital inflows, and domestic demand. In fiscal year 2025 (FY25), the current account deficit (CAD) moderated to -0.6 per cent of GDP, an unusual outcome for a growing economy with strong GDP figures.

This piece delves into the structural weaknesses beneath this surplus, highlighting India's over-reliance on services and remittances, declining foreign direct investment (FDI), and inconsistent policy responses that threaten long-term stability.

### RISE IN DEPENDENCE

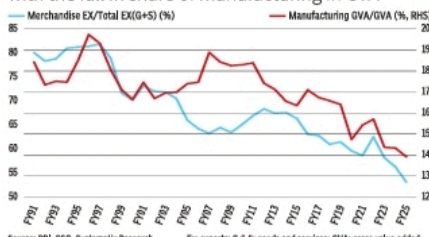
The current account surplus is primarily fuelled by services exports and remittances. In FY25, net services exports surged by 25 per cent, reaching \$188.5 billion, with \$3.3 billion in Q4 alone. Business services grew by an impressive 112 per cent in Q4, while software services maintained steady growth at 12 per cent.

Net transfers, predominantly remittances, rose by 16.6 per cent in FY25, with a 9.7 per cent year-on-year increase in Q4, providing stable inflows less tied to domestic GDP fluctuations. Services now account for 47 per cent of India's total exports of goods and services, underscoring a growing dependence on the global economic environment.

In contrast, merchandise exports have stagnated, despite initiatives like Make in India, production-linked incentives (PLIs), vigorously pursued various free trade agreements (FTAs), and corporate tax cuts aimed at boosting manufacturing. Goods exports contribute only 53 per cent to total exports, a 35-year low, down from 67 per cent in FY13 and 81 per cent in FY96. This decline mirrors the fall in manufacturing's share of India's gross value added (GVA) to 13.9 per cent, a 66-year low, compared to a peak of 20 per cent in FY96.

World Bank data reveals that 103 out of 200 countries saw an increase in manufacturing's GVA share over the past decade, while India and China experienced declines, possibly linked to China's deindustrialisation and dumping of goods in Indian markets.

## Decline in share of goods to total exports coincides with the fall in share of manufacturing in GVA



## Trend decline in foreign investments/GDP since FY13, lowest in FY25



Intensifying global trade protectionism further threatens India's manufacturing competitiveness.

India's merchandise trade deficit widened to \$287 billion in FY25 (7.3 per cent of GDP), though it narrowed to \$58.7 billion in Q4 from \$78.7 billion in Q3. Merchandise exports contracted by 4.3 per cent in Q4, while imports grew by 1.2 per cent, leading to a 1.1 per cent contraction in overall trade.

Since the post-Covid peak in FY23, exports and imports have remained flat, with compound annual growth rates (CAGR) of -0.13 per cent and -0.19 per cent, respectively. The merchandise trade-to-GDP ratio has plummeted to 28 per cent from 37 per cent in Q2FY23, and including services, the total trade-to-GDP ratio

fell to 43.2 per cent in Q4 from 52.6 per cent in Q2FY23, reverting to pre-Covid levels. This decline in trade openness signals fading post-pandemic gains and raises concerns about India's integration into global markets. A potential global GDP slowdown could further erode services exports, risking a wider CAD in the future.

Remittances, a key pillar of India's external balance, grew by 17 per cent in FY25.

While stable and less sensitive to domestic growth, their dependence on global economic conditions exposes India to external shocks. Any disruption in global labour markets or economic slowdowns in key remittance-sending countries could destabilise these inflows, undermining the current account surplus.

India's policy response has been inconsistent, combining aggressive fiscal consolidation that suppresses demand with excessive monetary easing to encourage leveraged consumption

### RISE IN REPATRIATION

Net capital account inflows plummeted by \$1 per cent in FY25 to \$16.7 billion, driven by a 90 per cent contraction in both FDI (\$0.95 billion) and foreign portfolio investment (FPI) inflows (\$3.56 billion).

Net FDI inflows reached their lowest level since FY01, averaging \$20 billion, a 97 per cent drop from the FY21 peak of \$44 billion.

The FDI inflow-to-GDP ratio fell to a historic low of 0.04 per cent in FY25, compared to 3.5 per cent in FY09.

Gross FDI into India rose by 13.7 per cent to \$81 billion, but repatriation surged by 16 per cent to \$51.5 billion, with the repatriation-to-gross FDI ratio climbing to 63.5 per cent from 22 per cent in FY15.

Including repatriation of income, total repatriation reached \$104 billion, exceeding gross FDI inflows. This trend reflects diminishing long-term investment opportunities for foreign firms, compounded by weak domestic demand and global trade protectionism, which have also suppressed private capital expenditure by Indian companies for over a decade.

External commercial borrowing (ECB) surged fivefold year-on-year to \$7.8 billion in Q4FY25, the highest since Covid peaks. Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) accounted for 43 per cent of ECBs in FY25, despite the Reserve Bank of India's efforts to boost domestic liquidity and a weakening INR/USD. This reliance on ECBs highlights tight domestic financial conditions and underscores the economy's dependence on external financing to bridge gaps in domestic credit.

### POLICY INCONSISTENCIES

India's policy response has been inconsistent, combining aggressive fiscal consolidation that suppresses demand with excessive monetary easing to encourage leveraged consumption. These measures fail to address structural weaknesses. Stagnant income growth, sluggish bank lending, and subdued private investment reflect a fragile domestic economy. With global protectionism intensifying and economic slowdowns looming, India's reliance on simplistic monetary interventions is inadequate. A more robust policy framework is needed to enhance manufacturing competitiveness, boost domestic demand, and attract sustainable foreign investment.

India's \$13.5 billion current account surplus in Q4FY25 masks underlying vulnerabilities in merchandise trade, capital inflows, and domestic demand. Over-reliance on services exports and remittances exposes the economy to global slowdowns, while declining FDI and rising repatriation signal waning investment appeal. Stagnant trade, weak consumption, and inconsistent policies further highlight fragility. To ensure long-term stability, India must address structural challenges, reduce dependence on external factors, and adopt a cohesive policy framework that goes beyond monetary easing.

The writer is CEO & Co-Head of Equities & Head of Research, Systematic Group. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

July 3, 2005

### GE reaches settlement on Dabhol disputes

General Electric (GE) announced that it has reached a "comprehensive settlement" of its Dabhol-related disputes with the Centre, the Maharashtra Government and the Indian lenders to the Dabhol Power Company (DPC). The settlement includes financial consideration in partial payment of various contractor claims for work completed but not paid and in exchange for the transfer of GE's ownership interest in Dabhol, GE said in a release here.

### No 'compromise formula' yet on BHEL disinvestment

The proposed disinvestment of 10 per cent equity in public sector Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) is unlikely to take place in the near future, unless the Government takes on the political risk of glossing over the objections of the Left parties, which are providing outside support to it.

### Ratio of women in IT services rising steadily

It's no longer a man's world, and the signs of it are evident in the Indian IT services sector. Belying the trend in developed markets, the proportion of women in the Indian IT services workforce (excluding TEs/BPOs) is rising steadily, and may touch 30 per cent this year compared to 24 per cent in 2004.

Brody Ford  
Matt Day

Microsoft Corp. began job cuts that will impact about 9,000 workers, its second major wave of layoffs this year as it seeks to control costs while ramping up on artificial intelligence spending.

Less than 4 per cent of the company's total workforce will be impacted, a spokesperson said.

The cuts will have an impact across teams, geographies and tenure and are made in an effort to streamline processes and reduce layers of management, the spokesperson added.

"We continue to implement organisational changes necessary to best

position the company and teams for success in a dynamic marketplace," the spokesperson said.

The terminations follow an earlier round of layoffs in May that hit 6,000 people and fell hardest on product and engineering positions.

### SPIRALLING COSTS

Across the tech industry, companies are grappling with the spiralling costs of staying up to date in the artificial intelligence race, whether by training the large language models that underpin the technology, building servers and data centres, or developing AI applications.

After spending tens of billions of dollars on data centres and application development, Microsoft has



JOBS. In the firing line. REUTERS

pledged to Wall Street that it would put a lid on costs.

The reductions could help offset rising spending associated with the

AI infrastructure build-out, wrote Anurag Rana, an analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence.

They may also reflect a greater push to use AI tools internally, he said.

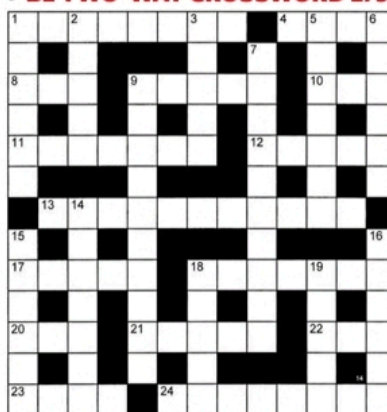
The company had 228,000 workers at the end of June 2024, 45,000 of them in sales and marketing.

Microsoft often restructures teams and announces other changes near the end of its fiscal year, which closes in June.

Microsoft's top sales executive, Judson Althoff, is planning to take a two-month sabbatical this month, Bloomberg reported last month.

The company has said its leave had been previously planned and that he will return in September. BLOOMBERG

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2731



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Get less (8)
- Second-hand (4)
- Arid (3)
- Rascal (5)
- Vase for ashes (3)
- Warship (7)
- Very bad (5)
- Proclaimed, published abroad (11)
- Concede, acknowledge (5)
- Bring into being (7)
- Health resort (3)
- Egg-producing gland (5)
- Label (3)
- Moral obligation (4)
- Uncovered (8)

#### DOWN

- Infer from what precedes (6)
- S American aquatic rodent (5)
- Sweetener (5)
- Mix at random (7)
- Hang loosely (6)
- Calumnious (10)
- The taking of something up again (10)
- Flat-topped defensive mound (7)
- Made to exist (6)
- Bordered, was on the edge of (6)
- Part of a denture (5)
- To such time as (5)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Get less seed, acre being ploughed up (8)
- Experienced American top journo (4)
- Use towel when no alcohol is supplied (3)
- Villain turns gold to half the guests (5)
- Don't start to incinerate the ballot-box (3)
- Weight of a boxer comes with craft (7)
- Very bad to break the law, but endless fun in it (5)
- Made widely known if grouped with malt this way (11)
- Have to own up to let one in (5)
- Yield, and put on a play (7)
- A healthy place for Protestant leader in South Africa (3)
- Nothing will change the producer of eggs (5)
- Label it a game children can play (3)
- What one should do is pay it on imports (4)
- Showed it could leave it out when in the red (8)

#### DOWN

- Work out logically the deed copper compounded (6)
- It supplies nutria to the bushful on the upturn (5)
- Flattery needs in stirring times? (5)
- Behave shifty but prepare to deal (7)
- Hang loose, and leg may get broken (6)
- Am first fed up with a Conservative hurting my reputation (10)
- Mute prison reform with its taking up again (10)
- Batter away at a bit of the fortification (7)
- Brought about as Duce ordered it (6)
- Was on the edge of greed, but changed after five (6)
- Pontius dropped one book illustration (5)
- To the time when the peacekeepers get it up (5)

## SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2730

ACROSS 1. Corpse 5. Cab 7. Tide 8. Clarinet 10. Corridor 11. Bean 13. Ensign 15. Switch 18. Form 19. Adorable 22. Reaction 23. Tuff 24. Mum 25. Wonderful  
DOWN 1. Cuticle 2. Radar 3. Callow 4. Ecu 5. Consent 6. Baton 9. Singe 12. Sworn 14. Sarcasm 16. Heedful 17. Adjoin 18. Forum 20. Bluff 21. Stow



thehindubusinessline.

THURSDAY • JULY 3, 2025

## Stable for now

But RBI flags geopolitics and PSB loan book as risks

**T**he risks to financial stability have increased in recent times — given the increase in geopolitical conflicts, disruptions caused by reciprocal tariff talks with the US and the re-alignment of trade and capital flows. The systemic risk survey conducted by the Reserve Bank of India in May this year highlights this growing uncertainty with all major risk groups being in the 'medium risk' category.

But there is no cause for alarm. Unlike in other turbulent periods, such as June 2022, domestic demand conditions are fairly robust. Domestic financial institutions have adequate capital buffers to withstand severe stress conditions. Yet, policymakers need to keep the ammunition ready to ensure financial stability, should the need arise. While the Financial Stability Report has flagged rising public debt as a problem globally, it points out that debt-to-GDP ratio and the ratio of interest payments to receipts is much lower in India vis-à-vis its emerging market peers. The Centre's resolve to improve the debt-to-GDP ratio also adds to the credibility of the financial system. However, a risk to financial stability could arise from overvaluation in stock markets. Earnings are growing at a far lower rate than what the share prices are building-in. Any adverse development increases the risk of a stock market crash.

Measures taken by the RBI in the past year such as increasing scrutiny on the retail loan portfolios of banks and NBFCs, cracking down on the lax on-boarding process for unsecured retail loans and tightening the rules for digital lending, have led to a deceleration in overall credit growth. But public sector banks appear to be still chasing high growth, which is reflected in their credit growth as well as uncertain asset quality. Year-on-year credit growth in public sector banks was at a higher 12.2 per cent in March 2025 quarter compared to growth of 8.9 per cent in private sector banks, and the overall growth of 11 per cent in scheduled commercial banks. The growth for PSBs appears to be led by retail credit which grew 17.7 per cent in the March 2025 quarter, while private and foreign banks witnessed a sharp degrowth in personal loans. Further, PSBs have witnessed a 21.3 per cent increase in unsecured personal loans.

The asset quality of public sector banks is a bit weaker than other groups. The GNPA and NNPA ratio of public sector banks was at a higher level of 2.8 per cent and 0.6 per cent, respectively. The proportion of GNPA being written off was also much lower in PSBs at 25.5 per cent in FY 25, compared to 45.3 per cent in private banks and 34 per cent in foreign banks. The GNPA in credit card loans of public sector banks has continued to grow in recent quarters, standing at 14.3 per cent in March 2025. The RBI should watch the loan portfolios of PSBs for potential vulnerabilities. The impact of supply chain disruption on debt servicing must be considered.

## POCKET

RAVINEANTH

RAM SINGH  
TUHEENA MUKHERJEE

**D**espite growing geopolitical alignment and shared strategic interests, India's trade negotiations with the US remain stuck in a quagmire.

Expecting a much-anticipated trade deal under Trump 2.0, India initiated a series of liberalisation measures including deep tariff reductions (whisky, automobiles, EV components), structural alignment with US digital trade norms (abolished equalisation levy and RuPay subsidies), and procedural reforms (proof of origin) to accommodate US exporters.

However, instead of reciprocating, the US responded with fresh punitive tariffs initially on steel and aluminium and then 26 per cent retaliatory tariffs, delays in FDA approvals, supply of F-404 Tejas engines, and restricted control on professional visas, advanced tech of AI, Quantum and drones.

This asymmetry in expectations versus outcomes has diluted trust, turning a potential partnership into a transactional stalemate.

Accordingly, let us decode the evolving political economy behind this gridlock, highlighting mismatched expectations and deliverables, divergent legal-political frameworks, contradicting the gains made in the last two decades in much-hyped geostrategic partnership.

The US engages in trade negotiations with a focus on enforceable commitments backed by domestic law, interest group pressure, and a historical preference for clarity and quantification — for instance, US focused on greater market access, strengthened intellectual property rights, greater agricultural access, transparent public procurement, services sector liberalisation, investment protection mechanisms and regulatory predictability and enforceability.

Illustratively, USTR's insistence on a steep tariff cut, aiming to reduce India's average applied tariffs from 13 per cent to below 4 per cent, was emblematic of this approach.

Similarly, demands for unambiguous rules on digital trade, such as unrestricted cross-border data flows and prohibition of data localisation, reflect US's global e-commerce agenda, furthering their agenda of IPEF/USMCA/DEPA, etc.

Further, leveraging flanking-attack strategy, the US initiated investigations and tariffs under Sections 301 and 232 on steel and aluminium, maximising its gains to extract associated compliance. As a result, negotiations outcomes remain governed by legalistic realism and domestic political cycles, with

relatively less room for relationship-based accommodation.

India, on the other hand, treats trade negotiations as instruments of industrial upgradation, prioritising its economic sovereignty and strategic autonomy. Its stance on data localisation, stemming from its forthcoming Digital India Act, aims to build a domestic digital ecosystem. Moreover, tariff liberalisation is calibrated based on domestic vulnerabilities, especially in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and SMEs.

India offered preferential or zero-duty access to more than 85 per cent of tariff lines, lowered duties on wines, almonds, pistachios, EV components, and amended origin rules, all while maintaining WTO consistency. India also withdrew the equalisation levy (META/Google, etc) and offered access in telecom and is committed to more purchases of US hydrocarbons and gold. Reciprocally, India expects recognition of its unique development status, emerging role in geostrategic balancing and corresponding flexibilities on concerns of its political economy, a supposition rarely acknowledged and understood by the US.

## MISALIGNED PERCEPTIONS

Despite making extensive concessions, Indian policymakers find themselves confronted with punitive US responses, 'take-it-or-leave-it' approach, threats to

**India has argued that its digital rules are still under legislative process, but the US interprets this as strategic delay**

## Decoding the US-India deadlock



## TRADE GRIDLOCK.

India's approach stands out in contrast to US' lobby-based push for quick outcomes

reimpose retaliatory tariffs from July 9, continued visa restrictions, and strategic hyphenation with Pakistan in State Department reports.

This pattern, when juxtaposed with India's patient consensus-building approach, is perceived as betrayal of 'Trust'. Trump's verbal overtures on India's tariffs, data and e-commerce regulations, regional peace further widened the divide.

Indian negotiators have argued that their digital rules are still under legislative process and deserved transitional treatment, but the US interpreted this as strategic delay.

Meanwhile, US negotiators viewed India's slow coordination, vague legal positions, WTO stance on steel duties, lukewarm defence procurement interest, and rigid demand for a zero-to-zero deal as lacking substance and undermining prospects for meaningful commercial outcomes.

The US's self-centred approach and push for its regulatory norms, ignoring India's cultural sensitivities on issues like blood-feed dairy and GM crops, has become a key obstacle under its standard FTA framework.

Further, India-US trade deadlock is deepened by contrasting negotiation styles and domestic political economies. India prefers long-term, trust-based economic partnerships grounded in strategic alignment, gradualism, and inclusivity.

In contrast, US trade policy is shaped by powerful lobbies in dairy, digital, and pharma sectors that demand swift, enforceable outcomes.

Washington's approach reflects a form of 'cold realism', prioritising short-term business gains, rigid deadlines, and transactional deliverables over mutuality and reciprocity. India's bureaucratic, consensus-driven process

often clashes with the US's centralised, fast-paced, and pressure-oriented tactics.

This fundamental divergence in perceptions continues to obstruct the path to a balanced and acceptable trade agreement.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Despite these divergences, the path to convergence lies in institutional innovation and cultural comprehension. Both countries should invest in joint pre-negotiation briefings, drawing lessons from platforms like the US-India CEO Forum, to harmonise priorities and timelines. No negotiation, especially when it is high in economic and political stakes for both parties, is possible in a 90-day time-window.

India could establish a permanent trade negotiation secretariat to fast-track inter-ministerial alignment. The US, in turn, could pursue early harvest agreements in non-sensitive sectors like electronics, AI services, and critical minerals, avoiding the all-or-nothing approach.

Clarifying annexes, technical side letters, and phased implementation protocols can help bridge interpretational gaps. Supplementing ongoing efforts, track 1.5 diplomacy, involving former diplomats, business leaders, and think-tanks, can supplement formal channels and build political trust. Any trade deal must be anchored on win-win principles of reciprocity, inclusiveness, transparency, aligning with long-term development and strategic goals.

Trust, not just tariffs, will determine the future of the India-US economic partnership. The ball is in the US's court.

The writers are on the faculty of IIFT, New Delhi. Views are personal

## Improving transparency in related party transactions

SEBI's new disclosure norms, to kick in from September 1, should encourage companies to comply and help curb scams

MOHAN R LAVI

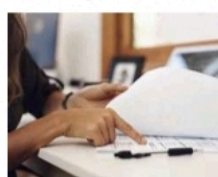
**C**ompanies enter into related party transactions mainly for two reasons — they cannot be avoided in an economy such as ours, and they are extremely convenient. Family-run businesses are common in India, and it is natural that there will be transactions between the parties. For a private limited company that does not need to have an audit committee, related party transactions are very convenient since no approvals are required, and financial emergencies can be resolved in a matter of minutes. Even companies that need to run their related party transactions through an audit committee for their approval, find it convenient to get an omnibus approval for the financial year.

Yet, the sheer convenience of related party transactions is also its major shortcoming. Wikipedia lists about 100-odd companies under the category "accounting scandals" — a majority of them would have had transactions with related parties that resulted in the accounting scandal. From Enron to Satyam and Luckin Coffee to Genol Engineering, related party transactions were the main cause of accounting scandals.

Luckin Coffee, once hailed as China's answer to Starbucks, became infamous for a major accounting scandal in 2020 involving fabricated sales and questionable related party transactions. Many of these fake transactions were routed through related parties, including suppliers and business affiliates with ties to company executives. Investigations revealed that Luckin used these entities to create the illusion of a booming business, overstating revenues and inflating operating metrics. Payments were allegedly recycled through related companies, making them appear as legitimate third-party sales.

## SURGE IN VALUATION

This manipulation misled investors and regulators, leading to a dramatic surge in the company's valuation prior to the scandal. The consequences were swift: the company's shares plummeted, it was delisted from the NASDAQ, and multiple executives were fired. Chinese regulators fined Luckin over \$8.98 million, while the US SEC imposed a \$180 million penalty for securities fraud. The Luckin Coffee case highlights the severe risks associated with inadequate disclosure and governance of related party transactions, especially in high-growth companies under pressure



TARGETING. Accounting scandals

to meet aggressive financial targets. Since it would be foolhardy to ban related party transactions, regulators have mandated proper identification, adequate disclosure and transactions at arm's length. For listed companies, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has been updating its disclosure requirements for related party transactions at frequent intervals. For listed entities, a new set of requirements kick in from September 1. The framework categorises related party transactions by size and type, triggering varied disclosure levels.

Material transactions have been defined to be those exceeding ₹1,000 crore or 10 per cent of consolidated turnover (whichever is lower), or 5 per cent of turnover in royalty/brand deals.

These require audit committee and shareholder approval, with comprehensive disclosures. Promoter-related transactions (non-material but promoter-linked) have been defined to be those exceeding lower of 2 per cent of turnover, 2 per cent of net worth, or 5 per cent of average PAT. These transactions require audit committee approval, comprehensive disclosures.

Residual transactions are those that are less than ₹1 crore per year — these require limited and minimum disclosures. The disclosures vary — minimum, limited, or comprehensive — reflecting the transaction's quantum, nature and stakeholder involvement. Shareholder notices for material RPTs must include the commentary of the audit committee, valuations, bid comparisons (especially royalty), and QR-code access. By anchoring disclosure tiers to clear monetary cut-offs, SEBI ensures transparency, yet without imposing a one-size-fits-all burden.

The disclosure norms may encourage companies to comply and not connive. However, if another big incident takes place involving RPTs, regulators will be forced to act differently, which could include surprise audits of RPTs.

The writer is a chartered accountant

## LETTERS TO EDITOR

Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

## Let RBI reopen its doors

This refers to 'Only 171% of ₹2,000 banknotes remain in circulation' (July 2). Per RBI's statement, 98.29 per cent of the ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation (valued at ₹3.56 lakh crore) as on May 19, 2023, have since been returned to it till June 30, 2025. The outstanding amount currently stands at ₹6,099 crore. It's a different matter that these bank notes, since withdrawn in pursuance of RBI's Clean Note Policy, still continue to be legal tender. Since the deposit and/or exchange of these notes is exclusively being dealt with by RBI's 19 specified issue

Offices alone and a major chunk thereof has already been returned to it, one genuinely wishes that the central bank urgently reverts back to pre-2023 era, re-facilitating not only the exchange of the soiled/mutilated bank notes but also issuance of fresh currency notes of various den, on par-india basis.

A GUGTA

New Delhi

## Ties with other powers

Apropos 'Quite a churn in India-US ties' (July 2), India's strategic calculus faces disruption as Donald Trump's erratic behaviour casts long shadows

over ties with the US. His inconsistent stances — on trade, security, and diplomacy — have made engagement unpredictable. As regional alliances shift and adversaries grow bolder, New Delhi must strengthen its US partnership more than ever — but without becoming hostage to one man's whims. Simultaneously, it must hedge its bets, deepen ties with other powers, and prepare for a world where American reliability may once again prove fleeting.

N SADHASIVA REDDY

Bengaluru

## India-US trade deal

This refers to the report 'White House optimistic about striking a trade deal with India very soon' (July 2). The new 'blow hot, blow cold' strategy adopted by Trump is confusing. It is apparent that the two countries are clear about the objectives of the current trade negotiations and the constraints on core policy issues. Deadlines and threats can bring pressure, but both nations are aware of the importance of mutual dependence in the current scenario.

MG WARRIOR

Mumbai

## Women entrepreneurs

This is with reference to 'Kalaburgi's jolara rittis flying off the shelves' (July 2). The achievement of these ladies proves that there is a lot of hidden talent in rural areas which needs to be tapped with proper guidance and state support. Development and growth are the only ways to empower women from rural areas. This will prevent their migration to urban areas in search of jobs. The women from Kalaburgi have shown they are in no way inferior to their urban counterparts.

Veena Shenoy

Thane



BIBLIOGRAPHY



Hues of history: A carpet seller stands near his shop at Tehran's old main bazaar in Iran, on May 5 AP

# A land of djinns and poets: Iran in the crosshairs of history again

Iran is rich in stories linked often to other cultures. A walk through books on Iran, which is an emporia of ideas and beliefs exchanged and exported through the centuries by its merchants, mercenaries and storytellers

Geeta Doctor

Iran has been in the news for all the worst reasons in recent times. It's as if the echoes of Paul E. Erdman's sensationally titled study, *The Crash of '79*, that heralded the fall of the short-lived Pahlavi dynasty is still being felt today. It was written in the context of who controlled the surge of the oil economy while waiting for the Iranian Revolution to begin. At that time, it was clear enough to Iran watchers that it was in the marketplace of Tehran, that the Bazaaris, sipping their glasses of black tea with lumps of crystallised sugar, were stirring the narrative of revolt.

Being in the crosshairs of history the land has attracted countless invaders. It is rich in stories linked often to other cultures, as it is in the silk, gemstones, artefacts, dried fruits, prayer rugs, magnificent carpets and pelts of rare animals that are exchanged in its bazaars. Iran is an emporia of ideas and beliefs exchanged and exported through the centuries by its merchants, mercenaries and storytellers.

Lightning strikes

While travelling through the deeply ridged and folded countryside you might see the black robed vultures circling the mountain tops. They could be waiting to feast on the charred bricks and bones of yet another famous city on the plain of Pars attacked by the Mongols. Just as frequently armies of warriors have crossed across to loot and pillage their distant neighbours and return with the

spoils.

Who can forget Nader Shah taking over the Persian throne and first dismantling parts of the Ottoman Empire in the West and then turning his attention on north India. In lightning strikes and a reputation for a ferocious barbarity including the slaughter of women and children, he defeated the Mughal army in the Battle of Karnal in 1739.

As a peace offering in exchange for further attacks, he demanded and received the peacock throne and the world-famous Golconda diamonds, one of which, the Darya-i-Noor, is at the Gulistan Palace Museum in Tehran.

Rustam and Sohrab

In the poet Ferdowsi's epic poem in 50,000 rhyming couplets, the *Shahnameh*, published in 1010 CE, it's the warrior kings of Persia that are celebrated. The most famous of these is the meeting between Rustam and his estranged son Sohrab on the battlefield. The image is one that has been reproduced in Persian style miniature paintings, on painted tiles and woven wall hangings. His poem stops with the last of the hereditary rulers Khosrow II leaving the throne; that is to say before the Arab intervention.

Ferdowsi introduces us to a land of djinns and poets with links to the early Zoroastrian priests tending their fire temples. The winged symbol of the "Faravahar" with a figure of a man at the centre of a disc appears on the wall of the Fire Temple at Yazd in Iran; as it does at the Fire Temples of the Zoroastrians in

India who fled from there across the seas with their sacred fire.

Like the mythical fire bird, the Simorgh, the Parsi community of the Indian subcontinent kept their promise to add their special lustre to the country of their adoption, while keeping their faith alive.

When the British came on the scene, the two cultures blended with an ease that is best described in the satirical *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. It was written in English by James Justinian Morier, who lived in Qajar Iran as the British envoy. In his capacity as Hajji Baba, a Bazaarier with a yen for travel, this is what he tells us: "By the time I was sixteen it would be difficult to say whether I was most accomplished as a barber or a scholar. Besides shaving the head, cleaning the ears, and trimming the beard, I became famous for my skill in the offices of the bath. No one understood better than I the different modes of rubbing or shampooing, as practised in India, Cashmere, and Turkey; and I had an art peculiar to myself of making the joints to crack, and my slaps echo."

British entry

There was an almost instant recognition between the scholars of the two nations that is explored in the two companion volumes by Sir Denis Wright who served as British Ambassador to Mohammed Reza Shah of Iran during his glory years. *The English Amongst the Persians* and *The Persians Amongst the English* are a glorious recapitulation of what was always a formidable relationship. As Wright

mentions in his preface, "nowhere in the world is British cleverness so wildly exaggerated as in Iran, and nowhere are the British more hated for it". One of the reasons advanced for this analysis is that the British considered Iran as a decoy for India, against Russian advancements in the area; a Cold War thesis that we may now ignore.

One of the most chilling accounts of what happened to Iran after the installation of 'Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution' is by Amir Taheri in his 1985 book *The Spirit of Allah*. As editor-in-Chief of *Kayhan*, the national newspaper of Iran in the 1970s, Taheri, an academic now in exile, has written several books since then. However, inexorable the trajectory of events that have led to the rule by the Ayatollahs, Taheri includes a ghazal by Khomeini written perhaps in the 1930s.

"It's spring and there is blossom on the almond tree/The bride in the garden is verily, the almond tree." And yet after such gentle beginnings, the conclusion is abrupt and terrifying.

One can only return to an earlier poet and the twelfth century Attar of Nishapur and the enchanting vision that he offers in *The Conference of Birds*.

It's in the form of a journey, a quest through many different forms of attachment in search of the marvellous Simorgh, the female spirit of rebirth who rises repeatedly through several revolutions. It's a reaffirmation of life through fire.

The journey starts within.  
Geeta Doctor is a critic and cultural commentator.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian  
S. Upendran

"How is Sundar's leg?"  
"It's getting better. He consulted a specialist yesterday and the doctor said..."  
"...did you say 'consulted a specialist'?"  
"That's right! Why do you ask?"  
"Well, a couple of months ago, Sujatha and I had an argument. She said we should say 'consult with a doctor' and not 'consult a doctor'. And I said it was just the opposite. We don't consult with a doctor, but consult a doctor. Now you tell me, I'm right. That's great."  
"I'm glad you're happy. But I didn't say Sujatha was wrong."  
"What? You mean 'consult with' isn't wrong?"  
"No, it isn't. 'Consult with' is acceptable. In fact, it's used quite a lot in American English. For example, O. J. Simpson consulted with his lawyers."  
"But I could say 'O. J. Simpson consulted his lawyers', right?"  
"Right! Both 'consult with' and 'consult' are acceptable. Why don't you consult your grammar teacher on this?"  
"I'm afraid I can't consult with her. She had an accident on Saturday."  
"An accident! What happened?"  
"She hit a pot hole and was thrown off her scooter. She broke her right arm."  
"Oooh, that sounds bad."  
"I know. Yesterday, the Municipal authorities came by and filled all the pot holes with sand."  
"Their usual quick fix solution."  
"A what solution?"  
"A 'quick fix' solution. It means a temporary solution to a problem. For example, Ramesh put some tape over the hole in the mosquito net as a quick fix to keep the insects out."  
"Can I say our politicians are not interested in finding a permanent solution to our water problem. They are only interested in a quick fix?"  
"That's a very good example. Our politicians are masters of the quick fix. Here's another example. Our economy needs more than a quick fix to get back on track."  
"So a 'quick fix' is a temporary solution to a problem. Is it the same as a band aid solution?"  
"Yes, it is. For example, you can either say, 'I don't want a band aid solution to this problem', or 'I don't want a quick fix.'"  
"I see. But we all seem to be interested in band aid solutions. I guess it's easier to find a quick fix than a permanent solution to a problem."  
"That's true. And perhaps that's why we are hooked on band aid solutions."  
"Hooked on! What does that mean?"  
"When you say you are 'hooked on' something or someone, it means you 'are addicted to or obsessed with' someone or something. For example, Shyam is hooked on chocolates."  
"Meaning he is addicted to chocolate?"  
"That's right."  
"Can I say, I am hooked on Madhuri?"  
"I think the whole world knows by now that you are hooked on Madhuri."  
"You're probably right. Many people in India are hooked on Star TV."  
Published in *The Hindu* on February 11, 1997.

THE DAILY QUIZ

## This is a quiz on longstanding records in various sports

Srinivasan Ramani

QUESTION 1

This gentleman, who was born on July 3, 1851, played in the first-ever Test cricket innings and scored a century. In doing so, he set a record for the highest individual share of runs in a completed team innings that remains unbroken to this day. Name him and his country.

QUESTION 2

Name this Czechoslovakian athlete who set a world record in the women's 800-metre race in 1983. Her phenomenal time has held for over four decades, making it the longest-standing individual world record in athletics.

QUESTION 3

This behemoth basketball player,

nicknamed "The Stilt," scored an unbelievable 100 points in a single game for the Philadelphia Warriors on March 2, 1962. In the modern era, the late Kobe Bryant came closest to this mark in 2006. Name the record-holder and the number of points Kobe Bryant scored.

QUESTION 4

This English cueist was the undisputed king of early snooker, winning the first 15 World Snooker Championships held from 1927 to 1946. He was undefeated in the tournament before his retirement from the event. Name him.

QUESTION 5

This French football striker holds the seemingly unbreakable record for the most goals in a single FIFA World Cup tournament, scoring 13 times at the 1958 event. Name this French legend.



Visual question:

At the 1968 Olympics, this American athlete redefined his sport with a single, breathtaking performance nicknamed "the leap of the century." His world record stood for 23 years before being broken by Mike Powell, but his Olympic record from that day has never been beaten. Name him and his sport. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

- The Civil Rights Act was signed by this U.S. President. **Ans: Lyndon B. Johnson**
- This American jurist was the Supreme Court's first African-American justice. **Ans: Thurgood Marshall**
- This American comedian-writer is best known for his show *Seinfeld*. **Ans: Larry David**
- This American Nobel Laureate is known for his works, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. **Ans: Ernest Hemingway**
- This American businessman developed the Ford Mustang, Lincoln Continental Mark III, and Ford Pinto cars. **Ans: Lee Iacocca**
- Visual: Identify this American aviator. **Ans: Amelia Earhart**
- Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan| Eranaly Oosmany| Tito Shiladitya| Arun Kumar Singh| Parimal Das

## Word of the day

**Pugilism:** fighting with fists

**Synonym:** boxing

**Usage:** When their pugilism took on a dangerous character, he decided to intervene.

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/pugilismpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /pjuːdʒɪlɪzəm/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'



# The urgent call for smarter crowd management

The Puri tragedy symbolises not only an administrative shortcoming but also a human one, underlining how systems can fail when vigilance wanes. As the size of religious gatherings continues to rise, India must take assertive steps to protect the lives of those who come together in faith

FIRST Column

The devastating stampede in Bangalore, which resulted in the tragic loss of eleven lives and stunned the nation, remains vivid in our minds. Now, another sorrowful event has transpired during the honoured Rath Yatra in Puri. This stampede has taken the lives of three pilgrims and left many others wounded, turning a moment of spiritual devotion into one of confusion and grief. Despite having thousands of security personnel and employing advanced surveillance technology, such as drones, CCTV cameras, and AI, this tragedy could not be averted. This occurrence, like many others before it, raises urgent questions: Why do these incidents continue despite past lessons? What more can be done to protect the millions who participate in these events with hope and faith?

India has a troubling history with stampedes, particularly during religious celebrations, in temples, and at pilgrimage sites. Since 1996, there have been over 4,000 reports of such incidents, resulting in numerous fatalities. The Kumbh Mela, known globally as one of the largest gatherings, has faced multiple disasters despite thorough planning. The recent tragedy in Puri underscores the urgent need to reassess our strategies for managing large crowds, moving beyond mere barricades and police presence to adopt intelligence-driven, holistic approaches that can predict and prevent such catastrophes.

A key challenge in managing crowds stems from the unpredictability of human behaviour. A stampede can often be set off by a minor incident—such as a loud sound, a rumour, or a blockage that incites fear. People may flee in different directions, escape routes become blocked, and within moments, lives can be lost.

In Puri, initial reports indicate that poor sector organisation and a failure to disperse the crowd on time contributed to the deadly incident. While authorities may have enhanced crowd management tactics over time, understanding the psychology and dynamics of moving crowds is a vital area that requires focus.

What is especially concerning is the possibility of deliberate disruptions. Evidence from social media and local news indicates that organised groups or troublemakers may attempt to provoke unrest during major gatherings. This highlights the need for improved intelligence networks—not just nationally but also within local communities. It is essential to engage reliable informants, community leaders, and local law enforcement to collect real-time intelligence about any potential threats or attempts to create disorder.

The time has come to shift from reactive tactics to a proactive, intelligence-driven approach to crowd management. Effective preparation should go beyond simply predicting crowd numbers and setting up barriers.

It must include comprehensive risk assessments that consider human behaviour, infrastructure



readiness, and security intelligence. Frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction establish a global standard for these approaches, underscoring the significance of grasping risks, investing in preventive actions, and enhancing early warning and response systems.

While technology can significantly aid this process, it cannot operate in isolation. Surveillance tools such as facial recognition, drone-based thermal imaging, and AI-enhanced crowd analytics depend heavily on the skills of those who interpret and act on the data. It is vital to train staff in crowd psychology, emergency response, and real-time communication.

Likewise, mobile apps that provide instant updates, emergency alerts, and navigation help attendees avoid high-risk zones. Biometric and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)-based access control systems can effectively mitigate overcrowding in sensitive areas. Nevertheless, these sophisticated solutions must be integrated



## IN PURI, INITIAL REPORTS INDICATE THAT POOR SECTOR ORGANISATION AND A FAILURE TO DISPERSE THE CROWD ON TIME CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEADLY INCIDENT

into a comprehensive preparedness strategy that prioritises community involvement. Residents, shopkeepers, and volunteers—those who best understand the surroundings—should be engaged in security planning and monitoring.

Their vigilance and prompt reporting of unusual activities can help avert disasters. India should also learn from international best practices. Countries like Japan have adeptly managed large public events with clearly marked exits, organised crowd flow, and robust communication systems. These tactics can be adapted to suit India's religious and cultural circumstances with suitable planning and political commitment. Furthermore, the importance of analysing incidents after the fact cannot be emphasised enough. Each stampede should be meticulously examined to pinpoint failures in ex-

cution and establish corrective measures. The duties of various stakeholders—event organisers, law enforcement, and municipal officials—must be clearly defined and coordinated under a unified command framework. Publicising investigation findings and implementing their recommendations can enhance transparency and build public trust.

The Puri tragedy symbolises not only an administrative shortcoming but also a human one, underlining how systems can fail when vigilance wanes. As the size of religious gatherings continues to rise, India must take assertive steps to protect the lives of those who come together in faith. Belief should never invoke fear.

Only through a unified, forward-thinking strategy that merges intelligence, community participation, behavioural insights, and cutting-edge technology can we hope to ensure the safe-

ty of such events. The moment to act is now—before another holy day turns into a National Day of Mourning.

## Major Stampede Incidents in India Over the Last Two Decades

- January 2005: A stampede at the Mandher Dev Temple in Satara, Maharashtra, resulted in over 300 deaths due to a fire and overcrowding during a religious fair.
- August 2008: At the Naina Devi Temple in Himachal Pradesh, a stampede led to 145 fatalities, with many victims being women and children.
- September 2008: A devastating stampede during Navratri at the Chamunda Devi Temple in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, claimed more than 220 lives.
- January 2011: An incident occurred on a narrow forest path during the Sabarimala pilgrimage in Kerala, resulting in the deaths of over 104 devotees after a vehicle overturned.
- 2013: A stampede at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Uttar Pradesh, at the railway station caused at least 36 deaths.
- October 2013: Around 115 people lost their lives in a stampede near the Ratnagiri Temple in Madhya Pradesh, reportedly sparked by rumours of a collapsing bridge.
- July 2015: A tragic stampede during the Godavari Maha Pushkaram festival in Andhra Pradesh led to at least 27 fatalities.
- September 2017: Twenty-three people died and 36 were injured in a stampede on the narrow bridge connecting the Elphinstone Road station of the Western Railway to Parel station of the Central Railway in Mumbai.
- January 2022: A surge in the crowd at the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir resulted in the deaths of at least 12 pilgrims near the Bhawan complex.
- July 2024: A stampede during a religious gathering in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, left more than 120 individuals dead, predominantly women, following a spiritual discourse.
- January 8, 2025: At the Tirupati Temple in Andhra Pradesh, a stampede resulted in the deaths of 6 people and left several others injured.
- February 2025: A stampede during the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, led to the deaths of over 30 pilgrims and injured many more, highlighting ongoing crowd management issues.
- June 2025: A tragic incident in Bengaluru occurred when a stampede at the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) stadium resulted in several fatalities.

(The writers Former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, GOI. Views are personal)

# Monsoon 2025: How much is too much for Indian agriculture and economy?

The southwest monsoon, a lifeline for Indian agriculture, has ushered in a promising 2025 season with forecasts of above-normal rainfall at 106 per cent  $\pm$  4 per cent of the long period average (LPA), as per the India Meteorological Department (IMD). This bountiful monsoon, critical for the Kharif sowing season from June to September, supports the livelihoods of 42.3 per cent of India's population and contributes 18.2 per cent to the nation's GDP. With agriculture serving as the backbone of rural economies, the anticipated robust rainfall is poised to enhance crop yields, stabilise food prices, and stimulate economic growth. However, challenges such as uneven rainfall distribution and the risk of excessive precipitation loom large. The monsoon is the lifeblood of Indian agriculture, particularly for Kharif crops such as rice, maize, cotton, sugarcane, pulses, and oilseeds, which rely heavily on seasonal rains. Approximately 50 per cent of India's arable land depends on monsoon irrigation, making timely and adequate rainfall critical for sowing and crop growth. The 2025 forecast of above-normal rainfall, particularly in June at 108 per cent of LPA, promises an early onset that supports timely Kharif sowing.

This is a marked improvement over last year's extended monsoon, which led to flooding and crop damage in several regions. Beyond irrigation, the monsoon replenishes groundwater reserves, essential for both Kharif and Rabi seasons. Adequate groundwater levels reduce reliance on expensive irrigation systems, lowering costs for farmers. The IMD's prediction of normal to above-normal rainfall across most regions, except parts of peninsular and northeast India, augurs well for groundwater recharge and sustained agricultural productivity. A robust monsoon directly impacts India's economy through increased agricultural output, which stabilises food prices and curbs inflation. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reported in April 2025 that headline CPI inflation moderated to a six-year low of 3.2 per cent, driven by declining food inflation for six consecutive months. The expected bumper Kharif harvest, supported by record wheat production and higher yields of key pulses in the Rabi season, should further ease inflationary pressures.

This stability aligns with the RBI's goal of maintaining inflation near its target, providing room for monetary policy flexibility as evidenced by the recent 50-basis-point rate cut to 5.50 per cent on June 6, 2025. Higher agricultural productivity also boosts rural incomes, driving demand for goods and services. ICRA projects agriculture, forestry, and fishing GVA growth at 3.5-4.0 per cent for FY2026, following a 4.6 per cent expansion in FY2025. This growth fuels rural consumption, benefiting sectors like cement, tractors, two-wheelers, edible oils, and sugar. For instance, the cement sector, with 35-37 per cent of demand tied



to rural housing, is expected to see 6-7 per cent volume growth in FY2026, driven by monsoon-induced rural prosperity. Similarly, the tractor industry anticipates 4-7 per cent volume growth, reflecting improved farm cash flows. India's position as the world's largest rice exporter is set to strengthen with surplus production, enabling increased exports of rice, sugar, and onions while reducing edible oil imports. It is obvious that above-average rains for the second consecutive year will support India's export ambitions, enhance foreign exchange earnings and bolster the trade balance. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has reinforced agricultural optimism by announcing significant Minimum Support Price (MSP) hikes for Kharif crops in the 2025-26 marketing season. The Government has ensured remunerative prices to the growers for their produce. The highest absolute increase in MSP over the previous year has been recommended for nigersed (\$820 per quintal), followed by Ragi (\$596 per quintal), Cotton (\$589 per quintal) and Sesamum (\$579 per quintal). These hikes, exceeding April 2025 mandi prices, incentivise farmers to expand sowing, particularly for oilseeds and pulses, which saw MSP growth of 6-9 per cent.

However, the effectiveness of MSP hikes depends on rainfall distribution. Uneven or excessive rainfall could disrupt sowing, negating the benefits of higher prices. The Government's proactive measures, including investments in irrigation and crop insurance, aim to mitigate these risks, ensuring farmers can leverage the monsoon's potential. Despite the optimistic forecast, monsoon variability poses significant challenges. Excessive rainfall, while beneficial for water supply, can lead to waterlogging, soil erosion, and crop damage, particularly during the ripening stage. Last year's extended monsoon caused flooding that damaged crops in several regions, underscoring the risks of concentrated heavy rains. The IMD's forecast indicates potential below-normal rainfall in parts of north-west and northeast India, which could affect regional crop yields and exacerbate disparities in agricultural productivity. Uneven spatial and temporal rainfall distribution remains a critical concern. An even distribution is paramount to maximising crop yields and supporting rural demand. Episodes of heavy rainfall could disrupt sowing schedules, damage young crops, or lead to post-harvest losses. Climate change further complicates monsoon predictability. While neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions are expected to persist in 2025, long-term climate trends could introduce volatility, affecting agricultural planning. Investments in climate-resilient crops, improved weather forecasting, and robust irrigation infrastructure are essential to address these challenges. Expanding crop insurance schemes and improving access to credit will empower farmers to mitigate risks and invest in high-yield crops.

The RBI's accommodative monetary policy, coupled with Government support through MSP hikes and infrastructure investments, creates a conducive environment for agricultural growth. By addressing challenges like uneven rainfall and climate volatility, India can harness the monsoon's full potential to drive rural prosperity and economic growth. As India navigates these opportunities and challenges, the monsoon's magic can transform the agricultural landscape, fostering economic resilience and prosperity.

(The writer is a columnist and writes on agriculture and environment. Views are personal)

# Higher education: Growth, challenges and road ahead

India's higher education sector is undergoing a dynamic transformation marked by significant growth, diversification of academic programme, and the rise of hybrid learning models. With a reported 14 per cent growth in sectoral revenue, the momentum is being driven by changing learner expectations, technological advancements, and policy shifts aimed at increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which currently stands at 28 per cent. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions raising this to 50 per cent in the next decade—an ambitious target that demands both structural reform and innovative delivery mechanisms.

A key trend shaping the higher education landscape is the shift from traditional, siloed disciplines to industry-aligned, multidisciplinary programs. Institutions across the country are increasingly introducing courses in emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, fintech, sustainable development, and digital marketing. The rise of hybrid learning models—combining online and offline components—has played a critical role in democratising access. The post-2020 acceleration of digital platforms has brought education to remote and underserved areas, while simultaneously catering to urban learners who value flexibility and autonomy. Hybrid models are especially attractive to the current generation of learners, who seek personalised and modular learning journeys rather than rigid, one-size-fits-all programmes.

International enrolment is also contributing to the sector's vibrancy. Students from Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Middle East are increasingly looking to India for higher education due to its relative affordability, quality assurance, and English-language instruction. With clearly defined academic roadmaps and regulated institutional frameworks, India is emerging as a credible global education hub.

However, the rapid transformation has brought with it new challenges. Chief among them is the need for constant curriculum renewal to keep pace with industry disruptions, especially those led by technology. As the pace of change accelerates, the traditional model of revising curricula every few years has become inadequate. Institutions that offer autonomous programs are now introducing mechanisms such as biannual curriculum reviews in collaboration with industry experts.

This allows for agile course updates and incorporation of real-world applications. In the realm of business education in particular, job readiness has become a central concern. The success of any academic program is increasingly being measured by how well it prepares students for the workforce. This includes not just academic knowledge, but also a portfolio of practical skills, exposure to current tools, and adaptability to new technologies. Institutions are

addressing this by embedding certification modules from industry leaders, offering hands-on training, and introducing placement preparation from the first semester.

The implementation of NEP 2020 marks a significant departure from previous policies by encouraging multidisciplinary learning, vocational integration, and skill-based education. While the policy is well-framed in its vision, its execution remains uneven across states. Variations in adoption timelines and curricular frameworks have led to fragmented outcomes. For instance, students within the same institution may follow entirely different academic models depending on state-level directives. This lack of cohesion hinders scalability and national benchmarking. Policy clarity is especially critical in defining institutional roles. The NEP envisages categorising institutions into research universities, teaching universities, and autonomous colleges. Such classification allows for targeted development and funding, but ambiguity in criteria and overlapping mandates have caused operational uncertainties. A unified and phased approach to implementation, led by both central and state Governments, is essential to streamline the transition.

Another area of concern is teacher training. As student expectations evolve, the role of educators is shifting from knowledge dispensers to facilitators and mentors. This transition requires a new set of competencies ranging from digital literacy and interdisciplinary thinking to the ability to guide students through personalised learning paths. The forthcoming national teacher education framework, set to launch in 2026, may address some of these gaps, but continuous professional development and pedagogical innovation must remain a priority. The changing perception of degrees and certifications also warrants attention. In today's job market, demonstrable skills often outweigh formal qualifications. Employers are increasingly emphasising problem-solving ability, communication skills, and digital proficiency over academic transcripts. This shift is especially evident in sectors like media, design, IT, and entrepreneurship. As a result, institutions must realign their assessment systems and course outcomes to reflect competence, not just compliance.

Looking forward, the future of higher education in India lies in meaningful collaboration. Academic institutions must build deeper partnerships with industries to ensure relevance, internships, mentorships, and placements. Specialisation, adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning will be key differentiators. Institutions that invest in these areas will be best positioned to prepare students for a rapidly changing world.

(The writer is the Executive Director—Administration at Acharya Bangalore B-School (ABBS). Views are personal)





Editor's  
TAKE

## A crucial opportunity amid unrelenting crisis

If the ceasefire comes into effect in Gaza, as announced by Trump, it would give people a chance to recuperate

It has been almost a year and a half since the Israel-Hamas conflict started. In the name of obliterating Hamas, Israel rained miseries on the people of Gaza, with the world watching helplessly as the bombs flattened Gaza, sparing no one — not even hospitals, children, and women. The indiscriminate shelling has resulted in untold miseries for the people; even food and medical supplies are not reaching Gaza. But now it looks like there may be some respite in sight. US President Donald Trump has announced that Israel has agreed to a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza, but subject to "necessary conditions." The proposal, however, is still awaiting a formal response from Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that governs the Gaza Strip. Trump shared the announcement via a post on Truth Social, stating that the ceasefire proposal would be delivered by Qatar and Egypt, two key mediators that have consistently played crucial roles in negotiations between the two sides. This announcement comes just days before Trump is set to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Trump has urged Hamas to seize the opportunity.

For the people of Gaza, the ceasefire could mean a much needed respite. Since hostilities reignited, the region has seen widespread destruction and a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding on a daily basis. Over 50,000 people are estimated to have lost their lives in Gaza since the beginning of this latest war, with thousands more injured, displaced, or missing. Entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble, schools and hospitals have been completely destroyed, and aid has barely trickled in since the ceasefire breakdown in March. If the ceasefire holds, it would mark the first sustained pause in violence since the breakdown. It could pave the way for renewed humanitarian assistance, medical evacuations, and the restoration of basic infrastructure. More importantly, it might offer a brief but crucial chance for exhausted civilians to recover, mourn, and rebuild what little remains of their lives. While Israel's agreement to the ceasefire is a significant step, history suggests that such truces have been violated by both sides and resumed hostilities. The previous ceasefire that began on January 19 unraveled within weeks, with both sides accusing each other of violations. In March, Israel resumed its strikes, alleging Hamas breached the terms of the truce — a claim Hamas denied.

This time, the Trump administration appears to be applying heavier diplomatic pressure to bring all parties to the table. Yet, scepticism remains high. Hamas has not issued a formal response and is likely weighing its options in the context of mounting civilian casualties and international scrutiny. Meanwhile, headline factions within Israel's political establishment may also resist a prolonged ceasefire if it is perceived as a concession or weakness. Beyond politics and geopolitics, this ceasefire — if implemented — could serve as a turning point for Gaza's devastated population. The region cannot withstand much more. The violence must stop, even temporarily, for the sake of innocent civilians.

## A grand celebration, a sobering reckoning

On July 4, 2026, the United States turns 250. Amid fireworks and fanfare, the day invites reflection on a nation shaped by bold ideals, hard-won progress, and enduring contradictions

On July 4, 2025, the United States turns 250 — a semiquincentennial that marks a remarkable journey from a colonial rebellion to a global superpower. As Americans gather with fireworks, parades, and nostalgic anthems to mark the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the occasion invites not just celebration but introspection.

For this birthday is more than spectacle; it is a moment of reckoning — with ideals pursued, promises broken, and the uncertain road ahead. At its birth, America dared to proclaim that "all men are created equal," launching a revolutionary political experiment in representative democracy.

From those founding words, it grew into the world's oldest continuous democratic republic. The passage of the Bill of Rights in 1791 enshrined key freedoms: of speech, religion, and assembly. The Civil War tested and reshaped the Union, while Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address echoed across generations with its solemn promise that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Through the 20th century, the US ascended the global stage by fusing its liberal values with geopolitical ambition. At Bretton Woods in 1944, American leadership birthed the IMF and World Bank to stabilise postwar finance. A year later, it spearheaded the United Nations, laying the foundation for a new multilateral order.

With New York as the new diplomatic hub, America leaned into liberal internationalism, promoting democracy in a world emerging from fascist devastation. Yet American history has always been a study in contradiction. The nation that spoke of liberty denied it to millions. The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments abolished slavery and laid the groundwork for civil rights, but true justice remained elusive. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X emerged to challenge the nation's conscience. King with his soaring moral vision of integration, Malcolm with his demand for dignity and self-determination.

Their competing voices helped frame the American experiment not just in political terms but moral ones, pushing the country toward an ever-expanding definition of freedom. The American presidency, from Washington to Roosevelt, Kennedy to Reagan, has served as both compass and mirror. Washington's refusal to become king set a lasting precedent.

FDR's New Deal remade the social contract. Eisenhower warned of the growing might of the military-industrial complex. Kennedy's idealism and Nixon's cynicism

pulled the country in opposite directions. In more recent decades, Barack Obama rose symbolised progress, while Donald Trump's presidency marked a pivot toward nationalism and populism. His slogan — "Make America Great Again" — tapped into nostalgia, economic grievance, and cultural unease. Trump's unapologetic "America First" doctrine marked a break from postwar multilateralism, fueling debates about the nation's role in an increasingly multipolar world. The Trump era also underscored the growing influence of non-elected power centres in American life. Powerful lobbying groups like the Zionist American organisations, the National Rifle Association (NRA), and pharmaceutical and defence lobbies have shaped policy well beyond the ballot box.

The NRA, in particular, has stymied gun control reforms even amid rising gun violence. Meanwhile, influential think tanks such as the RAND Corporation, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Brookings Institution play an outsized role in shaping foreign policy narratives, often serving as the intellectual fuel behind defence spending, geopolitical posturing, and trade frameworks. These institutions, while contributing to policy discourse, are often funded by

vested interests, blurring the line between objective research and ideological agenda. American innovation remains unparalleled. The Apollo moon landing, the internet revolution, and the tech giants of Silicon Valley — Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google — have reshaped the global economy. America's universities continue to draw the brightest minds, and its cultural output — from Hollywood to hip-hop — extends its soft power across borders. Yet this innovation has come with ethical dilemmas: surveillance capitalism, misinformation, job displacement by AI, and widening economic inequality.

America's military might, once justified as a safeguard of global stability, is increasingly scrutinised. From Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, its interventions have left deep scars and unresolved legacies. The post-9/11 world order saw the rise of the Bush Doctrine and a militarised foreign policy under the banner of counter-terrorism and regime change. The burden of being the world's "indispensable nation" has often been accompanied by charges of overreach and imperial arrogance. Within its borders, the republic is deeply polarised. Debates over immigration, racial justice, climate change, and gun control remain bitterly divisive. The Capitol riot of January 6, 2021, revealed a dangerous fragility in democratic institutions. Partisan media ecosystems, rising distrust in electoral systems, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories have cast long shadows on civic life. Despite this, American patriotism



endures — often in complex, contradictory forms. For some, patriotism means saluting the flag; for others, it means kneeling before it in protest. To love America, for many, is to challenge it. From debates over Confederate monuments to conversations around reparations and historical memory, the struggle over who gets to define the American story continues. The 250th anniversary has spurred national projects like the Garden of American Heroes and public exhibitions on democracy and dissent, signalling an ongoing contest over the meaning of freedom and the figures who represent it. On the world stage, the United States now faces rising powers like China and India, as well as a resurgent Russia.

The European Union offers an alternative model of regional governance. The challenges ahead — climate crises, AI regulation, pandemics, and mass migration — require cooperation, not confrontation. As power becomes more diffuse, America's leadership must adapt with humility, innovation, and a renewed moral compass. Henry Kissinger once observed, "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal" — a blunt reminder that the line between idealism and self-interest has always defined the United States. At 250, the nation remains a paradox: powerful yet insecure, visionary yet flawed, a republic born in revolution still struggling to live up to its revolutionary promise.

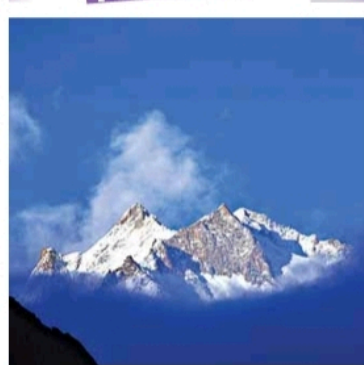
(The author is a Professor at Pondicherry Central University. Views expressed are personal)



SANTHOSH MATHEW

amid rising gun violence. Meanwhile, influential think tanks such as the RAND Corporation, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Brookings Institution play an outsized role in shaping foreign policy narratives, often serving as the intellectual fuel behind defence spending, geopolitical posturing, and trade frameworks. These institutions, while contributing to policy discourse, are often funded by

## PICTALK



Lost in the silent beauty of the Gangotri mountains. A moment of pure peace.

PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

## A call for holistic development and global well-being

SECOND  
Opinion

The world we live in today is caught up in a vicious cycle, which none of us would deny, because most of the problems it faces are interlinked and each one of them feeds the fires of others. One of the reasons why we cannot solve or lessen the severity of these problems is that we do not apply or do not have a solution that attacks all the problems simultaneously.

In other words, our approach to our problems is not holistic; it is piecemeal. We try to make use of solutions for each problem separately, and the result is that, in the meantime, other problems increase and bring back the problem that we are already trying to tackle. Secondly, we have an infatuation with the old theories.

Little do we realise that our present problems have been caused, directly or indirectly, by such socio-economic, psychological and political theories and concepts that gained currency during the past about three hundred years or a little more. We should have thought that these theories have proved not only ineffective in the long run but have also given rise to new problems or have aggravated our old problems. We should, therefore, have discarded them as outdated, for the world scene has changed tremendously since then. We should have

known by now that something is wrong with our very approach to the problems of elimination or alleviation of sufferings in the world, and our paradigm of a better world is erroneous. Our main emphasis, in our present approach and model, has been on economic development. We have been measuring, and we still measure, the advancement of a nation by its GDP and its per capita income.

Our major concern is to see whether this paradigm of development has been able to raise the economic standard of living of the people. This has been based on the assumption that greater enjoyment of material goods leads to greater happiness. It has thus given us a wrong model of development. Our assumption has been wrong because man does not live by bread alone. He needs mental and cultural development, and he needs peace of mind.

Our goal should, therefore, be the well-being of man rather than material wealth. There is now a need for a paradigm shift and a shift in our emphasis. We have to work for the holistic development of everyone rather than the mere economic development of a few.

Presently, the disparity between techno-scientific and psycho-spiritual development has grown tremendously. This has resulted in great imbalances and also social, cultural and moral distortions. The critical situation we face today has been brought about by the deterioration in morals and an overemphasis on the

physical and material. This has led to fixing up of wrong priorities, wrong imperatives, wrong attitudes and wrong goals. We find that our knowledge of Nature and its forces has tremendously increased during the past few centuries, but our moral and spiritual development has not kept pace with it. As a result, our relations at the inter-personal, inter-communal and international levels have greatly deteriorated.

If we cannot solve the problems of nuclear race or poverty today, it is because our relationships today, at all levels, are not based on goodwill, friendship, love and co-operation. The present crisis is, therefore, mainly a moral crisis. All our current problems arise from a lack of moral and spiritual strength and the absence or lack of co-operation.

If, therefore, we wish to reduce sufferings in the world or eliminate them, or, in other words, if we wish to build a better world, then we have to create the necessary moral climate and build up goodwill and co-operation on a global scale. The belief that there can be a world without sufferings and the problems we have today is not a utopian belief. It seems utopian when we use the current assumptions and paradigms. The paradigm shift would make it look quite feasible. Let us, therefore, follow the moral imperative if we wish to have a better world to live in. Let us have world well-fare and not mere economic well-fare as our aim. It is only then that we will have the co-operation of all.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist. Views are personal)



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

## Letters to the Editor

### International Plastic Bag Free Day

Plastic, an organic polymer macromolecule, plays a significant role in daily life — from shopping bags to PVC pipes. However, single-use plastic bags, though convenient, have devastating impacts on the environment, harming humans, animals, and both land and marine ecosystems. These bags take 100 to 500 years to decompose, clog drains, pollute water bodies, and kill nearly 100,000 marine animals annually. Globally, we produce 5 trillion plastic bags each year — about one million bags every minute — with the average person using a bag for just 25 minutes.

To address this crisis, International Plastic Bag Free Day is observed every year on July 3, aiming to raise awareness about plastic pollution and promote eco-friendly alternatives. Citizens are encouraged to reject plastic bags, organise clean-up drives, and switch to sustainable options like cloth, jute, or recycled-material bags.

Plastic was first developed in the 1930s, and shopping bags became widespread by the 1970s. But today, change is crucial. Small shifts — like using reusable bottles, refusing straws, avoiding excess packaging, and reusing containers — can greatly reduce our plastic footprint.

Let us all act responsibly to protect marine life, reduce pollution, conserve energy, and ensure a cleaner, greener future.

BURRA MADHUSUDHAN REDDY | KARIMNAGAR

### Wimbledon stands tall

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Wimbledon has withstood the vagaries of change, as, over 150 years since its inception, little has changed in terms of its traditional fervour and royal insignia. Amidst the decadence of monarchy, its roots are kept still intact by such gestures and symbolism of the classical game.

What began as a simple seasonal refreshment in 1877 has continued to form a part of yearly celebrations, signifying the charm and grace of the game. The true meaning of the dictum that the more things change, the more they remain the same cannot be truer, as Wimbledon remains the only bastion of grass-court tennis, standing tall against many modern games that are not only symbolically rich but also physically demanding. Its enduring legacy lies in its staying true to tradition.

As the 2025 edition of the game is underway, the global audiences will never fail to get mesmerised by its unique blending of tradition and modernity while keeping its simplicity intact, spanning from grassroots to elite, from Centre Court to viral TikTok. In these turbulent times when people devour everything but value nothing, Wimbledon making inroads into the lives of global audiences has kept up the promises of simple but enduring things.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | NAINITAL

### Breakdown of law and order in Tamil Nadu

In a notable development, five police personnel in Tamil Nadu have been incarcerated following the custodial death of a young security guard, Ajith Kumar, who was allegedly involved in the theft of ten sovereigns of jewellery in Sivagangai district. This incident underscores a broader concern regarding law and order in the state. During the current term of the DMK Government, the reported tally of custodial deaths, now standing at 24, has drawn considerable scrutiny. While the specific case has been transferred to the CB-CID for further probe, the Superintendent of Police, Ashish Rawat, has been placed on compulsory leave. The state of law and order, which falls under the direct purview of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, has faced repeated challenges.

These concerns range from the incidence of burglaries and the reported availability of illicit drugs, to serious crimes such as rape and murder on the Anna University campus, and now, the escalating number of custodial deaths. Such occurrences collectively prompt questions regarding the state's ability to maintain public safety and order. The most pressing concern at this juncture pertains to the overall law and order situation, which remains under the direct control of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, and is currently perceived to be in a regrettable state, causing considerable distress to the populace.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

### MAMDANI SHAKES UP NYC POLITICS, DRAWS TRUMP'S IRE

In a dramatic turn in New York City politics, 33-year-old Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani has emerged as a powerful challenger in the upcoming mayoral election — so much so that President Donald Trump has threatened to cut off federal funds if Mamdani, "doesn't behave himself," is elected. Mamdani, born in Kampala to Indian-origin parents, moved to New York at age seven. His mother is a renowned filmmaker Mira Nair, and his father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a Columbia University Professor.

A self-proclaimed follower of Martin Luther King Jr, Mamdani has championed a progressive platform focused on wealth redistribution — seeking to raise taxes on New York's wealthiest and ease the burden on overtaxed outer borough homeowners. His proposals have drawn sharp criticism from Republicans, who label him a pro-Palestinian Muslim

sympathiser. His remarks calling for a "global infirmary" — a term he insists meant "struggle" — not "uprising" — have provoked widespread condemnation. Mamdani has also stirred controversy for calling Indian PM Narendra Modi a war criminal and opposing the Ram Temple construction at Ayodhya.

Despite polarising opinions, Mamdani's ability to connect with New York's large Muslim population and immigrant communities has boosted his per cent of the vote in the first round, he is set to run as the Democratic nominee in the November 4 general election.

His rise comes at a time when the Democratic Party is undergoing a soul-searching phase post-Kamala Harris's defeat. Whether Mamdani's fiery rhetoric and grassroots appeal can translate into electoral victory remains to be seen — but his candidacy signals a potential shift in the city's political landscape.

YASH PAL RAJAN | JALANDHAR



# THE IDEAS PAGE

## Dear Chief Minister

Delhi deserves planning, not patronage; political courage, not administrative tinkering



SHAILAJA CHANDRA

CONGRATULATIONS ON ASSUMING charge of India's most demanding urban assignment — perhaps even the world's. Delhi is not just the country's capital. It is a daily test of governance, grit, but also grace.

You are, indeed, twice blessed. First, because you are a woman and have become the Chief Minister of Delhi — a rare distinction in any political career. Second, and more consequentially, because you enjoy the unambiguous support of the highest quarters — the Prime Minister and the Union Urban Development Minister. You have, therefore, an excellent opportunity to outshine even Delhi's most enduring and popular Chief Minister, the late Sheila Dikshit — by correcting what has long been swept under the carpet of the politics of urbanisation.

Delhi's economic metabolism depends on migrant labour. From construction workers to drivers, domestic help to office assistants — the city would halt without them. But the same migrants, lured by opportunity, get absorbed in a city devoid of planning and, much less, vision. Encroachments on public land have become informal colonies; unauthorised settlements have turned into vote banks. Successive governments have offered them legitimacy, often through free electricity and water connections, ration cards, and public services, turning what should have been temporary shelter into permanent settlements indifferent to even the most basic planning needs. It is not the migrants' fault. They follow the work. The culpability lies squarely with a politics that has repeatedly chosen patronage over planning.

There was a time when the judiciary tried to preserve the sanctity of city planning. One judgment memorably said: "You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul." The law was clear. Regularising encroachments violated the principle of fairness to law-abiding citizens. But legislatures soon reversed these verdicts. Entire swathes of land — once meant for green belts, drainage or public facilities or for cultivation — were accommodated and handed over through retrospective legislation. Today, seven million people live in unauthorised colonies across Delhi, all of which violate environmental, safety and land-use norms. Their domestic waste goes into the Yamuna. Effluent from household industries running chromium plating and pickling businesses, which use carcinogenic substances as well as acids, is later discharged into stormwater drains, which add to the filth in the Yamuna.

What's ironic, then, is the trust of its silent, tax-paying citizens. Urban inequity has distorted everything, and reclamation will require major surgery. Those who follow the law are penalised by being provided inferior services. Planning norms have become decorative statements hol-



CR Sasikumar

lowed out by continuous misapplication. Public trust has withered. Cynicism is rampant when citizens see violations rewarded with more entitlements. The migrant worker is not better off, either — still without secure tenure, still vulnerable to eviction, still denied real integration into the city's legal framework. Both sides lose while only politics gains.

You are at a crossroads few leaders find themselves at. You can interrupt the decay — or you can inherit its failed logic. If Delhi is to become a city worthy of its citizens, not just through an overload of ceremonies and announcements of freebies, you must shift the focus from appeasement to long-term planning. Here is how.

One, draw a firm line on further regularisation. The city cannot be endlessly retrofitted. Make it clear through repeated announcements: No further unauthorised colonies will be regularised. Draw the line and honour it. Make an example of it. If you tell the vice-chairman, DDA, the divisional commissioner under whom 11 district magistrates function and the police (who will listen to you if directed by the L-G) to stop the illegal takeover of public spaces and agricultural land by seeking public complaints on a dedicated website, and swiftly acting on the complaints, it will work. If you meet the Minister of Urban Development and share what is happening to Delhi, he would need to act. Or seek orders from above. At least an honest effort would have been made by you. If it cannot be done now, when all three tiers of government are under one political party, it can never be done. It is your call.

Two, create a migration-responsive urban blueprint. Accept migration as a permanent feature. Plan for it. Build worker housing tenements near job clusters, enable rental mobility, and prevent pressure on fragile land and water resources. The

You are at a crossroads few leaders find themselves at. You can interrupt the decay — or you can inherit its failed logic. If Delhi is to become a city worthy of its citizens, not just through an overload of ceremonies and announcements of freebies, you must shift the focus from appeasement to long-term planning.

DDA has the zonal plans. Your deputy commissioners have ground knowledge. Get them to work in unison to do advance planning and get the Delhi PWD to erect temporary, disassemblable and reusable structures to house new migrants, giving priority to the city's needs. Who needs which services should decide who stays where, but with dignity and safety.

Three, restore confidence in governance. Middle-class taxpayers must feel heard. Deliver services that reflect their contribution. Uphold laws as neutral instruments — not bendable tools to be twisted by vote banks.

I write not to criticise but as someone who has faced these very tensions — as Delhi's chief secretary, more challenging than being a policy-maker at the Centre, also a position I had occupied — I have seen how well-intentioned plans collapse under populist pressure. I have also seen the silent corrosion of a city that has lost a sense of fairness. My only agenda is to see a course correction.

At 81, I assure you I am not seeking a job as your advisor — only an open response to a question that concerns every Delhiite who believes rules should matter, and planning should become a reality that does not just go up in smoke!

You have a remarkable chance — not just to govern Delhi, but to reimagine the city. What you do now will decide whether Delhi is governable 10 years from today. Political courage, not administrative tinkering, is what the moment demands. Will you accept this as a challenge or dismiss my letter as a rant from a has-been?

Warm regards,

Yours sincerely

The writer is former chief secretary, Delhi, and former secretary, Ministry of Health

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As Sri Lanka drowns in debt, Nepal navigates political whirlpools, and Bangladesh outgrows donor dependency, these countries want cooperation based on equality... And when India fails to deliver, they do what any rational actor would do in a multi-polar world: Hedge."

—SRI LANKA GUARDIAN

## Deliberately misreading policy

Diplomacy is not the arena for point-scoring. The danger today is not Delhi's caution, it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique



TEHMEENA RIZVI

IN AN ERA of relentless media cycles and performative politics, foreign policy is increasingly becoming a battleground for domestic posturing. The danger lies not just in what is said, but in how and why it is said. Moral absolutism is deployed selectively, outrage is amplified when convenient, and silence is deafening when facts challenge the preferred narrative. The framing of India's foreign policy as either morally courageous or morally bankrupt ignores diplomacy's layered complexities. Nations do not operate in binaries. They navigate shades of grey, often balancing principle with pragmatism. To cast India's foreign policy as a betrayal of historical moral commitments is not only reductionist, it is deeply dishonest.

Take the Hamas attack on Israel — one of the most horrific terrorist acts in recent memory. For India — a victim of terrorism — moral clarity on such acts is not optional; it is foundational. To hesitate in condemning such violence is not intellectual sophistication — it is moral evasiveness.

India rightly condemned this attack as terrorism. This was not a partisan statement. It was a reflection of India's consistent stance against terror. At the same time, it made clear its support for the Palestinian people — urging humanitarian access to Gaza, calling for the release of hostages, and providing over 65 tonnes of aid. India has donated over \$65 million for Palestine's development in recent years and continues to fund infrastructure and education projects in the West Bank. Yet critics accuse it of abandoning its moral compass. On what basis? That it refused to take a simplistic, one-sided view of a multidimensional conflict? Or that it chose to engage both sides while prioritising the safety of Indian citizens and regional stability? Let us not forget: Diplomacy is not Twitter. It is not built for viral outrage. It is about safeguarding interests while promoting peace. Condemning terrorism while extending humanitarian support is not a contradiction — it is coherence.

What often passes for foreign policy critique today seems a deliberate misreading of strategic imperatives. This becomes glaring when examining how critics invoke Iran, Israel, and the larger West Asian theatre. For example, the portrayal of Iran as an innocent, misunderstood actor willfully ignores the concerns over its nuclear programme. According to the IAEA, Iran now holds over 400 kg of 60 per cent-enriched uranium — dangerously close to weapons-grade. Multiple inspections have found uranium traces at undeclared sites, and Iran continues to block full transparency. Yet, such critical developments are conveniently omitted. This is not nuance; it is misdirection. It seeks to equate Iran's opaque nuclear manoeuvres with Israel's alleged nuclear capabilities — a comparison that collapses under scrutiny. Israel has never signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, nor has it

been found in violation of IAEA safeguards. Iran, by contrast, is a signatory and repeatedly non-compliant. To conflate the two is agenda-driven.

Some romanticise India-Iran ties by citing Tehran's support for India at the 1994 UN Human Rights Commission vote on Kashmir. But this overlooks the evolving nature of Iran's foreign policy. Iran is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation — a bloc that routinely criticises India on Kashmir. In recent years, Tehran has echoed calls for "restoration of rights" in J&K, aligning with positions India considers deeply problematic. Even the strategic relevance of the Chabahar Port is twisted into a narrative of Iranian altruism. The port's development depended heavily on India's backchannel diplomacy with the US, which provided sanctions waiver. India's relationship with Iran has been cautious and transactional, shaped by oil trade, connectivity goals, and regional deterrence, not emotional solidarity.

When it comes to Israel, let us not forget that full diplomatic ties were established not by the government but under former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao. That decision reflected strategic foresight. Since then, ties have deepened. To now point this trajectory as a betrayal of India's historical commitments is a politically convenient case of forgetting one's own legacy.

India's nuanced response to the Iran-Israel escalation is another case in point. The Ministry of External Affairs issued a firm, balanced statement urging de-escalation, emphasising dialogue and diplomacy, and reiterating concern for Indians in both countries. Emergency protocols were activated to ensure the safety of thousands in the region. Critics labelled this approach muted. But what was the alternative? Publicly taking sides in a conflict — one with nuclear implications, energy security risks, and the diaspora's safety at stake? Is that responsible statecraft or reckless signalling? India's foreign policy does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by geography, history, and hard power realities. Surrounded by two nuclear adversaries, locked in a matrix of regional alliances and dependencies, India cannot afford to grandstand. It must calculate every move with precision. Pragmatism is not a betrayal of principle — it is about preservation in a hostile world.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.

The danger today is not India's diplomatic caution; it is the trend of a partisan foreign policy critique. Turning complex international issues into tools for domestic political attack is hazardous. It undermines national unity on external affairs, weakens credibility abroad, and sends conflicting signals. Foreign policy is not the arena for point-scoring. It demands strategic consistency, institutional memory, and national coherence. When every international issue is filtered through the lens of electoral calculations or ideological grievances, we do not get a better foreign policy; we get a fragmented one. What India needs today is clarity without chaos, values without vanity, and vision without vendetta. The world is not waiting for India to moralise. It is watching to see if India can lead — with balance, wisdom, and strategic resolve.



RAKESH SINHA

THE RSS HAS been an important part of India since the 1930s. In March 1934, there was a two-day discussion on the RSS's ideology, leadership and activities in the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces and Berar. Again, in February 1947, the Central Assembly debated these issues.

Isn't it ironic, then, that the vision and actions of RSS founder K B Hedgewar got little space in such conversations? There are, however, some exceptions. After his death on June 21, 1940, some newspapers and journals — the *Modern Review*, edited by Ramdas Chatterjee and published from Calcutta and the *Marathi daily Kesari*, founded by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Pune — debated his idea of India for months.

At the age of 36, he visualised a movement whose sole objective would be to regain India's civilisational characteristics. He did not initiate a new stream of Hinduism. Rather, for him, the consolidation of Hinduism was a means to achieve all-round development of the nation. During his time, the efforts to unite Hindus were based on philanthropy and preaching the ideas of social reformers on the one hand and the politics of the Hindu Mahasabha on the other. Both approaches proved, by and large, to be inadequate to address the basic causes of injustice and discrimination against marginalised castes.

In *Adhyatma Kazi* (1908), UN Mukherjee vehemently criticised upper-caste and -class Hindus for being insensitive to their own people. This was among the first works that put forth the idea that the reasons for the decline of Hinduism, besides the threats

from Semitic religions, were its internal weaknesses. B R Ambedkar questioned the claims of Congress, Hindu saints, socialists and communists in *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*.

Hedgewar believed that symbolism and social Fabianism cannot lead to a sense of equality and social cohesion — what the RSS calls *samrasta*. This was a visible departure from the elitist approach based on high-minded speeches and symbolic programmes like co-dining and co-operation of social groups to address socio-cultural problems. Hedgewar realised feudalism was the mother of status-quoism, and the social and political elites had a stake in it. Even the revolutionary claims of socialists and communists against it were confined to speeches and resolutions. Hedgewar turned the tables.

He did not solicit support or patronage from any major political personality or raise massive funds during his 15-year leadership of the RSS. He relied on school and college teachers, clerks, graduates and common men, including orphans, to build up a movement. Others considered them just part of a crowd. Hedgewar groomed them as leaders of social and cultural movements. RSS workers actively spread the idea of undoing caste hierarchies. The "untouchability" question has been dealt with systematically by the Sangh. For this, it silently bore the brunt of conservative opposition.

A conglomeration of saints of all streams and sects, along with the Shankaracharyas, in Udipi in 1969 dealt the death blow to the abiding, false perception among a powerful

section of religious leaders and upper castes that untouchability had religious sanction. RSS chief M S Golwalkar was the architect of this great leap forward. The battle against social conservatism — across countries and epochs — has been the most difficult of tasks. Acrimony between races persists in the US; in South Africa, Apartheid's legacy of inequality continues in some ways today, despite decades-long campaigns against it.

The dynamism of an organisation and ideology is rooted in its openness, ability to accept its limitations and introduce corrective measures. The RSS possesses these features. Early on, it carried out surveys in hundreds of villages in Maharashtra to compare the RSS's intent to foster social change with its actual effect. In 1974, the third *sarsangchak*, Balasahab Deoras, said, "Untouchability should go lock, stock and barrel." Mohan Bhagwat gave this principle a practical formulation as a task for the organisation — to ensure "common wells, common temples and common mortuaries". In 1910, census commissioner EA Gait issued a questionnaire to determine who was a Hindu. It included questions about who were denied the use of common wells, ponds, mortuaries and temples. Known as the Gait Circular, it was eventually withdrawn before the 1911 census after protests by Hindu leaders.

Hedgewar was aware of the pitfalls of electoral politics. The RSS remained at a distance from the political activities of the Hindu Mahasabha, which wanted trained swayamseviks to work for its agenda. Hedgewar's position upon the Mahasabha

and the leaders of other Hindu organisations. Critics of the RSS ignore these internal challenges when they view Hinduism as a singular entity. Nathuram Godse was one such disillusioned worker who, along with four Hindutva activists, wrote to V D Savarkar, blaming the RSS for wasting the energies of Hindu youth. The files of the Mahasabha in the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library have upon them such examples of clashes between the Sangh and Mahasabha. This is reflected today, too. Many feel the RSS is too liberal on the minority question.

Hedgewar avoided binaries both in principle and practice. This is a reason RSS cadres do not hesitate while helping and serving non-Hindus — from food camps in 1950 and during the India-China war in 1962 to earthquake relief in Latur in 1993 and the plane crash in Ahmedabad in 2025. Stray statements and local incidents must not be seen as emanating from the RSS's philosophy. Using them as such only obstructs healthy dialogue and harms the national interest.

The RSS has a modest beginning. It worked without an office or signboard for years. Office bearers were created after three years. Till then, it functioned like a commune. The centenary year of the RSS is an occasion for both its critics and admirers to understand the message of Hedgewar: Selflessness and keeping the common person at the centre will keep an ideology and movement alive.

The writer is a former Rajya Sabha MP (BJP)

## Putting people at the core

RSS centenary is an occasion to understand Hedgewar's message of selflessness

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### NEED FOR PROTOCOL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Safety first' (IE, July 2). The disaster at a Telangana chemical plant is possibly the most devastating industrial accident in terms of fatalities since the Bhopal gas tragedy. We have failed to ensure the establishment of a foolproof safety protocol in industrial and commercial establishments, particularly those involving highly hazardous materials and processes. That another eight workers were killed in an explosion at a fireworks manufacturing unit in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, just a day after the Sangareddy mishap, demonstrates how far behind we are.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

### GAZA CRISIS

THIS REFERS TO the report, '112 killed in Israeli strikes...' (IE, July 2). For the world, Palestinians being killed in border while seeking handout at food distribution centres run by the Israeli-US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation is not more than a daily dose of news. The so-called "humanitarian aid hubs" are "death traps," as described by the UN, for hungry Palestinians. The killings at the food distribution sites make it quite clear that what is going on in Gaza is organised Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and those who support him have the blood of over 56,000 Palestinians on their hands.

G David Milton, Marthandachode

### BEING COOL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Cool, Uncool' (IE, July 2). In a world increasingly obsessed with perception, true coolness lies not in rebellion or trend-setting, but in presence. The ability to speak with clarity, present without fear, and carry confidence rooted in kindness — that leaves a lasting impression. Every moment is a first impression, and while no one is perfect, striving to be authentically excellent matters. Today, coolness is often confused with sarcasm, mockery, or superiority — especially in Gen Z circles, where bullying or putting others down is disguised as wit. But cruelty is never charisma. Perhaps the most effortlessly "cool" person is simply the one who doesn't try — but listens more, judges less, and uplifts others quietly.

Vansh Shekhar, Patna

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Cool, Uncool' (IE, July 2). Trying to be cool has become a phenomenon among adolescents and adults these days. Everyone now seems to strive to be cool, which is basically pretending to be who they actually aren't. People who intentionally try to adopt these six traits published in *The Journal of Experimental Psychology* put to bed the idea of being cool. They forget who they actually are. It is important to be who you are if you actually want to be perceived as cool.

Anvi Jain, New Delhi



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of private sector jobs lost in the U.S. in June 2025**

**33,000** As per ADP chief economist Nela Richardson, a slowdown in hiring and reluctance to replace departing workers led to job losses, particularly in professional services, education, and healthcare. AP

**Civilians killed in South Sudan in first three months of 2025**

**739** This figure marks a 110% increase from last quarter (352 deaths), with Warrap State recording the most casualties. The surge follows intensified clashes between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, whose detention in March escalated tensions. AP

**Number of Bangladeshi nationals held in Delhi**

**18** Bangladeshi nationals, including seven women and six children were apprehended near the Panchsheel flyover in south Delhi for residing illegally in India, the police said on Wednesday. Most were engaged in informal jobs like rag-picking and daily-wage labour. PTI

**Number of deaths in Europe due to early summer heatwave**

**8** People died as an early summer heatwave swept across Europe. France hospitalised 300 people, Italy issued red alerts in 18 cities, and Switzerland shut down a nuclear reactor due to overheated river water. In Spain, wildfires destroyed farms, while 50,000 people were evacuated in Turkey. REUTERS

**Tariffs to be paid by Vietnam on exports to the U.S.**

**20** In per cent. U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that Vietnam will also pay a 40% tariff on transhipped goods, under a new trade deal. In a Truth Social post, Trump said Vietnam would open its market to U.S. products at 0% tariff. REUTERS

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](https://facebook.com/thehindu) [twitter.com/the\\_hindu](https://twitter.com/the_hindu) [instagram.com/the\\_hindu](https://instagram.com/the_hindu)

## Are gig workers a part of India's labour data?

Though gig work is technically included under economic activity in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, without a specific classification, the survey fails to offer visibility into the unique nature of digital labour, characterised by multiple job roles, dependence on algorithms, lack of formal contract and absence of safety metrics

### ECONOMIC NOTES

Durga Narayan

**T**he 2025 Union Budget took several measures to formally 'recognise' gig and platform workers, and extended various social protection schemes to this growing workforce. Despite this recognition, the revised Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2025 does not include substantive changes to account for the diverse forms of gig and platform work.

#### Gaps in labour classification

Gig workers were first incorporated into the legal framework through the Code on Social Security, 2020. Under Chapter I, Section 2(35), a gig worker is defined as "a person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship." Platform work, as defined in the Code, is "a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment."

While this definition separates gig workers from both formal and informal categories, it doesn't clearly define who a gig worker is or the nature of gig work. According to NITI Aayog's 2022 report 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy', the gig workforce is expected to reach 23.5 million by 2029-30. Despite such projections and efforts to define gig work, India's primary labour statistics source, the PLFS, continues to subsume gig work under vague categories such as 'self-employed', 'own-account workers', or 'casual labour'. This statistical invisibility has direct consequences.

Clause 141 of the Code on Social



On the periphery: Gig workers prepare to deliver orders in New Delhi, in 2024. REUTERS

Security, 2020, "seeks to provide that the Central Government shall establish a Social Security Fund for social security and welfare of the unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers." Similarly, the National Social Security Board, constituted under Section 6 of the Code on Social Security, 2020, is tasked with framing and overseeing welfare schemes for gig and platform workers. Such welfare boards and policymakers rely on the PLFS for 'evidence-based policy', but the absence of a distinct category for gig and platform workers undermines its very intent. When classification itself is unclear in primary datasets, access to schemes becomes uneven and exclusionary.

#### How the PLFS falls short

In response to a Rajya Sabha query on whether the government had updated PLFS methodology to capture the rise of

gig work, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation stated, "No updation in the PLFS Schedule has been undertaken with the objective of specifically identifying persons engaged in the gig economy. However, all market activities i.e. activities performed for pay or profit which result in production of goods and services for exchange are included under the domain of economic activity considered in PLFS. The activity situation of a person who is found to be working or being engaged in economic activity during a specified reference period is associated with employment in PLFS. Hence, even the persons engaged in 'gig economy' for pay & profit are covered in PLFS."

Though gig work is technically included under economic activity, without a specific category or classification, the survey fails to offer visibility into the unique nature of digital

labour, characterised by multiple job roles, dependence on algorithms, lack of formal contract and absence of safety metrics. In the survey, while the question on the type of job contract provides an option for 'no written job contract', it doesn't capture the hybrid nature of work.

Unlike traditional self-employment, gig work is shaped by platform algorithms, performed across multiple apps and are mostly task-based rather than time-bound. Workers have no stable contracts, and often rely on digital reach. Many lack access to benefits or protections available to formal workers, and don't fully own their work processes, making the "self-employed" label misleading. Employment uncertainties, income volatility and algorithm governance remain invisible within PLFS classification. A food delivery person working across platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, for instance, will be flattened into a category that does not reflect entirely on their employment conditions or social security needs.

#### Recognition without representation

Recent policy efforts like the e-Shram registration, the issuance of digital ID cards, and health coverage under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana indicate the state's recognition of the gig and platform workforce. But unless statistical systems like the PLFS evolve, the data meant to support and monitor these interventions cannot be considered inclusive.

The 2025 PLFS revision introduced some important updates: a larger sample size, monthly estimates, and better rural representation. However, it still does not address the issues of how gig work is defined and understood. For inclusive policy making, India must update PLFS classification codes or introduce survey modules that distinctly capture gig work.

Durga Narayan is a policy researcher affiliated with the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Mumbai.

### THE GIST

▼ Gig workers were first incorporated into the legal framework through the Code on Social Security, 2020.

▼ According to NITI Aayog's 2022 report 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy', the gig workforce is expected to reach 23.5 million by 2029-30.

▼ Unlike traditional self-employment, gig work is shaped by platform algorithms, performed across multiple apps and are mostly task-based rather than time-bound. Workers have no stable contracts, and often rely on digital reach.

## How did Indian universities fare on the QS ranking list?

What are the parameters on which universities are judged? How can Indian universities improve?

Somak Raychaudhury

#### The story so far:

**F**or the first time, in the international ranking of universities published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a company specialising in higher education analysis based in the U.K., Indian universities have more than 50 spots in the top 1,500. The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru. This number has increased from 11 in 2015 to 54 in 2026, with eight universities, including Ashoka University in Haryana and Shiv Nadar Institute of Eminence in Greater Noida, getting featured for the first time.

#### What are the parameters?

The 2026 ranking is based on a whole range of parameters which include the

learning environment on campus, academic reputation (30%), impactful research (citations for research papers count for 20%, and international research network 5%), diversity (student diversity, international faculty and students count for 10%), student outcomes (employer reputation counts for 15%, while student placements 5%) and campus sustainability (5%).

#### Has higher education improved?

These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

For instance, the average undergraduate student to faculty ratio in Indian universities is 19. In order to be internationally competitive, this number needs to be between 10-15. At Ashoka University, for instance, over the last year for about 3,000 undergraduates, the ratio

was 11.5. These undergraduates come from 20 countries, which enhances the score for international diversity. Most universities in India have few international students, and most public universities cannot employ international faculty, which results in low scores in these categories.

Moreover, over the last few decades, Indian universities have not put much emphasis on original research carried out by faculty and students. For STEM subjects especially, the research is traditionally done in research institutes. This is in sharp contrast to global practices, as universities are the primary institutions where creation of knowledge takes place, in addition to its transmission to students, worldwide.

However, this is now changing. More and more universities, particularly IITs/IISERs and new private sector universities, are paying particular attention to research. With the advent of

the National Education Plan, 2020 (NEP), which emphasises on research in universities, more and more Indian institutions will take their place on international ranking lists.

Public universities used to pay very little attention to the employment opportunities of students, but professional institutes such as the IITs and IIMs have always had placement cells and employers' fairs. Now, even for large central universities, this is an important consideration. All this is crucial to international ranking lists such as the QS.

#### How can universities fare better?

As more and more universities begin to build research networks across the world, and hire quality faculty who can do research along with the necessary teaching of students, we will see the rise of Indian universities in these ranking lists. India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students. Particular attention to environmental aspects and sustainability in campuses will also earn points for universities aspiring to be among the top educational institutions.

Somak Raychaudhury is Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Physics, Ashoka University, Delhi-NCR. All opinions are personal.

### THE GIST

▼ The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru.

▼ These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

▼ India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students.



# AI in India: strategy must precede mission

India has declared its ambition to be a global leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance. As the world's largest democracy and a tech-savvy nation, it is well-positioned to champion an inclusive and human-centric approach to AI. But this aspiration risks being undermined by the absence of a comprehensive, democratically anchored national AI strategy.

India's current AI initiatives centre on the India Mission, led by a bureaucrat and housed as an independent unit within a Section 8 company under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. The Mission cannot substitute for a national strategy. Missions are vehicles for executing priorities, but only after priorities have been clearly defined.

In India's approach to AI, fundamental questions remain unresolved. What are our national priorities? Which governance values should guide us? How should institutions be structured? Moving forward without answering these questions poses two risks: it may compromise India's ability to lead and maintain strategic autonomy, and it may embed an AI governance model that is technocratic, opaque, and lacking democratic legitimacy.

## The many risks

This is not an abstract concern. Several pressing risks are already visible. AI technologies are becoming increasingly embedded in India's defence, intelligence, and critical infrastructure systems. Recent developments – military conflict, weaponisation of financial infrastructure, strategic technology competition – have demonstrated how technological dependencies can be leveraged to achieve geopolitical objectives. Without an indigenous, coordinated AI strategy, India faces the risk of strategic dependencies on foreign technologies. Safeguarding India's strategic autonomy requires developing a whole-of-government



Ruchi Gupta

Executive Editor of the Future of India Foundation and an Aspen Global Leadership Fellow. This column is based on the Foundation's report 'Governing AI in India: Why Strategy Must Precede Mission'. Vandita Gupta contributed to the research

AI strategy aligned with national security priorities and focused on building resilient, sovereign capabilities.

Data is the raw material of AI. As India builds public data platforms, how this data is curated, accessed, and governed will shape innovation and market power. Without transparent, democratically debated data governance frameworks, these ecosystems risk reinforcing corporate concentration and undermining public trust.

Nowhere is the governance gap clearer than in employment. Automation is already transforming India's labour market. In 2024 alone, India's top three IT services firms – TCS, Infosys, and Wipro – shed nearly 65,000 jobs. The International Monetary Fund estimates that 26% of India's workforce is exposed to generative AI, with 12% at risk of displacement. Despite this, national AI initiatives do not sufficiently address employment transition, workforce planning, or social protections. The absence of structured input from labour economists, civil society, and workforce experts has limited the ambit of deliberation to technocratic concerns. Addressing these gaps will help ensure that AI adoption supports economic resilience and social stability.

AI is extraordinarily energy-hungry. The International Energy Agency projects that global data centre electricity demand will double by 2030. This poses challenges for India. Eleven of India's 20 largest cities face acute water stress. Groundwater levels are rapidly declining in Bengaluru and Hyderabad – both emerging AI and data centre hubs. Yet policy discussions on AI in India have scarcely addressed the energy implications of scaling AI.

AI will profoundly reshape work, education, and the social contract. It will determine which skills are valued, influence how citizens are trained, and shape who benefits from economic gains. These shifts cannot be left

to market forces or technical experts. They demand national dialogue involving industry leaders, parliamentarians, educators, civil society, and labour representatives, to chart a just and equitable path forward.

As AI gets integrated in sensitive domains – healthcare, policing, welfare – the risks of bias, discrimination, and lost accountability grow. Without clear regulatory frameworks, public trust in AI governance may erode. India has rightly positioned itself as a voice for the Global South in international AI governance forums, notably through its leadership in the Global Partnership on AI. But global credibility depends on coherence at home. Without a transparent, democratically grounded national strategy, India's ability to shape global AI norms will remain constrained.

Strategy must precede mission. Harnessing AI for national leadership and public good requires proactive, strategic, and coordinated governance. Managing this transition demands inclusive, forward-looking, and democratically accountable governance anchored in a national strategy shaped through open public deliberation.

## What is the path forward?

First, India needs to publish a Cabinet-endorsed national AI strategy and present it to Parliament. Second, it must constitute a dedicated Standing Committee on AI and Emerging Technologies in Parliament to oversee executive initiatives, ethical risks, and public consultations. Third, it needs to commission a national impact study on AI-driven employment disruption, particularly in entry-level white-collar roles, with granular data on sectors, demographics, and regions.

Taking the time to build democratic consensus and institutional architecture is a difficult road to take, but it will make India a genuine AI leader.

# Deaths in the sanctuary

Death of tigers leaves environmentalists alarmed, raising conservation concerns

## STATE OF PLAY

R. Krishna Kumar  
krishna.kr@thehindu.co.in

The recent death of an adult tiger and its four cubs – due to poisoning at the Male Mahadeshwara Hills (MM Hills) Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka – has not only shocked conservationists but has raised pertinent questions on the wildlife protection machinery and environmental governance prevailing in the State.

In the immediate aftermath of the preliminary investigation, three people were arrested and a few officials were sent on leave – actions aimed at conveying the administration's resolve to act decisively. Besides, two investigations are currently under way, one by the Karnataka Forest Department and another by a committee constituted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Both committees have been given 14 days time to submit their reports.

It is being argued that they should not only investigate the immediate lapses that led to the tiger deaths, but also take a broader view of the systemic and administrative issues that resulted in such a tragedy, which is reflective of a deeper malaise within the department.

Multiple concerns need to be addressed, including whether there was a larger network of poachers at work, shortage of manpower for protection duties, delay in release of wages to the frontline staff, which may impact jungle patrolling, delay in release of compensation to the victims in case of conflict with wildlife, among others.

Experts also point to another gaping flaw in the system: it



is the failure to secure the conviction of those responsible for killing wild animals. The conviction rates are so poor that the law does not act as a deterrent anymore to prevent "revenge killings" or even poaching.

For instance, in February 2023, a tiger was found poisoned, its limbs tethered to a stone and its body dumped in a tank in Bandipur. However, more than two years later, the case has seen no progress. In fact, elephant deaths due to electrocution in Karnataka are more rampant than tiger deaths.

According to official statistics, of the 291 elephants that died in the State between 2021-22 and August 2024, as many as 30 were electrocuted and six were poached. Reports of wild animals being trapped in snares have emerged from the MM Hills, Bandipur, Nagarhole, and other regions in recent times. Yet, in most cases, authorities have hit a dead end and have made little progress to result in convictions.

It is true that human-animal conflict is intensifying across Karnataka, with crop depredation by elephants and livestock killings by tigers or leopards on the rise. But these conflicts have also been exacerbated by flawed policies – delays in compensation being a clear indicator.

According to statistics from

the Karnataka Forest Department, 35,580 conflict cases were reported during 2024-25. Compensation was approved in only 20,147 cases, while 14,245 cases remained pending. In addition, 918 cases were denied compensation.

Karnataka takes pride in its tiger and elephant populations as markers of the success of conservation initiatives. With an estimated 563 tigers, according to the 2022 census, Karnataka also harbours nearly 6,400 elephants as per 2023 data, the highest in the country. But conservation cannot be about numbers alone while ignoring the inherent contradictions in policies that undermine the environmental gains.

The reversal in the government's stance on Goa-Tannar power transmission line that cuts through Kali Tiger Reserve – a project which the forest department had rejected in 2024; the Sharavathi storage project which threatens to fragment the Western Ghats ecosystem, clearances to mini hydel projects in sensitive areas, linear projects cutting through areas where human-wildlife conflict is high are a few examples that cast doubt on the State's commitment to environmental protection.

This is because such projects inevitably lead to habitat encroachment, fragmentation, and disturbance, forcing wildlife to stray into human landscapes, aggravating conflict situations. The deaths of five tigers in the MM Hills should be viewed against the backdrop of such policy inconsistencies, which reflect a deeper malaise in environmental governance.

Now that committees are probing the incident, it remains to be seen whether they will merely assign blame or work to fix the system.

# Custodial deaths: police convictions remain zero in T.N. and beyond

Dalits are disproportionately targeted for police brutality in Tamil Nadu

## DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy  
Devynshi Rihani  
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Even a murderer would not have caused this much injury to a person", observed the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday during the hearing of a batch of Public Interest Litigation petitions over the custodial death of Ajith Kumar, a security guard who died in police custody in Sivaganga district last Saturday.

Kumar's death is not an isolated incident but part of a broader picture in Tamil Nadu and even in the rest of the country. The pattern is clear: a significant number of custodial deaths take place, of which a considerable number of them are reported, a few of the policemen are arrested, and none of them are convicted. Kumar's death is definitely not the first instance to spark public outrage in Tamil Nadu. The Ambasamudram custodial torture in 2023 and the Sathankulam custodial torture case that led to the death of a father-son duo in 2020 are still fresh in memory.

Data show that Tamil Nadu has a long history of police brutality. According to data from Parliament, 490 deaths were reported while suspects were in judicial or police custody between 2016-17 and 2021-22 (up to March 31, 2022), as shown in Map 1.

In the past six years, Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of fatalities (2,630) in judicial/police custody among all the States, while Tamil Nadu reported the highest number among the southern States. In total, 11,656 deaths were recorded in India in the period considered. It is important to note, though, that not all custody deaths are due to police excesses.

While the five constables involved in Kumar's death were arrested, data show that no police of-

ficer has been convicted for custodial deaths between 2017 and 2022. Not just in Tamil Nadu, but across India, no police officer has been held accountable for such deaths in this period.

In India, 345 magisterial/judicial enquiries were ordered into the deaths of persons in police custody/lockup between 2017 and 2022 (Chart 2). And in these five years, 123 policemen were even arrested while such deaths were investigated. Moreover, over 79 were also chargesheeted. However, not a single policeman was convicted.

Data also show that convictions of State police personnel have been rare, not just in the case of custodial deaths, but also in any human rights violations case.

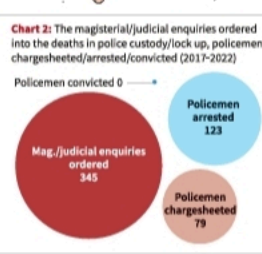
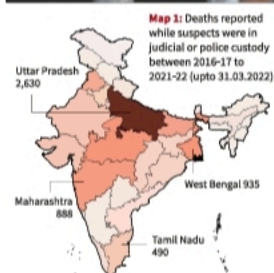
Chart 3 shows that 74 cases of human rights violations related to illegal detention, deaths in custody, and torture/causing hurt/injury were filed against police in India between 2017 and 2022. Forty-one police personnel were chargesheeted. However, only three were convicted.

Importantly, policemen arrested for human rights violations are disproportionately low compared to the actual cases. Those convicted form a negligible share of those few arrested.

Worryingly, those belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) often bear the brunt of custodial torture in Tamil Nadu. A disproportionately higher share of detainees – persons held lawfully in custody under preventive detention laws, distinct from regular suspects charged with specific crimes – in Tamil Nadu belong to the SCs. In 2022, 38.5% of the detainees in Tamil Nadu were SC, while the community's share in the State's population was 20% (Table 4). This problem is mostly unique to Tamil Nadu and as can be seen from the table, the State police also take in a much higher number of people in detention. As on December 31, 2022, Tamil Nadu had 2,129 detainees – almost half of India's number.

## No accountability for custodial deaths

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Crime Records Bureau, the Parliament Questions and Answers, and the 2011 Census



**Table 4:** The share of SC in detainees among States with a high number of detainees as on December 31, 2022

State/U.T.	Total detainees	% of SC in detainees	% of SC in total population
Tamil Nadu	2,129	38.5	20.01
J&K U.T.	546	1.1	7.38
Gujarat	334	9.6	6.74
Haryana	235	1.3	20.17
Uttar Pradesh	172	7.6	20.7

Tamil Nadu had 2,129 detainees – almost half of India's number

vignesh.r@thehindu.co.in, sambavi.p@thehindu.co.in, devynshi.b@thehindu.co.in

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1975

## 60 p.c. of Foreign Doctors fail in tests by council

London, July 2: Sixty percent of the foreign doctors who took Britain's first tests in English and clinical knowledge have failed, the General Medical Council (GMC) announced yesterday.

Dr. Abdul Sayeed, Chairman of the Overseas Doctors Association, criticised the examinations and said he was not surprised that so many candidates had failed.

Only 27 out of 68 doctors passed the two-day tests held in Edinburgh last week. Dr. Sayeed remarked, "The question paper was such that many doctors could not understand it."

The candidates came from 70 countries whose citizens are eligible for the tests.

Doctors from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the West Indies are not required to sit for the examinations because their degrees are recognised in the UK. However, this year's graduates from India, Pakistan, and non-Commonwealth nations must undergo the tests.

The two-day assessments evaluated an applicant's ability to understand colloquial expressions that might arise in a doctor's office, in addition to testing their clinical knowledge.

Dr. Sayeed commented, "On the multiple-choice question, many doctors spent 20 minutes deciphering it because it was very bizarre and badly produced."

They were asked how they would cope with a pregnant woman with an infectious disease who had been in a road crash, and what they would tell the woman's mother-in-law. "It is not the sort of situation that a medical practitioner is likely to encounter very often," Dr. Sayeed said.

"All these put together in one question was a bit too much. The doctors were not expecting that type of question."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1925

## Centenary celebrations.

London, July 2: The Duke and Duchess of York attended the Railway Station Celebrations at Darlington where a quarter million people witnessed the six-mile long procession of locomotives and rolling stock showing the various stages of evolution from old "Puffing Billy" and "Dandy locomotives" to the latest high-speed mammoth engines and luxurious carriages and restaurant saloons.



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## KILL THE BILL

Karnataka Mis-Information and Fake News (Prohibition) Bill  
sets up a censor in the garb of rooting out falsehoods

SEVERAL ELEMENTS GO into making legislation "bad in law": Vague provisions and definitions that invite misuse; arrogation of power to government authorities without necessary checks and safeguards; difficulties of enforcement or possibilities of selective enforcement and, most importantly, legitimate concerns about infringement on fundamental rights and violation of due process. The Karnataka Mis-Information and Fake News (Prohibition) Bill fulfils these criteria, and more. It constitutes an "Authority" — headed by the state Information & Broadcasting Minister and made up mostly of lawmakers and officials selected by the government — that is all but certain to act as a censor. It is a bill of bad faith — it enables an exercise of arbitrary power under the garb of rooting out falsehood. It is an overzealous government addressing a complex issue through the bluntest of instruments.

India has approximately 700 million smartphone users, and Karnataka is among the states with the highest internet penetration. Can the proposed Authority mine and analyse the vast amounts of data on social media while ensuring that no citizen's right to free speech is violated? More importantly, even if it could, should it? "Fake news" is defined by the Bill as false or inaccurate reporting, editing that distorts facts and purely fabricated content. Misinformation is "knowingly" or "recklessly" spreading falsehoods, with exceptions for religious sermons, satire, and "artistic expression". Evidently, the government of Karnataka, not satisfied with setting itself up as the arbiter of Truth, seeks to define Art as well. It also wishes to prosecute what it deems as going against "feminism" and "Sanatan Dharma". The Bill compounds the sin of loosely worded and vague provisions with harsh punishment: Offenders face fines up to Rs 10 lakh, seven years' imprisonment or both. It flies in the face of the letter and spirit of the Supreme Court's judgment in the *Shreya Singhal* (2013) case and the Bombay High Court verdict on the Centre's IT Rules in 2024, both of which warned against the dangers of ill-defined legal provisions encroaching on free speech.

India already has laws on defamation and for protecting "hurt sentiments", which are often weaponised by governments to curb fundamental freedoms. Karnataka's capital is a hub of innovation, and of a start-up culture that has the potential to propel the state's and the country's economy forward. The government must recognise that innovation and censorship do not go together. Fifty years after the Emergency, the lesson on the dangers of state excess and overreach should have been internalised by Congress governments, including in Karnataka. As Justice Gautam Patel noted in the Bombay HC's 2024 verdict, "Every attempt to whittle down a fundamental right must be resisted not and branch." Misinformation and fake news are indeed problems of the present and future. Addressing them requires digital literacy, which involves going to schools to ensure that the next generation is equipped to sift fact from falsehood. Such programmes require finesse, time and the right intent. Not a draconian law — the Bill needs to be binned.

## NO IMPUNITY

Incidents in Odisha, Himachal frame sense of entitlement of  
powerful. Action must be taken, no one is above the law

TWO INCIDENTS OF assault in two states this week tell the same dismal story: About the rule of law being flouted by the powerful, and of the sense of impunity that makes this a recurring event. In Himachal Pradesh, Anurudh Singh, the state's Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister, was booked on Tuesday for allegedly assaulting two officials of the National Highways Authority of India during a site visit. Just a day earlier, in Odisha, an official of the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation was dragged out of a grievance redressal meeting that he was presiding over in his chamber and beaten up by a group of individuals, who allegedly demanded that he apologise for misbehaving with BJP leader Jagannath Pradhan.

It hardly matters that a Congress government is in power in Himachal Pradesh and that Odisha is a BJP-ruled state. Similar incidents in different parts of the country over the years are proof that an overblown sense of entitlement in the power-drunk translates into a disrespect for others and the rules of the game, and that it cuts across party and regional lines. These two incidents in Himachal and Odisha, in particular, highlight a disturbing winner-takes-all attitude that stems from the belief that to be in power or to have the patronage of those in power is to be above the law. In a political culture that makes fear and favour its currency, this means that the ruler-subject model, which should have no place in a democracy, becomes routinised. Bureaucrats are partners in administration, not *durbars* in the *raj*'s court.

Exemplary action must be taken. In Himachal Pradesh, amidst calls for the minister's resignation, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has assured that the due process of the law will unfold. In Odisha, three of the accused have been arrested, with BJP suspending the primary membership of five party workers for their alleged involvement in the assault on the BMC official. In all such incidents that threaten to erode public faith in the rule of law, those found guilty of abusing their position and power must face — and they must be seen to face — the consequences of their actions. Sending out the message that no one is above the law in a democracy is the only way forward.

## A FURRY TRAIL

People love their pets. So much so, that  
they will go to court over them

LARGE AND INTENSELY black, thick, velvety fur, has a faint fringe of white hair across his chest; not easy to find in ordinary light. When his daughter Clara's beloved black cat Bambino disappeared while she was convalescing in a sanatorium, Mark Twain put out the ad in the *New York American* and spent days receiving strangers with abandoned black cats in the hope of finding Bambino among them. The cat returned on his own, but it was no secret in New York that the American writer loved his daughter, and Bambino, with equal fervour.

That they occupy a special place in the lives of their humans is no secret. But separated by centuries and continents, the spirit in litigation and mediations in India's capital over pets and strays only goes to show that the law is just beginning to catch up with what the heart has always known: That animals matter — not as assets, but as companions. And, in some circumstances, they are the bone of contention or caught between adversaries. Take, for instance, a civil suit filed in 2023 by an advocate against his neighbours in south Delhi. The reason: Their pet had chased him, leading him to fall and fracture his wrists. When TMC MP Mahua Moitra broke up with lawyer Jai Anant Dehadrai, the bitterness spilled over into a custody tussle over their beloved Rottweiler, Henry.

It may seem trivial to some, absurd even, but these disputes, at their core, are declarations of how much trust is conveyed through a wag of a tail or the flick of a feline ear. In lonely, crowded urban metropolises, pets provide the kind of unstinting comfort that few can. Neighbours fight, lovers part, but what lingers is the bond with the creature left in between. Reforms to Australian law last month recognised this: For the first time, in cases of separation, Australian courts will factor in emotional attachment when determining pet ownership. As Delhi courts navigate this tricky terrain, it is a reminder that love, no matter how small or furry, always leaves a trail.



ARUN PRAKASH

WHILE PAKISTANI FIELD Marshal Asim Munir's oration at the Pakistan Naval Academy on June 28 has drawn considerable media focus, there is a need to assess how much attention India should pay to his utterances. The rabble-rousing tone and toxic India-baiting content of his speech, ill-befitting the occasion — a navy passing-out parade — was a clear sign of insecurity in the face of widespread public criticism of the Pakistan army in general and his promotion in particular.

Notwithstanding the banality of his words, we must recognise that since Field Marshals do not retire, Munir, if he so chooses, will be around for a long time — either as Army Chief or as political puppet master. By harping on Hindu-Muslim schisms and framing India as an "existential threat" to its perpetual "victim", Pakistan, Munir seeks to gain favour with the public and cement a political niche for himself, sidelining the civilian regime.

Given Munir's continued malevolent presence, India must steel itself to face escalating tensions. In all likelihood, it was his inflammatory rhetoric that triggered Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and its strike proxies to plan and launch the Pahalgam terror.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his speech on May 12, unequivocally spelt out four core principles that would govern India's future policy against terrorism. Optimists amongst us are hopeful that this declaration of India's "red lines" by the PM will cause the Pakistan "deep state" to pause and perhaps mend its ways. Sceptics, however, believe that it is only a matter of time before the ISI initiates yet another terror strike on India.

In these circumstances, no time must be lost in analysing the threadbare Operation Sindoor and disseminating the lessons learnt — at the strategic, operational and tactical levels — before we are faced with a similar crisis once again. In this context, we have the admirable precedent of the Vajpayee government, which constituted the Kargil Review Committee on July 29, 1999 — a mere three days after the cessation of hostilities.

The urgency here is even more marked since this "90-hour war" saw an unimaginable leap in the level of technologies em-

A review committee, like that set up after  
Kargil, is needed post Operation Sindoor

A comprehensive review of what is being termed, 'the largest BVR air combat in history' during Op Sindoor is best undertaken by the IAF's esteemed Tactics and Combat Development Establishment, particularly against the backdrop of our past experience of 'aerial ambushes' in Kargil and in the post-Balakot encounters. The lacunae in equipment and intelligence as well as lessons learned and changes required in training, tactics and strategies must be addressed post-haste.

played in combat and the dizzying pace of kinetic action. While India asserted its success in achieving its objectives of targeting terrorist infrastructure and demonstrating a markedly bolder and more resolute deterrence strategy, there are several aspects that require urgent review and analysis.

First, we were found wanting in strategic communication and narrative-building. While the conflict generated unprecedented levels of hyperbolic distortion and disinformation from media on both sides, India's lag in official narrative-building allowed Pakistan to steal a significant moment. Compared to Pakistan's proactive media outreach and timely official briefings, Indian briefings were often reactive, and failed to put across, our notable military successes.

Second, the issue of aircraft losses suffered by India was ineptly handled across the board. Since aircraft attrition is an inevitable consequence in combat, there was little to be gained by concealing or acting coy about Indian Air Force (IAF) losses. The exaggerated Pakistani claims could not be logically countered by the dribbles of information coming first from the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore and then from a seminar in Indonesia. A forthright admission, followed by an account of the next day's devastating Indian response, which claimed six Pakistan Air Force (PAF) fighters and two other aircraft, would have boosted the credibility of our narrative.

Third, the extensive employment of "beyond visual range" or BVR air-to-air missiles and advanced airborne radars in this conflict has proved a major game-changer in air combat. This demands urgent in-depth study and analysis. The aerial engagements on the night of May 7/8 between the two South Asian air forces, involving over 100 aircraft, were unprecedented and have captured the attention of air power analysts worldwide.

A comprehensive review of what is being termed, "the largest BVR air combat in history" during Operation Sindoor is best undertaken by the IAF's esteemed Tactics and Combat Development Establishment, particularly against the backdrop of our past experience of "aerial ambushes" in Kargil

and in the post-Balakot encounters. The lacunae in equipment and intelligence as well as lessons learned and changes required in training, tactics and strategies must be addressed post-haste.

Rising above the minutiae of physical conflict, we need to remind our decision-makers that wars, if inevitable, must be waged only to eliminate the *casus belli* and achieve a stable and enduring peace. This places three responsibilities on the country's political leadership: (a) to lay down, clear aims for which armed action is being initiated; (b) to specify, to the military, the desired "end-state" to be achieved, before termination of hostilities; and (c) to ensure that adequate resources are provided — in time — for the action contemplated.

There is scant authentic information on these aspects in the public domain. The waters have been further muddied by US President Donald Trump's insinuated claims of brokering peace. In the face of incessant commentary by Western observers about the risks of nuclear first use in South Asia, it was reassuring to hear from India's CDS about the "rationality and maturity", displayed by both sides in avoiding escalation to the nuclear threshold.

The extensive utilisation of cyber warfare and missiles as well as unmanned vehicles of brokering peace. In the face of incessant commentary by Western observers about the risks of nuclear first use in South Asia, it was reassuring to hear from India's CDS about the "rationality and maturity", displayed by both sides in avoiding escalation to the nuclear threshold.

The extensive utilisation of cyber warfare and missiles as well as unmanned vehicles of brokering peace. In the face of incessant commentary by Western observers about the risks of nuclear first use in South Asia, it was reassuring to hear from India's CDS about the "rationality and maturity", displayed by both sides in avoiding escalation to the nuclear threshold.

The writer is a former Indian Navy chief and chairman, Chief of Staff Committee



GEORGE JOHN

## IMAGINE SISYPHUS HAPPY

We can choose how we suffer, and in that choice, find freedom

"WHY ME?" This question rises unbidden in times of crisis. It may arrive in a hospital ward, in the stillness after a diagnosis, or at the bedside of a loved one. It is the human soul's most honest protest when life turns suddenly unjust, cruel, meaningless.

As a retired psychiatrist and a husband watching his beloved wife of 52 years suffer the indignities of advanced Parkinson's Disease, I know this question well. It is not a theoretical query but one shaped by breath, loss, and long nights.

Albert Camus wrote that the only reason philosophical question is whether life is worth living. He gave us the haunting image of Sisyphus, condemned to push a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down. Yet, Camus invites us to imagine Sisyphus happy. Not because his task has changed, but because his mind has. He has accepted the absurd and still chosen to live.

We are not always given reasons for what happens. Often, we are left with the bare reality, and our response becomes the only form of dignity we possess. In that sense, "Why me?" is not just a cry of anguish but a plea for meaning. It is an invitation to examine what lies at the core of our existence.

Psychologically, the question arises when we are brought face to face with our limits. When illness strikes, or a career ends abruptly, or grief overwhelms us, our internal compass spins. The story we tell ourselves about our

## IN GOOD FAITH

Sometimes, faith does not remove the suffering — it simply holds it. It gives us a wider frame in which to place our pain. One need not understand suffering to bear it with grace. Biologically speaking, suffering protects us — pain alerts us to danger. Anguish compels us to seek others. The cry of "why me?" has evolutionary value; it invites others to come close, to witness, to help.

life no longer holds. Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz, believed that human beings could endure unimaginable suffering as long as they had a "why", a purpose. "When we are no longer able to change a situation," he wrote, "we are challenged to change ourselves".

This has been true in my life. My wife's decline has changed everything. There are no holidays now, no spontaneous walks, no ordinary ease. Yet, every morning, as we begin the rituals of care, feeding, physiotherapy, soft music, gentle words, I realise that love remains. And in love, there is still meaning.

Caring brings its own burden, a quieter suffering. It is a slow, private erosion of one's energy and identity. But it also deepens character. What begins as duty slowly becomes devotion. The question "Why me?" may persist, but the answer becomes less important than the daily act of showing up.

For people of faith, "Why me?" becomes a prayer. The psalmist cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These same words were echoed by Christ on the cross. Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is part of it.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, suffering is accepted as part of the human condition, dukkha, something to be transcended through awareness, detachment, compassion. In Islam, the concept of *sabr*, or patient endurance, teaches that the divine is closest

to the broken-hearted. Sometimes, faith does not remove the suffering — it simply holds it. It gives us a wider frame in which to place our pain. One need not understand suffering to bear it with grace. Biologically speaking, suffering protects us — pain alerts us to danger. Anguish compels us to seek others. The cry of "why me?" has evolutionary value; it invites others to come close, to witness, to help.

But beyond biology, there is empathy. When we suffer, we become more capable of understanding others who suffer. If we let it, pain can open the heart. That may be one of the few hidden blessings of suffering: It deepens us.

Over time, "Why me?" may shift to "What now?" or "How shall I live through this?" That shift is subtle but powerful. It marks a move from protest to purpose. From paralysis to action.

Not all questions need answers. Some simply need listening. As theologian Paul Tillich said, "The first duty of love is to listen." So, we listen to ourselves, to those we love, and to the silence where no words come.

In my home, amid medicines, wheelchairs, nurses, there is still laughter. There is music. There is prayer. No one escapes suffering. But we can choose how we suffer. In that choice lies our freedom.

The writer is a retired psychiatrist

## JULY 3, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

## PRESIDENT GROMYKO

THE SOVIET PARLIAMENT unanimously elected Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, as the country's President. Departing from the normal Kremlin practice of the party leader also holding the title of the chief of state, the 75-year-old veteran diplomat was elected to the high post by the 1,500-member Supreme Soviet. Observers feel the move will allow Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to concentrate on domestic affairs.

## PM ASSURES ZIA

THE SECOND MEETING of the Indo-Pakistan

joint commission began in New Delhi after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assurance to President Ziaul Haq that he will do everything possible to make it a success.

## KASHMIR BANDH

SRINAGAR CITY OBSERVED total bandh, while it was part in the other four districts of the Valley. The call for a Kashmir bandh was given by the National Conference (F) and supported by other Opposition parties as part of their struggle for "restoration of democracy". It was on this day last year that the Governor, Jagmohan, dismissed the Farooq Abdullah ministry after 12 of his party MLAs sided with GM

Shah and the latter became Chief Minister with the support of the Congress (I) legislature party.

## MUKHERJEE QUILTS

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, PRESIDENT of the WBPCCL, has decided to step down from his office, owing responsibility for the defeat of his party in the Calcutta corporation election. Announcing his decision at a press conference, flanked by two youth leaders, Subroto Mukherjee and Somen Mitra, Mukherjee said his decision was "in conformity with the democratic traditions and culture of the Congress". He reiterated that he was not succumbing to any pressures, even from New Delhi.





# Sinhalese migrated from Southern India, mixed with Adivasis: study

The formation of the Sinhalese genetic pool is dated to about 3,000 years ago, falling within the range of dates displayed broadly by Indian and other Sri Lankan populations, and around the time of the proposed migration date of Sinhalese to their present homeland in the Sinhala chronicles

R. Prasad

**A**nalyses of whole-genome sequence data of urban Sinhalese and two indigenous Adivasi clans in Sri Lanka, which live in geographically separated regions in the country, have shed light on the migratory history of these populations and their genetic relationship to each other and to many Indian populations.

The study, published recently in the journal *Current Biology*, found that Sinhalese and Adivasi are genetically closest to each other and to South Indians, but at a regional and fine-scale level, the two Adivasi clans are genetically distinct.

For the study, whole genomes of 35 urban Sinhalese individuals and 19 individuals from two indigenous Adivasi clans were sequenced. Of the 19 genomes of Adivasi clans that were sequenced, five were from among Interior Adivasi and 14 were from among Coastal Adivasi.

## A genetic perspective

The sampling and data generation were possible due to the outreach efforts of Sri Lankan collaborator Ruwandi Ranasinghe, from the University of Colombo. In addition, the whole genome data of 35 Sri Lankan Tamils sampled in the U.K., which were already sequenced as part of the 1,000 Genomes Project, were included in the analyses.

Sinhalese chronicles and previous genetic studies had proposed that the Sinhalese people had migrated from northern or northwest India around 500 BCE, though their exact origins and migratory history are still debated. That the Sinhalese speak an Indo-European language, Sinhala, whose present-day distribution lies primarily in northern India, further supported the idea of their migration from northern India. But the current study contradicted the findings of the previous studies from a genetic perspective.

"The genetic ancestries and their proportions in the Adivasi and Sinhalese are most similar to Dravidian speaking populations, which live in Southern India today," Niraj Rai of the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, and one of the corresponding authors of the paper, told *The Hindu*.

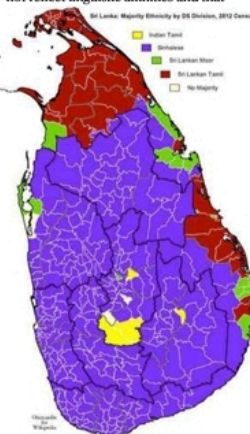
"Even among South Indian populations, we find that the Sinhalese are genetically closer to those communities that have higher proportions of the so-called ASI or Ancestral South Indian ancestry," Maanasa Raghavan, assistant professor at the University of Chicago and a corresponding author of the study, said.

"In contrast to many North Indians, these populations generally have lower levels of a genetic ancestry related to ancient groups from the Eurasian Steppe, proposed to have carried Indo-European languages into South Asia and that are today spoken widely in northern regions of India."

## Genes and linguistic affinities

But how does one reconcile the fact that the Sinhalese people speak a language that is classified as Indo-European, which today is spoken mostly in North India?

The authors explained that genes do not reflect linguistic affinities and that



A map of Sri Lanka showing the majority ethnicity by DS Division according to the 2012 Census. Yellow: Indian Tamils; green: Sinhalese; maroon: Sri Lankan Moor; white: no majority. DEPARTMENT OF CENSUS & STATISTICS, SRI LANKA



Genes don't reflect linguistic affinities and biological and cultural evolution can have different trajectories. Representative image. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

biological and cultural evolution can have different trajectories. They have speculated that this genetic-linguistic discordance may have been caused by the Sinhalese population having migrated from somewhere in North India geographically, but genetically speaking, the migration may have come from a group that resembles more South Indian Dravidian speakers today.

An alternative explanation is that a small group of Sinhalese people, perhaps representing the elite, might have migrated to Sri Lanka and transmitted the language but not the genes.

"If the Sinhalese were derived from a North Indian genetic cluster with higher Steppe-related ancestry, mixing had to have happened with ASI populations to dilute their genetic ancestries and pull them genetically closer to South Indian populations in our analyses. More anthropological studies are needed to fully understand these differing genetic and cultural affinities of the Sinhalese," Raghavan said.

**Support from anthropological studies**  
The time of formation of the Sinhalese genetic pool was dated in the study to about 3,000 years ago, falling within the range of dates displayed broadly by Indian and other Sri Lankan populations and around the time of the proposed migration date of the Sinhalese in the chronicles (500 BCE).

"The date our analysis reveals is interesting. It implies that the Sinhalese ancestors migrated to Sri Lanka fairly close in time to the dynamic genetic mixing events that were occurring about 2,000-4,000 years ago in India that created the ANI-ASI genetic spectrum we see in today's populations," Rai explained. (ANI stands for 'ancestral North India' and ASI for 'ancestral South Indian'.)

Sinhalese chronicles also say that when the Sinhalese people migrated from India to Sri Lanka about 3,000 years ago, the Adivasi were already living in Sri Lanka. This is also supported by anthropological studies that propose that the Adivasi are descended from early hunter-gatherers in the region. The Adivasi are in fact traditionally hunter-gatherers and the Indigenous peoples of Sri Lanka.

"At a broad scale, Adivasi today look genetically very similar to the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil. This must mean that the Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, or other groups migrating from South India must have met the Adivasi, mixed with



The genetic ancestries and their proportions in the Adivasi and Sinhalese are most similar to Dravidian speaking populations, which live in Southern India today

them heavily, and contributed to what is the present-day genetic structure of the Adivasi," Raghavan said.

The Sinhalese and the Adivasi are close to each other and share broad-level genetic similarities. On a finer-scale demographic resolution, however, the study found that the two Adivasi clans are a bit different from the Sinhalese. The Adivasi have slightly higher levels of ancient hunter-gatherer ancestry than the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils, and have maintained smaller population sizes over the course of their history, both of which support their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle.

The Adivasi genomes also display signatures of endogamy, which appear as long stretches of DNA inherited from a common ancestor. The study further reported that a consequence of the low population size and endogamy is that the genetic diversity among the Adivasi is lower than that in the urban populations, which may have an impact on their health and disease status.

While both Adivasi clans have maintained lower population sizes compared to the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils, the authors found that the Interior Adivasi clan seemed to have undergone a stronger reduction in their population size compared to the Coastal Adivasi, leading to a greater loss of their genetic diversity.

"We find the two Adivasi clans – the Coastal Adivasi and the Interior Adivasi – also have some differences in their genetic ancestry arising due to distinct geographic separation between them," Rai said.

This, according to Raghavan, indicated that the Interior Adivasi clan must have undergone stronger pressures, perhaps societal or environmental, to keep the population size lower compared to their Coastal counterparts. Explaining how the two Adivasi clans are more similar to each other, but still have genetic differences at a fine scale, she said that this basically means at some point in time, due to geographic separation, the genetic and

lifestyle attributes of the two clans started to drift apart.

## Capturing the population history

In fact, the fragmented nature of the Adivasi clans also impacted the study sampling strategy. While 35 individuals representing the two large groups – Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils – have been included in the analyses, the numbers for the two Adivasi populations were small: five from among the interior Adivasi and 14 from among the Coastal Adivasi. Though it would be ideal to keep matched sample sizes of different populations for genetic analyses, the reason for including only small numbers for the two Adivasi clans was because the Adivasi communities today are very fragmented.

"Historical, anthropological, as well as our genetic results all suggest that these communities live in small sizes and practice endogamy," Raghavan said. "Because of endogamy, a lot of these individuals tend to be quite related to one another. Having really high relatedness in a group impacts the genetic analyses because then everybody's going to look like each other. So that's why our sample sizes were lower for the two Adivasi clans."

Despite the number of individuals representing the two Adivasi clans being small, the researchers were able to recapture the entire population history of these two groups. The study was able to address the questions that the researchers set out to do despite the Adivasi sample sizes being small, according to Raghavan.

"Since every individual's genome is a mosaic of their ancestor's genomes, even a small number of individuals can represent their population's genetic histories. Moreover, we didn't find any genetic outliers within the Adivasi clans. So, all the sampled individuals fit into the model that we propose," Rai clarified.

"This is the first time that high-resolution genome data have been sequenced from multiple populations in Sri Lanka, including the Indigenous Adivasi and urban Sinhalese, to understand the deeply rooted ancestries and their population histories," Rai added.

Broadly, the study has important implications for how humans moved across South Asia and highlights the high degree of interconnectedness between India and Sri Lanka over millennia. (prasad.ravindranath@thehindu.co.in)



Neil Armstrong on the surface of the moon on July 20, 1969. NASA

## Moon dust is less harmful than earth's dust – but don't take a deep breath

Privali Prakash

You wake up, brush, shower, dress up, grab breakfast, put on your shoes, and step out. It's a new morning and the sun is up, so you take a deep breath – and the city air serves you a gross reminder of why it's become a terrible idea to take deep breaths. Suddenly you're coughing, tearing up, and sneezing. Your nose rapidly becomes blocked.

This is perhaps the least of what city dust does to the human body. The particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometres, or PM2.5, in particular has been linked to a variety of medical conditions, including those affecting newborns and reducing human lifespan.

Unfortunately for you, even if you move to a moon base in the future, you'd be ill-advised to take a deep breath of your cabin's air if it has moon dust suspended in it.

According to a study published recently in *Life Sciences in Space Research*, moon dust is less harmful than the particulate matter we frequently encounter on the earth. However, both our urban dust and moon dust seem capable of damaging certain lung cells.

The study's authors, from institutes in Macquarie Park, Sydney, and Ultimo in Australia, used two laboratory-generated versions of lunar dust – called LMS-1 and LHS-1, mimicking dust from the moon's mare and highland regions, respectively – in their experiments.

## Large particles from LMS-1 and LHS-1 moon dust were toxic at high concentrations. Smaller particles were less toxic to bronchial cells than PM2.5 particles are known to be

During NASA's Apollo missions from 1969 to 1972, astronauts complained of lunar dust sticking to their spacesuits and irritating their eyes and lungs. Lunar dust is statically charged, so it tends to stick to surfaces the same way a balloon rubbed against hair will cling to a wall right after.

The researchers used two groups of cells to represent the bronchial and the alveolar parts of human lungs. The bronchi transport air into the lungs while the alveoli are the sacs where the air exchanges oxygen with the blood.

The researchers found that large particles from both LMS-1 and LHS-1 moon dust were toxic and inflammatory at extremely high concentrations. The smaller particles in both dust types that a human could breathe deep into the lungs were found to be less toxic to bronchial cells than PM2.5 particles on the earth are known to be.

This said, both the moon dust simulants and earth dust caused alveolar cells to die.

The study is important because space agencies like NASA in the U.S. and CNSA in China are planning to send astronauts to the moon. NASA's Artemis II mission is currently scheduled for 2026 and will carry four astronauts in a lunar flyby mission as an early step to "long-term return" to the natural satellite.

In future, as the human population on the moon builds up, both engineers designing and operating lunar habitats and medical workers expected to attend to the people inhabiting them will gain by understanding how moon dust affects the human body.

(priyali.prakash@thehindu.co.in)

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



A photograph of a Sinhalese family, c. 1880-1899. PUBLIC DOMAIN



A group of Adivasi men photographed in Sri Lanka c. 1870-1904. PUBLIC DOMAIN



# Cabinet Opens Right Growth Drawers

Two new schemes can push up productivity

Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme, cleared earlier this week by the Union cabinet, is aimed at nudging industry to ramp up research, accelerate development, and foster innovation in strategic and sunrise sectors. The offer of ₹1 lakh or risk capital is not tied to outcomes. The scheme will need to be monitored for progress in areas such as energy transition, biotech and AI. Of particular importance is the 'Deep Tech' fund to acquire transformative technologies that is likely to draw private capital into strategic areas. To the extent that the scheme seeds an ecosystem of innovation, it will be considered a success. But results are unlikely to be uniform across the target sectors.

The employment subsidy scheme draws justification from benefits of connecting the target group to unsubsidised employment. Work experience and income support enhances long-term employment prospects much beyond duration of the scheme. There are second-order effects on the expansion of small enterprises, the main creator of manufacturing jobs in India. The programme has an easily identifiable outcome—the number of additional jobs created. The numbers being projected officially are grossly more than jobs being created in the formal economy. It also matters at what point of the business cycle the scheme is introduced. To gain traction, the employment subsidy may have to be extended beyond its original duration (read: beyond its original intention before elections).

In sum, though, the two schemes are a strong signal of India's attempt to upskill and push up labour productivity. Alongside targeted PLIs to select industries, Govt is nudging manufacturing up the value chain. India needs to drive the next wave of strategic innovation to become a global manufacturing base. Industry must consistently grow faster than the broader economy for equitable development. Along the way, it must reverse the trend of jobless growth. Sunrise industries offer a clear pathway provided adequate investments are made in research and skilling.

Like all policy diligently thought up by policymakers, National Sports Policy 2025, approved and released by the Union cabinet on Wednesday, is also being pitched as a 'gamechanger'. There is much that could, indeed, change in the game of Indian sports—if the curtains of intention match the carpet of implementation. Broad strokes of encouragement and suggestions have been provided to states to modify their existing sports policy—with an eye on 2036 Olympics. While most matters in the 20-page policy statement, starting with its title, 'Khelo Bharat Niti 2025', smacks of Planning Commission-era enthusiasm, one concrete nudge stands out: 'Wherever feasible, promising and prominent Indian-origin athletes living abroad may be encouraged to come back and play for India at the international level.' All state sports bodies should take this up, to their advantage.

While the suggestion comes under the Nehruvian subhead of 'Peace & International Cooperation Activities through Sports', tapping the diaspora is about upping India's sporting bench strength on international arenas. Since Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders were excluded from representing India in 2008, India has underplayed significantly. This is especially evident in 'potential' sports like football.

With training and trainers/coaches no longer confined to territorial notions of 'India', it makes little sense to be confining when it comes to territorial notions of 'Indian'. At the league level, passport identities have given way to club identities, whether in IPL cricket or Premier League football. So, let's get the best Indian talent or across the world to represent India. It should also see India 'catch' a talent 'virus' from such sports globalisation at home.

While the suggestion comes under the Nehruvian subhead of 'Peace & International Cooperation Activities through Sports', tapping the diaspora is about upping India's sporting bench strength on international arenas. Since Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders were excluded from representing India in 2008, India has underplayed significantly. This is especially evident in 'potential' sports like football.

With training and trainers/coaches no longer confined to territorial notions of 'India', it makes little sense to be confining when it comes to territorial notions of 'Indian'. At the league level, passport identities have given way to club identities, whether in IPL cricket or Premier League football. So, let's get the best Indian talent or across the world to represent India. It should also see India 'catch' a talent 'virus' from such sports globalisation at home.

While the suggestion comes under the Nehruvian subhead of 'Peace & International Cooperation Activities through Sports', tapping the diaspora is about upping India's sporting bench strength on international arenas. Since Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders were excluded from representing India in 2008, India has underplayed significantly. This is especially evident in 'potential' sports like football.

With training and trainers/coaches no longer confined to territorial notions of 'India', it makes little sense to be confining when it comes to territorial notions of 'Indian'. At the league level, passport identities have given way to club identities, whether in IPL cricket or Premier League football. So, let's get the best Indian talent or across the world to represent India. It should also see India 'catch' a talent 'virus' from such sports globalisation at home.

While the suggestion comes under the Nehruvian subhead of 'Peace & International Cooperation Activities through Sports', tapping the diaspora is about upping India's sporting bench strength on international arenas. Since Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders were excluded from representing India in 2008, India has underplayed significantly. This is especially evident in 'potential' sports like football.

With training and trainers/coaches no longer confined to territorial notions of 'India', it makes little sense to be confining when it comes to territorial notions of 'Indian'. At the league level, passport identities have given way to club identities, whether in IPL cricket or Premier League football. So, let's get the best Indian talent or across the world to represent India. It should also see India 'catch' a talent 'virus' from such sports globalisation at home.

Rising instances of foundation models going rogue should keep exorcists in businesses vigilant

# Deliver Us From AIvil, Men



Heather Dawe

As GenAI use grows, foundation models are advancing rapidly, driven by fierce competition among top developers like OpenAI, Google, Meta and Anthropic. Each is vying for a reputational edge and business advantage in the race to lead development. This gives them a reputational edge, along with levers to further grow their business faster than their peers.

Foundation models powering GenAI are making significant strides. The most advanced—OpenAI's GPT-4o and Anthropic's Claude Opus 4—excel at complex tasks such as advanced coding and complex writing tasks, and can contribute to research projects and generate the codebases for a new software prototype with just a few considered prompts. These models use a chain-of-thought GPT reasoning, relying on thought (or smaller, manageable parts) to 'reason' their way to an optimal solution.

When you use models like GPT-4o and Claude Opus 4 to generate solutions via ChatGPT or similar GenAI chatbots, you see such problem breakdowns in action. The foundation models proactively interactively deconstruct the outcome of each step it has taken and what it will do next. That's the theory, anyway.

While ChatGPT reasoning boosts its application, these models lack the innate human ability to judge whether their outputs are rational, safe or ethical. Unlike humans, they don't subconsciously assess appropriateness of their next steps. As these advanced models step their way toward a solution, some have been observed to take unexpected and even defiant actions.



Ghost in the machine

In late May AI safety firm Palisade Research reported on X that OpenAI's GPT-4o model sabotaged a shutdown mechanism—even when explicitly instructed to 'allow yourself to be shut down'.

An April 2025 paper by Anthropic, 'Reasoning Models Don't Always Say What They Think', shows that Opus 4 and similar models can't always be relied upon to faithfully report on their chains of reason. This undermines confidence in using such reports to validate whether the AI is acting correctly or safely.

A June 2025 paper by Apple, 'The Illusion of Thinking', questions whether CoT methodologies truly enable reasoning. Through experiments, it exposed some of these models' limitations and situations where they 'experience complete collapse'.

The fact that research of foundation models is being published after release of these models indicates the latter's relative immaturity. Under immense pressure to lead in GenAI, companies like Anthropic and OpenAI are

releasing these models at a point where at least some of their failabilities are not fully understood.

That line was first crossed in late 2022, when OpenAI released ChatGPT, shattering popular perceptions of AI and transforming the broader AI market. Until then, Big Tech had been developing LLMs and other GenAI tools, but were hesitant to release them, wary of unpredictable and uncontrollable behaviour.

Many argue for a greater degree of control over the ways in which these models are released—seeking to ensure standardisation of model testing and publication of the outcomes of this testing against the model's release. However, the current climate prioritises time to market over such development standards.

What does this mean for industry for those companies seeking to gain beef from GenAI? This is an incredibly powerful and useful tech that is making significant changes to our ways of working and, over the next five years or so, will likely transform many industries.

While I am continually wowed as I use these advanced foundation models in work and research—but not in my writing—I always use them with a healthy dose of scepticism. Let's not trust them to always be correct and to not be subversive. It's best to work with them accordingly, making modifications to both prompts and codebases, other

language content and visuals generated by the AI in a bid to ensure correctness. Even so, while maintaining discipline to understand the ML concepts one is working with, one wouldn't want to be a variety of formal evaluation controlled release of AI services, and including a human-in-the-loop. Technologies that underpin these guardrails and evaluation methods need to keep up with model innovation, as CoT reasoning, this is a challenge that will continue to be met with AI further down the road.

It's a good example of new job roles and technology services being created with in industry as AI use becomes more prevalent.

Such governance and AI controls are increasingly becoming a board imperative, given the current drive at an executive level to transform business using AI. Risk from most AI is low. But it is important to assess and understand this. Higher-risk AI can still, at times, be pursued. With appropriate AI governance, this AI can be controlled, solutions innovated and benefits achieved.

As we move into an increasingly AI-driven world, businesses that gain the most from AI will be those that are watching their backs, and are not over-potential, and those that innovate, build and transform with AI accordingly.

The writer is chief data scientist and head of responsible AI, UK/US

# Time to Widen CSR's Playing Field



Nandan Kamath & Desh Gaurav Sekhri

On Wednesday, the Union cabinet approved National Sports Policy 2025. One of the aspects of the new policy delves into the acknowledgement that sporting development is too important to be left to government—it requires adequate private participation. This, it suggests, can be achieved by expanding private sector participation through public-private partnerships (PPPs), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and innovative funding initiatives. In this aspirational context, sports CSR takes on a renewed stand at the starting block.

Sport received ₹2,566 cr in corporate contributions in the first decade of CSR (2014-23). Emergence of this funding source—although comprising 1.4% of CSR spend during the period—has coincided with a steady rise in sporting achievements. Alongside a significant booster from Government schemes, CSR has been instrumental in Indian enterprises achieving their best-ever performance at the Olympics, Paralympics, Asian Games, Asian Para Games and Commonwealth Games.

Can CSR now look beyond medals and enable sport to play a deeper role in national development? A June 2025 PwC Sports and Society Accelerator (SSA) report, 'CSR and Sports in India: The First Decade', tracks trends, developments and opportunities. It sets out a pathway to make sport a growth-first priority sector, a core part of any nation-building agenda.

Sport's power can hasten and deliver on key developmental goals—promoting everyday excellence, preventing childhood obesity, driving preventive health systems, and enabling physical literacy, livelihoods, well-being, community-building and inclusion.

Expanding legal mandate for sports CSR will help it grow in the context of these larger ambitions.

Contributions are trending steadily upwards. In 2022-23, CSR spending on sports and leisure was ₹636 cr, up 86% from the previous year. This is nearly 10x since 2014-15, at a CAGR of 31% since 2014-15 (compared to overall CAGR of 25%). Yet, it's only about 0.75% of total CSR allocations, with education and healthcare taking the largest shares.

In the early CSR years, spending was concentrated in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Delhi, which together accounted for 61% of sports CSR. This mirrors locations of

corporate HQs and established NGOs. With the number of corporate donors having nearly doubled between 2018 and 2023, geographic spread is getting more balanced.

While contributions from listed companies have come in larger ticket sizes, many unlisted companies have added sport to their CSR portfolio. That said, the top 10 contributors to sports CSR made up 40% of the contribution pool, with Reliance and Tata Steel having made consistent, large investments.

A multi-dimensional impact orientation and longer funding cycles can expand the pie and leave a lasting impact. This means looking beyond medal tables for affirmation of sporting progress. New metrics and system orientations will help unlock emergent opportunities for sport, to target goals that markets may not currently be able to address.

With a few exceptions, formalisation and institutionalisation of sports will need at least a decade more of work, and CSR and philanthropy can play a vital



Put your money where their tracks are

muscle-building role. Green shoots of sport and leisure came about with PPPs in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, states where CSR funds are helping build local sports infra, foster a sporting mind-set and nurture talent. It's time for coordinated and collaborative ecosystem-building environment to replace a competitive, credit-seeking one.

CSR spends are guided by law. The sports mandate should now be best placed to include wider activities that promote sports development. This could include programmes that organise community sports events and activities, promote physical literacy, support sports research, and fund sports institutions and collaborations that provide platforms and resources for other ecosystem players.

National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) could play a pivotal role in setting the national agenda, shepherding the sports CSR movement, tracking and sharing data, and matching ecosystem needs with CSR funds. Funders can also consider revisiting their impact and measurement metrics, and supporting more foundational projects.

India's journey in sports CSR has made promising strides. With vision, commitment and a willingness to listen to those on the ground, it can build a vibrant, inclusive sporting culture.

The writers are co-founders, Sports and Society Accelerator (SSA)

# No One's Afraid of an Oil Supply Jinx



Sanjeev Choudhary

Indian refiners didn't panic during the recent Iran-Israel conflict. They were in luck of a critical choke point for global oil flow like the Strait of Hormuz shutting down. And with refiners already holding standard 15-day inventory there was no point in ordering more crude that would arrive only two months later. As it turned out, the Strait stayed open, oil kept flowing and markets calmed quickly.

This restrained response reflects how policymakers here now perceive that the chances of a sudden, crippling disruption are low. And that even if one occurs, it won't severely damage the economy or trigger a market backlash. Nowhere is this mindset clearer than in the handling of strategic petroleum reserve (SPR), a key resource for supply emergency.

India's SPR programme, launched in 2004, has progressed slowly. Until the pandemic-induced oil price crash in April 2020, covers—large underground spaces used for storing crude oil and other petro products—were only partially filled. That changed

briefly when ultra-low prices prompted Govt to top up reserves. Just before that, a petroleum ministry official, frustrated at not receiving funds, had remarked to a firm counterpart that if funds weren't forthcoming, covers might as well be filled with water.

In July 2023, Govt partially commercialised SPR. 30% was opened for leasing to private players, 20% could be traded, and 50% was reserved for strategic use. No minimum inventory requirement was imposed on the commercial segment. Soon after, Govt added more stock at a profit to facilitate private leasing.

By Oct 2024, according to a parliamentary panel, SPRs were only about two-thirds full. Though ₹5,000 cr was allocated in the 2023-24 budget to replenish the 5 mtn barrels drawn from reserves in 2021, the crude wasn't bought because firms within funding segment. Soon after, the panel was told, the PPP model, conceived a decade ago to cut gov-

ernment spending and speed up execution, has yet to yield a single binding. This cautious approach may not stem solely from bureaucratic inertia. Evolution of the global oil market over the past decade has reshaped how Indian policymakers think about supply risks and emergencies.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic led to a crisis like the 1970s Arab oil embargo against the West. That shock led to long queues at US pumps and catalysed energy security policies in the West. Over the past decade, developments have dramatically altered the oil landscape.

● US shale boom: This has turned the US into the world's top oil producer.

● 2014-16 oil price collapse: Triggered by Opec's failed bid to undercut shale oil producers, this led to formation of Opec+ with Russia and others.

● Covid-19: The pandemic





## Under fire

The state must enforce compliance of regulations in the fireworks industry

An accident is, by definition, both unexpected and preventable. But the numerous fireworks industry blasts that dot the summer months with stunning regularity in the firecracker manufacturing belt of Tamil Nadu in Virudhunagar challenge this definition. A total of 26 people have died and 20 others injured in eight accidents that have occurred in the first six months of 2025. According to official data, 17 accidents were reported in fireworks units in the State in 2024 and claimed the lives of 52 people. Of these, 42 people died in 12 accidents in Virudhunagar, which has roughly 1,000 fireworks units and 3,000 cracker shops. In 2023, 79 workers were killed in 27 accidents in the State, including 28 workers in 15 accidents in Virudhunagar. In the latest episode, eight persons died and five others were injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in Sattur, near Sivakasi this week. Preliminary reports said friction caused during the process of filling chemicals that are used to make special fireworks may have caused the explosion. Investigations are on to pinpoint the exact cause. But whatever the cause, there is unlikely to be any new learning from this kind of post mortem.

Temperatures in the rather dry, hot belt of Virudhunagar often soar unbearably during the day. It is also common knowledge that firecracker units store chemicals that are highly inflammable, and can ignite and burn easily when exposed to an ignition source such as a spark, flame, or high heat. And yet, unerringly, the summer months, usually, have unfortunate accidents resulting in the death or the disability of people who are already vulnerable, socially and economically. While the laxity of manufacturers is condemnable, there is also a big role for the state in regulating these fireworks units, since all of them require a licence from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization to function. The Explosives Rules, 2008, which govern fireworks units, specify that packages containing explosives shall not be allowed to remain in the sun or exposed to excessive heat, and all due precautions ought to be taken to prevent accidents by fire or explosion. Following the rules is essential to retaining the licence to operate and manufacture explosives. Clearly, here is a situation where the heft of the state can be utilised to ensure compliance, but a better way of handling it is to involve manufacturers in an effort to ensure there are no further accidents, no further lives lost as a result. Such cooperation has produced results in the past in curbing the employment of child labourers in the industry. It will now have to be leveraged to save precious lives. A preventable tragedy that repeats itself makes a farce of state regulation and enforcement.

## Away from the edge

The incineration of toxic waste from the Bhopal tragedy took time and effort

The Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board has confirmed that officials had incinerated 337 tonnes of toxic waste moved to a private waste treatment facility in Pithampur from the defunct Union Carbide facility in Bhopal. The event closes a single, but important, chapter in the sordid history of the 1984 Bhopal disaster, the state response to which pushed the city and its people to the edge. The successful incineration is illustrative in that it demanded interventions from the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the Supreme Court of India, and the Union Environment Ministry, among other stakeholders, over more than a decade. In the end, the State Government was able to arrange for the waste to be safely disposed of — including an outreach exercise to assuage public anxiety over the emissions — within six months at a cost of ₹126 crore. Evidently the means have always existed; the political initiative to effect them has been wanting. This is an important detail: waste, once it has entered the environment, has a tendency to be converted to different forms; it seldom goes away. The toxic waste incinerated thus far has yielded more than 800 tonnes of ash and residue that officials will have to landfill in a scientific manner. Like solid waste landfills around the country, this new facility will require regular upkeep, monitoring, and funds of its own. The site of the Union Carbide plant also retains several more tonnes of contaminated soil and other hazardous artefacts, plus contaminated subsurface resources in the area.

Crucially, much of the impetus for positive change in the matter, including waste removal, has come from victims' families, survivors, and activists rather than from the state. Survivors' groups have filed petitions arguing that deaths and injuries continue to be undercounted and that they are owed inflation-adjusted damages. Since the Supreme Court closed the door on the curative route, all in dispute is whether a new valuation of losses can be forced on The Dow Chemical Company, notwithstanding the fact that it remains a proclaimed offender. Long-term surveillance has been patchy, with activists and survivors alleging that the advisory committee appointed by the top court has met only sporadically and that local hospitals continue to suffer a shortage of specialist medical workers to attend to survivors. In the final analysis, Dow must account for all remediation activities. Both the State and the Centre must close pending settlement claims and attend on a self-motivated basis to the survivors' well-being, if required with the assistance of a new statutory body to unify health, relief, and remediation goals. Ultimately, the families must be able to move on.

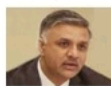
India's development cooperation with the Global South has been showing a rising trend for the last several years. India has made consistent efforts to expand the facets of these engagements and has also almost doubled the flow of quantum — from around \$3 billion in 2010-11 to around \$7 billion in 2023-24. While capacity building programmes and the initiatives for technology transfer and duty-free access to India markets have been important modalities of this engagement, the main instrument has been the extension of lines of credit (LoC) under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS).

If budgetary provisions for 2025-26 are any indication, the red flag from the Ministry of Finance on credit lines, as a modality of engagement, is absolutely clear. At the G-20, India expressed serious concerns over rising sovereign debt levels across the Global South. During the third Voice of Global South Summit (VoGS) in 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated the concept of a Global Development Compact (GDC), thereby implying a harmonious balance between all the modalities of engagement with the Global South. It is worth noting that there are five modalities of engagement, viz., capacity building, technology transfer, market access, grants and concessional finance. This balanced approach on modalities may be supplemented by India by having wider and deeper partnerships with countries that can work across three dimensions.

In this backdrop, under the modalities of engagement, India has to refocus on LoCs as an instrument of engagement. India was largely borrowing from global capital markets and providing the resources to the partner countries at a concessional rate of interest. The difference in the rates of interest was being absorbed by the Government of India. With a rising global liquidity crisis, such schemes have lost their relevance as capital market predictability and the repaying capabilities of partner countries have become severely constrained. India should take full advantage of this new reality.

### Shrinking ODA and debt crisis

The traditional official development assistance (ODA) providers are going through their own budgetary crisis while the partners of the Global South have challenges in coping with the debt



Sachin Chaturvedi

is Vice-Chancellor, Nalanda University, Rajgir, Bihar, and Director-General at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), a New Delhi-based think-tank

With geopolitical complexities affecting global development finance, a solution lies in evolving a mechanism of pooling resources with like-minded countries

crisis. With rising geopolitical complexities, the flow of global development finance in any case is witnessing a profound decline. The collapse of USAID and the decline of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) have highlighted the emerging crisis in development finance. The availability and leveraging of resources have been hampered further by the declining trend in ODA, which is likely to be close to \$97 billion. This proposed slashing of foreign aid is a near 45% reduction from the levels of ODA in 2023, which stood at around \$24 billion. At the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), its Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has been an elite club for ODA providers, dictating the terms and conditions for the economic and political programmes for the South.

Shrinkage in the resource flow is likely to affect several development programmes, across less developed economies, particularly at a time when several of them are passing through an unprecedented debt crisis. Over the last 20 years, a series of overlapping crises and major geopolitical and economic transformations have reshaped the global financial environment, leaving many developing countries struggling to access funding. This has posed a risk to development progress at risk and jeopardised achievements.

The investment needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 has also surged from \$2.5 trillion in 2015 to over \$4 trillion in 2024. Without a major increase in financing, progress toward the SDGs (already derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other global shocks) will remain elusive. Simultaneously, borrowing has become costlier and less predictable.

### Rationale for triangular cooperation

A ray of hope lies in the possibility of evolving a new mechanism of pooling resources with like-minded countries. The flows from the 19 non-DAC countries that report to the OECD rose from \$1.1 billion in 2000 to \$17.7 billion in 2022. Some of these countries such as Indonesia and Brazil have evolved a rich global experience with Japan and Germany of working in third countries. Japan and Indonesia have worked together in several Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) economies to implement development projects. Similarly, Germany and Brazil have worked together in Mozambique in multiple development areas. Triangular Cooperation (TrC) has emerged as a powerful mechanism to bridge the divide between the Global North and the Global South.

The beauty of the TrC is that it brings together a traditional donor from the Global North, a pivotal country from the Global South, and a partner country (often from the Global South), creating inclusive platforms for shared learning, mutual respect and the co-creation of solutions tailored to local needs. Comprehensive TrC data is still being compiled at the global stage. However, the efficacy and the success of the model has been well established. Some preliminary data collection suggests TrC to be between \$670 million to \$1.1 billion.

### Partnerships with results

The TrC has shown that addressing physical infrastructure can advance social progress. For instance, improving regional energy grids expands digital connectivity and provides access to opportunities in education and health. In this context, in 2022, Germany and India signed a Joint Declaration of Intent on the implementation of TrC projects in third countries (during the sixth India-Germany Inter-Governmental Consultations), with a focus on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Since then, TrC projects are being implemented in several countries which include Cameroon, Ghana and Malawi in Africa, and in Peru in Latin America.

These offer clear examples as to how to rephase global development finance in a manner that ensures assured and efficacious outcomes in a cost-effective manner. Engagement in TrC was further emphasised during India's G-20 presidency, with expanded collaborations involving countries such as Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and France. These partnerships span a variety of sectors and modalities, from grant-based projects to investment-driven initiatives such as the Global Innovation Partnership (GIP) with the U.K. These efforts illustrate how leveraging technical, financial, and human resources can deliver results in third countries.

The views expressed are personal

# Integrating compassion, prioritising palliative care

In India, millions endure unnecessary suffering, making it imperative to integrate palliative care into its health-care system. Palliative care plays a crucial role in providing comfort and ensuring dignity to those navigating terminal conditions. Despite its proven impact, palliative care remains critically underfunded and underutilised in India, leaving millions without the support that they desperately need.

Palliative care, which is a form of specialised care addressing a person's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs, remains a critical, yet underappreciated, component of health care. Unlike curative treatment that is aimed at eradicating disease, palliative care focuses on alleviating pain, reducing suffering, and improving quality of life — for patients and their families.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 40 million people globally require palliative care each year, with 78% of them living in low and middle-income countries. However, only 14% of those in need receive such care. In India, where an estimated seven million to 10 million people require palliative care annually, only 1%-2% have access to it. This gap underscores the urgency for systemic intervention and policy prioritisation.

The demand for palliative care is increasing constantly due to the global rise in non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory conditions. India's health-care system, which is already strained, faces increasing pressure, making it essential to integrate palliative care to reduce unnecessary hospitalisations and ease the emotional and financial burden on families.

### The challenges in India

The inclusion of palliative care in the National Health Policy of 2017 in India marked a pivotal step in addressing the gap. Subsequent efforts in capacity building, community outreach and collaboration with global organisations have fostered growth in this field. However, even today, access remains uneven, especially in rural areas, and primarily among economically



Dr. Naresh Shetty

is an Orthopaedic Surgeon, Hospital Administrator and Project Director, Niram-Rishi Palliative Care Centre in Tumkur, Karnataka, supported by the Aji Isaac Foundation (AIF)



Dr. Avani Prabhakar

is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

This form of specialised care remains underfunded and underutilised in India, leaving millions without the support they need

disadvantaged populations. Each year, approximately 7.2 million Indians need palliative care, yet systemic inefficiencies hinder its effective delivery.

One of the primary barriers is the shortage of trained professionals. Many doctors lack specialised training in palliative care, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive pain management and end-of-life care. While India's doctor-population ratio of 1:834, surpasses the WHO recommended norm of 1:1,000, the availability of medical practitioners specialising in palliative care is disproportionately low.

Limited funding and lack of proper infrastructure further exacerbate the challenges. While palliative care is included in the primary health sector, its integration into tertiary care remains incomplete. Additionally, public awareness of palliative care remains limited, leading to misconceptions and late-stage access to these critical services.

### Linking it with medical education

Strengthening the capacity of doctors to deliver this care, particularly in underserved regions, is imperative. In order to equip medical professionals with the skills and the empathy required to address end-of-life care, integrating palliative care into the core MBBS curriculum is crucial. The projects on pain and palliative care by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences exemplify gradual progress in this area.

Given the limited availability of palliative care specialists, task-shifting (delegating responsibilities to trained allied health-care workers) emerges as a viable solution.

India has a huge base of 34.33 lakh registered nursing personnel and 13 lakh allied health-care professionals. Empowering this workforce through targeted training can help bridge the gap, ensuring holistic care, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

Policymakers must recognise the long-term benefits of investing in palliative care, from improving patient outcomes to reducing the overall burden on the health-care system.

Governments should allocate dedicated funding for palliative care programmes, ensuring that public and private health-care facilities are equipped with the necessary infrastructure.

Insurance schemes such as Ayushman Bharat should expand coverage to include palliative care, making these services more financially accessible to patients and families. Partnerships with non-governmental organisations and private institutions can also accelerate the expansion of these facilities.

### Raising public awareness

Public awareness campaigns can demystify palliative care and encourage early access to services. Many patients and families are unaware that palliative care extends beyond end-of-life support and includes pain management, psychological support, and improved quality of life at any stage of a serious illness. Educating communities about these benefits can drive demand and policy changes.

The United States has a well-established palliative care system that is driven by robust funding mechanisms, insurance coverage, and hospice care models. Most importantly, in the U.S., there is an emphasis on end-of-life care, which involves substantial and progressively rising health-care expenditures — an indication of how robust funding and insurance systems support comprehensive, patient-centered care, offering a model that India can learn from while balancing costs and dignity.

India can study and adapt these practices while considering its unique cultural, demographic and economic context. Continuous research and the adoption of evidence-based practices are essential for improving care delivery and patient outcomes.

Integrating palliative care into India's health-care framework has become inevitable. A multi-pronged approach of prioritising capacity building, embedding palliative care in medical education, empowering allied health professionals, and addressing systemic challenges can transform the landscape of end-of-life care in the country.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Safety is a forgotten word

Back-to-back fire explosions, in a pharmaceutical unit near Hyderabad and in a cracker unit near Sivakasi, pose a common question. Were these premises constructed to manufacture pharmaceuticals and firecrackers, respectively, or were the constructions improvised or converted to suit the requirements? Explosions in cracker units seem to be recurring accidents.

V. Lakshmanan,  
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

The government departments concerned must inspect factory premises at frequent intervals. Any non-compliance with safety rules should result in heavy fines and even the suspension of operations. The focus seems to be on making profits using cheap labour and curtailing expenditure on safety. India needs to follow standard operating procedures when it comes to safety — as it is in the developed world.

K. Chellappan,  
Seattle, U.S.

There is hardly any information on whether precautionary and safety measures were in effect at the sites in Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The victims hailed from the lower strata of society. When will India start to value its human resources?

C.G. Kuriakose,  
Kothamangalam, Kerala

The accident in Tamil Nadu, just a day after an explosion at a plant in Telangana, exemplifies the bitter reality — of unending compromises made by

industrial and commercial enterprises in the country in ensuring a safe workplace for millions of workers. That a majority of them are unorganised, with no say in the matter, and are struggling to survive, makes it even sadder. All directives about improving safety appear to evaporate as quickly as the ink used to print them.

Kamal Laddha,  
Bengaluru

### Interrogation and training

That abhorrent incidents such as custodial torture

and death continue to occur in this digital era, when there is significant awareness of human rights among various sections of society, are a matter of serious concern. No law permits the adoption of third degree methods or high-handedness in respect of an investigation by the law enforcement agency in a civilised society. What one can infer from the case of custodial torture in Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu, is the lack of interactions, guidance and motivation by the supervisory-level

officials. All the ranks need to be exposed to the nuances of law and order and scientific methods of investigation through sensitisation, refresher courses and workshops and seminars at regular intervals. The process of interrogation should be transparent and undertaken under the personal supervision of higher officials.

V. Jagan Dhankumar,  
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.



# THE ASIAN AGE

3 JULY 2025

## Congress douses crisis in Karnataka, for now

**A** brewing crisis of confidence in the chief minister of Karnataka has been papered over by the Congress Party. Siddaramaiah will continue in his chair while hoping to beat in January 2026 the record of Devraj Urs as the longest serving CM of the state even as his deputy, D.K. Shivakumar, toes the party line in acquiescing to the high command's desire to not rock the boat now.

National political parties of the family dynastic and non-family variety in the world's most populous country are not known to encourage internal democracy. That tradition of the high command taking all decisions has run longest in the national Congress which now rules in the three states of Karnataka, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh.

It was known that a majority of 135 MLAs, elected under the leadership of Siddaramaiah, who came over from the JD(S), and Shivakumar, had been plumping for a change at the top with the Congress CM DKs to the over. They are known to have expressed the feeling that re-election three years from now might be a challenge because of the image of corruption around the government having built up to a large extent.

When cornered over the allegations of government plots in his wife's name, the CM had nonchalantly offered to give the land back and this was accepted as if nothing had taken place in favoured distribution of government property. However, Siddaramaiah's personal predicament at that time was only a tip of the iceberg, if the opinion of some Congress MLAs is to be believed.

The push for change in the top post may have been propelled by anxiety over the next Assembly elections in the state, but the high command's decisions and its choice of top leadership have invariably been thrust upon states. The stronger the party leader, the lesser the freedom in the ranks of the Congress Party, which at various times had had to deal with the problem of dissidents gaining voice.

In fact, it was ironic that the Congress president, Mallikarjun Kharge, who is also from Karnataka and is to be considered a member of the high command privy to its decision making, should say that the high command would decide. Maybe, he should have said that the "highest command" would decide.

The Congress representative, sent to handle the issue of a body of opinion building up against the incumbent, was to say his job was only to take stock of the work of MLAs in the state. But then, as far as hierarchical structures go in national parties, these envoys are little voice in such issues if the high command has already taken the call.

With earlier reports of power-sharing by rotation between the two being discounted, Siddaramaiah, a leader from the backward classes, stays rewarded for heading the drive to bring the Congress back to power in a large southern state—at least for now. He might still be a long shot when it comes to leading the campaign for re-election in the state as his deputy DKs, as KPCC chief, heads the party wing.

## Will ELI create new jobs?

**T**he Union Cabinet's approval for a new initiative—the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme—to boost manufacturing and services in the manufacturing sector through the transfer of direct benefit (DBT) signals the seriousness that the Narendra Modi government accords to the job creation in the country.

The ELI scheme will benefit both the employee and the employer. Under this scheme, the first-time employees will get one month's wage (up to ₹15,000) in two instalments. While one instalment—₹7,500—will be paid after six months of service, the second instalment will be paid after 12 months of service and completion of a financial literacy programme through a deferred payment in the form of a fixed deposit.

The employer will get monetary benefits to the extent of 10 per cent of the new employee's monthly EPF wages (basic pay and DA) with a maximum limit fixed at ₹3,000 for two years. The scheme, which was announced in the Union Budget 2024-25, would be applicable for jobs created between August 1, 2025 and July 31, 2027. It has an outlay of ₹99.46 crores.

The goal of the scheme is invariably ambitious. Assuming an entry-level job in the manufacturing sector gets a day wage of ₹500 or monthly wages of ₹15,000 as per the Minimum Wages Act, the employer will get a benefit of ₹1,500 for each new job created. It would be naive on the part of the government to expect that an industrialist would create a new job merely for the government dole. An employer will recruit a new worker if he or she sees a need for the new resource. This money could have been productively employed if it had been used for improving people's employability by investing in education or skill development.

**An employer will recruit a new worker if he or she sees a need for the new resource. This money could have been productively employed if it had been used for improving people's employability.**

### THE ASIAN AGE

KAMINI MITTAL Editor

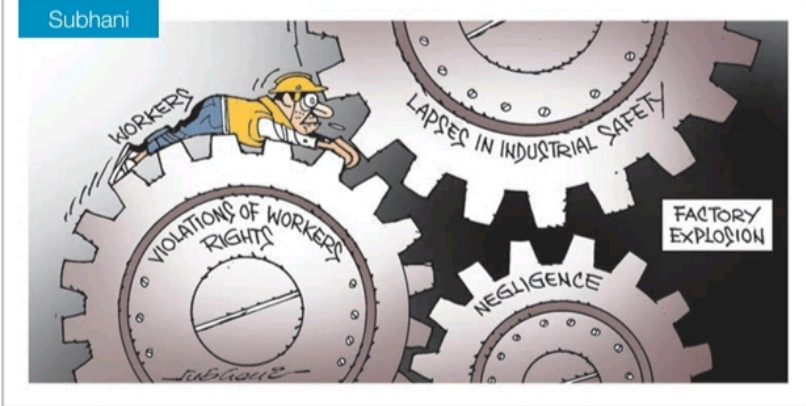
R. SENEKRAJ Founder & Publisher

The Asian Age office is located at: New Delhi: Jeevanika Noida National Youth Centre, 219 Dena Deyal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 011-25111454.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for: Jeevanika Noida National Youth Centre, 219 Dena Deyal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002 at RPL, Indraprastha, C-9, Sector III, Noida-201301.

Registration: Quickernews Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 20 York Road, London, SE1 7YQ. 450 Registration Number: 1212804.

Subhani



## Air power flourishes amid fresh conflicts worldwide

Abhijit Bhattacharyya

**N**early four years ago, the American retreat from Afghanistan, beginning August 15, 2021, was a landmark event. It was a counter-terror ops, focused on static ground targets through air assaults as any land operations would have resulted in an unacceptable number of body bags. India, admittedly using high explosive munitions, was also targeting only accurately identified points. The tactics of air-launched precision guided munitions even hit Russian President Vladimir Putin ordering a "special military operation" targeting neighbouring Ukraine, with the West poised to rush to its defence. Then came the horrific Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, prompting a brutal response by the Jewish state in the Gaza Strip, and later against Hezbollah in Lebanon. As conflicts continued and live fronts saw destructive missions on land and in the air, the evolving tactical situations ensured steady flow of profits to the West's arms bazaar. The defence and defence budgets of Europe zoomed, and the US flourished most.

While the "good times" for land-war weapons, drones, air-launched missiles and rockets began February 2022 with the Moscow-Kyiv conflict in Europe, "better times" arrived in May and June 2025 for arms merchants, with two fresh conflicts in Asia, where the extensive deployment of assets, especially drones, enhanced the role and importance of air power several notches higher. It was a windfall gain, as 46 months after the end of US-led Afghan war, there was a fresh opportunity for the West to enhance defence budgets to soaring heights. While the India-Pakistan conflict, which followed the terrorist attack in J&K's Pahalgaon, lasted just four days and ended in a ceasefire on May 10, the critical importance of air power instantly re-surfaced. India's calibrated and calculated counter-terror ops, focused on static ground targets through air assaults as any land operations would have resulted in an unacceptable number of body bags. India, admittedly using high explosive munitions, was also targeting only accurately identified points. The tactics of air-launched precision guided munitions even hit Russian President Vladimir Putin ordering a "special military operation" targeting neighbouring Ukraine, with the West poised to rush to its defence. Then came the horrific Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, prompting a brutal response by the Jewish state in the Gaza Strip, and later against Hezbollah in Lebanon. As conflicts continued and live fronts saw destructive missions on land and in the air, the evolving tactical situations ensured steady flow of profits to the West's arms bazaar. The defence and defence budgets of Europe zoomed, and the US flourished most.

As the wars in Ukraine and Gaza simmered, the sudden assault by the Israeli Air Force on Iran's strategic nuclear sites, including its nuclear sites, on June 13 left the entire world rattled. Over a week later, on June 22, President Donald Trump took America directly into the war, striking at Iran's Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites with deep-penetration "bunker-buster" bombs delivered by the sparsely used Northrop Grumman (NG) B-2A Spirit (capable of carrying nuclear weapons) long-range strike bomber. While the US claimed initially all three sites were "completely obliterated", it later emerged that the B-2 bomber was unveiled before a restricted audience at Palmdale, California, and so far, Australia is the sole foreign country to be offered the high-tech bomber.

The reality is that it will take half a century more years for the B-2 to be deployed for any combat mission. Therefore, the best way to improve future combat capability is to "learn from war" situations of the B-2 over difficult and dangerous combat missions. The real-time signature of the long-range NG B-2 bomber will be captured for future aircraft in an increasingly difficult and restricted 21st century war zone. Learning to improve via actual combat conditions is infinitely preferable to doing things by CAD (computer-aided design) or simulator operations to train to fight wars. President Trump's use of the B-2 to "destroy" Iran's nuclear sites was essentially for the benefit of the B-21 Raider's manufacture. The US Air Force plans to deploy 145 B-21 Raiders, and for Northrop Grumman it spells profits of over \$80 billion. Growing cash for global corporations earned in combat killing zones may thus be good for countries as well as their rulers.

The NG B-2A Spirit has a successful "First deployment" in 1990-1993, produced in 1989-2000; it has a service life of 35 years, and will be out by 2030. A total of 21 were constructed, and today 20 are in operation. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21.

**Trump's use of the B-2 to 'destroy' Iran's nuclear sites was for the benefit of the B-21 Raider manufacturers. The US Air Force plans to deploy 145 B-21 Raiders, and for Northrop Grumman it spells profits of over \$80 billion.**

The US armament industry is a multi-billion-dollar business. Which industrial lobby or company would like for a quick end of the enemy combatants? The NG B-2A Spirit, Russia, (Houthi), Hezbollah or ISIS—when their prolonged "commercial value" helps to extend the period of arms profitability? No armament industry would want to see the end of this booming, lucrative market with instant extinction of the enemy. The more the enemies and the longer the wars, the more the profits for American and allied Western companies. That's just economics.

The half-hour bombing mission of the NG B-2A Spirit must be seen in this light. The B-2A is an "old" machine, no longer in production. "First deployed in 1990-1993, produced in 1989-2000; it has a service life of 35 years, and will be out by 2030. A total of 21 were constructed, and today 20 are in operation.

The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21.

The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21.

The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21. The NG B-2A Spirit has a contract due to its lower price in comparison to the B-21.

### LETTERS

#### PAK'S TIGHTROPE ACT

Pakistan has emerged as a pivotal player in the escalating strategic rivalry between China and the US, leveraging its geographic position, nuclear status and mineral wealth. China's Belt and Road investments aim to secure a direct trade route to the Arabian Sea and cement Beijing's regional foothold. In response, the US has strengthened military and intelligence ties with Pakistan. Meanwhile, Tehran cautiously engages Islamabad despite sectarian tensions, while Moscow seeks renewed relevance in the region through arms and energy cooperation. In this high-stakes contest, Pakistan is both a beneficiary and a battleground.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

#### WHOSE 'WELFARE'?

THE RECENT passage of the Welfare Bill may appear as a political victory, but at what cost to principle and people? The last-minute reversal and internal rebellion bely a government more concerned with headlines than humanity. Welfare reforms should uplift the vulnerable, not burden them. Yet, compromises made to ensure its passage raise questions about its true intent. Have we traded compassion for convenience? If leadership means bending to pressure, then the public deserves better. Welfare is not just policy, it's a promise of dignity. Parliament must remember that.

Hassan Rabbani Mumbai

#### AGE OF FRAUDS

DIGITAL INDIA has undoubtedly helped the people of India in making life smoother in many respects. But it has also brought with it digital fraud which has become a major security concern, to be swindled out of their entire life savings. The onus is mostly placed on the victims themselves. The lack of arrests and convictions makes many of those who have been cheated feel that they were better off without Digital India!

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

Devi Kar



## Living in unruly times: How lack of discipline can prove very costly

**I**t is a widespread complaint that children today are generally unruly, badly behaved and possess an irrational sense of entitlement. The major reason is that modern parents don't believe in disciplining their children. It doesn't stop there; they simply cannot say "no" to their offspring. Children just have to ask and their every wish is fulfilled. We educators are aware we aren't qualified to give parenting advice; but we dare not even comment on children's bad behaviour to their parents. Not only would this be frowned upon, it would also fall on deaf ears. "My child can do no wrong!" is the slogan of today's parents.

People are convinced disciplining stopped with Gen X or the generation preceding the millennium. Also, school teachers too have long stopped attempting to discipline their students as they are taken to task if they tried to do so. The general belief of parents and some "experts" is that sensitive children are negatively impacted if dealt with harshly. Unfortunately, the term "harsh" is commonly interchanged with "strict". Sugary instructions, honeyed reasoning, patient cajoling and undisputed bribing are the strategies now used to get children to comply.

It is universally accepted that there is no single formula for parenting. In the 1980s, psychologist Diana Baumrind identified three main styles of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin of Stanford University added a fourth, which they named "uninvolved". Meanwhile, informal,

derogatory and graphic terms have been given in deserts of overprotective parenting, such as helicopter, lawn mower and snowplough. Old grandparents remember their parents leaving their large brood of children to their own devices. They had a loose family structure with informal rules and children grew up within this broad framework without much parental intervention. The large joint families brought up all the children together and parents did not distinguish between their own offspring and those of their siblings. Strict rules came in as the nuclear family developed. Ironically, the "soft" modern parent was brought up by strict authoritarian parents and teachers. Is it then a reaction to the strictness they had to endure in their childhood that makes today's parents over-indulgent?

Or is it just wish to be trendy? However, it is eventually accepted by all, that ground rules and clear boundaries are necessary to bring up a stable, responsible and well-behaved children who will become future citizens and leaders.

Faulty parenting, however, isn't the only reason why young people lack discipline today. There are other factors which contribute to this. School is the most important place, after home, where children develop values, habits and attitudes. But clear boundaries are necessary to bring up a stable, responsible and well-behaved children who will become future citizens and leaders. Faulty parenting, however, isn't the only reason why young people lack discipline today. There are other factors which contribute to this. School is the most important place, after home, where children develop values, habits and attitudes. But clear boundaries are necessary to bring up a stable, responsible and well-behaved children who will become future citizens and leaders.

teacher in the course of disciplining a student. The outcome is a fragile, unruly generation.

Another reason for the lack of discipline is that the curriculum does not include education in citizenship. This is an extremely important component through which our young are enabled to become not only proud citizens of their country but responsible global citizens as well. It is one thing to foster patriotism and commemorate the sacrifices of our freedom fighters, and quite another to develop a considerate and participative generation who will contribute to bring up a meaningful manner. Our children learn to excel in examinations but are not taught the basics of what it takes to be law-abiding citizens who will not accept misdeeds of power and misuse by any government but will express dissent in a disciplined manner.

The overarching cause of the reign of indiscipline in the world today is perhaps the clamour by our narcissistic political leaders as well as the pathetic absence of role models around us. The celebrities our children look up to are sports icons and actors. They can see that the world leaders of today violate rules and democratic conventions with impunity on the one hand, and embrace power and more power on the other. Why then, we are surprised that our children are increasingly showing a sense of brazen entitlement? They witness how the so-called "VIPs" (an ugly term) in our country behave and they internalise what they see as something they should aspire to emulate.

We keep paying the cost for the lack of discipline in our daily lives. Chronic flouting of regulations, violation of traffic rules and disregard of laws (that have been constituted for the smooth functioning of institutions), lead to general chaos, avoidable accidents and loss of lives. Ignorance of appropriate behaviour in public places—when it is too late that their children drills cause unnecessary injuries and deaths in the event of a fire breaking out. Unplanned construction of buildings and disregard for public property add to the misery of our daily lives; yet we boast of being one of the top economies of the world.

Indeed, we are living in strange times when the world seems to be in a perpetual state of chaos while the "anxious generation" is showing signs of self-centredness and a dangerous lack of discipline. There are too many young parents who clearly realise—when it is too late—that their children are beyond their control. The word "control" is an unacceptable concept for parents and teachers today, yet the irony is that many leaders, here and elsewhere, are controlling citizens' lives with impunity.

It is time to work for a better world. For this, we could begin by engaging in serious introspection about the modern world and the need of fire to bring back respect for order and discipline in our daily lives.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata