



Careful curation

Bihar's electoral roll revision risks excluding short-term migrant voters

Bihar's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls by the Election Commission of India (ECI) has drawn criticism from political parties, and rightly so. The enormity of the task, the short duration, and the strict criteria for verification could result in the wrongful exclusion of lakhs of voters. The ECI's statement that only ordinary residents would qualify for inclusion in the electoral roll has raised concerns, particularly among Opposition parties. Critics argue that it would be difficult for migrant voters – an estimated 20% of Bihar's voting population – to be present for verification during the window that ends on July 31, and creates a high probability that they could be struck off the rolls. The Representation of the People Act, 1950 states that "A person absenting himself temporarily from his place of ordinary residence shall not by reason thereof cease to be ordinarily resident therein", and manuals on electoral rolls add that such people will be treated as ordinary residents as long as they possess the ability and intention to return. This means that there must be caution in removing the names of migrants, especially those who are away from their place of residence for a short period.

The issue becomes more complicated with long-term migrants. In Bihar's case, there is a significant section of the voting-age population, especially males, migrating for work. This becomes evident when parsing voting data from the 2024 general election in the State, revealing a unique electoral dynamic. Bihar is a State where more women turned out to vote than men in absolute numbers (for every 1,000 men there were 1,075 women), even though there were more registered male electors on the rolls (for every 1,000 men, there were only 917.5 women). This electoral dynamic was observed in Jharkhand, and to a lesser extent in Himachal Pradesh, but nowhere was the difference starker than in Bihar. There is good reason to believe that many of the absentee male electors were registered in their home constituencies in Bihar but were unable to return on polling day, drastically lowering the overall turnout rate for men. These electors were likely part of a large migrant cohort that included many long-term migrants. The SIR must carefully parse such electors and ensure that only long-term migrants are removed from the rolls – not an easy task. For long-term migrants, meaningful representation requires their vote to be registered where they currently reside and work. Migrant workers are integral to the economic engines of several States, and their political voice should be more impactful in holding representatives accountable for their everyday challenges there, rather than in their native places. The ECI's SIR must balance these principles. Ideally, such a process should take more time than the one month that the ECI has allocated for it.

Murder most foul

Policemen resort to violence to extract 'confession' on mere suspicion

Nearly 15 years after the Supreme Court of India described custodial torture and deaths as the most heinous crime committed by men in uniform, brutal third-degree treatment of suspects remains a chilling reality. Emboldened policemen, with contempt for procedure, show no hesitation in resorting to violence, not just within but also outside police stations. In Tamil Nadu, the recent death of a young man, Ajith Kumar, who was detained and tortured by a special police team, in plain clothes, for alleged theft in Sivaganga district, underscores the deeply ingrained authoritarian and intimidating nature of the police force. The impunity with which he was detained, without a formal complaint or the registration of a First Information Report, illustrates just how normalised such disturbing behaviour has become in policing. Under the direction of the Manamadurai Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Ajith Kumar was taken by the team to several secluded spots and subject to lathi blows to force him into confessing to have committed the theft – a woman visiting a temple in Madapuram had asked him to park her car; she later claimed that jewellery in the car was missing. Ajith collapsed under the brutality and the theft remains unproven. Justice S.M. Subramanian of the Madras High Court (Madurai Bench) aptly said, "It is almost police-organised crime... Very crudely, we have to say it is the state killing its own citizen".

Most victims are from oppressed backgrounds, making them easy targets. In this case, attempts at a cover-up failed due to protests and political outrage. With the custodial murder of a father and son in Sattankulam during the COVID-19 pandemic still fresh in public memory, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin wasted no time in damage control. Seven policemen, including the DSP were suspended; later, five were arrested. The case was transferred to the CBI. Mindful of a political fallout, with the Assembly elections nine months away, Mr. Stalin apologised to the victim's mother. Solutum was offered, including a cooperative society job to his brother, and a housing plot to the family. Mr. Stalin said that such incidents are "unforgivable" and "unjustifiable" – views he has not aired in suspected custodial death cases in the past four years. However, these measures alone will not bring closure to the families. As directed by the High Court, he must ensure there is action against senior police officers, if their involvement is proven. A fast track trial is needed. It is time for the law-keepers to fall in line and for such killings to end.

Socialism, secularism are the spirit of the Constitution

India's Constitution is not merely a legal document. It is the embodiment of the ideals and the aspirations of a nation that was forged in the crucible of an anti-colonial struggle. Among its most fundamental principles are socialism and secularism, values that are not confined to the Preamble alone but which are woven throughout its text, reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy, in the Fundamental Rights, and in its very structure. Recent calls by the leadership of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leadership to remove the words socialism and secularism from the Preamble are not just an attack on semantics but is also a direct assault on the foundational vision of the Indian republic itself.

The RSS General Secretary made this call recently under the garb of criticising the Emergency, which happened 50 years ago, as the words socialism and secularism were added in the Preamble under the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 during the Emergency. It is a deceitful move by the RSS to invoke the Emergency in order to discredit these principles, especially when it colluded with the Indira Gandhi government during that time for its own survival. To use that event in history to now undermine the Constitution reflects the RSS's hypocrisy and opportunism.

Reflected in the Preamble and beyond Socialism, in the Indian Constitution, is a commitment to social and economic justice, the eradication of inequality, and the creation of a welfare state. The Preamble promises "Justice, social, economic and political" to all citizens, and seeks "Equality of status and of opportunity". It underlines the fact that even before the 42nd Amendment, the spirit of socialism was always present in our Constitution.

There were significant efforts in the Indian Constitution to increase the freedoms of citizens and to reduce the inequalities prevalent in society. The Fundamental Rights were major steps in that direction. Article 14 guarantees equality before law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. These rights, read together with the Preamble



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and Directive Principles, enshrine a vision of a society free from exploitation, where the dignity of every individual is upheld.

The Directive Principles of State Policy have the clearest articulation of the socialist vision, in the Indian Constitution. Articles 38 and 39 clearly lay it out, and is further explained in Articles 41, 42 and 43. These provisions are not just aspirational; they have guided landmark legislation and judicial interpretation in India.

Secularism in the Indian Constitution is not mere religious neutrality but the positive assurance that the state will treat all religions equally, protect the rights of minorities, and ensure that no citizen suffers discrimination on the basis of faith. The original text of the Preamble, even before the addition of the word secular in 1976, had already promised "Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship" and "Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual".

Under Fundamental Rights, Articles 25 to 28 provide the Right to Freedom of Religion and further underscore the secular nature of the Indian Republic. Articles 29 and 30, on Cultural and Educational Rights, too reiterate this. These articles ensure that the state neither identifies with nor privileges any religion, and that every citizen, regardless of faith, enjoys equal rights and protections. Even the Supreme Court of India has repeatedly affirmed that secularism is part of the Constitution's 'basic structure'.

The Basic Structure Doctrine was introduced in 1973 in the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Kesavananda Bharati*. It holds that while Parliament can amend the Constitution, it cannot alter its fundamental structure, i.e., the basic structure of the Constitution is inviolable. As mentioned earlier, the 42nd Amendment which introduced the words socialism and secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution was enacted in 1976, three years after this historic verdict. Yet, the additions could be made precisely because they did not violate the basic structure of the Constitution.

Inseparable from the Constitution's fabric It is a fallacy to claim that socialism and secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution are mere 'additions' or 'impositions' from the 1970s. The Objective Resolution of the

Constituent Assembly, the Constituent Assembly debates themselves and the lived experience of India's glorious anti-colonial freedom struggle all testify that these values were central to the vision of the Republic's founders.

The Constitution's commitment to social and economic justice, equality, and fraternity is inherently socialist. Its guarantee of religious liberty, non-discrimination and minority rights is inherently secular. Even if the words socialist and secular (the word secular was there in Article 25(2)(a) even before the 42nd Amendment) were to be removed from the Preamble, the Constitution's core philosophy, structure and provisions would remain unchanged in their essence.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's final speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, offers profound insights that reinforce the argument that the notion of equality (which forms the foundation of the ideas of socialism and secularism) is embedded in the Constitution's spirit and structure. B.R. Ambedkar's words remain a guiding light against any attempt to dilute these foundational values.

The real agenda has been exposed

The RSS's demand to remove socialism and secularism from the Preamble of the Constitution is a calculated move to undermine the very foundations of the Indian Republic. It exposes its long-standing agenda to replace the Constitution with a veiled Manusmriti, to subvert the secular democratic republic of India, and create a theocratic Hindu Rashtra. The attempt to erase socialism and secularism from the Preamble is an attempt to rewrite history, to delegitimise the legacy of India's anti-colonial freedom struggle, and to pave the way for an oppressive majoritarian state.

The Constitution of India is a living document that is designed to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for all. Socialism and secularism are the pillars on which the edifice of the Indian Republic stands. To attack them is to attack the very soul of India's democracy. All those who cherish the values of the freedom struggle – a struggle that the RSS was not part of – must stand united in defence of the lofty values of the Constitution, and resist any attempt to destroy the idea of India.

Opening new doors for Parliament's library service

In recent years, disruptions have been the hallmark of parliamentary proceedings in India. It is almost easy to forget that Parliament is not just a seat of politics. It is where policy is made and autopsied and the government is held accountable by people chosen to do so.

Legislating on complex and diverse issues, from economic reforms and climate change to national security and emerging technologies is a daunting task. The key is to have access to world-class research and referral services. The Parliament library is one of the best in the country. Its services are used by research scholars, but only a handful of Members of Parliament (MP) use it, say MPs past and present.

The Parliament Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service (LARRDIS) is prompt and efficient – an MP recalled how his online query about the speeches made by another MP during his 15-year parliamentary tenure led to all of them being sent to his email inbox within three days. Inputs, however, are limited to what is contained in its now entirely digitised volumes. "It is not a research organisation or an academic institution," was how one MP described the role of LARRDIS. But this gap is now filled by organisations such as PRS Legislative Research with its Legislative Assistants to Members of Parliament (LAMP) fellowships.

Of the 800 or so MPs in Parliament, at any given point, only between 40 to 50 MPs have a LAMP fellow. Lauded for its immense value addition and effectiveness, LAMP nevertheless has finite resources – fellows spend a short time with MPs. Therefore, many MPs rely on political aides or external consultants for research. With House discussions devolving increasingly into political combats, many political parties also supply their MPs with talking points. This means that inputs to MP offices can be partisan or lacking in expertise or facts, resulting in debates that may lack analytical depth.

The good, the bad and the ugly of LARRDIS While LARRDIS has been active in digitising parliamentary records such as creating PDF



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archives of Lok Sabha proceedings, committee reports, and rare books (even introducing a service in 2023 to share articles written by MPs with others), its services are predominantly reactive. MPs must submit requisitions either in person or online.

The volume of requests by MPs for information surged from 150 in 1950 to over 8,000 in 2019. Yet, LARRDIS operates largely in a silo, with minimal partnerships with universities, think tanks, or consulting firms. This isolation limits its ability to provide proactive, anticipatory policy analysis and predict trends. It has also limited in-house research capacity.

To meet the evolving demands of Indian democracy, there is a need for LARRDIS to evolve into an agile, forward looking, and inclusive research hub, making the best use of some of the premier academic institutes in the country. It will enrich India's legislative process.

Other parliamentary research services Established parliamentary democracies have dedicated research units that provide lawmakers with authoritative, objective, and timely information. According to the Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a holistic research function within the system ensures confidentiality, neutrality and institutional memory.

The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) collaborates with think tanks, academic partners, and other parliamentary services to build a diverse knowledge repository. It maintains an accessible website housing reports and policy digests. The EPRS tracks global trends affecting the European Union (EU), provides initial appraisals of European Commission impact assessments, and produces "Cost of Non-Europe" reports assessing benefits of EU-level common action.

Argentina's Scientific Office for Legislative Advice (OCAL) informs Parliament about scientific and technological options by collaborating with external institutions, conducts

studies on social challenges, connects legislators with scientists and citizens, and runs training programmes. France's Parliamentary Office for Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Options (OPECST) and Mexico's Office for Information of Science and Technology for the Congress of the Union (INCYTU) serve similar roles.

LARRDIS could emulate this proactive 360-degree approach. Partnerships with academic institutions for policy-relevant studies to address complex and emerging issues such as Artificial Intelligence governance or climate change can be one option.

The IPU highlights such collaborations in countries such as Benin (Africa) and Colombia (South America), where embedding scholars co-author technical papers for enhanced research quality. Egypt attaches groups of specialists and research fellows to parliamentary committees. Sweden has the Association of MPs and Researchers (RIFO), for facilitating dialogue between lawmakers and researchers.

Building an institutional asset

A phased and consultative approach that is aligned with global best practices would be the ideal route for restructuring LARRDIS. LARRDIS's mandate, eligible users (MPs, citizens), turnaround timelines, and confidentiality protocols need to be delineated. Talent from think tanks, academic institutions, consulting agencies, and experts from organisations such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the United Nations Development Programme can add depth to its work.

This is not merely an administrative reform. It is an investment in the quality of lawmaking, accountability, and governance. For a complex country such as India, the cost of misinformation policy can be staggering. A state-of-the-art research service would bridge the information asymmetry between legislature and executive, enhance the quality of debates, and strengthen the trust of citizens in parliamentary processes.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A danger to democracy It is deeply shocking that the 'Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls' in poll-bound Bihar is set to disenfranchise a significant percentage of voters. This massive planned pruning raises serious doubts about the intent behind the SIR. When such large-scale deletions occur without due diligence or public awareness, democracy stands threatened. Therefore, the Election Commission of India is duty bound to explain to the nation whether the SIR is a

transparent cleanup or a clean-out of voters.
P.H. Hema Sagar,
Secunderabad

The 'Tibet test' For New Delhi, it is time for a test – this time, it's the Tibet test ('World' page, July 3). With the 14th Dalai Lama explicitly asserting that his successor will be "decided by a trust, [and] not the Chinese government," this represents yet another strategic challenge, wherein New Delhi morally needs to back the "honoured guest".

On the other hand, such a stance may come at a strategic cost for already tricky India-China relations. The deftness with which India walks this tightrope without making compromises on strategic autonomy will determine how much India scores in the Tibet test.
Nishat,
New Delhi

Palliative care model I write this letter as a retired professor after reading the article, "Integrating compassion, prioritising

palliative care" (Editorial page, July 3). Pallium India, Trivandrum has been successfully undertaking palliative care in India. In the family structure of the aged, having friendly carers at home remains a critical part in good palliative care. The plight of the lonely aged is what is cause for

concern. Between old-age homes and family-based care, India needs mid-level aged care homes such as 'Pahal Veedu' (day care centre) for the aged. Models such as the one in Thrissur, Kerala, can be replicated across India.
Dr. M. Borain,
Gandhinagar, Tamil Nadu

Corrections & Clarifications

A sentence in an article, "Using tech to empower women and children" (Opinion page, July 2, 2025), should have read: "The Maternal Mortality Rate has declined to 97 per 1,00,000 births (2018-20) from 130 per 1,00,000 births (2014-16)." In both instances, it was not 1,000 births, as published.

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Rabies vaccine shortage I am writing this letter to express concern over the shortage of anti-rabies vaccines in Chennai's health centres. With rising cases of dog bites and the potential risk of rabies, there cannot be delays in treatment in the event of being bitten. There also needs to be public awareness campaigns on post-bite measures.
Sweetha V.,
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Is U.S. imperialism a threat to the world?

PARLEY



Prakash Karat
Former General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)



Happymon Jacob
Founder-director of the Council for Strategic and Defense Research

During the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, the U.S. struck three nuclear facilities in Iran in violation of international laws. This unprovoked strike is the latest in a series of unilateral military interventions by the U.S. across the world, including the illegal occupation of Iraq under the pretext of possible weapons of mass destruction, and the occupation of Afghanistan. Is U.S. imperialism a threat to the world? Prakash Karat and Happymon Jacob discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Vignesh P. Venkitesh. Edited excerpts:

Is the U.S. pushing its imperialist agenda especially after President Donald Trump's return to the White House? If so, how?

Prakash Karat: Yes. The background to this effort by President Trump is the decline in U.S. hegemony and the crisis of neoliberalism which has affected the U.S. and the world. With his 'America First' policy, Mr. Trump is squeezing even his allies. He is trying to revive the U.S.'s dominance and hegemony, which is important for him.

Happymon Jacob: American hegemony has been under challenge for some time. The U.S., the world's sole superpower, has in the past and is today engaged in aggressive military behaviour against regimes that it has issues with. It has violated the international order and international laws that it helped create in 1945. But it is behaving like any country that accumulates too much power. It is pursuing what it believes are its interests, because it has the power to do so. I am not condoning this; I'm simply saying this is how hegemony behaves. In some ways, the Trump administration's use of power is not even well calculated towards an end; it is just random and reckless.

Do you think the U.S.'s dominance is threatened by China's advances in areas such as renewables and electronics?

PK: The corollary to the decline in U.S. power is the rise of China – its economic power, technological progress, and global political influence. The effort that Mr. Trump is making now did not start with him. During the Obama and Biden presidency, too, the U.S. was focused dealing with this strategic threat from China. So the U.S. definitely sees China's rise as a threat.

HJ: There has been a structural decline in American power. The U.S. is a \$30 trillion economy and China is a \$20 trillion economy. No other country is close to either of these two in some ways. So, the U.S. is certainly rattled by China's rise and the decline of its own power internationally. There is a structured rivalry or a



U.S. President Donald Trump delivers an address to the nation after the U.S. struck Iran's nuclear facilities. He is accompanied by Vice President J.D. Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. REUTERS

new Cold War that is brewing. But having said that, let me also argue that if tomorrow there is a consensus between the U.S. and China about how two great powers must behave internationally, that will create difficulties for other rising powers such as India.

PK: For the American ruling class, dealing with the China threat will become the central focus again. The opening salvo was the tariff war. The U.S. finds it difficult to pursue that because China stands firm and does not succumb to tariff threats. I think the Trump administration will start shifting focus to the Asia Pacific region. The rivalry between the U.S. and China will become one of the key features in the coming days. The rise of China is the only alternative pole, and the U.S. will try to continue to do something to contain China.

How will a bipolar or a multipolar global order fare for other rising regional powers?

HJ: The problem with having two poles – the U.S.-led pole and the China-led pole – is that rising powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa tend to have less agency. What is probably more useful is a multipolar world order with more consensus-building and conversations, and where the United Nations is not overruled by countries with more power. While great power consensus is a problem for countries such as India, great power competition is also going to be a problem for us. It is not an easy choice for us and it is going to be more contested and more chaotic as the years go by.

PK: What is good for India would be growing multipolarity and us playing a role within that. But the reality is that India has got more aligned with the U.S. through the Quad and other economic and defence ties. If we had been able to have a more independent foreign policy and retain strategic autonomy, we would have been able to take full advantage of this growing multipolarity. But after the U.S. bombed Iran, India refused to condemn the attacks, which



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HAPPYMON JACOB

were against international law. India also distanced itself from a statement from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) condemning Israel's attack on Iran. We are clearly getting aligned with the U.S. and Israel. We are not in a position to take advantage of the growing multipolarity in the world today.

HJ: In terms of security, India has China as a neighbour. China has territorial claims vis-a-vis India and we have had conflicts with China in the past. If we have a challenge next door, we need friends and that could be Russia, the U.S., France. If we do not have friends, our ability to meet our security needs will be susceptible.

At the end of the day, in an anarchic international system, states have to look after their own security. If we are convinced that the Global South, the SCO, or the BRICS countries are going to support us diplomatically and politically when we are in trouble with another country, we are going to sort of support them. During the recent Pahalagam attack and the stand-off with Pakistan, not too many countries stood by India. Some say that is because India is too multi-aligned. Israel appears to have stood by India then. This is not to condone Israel's excesses and the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza as well as its attack on Iran, but at the end of the day, the question we should ask is, who is going to stand by us when there is trouble in our own neighborhood.

PK: That's a valid concern. But despite India having such close ties with the U.S., Mr. Trump said after the Pahalagam incident and the conflict with Pakistan that the U.S. had intervened to settle matters. The U.S. will start treating us like an ally in the way it has always had Pakistan as an ally. This is one of the risks that we take by aligning ourselves with the geopolitical interests of the U.S. In Asia, India has become a member of Quad. If Quad becomes a security alliance, India's capacity or opportunities in a multipolar world will shrink.

Will India's efforts to be non-aligned affect the role of BRICS and other groupings in challenging the U.S. imperialist agenda?

HJ: There should first be a prioritisation of interests first. In an anarchic international system, the priority is the security of a country. The SCO is a China-dominated entity in some

ways, and India and China are not the best of friends. BRICS has expanded to such an extent that the countries within it don't agree with one another on most issues. While I am all for multiple groupings in the international system that can offset and balance unipolarity and hegemony, I'm also concerned about jumping on the bandwagon of too many of these, which may not necessarily lead to anything.

PK: I agree that the SCO is not a regional body which will be of great use to us, but it is also something which we cannot opt out of because of Pakistan. BRICS shows that there is a potential for the countries of the Global South to get on a collective forum and articulate their interests, notwithstanding the fact that many of them may not have commonality of interest in all issues. When we are a part of BRICS, and a country in the BRICS is subjected to aggression, we should at least take a stand and say 'no, we are against this'. We can't say we are neutral. If we want to really make these forums represent the minimum interests of the countries of the Global South, then we should be able to take a stand at least regarding attacks on territorial sovereignty. When we have a strategic alignment with one of the big powers, our claim of being a spokesperson for the Global South gets completely undermined. India's strategic ties with the U.S. hampers the great potential and the role we can play in a multipolar world.

What role will the Global South play in the future, especially with Mr. Trump's agenda?

PK: Whether it is the reciprocal tariffs or the trade war that Mr. Trump is launching, the real victims are going to be the countries of the Global South. Most of them are going to be really badly affected. Their economies are going to suffer. There will be loss of jobs and serious financial problems. In the coming days, India should be part of the mainstream Global South resistance which, I'm sure, will develop. India must be able to work out a clear strategy to be part of the mainstream Global South, whether it's the debt crisis, trade imbalances, or climate change, as all these things are going to get aggravated due to the policies being adopted by the Trump administration.

HJ: In an age where we have multilateralism failing, we need alternatives. Minilateralisms and alternatives like the Global South have a responsibility to come together, talk about the issues that much of the humanity faces, and do something about it. The failure of multilateralism is another reason why the Global South must survive.



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NOTEBOOK

Access, the greatest asset of a reporter

The life of a credible reporter involves a constant balance between garnering access and maintaining the credibility of our byline

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

If a reporter's currency is their byline, their greatest asset is access – whether to leaders in corporate India, to officials within the government, to actors, or to sportspeople. However, access is a complicated thing. It involves building trust and establishing contacts over the years. It is equally shaped by how a reporter and the organisation they work for are perceived.

After a stint in a smaller, digital-only media platform, I returned to *The Hindu* recently. The difference in access is stark. Back then, I would struggle to chase after companies, big or small; and I would have to cajole them to comment on a news development. Sometimes they would give me interviews, but more often than not, they would ignore me for days.

The same thing happened with government officials. As I enjoyed a personal rapport with some of them, they were open to having conversations. But those who did not know me did not care.

Now, the situation is different. The same companies I had hounded, and the several others that I did not, seem all too eager to organise 'relationship building meetings'. For every data release or policy development, I get bombarded with quotes and press releases on what the heads of these companies have to say.

The government's attitude has also changed, though not as radically. While earlier requests for meetings with Secretaries and Joint Secretaries fell on deaf ears, they are now entertained.

However, this is not a privilege I take for granted, since I have seen what happens when one does that. My first stint at *The Hindu* coincided with the time when Arun Jaitley was Finance Minister. Jaitley gave reporters more or less a free writ to

roam the halls of the Ministry for stories.

This policy carried over briefly when Nirmala Sitharaman took over as Finance Minister. However, it soon stopped because the privilege was grossly abused. It was brought to the Minister's attention that several reporters were ordering food from apps to be delivered directly to North Block, which not only houses the Home Ministry, but is also located opposite the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister's Office. Some reporters went as far as to tail government officials on their way to the bathroom, hoping to get a quote from them.

Ms. Sitharaman decided to go the other extreme. She banned entry of all media persons to the Ministry, unless they had an official appointment. Those appointments, too, became rare. It took the media several years to regain their reluctant trust. Things are still far from where they were during Jaitley's time, but they are certainly better than what they were in 2019.

Access also depends very much on the journalist's work. Once I reported a foolish remark by a Minister. The news item was carried on the front page and I was immediately blacklisted. I no longer had access even off-the-record insights. It finally took a change of personnel in the Minister's office for me to regain some semblance of access. The attempt to gain greater access remains ongoing.

Several media houses and journalists have ample access to officials simply because they write what the government wants them to. But the life of a credible reporter involves a constant balance between garnering access, our prime asset, and maintaining the credibility of our byline.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

In the grip of Bonalu fervour



A devotee carries a 'bonam' or earthen pot at Golconda Fort during the Bonalu festival in Hyderabad. Decorated with turmeric and vermillion, the bonam contains rice cooked with milk, sugar, and neem leaves, which is given as an offering to Goddess Kali. Bonalu is a major month-long festival celebrated across Telangana. SIDHANT THAKUR

FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 4, 1975

Connors, Ashe to meet in finals

London, July 3: Defending champion Jimmy Connors and Arthur Ashe won their semi-finals in the nearly Rs. 19.6 lakhs Wimbledon tennis championships to-day and became the first Americans to meet in the finals since Jack Kramer beat Tom Brown way back in 1947. Top seed Connors in a display of tennis

mastery that awed the capacity of 15,000 in Centre Court tamed Roscoe Tanner's 140 mile-an-hour served with a dazzling display of ground strokes and beat him in 75 minutes 6-4, 6-1, 6-4. In the other semi-final, sixth seeded Ashe beat Australia's 16th seed, Torrey Roche, in a comparatively tedious two hour and 50 minute marathon 5-7, 6-4, 7-5, 8-9, 6-4. Connors, an overwhelming favourite to beat Ashe, now is better than even money to become the first champion since 1938 to win the singles without the loss of a set.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 4, 1925

The situation in China

Canton, July 3: A Commission of 16 persons has been formed to conduct the National Government including the son of the late Dr. Sun Yat Sen, as a Minister of Communications. The oath adjures the Commission to follow Dr. Sun Yat Sen's political will. All foreign consuls except the British and French were invited.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount for road joining Agra-Lucknow and Purvanchal

4,775 In ₹ crore. The project, approved in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, aims to enhance connectivity across major regional corridors. The proposed expressway will be constructed in six lanes and span 49.96 kilometres. **PH**

Total tax breaks proposed in the U.S.'s Big Beautiful Bill

4.5 In trillion dollars. The 800-plus page bill proposed by the Trump administration seeks to introduce massive spending and safety net cuts along with tax breaks. The package includes \$1.2 trillion in cutbacks to Medicaid health care and food stamps. **AP**

Women removed from Maharashtra government scheme

2,289 An investigation revealed these women, who were government employees, have been beneficiaries of the Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin scheme. Under the scheme, women from 21-65 are given a financial benefit of ₹1,500 through direct benefit transfer. **ANI**

The length of Ethiopia's new mega dam on the Nile

1.8 In kilometres. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that the 145-metre-high Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is complete and will be officially inaugurated in September. It was constructed on a \$4-billion budget and will be used for electricity and development projects. **AP**

Highest score by an Indian batsman in a Test in England

269 India captain Shubman Gill scored a superb maiden Test double-century against England during the second Test at Edgbaston. The 25-year-old, surpassed Sunil Gavaskar's 221 at the Oval back in 1979. **PH**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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T.N.'s health sector: feats and challenges

What are some of the focussed initiatives and innovative programmes introduced to expand Tamil Nadu's public health sector? What is the 'Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam' scheme and how has it helped in tackling non-communicable diseases? Is the health workforce stretched beyond measure?

EXPLAINER

Serena Josephine M.

The story so far:

Tamil Nadu has consistently ranked high in the health sector. A robust public health system, 11,000+ institutions at the primary, secondary and tertiary care levels and scores of pioneering schemes have enabled the State to stay ahead in many of its key health indicators. Despite such achievements, the State's health sector is in the midst of a brewing crisis – a crisis fueled by a high number of vacancies, a strained workforce, and a lackadaisical attitude towards long-pending demands of doctors.

How has T.N. healthcare fared so far?

Over the years, the State has made significant strides in expanding its health infrastructure and improving health outcomes through focussed initiatives and innovative programmes, while prioritising core areas of maternal and child health, and prevention and control of infectious diseases. In particular, it has scaled up interventions targeting non-communicable diseases. Its flagship scheme, 'Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam' (MTM), has taken screening and drug delivery for conditions such as diabetes and hypertension to people's doorsteps, while community-based cancer screening programmes have also taken off.

Moreover, the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation streamlines drug procurement and supply for government hospitals; the Transplant Authority of Tamil Nadu (formerly Cadaver Transplant Programme) regulates the process of organ allocation and maintenance of wait lists; and the Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme provides financial assistance and nutritional support to pregnant women belonging to economically and socially disadvantaged sections. Schemes such as the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health



Hospital blues: The Government RSRM Lying in Hospital in Royapuram, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. **RAGU R**

Insurance Scheme have enabled better access to healthcare, especially for advanced procedures and surgeries such as organ transplants for the poor.

What gains have been made?

Such focussed measures have enabled the State to steadily bring down its maternal and infant mortality numbers. As per the State's Health Management Information System, the Maternal Mortality Ratio stands at 39.4 per 1,00,000 live births (2024-2025), a dip from 45.5 in 2023-2024, while the Infant Mortality Rate fell from 8.2 per 1,000 live births (2023-2024) to 7.7 in 2024-2025. The under-five mortality rate has also declined from 8.9 (2023-2024) to 8.2 during 2024-2025.

On its part, the MTM has demonstrated an improvement in the management of hypertension and diabetes in the State. Among adults with hypertension, the

proportion with blood pressure control rose to 17% (previously 7.3%), while among those with diabetes, the proportion with blood sugar control rose to 16.7% (previously 10.8%) respectively.

These achievements are the outcomes of a resilient healthcare system that was built brick by brick over decades and stood the test of time during the COVID-19 pandemic. But certain deficiencies have surfaced in the State's public health sector, stemming from failures in addressing the needs of its workforce.

What are the unmet needs and gaps?

Despite exponential growth in terms of health infrastructure, there has been no proportionate expansion in the workforce. Delay in filling up vacant posts (across different levels) and lack of new posts' creation have left a dent in the sector. The health sector, including at the

primary care level, is running the show by redeploying/diverting doctors and staff nurses to various facilities.

A crucial cadre of T.N.'s public health system are its Village Health Nurses (VHN), who play a vital role in maternal and child healthcare. As per the latest official data, 2,013 posts of VHNs (of the 8,713 sanctioned) and 1,251 posts of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (of the 2,057 sanctioned) are lying vacant. There has been an inordinate delay in filling the vacant posts due to legal issues. VHNs spearhead antenatal care, delivery services, post-natal follow-up and immunisation. Instead of serving one village (population of 5,000 to 6,000 as per norms), each VHN is now covering at least two to three villages each. Facing an acute crisis, they have been rising concerns about falling behind in maternal and child healthcare services.

On the other hand, there is a growing concern about the shortage and skewed distribution of specialists in the State. Government doctors have been asking for an increase in their workforce as per patient strength, according to norms prescribed by Indian Public Health Standards. Many of them note that there is a huge rise in patient inflow to government hospitals, but no commensurate rise in staffing. In the last four years, the State recruited some 3,500-odd medical officers to its primary healthcare (point of entry) but is yet to address specialist shortfalls at the secondary and tertiary care levels. In particular, there is a huge deficit in super speciality cadre such as for cardiothoracic surgery and vascular surgery.

Additionally, contractual recruitments and proposed models for public private partnership in service delivery, such as for haemodialysis, are facing stiff opposition among the existing workforce.

For a State like Tamil Nadu, which takes pride in its advanced health infrastructure, a discontent and stretched workforce is detrimental in many ways. It could affect performance, patient outcomes, and public trust.

THE GIST

Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam (MTM) has taken screening and drug delivery for conditions such as diabetes and hypertension to people's doorsteps, while community-based cancer screening programmes have also taken off.

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Can the Supreme Court halt an Act passed by a State?

What did the Supreme Court mandate in the Nandini Sundar case on July 5, 2011?

R.K. Vij

The story so far:

Disposing of a writ and contempt petition, the Supreme Court in *Nandini Sundar and Ors. versus State of Chhattisgarh* held that the passing of an Act by the State of Chhattisgarh, subsequent to its order, cannot be said to be an act of contempt of the order passed by the Court.

What did SC order of July 2011 state?

The Supreme Court, on July 5, 2011 issued an order stating that the State of Chhattisgarh shall cease and desist from using Special Police Officers (SPOs) in any activities, directly or indirectly, aimed at controlling, countering, mitigating or otherwise eliminating Maoist activities. The Court ordered the State to recall all firearms issued to any of the SPOs. The order said that the State shall take all

appropriate measures to prevent the operation of any group, including but not limited to the Salwa Judum and Koya Commandos.

The Court also directed the Union of India to cease and desist from using any of its funds in supporting, directly or indirectly, the recruitment of SPOs for the purposes of engaging in any form of counter-insurgency activities against Maoists. The Court concluded that the appointment of inadequately paid and ill-trained SPOs engaged in checking Maoism was violative of Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution.

Why was a contempt case filed?

Consequent to the Supreme Court order of July 2011, the State of Chhattisgarh enacted the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Armed Police Forces Act, 2011. Section 4(i) of the Act provides that an auxiliary force shall be constituted 'to aid and assist the security forces' in the maintenance of

public order and preventing, controlling and combating Maoist/Naxal violence and insurgency, etc. Section 5(2) of the Act further states that the members of the auxiliary force 'shall not be deployed in the front-line positions of an operation and shall always work under supervision of the security forces...'. The provision of compulsory training for a period not less than six months, is also prescribed under the Act. Only those SPOs, who would be eligible as per these prescribed yardsticks, were to be inducted into the auxiliary force (by screening committee). The legislature thus had addressed all the concerns observed by the Supreme Court.

However, it was argued by the petitioners that the said enactment was not in consonance with the Court's order and therefore amounted to contempt of Court.

Why was contempt prayer rejected?

There were reasons for rejecting the relief

sought by petitioners. One, the Supreme Court took cognisance of the fact that all the directions issued by the Court had been complied to by the State of Chhattisgarh and necessary reports were submitted.

Second, the Court said that every State legislature has plenary powers to pass an enactment so long as the said enactment was not declared to be *ultra vires* of the Constitution. Any law made by Parliament or a State Legislature cannot be held as an act of contempt. The Court clarified that a legislature has the power to pass a law, to remove the basis of a judgment or validate a law which has been struck down by a Constitutional Court. This is the core of the doctrine of separation of powers and must always be acknowledged in a constitutional democracy. Any piece of legislation enacted by a legislature can be assailed only on the twin prongs of legislative competence or constitutional validity.

In *Indian Aluminium Co. versus State of Kerala* (1996), the Supreme Court observed that Courts must maintain the delicate balance devised by the Constitution between the three sovereign functionaries. The Court therefore held that unless and until it is first established that the statute so enacted is in opposition to constitutional law or otherwise, it cannot be struck down.

RR Vij is a former IPS officer and views are personal.

THE GIST

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IN THE LIMELIGHT



A still from 'Jurassic Park' UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Back in the flesh: 'Jurassic Park' and the dinosaur renaissance

Over three decades ago, Steven Spielberg's blockbuster legacy turned dinosaurs into pop cultural icons, sparked a scientific awakening, and helped usher in a real-world reckoning over the morality of resurrecting the dead

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury

In the summer of 1993, the world watched spellbound as a towering Brachiosaurus gracefully reared up to nibble treetops, while John Williams' score swelled like God breathing. Steven Spielberg's genre-defining blockbuster rewrote the cultural DNA of dinosaurs forever, transforming them from textbook curiosities into Hollywood royalty. An entire generation developed an unshakable obsession with creatures that had been extinct for 65 million years. All because of a movie.

For a film that opens with a mosquito trapped in amber, *Jurassic Park* has aged with surprising elasticity. It had the makings of a pulpy B-movie, but the magician in Spielberg spun it into something timeless. Ever since, it's been re-spun, rebooted, and rebranded across three decades.

The science, even then, was flimsy. *Toxorynchites rutilus*, the species of mosquito shown, doesn't even suck blood. And DNA degrades far too quickly to survive millions of years. But that shaky premise has since evolved from science fiction, to "science eventuality," to literal modern-day science. While extracting dinosaur DNA from fossilised insects remains a fantasy, the real world has been inching closer to that cinematic magic.

Iconic special effects

Of course, the magic wasn't all Spielberg. Stan Winston built animatronics with blinking eyes, breathing chests, and skin stretched over robotic bones. Industrial Light and Magic's (ILM) groundbreaking CGI handled the weight and gait of creatures that had never been seen before, using a special 'Dinosaur Input Device' to puppeteer their movements

digitally. Just 15 minutes of dinosaur screen time was enough to reshape how a generation imagined prehistoric life.

The irony is that while *Jurassic Park* was hailed for its scientific fidelity, it also got a fair amount of things wrong. The Velociraptors were scaled up to nearly double their actual size. The T. Rex's vision, contrary to Dr. Grant's famous whisper, was not based on movement; it likely had binocular depth perception and could smell you coming a mile away. Most egregiously for modern palaeontologists, the dinosaurs were featherless, greyish reptiles, missing the colourful, bird-like traits we now know many had.

But Jack Horner, the real-life palaeontologist who inspired Alan Grant, saw the bigger picture. In his words, the movie wasn't a documentary, but a doorway to suspend all disbelief. Yet, over time, the franchise leaned deeper into American military-industrial fantasies. The recent entries have given us weaponised Velociraptors, genetically-engineered hybrid killing machines, and a Mosasaur the size of a battleship. Behind the scenes, consultants still fought to keep the science honest. Some succeeded (the *Pyraptor* from *Jurassic World Dominion* finally had feathers) but the overarching 'scary sells' mandate remained. Pink-plumed, birdlike dinosaurs, no matter how accurate, just didn't test well.

The palaeontology renaissance

In the years following the film's release, palaeontology experienced a renaissance. The so-called "Jurassic Park Effect" turned casual curiosity into career paths. Children who once saw dinosaurs as static images began imagining them as dynamic, intelligent, and even graceful creatures. Universities saw a spike in students declaring interest in prehistoric

life. Museums were packed again. Dinosaurs were, suddenly, the coolest things ever.

The once unassuming field relegated to academia now had a face, a soundtrack, and perhaps most importantly, funding. Governments and institutions began investing more seriously in palaeontological research, emboldened by a public that was suddenly into dinosaurs. Before *Jurassic Park*, new dinosaur species were discovered at a rate of maybe three or four per year. Today, that number hovers around 50. Whether digging in the deserts of Mongolia or scanning fossils with particle accelerators, researchers rode the wave of public fascination the film helped ignite.

Which is exactly why the *Jurassic World* sequels sting a little. They're fine as popcorn films, but they could've done more. The original reimagined how the world saw dinosaurs. The new films played it safe, recycling familiar nostalgic images rather than reflecting what science had since uncovered. Sure, they'll still get some kid to Google "Indominus Rex vs Spinosaurus", but it's hard not to feel a little let down by what could've been.

On the ethics of de-extinction

Jurassic Park did something more speculative and slippery by introducing the world to the concept of "de-extinction." Today, we live in a time where resurrecting lost species no longer sounds entirely impossible. Ben Lamm, founder of Colossal Biosciences, believes the woolly mammoth will walk again by 2028. His labs are working with ancient DNA, comparative genomics, and somatic cell nuclear transfer – the same science that cloned Dolly the sheep, now turbocharged with robotics and AI. The ostensible goal has been to resurrect extinct species to seed ecosystems with

keystone animals. His team is also simultaneously attempting to revive the dodo, the thylacine (the Tasmanian Devil, or Taz from *Looney Tunes*), and potentially use artificial wombs for reproduction. It's the closest thing we have to a real-life InGen, though unsurprisingly, not everyone is optimistic. Some question the ethics of creating a single living animal just to prove it can be done. Others worry about the unintended consequences of gene editing, including evolutionary whiplash, cellular chaos, and the specter of designer organisms being commodified.

There's a certain poetry in how *Jurassic Park* warned us about the dangers of turning nature into a spectacle while itself becoming the most breathtaking spectacle ever made. A movie that staged a cautionary tale about playing God with prehistoric DNA ended up inspiring decades of scientific fascination, funding, and, ironically, real-world attempts. The franchise that once asked whether we should resurrect extinct animals is now part of a cultural machine that increasingly seems to whisper, "Why not?" It captured, maybe accidentally, the exact shape of our cultural neurosis: the maniacal desire to control nature, a belief in technological omnipotence, and a tendency to moralise after the fact.

Perhaps the cruelest cosmic twist is that the plastic toy dinosaurs clutched by children today – those mass-produced echoes of Spielberg's creations – are, in a very real sense, made of dinosaurs. Fossil fuels, derived from ancient organic matter liquefied over millennia, have been moulded into choking hazards and Happy Meal replicas of the creatures. These great beasts who once walked the Earth now circle in a perfect closed loop of commercial mythmaking. Capitalism, like life, finds a way.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The first quiz in a multi-part series on the Indian National Movement

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1
Which tribal community led a rebellion in 1855-56 in response to British colonial exploitation?

QUESTION 2
Under which Act was Bahadur Shah Zafar tried in the Red Fort in 1858?

QUESTION 3
Which Indian revolutionary raised an early version of the Indian flag at an international socialist gathering in 1907, marking India's assertion on the world stage?

QUESTION 4
Upon conviction, what was the sentence handed down to Savarkar by the British colonial government?

QUESTION 5
What was the codename for the attempted pan-India uprising against British rule during World War I in 1915?

QUESTION 6
Who was the exiled Indian prince who headed the Provisional Government of India set up in Kabul in 1915?



Visual question:
This Kerala ruler, portrayed by Malayalam actor Mammootty on the silver screen, waged a 13-year guerrilla war against the East India Company. Name him. FILE PHOTO

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz 1: This gentleman played in the first-ever Test cricket innings and scored a century. **Ans: Charles Bannerman from Australia.**

2. Name this athlete who set a world record in the women's 800-metre race in 1983. **Ans: Jarmila Kratochvílová (800 m in 1min, 53.28 seconds)**
3. This basketball player scored 100 points in a single game for the Philadelphia Warriors on March 2, 1962. The late Kobe Bryant came closest to this mark with these many points. **Ans: Wilt Chamberlain; 81**

4. This English cueist was the undisputed king of early snooker. **Ans: Joe Davis**
5. This French football striker holds the record for the most goals in a single FIFA World Cup tournament. **Ans: Just Fontaine**

Visual: This American athlete redefined his sport with a single, breathtaking performance nicknamed "the leap of the century." **Ans: Bob Beamon for long jump**

Early Birds: Tamal Biswas; Siddhartha Viswanathan; Haridas Pal; Abhay Krishan; Piyali Tuli

Please send in your answers to
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"My father and I went to the new restaurant yesterday. We didn't really eat all that much. But we got a bill for 500!"
"That must have knocked your father for a loop."

"Knocked my father for a loop! I've never heard that expression before."

"That's not surprising! 'Knock someone for a loop' is a slang expression and it means to 'surprise or upset someone'. For example, this morning I heard that Rajat was getting a divorce. The news really knocked me for a loop."
"Meaning, it upset you terribly."
"Yes, that's right!"

"When I heard that one of my classmates had been arrested, it knocked me for a loop. Can I say that?"

"Yes, you can. You could also say, 'It threw me for a loop'. You can either 'knock someone for a loop', or 'throw someone for a loop'. Both are acceptable."

"I see."

"In your case, the questions that you get in your physics exam always throw you for a loop."

"That's true. So, how's life?"

"Not too good, I'm afraid. The company isn't doing too well. So, the management is trying to pension off some of the old people."

"Pension off? You mean these people are being fired?"

"No! Not when you pension off someone, it means you retire him/her with a pension."

"Is your boss going to pension you off?"

"I haven't worked long enough to get a pension! The company that my best friend works for has pensioned off many of its workers."

"Sounds pretty serious. Does this mean that you will not be asking your boss for a raise in the near future?"

"You're right. I won't be asking him for a raise. Neither my friends nor the manager is planning to ask for one."

"Shouldn't that be 'Neither my friends nor the manager are planning to ask for a raise'?"

"No. You see, when you have two subjects joined by either 'or' or 'nor', then the verb you use is determined by the subject that comes after 'or' or 'nor'. For example, in the sentence 'Neither my friends nor the manager...' "

"...the subject that comes after 'nor' is 'manager'."

"Exactly! Since 'manager' is singular, the verb that follows it should be singular as well. Therefore the verb that follows it is 'is' and not 'are'."

"I see. But suppose I say, 'Either the cat or the dogs...' "

"In this case, since the plural subject 'dogs' follows 'or', the verb..."

"...that follows 'dogs' must be plural too! Either the cat or the dogs have eaten the meat."

"But if you reversed the order, you would say, 'Either the dogs or the cat has eaten the meat'."

Published in *The Hindu* on February 25, 1997.

Word of the day

Woebegone:

worn and broken down by hard use; affected by or full of grief or woe

Synonyms: creaky, decrepit, derelict, flea-bitten, run-down

Usage: That is a woebegone old shack.

Pronunciation: newth.live/woebegonepro

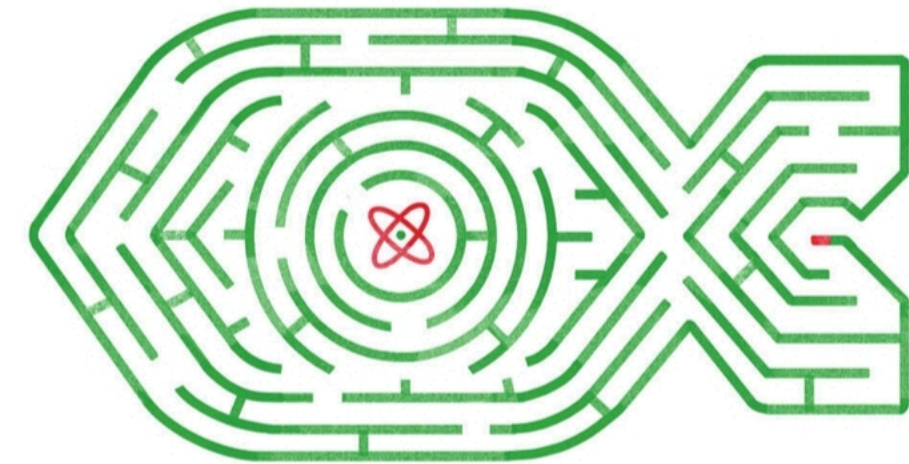
International Phonetic Alphabet: /wəʊbɪɡən/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

THE IDEAS PAGE

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



It is feared that the conflict between Israel-US and Iran could push Iran towards nuclearisation. What would a nuclear-armed Iran mean for West Asia and the world?

Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+JUYKqAFHBAwMQQ1>

Nuclear Iran is best bet for peace

It would be less dangerous than an Iran that feels cornered, insecure, and conventionally belligerent



HUSSEIN BANAI

THE PROLIFERATION of nuclear arms is a net loss for global peace and security. It raises the risks of accidental war, empowers authoritarian regimes and undermines decades of nonproliferation efforts. From both a moral and strategic standpoint, it is better for Iran not to get the bomb.

But what if it does? This is not a prediction nor a policy endorsement. It is a hypothesis grounded in the counterintuitive logic of deterrence theory and shaped by the failures of decades-long Western policy that have prioritised sanctions, limited engagement, covert sabotage and containment over comprehensive security guarantees to the Islamic Republic. In entertaining this possibility, I want to raise the uncomfortable but necessary question: Might Iran's acquisition of a nuclear deterrent actually lead to more stability in the Middle East?

At the heart of this question lies a paradox as old as the nuclear age. Scholars and strategists alike — from Kenneth Waltz to

the perfect case in point.

A nuclear Iran would alter this dynamic. First, it would constrain Israel's freedom of military action. The assumption that Israeli or US strikes will go unpunished — or that Iran will absorb blows without escalating — would no longer hold. A credible Iranian deterrent would inject caution into Israeli planning, especially in moments of political recklessness or brinkmanship. It would make the cost of war explicit. And history suggests that when adversaries both possess nuclear weapons, they become more risk-averse, not less.

Second, a nuclear weapon could moderate Iran's behaviour. This may sound counterintuitive, but again, history offers precedent. Once a state has secured a nuclear deterrent, its need to rely on destabilising asymmetric tactics — proxies, insurgencies, covert operations — tends to decrease. Nuclear security allows for strategic maturity. India after 1964, China after 1964, and even the Soviet Union in the late Cold War period — all became more status quo-oriented and less revisionist after going nuclear. Possession of the bomb doesn't make a state benevolent, but it does force it to act like a state: Accountable, strategic, and aware of its own vulnerability.

Would Iran follow this pattern? It's impossible to say. The regime is ideologically driven and repressive. But it is also calculating. Its leaders have repeatedly shown a capacity for pragmatism when the survival of the regime is at stake, as evidenced by the ceasefire that ended the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the nuclear deal in 2015, and the most recent ceasefire with Israel. A nuclear deterrent might compel the Islamic Republic to moderate from within, to temper ideological paranoia gives way to pragmatic coexistence.

The Middle East is already a nuclearised environment. Israel has the bomb. The US has military assets in the region capable of delivering nuclear strikes. Iran operates under constant existential threat. The question is not whether a nuclear Middle East is ideal — it is not — but whether it would be more stable than the current state of affairs. If Iran, too, had the kind of deterrent that forces enemies to think twice before acting, this hypothesis is not an argument for acquiescence. The goal should still be diplomatic engagement, arms control, and regional dialogue. But if those efforts fail — and they are failing — then we should at least ask whether a nuclear Iran is less dangerous than a cornered, insecure, and conventionally belligerent one? A nuclear Iran may well freeze the battlefield rather than ignite it, and that may be the best peace the region can hope for.

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The writer is associate professor of International Studies at the Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies, Indiana University, and the author of several books on Iran's political development and US-Iran relations

It makes the world more dangerous

At a time when international norms are being reshaped, Iran developing nuclear weapons could increase volatility in West Asia and beyond



KABIR TANEJA

IN THE MID-1950S, Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, initiated the country's nuclear journey. Amidst stiff opposition from its principal supporter, the United States, and with discreet help from France, Tel Aviv built its nuclear programme by the end of the 1960s. Today, Israel is widely known as a non-declared nuclear weapons state. This exclusive status is often compared to Iran's nuclear programme of today, which was targeted by US President Donald Trump on June 22 as B-2 stealth bombers of the US Air Force dropped 14,000 kg bunker-buster bombs on three of the country's nuclear sites — Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan.

Iran's nuclear programme has been the centre of delicate political brinkmanship for years. It began under the rule of the former pro-West Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, and was pitched as civilian in nature, developed around former US President Dwight D

raised fears that Iran was rushing towards a nuclear weapon as it pushed back against the JCPOA. Under Trump, Israel eventually found success, as whispers about intelligence suggesting Iran had materials to build nine warheads reached Trump's ears. Trump ignored even his own intelligence apparatus, which had aired doubts.

The Israel-Iran conflict is now central to the region's security debate. While speculation continues over the kind of damage the US air strikes have really caused, and how much of a setback has been dealt to potential weaponisation, the path forward could also accelerate nuclearisation instead of deterring it. The impact of nuclear weapons dictating the strategic calculus in West Asia will not be geographically limited — it will be global. Arguments around the validity of nuclear weapons and their relationship to the protection of sovereignty and power cannot be dismissed. Especially at a time when international norms put in place predominantly by the West after World War II face a potential collapse. The latter is giving rise to a strategic calculus of "might is right" for the future. And there is no better deterrent than a nuclear weapon. Recently, North Korea has proved this.

Whether Iran remains adamant on gaining nuclear deterrence is an open-ended question after the recent strikes. Israel will do its best to preserve its newfound status as the region's primary military power. Irrespective of who holds power in Tehran, the probability of a unanimous view that nuclear weaponisation is the only way to prevent a repeat of June 2025 may solidify. A domino effect could then play out where nuclear shields — Arab, Iranian, and Israeli — cannot be discounted.

Former prime minister of Pakistan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto perhaps best described a cornered state's vision of what nuclear capabilities can provide and how it can be marketed to a population. In 1977, according to various accounts, Bhutto said, "A Jewish bomb, a Christian bomb, now a Hindu bomb. Why not an Islamic bomb?" Pakistan is the only nuclear Islamic country, and its know-how in this regard is widely accepted to be transferable to its Arab partners such as Saudi Arabia if need be. In the end, attaining nuclear weapons in today's day and age is not a technical challenge but a political decision that has long-lasting ramifications. West Asia should make such a decision cautiously and wisely.

The writer is deputy director and fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"If Russia prevails in its war of aggression, it will not be because of lack of Ukrainian resolve. It will be because of American fecklessness."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

Two quizmasters, on the facts

Facts are important. The need today is also to train people to sift out misinformation and propaganda



ZERO HOUR
BY DEREK O'BRIEN

TWO QUIZMASTERS in conversation.

Derek O'Brien: This is the first time we've done something like this. Thank you, Siddhartha.

Siddhartha Basu: It's the first time ever the both of us have been together, and I'm delighted.

DOB: You and I met just three years ago. And it was such a beautiful occasion. We had dinner at home. You started Quiz Time in 1985. I was 24, you were 31. You were doing television shows, and I was more into stage shows before I did TV. Yes, but we only first met in 2022. And it's been so lovely.

SB: I'm thankful to hear that from you, because your family has been right at the forefront of open quizzing. Let us chat about the whole business of the purpose of general knowledge, quizzing and life lessons, too.

DOB: It's very interesting that you've used the word "business." For you and me, it was business. But the interesting story is how it moved from a hobby into a business.

SB: Prannoy Roy used to joke with me, "You'll always be a Bonga year," because he didn't want to be a businessman enough. We hadn't thought of it that way, but, fortunately, the business followed.

DOB: Yes, from 1967 to the 1980s, nobody charged a rupee for a quiz. You and I did.

SB: You know Quiz Time or a national inter-college quiz wasn't my idea. I was roped into it by happenstance as a host. I was asked to come for 10 minutes and just give an introduction. I was in and out. And then, one month later, they said, "Why don't you be the quiz master for Rs 1,000 an episode?" I left my job instantly. My son was yet to be born and I took the plunge.

DOB: While working for eight years in an advertising agency, Ogilvy, I started doing quizzes on weekends for a fee, Rs 2,000 a quiz — for Maggi and Bata. This was in the late 1980s.

SB: Since you mentioned the Maggi Quiz, the largest ever live ground quiz I have done was the national finals of the Maggi Quiz at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Delhi for 15,000 kids. I want you to rewind to when the first open quiz was conducted by your father, Neil.

DOB: In 1966, my dad, who was in his 30s, was sent by his employers to the UK. My parents were there for three months and that is where they were exposed to University Challenge, a quiz started in 1962. The local parish in Kolkata used to have

a contest for one-act plays. So, Neil and his cousin Errol came up with the idea to change that to an inter-parish quiz. And so was born India's first open quiz, the Eddie Hyde Memorial. The Boornvita Quiz Contest on TV came in 1993. Then you and Amitabh Bachchan, with Kaun Banega Crorepati, took quizzing to another level.

SB: Kolkata has been the capital of quizzing. The city had many quizzards and a number of them came later on Mastermind, which is another show that I was doing. But then I think there are all those people who know the strangest things about the strangest things. I've always been averse to the term trivia, because I don't think it needs to be about peripheral information.

DOB: Today, it's not just the recall of knowledge which excites young people. "Can I speak better English? Can I feel confident?" That is where young people are moving to.

SB: What has become terribly important now is to have contextual knowledge and information. See how much misinformation and propaganda is out there. And WhatsApp University. How do you train, particularly young people, but also ourselves, to have our antennas up... on another note, because even your brothers (Andy, Barry) have been quizzing, tell us about growing up.

DOB: My father would always tell us to read. Then write it down. That will help you recall. He had his diaries, so he would read, and he would write.

SB: Note it down?

DOB: Yes. Write it down as a quiz question in a diary. From 1967, he's had all these questions. So you never have to prepare for a quiz when you're setting a quiz. For all the research you do, whether for a quiz or in Parliament, there is a simple rule: You need three authentic sources.

SB: Minimum. Reliable. Authentic sources.

DOB: Yes, verified sources. And that is where the authenticity comes in. So do not forward information you receive on your mobile phone. Check first.

SB: It is incumbent on everybody to be sure of the facts before they spread it or just forward it.

DOB: You receive a piece of information, you put it on your family WhatsApp group without checking, and you are the editor who is putting it out. So you have to be careful.

SB: Fact-checking for anything that is shared publicly has now become very important, and everybody needs to be able to do it at their level.

DOB: I have enjoyed this conversation. I really want the two of us to do a couple of quizzes together — for a good cause. And whatever we raise from our quiz shows, we will give to a charity of our choice.

SB: I accept, let's figure it out.

The writer is MP and leader, All India Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BIN THE BILL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Kill the bill' (IE, July 3). The fake news bill in Karnataka and its provisions are somewhat similar to the Centre's Fact Checking Unit (FCU), which was struck down by the Bombay High Court as unconstitutional. Any law that seeks to address misinformation should have definitional clarity, especially with respect to methodology. The lack of published guidelines also makes it hard to evaluate whether the law is actually reducing misinformation or simply suppressing free speech. This not only poses a constitutional problem but also an implementation gap. The bill should be bin.

SS Paul, Nadi

ENDURING SUFFERING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Imagine Sisyphus Happy' (IE, July 3). The powerful piece demands a slow and reflective re-reading. It moved me to tears. Only someone who has endured suffering and emerged from it stronger can truly grasp the depth of this article. It also speaks to those who are still in the midst of pain, who have chosen to carry on instead of giving up. Suffering is inseparable from life. This article doesn't romanticise suffering but helps us accept it. And in that acceptance lies a kind of peace.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

DALAI LAMA V CHINA

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Dalai Lama, his successor, and China' (IE, July 2). The Dalai Lama's recent assertion that his reincarnation will be decided solely by the Gaden Phodrang Trust is a historic and principled stand for religious autonomy. His decision reaffirms the spiritual and cultural rights of Tibetan Buddhists, who have followed this tradition for over 600 years. China is politicising a deeply religious process. Its insistence on using the "golden urn" and central government approval to identify the next Dalai Lama is a distortion of religious practice.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

PET LOVE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A Furry Trail' (IE, July 3). In a world where many won't lift a finger unless it benefits them, animals demonstrate a selflessness that puts humans to shame. There are countless examples — a dog that alerted neighbours during a heart attack, or animals that risked their lives for others, even diving into fire. Meanwhile, humans have increasingly become spectators to suffering, pulling out phones to record accidents instead of helping. Amid rising apathy, the truest lessons of humanity are being taught to us — not by fellow humans, but by the furry souls we overlook.

Eksha Srivastava, Patna

SCIENCE

Endocrine disruptors in plastic waste: a new public health threat

Plastic pollution is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is a biological invasion with profound implications for human health; infiltration of microplastics and plastic-derived EDCs into human bodies is triggering hormonal disruption, reproductive dysfunction and chronic diseases

Sudheer Kumar Shukla

Plastics have revolutionised modern living with their convenience and affordability, but this same ubiquity is spawning an invisible, long-term health crisis. Beyond choking oceans and clogging landfills, plastics are now infiltrating our bodies through microplastic particles and a cocktail of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). The evidence is clear and deeply concerning: these substances are interfering with our hormonal systems, damaging reproductive health and increasing our susceptibility to chronic diseases, including cancer. India, now the world's largest generator of plastic waste, stands at the epicentre of this escalating public health emergency.

Once considered inert pollutants, microplastics — plastic particles smaller than 5 mm — are now recognised as biologically active. A 2022 study by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam detected microplastics in the blood of 80% of human participants. Further, a 2024 study published in *Nature Scientific Reports* reported the presence of microplastics in nearly 89% of blood samples in India, with an average concentration of 4.2 particles per millilitre. These particles have also been found in human lungs, hearts, placentas, breast milk, ovarian follicular fluid, and semen. Alarmingly, testicular tissue in Indian men was found to contain three times more microplastics than in dogs.

The plastics in our lives are not chemically neutral. They often contain EDCs such as Bisphenol A (BPA) and BPS: used in water bottles, food containers, and thermal paper. They also have Phthalates (e.g., DEHP, DBP) that are used to soften plastics and found in cosmetics, toys and IV tubing and PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), found in food packaging and non-stick cookware.

These chemicals mimic or block natural hormones such as estrogen, testosterone, thyroid hormones, and cortisol. They interfere with receptor binding, disrupt gene expression in reproductive organs, and induce oxidative stress, inflammation, and apoptosis (cell death).

Animal studies published in *Food and Chemical Toxicology* (2023) showed that even low doses of polystyrene microplastics disrupted testosterone levels, impaired sperm production, and damaged the blood-testis barrier. Similar effects were observed in ovaries, where microplastics reduced anti-Müllerian hormone levels, triggered oxidative stress pathways, and induced cell death.

Microplastics in sperm
Recent clinical studies from China and India have linked the presence of microplastics in semen to reduced sperm count, concentration and motility. Exposure to BPA and phthalates has been associated with lower testosterone levels and elevated luteinizing hormone (LH) levels — both indicators of endocrine disruption. A global review published in



The poorest populations, often living near waste dumps or working in the informal recycling sector, bear the brunt of the plastic waste crisis. AP

Science of the Total Environment further supports the connection between microplastics and male subfertility. Notably, a 2023 study in *Environmental Science & Technology Letters* reported a strong correlation between microplastic levels in semen and decreased sperm count, motility, and abnormal morphology in Chinese men. In India, studies have documented a 30% decline in average sperm count over the past two decades.

A study published in *Ecotoxicology and Environmental Safety* (2025) found microplastics in 14 out of 18 follicular fluid samples collected from women undergoing fertility treatment in Italy. These particles, along with their associated endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), were found to compromise egg quality and were linked to menstrual irregularities, reduced estradiol levels, and an increased risk of miscarriage. Epidemiological studies have also linked exposure to phthalates and BPA with conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis, and spontaneous abortions. These associations have been further supported by findings published in *Advances in Pharmacology* (2021) and *Frontiers in Cell and Developmental Biology* (2023).

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) now classifies several plastic additives as probable human carcinogens.

Case-control studies from India have shown that women with elevated levels of DEHP in their urine face nearly a threefold increased risk of breast cancer (odds ratio = 2.97). Exposure to BPA and phthalates has also been linked to higher incidences of prostate, uterine, and testicular cancers.

In addition to their carcinogenic potential, these EDCs have been implicated in metabolic disorders. By mimicking cortisol, altering insulin sensitivity, and promoting fat storage,

EDCs contribute to the development of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Moreover, PFAS exposure has been associated with metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, and thyroid dysfunction, as reported in a 2024 study published in *Frontiers in Public Health*.

Plastic waste in India

India generates over 9.3 million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Of this, approximately 5.8 million tonnes are incinerated, releasing toxic gases, while 3.5 million tonnes end up polluting the environment. Studies have shown that residents in cities like Mumbai are exposed to between 382 and 2,012 microplastic particles daily through air, food, and water. In Nagpur, doctors are reporting an increase in cases of early puberty, respiratory problems, obesity, and learning disorders in children — conditions increasingly linked to plastic pollution. Recent testing by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) detected phthalate concentrations in drinking water samples from Delhi, Jabalpur, and Chennai that exceeded European Union safety limits.

Despite progressive policies like the Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016, updated in 2022 and 2024), enforcement remains inconsistent. Current regulations do not account for low-dose effects or the complex interactions of EDCs, nor do they address the specific vulnerabilities of children and pregnant women.

The health burden associated with EDCs in India is staggering, costing over ₹25,000 crore annually due to increased healthcare spending and lost productivity. The poorest populations, often living near waste dumps or working in the informal recycling sector, bear the brunt of this crisis. Globally, the U.S. reports annual healthcare costs of \$250 billion linked to plastic-related chemicals, according to the Endocrine Society.

Biomonitoring and surveillance are

crucial for establishing national programmes that measure EDC levels in blood, urine, and breast milk. Longitudinal studies must be funded to assess the health impacts of EDC exposure on fertility, neurodevelopment, and chronic diseases. In addition, public awareness needs to be improved, and behaviour changes should be encouraged, such as educating people on the risks of microwaving food in plastic containers and promoting the use of glass, stainless steel, and EDC-free alternatives. It is also important to advocate for antioxidant-rich diets to help counteract oxidative stress.

Further actions should include enforcing plastic segregation, recycling, and safe disposal, while investing in microplastic filtration systems for water treatment plants. Additionally, incentivising the development of biodegradable, non-toxic materials is essential to reduce EDC exposure.

Plastic pollution is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is a biological invasion with profound implications for human health. The infiltration of microplastics and plastic-derived EDCs into our bodies is triggering hormonal disruption, reproductive dysfunction and chronic diseases.

The science is undeniable, and the time for action is now. For India, the world's most exposed population, this is more than a policy issue — it is a generational imperative. We must address this silent epidemic through science-driven regulation, robust monitoring, education, and systemic change. The health of our people, especially our children, depends on it.

(Dr. Sudheer Kumar Shukla is an environmental scientist and sustainability expert with over 20 years of experience in environmental policy, waste management and the circular economy. He currently serves as head-think tank at Mobius Foundation, New Delhi. sshukla@mobius.org)

THE GIST

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The health burden associated with EDCs in India is staggering, costing over ₹25,000 crore annually due to increased healthcare spending and lost productivity. This silent epidemic must be addressed through science-driven regulation, robust monitoring, public education, and systemic change

A new BHARAT — establishing healthy ageing parameters for the Indian population

Rupsv Khurana

We don't all age the same way, but we all do age. We intuitively recognise frailty when things start to slow down. Ageing unfolds at different rates, over time, between individuals, within and across populations. Often, it happens in bursts.

Ageing is complicated. It is driven by molecular and cellular interactions and is shaped by one's environment, lifestyle, and socio-economic conditions. This means one's chronological age often does not reflect how old one's body really is. Since researchers discovered in 1935 that ageing can be altered, they have been looking for reliable biological clocks, called biomarkers, that in isolation or together can indicate how old our bodies are and how they might respond to factors such as diet, exercise, etc.

Last year, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, launched a large-scale study called BHARAT, short for 'Bio-

markers of Healthy Aging, Resilience, Adversity, and Transitions', as part of its Longevity India Program. The study aims to map the physiological, molecular, and environmental indicators that drive ageing in the Indian population.

"We lack clear information on what features define or influence healthy ageing," says Deepak Kumar Saini, convenor of BHARAT and professor of development biology and genetics at IISc. "We are building an information portal to understand the rules of healthy ageing in Indians."

Worldwide, life expectancy has risen significantly over the past few decades. Living longer does not mean living healthier. Studies have predicted a 168% increase in Parkinson's disease cases in India by 2050 and a 200% rise in dementia across low- and middle-income countries. Yet much of what we know about health and disease risk comes from studies in Western populations, which means the diagnostic tools, biomarkers, and



Closer look: The Indian Institute of Science's BHARAT study aims to map indicators that drive ageing in the Indian population. ISTOCKPHOTO

even treatments may not be optimal for people in India or other non-Western countries.

Gaps for patients

This limited focus has created a gap between population-based biomarkers and diagnostic cut-offs for people in the Global South. This can lead to misdiagnosis and treatments that do not reflect how diseases progress or respond to therapeutic in different groups.

"Western values for cholesterol, vitamin D, or B12 may la-

bel many Indians as deficient. But are these truly abnormal within our context? Our study aims to answer that. We are not only identifying biomarkers for healthy ageing but also building the Bharat Baseline — a reliable reference for what is normal in the Indian population," Prof. Saini says.

Earlier this year, researchers from Sichuan, China, reported in *Scientific Reports* that certain biomarkers for breast cancer, such as high levels of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol,

could signal an elevated risk in European populations but may serve as supportive indicators in Asians.

"We see differences in inflammatory markers. For instance, C-reactive protein (CRP) levels tend to be elevated in Indians even without acute illness. This inflammation often results from early-life infections, environmental toxins, or chronic nutritional and metabolic issues," Shawn T. Joseph, senior consultant, head and neck surgical oncology, VPS Lakshmi Hospital in Kochi, says. "Applying Western CRP cut-offs risks missing early warning signs of cardiovascular or metabolic disease in Indian patients," he adds.

An India-specific database

BHARAT's goal is to change this. Its database will include genomic biomarkers (like mutations linked to disease susceptibility), proteomic and metabolic indicators (reflecting biological pathways and metabolic health), and environmen-

tal and lifestyle factors.

Identifying early warning signs of age-related changes can enable better prediction, intervention, and potentially delay the onset of disease. There is a need for proactive markers of health, indicators that can tell when an organ is functioning below its optimal level, even if it is not yet diseased. For instance, your liver age is more than your chronological age. To do that, researchers must sift through large, many-dimensional datasets and plan to take the help of artificial intelligence (AI) models.

"AI and machine learning are essential to integrate and analyse layered data to see the full picture. It can simulate the impact of interventions and augment existing datasets to improve signal detection that may otherwise be missed in high-dimensional, small-sample studies. This will help us choose the most effective interventions before launching costly trials," says Tavprit Sethi,

professor of computational biology at the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi, who is also one of the investigators of BHARAT.

India's population is genetically, environmentally, and socio-economically diverse. Prof. Saini anticipates a few challenges, including the difficulty of obtaining samples from healthy adults, securing long-term government and philanthropic funding, and expanding the study to collect samples from across the country.

(Rupsv Khurana is science communication and outreach lead at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru. khurana.rupsv@gmail.com)

For feedback and suggestions

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Research for development

Efforts must go beyond the RDI scheme

The Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme, approved by the Union Cabinet this week, is an acknowledgement that policymakers must find ways to spark innovation and support it with funding. However, while the scheme is a step in the right direction, a lot will need to be done and, given the way the scheme is designed, it may not address some key concerns that hinder India's research & development (R&D). India spends less than 1 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on R&D, while for China and South Korea, for example, it is over 2.5 per cent. Thus, while India has an enormous pool of tech graduates, many of them migrate abroad or find employment in roles where they don't use their hard-earned skills. India ranks 39th on the global innovation index, which is way below its potential.

The scheme envisages long-term financing at low interest rates for R&D through a two-tier mechanism to spur private-sector investment in RDI. The top tier, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), will handle a corpus of ₹1 trillion through a special-purpose fund, which it will pass on at zero or low interest to a second tier of fund managers. The second tier will disburse funds to interesting projects in the private sector. The idea is to provide growth and risk capital to sunrise and strategic sectors to facilitate innovation. The scheme is aimed at encouraging the private sector to scale up RDI in sunrise domains and support the acquisition of critical technologies. In itself, this would be useful. Comparisons would, however, arise, for example, with two government institutions that have famously funded research successfully. One is the United States Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or Darpa, and the other is Japan's erstwhile Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI).

Miti performed a role similar to that envisaged for the RDI scheme for five decades, funneling funds into projects that enabled Japan's private sector to develop its formidable techno-industrial base. But Japan already had an educational system with thriving research institutions and universities that did "bluesky" fundamental research across many disciplines. Miti enabled that knowledge and those skill sets to be repurposed and channelled into industrial applications with commercial value. Darpa funded research into all kinds of bluesky and "moonshot" projects across America's universities and research labs. While it was focused on defence applications, it famously enabled the creation of the internet and drove R&D into robotics, medical research, and solar power, among other things, by funding such projects in universities. Miti looked for return on investment (RoI), whereas Darpa funded research without RoI as top priority.

By comparison, India lacks both private corporate funding for R&D, as well as funding for bluesky R&D at university level. One reason for the brain drain from India has been the lack of opportunities in technical fields, owing to a variety of reasons, including a lack of research grants and delayed release of funds even where grants are sanctioned. The RDI scheme may address some of the concerns about private-sector R&D, though it will be critically important to support the right sort of projects. It is worth noting that great innovation often comes out of small startups rather than large corporations. Predictably, the success of the scheme will depend on the kind of organisation and projects that are funded. In this regard, it is important to focus on small, agile firms engaged in technology research. Large corporations usually have the financial wherewithal to invest. India also needs to find ways to channel funding efficiently into fundamental bluesky research in universities and other research organisations.

Focus on development

State capacity should not be diverted to restrict free speech

As internet penetration in India grows and the use of artificial intelligence and deepfakes spreads, the problems to social order and democratic integrity posed by fake news have only grown. Tackling them, however, requires a careful balance. Regulating a quickly developing technical field using a somewhat technologically backward state machinery will certainly create problems. It is necessary, therefore, that authorities in India are cautious about the regulatory steps that they take. Such caution is not on display, unfortunately, in the state of Karnataka at the moment. The state government has produced a draft Bill that allows for jail terms of up to seven years for the production of fake news and other problematic content. The problems involved in the definition of "fake" have been pointed down the road, and left to a special committee that the Bill also promises. While the intent of this piece of legislation is understandable, it is also an example of legislative overreach that will create as many problems as it solves. The Karnataka government has not properly considered the chilling impact it will have on free expression.

The Bill reflects a problem that goes beyond one state government. The authorities in India at all levels have become far too engaged with imposing restrictions on speech. The Union government has at various points amended the Information Technology Rules to give itself broader powers to impose restrictions on online platforms. In September last year, the Bombay High Court invalidated an aspect of these changes that essentially empowered a government "fact check unit" to order the removal of news items from the Indian internet. State governments, which bear primary responsibility for law and order, have not been slow to find ways to similarly empower themselves to restrict free speech. Multiple states have also set up similar "fact check units". But some have gone further. The state of Maharashtra, for example, has proposed a Bill against so-called "urban Naxals" — a term used frequently not for the real far-left-wing militants, who are thankfully a vanishing problem today, but for run-of-the-mill dissenters, especially in academic settings. Even aside from legislation of this sort, Indian authorities at state and local levels have become far too addicted to ordering complete shutdowns of the internet for "law and order" reasons. This is sometimes ordered by relatively low-level functionaries.

India's greatest constraint when it comes to development is bureaucratic and regulatory capacity, particularly at state level. It is unfortunate that an increasing amount of this scarce capacity is being diverted towards mechanisms meant to channel, influence, or restrict the freedom of expression in the country. This is a violation of constitutional requirements as well as a betrayal of the development aspiration of the country's population. It is vital that India's governments step back and reexamine their approach. Contract enforcement is lax, and investigations are delayed. It is necessary and appropriate to add new criminal offences and investigations in the name of tackling fake news or "dangerous" expression? The broad intent of the Union government to reduce the amount of criminalisation within the legal framework is laudable. This principle should be applied in matters of governance in general.

India's current account advantage

The current account deficit poses little concern amid global volatility, but its financing requires close monitoring

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Last financial year, India's current account deficit (CAD) printed at a non-worrisome 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), driven by healthy net invisible receipts. It was a high water mark of 0.7 per cent in 2023-24, despite the goods trade deficit rising to 7.3 per cent of GDP from 6.7 per cent.

This happened because both the services trade and secondary income accounts saw a higher surplus, which more than offset the deterioration in the goods trade deficit. Such low reliance on external financing of CAD is a buffer against volatility in capital flows and the attendant currency swings — facets that have become the norm rather than the exception today because of macroeconomic and geopolitical flux.

Elevated uncertainties around trade have cast a long shadow over economic activity. S&P Global expects world GDP growth to slow to 2.9 per cent in 2025, from 3.3 per cent in 2024, as the two largest economies, the United States and China, plod on. This will adversely impact India's exports, while healthy domestic growth, which we expect at 6.5 per cent, should support imports.

Will that be worrisome for India's current account? Not so much — yet. This financial year, we expect CAD to remain in the safe zone at about 1.3 per cent of GDP. The current account comprises not only the goods trade but also the services trade, and incomes under the primary and secondary accounts (largely personal transfers, including remittances).

Before discussing their prospects, it is pertinent to recall what caused the last sharp rise in CAD — to 4.3 per cent and 4.8 per cent of GDP in FY22 and FY23, respectively. India's merchandise trade deficit as a share of GDP had risen sharply above the 10 per cent mark in both years, owing to a broad-based deterioration in goods trade deficit, as the prices of crude oil and gold took off. The surplus in services and secondary income, however, remained static at

3.5 per cent of GDP. The situation is materially different now. The spectre of higher tariffs imposed by the US means export prospects, including for India, will be subdued in 2025.

The surge in global goods trade earlier this year, driven by importers frontrunning purchases in anticipation of higher tariffs, wear off, as suggested by the World Trade Organization's (WTO) latest forward-looking New Export Orders Index, which fell to 97.9.

In FY25, India's goods exports flatlined at \$441.8 billion, compared with \$441.2 billion in FY24. This year, headwinds are expected to rise. At the same time, the elevated tariffs on Chinese goods will accentuate overcapacity and deflationary pressures there, goading businesses to divert excess supply to other markets, including India.

While that means some upward pressure on core imports, what about crude oil and gold, the top two commodities in India's import basket? Crude oil prices, which had flared up owing to uncertainties in West Asia, are now abating as fundamentals reassert.

The surge was in any case transitory, given sluggish global economic growth and the long-term slowdown in oil demand. This is because of the increasing adoption of green energy and electric vehicles, especially in China, the world's largest automobile market. We expect crude prices to settle lower, around \$65-70 per barrel, compared with \$79 per barrel last financial year. So, crude imports are unlikely to exert much pressure. Likewise, prices of coal, India's other key energy import, are expected to fall sharply.

But gold prices, which rose sharply last financial year (30 per cent in dollar terms), are expected to rise further this year, according to the World Bank. That's because gold is a special asset class and considered safe haven by investors, which means its price rises during uncertainty. Ergo, some pressure on gold

imports is likely. Interestingly, however, gold demand in India has been trending downward in recent years. It typically declines in years when prices rise. Last financial year, for instance, imports fell by 38 metric tonnes year-on-year to 757 metric tonnes — despite the government sharply reducing import duty to 6 per cent from 15 per cent in July. Lower demand will also curb the dollar value of India's gold imports.

Higher imports in some categories, along with a tepid outlook for goods exports, can accentuate pressure on India's goods trade deficit this financial year. To be sure, services exports, which account for 48 per cent of total exports, will provide a buffer.

Software exports, for which the US remains the biggest destination, could see some pressure as the world's largest economy is expected to decelerate this year. Notably, however, in the past few years, India has been doing phenomenally well on the front of professional and management consulting (PMC) services, thanks to the stellar rise of its global capability centres (GCC). For instance, between FY21 and FY25, while net information technology (IT) exports rose at an average 14 per cent, net PMC exports surged 33 per cent. The latter's pace can offset any slack in the former and keep the overall services trade surplus buoyant this financial year.

As for remittances, the US has reduced the tax on them to 1 per cent from the earlier announced 3.5 per cent, offering relief. Moreover, since this is applicable only from January 2026, the impact this financial year would be limited. While the US is now the largest source of Indian remittances, the Gulf still accounts for a substantial part. Although those economies are reducing dependence on income by diversifying and encouraging private sector growth, low oil prices are unlikely to make a material difference to remittances from there.

To wit, the United Arab Emirates is the second-largest source of remittance for India and its non-oil sector accounted for about 75 per cent of GDP in 2024.

Hence, while India's CAD may face marginal pressure this financial year, there are no big worries. But its financing needs monitoring. Last financial year, despite a decline in CAD, financial flows were not adequate to fund it as both net foreign portfolio investments (FPI) and net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows fell sharply. However, the rise in net external commercial borrowings (ECB) provided some support.

This financial year, too, foreign capital flows are expected to remain volatile given the heightened global uncertainties. For instance, FPI debt has already seen net outflows in the first three months of this financial year, and external commercial borrowings may not be as buoyant as last year, given the softening in domestic interest rates.

However, with comfortable foreign exchange reserves and the expectation of only a marginal rise in CAD, India is in a good position to weather global volatility.

The authors are, respectively, chief economist and senior economist at Cricil

CORRECTION

Ajay Chhibber, whose article appeared on this page yesterday, is distinguished visiting scholar, George Washington University, and not what was inadvertently carried. The error is regretted.

RBI's risky project finance rules

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) recent project financing guidelines have led to much cheer in the stock markets. One highlight is that the provisioning requirement on project finance is now 1 per cent, instead of 5 per cent proposed in the discussion paper issued earlier. Many lenders feared that a blanket requirement of 5 per cent, provisioning would absorb all capital and slow down lending. Thus, the RBI has avoided a short-term slowdown in economic activity. However, are these guidelines net positive from a long-term point of view, or are some tweaks necessary, given our experience of the Indian banking crisis between 2008 and 2018? My focus here is on the provision that allows lenders to grant extensions to projects that miss their pre-committed commencement timelines.

Let us first understand the basic structure of project financing. A typical project goes through three phases, namely, the design phase, the construction phase, and the operational phase. The project is conceived and planned during the first phase. Prospective lenders evaluate the plan prepared during the design phase and approve or disapprove project finance. In case they approve, they also finalise the terms of the loan.

The loan terms usually recognise the existence of a construction phase when the project is being built. Given that the project does not generate any revenue at this stage, loan repayment generally starts after the construction is over and the project has begun operations. The expected date of starting operations is known as the date of commencement of commercial operations (DCCO). It is not difficult

to imagine that, for several reasons, a project may not be able to start on the DCCO as planned several years earlier. The crucial point here is that if the DCCO is delayed, the borrower will not be able to repay the loan on the originally agreed schedule. What lenders should do in such a case is the main subject of the circular.

A strict way of dealing with such loans is to classify them as non-performing assets (NPAs) and start recovery proceedings. Recovery proceedings could lead to borrowers being dragged to the bankruptcy court and even the liquidation of their assets. To understand why such a strict approach may not always be socially beneficial, consider a project that requires rare earth minerals as inputs. Assume that the project was supposed to be completed this year. Now that China has unexpectedly restricted the exports of those materials, the project is stalled and misses the original DCCO. It is easy to see that there is a realistic possibility of the rare earth minerals issue being resolved shortly, either by India coming to some kind of agreement with China or by securing other sources of supply. So, if the bankers had granted an extension to the DCCO, the project could have been saved instead of selling its assets piecemeal at fire-sale prices. This would have been advantageous to society, as the best users of capital would have used the capital, maximising production and employment. Even the bankers would have recovered their full overdue amount in due course.

If extending the DCCO is a win-win solution, why not do it in all cases? To understand the downside of

blanket extensions, consider a borrower whose DCCO is delayed due to mismanagement. In such cases, bankers are better off declaring the loan an NPA and initiating recovery proceedings. Giving more time to incompetent borrowers would mean further mismanagement and eventually lower recovery of the loan. In some cases, borrowers may even stall projects pledged to the banks. Even social welfare is likely to be enhanced if the assets are passed on to a more efficient user of capital through bankruptcy or liquidation proceedings.

Unfortunately, the RBI circular does not distinguish between the two types of reasons due to which projects may get delayed. It allows lenders to extend the DCCO without restricting NPAs on the basis of the reason for the delay. It is not a liquidity shock. While allowing DCCO extensions for liquidity shocks is welcome, extending the same concessions when the reason for delay is within the control of management could lead to misuse and be socially harmful.

I recognise that it is hard for the RBI to define and distinguish between liquidity shocks and fundamental shocks. However, lenders can be asked to have a board-approved policy of identifying liquidity shocks and establish a process where the DCCO may be extended only when they are convinced that the delay is due to such shocks. The officer in charge should be asked to describe the liquidity shock, and a competent authority should be asked to review it. The RBI, for its part, can review the policy followed by lenders. This way, best practices may emerge. A blanket extension of DCCO may sow the seeds of a future crisis.

The author teaches finance at Indian School of Business. The views are personal

True crime, stranger than fiction



NEHA KIRPAL

commanded three ships in his career. After he retired, he became a prolific writer, authoring 16 books across diverse genres, including espionage, war history and romance. Following the success of *Queens of Crime* (2019), co-authored with actor Sushant Singh, *Dial 100* is Mr Yadav's second foray into the true-crime genre. Rooted in real investigations across the length and breadth of India, the book provides a rare, behind-the-scenes look into how the country's toughest crimes are cracked. With the pace of an OTT thriller, each chapter of the book reads like a case file — layered, tense and filled with sharp twists.

Many of the cases in the book sound familiar, and we habitually come across them in the papers: A wife conspiring with her ex-lover to murder her hus-

band; an inter-state gang looting a moving train; a serial killer leaving a bloody trail across states; and a cyber conman evading capture. Multiple identities, abductions, train robberies, rapes, murders, serial killings, cyber-crime, job scammers and fraudsters — all this and more find place in this book. Mr Yadav describes the cases in vivid detail, often portraying the criminals' meticulous planning and execution.

Fiction often influences reality too, and so not surprisingly, several criminals learn a lot by watching B-grade films, particularly those that showcase outlandish and imaginative methods of committing crimes. Through the complex cases, Mr Yadav also shows the inner workings of the police, and how they use their instincts to decipher the

minds of criminals. A police inspector in charge of one of the cases rightly points out that there is no such thing as a less or more hardcore criminal. "A criminal is a criminal. Period," he asserts.

Each of the cases prove how the use of technology, in various forms, such as mobile tower coverage, CCTV footage, narco-analysis tests, DNA analysis, polygraph tests, IMEI tracking and "gait analysis" (the study of how someone walks) lead the police to nab the cleverest of criminals.

In the book's preface, Mr Yadav points out that the Indian police force is often stereotyped as sloppy or inefficient — a perception that, while popular, is far from the truth. He adds that with a staggeringly low police-to-

population ratio of just 150 officers per 100,000 citizens, India falls significantly short of the 200 mark stipulated by the United Nations. "This inadequate staffing, compounded by low pay, grueling work hours and limited opportunities for continuous training in an era of rapidly evolving technology, paints a picture of an overburdened and under-resourced force," elaborates Mr Yadav.

Crime is never pleasant to read about or watch, least of all experience. But the real-life stories in the book remind readers how to keep themselves safe and watch for dangerous warning signals. The fact that Mr Yadav has also been a screenwriter in the past possibly explains why the language in the book is straightforward and free of

complicated jargon. He presents the cases in a relatable manner — recreating dialogues and scenes in a way that an engaging film or web series would.

Mr Yadav dedicates the book to police officers — unsung heroes — who relentlessly pursue justice, often going above and beyond the call of duty. "Through their efforts, they bring hope to victims, restore order to chaos and remind us of the power of integrity and perseverance in creating a safer world for everyone," he writes. The book also serves as a cautionary tale to those who believe they can outsmart the law, as Mr Yadav: "Let us work towards building a society where the fear of justice deters criminal intent and where the law is upheld as a beacon of fairness and accountability," he proudly concludes.

The reviewer is a New Delhi-based freelance writer

EXPLAINED HISTORY

WHY THE U.S. CELEBRATES ITS INDEPENDENCE DAY ON JULY 4



John Trumbull's painting 'Declaration of Independence' (1819), Wikimedia Commons

THE UNITED STATES is celebrating its 249th Independence Day on Friday, July 4. This was the day in which the country's founding fathers formally signed the Declaration of Independence, officially ending British rule over the colonies. Here's a brief history.

Discontent with crown

More than 150 years after the first permanent British colonies emerged in North America, the colonists had grown increasingly frustrated with the Crown. With the 13 original colonies having no representation in the British Parliament in London, the 1760s and early 1770s saw the passage of a series of laws which imposed high taxes and curtailed colonists' activities.

Legislations such as the Sugar Act (1764), the Tea Act (1773) and the Intolerable Acts (1774) were seen by Americans as excessive British interference in their lives. With the Enlightenment giving a rise to ideas of freedom and equality, the situation was ripe for an uprising.

Boston Tea Party & beyond

On December 16, 1773, an anti-British group known as the Sons of Liberty destroyed a shipment of tea sent to Boston by the British East India Company. The so-called Boston Tea Party began a resistance movement against the colonies against the oppressive tea tax – and the British Empire as a whole. The colonists claimed that Britain had no right to tax the colonies without giving them representation in the British Parliament. To decide further course of action, the 13 colonies came together to form the Continental Congress. The Congress initially tried to enforce a boycott of British

goods, and meet King George III to negotiate better terms. But their attempts were in vain.

This meant that by April 1775, all 13 colonies were fighting a full-blown war of independence against the British Crown.

This war went on till 1783 when Britain formally recognised American independence after its military defeat. The American victory, in no small part, was made possible due to the support of Britain's European rivals – namely France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic.

Declaration of Independence

Years before 1783, while fighting still raged on, the Continental Congress declared American independence from British rule. On July 2, 1776, 12 of the 13 members of the Congress "unanimously" observed that the colonies "are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states."

As John Adams, who later became the second President of the US, noted: "The second day of July 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival."

He was off by two days. The formal document solemnising the colonies' independence – the Declaration of Independence – was signed on July 4, the day that is still observed as the US Independence Day.

The Declaration read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

EXRESS NEWS SERVICE

AI CHATBOTS EXCESSIVELY USE CERTAIN WORDS: STUDY

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) tools tend to use certain words – like "delves," "crucial," "potential," "significant" and "important" – far more often than human authors do, a new study has found. For the study, published on Wednesday in Science Advances, Dmitry Kobak of the University of Tübingen and his colleagues analysed patterns of word-use in abstracts of more than 15 million biomedical research papers published between 2010 and 2024. After ChatGPT was introduced in November 2022, a collection of words started showing up with unusual frequency, which the researchers inferred to be a telltale sign of the use of AI.

The researchers reported a total of 454 words used excessively by AI chatbots, based on which they calculated that at

least 13.5% of all biomedical abstracts appeared to have been written with the help of chatbots – a number that went up to 40% in certain countries where journals were less selective.

These findings are in line with what computer scientists have been aware for a while: that AI favours certain words, although it's not clear why, said Subbarao Kambhampati, a professor of computer science at Arizona State University. Some scientists, he said, have been deliberately refraining from using words like "delve" for fear of being suspected of using AI as a writing tool.

At the moment, there appears to be no consensus regarding the use of AI for academic writing – while some are vehemently opposed, others are not as rigid about the matter.

THE NYT

Why same cab ride costs more at times: How dynamic, surge pricing works

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR

NEW DELHI, JULY 3

THE MINISTRY of Road Transport and Highways announced this week that cab aggregator companies such as Uber, Ola, and Rapido may now charge customers up to twice the base fare as the maximum fare.

The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025, notified on July 1, raised the limit from its previous ceiling of 1.5 times the base fare. "The aggregator shall be permitted to charge a minimum of 50% lower than the base fare and a maximum dynamic pricing of two times the base fare...", the guidelines said.

Individual state governments notify base fares for specific categories of motor vehicles. The Ministry has advised states to adopt these revised guidelines within three months.

Dynamic pricing

Dynamic pricing is a structural response to customer demand. It entails increasing prices when the demand for a product or service is high, and lowering them during periods of low demand.

Companies resort to dynamic pricing models to benefit from variations in the supply and demand of a product or service. This is simply market economics at work. Dynamic pricing follows the economic theory of demand, which states that the price of a product will increase when its demand increases in relation to its supply. This can happen due to a variety of factors. Demand for cabs can go up in the business district during the evening rush hour. Rain can reduce the availability or supply of cabs.

Dynamic pricing models are widely used across industries, including entertainment, utilities, and hospitality. The e-commerce giant Amazon has a dedicated 'Automate

Pricing' tool, which allows sellers to set rules and parameters describing when and how prices may fluctuate for a range of products. The Indian Railways, which transports more than 20 million passengers every day, first considered implementing dynamic pricing in 2006. Then Minister for Railways Laloo Prasad proposed a dynamic pricing scheme for both freight and passenger trains, impacting peak and non-peak seasons, and premium and non-premium services.

In 2016, the Railways formally adopted the 'flexi-fare' scheme, under which base fares of Rajdhani, Duronto, and Shatabdi trains would increase by 10% with every 10% of berths sold, capping at 1.5 times the original fare. Changes were subsequently made following reviews of the scheme.

Dynamic pricing models have been criticised for enabling price gouging. Airlines

have been accused of trying to cash in on high demand in certain sectors at certain times, raising fares unreasonably. Last September, after ticketing platform Ticketmaster was accused of inflating ticket prices for a concert by the rock band Oasis on checkout, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer had described the price hike as "depressing".

Surge pricing

While the terms dynamic pricing and surge pricing are sometimes used interchangeably, 'surge' is a part of the dynamic pricing strategy that companies employ.

Surge refers to the additional fee demanded from the consumer during periods of high demand, such as rush hours, when traffic congestion is at its peak. Such fees are also applied to utilities such as electricity, and used to help balance supply and de-



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EXPLAINED DEFENCE

Tamal, the last imported warship

Built in Kaliningrad, Russia, *INS Tamal* is set to be the last Indian warship purchased from a foreign country. This is a result of decades of efforts by the Navy at achieving maximum indigenisation in shipbuilding

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, JULY 3

WITH THE commissioning of *INS Tamal* at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia on Tuesday, the Indian Navy has likely inducted its last foreign-built warship.

This is a major milestone for the Navy, which has, over the years, progressively indigenised shipbuilding, increasing bit by bit the indigenous content in warships, as well as designing them in India.

INS Tamal is the eighth Talwar-class frigate – these are improved versions of the Krivak III-class frigates – built by Russia for the Indian Navy as a part of Project 1135.6.

It is also the second of four additional follow-on ships of the class that were ordered in 2018. The first, *INS Tushli*, was commissioned in Kaliningrad in December last year. The final two, *Tripud* and *Tanyaro*, are being built in India by the Goa Shipyard Limited with transfer of technology and design assistance from Russia.

Tripud, which was launched into sea last July and is expected to be commissioned in 2026, will be India's first indigenously built Talwar-class frigate.

This is the story of *INS Tamal*, and the Indian Navy's journey towards indigenisation.

Tamal: A moving sea fortress

INS Tamal is a multirole frigate with a displacement of 4,035 long tonnes (1 long tonne = 1,016 kg) at full load, a length of 124.8 m, and a beam (width at its widest point) of 15.2 m. It has a maximum speed of 30 knots (56 km/h), and a range of up to 4,850 nautical miles (8,980 km). The ship will be manned by a crew of 250 sailors and 26 officers.

The Navy describes *INS Tamal* as a "formidable moving fortress at sea", and says that it is capable of carrying out blue water operations in all four dimensions of modern naval warfare – air, surface, underwater and electromagnetic.

AIR: *INS Tamal* carries two kinds of anti-aircraft missiles – 24 vertically-launched Shil surface-to-air missiles with a range of up to 70 km, and eight short-range Iga missiles. At close range, incoming aircraft and missiles can also be fended off by the ship's two A-630s: fully-automated 30 mm rotary cannons that can fire more than 5,000 rounds per minute.

SURFACE: *INS Tamal's* anti-ship/land attack capabilities are centred around the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. The ship carries a complement of eight such missiles which boast an operational range in the hundreds of kilometres, and can fly at speeds of up to Mach 3 (3,700 km/h). The frigate also has one 100 mm A-190E main gun; this can fire 25 kg shells to distances of more than 20 km.

UNDERWATER: For anti-submarine warfare (ASW), *INS Tamal* has an RBU ASW rocket-launcher, which can fire salvos of up to 12 rockets equipped with depth charges at a

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INS Tamal in Kaliningrad during trials. Screenshot from video/X/@indiannavy

FRIGATE: SHORT HISTORY OF A MULTIROLE NAVAL VESSEL

■ During Europe's Age of Sail, the term "frigate" was used to describe fully-rigged ships (with three or more masts) built primarily for speed and manoeuvrability, and intended to be used in scouting, escort, and patrol roles.

While designs varied, these ships were smaller than ships of the line, the mainstays of naval battle in this era, and typically had only one gun deck.

■ The term fell out of use as warships without sails appeared on the scene in the second half of the 19th century. Naval tactics evolved, and frigates were effectively replaced by "cruisers" with different levels of armour and armament.

■ Frigates re-entered the naval lexicon during World War II. The Royal Navy used the term to describe vessels that were larger than corvettes but

smaller than destroyers. They were primarily used as anti-submarine escort vessels; protecting Allied merchant ships from German U-boat attacks in the Atlantic. Apart from their names, these modern frigates did not share much in common with models from past centuries.

■ The post-war development of missile technology made it possible for relatively small ships to pack tremendous firepower, further spurring the return of frigates to navies around the world.

■ Today, frigates are primarily meant to serve as platforms for guided missile systems. They can serve in a variety of roles, from anti-submarine, anti-ship, and anti-aircraft warfare to land attacks, and can fight either solo or as part of a larger naval formation.

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plex automated systems for nuclear, biological and chemical defence, including damage control and firefighting that can be operated centrally from sheltered posts.

"These complex systems aid in minimising casualties, achieve rapid restoration of combat effectiveness, enhancing combat capability and survivability," the Navy had said.

INS Tamal will soon set sail for its home port in Karwar, Karnataka.

Towards indigenisation

The Navy has said that *INS Tamal* will be the last imported warship to be inducted into its fleet. This is the culmination of a decades-long push towards indigenisation of naval shipbuilding, and a major milestone in the road to *atmanirbhar* (self-reliance) in defence.

Life of Khrala, activist at centre of Dosanjh film

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR

AMRITSAR, JULY 3

LAST WEEK, Punjabi actor and singer Diljit Dosanjh shared an Instagram post by filmmaker Honey Trehan and Sunayana Suresh about their film *Punjabi 95* being "censored before release".

The film, based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, has not been certified by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) for over a year. Another film featuring Dosanjh, *Sardarji 3*, which stars Pakistani actor Hania Amir, has also not been released due to the informal ban on Pakistani artists.

Activism during militancy

Khrala belonged to Amritsar, and was

known for his campaign against the disappearances of thousands of Sikh youths during the Punjab militancy in the 1980s and the 1990s. Mares were later found to have been killed in alleged fake encounters.

Khrala, a former director of a cooperative bank, was also appointed general secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal's human rights wing, which was created to examine cases of alleged extra-judicial killings.

However, Khrala himself became a victim of one such forced disappearance. On September 6, 1995, he was kidnapped from his house, allegedly at the behest of Punjab Police officials. The activist was allegedly tortured at the Jhalal police station before being shot dead, and his body was disposed of near the Harikie Bridge on the Sutlej river.

Following a petition filed by Khrala's widow, Paramjit Kaur, the Supreme Court in

1996 ordered that the case be handed over to the CBI. A Patiala court in 2005 convicted six policemen of his murder, and the verdict was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2011. That year, the National Human Rights Commission directed a high-level state committee to probe 657 militancy-era cases of official agencies cremating unclaimed bodies – an issue Khrala was looking into.

Today, Paramjit Kaur runs the Khrala Mission Organisation in his memory. Earlier this year, it was announced that a new elementary school in California, US, would be named after Khrala.

Controversies around film

The Khrala family gave its consent for the film to be made around four years ago. But the CBFC has protracted 120 cuts to the film. Director Honey Trehan has said that the film's

producers were forced to remove their entry from the Toronto Film Festival, and to stop its overseas release. He has claimed to have submitted documents totalling 1,800 pages to prove the factual accuracy of the film.

Politicians from Punjab have so far not commented on *Punjabi 95*, even as many in the Congress and the BJP have defended Dosanjh over *Sardarji 3*, saying it was shot before the Palghat attacks.

Dosanjh has also starred in other movies on the Punjab militancy.

Punjabi 1984, which was based on a fictional story, also included themes of human rights and faced no resistance during its release in 2014. A decade later, *Chamkila* focused on the life of singer Amar Singh Chamkila, who was killed under mysterious circumstances during that period. Some

Khalistan sympathisers criticised the film.

opportunities from surge, while dark red areas indicate larger ones," says the website. In 2016, Wharton Business School researchers Gerard P. Cachon, Kaitlin M. Daniels and Ruben Lobel argued that the surge pricing model, while critiqued, did benefit Uber consumers by helping subsidise prices during off-peak times.

Their research compared the surge pricing model to a benchmark fixed price and found that it also allowed Uber to serve markets that would otherwise remain underserved under a fixed pricing model, such as consumers hailing a cab on a rainy night.

They also argued that Uber allows drivers to "self-schedule", or decide their operating schedule, allowing them to gravitate towards areas where prices are higher. Surge prices are effective, (Cachon, Daniels, Lobel, The Role of Surge Pricing on a Service Platform with Self-Scheduling Capacity, SSRN, 2016)

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Draw a moral line

India and world must stand on the right side of it. Beijing must not be allowed to choose the next Dalai Lama



AMITABH MATTOO

ON JULY 6, this coming Sunday, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, will turn 90. The world must pause, not just to offer a birthday greeting, but to ask a question that strikes at the heart of Asia's spiritual and strategic future: Who gets to decide who leads Tibetan Buddhism after him?

His Holiness has now made that answer emphatically clear. The Gaden Phodrang Trust, which he established and imbued with his moral authority, will oversee the identification of his reincarnation. It is a spiritual masterstroke and a political gambit thrown before Beijing's long-standing ambition to manufacture a successor.

Make no mistake: This is not just a Buddhist matter. This is a battle between a sacred civilisational legacy and the crude apparatus of authoritarian control. This is Tibet versus totalitarianism. Dharma versus dictatorship.

I have met His Holiness many times over the years. Each encounter has left me transformed. There is an aura that envelops him, yes, but more than that, a deeply disarming presence. A man of boundless humour and unshakeable calm, he carries within him the accumulated wisdom of centuries and the clarity of a physicist.

And yet, he has never been just a relic of the past. He has been a visionary of the present. In every one of my offices over the decades, I have kept thangkas, gifted and signed by His Holiness, not as ornamentation, but as quiet testimony to the spiritual and civilisational power he embodies. They remind me, daily, that moral authority still walks this earth in human form.

That moral authority has now been exercised with profound foresight. China's obsession with the Dalai Lama is as irrational as it is revealing. Having crushed the 1959 Tibetan uprising, desecrated monasteries during the Cultural Revolution, and abducted the legitimate Panchen Lama

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in 1995, replacing him with a compliant impostor, Beijing now wants to write the final chapter. To appoint the next Dalai Lama.

The absurdity is almost comic. A Marxist-Maoist-Leninist Xi-led regime claiming the right to anoint a reincarnated lama? It would be laughable if it weren't so dangerous.

This isn't religion. It's control. It is the erasure of a people by capturing their soul.

And the method is predictable: Fabricate legitimacy through an ancient-sounding ritual ("Golden Urn"), prop up a state-approved child, and use diplomatic muscle to coerce acceptance. But Beijing has made a fatal miscalculation. Legitimacy cannot be forged in a Party committee. Faith cannot be coerced at gunpoint.

A child selected by the CCP will not be the Dalai Lama. He will be a spiritual mannequin in a gilded cage.

What China fears is not just the man, but the institution.

Since the 17th century, the Dalai Lamas have represented a rare synthesis of spiritual depth and civilisational authority. Their reincarnation is not hereditary but karmic, recognised through dreams, signs, and devotion. It is an institution rooted in introspection, not imposition.

By pre-empting Beijing with the Gaden Phodrang Trust, His Holiness has ensured that no foreign power can hijack this sacred lineage. In one quiet, resolute move, he has reminded us all: You may occupy a land, but you cannot colonise the soul of a people.

India has a historic, civilisational stake in this unfolding drama.

We gave refuge to His Holiness in 1959. Dharmsala became the new Lhasa. We offered hospitality but too often felt silent when moral clarity was needed. In Tibet, we conceded Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in a moment of strategic naïveté. In the decades since, we have tiptoed around the Dalai Lama question, wary of provoking Beijing.

That era of ambiguity must end.

India must now unequivocally support the Tibetan people's right to determine their spiritual future. Not just privately, not just symbolically, but publicly and forcefully. Anything less would be a betrayal, not only of the trust reposed in us by Tibetans, but of our own dharmic foundations.

This is not merely an ethical imperative. It is also cold, hard realpolitik. A Chinese-appointed Dalai Lama will bring Beijing's writ closer to our borders, destabilise Himalayan communities, and weaponise religion in the service of authoritarian geopolitics.

At 50, His Holiness has done more than most statesmen, philosophers, and warriors put together. He has carried the weight of a nation in exile, resisted hatred with humour, and stared down a superpower with serenity. In a world bereft of heroes, he stands tall, a monk in exile, a prophet of compassion.

The least we can do is ensure that his legacy is not buried under the rubble of silence. We must say, clearly and collectively: The Dalai Lama's reincarnation will not be decided in Zhongnanhai. It will not be decided by Politburo or Party cadres. It will be decided by Tibetans, through Tibetan tradition, in Tibetan time.

This is the moral line. This is the civilisational frontier.

India must stand on the right side of it. So must the world.

As His Holiness once told me, with that unmistakable twinkle in his eye: "We are all just visitors on this planet, for 90, maybe 100 years... we must use our time meaningfully."

He has. Now it's our turn.

The writer is dean and professor at the School of International Studies, JNU. He is honorary professor at the University of Melbourne and a former member of India's National Security Advisory Board.

SLAP IN MUMBAI'S FACE

Goons and their parochial politics have no place in a state looking to the future. They must face force of law

THE ASSAULT ON a sweetshop owner in Mumbai's Mira Road, allegedly by hooligans affiliated with the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), for not speaking in Marathi, is not an isolated incident. It is a deeply troubling brand of politics rearing its head again. Coming in the wake of an agitation against the state government's ill-conceived resolutions on the three-language policy — first making Hindi mandatory at the primary school level, then making it optional — it is a warning that must be heeded. Both Raj Thackeray's MNS and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) accused the BJP-led Maharashtra government of seeking to impose Hindi on the state, the estranged Thackeray cousins coming together after two decades on the plank of "Marathi pride". Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnis government did well to withdraw its Hindi language mandate to schools. But that the incident of assault in Mumbai came as MNS workers celebrated the revocation and days before the protest-turned-victory rally called by the Thackerays on July 5, should ring alarm bells — a parochial politics cannot be allowed to change the subject and tip over into violence in India's most industrialised state.

Ever since it was founded in 2006, the MNS has periodically stoked the "Marathi pride" issue, employing divisive, even violent, tactics. At a Gudi Padwa rally earlier this year, Raj Thackeray said that his party would not hesitate to slap residents in the state should they refuse to speak Marathi — following this, MNS workers attacked officials at banks for not offering services in the language. However, it is also apparent that such belligerence resonates less and less among the people in a state where non-Marathi speakers make up a significant chunk of the population, and whose capital, Mumbai, attracts workers from across the country. The MNS's stark and growing disconnect from the ground is evident in its electoral record. From 13 seats in the 2009 Assembly elections to none each in 2014 and 2019 to none at all in 2024. The Shiv Sena (UBT) is also currently engaged in a fight for relevance following the drubbing of the Maha Vikas Aghadi in the 2024 Assembly election — that may explain its regression to the lumpenism that long characterised the undivided Shiv Sena. In doing so, however, it risks stripping away the sheen that Uddhav Thackeray's chief ministership, seen to be steady and sober during the pandemic, had earned for the party.

The hooliganism in Mira Road must be condemned and the perpetrators must face the consequences of taking the law into their own hands. The Maharashtra government, which came to power with a sweeping mandate, needs to deliver on promises of enhancing economic opportunity, ease of doing business and carving out wider avenues of development for Maharashtra's youth. This cannot happen if a narrowing political project is allowed to cock a snook at the rule of law.

THE SCAMMER'S TRAIL

Rise in digital scams calls for public awareness of fraudsters' modus operandi, and swift action by banks and authorities

THERE HAS BEEN a sharp increase in "digital arrest" scams in India. As per data from the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal, the reported digital arrest scams and related cybercrimes have more than tripled, rising from 39,925 in 2022 to 123 lakh in 2024, with the defrauded amount growing from Rs 91.14 crore to Rs 1,935 crore. Such scams tend to involve fraudsters impersonating law enforcement officials such as the police, the CBI and the Income Tax Department in order to dupe people. The victims, who are from a cross-section of society, including industrialists, private sector professionals, and senior citizens, are ensnared through fake interrogations on video calls. An investigation in this paper has carefully documented several instances where people have been duped of lakhs and crores of rupees.

The reports in this paper show how money is transferred from the victims to mule accounts that are used by scammers, and then in some cases to other accounts across the country. In one instance, a staggering sum of nearly Rs 6 crore was transferred over many bank accounts in a matter of a few minutes. In another case, there are indications of the stolen funds being used to buy cryptocurrency. Recoveries have been few and far between. In most cases, the bulk of the amount is withdrawn in cash from the mule accounts. In one case reported in this paper, a retired IAF veteran, who was defrauded of Rs 1.59 crore, has till now got back only Rs 16.1 lakh. In another case, the victim, a former deputy nursing superintendent, who had lost Rs 83 lakh of her pension and savings, has not recovered anything.

The authorities and banks have taken steps to spread awareness and monitor suspicious activities. On October 27, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his Mann Ki Baat, warned people against digital arrests. "Beware of digital arrest frauds. There is no system like digital arrest under the law," he said. The Reserve Bank of India has also cautioned against digital arrest scams. Banks have launched awareness campaigns to educate the public regarding the nature of the scams. These efforts need to be ramped up urgently. Governments, banks and the central bank must continue to spread awareness about such scams and educate the public about the modus operandi of the fraudsters. Banks must further tighten the KYC process — as per a report in this paper, the addresses of the mule accounts were "fictitious" in a number of cases. Accounts with large suspicious transactions — for instance, there were 1,960 transactions in one account on one day — need to be flagged immediately and appropriate action taken. Such cases should also be investigated more swiftly.

HOW TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

Mizoram is India's first fully literate state. It offers a lesson to larger, more resource-rich states

IN AN AGE of widening social inequities, a quiet revolution has unfolded in the country's Northeast. Mizoram has become India's first fully literate state under the Centre's ULAS — New India Literacy Programme. According to the latest data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 98.2 per cent of Mizo citizens aged seven and above are now literate — well above the national average of 80.9 per cent, and ahead even of Kerala, long celebrated for its human development achievements.

The story behind Mizoram's achievement is not one of top-down technocracy alone. It speaks of a broader, more holistic model of inclusive development that involves patient, community-led work or what Mizos recognise as *tawngngah*. It is a story of volunteers who braved remote locations and poor connectivity to bring literacy to the last mile, and of individuals who aspired to be more. The result is success in an area where India has long struggled: Adult and functional literacy. The literacy rate in Mizoram stands at 98.1 per cent, while urban areas reach 98.3 per cent, indicating almost no urban-rural divide, an anomaly in a country where the gap often exceeds 15 percentage points. Mizoram ranks high on other important indicators as well. It boasts the third-highest female workforce participation rate in the country. Its sex ratio at birth (975 females per 1,000 males) surpasses the national average (929). It has the lowest infant mortality rate in the Northeast, and one of India's highest school attendance rates at both primary and secondary levels.

While size is a defining factor, in India, where development is often equated with urban growth, there is a lesson here for larger and more resource-rich states. Mizoram shows that policy nimbleness is often a function of intent and accountability, that investing in people, trusting local institutions, and building with community at the centre can move mountains. As India looks to a digital, green and global future, the path ahead must concern itself with the dignity and agency of all, including and especially those on the margins.



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi recently reviewed the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP). His emphasis on public participation and scaling up successful and innovative strategies comes at a critical time. Advances in diagnostics, digital tools, and vaccines are creating opportunities to reshape how we detect, treat, and prevent TB.

Progress in recent years is encouraging. According to the WHO's Global TB Report 2024, global TB incidence fell by 8.3 per cent between 2015 and 2023. India outpaced this trend, achieving a 17.7 per cent reduction. These gains reflect the focused efforts and commitment of the NTEP.

As we look to sustain and accelerate these gains, we must focus on closing the diagnostic gap — the most critical weak link in the TB care cascade. In 2023, an estimated 2.7 million people worldwide who developed TB were not diagnosed or notified. Without diagnosis, timely treatment is impossible, and the chain of transmission continues. Compounding this challenge is the emerging evidence that a significant number of TB patients do not exhibit symptoms. Studies suggest that this early stage of the disease, known as subclinical TB, may account for about 50 per cent of cases in high-burden settings, including India. This is likely a key driver of the ongoing transmission.

India's recently concluded 100-day intensified TB-Mukt Bharat Abhiyan has provided several learnings. By screening vulnerable populations, including those without symptoms, the programme noted that the campaign identified 285 lakh asymptomatic TB patients — out of 7.19 lakh diagnosed. These individuals would likely have been

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CLOSING IN ON TB

New-generation diagnostics are making treatment accessible for more patients

missed on conventional, symptom-based screening approaches. By deploying portable chest X-rays, the campaign demonstrated the transformative potential of technology. AI-assisted reading of X-rays can detect lung abnormalities rapidly and accurately, allowing for quick identification of otherwise "missing" cases. The government's plan to scale up this approach country-wide is encouraging and could serve as a global model.

A new generation of point-of-care diagnostic tools is transforming what's possible. Traditional sputum-based tests can be challenging, particularly for children and the elderly. But innovations — such as non-invasive sampling methods like tongue or nasal swabs — can help detect TB earlier and more affordably. The availability of open PCR platforms can be another game-changer — by cutting the cost of testing significantly, these platforms can make high-quality molecular diagnostics accessible across public and private settings. In India, several of these tools are already being piloted, and the Indian Council of Medical Research is playing a key role in facilitating their adoption into routine care.

Along with the upgradation of our diagnostic capacity, we must look at reducing mortality due to TB. India has taken important steps to improve supportive care, including the doubling of monthly nutritional support under the Nishay Poshan Yojana (NPY) — a direct cash transfer scheme that helps patients meet their dietary needs during treatment. This expansion is timely, as undernutrition remains one of the leading risk factors for TB progression.

The country is also moving toward differentiated models of TB care, where services

are tailored based on a patient's risk profile and severity at diagnosis. This includes early risk stratification, timely referral of severe cases to higher-level facilities, and the provision of more intensive inpatient care where needed. This approach can drive down mortality appreciably and must become a core feature of the TB response. We must prioritise reducing TB deaths to as close to zero as possible in the near future.

While these advancements in diagnostics, treatment, and care delivery are crucial, we must not lose sight of the long-term solution — an effective TB vaccine. The experience of developing Covid vaccines demonstrates how global collaboration, streamlined regulatory pathways, and strong public investment can significantly accelerate timelines — an approach that must now be applied to TB vaccine development. India, with its scientific leadership and manufacturing capacity, is uniquely placed to drive the development and equitable deployment of next-generation TB vaccines, just as it did with Covid.

PM Modi's leadership has played a pivotal role in keeping TB elimination high on the national agenda and inspiring other countries to set ambitious goals. With continued political commitment, evidence, data-informed policies and a strong focus on innovation, India can drive transformative change in the global fight against TB.

The writer is chairperson, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation and principal advisor, NTEP, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

JULY 4, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

BLAST CAUSED CRASH

THE INDIAN TEAM that came to investigate the causes of the Air India jumbo jet crash into the Atlantic has come to the conclusion that sabotage, probably a time bomb or explosives planted on the plane, may have caused the explosion in mid-air. The conclusion, for the present, is "preliminary" and indicates that there was no structural defect with the plane.

INDO-PAK AGREEMENT

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN India and Pakistan for co-operation in agriculture and

allied fields will be signed in New Delhi before the conclusion session of the three-day ministerial meeting of the Indo-Pakistan Joint Commission. An External Affairs Ministry spokesman told reporters that the four sub-commissions of the Joint Commission had more or less completed their work and a cultural agreement had also been finalised.

EC SEEKS OPINIONS

THE ELECTION COMMISSION has sought the views of the Centre and the Punjab government on holding parliamentary and assembly elections in the state. The Chief Election Commissioner, R K Trivedi, told UNI that he

had written in this regard to the Punjab government and the Union Home Ministry on June 28, the day the five-year term of the state legislative assembly expired. He also wanted to know whether President's Rule would be revoked before October 5.

MISSING SHIPS MYSTERY

TWO INDIAN SHIPS with a total of 44 crew members on board have been missing since June 21, 1985 — one 90 miles north of Sri Lanka's east coast port Trincomalee and the other in the Bay of Bengal. An extensive search by the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard is yet to yield any clue about their whereabouts.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

Choosing the next Dalai Lama

India must explicitly support the road map laid out by the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists

Fourteen years after the Dalai Lama said he would decide on the issue of his succession by the time of his 90th birthday in 2025, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists has made it clear that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue after his death and that a trust founded by him will be the only authority to recognise his reincarnation. The announcement drew a predictable response from China, which sees the lama revered by millions around the world as a "separatist", with Beijing claiming that the Dalai Lama's successor will be selected by choosing a name from a "golden urn" and that the chosen person will have to be endorsed by the Chinese government. The problem here is that leading Buddhist scholars and historians have debunked the "golden urn" mechanism, introduced by China's rulers in the late 18th century. China itself had no role in the search or recognition of the 14th Dalai Lama, who has lived in Dharamshala since fleeing Tibet in the face of a military crackdown in 1959.

China's efforts are aimed at strengthening Beijing's grip on Tibet and its population of about 3.6 million, and to project itself as a global leader in Buddhism. Despite a range of repressive measures, including suppression of Tibetan Buddhist practices, forced enrolment of children as young as six in boarding schools to assimilate Tibetans into the mainstream and an all-pervasive surveillance machinery, the Dalai Lama continues to have a massive following. It is widely expected that China will name its own Dalai Lama, a precedent having been set by Beijing selecting its own Panchen Lama in 1995 and the disappearance of the Dalai Lama's choice. But Beijing will be aware that its choice is unlikely to be endorsed by Tibetans or carry the moral and spiritual weight that the seat commands.

Given that India is home to the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government-in-exile and a large Tibetan diaspora, this matter has the potential to become a flashpoint between New Delhi and Beijing. Chinese officials have said they expect India not to "interfere" in the selection of the next Dalai Lama. India would like to avoid friction but cannot and should not stay silent. Buddhism has a significant presence in the strategic border regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Sikkim. And both morality and statecraft demand that India support the Dalai Lama and make its stand explicit.

Understanding India's nutritional adequacy

Nutritional adequacy underpins an economy's growth to a significant extent. In this context, the latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey provides data on nutritional intake that should prompt policymakers to bridge gaps.

First, the calorie consumption at the lowest fractile of India's economic classes (the bottom 5% of the population by expenditure) remains significantly below what is considered ideal for Indian adults. At 1,688 kilocalories (kCal) a day in rural areas and 1,696 kCal in urban areas, the average intake falls short of the recommended daily intake of 2,500 kCal by close to a third. Even as governments — both the Centre and the states — try to ensure adequate intake through support programmes including the public distribution system, several other factors are in play. Problems of access, nutrient balancing, efficient targeting and delivery need urgent solutions. That said, the trend of a shrinking gap between the top and bottom fractiles over the past decade is heartening.

Second, the recent trend of diversification of households' nutritional basket holds strong. Though cereals continue to be the single-largest source of protein for households, their share in the overall protein pie is falling, with households turning to pulses, dairy and meat/fish/poultry. That is welcome, given it indicates rising spending on nutritional balance — with commensurate imprints on human health. As non-communicable diseases start to define India's morbidity picture, it is necessary to get the nutritional mix and diet basket right.

Third, as the data is parsed for regional patterns, a more comprehensive picture of deficits is likely to emerge, not always fitting neatly with economic conditions. There will be socio-cultural factors at play that need to be understood and factored in as the State moves to tweak policies.

Delhi's multilateralism plank needs tweaking

Differences between India and China are now at the heart of their interactions in multilateral institutions and, thus, of geopolitics

On June 26, the defence ministers' meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) concluded in the eastern Chinese coastal city of Qingdao without a joint statement. India had refused to sign on as the draft document avoided mention of the Pahalgaon terrorist attack in April while highlighting terrorist incidents in Pakistan. India argued that signing the document would undermine its positions and policies on State-sponsored terrorism.

This has highlighted by defence minister Rajnath Singh underscores China's efforts to shield its "iron brother" and ally, Pakistan. While the disagreement over the issue casts a shadow over high-level meetings of SCO hosted by China as the rotating president, it also reflects a deeper problem of how India-China differences are now at the heart of their interactions in multilateral institutions and, thus, of geopolitics.

SCO and BRICS, which is set to be summit over the weekend in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, have been geopolitically significant from their very conception. However, their focus was not what Chinese officials often identify as "practical cooperation", which included cooperation in economics and trade, technology, counter-terrorism, and sharing experiences in dealing with economic challenges to coordinating positions in multilateral trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund and on climate change. This focus allowed the members to avoid geopolitical divisions. While these are still significant objectives, China's strategies in these organisations have changed in the last decade.

In Communist Party of China General Secretary Xi Jinping's "new era", Beijing has started to redefine the role and identity of SCO and BRICS, yoking them more closely to its own domestic and international objectives. It has, thus, used these institutions to promote anti-liberal Chinese model of political and economic development globally as well as to showcase Chinese foreign policy initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the three global initiatives — on development, security and civilisation — launched since 2021.

China has aggressively promoted the expansion of the membership of the SCO and BRICS as a way of countering the weight of Western-dominated regional and global institutions and it now increasingly wants to utilise these platforms to advance its geopolitical positions aligning with its own positions and interests. For example, China has hinted in recent years that these organisations should coordinate their positions on matters such as the

Israel-Hamas conflict.

India itself became a member of the SCO alongside Pakistan as part of the organisation's expansion and one rationale Chinese academics subsequently offered was to let the two countries use the forum to help resolve difficult bilateral problems. But China — hardly the honest broker — persistent India-China differences over Pakistan-sponsored terrorism relate to their broader geopolitical rivalry with Pakistan playing the role of China's proxy in South Asia. Expanding the role of the SCO and BRICS to cover geopolitical issues as China has sought to do, redefines the role and identity of these institutions and, consequently, opens up avenues for internal divisions.

Chinese moves have naturally led to opposition from India. New Delhi eventually acquiesced in the expansion of BRICS but has taken a softer line than other members on Israel's actions in Gaza. Despite its gap in capabilities with China, India perceives itself to be a leader on the Asian continent and a rising power globally. China, for its part, sees itself as a putative successor to the US as the global hegemon but is aware of the challenge that India poses at least over the short term.

Beijing's words and deeds have been tailored accordingly. In response to remarks by the Indian defence minister at a meeting with his Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of the SCO meet that stressed "the need to create good

neighbourly conditions" among other things, Beijing declared that "China stands ready to maintain communication with India on issues including delimitation negotiation and border management, jointly keep the border areas peaceful and tranquil, and promote cross-border exchange and cooperation". However, the previous 60 days had also seen Sino-Pak military collusion during Operation Sindoor, a tit-for-tat exchange between China, Pakistan and Afghan foreign ministers in Beijing soon after the declaration of a ceasefire, as well as the inaugural Bangladesh-China-Pakistan meeting in Kunming in June.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, multilateral forums such as the SCO and BRICS provided useful platforms for interactions between the political leaderships of the two countries. However, structural conditions underlying India-China interactions have changed over the last decade.

Even as there is the appearance of a rapprochement, India-China contestations have not only continued but extended to multilateral organisations. The Brics Summit in Rio has for its theme "Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance". However, India-China competition will now likely pre-



Devendra Kumar



Jabin Jacob



Given Chinese ambitions within regional and global organisations, New Delhi and Beijing will have fewer multilateral fora to discuss differences.

vent institutions such as the SCO or BRICS from emerging as platforms for Global South cooperation and advocacy. Given Chinese ambitions and strategies within regional and global organisations, there will be fewer multilateral forums where India and China can come together to move their relationship along other tracks or to discuss differences. Meanwhile, a West in relative decline and often unwilling to meet its commitments to the global good, and India's still limited capabilities in an age of rapid economic, technological and military transformation mean that claims of strategic autonomy ring increasingly hollow. Instead, New Delhi faces increasingly stark choices — align with China on the latter's terms, alignment with a West pulling in different directions, or a difficult, lonely free-float position in international politics. The twin questions of what India must do to regain agency in its international relations and how it must go about doing it, have not yet been credibly addressed by its political leadership.

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What Prada did to the GI law and Kolhapuris

The leather sandals seen on the ramp for the Prada Men Spring Summer 2023 collection have recently been in the eye of a storm. While Prada has now acknowledged that the products were inspired by the traditional Kolhapuri chappals (a registered Geographical Indication since 2008) has any law been broken here? To unpack the controversy, one must first understand what a GI registration really means.

A geographical indication is a tag given to a product (natural or man made) that originates in a particular place and has a particular set of characteristics. Kolhapuri chappals are identified in the registration as a species of open Indian footwear made of bag tanned leather with vegetable dyes, produced using traditional techniques and tools. According to the registration, these products use buffalo hide, cow hide, calf skins of buff and cow treated with lime (siskid) and tanned using vegetable tanning material (Babbarak and myroban nuts), and also fibre for stitching. They also involve the use of hand tools for unbraiding, fleshing, beaming and scrubbing.

The GI law merely serves as a badge of origin and authenticity for a craft or product that comes from a particular region. For example, tea that is not grown in Darjeeling under a specific set of circumstances cannot be called Darjeeling tea. However, if tea grown elsewhere mimics the taste and aroma of a perfect cup of first flush from Darjeeling without using the word on its product packaging or promotion, the law will let you drink your tea (or sip it), without interfering.

GI infringement occurs when a product is mis-tagged, i.e. something made elsewhere under a different set of conditions and/or using different raw materials is sold as the original GI tagged product. If Prada sold products tagged as Kolhapuri chappals when they were in fact not made in Maharashtra or Karnataka according to the specifications of the GI registration, only then would the question of infringement arise. That is clearly not the case here. So irrespective of how ranked one may feel, there is no actionable claim that can be made in this instance.



Now that the law is done and dusted, the question of ethics and cultural appropriation must be addressed.

for the infringement of a GI or any other form of intellectual property.

In this backdrop, should we demand that since these are traditional leather chappals, Prada should call them by that name?

A brand's decision as to where they manufacture their products is a purely commercial one. Prada currently does not manufacture its leather footwear in India. It has its own set of quality control measures and product specifications, that could potentially conflict with the specifications of a GI tagged product. So, a demand for the product to be called as Kolhapuri chappals makes sense only if they are manufactured in the specific districts of Maharashtra or Karnataka in accordance with the criteria of the GI registration and are not based on Prada's own specifications and materials. If they don't do either, then it would be a mis-description to tag the products as Kolhapuri chappals and ultimately a disservice to the original craft and its GI registration.

I can almost hear you asking, "then what is the point of the registration?" A GI registration helps set standards for the product; it regulates the place of manufacture, the raw materials and technique used.

If the raw materials and techniques are accurate but the place of manufacture is different, it is at best a "copycat" — the product cannot be sold under the GI tag, which appears to be the case here. And the question of acknowledging inspiration is a purely ethical and moral question, not a legal one.

So does this mean that Prada now "owns" Kolhapuri chappals? The answer is again, no. Designer apparel and accessories are protected (after registration) under the Designs Act, 2000 in India. For a design to be registrable it needs to be original and not in the public domain. The risk that a luxury brand takes with potentially launching a product that is firmly in the public domain is that it cannot claim infringement against third party knock-offs since the design in this case would not be registrable in Prada's favour. But here again, it is important to remember that the commercial decision of whether these products will traverse the path from ramp to retail has not been publicly declared. So the claim that Prada will be "selling" these for a lakh plus is at best a click-bait headline for the moment.

Now that the law is done and dusted, the question of ethics and cultural appropriation must be addressed. Although there is no actionable legal claim against Prada, the public clamour and PR backlash have resulted in opening up a channel of communication between them and the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce. Whether it will result in tokenism or a commercial boost to the traditional practitioners of the craft, remains to be seen.

One definite positive outcome I see from this controversy is an uptick in the sales of the original Kolhapuri chappals. With a foreign luxury brand's apparent endorsement, we will hopefully see our heritage products as cool. After all, what's a saucer for the goose is chutney for the gander!

Shwetasree Majumder is managing partner, Pidas Law Chambers. The views expressed are personal.

MIGNON HOUSTON | US STATE DEPARTMENT DEPUTY SPOKESPERSON

Quad countries are major maritime partners. They understand the vulnerabilities when freedom of navigation is not respected

India's new NDCs must take private sector along

As governments around the world update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on climate action, there is a significant opportunity for the India's government and its private sector to raise ambition and accelerate implementation. From the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008 to the NDC in 2015 and its update in 2022, India has steadily signalled its commitment to play a leading role in addressing the climate crisis. Its 2023 NDC, expected to be announced in the run-up to COP30 in Brazil, can signal a new approach — one that places businesses and the private sector at the centre of India's climate journey.

India's first NDC in 2015 formalised climate goals in the global arena, with a commitment to reduce emissions intensity by 33-35% by 2030 and achieve 40% of power capacity from non-fossil sources. The subsequent NDC in 2022 raised the pledge to reduce emissions intensity by 45% and create 50% cumulative generation capacity from renewables. India also declared a net-zero target year of 2070.

India's soft-law climate strategy was strengthened by a similar commitment in the private sector when over 125 Indian companies adopted Science-Based Targets. Many voluntarily set net-zero targets ahead of the national 2070 deadline, backed by internal carbon pricing, green finance mechanisms, and renewable energy efforts.

In this context, 2025 offers India a historic opportunity to craft a 2035 roadmap that signals higher ambition based on a strategy that integrates the government's vision with that of the private sector in the areas of energy transition across sectors as well as adaptation and creation of climate-resilient infrastructure.

In a 2025 survey of Indian business leaders, 99% supported a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, with 84% calling for this shift within the next decade. India's green transition is thus increasingly shaped by an "ambition loop" where early business action strengthens regulatory confidence, which then catalyses further private sector ambition. This has already made Indian solar and electric vehicles (EVs) globally competitive.

In several cases, government signals — such as reverse auctions in solar, the National Hydrogen Mission, the Perform, Achieve and Trade scheme — enabled private sector investment and progress. Zorana, for instance, accelerated the electrification of its delivery fleet, while Wipro and Infosys led global net-zero alliances, actions centred not only on compliance but also on competitiveness and future-proofing. Similarly, regulatory signals such as climate

disclosure frameworks from RBI and the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting Framework have helped change corporate behaviour. Businesses have welcomed efforts by the government to develop a National Adaptation Plan to outline national priorities across regions and sectors, and identify necessary support for effective implementation. India's next NDC offers a critical opportunity to raise its climate ambition by integrating stronger implementation mechanisms, recognising progress in the private sector and exploring deeper partnerships. India's climate ambition must not come at the cost of development — it must drive it. Clean energy will help deliver energy security, lower the import bill (5% of the GDP), and create up to 35 million green jobs by 2047. Climate action is smart economics.

Moreover, India's forests, wetlands, and agro-ecosystems are critical buffers against climate shocks, offering both carbon sinks and climate resilience. India's next NDC should also recognise the role of Natural Climate Solutions (NCS), encourage corporate investment in forest restoration and biodiversity, and align adaptation priorities with business resilience strategies.

Financing this transformation will require unprecedented mobilisation of both domestic and international capital. As per preliminary government estimates, achieving India's current NDC targets will require \$162.5 trillion (\$2.1 trillion by 2030 — equivalent to \$1.1 trillion (\$170 billion) annually. Notably, climate finance in India has largely been domestically driven, with approximately 83% of flows originating from domestic sources. Bridging the gap — particularly for adaptation and nature-based solutions — requires a mix of accelerated domestic investments and significantly enhanced international support, making a strong case for an investment-ready NDC that includes quantified financing strategies and sectoral targets to help de-risk investments and catalyse both public and private finance at scale.

India's G20 momentum, and the upcoming BRICS and COP30 platforms offer an opportunity to anchor climate ambition within broader national goals, including achieving Vision Bharat by 2047, energy independence, and industrial competitiveness. Indian business has shown their willingness. Now we need bold government leadership to unlock its full potential.

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There is an urgent need for stringent legislative provisions that can act as an effective deterrent against the creation and dissemination of provocative content and acts perpetrated with criminal intent in cyberspace

● DIGITAL TRAP

WEB GIANTS NEED TO INVEST MORE IN POLICIES, PARTNERSHIPS; THE PUBLIC MUST NOT BECOME GULLIBLE VICTIMS

The underbelly of social media

WE HAVE WEAPONISED social media to gain instant visibility, with posts that stir common thinking or express a perspective that's controversial, provocative, or both. Social media has evolved into a vehicle for bold views and bolder reactions, spurred by the cloak of anonymity it provides on the one hand, and the exponential reverberation it creates on the other.

People who wish to stay connected with personal and professional friends and acquaintances, or those wishing to build a network to support their progress, use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn extensively. Another trigger for staying connected 24/7 is the fear of missing out (FOMO)—on news, social events, or online trends.

To preserve the image the social media enthusiast wants to propagate, the story-line could be fictional, the pictures could be edited, and the narrative could be fake. And it isn't without deleterious side effects. Whatever your motive when you publicise events in your life, like a picture from a colourful holiday abroad, greeting a celebrity, or eating at an exotic restaurant, it's like one-upmanship. In a sense, you're competing in a race to celebrityhood, and that could induce a variety of reactions. Maybe a dismissive sneer in a few who have been there, done that, no reactions at all, or threatening behaviour from some hiding behind online anonymity. Like cyberbullies who could cause psychological damage over time—ourselves harm in the case of the excessively vulnerable.

Knowingly or unknowingly, posts consumed could evoke feelings of inadequacy even in passive participants—more so when the mind decides that the other person is undeservingly wearing better clothes, driving a better car, or living in a better house.



ANIL NAIR
Founder, ThinkStreet

When the medium itself exacerbates anxiety and addiction, excessive screen time and irregular sleep patterns could become way of life too, affecting the fulfilment of relationships and responsibilities. It's bizarre that as war overtakes West Asia and all eyes are trained on what the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, will do in response to Israeli attacks and American strikes, there is much attention on some of his decade-old tweets on poetry, emotions, and relationships, including one in which he described himself as naughty and playful.

Equally so that the International Tennis Federation and the Women's Tennis Association recently released a report about the abuse tennis players received in 2024. Of the 1.6 million posts analysed depicting artificial intelligence, 8,000 were abusive or threatening. They came from 4,200 separate accounts, targeting 458 players; 26% of such messages were aimed at just five players, with one player receiving 263 from a single account. Not surprisingly, about 40% of the abuse emanated from angry gamblers.

And then there are perplexing, sometimes deviant, online challenges to induce teenagers into trading on infirm ground. Like chewing peppers or drinking sauce that's unbearably hot, walking blindfold in traffic, or choking oneself. The most

horrific is the blue whale challenge that lasts up to 50 days, commencing with innocuous tasks that become increasingly dangerous and demeaning, ending with instructions to inflict serious harm upon or kill oneself.

Are we living in a post-truth epoch? Misinformation is yet another major threat to civil society, given social media's reach and ubiquity. While past events have made sceptics of many of us, it has eroded trust in institutions too. For instance, during Covid-19, people were thoroughly confused about whether getting vaccinated was for better or worse, thanks to an overdose of conspiracy theories.

Social media is also fertile ground for selling products and services, misrepresenting details about efficacy, impact, or side effects. Like when tobacco companies' 4,200 separate accounts, targeting 458 players; 26% of such messages were aimed at just five players, with one player receiving 263 from a single account. Not surprisingly, about 40% of the abuse emanated from angry gamblers.

What about influencers, and bots? It's amazing that social media users can espouse views on any topic, regardless of expertise, qualifications, or the authenticity of their facts. And it's baffling when research reveals that posts containing mis-

information reach more people, far more rapidly. Maybe untruths are more engaging than bland facts?

When algorithms are deployed, they create content that's individualised, based on online behaviour, motivated to get users to spend more time on the platform. Brands that seek to reach unexploited buyer niches engage influencers who are incentivised to produce favourable content that generate higher views—and higher sales. Influencers are often accused of discovering virtues that products don't possess, or exaggerating them.

And then there are bots, deployed to run disinformation campaigns at scale, be it to sell health and wellness products, create social unrest, or influence elections. While bots have been generally difficult to spot, now there are effective tools to detect bot activity.

There is no doubt that those trying to coerce or manipulate others through social media have a deep understanding of human psychology. They know that repetition often creates new truths, that users have no time to fact-check, and are inclined to believe views consistent with their inherent beliefs.

Are we done enough? The UN offers a holistic framework for pre-emptive action. This includes building societal resilience, offering empowered choices over content consumed, refining the business models of tech companies and advertisers, government interventions to facilitate the free flow of authentic information, and the highest levels of transparency and freedom for researchers and academics to help make course correction.

But two prime constituents need to do much more. We conglomerationists—by investing more in robust policies, fact-checking partnerships, algorithmic controls, and research grants. And the consuming public who must not become gullible, willing victims.

Those trying to coerce or manipulate others through social media have a deep understanding of human psychology

From fringe to financial mainstream



ROOPA KUDVA

The writer is a business leader and start-up investor

As Bitcoin gets more embedded in regulation, institutional portfolios, and financial narratives, questions about its lack of asset backing are becoming less relevant

IN A LANDMARK development, on June 17, the US Senate passed the GENIUS Act, legislation specifically aimed at regulating stablecoins. This marks a new phase for the cryptocurrency ecosystem, boosting clarity and confidence. From a low price of around \$3,100 in 2018, Bitcoin has now crossed \$2.1 trillion in market value, surpassing Meta, Alphabet, Tesla, and Broadcom.

What started off as a challenge to fiat currencies has steadily evolved into a widely held asset class, and created wealth for many. Here's how that transition unfolded, shaped by institutional moves, regulatory recognition, and evolving investor behaviour.

In 2020, MicroStrategy became the first listed company to hold Bitcoin on its balance sheet as a treasury asset, with Square and Mass Mutual following suit. By 2021, larger investors began to enter. The US Securities and Exchange Commission approved spot Bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in 2024. This opened the door for traditional institutions and retail investors to access Bitcoin through regulated channels, much like gold ETFs.

Throughout 2025, ETFs have continued to drive inflows while global banks have begun developing structured products tied to Bitcoin. There is early talk of sovereign Bitcoin reserves emerging on the horizon.

Policy discourse has shifted from restriction to structured integration. Between 2018 and 2019, a patchwork of regulatory pushback and uncertainty stalled momentum. In 2020, the US started clarifying its tax treatment, with Bitcoin being formally treated as property where gains

are taxed as capital gains.

El Salvador's recognition of Bitcoin as legal tender in 2021 (since revoked) drew global attention. India has introduced a 30% tax on crypto gains (plus surcharge and cess) as well as tax deducted at source, which amounted to recognition without endorsement. In 2025, President Trump backed stablecoin legislation while India prepared a public consultation paper.

In 2018, retail sentiment turned deeply negative and the crypto winter began. By 2020, investors began treating Bitcoin as a store of value (comparable to digital gold), with the inflation hedge narrative gaining ground.

Despite volatility between 2022 and 2023, long-term holding increased while exchange infrastructure improved. Platforms like Lightning Network reduced friction for users. Through-out 2024 and 2025, spot ETFs normalised Bitcoin in mainstream portfolios. Retail and institutional investors now access it through regulated, familiar products. Risk appetite has evolved, and while volatility remains high Bitcoin is no longer seen as purely speculative. Instead, it is treated as a long-duration asset.

India allows ownership and trading of Bitcoin, but the Reserve Bank of India remains concerned about systemic risks. A 30% tax on income from crypto and 1% tax deducted at source on transactions continues to act as a deterrent.

Policy engagement is growing, however. A government consultation paper is

expected in mid-2025. Industry groups are pushing for a shift from prohibition to prudence. A Bitcoin reserve pilot has been informally proposed. India is taking a measured approach, watching global developments closely while avoiding any rushed decisions.

Bitcoin is no longer defined by ideology or anonymity. It is treated as an alternative asset like gold or venture capital. It is used for diversification, long-term appreciation, and macro hedging. Volatility remains a feature, but the investor base is broader and more informed. The shift is ongoing but unmistakable.

Risks
Limitations of 'digital gold' analogy: Gold has over 5,000 years of historical precedent as a store of value. Gold maintains value during total system failures such as wars, internet outages, or power grid collapse, while Bitcoin requires functioning digital infrastructure to operate.

Gold's supply is physically constrained by mining economics, whereas Bitcoin's scarcity depends entirely on code. Could that theoretically be changed by consensus? Additionally, gold has industrial and decorative utility beyond investment. To be a true store of value in the long term, it would also arguably need lower volatility and higher stability of purchasing power.

Cyclical adoption: Current institutional interest may be driven by low interest rates and liquidity, which are conditions that could reverse and make traditional assets more attractive. Corporate Bitcoin

holdings often represent small percentages of balance sheets and could be quickly liquidated during financial stress.

ETF inflows can reverse rapidly, as seen in other asset classes during market corrections. Regulatory approval in one jurisdiction doesn't guarantee permanence, as policies can change with new administrations or financial crises.

Systemic risks: Quantum computing advances could potentially compromise Bitcoin's cryptographic security, undermining its fundamental value proposition. Major exchange hacks or custody failures could trigger institutional flight and regulatory crackdowns.

Central bank digital currencies, including in India, might provide government-backed alternatives that reduce demand for decentralised cryptocurrencies. Environmental concerns about energy consumption could lead to stricter regulations. Extreme volatility during the next major financial crisis could demonstrate Bitcoin's correlation with risk assets rather than its safe-haven properties.

Here to stay
Bitcoin's value comes from being trusted, secure, and useful, especially as a store of value or a hedge against inflation. Its worth will be sustained if market demand and belief in its long-term utility sustains.

As it becomes more embedded in regulation, institutional portfolios, and financial narratives, questions about its lack of asset backing are becoming less relevant. The debate is shifting from whether Bitcoin is here to how it fits into the broader financial system. Bitcoin hasn't replaced money, but it does appear it's here to stay.

Debate shifting from whether Bitcoin has value to how it fits into the broader financial system

Mamdani won because too many elites lost

HELL HATH NO fury like the disappointed haute bourgeoisie. A populist revolt has been brewing among the American left since the global financial crisis dealt a severe economic shock to young college graduates. The surprising primary win of 33-year-old Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani in New York City's mayoral primary is the latest manifestation of their economic frustration. And it will only get worse.

One of the more surprising results of the Mamdani victory concerns his base: Younger, well-educated, fairly affluent, and living in Brooklyn—especially the more bohemian Williamsburg and Bushwick neighbourhoods. Mamdani was much less popular among lower earners who live in the Bronx. So it's revealing that the relatively well-off turned out enthusiastically for someone who, only a few years ago, promised to seize the very means of production that underpinned their success.

The reason may be that Mamdani's supporters tend to be elite, but don't feel elite enough. They are the ones who suffer from what University of Connecticut professor emeritus and complexity scientist Peter Turchin calls elite overproduction. Many children of middle- and upper-middle-class households went to college expecting to have a career that brought wealth and status. But there are a limited number of "elite" jobs. The result is a surplus of aspiring elites who end up resentful and blame a system they deem unfair. Turchin argues that past periods of social unrest were due to an overabundance of disappointed elites. It also explains recent bouts of populism, including the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Part of the problem is that the divide between culturally and economically elite jobs has widened. Based on the government's Current Population Survey between 2022 and 2025, about 12% of the college graduates who live in Brooklyn work in what I call "creative" industries (arts, media, non-profits). This may seem low, but Brooklyn is one of the largest counties in the country and is very economically diverse. Creative college graduates here take up a smaller share of graduates in the other New York boroughs (between 5% and 11%) and the US's college educated population overall.

The creative college graduates in Brooklyn have a median household income of about \$125,200. But that does not go far in New York, especially for those from affluent families who expect to replicate their parents' standard of living. When their parents were young, having a college degree ensured much higher relative pay. Big cities were also less expensive back then, and a non-profit job could afford a decent living while less. Only 30% of creative college-educated Brooklynites are homeowners, compared to 76% of college graduates in the rest of the country. It gets worse when they compare themselves to peers who became part of the economic elite. Brooklyn also houses many who work in finance, law and consulting. Their median household income is over \$290,000, and 58% own their home (though they tend to be a bit older).

Although the cultural and economic elite have always lived alongside each other, the reason the divide is getting wider is because in the last few decades being in a big city such as New York has become necessary to elite success, but cultural or economic. But cities have also become much more expensive, mainly as the result of increased demand for housing and limited supply. Economically elite jobs have also become even better paid relative to cultural elite jobs.

All this is why Mamdani's focus on affordability, his promises to freeze rent, subsidise food costs, and impose large taxes on the economic elite, is appealing to so many well-educated voters. It is also a legitimate problem that success in their industry requires living where they can't necessarily afford the lifestyle they want and feel they deserve. Turchin expects the problem will only get worse. Recent shifts in the labour market due to technology suggest the earnings premium from college may shrink further and cause more economic frustration. At the very least, if these voters turn to populism that pushes more price controls on housing and other necessities there will be even more shortages and higher prices for market-priced goods, and the affordability problem will swell, not only for the disaffected cultural elite but for everyone.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Justified caution

Apropos of "Wither vanity metrics" (FE, July 3), as we are living in an ever-evolving, dynamic world, fund managers are right in demanding profitable returns sooner than earlier accepted timelines. Before expecting fund managers to open their purse for Series A money, promoters have to prove their credentials and business model. They must remember there is no easy

money or free lunches, more so now. Fund managers can't be blamed for being strict with their spending given that both big and small names in start-ups have exploded in recent times. —Bal Govind, Noida

Economic potential

India stands on the cusp of economic transformation, with nine high-growth, innovation-driven sectors—from e-commerce and semiconduc-

tors to electric vehicles (EV), artificial intelligence (AI), to space—projected to generate \$588-738 billion in annual revenue by 2030, a sharp rise from \$164-206 billion in 2023, according to McKinsey. Backed by robust macroeconomic fundamentals, policy support, and rising digital adoption, the sectors are poised to reshape our industrial landscape. E-commerce is expanding in rural markets, semiconductors and cloud services are surging

with investment, and EVs and battery manufacturing are picking up pace with state schemes. Simultaneously, AI, cybersecurity, space, nuclear fusion, and robotics are emerging as strategic frontiers, reinforcing India's potential to become a hub of innovation and advanced manufacturing by the end of the decade. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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DECCAN Chronicle

4 JULY 2025

India must back Dalai on choice of successor

What should be a celebration of a spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists of the Nalanda tradition who turns 90 this weekend has had a dose of geopolitics injected into it as the succession issue has cropped up. However, the Government of India, which inherited the 14th Dalai Lama's refuge in the country as a natural supporter of a spiritual movement under pressure in Communist China in the 1950s, is firm that the Dalai Lama and the Gaden Phodrang Foundation he has set up must handle the succession as it wishes.

China, which views the Dalai Lama as a separatist and is in political exile in India, has respected his big following to the extent of not thrusting its own Dalai Lama and allowing only a Panchen Lama in Lhasa's Potala Palace. However, China insists that it alone has the authority to approve the next Dalai Lama. It is easy to see then how another friction point in already fractious India-China relations is the choice of the 14th Dalai Lama.

There is logic to the view that a belief in reincarnation, through which successions have been ordained in the 600-year-old religious practice, will be decided only by established conventions and that the desire of the 14th Dalai Lama be respected in making the choice. This is strictly in the domain of religion and neither India nor China should have a say in how the succession takes place. It is another matter that the issue has been heavily politicised and has a bearing on India-China relations, especially since the Dalai Lama has stated that his successor will be from outside China.

China played dirty in the previous reincarnation that was said to have been spotted. Its officials abducted a six-year-old boy, anointed by the current Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama, who has not been heard from since 1995. The current Beijing-installed Panchen Lama has pledged allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party, strengthening China's resolve to take greater control of the Tibetan people.

Having invested so much time and given refuge to the Dalai Lama and his followers, who constitute a big diaspora of Tibetan Buddhists in India and elsewhere, India has no option but to go along with the wishes of the Dalai Lama who has been a revered figure in India for decades and among the many people who fled Tibet with him and their successors who were born outside Tibet. There is no place for the nation to have a policy on this and even less for any intervention at this stage.

It is tragic then that China is thought to be waiting for his death as he has not responded to China's offer to discuss his future. The Tibetan government in exile cannot be expected to even consider this as its very establishment is owed to the Dalai Lama being viewed as a freedom fighter who, dressed as an ordinary soldier, fled China to settle in mountainous Dhamashala, with a resemblance to their Tibetan home, where he set up a government in exile.

The US, where the Dalai Lama's followers have long been recognised as religious refugees, has resolved to support his choice of successor. With the status quo having prevailed for 66 years of the leader's residence in India as the very personification of the Tibetan movement, there is little need to change anything, regardless of China's views on the Dalai Lama and how it would love to shape the hunt for his successor.

Keep tight vigil at Amarnath

The 35-day Amarnath yatra, the annual pilgrimage undertaken by devotees of Lord Shiva at the ice lingam in the Amarnath cave temple has begun this year, too, under an unprecedented three-tier security cover. It is expected that about five lakh devotees will undertake the pilgrimage this year. About 1,000 pilgrims will be the first batch to start the journey. The total number of pilgrims registered for the yatra this year is marginally lower than the last year's figure.

Pilgrimage is a pious activity across religions and the people of all religions are part of the festivities of one of the pilgrimages of one faith are facilitated in the journeys by people of all faiths. The Amarnath yatra is no different as the people of Kashmir extend their warmth and hospitality to the pilgrims who come there from all over India. However, the Kashmiri terrorists have occasionally targeted the yatra, the major such instance being in 2017 when several pilgrims were shot dead by them. Since then, the government has stepped up the security and hence the journeys have been eventless, except for the hazards posed by the arduous route. This year's attack on tourists in Pahalgam, which acts as a base camp for the yatra, has the authorities at their utmost vigil.

It may be remembered that the Union government has been claiming that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has been changed forever after Article 370 was hollowed out and the state was bifurcated, made a Union territory and brought under the President's rule. However, the situation on the ground does not support the claim; the Pahalgam attack was one of the several such instances in which Pakistan-backed terrorists ran amok. That should have jolted the government out of its slumber but unfortunately it didn't. The government has asked responsibility this time around to ensure that the pilgrims are welcome there, are able to undertake their journey without hassles and get back home safely. It must do whatever it takes to accomplish the task.

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu

Parag Jain as new RAW chief game-changer in Indian spy craft

India's espionage architecture is quietly shifting. The appointment of Parag Jain as the new chief of RAW comes at a particularly volatile moment globally. Iran has just executed alleged Mossad assets and detained hundreds of reporters, triggering emergency backchannel coordination by several countries including India. A few Indian students caught in the crossfire in Mashhad were hastily repatriated. It was also a reminder that secret wars don't stay in the shadows for long.

Mr Jain's arrival at the top of RAW isn't just a routine succession. He represents a deeper recalibration. Known for his pivotal role in Operation Sindoor, Mr Jain brings a rare blend of human intelligence and intelligence fluency, said to have enabled India's pinpoint strikes on terror hubs across the border.

That kind of quiet effectiveness is what India's intelligence community desperately needs. Someone not just to pre-empt threats but to lead with precision in an era where drones, data leaks and digital fingerprints define geopolitical risk. All of this is unfolding as national security adviser Ajit Doval, the original architect of India's modern covert capability, approaches the twilight of his tenure. While no names are confirmed yet, the jockeying for the NSA chair has quietly begun. The next NSA will walk into a role



Will Trump's 'Hammer' create a new West Asia?

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

Just as Winston Churchill boasted that he drew the Middle East's borders with a ruler when he chaired the 1921 Cairo Conference as Britain's colonial secretary, US President Donald Trump might claim that a new West Asia thundered into existence when he unleashed "Operation Midnight Hammer" against Iran. Sadly, Chanakya's short-sighted "enemy's enemy is a friend" dictum seems to determine contemporary India's response to these dangerously self-centred positions.

Ostensibly, the United States committed wanton aggression against an unoffending nation with which India also enjoys cooperative ties in order to further the territorial, regional and ideological ambitions of a racist power that is Washington's prized protégé. To complicate matters, Narendra Modi's India, too, enjoys close diplomatic and defence ties with Israel while viewing the region's Muslim multitudes with suspicious fear. What might add to the embarrassment of the more sensitive among India's leaders is New Delhi's own ambiguity on the questions of nuclear proliferation. In February 1997, then external affairs minister (later Prime Minister) Inder Kumar Gujral reiterated India's opposition to the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, saying that "India favours any step aimed at destroying nuclear weapons, but considers that the treaty in its present form is not comprehensive and bans only certain types of tests".

India is one of three countries — the other two signatories of the CTBT being Pakistan and North Korea — that have tested nuclear weapons since the treaty opened for signature in 1996. India maintains a "no first use" nuclear policy and has reportedly developed a nuclear triad capability as a part of its "credible minimum deterrence" doctrine. Far from being praised, this position, like India's opposition to the CTBT, invites charges of double standards from countries that do not share India's objection that the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty imposes nuclear apartheid by recognising only China, France, Russia, Britain and the United States as nuclear powers.

For instance, Japan, which is believed to enjoy the capability to develop its own nuclear weapons, but resists the temptation to do so, doesn't share with India. However, US President George W. Bush emphatically rejected scepticism on this score in July 2005 when he granted Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh an epochal civil nuclear agreement that wiped the slate clean and transferred all its historically reserved for countries that forswore nuclear weapons. Dwell on the sequence of events. The only governmental action of note amidst all these revolving clashes is the decision by Britain's Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, to impose sanctions on two hardline Israeli politicians, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, respectively, for their role in the Prime Minister's national security and junior minister of defence under the egregiously racist Netanyahu. Both men want more than two million Palestinians expelled from Gaza and the occupied territory filled with Israeli settlers. Similar ethnic cleansing of the West Bank with its three million inhabitants may follow so that the more than 670,000 Israeli settlers there not only retain supreme but can invite other Jews to take over the vacated territory.

Sir Keir by sanctions are no more than an irritant since all they can do to prevent the two men from

Despite his innocence of history and tradition, Mr Trump should know that Israel's opponents in the region will never be reconciled to its intrusive presence unless they themselves are guaranteed sovereign independence

published in two books, David Wise's *Mohabnat with the Cross*, by a journalist, Gregory Douglas (2013). India's media doesn't appear to have gone overboard over these revelations. As the Asian tragedy unfolds, however, the murderous aggressions which have inflicted enormous misery and suffering on countless poor people appear to be as pointless as Israel's boastful "Operation Rising Lion" against Iran (named after a Biblical verse promising a victorious future for Israel might) or Mr Trump's spate of tactical falling out with the world's richest man, South Africa-born Elon Musk, who spent more than \$20 million in getting the 47th President elected to the world's most powerful job. The only governmental action of note amidst all these revolving clashes is the decision by Britain's Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, to impose sanctions on two hardline Israeli politicians, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, respectively, for their role in the Prime Minister's national security and junior minister of defence under the egregiously racist Netanyahu. Both men want more than two million Palestinians expelled from Gaza and the occupied territory filled with Israeli settlers. Similar ethnic cleansing of the West Bank with its three million inhabitants may follow so that the more than 670,000 Israeli settlers there not only retain supreme but can invite other Jews to take over the vacated territory.

Sir Keir by sanctions are no more than an irritant since all they can do to prevent the two men from

setting foot in Britain and freeze whatever British assets they might hold. But this mild censure at a time when even supposedly moral Asian nationalists are only too flattered to hob-nob with the triumphant Israeli has drawn sharp criticism from Marco Rubio, the US secretary of state, and naturally from Tel Aviv. Of course, Indians, especially the so-called saffron brigade, have no knowledge of — or interest in — the Zionist vision of "Eretz Yisrael", the expanded homeland that is expected to swallow up even more Arab land and push its inhabitants into the sea. The Indian commitment being communal, Jews are defined by the religion of their West Asian adversaries and guaranteed support.

As hostilities can suddenly erupt at any time, the challenge is to lay the foundations of a lasting settlement with the fragile peace still holds. Despite his innocence of history and tradition, Mr Trump should know that Israel's opponents in the region will never be reconciled to its intrusive presence unless they themselves are guaranteed sovereign independence.

Even "Operation Midnight Hammer" had violated their rights by unilaterally abusing their airspace to bomb Iran. Saudi Arabia and Jordan may have tolerated it because they now see Shia Iran as the greater threat, if Syria and Iraq acquiesced, it was because they had no choice. It will not always be so. America's West Asian allies have agendas of their own, irrespective of whether the United States needs them more than they need the US.

Either way, the most effective way of restraining their historic passions is to underwrite their security, borders and territorial integrity through a stable sovereign Palestine that Israel will dare not touch. Such a Palestine might not dare to touch Israel either. It would have no reason to. Only the US can ensure this equilibrium.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS Sudden deaths NOT FROM COVID JABS

It is regrettable to see responsible persons holding the highest offices in our democracy unnecessarily creating fear through rumours linking sudden deaths and covid vaccines. If we recall our first wave of pandemic globally a lead medical magazine Lancet predicted around 45 lakh deaths when vaccines were not ready indignously. We made vaccines locally and gave to the largest population amidst huge vaccine hesitancy and also exported to over 150 countries. Vaccines saved lives in India and globally. Let us believe in the largest scientific bodies of our nation like ICMR and stop spreading fear of vaccines. Politicians must please stop politicising vaccines

Dr. P. Soundararajan
Chennai

UNITE AGAINST TERROR

If powerful nations like the US, Japan and Australia cooperate with India in its relentless effort to stamp out terrorism in the world, things will surely work. That said, the successive governments in Pakistan have done precious little for their people, who badly want peace and growth. It is time the corridors of power there worked closely with other nations including India and ensured a terror-free world. It is not impossible though.

S. Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

CAPTAIN COOL

MS Dhoni has moved to register his candidature for the committee didn't even get around to signing the minutes of its own meetings. And then, in a classic Delhi plot twist, the key driver of the process, revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra, exited stage left to take up residence in Mint Street as RBI governor. The process flattered.

By May 2025. Another selection round was attempted, but then a judicial aspirant could ease the load on overburdened courts. The disputes kept mounting, but GSTAT? It's still stuck in a Kafkaesque limbo. A classic Indian institution-in-the-making. All announcement, no arrival.

So nearly eight years since GST was launched, but then a judicial aspirant could ease the load on overburdened courts. The disputes kept mounting, but GSTAT? It's still stuck in a Kafkaesque limbo. A classic Indian institution-in-the-making. All announcement, no arrival.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

Love them, hate them, ignore them at national level is the only guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share his opinion, bahu escapes dilipcherian@hotmail.com

Fuller Basket for Smarter Growth

New CPI aims to sharpen inflation tracking

A new CPI series currently being drawn up is expected to broaden the basket of goods and services and provide richer data to capture regional variations. A better representation of retail inflation should improve monetary targeting and allow a quicker response time. Inflation management requires a considerable supply response in India. Granular data is useful in identifying bottlenecks and devising workarounds. The under-representation of services across states is useful in identifying bottlenecks and devising workarounds. The under-representation of services across states is useful in identifying bottlenecks and devising workarounds.

Alongside a redesign of CPI, the methodology also requires an upgrade. The sample size needs to be enlarged, and data collection should rely on tech-driven solutions. eCommerce offers easily accessible datasets that can be incorporated after scrubbing for discounting patterns. The allocation of weights when individual data is unavailable must not cause avoidable distortion. The statistics ministry is understood to be working on all these aspects to produce a better tool for its policy clients as well as producers and consumers.

Constructing an accurate econometric CPI model is key to ensuring the economy stays on its growth trajectory. These are interesting times for statisticians, with AI poised to revolutionise data collection and modelling. Not only does AI magnify datasets in real time at a lower cost, it can also harvest richer data, involving quality and sourcing. This opens the use of indices like CPI to track price pressure build-up at a higher frequency and to establish the effect of trade deals. Macroeconomic modelling gains immensely from a better understanding of price rigidity, and policy can be tested to enhance transmission. Improved policy outcomes based on indices that were unthinkable even a decade ago are likely to become the norm globally. India can make a quantum jump in economic management by incorporating AI into measuring its macro variables.

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Place of Voting: The Other Voter's Choice

Over decades, as EC fine-tuned voting systems and bolstered outreach efforts, the number of voters have steadily but surely increased. Yet, many are left out because they are registered in their home cities/towns/villages while residing elsewhere, mostly for work reasons. Returning to their constituencies to cast their ballot can, indeed, be an issue. To address this, EC has suggested that citizens should register only in constituencies where they reside, not where their 'permanent address' lies. This aligns with Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act 1950.

The issue is particularly sensitive in states like poll-ready Bihar, where outmigration is high. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, voter turnout in Bihar was 66%, while the national average was 68%. A major reason for this gap is the inability of 'emigrant workers to return home to vote. Many still prefer to vote in their hometowns or villages due to family ties, land ownership, continued access to state benefits (since portability of benefits is yet to be fully implemented) or because of investing in the future of such a place. While EC rightly notes that political parties often pay for voter travel — encouraging an unhealthy quid pro quo — stopping it is an administrative task. Requiring people to vote only where they live is not justified.

Along with proxy voting for NRIs and postal ballots for service personnel, Form 6 allows migrants to vote from their place of residence for local candidates. But this has not been popular. EC has also experimented with solutions, including pilot project using remote voting machines and postal ballots. The alternatives must be pursued, rather than enforcing a rule that fixes voters to their workplaces. It must be their choice.

JUST IN JEST
Tenzin Gyatso and Jagat Prakash Nadda await a similar sign

Buddhism and BJP, A Succession Story

Buddhism and BJP are looking for new bosses — someone who will succeed Tenzin Gyatso and Jagat Prakash Nadda as dalai lama and BJP president, respectively. While BJP has never stated any belief in reincarnation — Nadda and first BJP president Atal Bihari Vajpayee roaming the Earth at the same time makes it tricky — the fact is that like Lhamo Thondup, who went on to become Tenzin Gyatso a.k.a. the 14th dalai lama, the 11th BJP president is also a 'continuation' of helmsman of the same faith. True, as Tibet's head of state, the dalai lama carries an impressive title: Jampel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso, which translates into English as 'Holy lord, gentle guru, compassionate, defender of the faith, ocean of wisdom'. At best, the Union health as well as chemicals and fertilisers minister — not to mention leader of the house in Rajya Sabha — who quadruples as party president, can be addressed as 'sirji'. But both posts are big shoes that will need filling.

Gyatso, whose (current) birthday falls this coming Sunday, has stated that he will be reborn, and that the authority to recognise his future reincarnation is solely Gaden Phodrang Trust, a non-profit body in India registered in 2011, making it 31 years younger than BJP Nadda's successor will be chosen later this month, before Parliament is re-incarnated on July 21.

India must act to preserve Tibetan autonomy and culture, or risk letting China snuff it out

'Com'on, Play the Dalai Card



Saibal Dasgupta

In Tibetan Buddhism, it's acceptable for a dalai lama to reincarnate outside China or Tibet. The 4th dalai lama was born in Mongolia in 1589, and the 6th, Tsangyang Gyatso, was born in 1682 in the Tawang area of today's Arunachal Pradesh. The next dalai lama likely to reincarnate in India? Many scholars of Tibetan Buddhism believe that if the 14th dalai lama Tenzin Gyatso, who turns 90 on Sunday, can exercise his spiritual will, he would prefer to be reborn in India. He has spent 66 years in India since he arrived to escape Chinese persecution in 1959. Bulk of Tibet's 1,30,000 exiles live in India and Nepal.

The reincarnation will most likely happen in India, said Claude Arpi, author of several books on Tibet. 'Buddhism emerged in India before reaching Tibet. There are about a million Buddhists in India. There is also the issue of protecting the child who will be the chosen successor. I don't think any other country will be a suitable place for this suggestion.'

Tibetans learnt a bitter lesson when a 6-year-old boy announced by the dalai lama as the 11th pan-chen lama — second only to the former in spiritual authority — suddenly vanished in 1995 from a part county in Tibet shortly after the announcement. Chinese authorities immediately replaced him with their nominee — an important reason why the dalai lama has said



Dalai dialektics

that his reincarnation would be born in the free world.

Speaking on Wednesday, the dalai lama has made it clear that he will not be the last leader of the movement to preserve and promote Tibetan autonomy and culture amid aggressive suppression. He also made it clear that his successor will be chosen by monks in a trust created by him, while rejecting China's claim that Beijing is the sole authority in the most visible fashion.

Though India has refused to overtly play the 'Tibet card', it is a fact that the presence of the dalai lama and so many other Tibetans has helped lure India's profile among supporters of human rights across the world and as a soft power. The question is whether it would actively support the Tibetan leader's quest to preserve the tradition of succession, or be a silent spectator.

It would have been a great idea if Narendra Modi visited Dhamaramshala to greet the dalai lama on Sunday. But since he will be in Rio, he could send the home minister



Kiren Rijiju

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right to interfere or decide who the successor of his business the dalai lama will be. Only he or the institution has the authority to make that decision.'

Tibetan Buddhists across the world expect greater support from New Delhi. 'Reincarnation of the dalai lama, the panchen lama and other great Buddhist figures must be chosen by drawing lots from a golden urn, and approved by the central government', Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning had said earlier this week. China is determined to place a lackey as a successor. India has an opportunity to reaffirm the values that prompted Jawaharlal Nehru to provide space for fleeing Tibetan refugees fleeing from China-annexed Tibet in 1950-51.

Many Americans hope the reincarnation would take place in the US, which is best suited to handle Beijing's pressures. This is one of the reasons why the Biden administration got US Congress to pass the Resolve Tibet Act in 2024. The Act asserts that Chinese officials are 'historically inaccurate' in claiming that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times. It also says the US would encourage a negotiated settlement between China and Tibet.

But few people expect Trump, who is in the process of finalising a trade deal with China, to implement the Act, or cause political disfigurement to China's leaders.

Speaking at London's Royal Albert Hall in 2006, the dalai lama said that Buddhism was introduced in Tibet by a great philosopher and logician, an antakarshita, from India in the 8th c. It is for India to preserve Tibetan Buddhism from possible decay if the Chinese have their way. In fact, not acting on Thursday to Beijing that China has no business appointing the next dalai lama. 'This is not about politics — it's about religious belief', he said ahead of his Dhamaramshala visit. 'No one has the

The writer is former Tel Beijing correspondent

Dancing the Quadriple

backing down when the shoe starts to pinch. After China's restricted supplies of critical minerals. Now it seems Trump wants to visit China with a large business delegation.

'America First' means jobs at home, and if China can create them, he doesn't mind. For Trump, tech denial is a temporary tool, not a strategy that when combined with unpredictability can be lethal.

What do these confusing signals mean for the Quad? Remember, it was created, revived and propagated to balance 'counter China'. The meeting was an affirmation that Quad is in good health. Quad ministers also announced a new initiative on critical minerals to reduce dependency on China. The idea is to diversify and create new supply chains, and 40 private companies from Quad countries were here to discuss ideas. Plans are also afoot for a leaders' summit later this year.

And, yes, the Americans have concerns in writing that Donald Trump will travel. The dates will be decided later as the Indian side works to design a summit to suit the times. Going by the Trump rule — 'what can't be said in one place is not worth saying — long speeches won't be ideal.

All said and done, Quad is moving ahead despite doubts from certain quarters and a general suspicion of 'groups' among Trump supporters. The US system seems to see value in the Quad, even if the president appears indifferent.

S. Jaishankar also met top US officials, including defence secretary Pete Hegseth, FBI director Kash Patel, director of national intelligence Lita Gabbard, besides his counterpart Marco Rubio. The visit was India's first political engagement with the US since Operation Sindoor. Jaishankar insisted the matter of Trump's repeated claims of mediation did not come up.

While the time up was Quad members — who maintained neutrality when India launched Op Sindoor — 'unequivocally' condemning all acts of terrorism, including cross-border terrorism — without naming Pakistan. The language was mostly a repeat from older statements, but updated with the location of the latest atrocity, Pakistan.

After the shock of the SCO statement where Pakistan was mentioned all — but Balochistan was — and Jaishankar refused to sign, the Quad joint statement was an improvement with all boxes checked. The ministers have pared down the group's agenda to four main pillars: maritime and transnational security; economic security; critical and emerging technology; and humanitarian assistance.

Frankly, Trump is too busy making deals with China after threatening massive tariffs and then

Harsh V Pant & Sayantan Halder

Marco Rubio hosted his counterparts from India, Australia and Japan for the first time in his office. With that backdrop, the Quad joint statement outlined four key areas that will guide the group's agenda. These include maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response.

Quad's stated objective to continue to work together to address the challenges of the 21st century, including the Indo-Pacific region, and other Pacific regional groupings, demonstrate the group's commitment to the willingness to reach the last mile in fostering cooperation. A slew of new announcements included the new Critical Minerals Initiative to secure and diversify critical minerals supply chains, and Indo-Pacific Logistics Network, announced at last year's Wilmington summit, that is now poised to be underway to strengthen the group's HADR humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Last year, Quad also seeks to launch the Pacific Future Partnership in Mumbai. The group did share its concerns about China's growing belligerence at the East and South China Sea regions — without naming it. It also shared concerns about North Korea's destabilising launches using ballistic missile technology in violation of several UNSC resolutions. The group also called for the engagement in Myanmar, and its adverse implications on regional security, calling for a speedy resolution.

The group continued to condemn violent extremism, specifically mentioning Pakistan. Given India's experience at the recent SCO Summit, where the absence of Pakistan's mention from the joint statement resulted in a serious dilution of the group's commitment to act on terrorism and foster cooperation on counterterrorism, this was somewhat reassuring. Even as the other 'P' word — Pakistan — was not mentioned.

All in all, the Quad foreign ministers' summit tried to showcase the group's commitment to establish a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. With conflict and turmoil manifesting in several global frontiers, the Indo-Pacific remains vulnerable to instability caused by manifold challenges. Steadfast cooperation among Quad countries will remain essential in safeguarding regional peace and stability.

The review seeks to assess whether the group remains aligned with Trump's 'America first' agenda of foreign policy. A negative outcome for Australia from this assessment poses the risk of critically impairing Canberra-Washington ties, as well as destabilising the Indo-Pacific maritime

How Square is Quadrilateral?

security architecture. India is, too, seen vulnerable, in the aftermath of Trump's claims of brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan post Operation Sindoor. The US periodic insinuations about existing imbalances in India's trade policies vis-à-vis the US have also cast a shadow of uncertainty over the otherwise speedy pace of progress in bilateral relations between the two countries.

Given such looming uncertainties, closure of a trade deal between Washington and Beijing poses questions about cooperation with India. With that backdrop, the Quad joint statement outlined four key areas that will guide the group's agenda. These include maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response.

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Algo of BlissTech

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THE SPEAKING TREE

Where Rivers Meet & Merge

NARAYAN SIRDASAI

The place where two or more rivers meet is called a sangam, or a prasang. In Uttarakhand, there are several prominent prangs, including Vishnuprayag, Karnaprayag, Nandaprayag, Rudraprayag and Devprayag. At Devprayag, rivers Alaknanda and Bhagirathi combine to form the holy Ganga. There are many confluences in India, the main being at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, known as Prayagrah in Uttar Pradesh.

In India, a sangam is considered a holy place and a pilgrimage site where devotees perform puja, rituals and ancestral rites, often with a view to attaining good health and progress in their own lives and the well-being of the loved ones. It is the place where two rivers coming from different sources and directions meet to form a new river, which then continues its onward journey towards the ocean. The sangam's sacredness is a spiritual significance because it is a place where, metaphorically speaking, two incoming rivers drop their birth, their identity and give birth to a new river.

Real spiritual effort is about erasing the ego and reclaiming one's divine nature. It is the ego, the idea of being a separate individual from the Self or whole, which is the primary cause of selfishness, violence, misery and suffering. Pilgrimage to a sangam reminds us that the way to benediction, contentment and bliss lies in effacing one's ego.

The writer is former Tel Beijing correspondent

Chat Room

They're the World, We're the Children

Agropec 'Niti Anyang Set to Unveil Plan for Elderly Care' by Yogita Sethi (Jul 3), the plan is highly appreciated, since there has been a general increase in life expectancy and deceleration in births due to two- or one-child families as a result of family welfare programs and increasing cost of living. What's required are paid old-age homes, and two- or one-room flats for couples and singles, as well as free accommodation for the poor and disabled, for medical care, food, recreation facilities, etc. with attendants. An integrated implementation of the plan for the old with the highest degree of accountability should be promoted. High accountability in old-age homes in advanced economies has led to the post-pandemic demand for old-age homes is rising, but safety is a major concern. Further, make gov pension tax-free, with free medical aid up to ₹10 lakh. In the dark of their lives, the old need to unwind softly before passing into another world. A. L. Agarwal

Former prof, economics, IIT Delhi