



Double trouble

The Aadhaar seems the default bet to restrict a voter to one polling location

The integrity of the electoral system in India is dependent upon the confidence reposed in it by prospective voters and the participatory political parties. In recent years, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has drawn flak – from overblown to deserved reasons – from political parties and civil society activists concerned about trends in Indian democracy. A new complaint after recent State elections relates to the increased number of electors in the Assembly polls when compared to the numbers registered in the general election for the same year (2024). While a report in *The Hindu* found that such discrepancies in electorate registration were not unusual when compared to previous election cycles, the question raised vociferously by the Opposition Congress party) as to how a State such as Maharashtra registered an increase of 48 lakh voters in just six months since the general election has not been adequately answered by the ECI. This along with the ECI's disclosure that the nature of registration allowed for different electors to have the same Electors Photo Identification Card (EPIC) number, has allowed Opposition parties, particularly the Trinamool Congress, to raise questions about the credibility of the registration process. What is worrisome is the possibility of electors voting across States.

Prima facie, this discrepancy in EPIC numbers – which the ECI has averred that it will rectify by updating the numbers in its voter database to make them unique – is not problematic. Even if the EPIC number is shared by different voters, they can only vote with their verified IDs. Yet, the larger problem, of a possibility of a voter having multiple EPIC numbers across different States, calls the process in question. For example, a migrant voter can vote in a particular State of residence and in his/her home State if elections are held in close succession as there is a good possibility of the duplicate EPIC number remaining in the database. The most effective solution would be to link the Aadhaar number and biometric verification for voting. But this is still not foolproof. The Aadhaar's purpose is to identify residents, and not citizens, and would have to be supplemented by another proof for voting eligibility. Second, an Aadhaar number on electoral rolls could result in misuse such as profiling, and the ECI has to make it when the rolls are made available to political parties. Besides, biometric verification for de-duplication should be supplemented with clear alternative identity verification as the former has the potential of excluding genuine voters because of technological failures. The ECI must be open to undertaking a clear de-duplication exercise that will allow a voter to have only one EPIC number and voter ID, with the eligibility to vote only in their area of residence.

Against domination

The US is seeking to dictate the terms of engagement in space

Just as Firefly Aerospace became the first private entity to soft-land a robotic lander on the moon on March 2, NASA acting administrator Janet Petro said "the way that we keep America first is by dominating in all the domains of space. And the domain... we're going to capture... is going to be on the surface of the moon, and around the moon". The comment was objectionable in its essence, but also carries a lesson for the rest of the spacefaring world. The U.S. space programme remains the wealthiest and most farsighted in modern history. But like U.S. President Donald Trump, she seems to have lost sight of the difference between leadership and domination. Just as the conduct of Mr. Trump and the U.S. Vice-President at the White House meeting with the Ukrainian President clarified the U.S.'s self-serving priorities, so too does Ms. Petro's comment reveal a nakedly aggressive streak in American policy – in this case, what the U.S. sees as its rightful place in humankind's aspirations about space.

The moon and celestial space, and the material and intellectual resources required to access them, are part of the Great Commons and they are already suffering the effects of a growing tide of protectionism worldwide, exacerbated by gaps between the evolution of law and the pace of innovation. Regulatory clarity is emerging very slowly and is often stunted. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recently said that it cannot be held responsible for the fragments of a SpaceX rocket that fell over Poland because the FAA lost oversight once SpaceX had lost control of it. Given the bent of the FAA's and Ms. Petro's statements, there is no reason these commons will escape the U.S.'s reckless visions of domination without proactive decision-making. In the absence of the ability to defy its government's orders, NASA's position risks endangering international cooperation – an enviable edifice assembled over decades in the face of an expensive, perilous, time-consuming affair – in space flight, often with NASA input. Irrespective of Ms. Petro's tenure at NASA, her words indicate that the helplessness is not beyond being expected to further Mr. Trump's inflammatory rhetoric, if not agenda, in space and as well as on the ground. The cooperation must resist this. Given the Trump administration's attitudes towards other cooperative efforts, such as the fight against climate change, which demand internationalism over provincialism, it is imperative that national and supranational space bodies, including the Indian Space Research Organisation, come together to cultivate mechanisms to resist unilateral action in space, if not prevent it altogether.

In February this year, the Union Finance Minister introduced the Income-Tax Bill, 2025, in Parliament. If enacted, the legislation will replace the Income-Tax Act, 1961, and, according to the government, will simplify the law for both taxpayers and administrators alike.

The current law, of 1961, the government claims, has become unwieldy and unclear not only for the common person but also for professionals, littered as it is with provisos, exceptions, and non-obstante clauses. The newly designed draft purports to clear the fog and foster greater certainty in taxation, with a view to reducing litigation and creating a fairer, more predictable tax environment.

There can be little doubt that these are worthy causes to pursue. But a reading of the Bill shows us that behind the cosmetic and structural alterations that it seeks to make, little else will change. Many of the complexities and ambiguities that plague the current legislation remain unbroken. And, in some areas, the Bill seeks to make into law a set of powers that are troublingly authoritarian, even more so than what the present, already severe, legislation permits.

Jurisdictions across the world have tried to move towards legislative drafting that promotes the use of plain language. The underlying idea is that laws should be more accessible to the broader public, thereby enhancing transparency and making governments more accountable.

Some critics argue that plain language and precision do not always go hand in hand – that the technicality of legalese ensures greater accuracy and specificity; that a quest for clarity can at times come at the cost of exactness.

However, global examples have shown us that simplifying legal language is not necessarily detrimental to accuracy. In fact, clearer laws can help eliminate confusion, improve compliance and ultimately reduce litigation.

Complex and knotty text

But the Bill, despite its vaunted objective, scarcely embraces this approach. It continues to rely on dense and convoluted text, doing little to make the law more accessible to the common taxpayer. For instance, we are led to believe that the replacement of the phrase "notwithstanding anything contained to the contrary..." with the words "irrespective of anything to the contrary" will help simplify the law.

The use of the term "notwithstanding" denotes what lawyers describe as a "non-obstante" clause; it has a rich legal history attached to it. In theory, the word "irrespective" ought to now be accorded the same meaning, but it is hard to comprehend how this change helps unravel the law to the everyday taxpayer.



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It is worth bearing in mind that fiscal laws are not the easiest to draft in simple terms. But the Bill's failure here emanates at least partly out of the absence of any change in government policy. The state's approach to how it taxes income remains what it has been for years. In the absence of any fundamental adjustment in the law's basic thrust, the draft winds up akin to something of a manual or a digest – a marginally more concise guide to the existing 1961 law.

The Bill does seek to remove a few of the outdated redundancies in the prevailing statute. In places, definitions have been made crisper, and some of the timelines and compliance requirements have been consolidated into tables and schedules. But all of this could well have been achieved through streamlined amendments rather than a complete overhauling of the existing statute.

What is more, for all the efforts that the Bill seeks to make, its provisions continue to perplex. The framers appear to have overlooked the fact that a mere shifting of timelines from clauses and paragraphs to tables and schedules will not eliminate the law's inherently litigious nature, especially when those tables include cross-references to other sections of the Act.

Cosmetic matters

To make matters worse, despite its intended repeal, the new law will also incorporate by reference some of the existing legislation's clauses. For example, the term "income" is defined under Section 2(49) to include a series of things such as profits and gains, dividend and allowances, as well as everything covered under Section 2(24) of the present law. If a definition needs reference to the old legislation, one might well wonder what we are really gaining from this exercise.

Bringing about textual alterations without altering the statute's basic philosophy presents another problem. Since 1961, India's courts have rigorously interpreted the legislation's provisions, clarifying the law for taxpayers. Now, changes made through the Bill may reopen settled debates, subjecting the same provisions to renewed interpretation. The result might well be more litigation and less certainty.

Consider one of the more heavily contested areas under the Act: the power of the income-tax authorities to reopen completed assessments. Until April 2021, the Revenue could make reassessments only if it had "reason to believe" that income had escaped the tax net – a phrase that sparked endless court battles. The law was then changed to allow reassessments wherever authorities had "information" suggesting income had escaped assessment. The term "information" was defined to include, among other things, data obtained through a "risk management strategy"

framed by the Central Board of Direct Taxes. However, in a law brimming with definitions, "risk management strategy" remained undefined. Although some of these gaps have been addressed by the courts, delegating critical power to the executive has opened the door to potential abuse. The Bill does little to filter this provision. Instead, it adopts the existing text and rearranges its structure. It is difficult to see how this approach will alleviate litigation.

The point of search and seizure

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Bill is its approach to search and seizure. The current law grants to the taxman enormous police power to search persons and their properties, and seize goods found during a search. Although this authority has been upheld by the courts previously, its validity following the Supreme Court of India's judgment in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India* (2017), where the fundamental right to privacy was affirmed, is suspect.

Rather than addressing this concern, the Bill extends the power of search into new domains. It does so by allowing officials to inspect "any information stored in an electronic media or computer system". A computer system is defined widely to include all manners of data storage and what is described as a "virtual digital space" – among other things, email servers, social media accounts and digital application platforms. Should a taxpayer deny access to these spaces, the authorities can now override access codes to enter the system.

In sanctioning this the Bill marks a significant departure from the law as it stands, which does not explicitly permit digital intrusions. Until now, officers have still been demanding access to laptops and hard disks, although it could be contended that these directions are in breach of the law. But if the Bill is enacted, officials, in the furtherance of a search, can legitimately trawl through emails and messages received and sent on Gmail, X, or Instagram, and every other such platform.

In times where digital communication is so deeply integrated into both professional and personal life, to permit government easy access to intimate and sensitive data is fraught with danger. The Bill offers no judicial oversight over these powers. To the contrary, it enables authorities to keep to themselves the reasons undergirding a search.

When the Select Committee of the Lok Sabha scrutinises the Bill, it may well find that this is an exercise best shelved. Rather than a sweeping effort at repeal and reenactment, we may be better served if Parliament can tidy up some of the misgivings in the present law and rid it of its more draconian commands.

Remodelling the UAE-India aviation partnership

During a recent tour of the Navi Mumbai International Airport in Maharashtra, I was left deeply impressed by the scale of India's aviation ambitions. Navi Mumbai International Airport has the potential to serve as a game-changer in taking India's aviation sector to exciting new heights, providing new avenues for the Indian travelling public to benefit from an increasingly inter-connected world.

As the pace of growth in India's aviation sector – it is already the world's third-largest domestic market in terms of passenger numbers – continues to quicken and the Government of India's initiatives such as the Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) airport scheme are rapidly implemented, it is essential that an equally visionary approach to regulation and international partnerships is also considered.

The UAE as a vital travel destination

For decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has proven itself to be a close strategic partner and friend to India. Today, the UAE is India's most significant outbound travel market, with over 4.5 million Indian tourists visiting the UAE in 2023. Every week, Indian carriers fly over 600 times to the UAE, while UAE carriers operate over 500 weekly services to India. On the surface, these numbers appear significant. However, they are far below meeting current, let alone, future consumer demand.

The impact of what is effectively a mismatch between supply and demand has directly contributed to spiralling ticket prices and a lack of choice for the UAE and Indian travelling public alike.

Under current bilateral air service arrangements, the UAE's carriers are limited to



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operating to a total of only 15 Indian cities, thus having no choice but to ignore the consistent demands of key Indian growth centres, including Surat, Visakhapatnam, Indore, Tiruchirappalli and Patna to operate services. Similarly, Indian carriers are unable to increase their level of frequencies to Dubai, despite unprecedented interest from Indians to visit family and engage in business and leisure activities in this vital global hub.

The benefits of a modernised strategy

With estimates suggesting that for every 1% increase in Indian passport holders, a further 10 million Indians will seek to travel overseas, this situation will only grow more acute. Restrictive bilateral regulations will contribute to further increases in the price of airline tickets, limit the ability of Indian citizens to travel abroad, and potentially inhibit the advancement of broader UAE-India investment, trade, and economic partnerships.

Just as the UAE and India have expanded cooperation through trade agreements such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), there is an urgent need for a more progressive and open approach on aviation. A modernised aviation strategy will act as an economic multiplier, drive investment, and ensure that our aviation partnership can become a key pillar of regional and international connectivity and growth.

Beyond revisiting the regulatory frameworks that guide our aviation relationship, the UAE is keen to support, through new investments and partnerships, India's ambition to become a global aviation powerhouse.

Whether this support is in the form of

knowledge-sharing and the training of Indian pilots, partnering in India's rapidly emerging aviation maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) industry, promoting India's globally renowned tourism sector, investing in the Indian government's UDAN airport scheme to better connect Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities, or in achieving win-win outcomes for our respective airline carriers, it is imperative that we seek new areas of collaboration in this critically important sector.

Cooperation over competition

Fundamentally, an opportunity exists to establish a combined sky and aviation eco-system that privileges cooperation over competition. Through greater engagement, we can ensure that the respective aviation sectors of both our countries are able to grow and succeed, whilst offering the citizens of the UAE and India the ability to connect, engage, and thrive.

Just as Dubai and Abu Dhabi benefit from their status as global aviation hubs, cities throughout India have the potential to attain similar levels of seamless connectivity. By better connecting and supporting the aviation ambitions of emerging Indian cities, we can together ensure that inclusive and sustainable economic growth are felt not only within India, but also far beyond its borders.

Enhanced cooperation in the aviation sector is just one example of how the UAE-India partnership can evolve to unlock new avenues of mutually beneficial growth and integration. Building upon the significant strides we have achieved over recent years in our bilateral strategic ties, even the sky is not the limit in what we can achieve in our aviation partnership.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Online 'vulgarity'

In the report, "SC seeks regulatory steps against 'vulgarity' online" (March 4), the counsel's argument that his client – the YouTuber who is now in trouble – "had no sense of humour" and that "the prohibition would affect his livelihood and that of his 280 employees" is ludicrous. Self restraint must form a part of forethought. Of late, social media platforms have content that will have a harmful effect on innocent and sensitive minds and affect the age-old institution

of family and its values. It is time that there is some sort of censorship machinery to rein in those managing social media platforms.

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad

Online vulgarity is a major concern as it remains unchecked and uncensored. Unless a controversy breaks out, the purveyors continue to ply their trade unmindful of the fact that they are transgressing all limits. When comedy turns puerile it ceases to be wholesome and those who laugh at

body shaming or crass and coarse comments should have their heads examined.

C.V. Aravind, Bengaluru

Go forth and multiply

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's advice to people in the State to have more children as a way to handle the delimitation issue is strange. Instead, he could advise them to learn Hindi. Under British rule, people from Tamil Nadu mastered the alien language, English, and dominated the British

administration. People from the State can now do the same thing with Hindi.

P. Vasudeva Rao, Secunderabad

This is a strange, immature and unwarranted piece of advice and will dull the perception of Mr. Stalin having a "strong and clear mind".

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Admission criterion

Getting a B.Com (Hons) seat at Delhi University north campus is a dream for

many like me who have a commerce background. But, all of sudden, our hard work and aspirations have been destroyed by the National Testing Agency and Delhi University after a change in the eligibility criterion. Mathematics is now a compulsory subject, replacing the earlier option of accountancy. We were informed about the change recently. Is this the "inclusivity" that Delhi University and testing agencies talk about? Delhi University says that we can apply for the B.Com

programme but this is a course that is not even found in most of the top colleges. For the last three years, since the Central University Entrance Test was introduced, B.Com (Hons) was a course that anyone who did either mathematics or accountancy could apply for. This unfair decision affects thousands. Shashy Srivastava, New Delhi

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

Designing India's AI Safety Institute

India's Artificial Intelligence (AI) ambitions took a significant leap forward when Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced that the country would launch an indigenous AI model and establish an AI Safety Institute (AIISI) under the Safe and Trusted Pillar of the IndiaAI Mission.

Rather than relying on rigid regulations that may quickly become outdated, governments worldwide are establishing AIISs to address potential AI risks. Since 2023, the U.K., the U.S., Singapore, and Japan, among others, are setting up AIISs. These are not just government-backed research/testing institutes, but a part of the global AI network that seeks to facilitate "common technical understanding of AI risks". Recently, the U.K.'s AIISI unveiled its open source platform called "Inspect" to evaluate models in a range of areas such as their core knowledge, ability to reason, and autonomous capabilities. The U.S.'s AIISI convened an inter-departmental taskforce to tackle national security and public safety risks posed by AI. Singapore's AIISI is focusing on content assurance, safe model design, and rigorous testing. Each of these initiatives underscores the need for technical rigour and international collaboration.

India-specific solutions
India must prioritise imminent local concerns. A critical issue is AI systems' inaccuracy and their potential to perpetuate discrimination in an Indian setting. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) announced that the AIISI is set to operate on a hub-and-spoke model, collaborating with academic institutions, startups, industry players, and government departments. This will ensure that India's unique socioeconomic landscape, linguistic diversity, and technological gaps are addressed. India's vibrant startup ecosystem offers valuable lessons.



Rutuja Poo
Lead, Government Affairs, Ilegal Law



Arya Pachisia
Associate, Ilegal Law

Startups such as Karyia are tackling the problem of unrepresentative data by empowering rural communities to create high-quality datasets in Indian languages. Others are advancing multilingual AI development, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. These efforts highlight how India-specific solutions can address technical challenges while fostering social equity. India's AIISI should build on such initiatives.

The Indian AIISI is already seeking to advance indigenous research and development, leveraging Indian datasets. Under the Safe and Trusted pillar, the IndiaAI Mission has already selected eight Responsible AI Projects and launched a second round of Expression of Interest. This focuses on critical areas such as watermarking and labelling, ethical AI frameworks, risk assessment and management, and deep-fake detection tools.

Simultaneously, our AIISI should collaborate with global AIISs to understand and mitigate global risks. It should take a leaf from the Bletchley Declaration, signed at the U.K. AI Safety Summit, which focuses on global threats such as cybersecurity threats and disinformation.

Common global understanding
India's AIISI cannot operate in isolation. To effectively govern AI, it must strike a balance between local relevance and global alignment. This requires adopting international standards while adapting them to India's context. Interoperability is key, as it enables seamless collaboration and accountability across borders.

A crucial first step is to establish a global standardised AI safety taxonomy. Today, technical experts, policymakers, social scientists, and legal professionals may use varying terminologies for discussing AI-related concerns. This divergence and the inherent complexity of AI systems creates communication barriers that hinder safety assessments. A

standardised taxonomy would enable meaningful multidisciplinary research by ensuring all stakeholders speak the same language when evaluating AI systems and also clearly attribute responsibilities across the AI supply chain.

Second, India's AIISI must also support the creation of an international notification framework for AI model development. This framework would encourage AIISs worldwide to share information about the purpose and potential impact of powerful AI models. Such transparency would enable coordinated governance and help India prepare digital infrastructure for the safe deployment of advanced AI systems.

India's leadership within the Global South places it in a unique position to champion inclusive AI governance. Many emerging economies lack the resources and technical expertise to establish their own AIISs. India can lead a collective effort in the Global South to co-develop AI safety frameworks and evaluation metrics to tackle local challenges.

The MeitY-UNESCO collaboration on India's AI readiness provides a strong foundation by identifying gaps in ethical development and deployment of AI. Leveraging these insights, India's AIISI can develop comprehensive frameworks and guidelines that promote both safe AI development and deployment. Additionally, through the ongoing projects under IT Ministry's IndiaAI Mission, India is focusing on themes such as machine unlearning, synthetic data generation, AI bias mitigation, and privacy-enhancing tools. These can serve as the building blocks of a robust AI safety ecosystem. India's AIISI should develop indigenous tools and frameworks that embed responsible AI principles by design. At the same time, it must actively engage with the global AI network to ensure interoperability and collaboration.

Anatomy of three riot-like situations

The challenge is to identify potentially provocative content before it goes viral

STATE OF PLAY

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After the Delhi Assembly election results were announced, a social media post showing Opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, and Arvind Kejriwal being scantly clad, with Arabic verses written on their bodies, sparked tensions in Udayagiri, a locality with a significant Muslim population in Mysuru, on the night of February 10.

A large crowd gathered in front of Udayagiri police station demanding action against the man who had put up the post. Though the police arrested him, there were rumours that he was being released on bail. A local Maulvi reportedly addressed the crowd with a provocative speech, which allegedly incited violence. The crowd threw stones at the police, injuring 14 personnel.

This is the third riot-like situation that has been created in Karnataka over the last five years. The earlier incidents occurred in D.J. Halli in Bengaluru in August 2020 and Hubballi in April 2022. Each time, the script has been the same.

In the earlier cases too, large crowds of Muslims gathered outside police stations to lodge complaints against provocative social media posts against Islam. Even as the police arrested those responsible for the posts, the anger of the mob did not subside and eventually turned against the police. In D.J. Halli, the police opened fire, killing four.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which was in power in the State during the first two disturbances, invoked the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act



(UAPA), 1967, and handed over the probe to the National Investigation Agency amidst opposition to invoking the UAPA as "unwarranted". In the Udayagiri case, the police have booked rioting cases against vandals.

The police in Karnataka seem to be struggling with how multiple elements — extreme communal polarisation, hate speeches, and organised provocative content on social media — feed each other in a vicious cycle online and in the real world. In an attempt to address this problem, the police have begun social media monitoring cells at the district level. Police have filed numerous suo motu cases whenever they come across such "inflammatory and derogatory" content.

However, the challenge is to identify such potentially provocative content before it goes viral and leads to law-and-order situations. The limited software that the district cells have is not compatible with regional languages, does not read what is written on images (as was the problem in the Udayagiri case), and scans only posts but not the comments section of these posts.

This has essentially left police personnel at these cells with no option but to surf through the vast volumes of content on social media to check for objectionable content. They also have lists of accounts that are prone to post

such content in their districts. While monitoring open platforms such as Facebook and X is one challenge, monitoring private channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram is close to impossible. For instance, in 2022, there was disturbance in Hubballi after a WhatsApp video showed a safe from flag over a mosque.

Such social media monitoring by the police has also led to overreach, with many cases being booked against people for criticising the ruling party. There was a sudden spike in the number of sedition cases booked over social media posts in the 2019-2022 period. According to a study by Article 14, in 2021, Karnataka featured first on the list of the number of people booked for sedition for social media posts in the 2010-2021 period.

It has been proved time and again that only community outreach and trust between the local police, leadership, and the community can prevent escalation of situations.

In D.J. Halli and Hubballi, the crowds were allegedly brought together by what are seen as "Muslim parties", which have been accused of trying to thrive on religious polarisation. In Udayagiri, the crowd was allegedly assembled by a Maulvi. In all these cases, those who mobilised the crowds initially to capitalise on the inflammatory content failed to control it eventually, even when they tried to, say the police.

But these instances show that this is not merely a policing problem; it is a larger social and political issue. With the minority community frequently coming under attack both online and offline by Hindu groups, religious polarisation has intensified, and pent-up frustration is spilling out to the streets.

Government talks big on gender budget, delivers little

Gujarat allocates more than 37% of its Budget to women, whereas Maharashtra allocates a mere 3%

DATA POINT

Shabana Mitra,
Sharvani Prakash,
Anjana Ramesh

The Union and State governments regularly talk about their commitment to women's empowerment. One of the four pillars of a Viksit Bharat 2047 is *mahila* or woman. The Finance Minister mentioned women several times in her 74-minute speech during the Union Budget.

One of the most powerful tools to show commitment to the cause of women's empowerment is through fiscal backing. This year, the gender budget has increased to 8.9% of the overall Budget. **Chart 1** shows the gender budget over the years as a share of the overall Budget (in percentage). It is important to note here that there is no separate gender budget in the overall Budget; this term simply refers to all the allocations to women-led schemes under various ministries and departments.

Where does the money go? Gender budgets have three components: Part A comprises schemes with 100% provision for women and girls; Part B comprises schemes with 30-99% allocations for women and girls; and Part C reflects schemes with allocations for women and girls below 30% of the provision. Part C was introduced only in the 2024-25 Budget. Over time, as seen in **Chart 2**, the proportion of Part A has decreased and the proportion of Part B has increased.

Since the inception of the concept of a gender budget, the highest number of ministries/departments (49) have reported allocations for gender-related schemes this year. Twelve new ministries/departments have reported allocations for gender-related schemes this year. This indicates that there is a push to diversify the gender budget from the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

ment. Around 10 ministries/departments have reported more than 30% of their allocations to gender-related schemes for FY 2025-26.

In her Budget speech, the Finance Minister mentioned increased allocations to women and said that this has been made possible by increasing funds for women-led enterprises. The Budget mentions several promises for women and women-led development, especially in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) space. But is the Budget really going to cater to all this?

Only 0.7% of the gender budget has been allocated to the Ministry of MSMEs (**Chart 3**). The Ministry offers schemes such as the Mahila Coir Yojana, the Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme, and the Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries. The allocation for skill development of women in the entrepreneurial space is only ₹38.4 crore, which is 0.0009% of the gender budget. Surprisingly, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and the Capacity Building and Skill Development Scheme under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has only been allocated around 0.23% of the gender budget.

Almost 10% of the gender budget has been allocated to the Department of School Education and Literacy and the Department of Higher Education. Education and technical training are among the pillars of sustainable long-term growth. They provide a highly literate and skilled workforce. These investments will also effectively close the gender gap in the labour market. Investments such as these are a step towards Viksit Bharat.

The agricultural industry that has contributed the most to the increased female labour force participation rate over the years has only been allotted 4.2% of the gender budget. Interestingly, ₹15,000 crore out of the ₹18,739 crore of

the allocation to the Agriculture Department is to the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme, which falls under Part C. Under the scheme, income support of ₹6,000 per year in three equal instalments is provided to all land-holding farmer families. However, since the land that the women work on is mostly owned by men, they will not benefit from the scheme.

In 2023-24, 64.5% of women (15-59 years) cited childcare and personal commitments as the reason for not working, indicating the urgent need for childcare services. However, Saksham Anganwadi and the Poshan 2.0 scheme have only been allocated 3.9% of the gender budget. More importantly, this share has not increased significantly in the past few years.

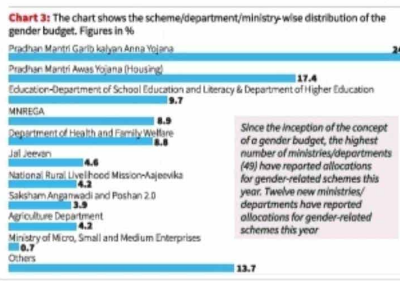
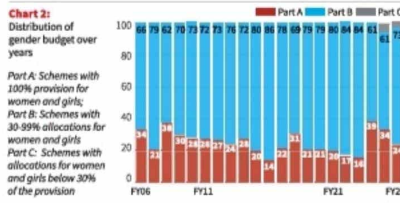
Approximately 17.5% has been allocated to the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing scheme). Also, 8.9% of the gender budget has been allotted to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. While these schemes do empower women, it is important to invest in skill development and provide child and elderly care for long-term empowerment. For a Viksit Bharat, there needs to be focussed investments towards women-led development in the domains of manufacturing and finance.

Further, the States have varied experiences with allocating funds to women-centric programmes. Gujarat allocates more than 37% of its budget to women, whereas Maharashtra allocates a mere 3%. Therefore, though there is much conversation about women being the pillars of economic growth in India, the Union and State governments are not backing really this promise. Without state support, it is going to be challenging to achieve gender parity or work towards women-led development.

Shabana Mitra, Sharvani Prakash and Anjana Ramesh are researchers at ICRIER

Tipping the scales

The data for the charts were sourced from India's Budget documents. They include the author's computation of gender budgets



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 5, 1975

France may offer Indian firms sub-contracts in W. Asia

New Delhi, March 4: France is likely to place substantial orders for equipment by way of sub-contracts with Indian firms both in the public and the private sector for the large number of development projects being set up with its assistance in the West Asian countries. Such sub-contracting will be made under schemes for development co-operation which are currently under discussion with Mr. De Mioriel, leader of the official French economic delegation, which is now in the capital. Mr. De Mioriel called on the Union Finance Minister, Mr. C. Subramaniam, this evening and had talks with him lasting for over 30 minutes.

France is also likely to provide assistance for the construction of submarine pipe lines for the transportation of crude oil to the coast from the Bombay High off-shore oil-fields when the development wells in the area are completed and start commercial production. The Union Finance Ministry is understood to have drawn up a large number of areas in which technical co-operation between France and India could be established. The object of Mr. De Mioriel's present visit to India is to make a "tour d'horizon" of the entire gamut of development cooperation between the two countries both within India and in the third countries. The subjects identified by the Finance Ministry cover fertilizers, electronics, communications, agriculture, oil exploration, etc.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 5, 1925

Tax on sea passengers in Burma

Rangoon, March 4: The expulsion of the Offender Bill and Tax on Sea Passengers' Bill, published by the Government for criticism, have elicited comments of the press. A representative of European, Indian and Burman opinion. The first Bill is to authorise expulsion of Non-Burmans convicted of criminal offences or ordered to furnish security for good behaviour. The second is to impose a tax of five rupees on persons entering Burma by sea to prevent loss of revenue from non-payment of capitation tax in Lower Burma and Thathameda in Upper Burma by immigrants.

Kashmir university has a plan to help farmers manage a dry summer

Kashmir had a dry winter this year, with a rainfall deficit of around 80% in anticipation, researchers at SKUAST have prepared planting and adaptation strategies for farmers in the region; this includes measures to preserve moisture, micro-irrigation, crop rotation plans, and the creation of a seed stock

Hirra Azmat

From seed distribution to crop calendars, the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) has an action plan to tackle the dry conditions it expects in Kashmir this summer.

Kashmir has had a dry winter this year, with the months of January and February recording a rainfall deficit of around 80%. Even though the weather department had forecast a wet spell until February 28, there has also been a significant shortfall of snow in Kashmir, plus the attendant consequences.

Crop contingency plan

Experts have previously warned that if the dry weather continued, it could lead to a drought-like situation in the subsequent spring and summer. They have also stressed that it could severely affect water-dependent sectors such as irrigated agriculture (paddy), horticulture, hydroelectric power production, and even drinking water supply.

Forests are also at risk of wildfires and a few have already been reported.

In anticipation, researchers at SKUAST have prepared planting and adaptation strategies for farmers in the region.

Asif Bashir Shikari, head of the National Seed Project at SKUAST, said Kashmir has been experiencing erratic weather for several years now. This year, the snowless winter has left the region in a precarious situation.

He added that SKUAST has prepared a "crop contingency plan" led by its vice-chancellor, Nazir Ganai, for short- and long-term mitigation of a drought-like situation.

"Briefly, our action plan for these weather fluctuations operates on two fronts. First, on logistics support, what we provide to farmers and other stakeholders in terms of benefits and support in a situation like drought; and second, it comprises farm advisory services," Asif said. "Among agricultural inputs, seed availability is the most important, especially in drought-like conditions, where having the right planting material is paramount."

"Annually, we require 1.5 lakh quintals of seed, with farmers specifically depending on certified seed. To meet this demand, the university produces at least 100 quintals of breeder seed of field and vegetable crops," he added.

The scientist stressed that in case of a drought-like situation, he and his peers recommend the consumption of crops other than rice and "accordingly facilitate the enhanced seed availability of drought-tolerant maize varieties and hybrids, such as SMC-8 and SMH-5, and



The old Mehjoor Nagar Bridge on February 19, 2025, following a prolonged dry spell in Srinagar. PTI

pulses, as these crops are more resilient to dry conditions. Pulses, in particular, require less water and can still produce a reasonable yield with minimal losses."

Helping crops survive

"Apart from seed management, we emphasise implementing other drought mitigation strategies. For vegetable crops, techniques like mulching – covering the topsoil with material such as bark, wood chips, leaves, and other organic material in order to preserve moisture and improve the soil condition – can be practiced," Asif said.

Experts also recommended using anti-transpirant agents, which block plants from releasing water into the air. Similar measures are applied to horticultural crops like apples.

"We also promote micro-irrigation systems, such as drip irrigation, by installing demonstration units in farmers' fields. Water-saving technologies such as mist sprayers are already in use in saffron fields," according to Asif. "Through these combined efforts, we aim to help farmers adapt to changing weather conditions and sustain agricultural productivity."

Helping crops survive also means keeping pests at bay. With rising temperatures, pests that were previously docile have become invasive and more active. For example, a common pest called aphids completes its life cycle much faster and produces more generations per year in warmer weather. Leaf miner blotch, a pest of apple crops, has graduated from being a minor to a major concern for the same reason, researchers said. "This necessitates issuing advisories to farmers and suggesting innovative chemical control



We cultivate fodder seeds in Jammu. Last year, we produced 300 quintals of foundation seed and supplied it to the Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

measures in such situations," Zafar Mehdi, associate professor in the Division of Basic Sciences and Humanities at SKUAST, said.

The action plan has multiple categories of advisory services. "The meteorological department provides weather data, and based on that, we develop crop calendars." These calendars specify normal crop cycles as well as alternate crops that should be planted in case of drought conditions," Zafar added.

"Take Budgam, for example, a significant vegetable-producing region," Asif said. "Abrupt climatic changes in the Kashmir Valley, including rising temperatures and incidence of drought, threaten vegetable crop production. Kharif vegetables, particularly those from the Solanaceae and Cucurbitaceae families, suffer from heat and water stress, affecting germination, pollen sterility, growth, and yield."

The corresponding interventions in this scenario, he continued, include selecting heat-tolerant crops to plant, like fava bean, and cowpea, as well as short-duration varieties.

He also suggested adjusting the planting schedules, using improved seedling production techniques, and employing techniques that conserve soils' nutrients and moisture.

"Efficient irrigation methods like drip and micro-sprinkler systems, along with organic soil amendments and foliar nutrition, can enhance resilience and ensure sustainable vegetable production," Asif added.

A persistent problem

Unlike food crops, however, fruit crops can't be rescued by crop rotation. They need direct mitigation strategies. "For example, advisories outline the necessary sprays for early blooming, including applications of growth regulators," according to Asif. "If almond trees bloom early, specific measures are suggested to protect the fruit. Similarly, in the event of water loss, sprays containing anti-transpirants and other essential chemicals are recommended."

He added that the availability of fodder seed has also been a persistent problem because the local production of seeds is limited. And in a drought-like situation, the production drops further.

"Since fodder is typically harvested at the green stage, seed production does not occur within the valley. However, seed production is essential, and the university has taken significant steps in this regard. As part of a strategic approach, we cultivate fodder seeds in the Jammu region. Last year, we produced approximately 300 quintals of foundation seed and supplied it to the Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry for further multiplication," Asif said.

(Hirra Azmat is a Kashmir-based journalist who writes extensively on health and the environment. Her stories have appeared in various local and national publications. azmathirra@gmail.com)

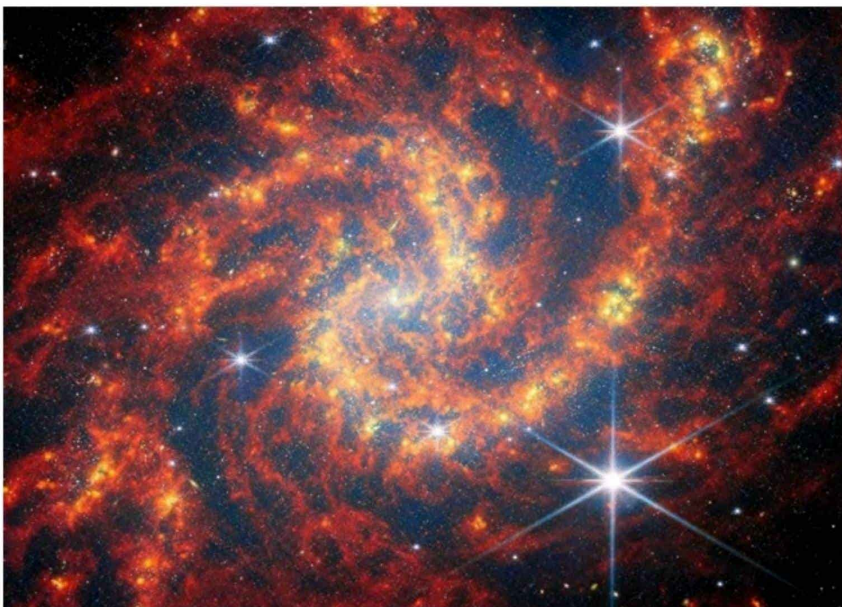
THE GIST

The action plan for weather fluctuations supports farmers by providing logistics, farm advisory services, and breeder seed produced by SKUAST. The right planting material is paramount in drought-like conditions.

Researchers aid with drought mitigation strategies like mulching. They also advise on the use of anti-transpirant agents, promote micro-irrigation systems, and develop crop calendars which specify alternate crops to be planted in case of drought.

Fruit crops can't be rescued by rotation. They need direct mitigation, which includes sprays for early blooming and growth regulators. In the event of water loss, sprays containing anti-transpirants and other chemicals are recommended.

BIG SHOT



The Webb space telescope captured this new view of barred spiral galaxy NGC 2283 in just 10 minutes of observing time, showcasing the light from clouds of hydrogen gas heated by young stars, as well as the stars themselves. ESA/WEBB, NASA & CSA, A. LEROY

QUESTION CORNER

A finger on the carbon button

Q: What is carbon intensity?
A: Carbon intensity is a useful way to measure how

much carbon a particular sector is emitting and how it has increased or decreased over time. Usually, sectors have their own ways to measure their progress.

The steel sector may focus on the number of tonnes produced annually; the medical insurance sector may focus on the number of claims successfully fulfilled; and HR services may focus on how many hours of unproductive work they may have done away with.

The government of a country may also measure its own development by tracking, say, the GDP per capita.

In a world that is warming rapidly and desperately needs to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, carbon intensity adjusts those existing metrics to include the amount of carbon dioxide produced. For example, the carbon intensity of the steel sector can be measured as the number of tonnes produced per tonne of carbon dioxide



A country's carbon intensity can be understood by dividing the growth in GDP per capita by the carbon dioxide emitted. REUTERS

emitted. An entire country's carbon intensity can be understood by dividing the growth in GDP per capita by the amount of carbon dioxide emitted. And so on.

Recently, China said it had lowered its carbon intensity by 3.4% in 2024, missing its target of 3.9%. Some economists have said its road ahead is difficult considering China has committed to having its carbon emissions peak before 2030.

— Vasudevan Mukunth

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Growth goals in uncertain times

The recovery of the Indian economy to a 6.2% growth in the third quarter of FY25, from the revised estimate of 5.6% in the previous quarter, was not entirely unexpected. Several indicators had pointed to an improvement from the lows the economy had reached, and the data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) last week are therefore welcome. The recovery would take growth for the year so far to 6.1%. The NSO has also revised upwards its estimates for full-year growth to 6.5% from its earlier estimate of 6.4%. The revised estimates for last year's growth show the economy to have grown at 9.2% in 2023-24. But overall, there has been a deceleration in the recent quarters. The 6.2% growth rate also shows that the 6.5% target for the full year is unlikely to be met because to achieve that, the asking growth rate in the fourth quarter will have to be a high 7.6%.

The primary sector, including agriculture, has shown good performance, growing from 1.8% in the same quarter last year to 5.2%. But manufacturing and services sectors showed a decline from 12.4% and 8.3% last year to 4.8% and 7.4%, respectively. These sectors may continue to show weakness because of global uncertainties resulting from the tariff war unleashed by US President Donald Trump. A good part of India's exports may be affected by the emerging global trade scenario.

The improved performance in the third quarter is mainly the result of higher government spending and growth in private consumption expenditure. These are good auguries. Inflation is expected to moderate to 4.8% in the current financial year. But there is the risk of imported inflation created by trade issues. There is a recovery in the labour market as well. It remains to be seen if all this will sustain. Government investment may not continue at the same level, especially because the populist spending of states may constrain investment spending. The boost from the changes in income tax slabs is uncertain, and in any case, that may be for the medium term. The impact of the increase in consumption during the Kumbh Mela is also unknown as of now. Private corporate investment is difficult mainly because corporates are not ready to make large investments for many reasons including global uncertainties. The overall situation is, therefore, touched by uncertainties both on the domestic and global fronts. India will remain the fastest growing major economy but may take some hits and suffer setbacks.

Spending spurs 6.2% growth but challenge will be in sustaining momentum

Groundwater crisis: Step up action

India is facing its worst groundwater crisis in history with water resources fast depleting and available water getting increasingly contaminated. A recent study found that about 450 cubic kilometres of groundwater was lost in northern India during 2002-2021. Climate change will further accelerate the depletion in the coming years. The study conducted by experts from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) in Hyderabad said decreased rainfall during the monsoons and warming of winters will increase irrigation water demand and reduce groundwater recharge. Already, there is exploitative extraction of groundwater all over the country. According to the India Water Portal, the country uses 25% of all groundwater extracted globally; this is more than the combined consumption of the US and China. The World Bank had once estimated that 60% of the country's groundwater blocks would be in a critical condition by 2025. The year has already arrived. A UN report has said that some parts of the Indo-Gangetic basin have already passed the groundwater depletion tipping point.

Many schemes such as the Atal Bhujal Yojana were launched to ensure sustainable use of water for drinking, irrigation and other purposes but the problem has only worsened. The overdrawing of water through tube wells in Punjab and Haryana has pushed the water levels far down. Unscientific extraction of water, combined with the vagaries of weather and climate, has posed the danger of desertification in some parts of the country. The government had formulated a multi-decadal action plan (up to 2070) to regulate the use of groundwater and conserve existing resources. Rainwater harvesting plans and projects for recycling of water haven't made much progress. There is colossal wastage of water at domestic and other levels. The way forward is in ensuring greater awareness about the value of water, of economy in its use, and more effective action at individual, family, community and government levels to conserve water.

A recent Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) report has pointed out that there is a rise in water contamination across the country. It said 440 districts reported excessive nitrate levels in groundwater, up from 359 districts in 2017. Karnataka is among states that have reported the highest contamination. Fluoride and uranium contamination is also high in many states, including Karnataka. Water contamination is known to cause major health problems including Blue Baby Syndrome in infants. Excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides, hazardous waste dumping, landfills and deforestation are all causes of groundwater contamination. Steps should be taken to identify contamination and end it - Karnataka must pay special attention to the problem by initiating targeted mitigation efforts.

Contamination has also emerged as a serious threat, especially in Karnataka

COMMENT

AD HOC REFORM

Retired judges for backlog relief

Article 224A allows retired judges to adjudicate in HC's, significantly reducing pendency

B ARVIND SREVATSA AND SAAI SUDHARSAN SATHIVAMOORTHY

The issue of judicial backlog in India's High Courts has reached alarming proportions, threatening the promise of timely adjudication. The numbers paint a grim picture: 62 lakh pending cases clog the system, with criminal matters accounting for 18 lakh cases and civil disputes making up the remaining 44 lakh. These figures reflect the pressing need for systemic judicial reforms to prevent an erosion of public confidence in the rule of law. From the roots of this crisis run deep. From the demand side, the High Courts face an overwhelming caseload due to their broad jurisdiction, expansive - and often excessive - government litigation, and fast shifts in socioeconomic levels. From the supply side, procedural complexity, Byzantine administrative practices, liberal case acceptance and a high degree of judge vacancies have slowed down disposal rates.

In response, the Supreme Court has recently sought to adopt a proactive approach in tackling the backlog. Through its directions in Lok Prabhav Union of India, the Court has breathed new life into Article 224A of the Constitution, thereby allowing retired judges to sit and act as judges of High Courts. Article 224A was introduced through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1963, at a period when the government was trying to find efficient means to increase the bench strength of High Courts. Under the framework, the Chief Justice of a High Court, with the prior consent of the President, may invite a retired judge of the same or different High Court to sit temporarily as an ad hoc judge.

The original goal was clear: address temporary caseload rises without resorting to a long-term judicial expansion - a sensible, economical strategy based on resources. Furthermore, the parliamentary debates during the introduction of Article 224A underscored a guiding principle: the independence of the judiciary must remain intact. By

stipulating that retired judges could only serve if the Chief Justice deemed it necessary, and that the President must assent to the request, the framers placed a series of checks to prevent inappropriately exercising this power. The participation of several constitutional functionaries was meant to protect the bench's dignity and shield it from unjustifiable influences.

However, for many years, this provision stayed essentially inert, a constitutional curiosity gathering dust on legal books. Only recently, when the crisis of judicial delays approached a breaking point, did the actual value of Article 224A begin to be recognised. By means of its earlier directions in Lok Prabhav



v. Union of India, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court revisited it in 2021. The Court laid down comprehensive guidelines for its implementation. Portentously, the recent directions of the Court, by keeping in abeyance the conditions stipulated in its earlier judgement dated April 20, 2021, have removed the hurdles in the way of appointing ad hoc judges. The earlier directions had permitted recourse to Article 224A only if the High Court already had 80% of its regular positions filled.

The Court has now allowed High Courts to appoint ad hoc judges up to 10% of their sanctioned strength, with a minimum of two and a maximum of five per High Court. This pragmatic approach acknowledges varying case burdens across different jurisdictions. A particularly significant directive states that ad hoc judges will serve on benches alongside sitting judges, focusing on pending criminal appeals. This is a cru-

cial step, as prolonged delays in resolving criminal cases have long plagued the justice system, leaving many undertrial prisoners languishing in jails. Ensuring the swift resolution of criminal appeals is both a constitutional necessity and a moral imperative.

Temporary solution

However, as we have noted, the causes of the pendency issue are several and span both the supply and demand sides. Moreover, the appointment of ad hoc judges might only be a band-aid fix failing to deal with the underlying causes of the issue. Beyond court openings, various administrative and procedural problems limit efficient case handling. Though e-filing systems and computerisation have been around for some time, the system mostly depends on labour-intensive, delay-sensitive paper submissions and conventional court procedures. Many High Courts, for instance, allow any filing error in an electronic petition to finally call for the provision of a physical copy, thereby compromising the practical advantages of digitalisation. Ad hoc scheduling and regular adjournments, meanwhile, waste precious court time.

Further complicating the efficient organisation of daily court operations is the absence of simplified procedures to ascertain how much hearing time each item demands. Besides, excessive government litigation has to be addressed. Government agencies, whether state or federal, often jump into lawsuits as their go-to response, dragging old fights back to court or challenging every decision that doesn't go their way - even when there's hardly any money at stake. Organising screening mechanisms across government departments could help lower pointless paperwork.

No doubt the mechanism under Article 224A aligns with practices of Canada, South Africa and the UK. While the appointment of ad hoc judges may offer immediate relief, long-term solutions require structural reforms such as timely filling up of permanent vacancies and improving judicial infrastructure. A structured and transparent system for appointing ad hoc judges can further enhance results. Such reforms would actualise the constitutional tenets of justice while helping foster the nation's developmental dreams and institutional stability.

(The writers are advocates in the Madras High Court)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Not the last word yet

Typewriters never really went away, we did

SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA

Typewriters are staging a comeback, and that is undoubtedly breaking news. Everybody who has one and didn't know it had value now all of a sudden knows it has value. The humble typewriter, once a staple of offices, still holds a place of nostalgia and practical use in various cultures even today. Tom Hanks has given a spur to the antique typewriter resurgence.

My proud possession, Smith Corona, is far from being merely a relic of the past. It embodies a rich tapestry of stories, innovations, and customs that vary from time to time and country to country. Mine was sourced from a professor, and it had instantly raised my level as a writer. The keyboard to me sounded like musical notes. For me, there could

not be any news better to hear than the return of the typewriter.

The demand is strategic and is no less nostalgic. Initially considered obsolete in the digital age, typewriters are experiencing a subtle but noticeable resurgence. German politicians are considering a return to using manual typewriters for producing sensitive documents in the wake of the US surveillance scandal. The Russian government too took similar measures after the spillover impact of espionage was partially revealed.

At an individual level, however, it is increasing incidents of cybercrime that are compelling people to live an analogue life. It is forcing people to stay away from technology, enforcing them to talk less on the mobile. And for this reason, more people meet across the table with goodwill and coffee mutually exchanged.

The much talked about espionage case may have given the market a fillip, but typewriters had gained a comeback

following Richard Pol's 2017 book *The Typewriter Revolution*. Poets, writers, artists, and even students are putting words to paper and finding pleasure in generating the familiar acoustics. The typewriter's tactile feedback and the clackety-clack of typewriters. They are using the antiquated machines as a creative escape from computers and the internet.

There is more to it than meets our eyes. Typewriters use our senses to focus on one thing at a time, which helps in deepening attention. Unlike a computer, where tabs and screens distract attention. The feel of the keys and the sound of the return wheel produces a unique sensation that is unknowingly transferred onto the words.

Global Typewriter Market Report 2024 is any indication, the typewriter market will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 3% from 2023 to 2030. The tactile and mechanical feel of the typewriters will fuel its resurgence. Typewriters never really went away; we only did.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A storyteller of courage and conviction

I refer to 'Playing the role of a criminal insider is not easy' (Mar 4). The Tuesday Interview with acclaimed writer Banu Mushtaq, whose book *Heart Leap*, has been longlisted for the International Booker prize was riveting, offering a glimpse into her remarkable personality. Through her stories, Mushtaq sheds light on the trauma faced by her own Muslim community, playing a critical role as an insider with keen observation of the lives of women and girls in her community. As a writer, activist, social worker, journalist, and advocate, Mushtaq is a multifac-

ed personality. Her decision to depict Muslim characters in a more nuanced light, rather than simply portraying them as virtuous or villainous, was met with opposition from her community. Despite facing censure, ostracism, and even a murder attempt, Mushtaq has bravely overcome these challenges. It is heartening to see that other writers have stood by her, providing a much-needed moral boost. It is fervently hoped that the collection of stories will make it to the shortest and ultimately win the prize.

H R Bapu Satyanarayana, Mysuru

Laws good enough

Apologies 'SC makes morality pitch for social media purges' (Mar 4). The Supreme Court's suggestion to the Union government is fraught with the risk of bureaucratic overreach. The proposed regulatory mechanism, which aims to balance "known standards of morality" with freedom of speech and expression, is unnecessary and potentially authoritarian. Our Constitution already guarantees freedom of speech and expression while imposing reasonable restrictions, including those related to decency and morality. The existing legal framework is suffi-

cient to address concerns around objectionable content. Introducing an additional layer of administrative regulation will only serve to curtail the exercise of our fundamental right to free speech.

Ramesh Ramachandra, Bengaluru

Stricter guidelines needed

The Supreme Court's call to regulate digital content and uphold morality while protecting free speech is timely and crucial. The rise of social media influencers has led to the unchecked spread of vulgarity, with some individuals using the guise of free expression to propagate obscene

content. While free speech is a fundamental right, it does not grant individuals a licence to corrupt young minds and disrespect societal values. Stricter guidelines are necessary to ensure that digital platforms maintain ethical standards. The government must implement robust regulations to protect public morality while preserving our right to free speech.

Vishal Mayur, Tumakuru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed - not handwritten - will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

It (salary hike for MLAs) came up in the meeting. There were opinions expressed... We'll introduce the revision of salaries in the legislature because it's been a long time.



H.K. Patil, Karnataka Minister

The only thing that the politicians seem to agree on is raising their own pay.

Calvin Coolidge

TO BE PRECISE

Delimitation concerns: Tamil Nadu CM urges people to have more children



IN PERSPECTIVE

Finding stability in growth

Karnataka's upcoming budget must balance economic expansion with social equity

RAJESHWARI U R

Karnataka's upcoming budget presents an opportunity to drive sustainable economic growth while ensuring social equity. With the state's economy projected to expand, the budget must strategically allocate resources to maximise long-term development. By learning from past challenges - such as revenue deficits and regional disparities - Karnataka can craft a budget that strengthens infrastructure, boosts key sectors like education and agriculture, and promotes inclusive growth. A well-balanced approach, prioritising both welfare and capital investments, will ensure that economic progress benefits all regions while maintaining fiscal stability.

A major challenge for Karnataka is capital expenditure which plays a crucial role in long-term infrastructure development. For 2024-25, the capital outlay is set at Rs 2,903 crore, marking only a 3% increase over the revised estimate for 2023-24. Given Karnataka's status as both a global IT hub and a rapidly growing urban centre, this limited rise raises concerns, as substantial investments are necessary to ease congestion, improve public transit, and support emerging business ecosystems. Data suggest that inadequate capital spending can stall critical infrastructure projects, dampen economic activity, and undermine long-term productivity - posing a significant risk to fiscal sustainability.

Karnataka's revenue deficit which had been relatively controlled in earlier years is projected to nearly double in the coming fiscal period when measured as a percentage of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). The revenue deficit for 2024-25 was projected to be 1% of GSDP (Rs 27,354 crore), an increase compared to the revised estimate of 0.5% for 2023-24. The rise in expenditure is driven by social welfare commitments and growing non-scheme costs like salaries and pensions. While welfare programmes are vital for equity, balancing them with fiscal prudence is crucial to sustain investments in infrastructure and education without escalating debt.

The education and skill development sector in Karnataka also needs attention. Investing in modern infrastructure and vocational training can significantly boost productivity and innovation, with studies showing that even a 2-3% GDP increase in education yields long-term benefits. By upgrading curricula and expanding digital access, the state can equip its youth for a rapidly evolving global economy, ensuring that Karnataka retains its competitive edge in the knowledge-driven world.

Agriculture, a key pillar of Karnataka's economy, faces challenges like water scarcity, outdated practices, and inadequate farmer support. Research shows that investment in agricultural R&D delivers high returns, ranging from 20% to 60% annually. However, insufficient funding has left rural incomes stagnant. Increased investment in irrigation, crop diversification, and modern technologies can boost productivity and strengthen food security.

Disparities in development

Issues of regional disparity and social equity in Karnataka require targeted attention, as the state faces significant imbalances in development between urban and rural areas. Urban centres like Bengaluru benefit from substantial economic advantages, while many rural regions continue to lag behind. Data from the Economic Survey of Karnataka reveals that Bengaluru Urban district leads with a per capita Gross District Domestic Product (GDDP) of Rs 62,131, surpassing the state average, followed by Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Chikmagalur and Bengaluru Rural districts, all of which also exceed the state average. In contrast, the lowest per capita incomes are found in Kalaburagi, Bidar, Chitradurga, Koppal, and Yadgir districts - four of which belong to the historically underdeveloped Kalyana-Kannataka region - where incomes are approximately 1.5 times lower than the state average.

This stark disparity underscores the need for targeted fiscal policies that prioritise healthcare, education, and infrastructure in underdeveloped areas to promote balanced growth and reduce socioeconomic inequalities. Addressing such disparities through responsible budgeting can further ensure equitable distribution of developmental benefits, empower women, and foster inclusive growth.

Furthermore, Karnataka must adopt debt-driven growth measures, ensuring transparency and efficiency in resource allocation. Learning from past expenditure inefficiencies, the government should track the impact of social programmes to optimise spending. Encouraging private sector participation through public-private partnerships (PPPs) can also drive infrastructure development without straining public finances.

The upcoming budget must balance such long-term goals with climate-conscious policies to support the state's clean energy ambitions. While the previous budget introduced incentives for electric vehicles, more comprehensive environmental policies, including sustainable urban planning and renewable energy investments are necessary to secure long-term economic and ecological benefits. Ultimately, Karnataka's budget should strike a balance between social equity, economic expansion, and fiscal discipline, ensuring that immediate priorities do not come at the cost of long-term stability.

(The writer is an associate professor at the Department of Economics, Christ University)

Why the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill should be rejected

TEJASVI SURYA

Bengaluru is more than just a city. It is India's innovation capital, a hub of economic growth in South India. With the right leadership, it could set an example for urban governance and sustainable planning. However, a lack of vision, efficiency, and accountability in governance has severely impacted its infrastructure, mobility, and livability. Instead of addressing these pressing concerns with smart urban planning, the Karnataka government has proposed the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill (GBGB Bill)—a move that will create confusion, weaken local governance, and hinder Bengaluru's long-term progress.

The Congress-led Karnataka government's GBGB Bill is a politically motivated attempt to centralise power, undermining local governance and democratic decentralisation. Far from improving governance, the bill erodes the autonomy of Bengaluru's elected representatives and paves the way for bureaucratic overreach. It violates the principles of the 74th Amendment to the Constitution, which empowers urban

local bodies to legislate and execute laws on municipal matters.

At the heart of this bill is the proposed Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), a bureaucratic superstructure controlled by the chief minister and the Bengaluru development minister. This body, along with a committee of bureaucrats and politicians, will take over the key decision-making power from local corporations. Instead of empowering the directly elected BBMP representatives, the bill reduces them to mere spectators while handing control to MLAs and bureaucrats.

The KMC Act, 1976, and BBMP Act, 2020, had granted corporations authority over infrastructure, development, and civic amenities in consultation with ward committees. Under the GBGB Bill, MLAs will have overriding control, opening the door to political interference and favouritism in local governance.

Bengaluru already has a constitutionally mandated Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC) responsible for regional coordination, infrastructure planning, and sustainable development. Instead of empowering the MPC, the GBGB Bill seeks

to create an unconstitutional parallel structure—the GBA—without any elected accountability. A well-functioning MPC can ensure better coordination between urban agencies, state departments, and local bodies. Rather than adding an unnecessary bureaucratic layer, the government should strengthen the MPC, integrate technology-driven planning solutions, and promote community-driven decision-making.

The GBGB Bill will further complicate Bengaluru's financial structure, leading to project delays and a lack of fiscal clarity. One of its major flaws is the proposal to split BBMP into multiple corporations, ranging from three to ten separate entities. This would require each corporation to have its own administrative setup and budget, leading to duplication of expenses and wasted taxpayer money. The GBA would control financial allocations, reducing local governments' autonomy. The bill provides no clarity on how revenue collection will be managed across the multiple corporations—creating a recipe for financial mismanagement.

A bill with such far-reaching consequences demands rigorous public debate

and consultation, yet the Congress government has deliberately manipulated the process to push it through without transparency. The draft bill was released just two days before the start of public consultations, which lasted only three days, giving citizens barely any time to respond.

The revised draft was not released, meaning citizens were consulted on an outdated version while the actual amendments remain hidden from public scrutiny. There has been zero transparency on which draft will be sent to the legislature. This is not governance—it is a deliberate suppression of public opinion.

Real challenges ignored

Instead of focusing on core urban issues, the GBGB Bill ignores Bengaluru's most pressing challenges. It offers no comprehensive strategy to tackle the city's notorious congestion. Instead of empowering the Bangalore Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA), it creates an additional bureaucratic structure.

The bill also lacks a roadmap for water conservation, flood management, or ecological preservation. Bengaluru's

unplanned growth has led to rampant violations of zoning laws and inadequate infrastructure. The bill fails to provide a regional master plan or enforce better urban planning policies.

At its core, the GBGB Bill is a political manoeuvre by the Congress government to consolidate control over Bengaluru's governance. Knowing that it lacks electoral support in Bengaluru, Congress is attempting to install an unelected body to oversee financial allocations and urban development projects. This will lead to corruption, inefficiency, and a governance model that prioritises political interests over citizen needs.

The GBGB Bill is a step in the wrong direction. We must reject this flawed bill and instead push for genuine, well-planned urban reforms that will truly make Bengaluru a livable and well-governed city.

Delhi's municipal corporation was split into three bodies in 2012 to improve governance, only to be reunified in 2022 due to financial imbalances and administrative inefficiencies. Bengaluru should learn from this mistake, limiting the municipal zones to three or four instead of 10, ensuring fi-

nancial autonomy while maintaining a unified oversight body for better inter-zone coordination. Hyderabad, meanwhile, has successfully implemented urban planning through the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA), ensuring structured infrastructure growth and long-term city planning.

Bengaluru should empower the MPC to oversee city-wide projects, regulate zoning, and prevent haphazard urban sprawl. A regional approach to mobility, housing, and infrastructure planning can ensure sustainable growth, better traffic management, and efficient land use, creating a city that is both livable and future-ready.

We demand the full implementation of the BBMP Act 2020 and the empowerment of ward committees and corporations. The future of Bengaluru should be shaped by its people, planners, and elected representatives, not by politically motivated bureaucratic structures. Bengaluru belongs to its citizens.

(The writer is a Member of Parliament, representing Bangalore South in the Lok Sabha)

The US is finally catching up with China's strategic playbook by incorporating minerals into its foreign policy, recognising the crucial role they play in national security

GRACIELIN BASKARAN

For many years, while China strategically secured minerals from around the world, the United States rarely used foreign policy to obtain the minerals it needs. That has finally changed—and dramatically so. Within the first 40 days of President Trump's term, he has expressed interest in acquiring Greenland for its rare earths; annexing Canada, with its vast reserves of uranium and copper; and securing control over Ukraine's rare earths and titanium in exchange for continued US support.

After the blowup between Trump and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday in the Oval Office, the fate of the Ukraine minerals deal is uncertain. Zelenskyy said he is still "ready" to sign a deal, on March 3, Trump said he did not believe the deal was dead.

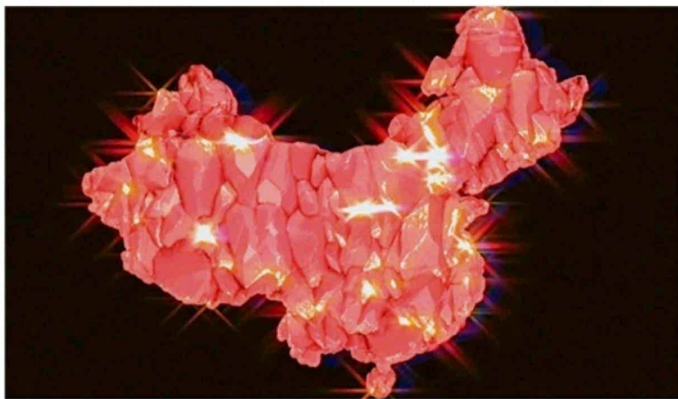
Whether the Ukraine deal is eventually signed or not, incorporating minerals into foreign policy is crucial for US national security. However, without dedicating government investment and diplomatic resources—as China has done—this initiative remains a hollow effort and may fail to deliver any results.

With less than 2% of the world's reserves of rare earths, graphite, cobalt and nickel, the United States must work closely with resource-rich nations to make sure American companies can get the minerals they need to build, among other things, phones, batteries for electric vehicles and semiconductors. China has similar challenges and has made minerals diplomacy central to its foreign policy. Despite accounting for only 1% to 10% of global lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper production, China imports enough to process more than 65% of some of these metals and 90% of rare earths. This level of control is the outcome of years of strategic industrial planning and foreign policy efforts by Beijing.

Trump appears to be taking a page from China's playbook of active minerals diplomacy. The draft agreement with Ukraine would reportedly create a fund controlled by the United States and Ukraine to receive future revenue from Ukraine's natural resources. But if it is signed, it is not clear whether such an agreement will actually enhance US mineral security. In fact, it will be decades before we see the impact of this agreement, if at all.

The United States has seemingly minimal knowledge of Ukraine's underground resources. There is no modern mapping of the country's rare earth deposits; the most recent surveys are believed to have been conducted 30 to 60 years ago by what was then the Soviet Union. Without up-to-date geological data, it is impossible to determine whether these resources are economically viable for extraction. If the ore grade is too low, the deposits are too small or the byproducts aren't valuable enough, private companies are unlikely to invest the \$500 million to \$1 billion needed to develop a mine and separation plant.

Moreover, under the draft agreement, Ukraine would be required to pay a percentage of proceeds from newly developed mineral assets into a reconstruction investment fund with joint US and Ukraine



A new era of minerals diplomacy

ownership, existing mineral, oil and gas operations are to remain exempt. Given that the average time to develop a mine from resource discovery to production is approximately 18 years, it will take at least that long—four more US presidential election cycles—before the United States can begin sourcing minerals from Ukraine.

There are ways to make minerals diplomacy more effective, but it will require a willingness by the US government not just to strike deals but also to spend and invest, over a long period, in countries that have the mineral resources we need. That may be a tough sell at a time of fiscal austerity and budget cuts to the federal government. But China did not build the significant competitive advantage it holds in electric vehicle manufacturing by reducing spending. One analysis found that between 2009 and 2023, the Chinese government allocated at least \$230.9 billion in subsidies to help develop the nascent industry. The fruits of that effort are apparent in the domination of BYD's electric vehicles worldwide.

So how should the American government spend the resources needed to build a competitive minerals diplomacy strategy?

First, the United States should increase the capacity of the US Geological Survey to conduct geological mapping and reduce exploration risks in key regions. Many resource-rich countries remain unmapped or reliant on outdated surveys. The US Geological Survey could also place their attaché in embassies, to work alongside

geological surveys and mining ministries in host countries, promoting resource development strategies that are favourable to Western investors.

Second, the United States needs to help build roads, bridges and other infrastructure in mineral-rich places. Mining is one of the most energy-intensive sectors in the world. Globally, it accounts for 38% of industrial energy use. One of the challenges with mining in Ukraine, for example, is the fact that missile and drone strikes have damaged about half of that country's power substations. To ease the way for Western mining companies in Ukraine, the United States should increase funding to institutions like the US International Development Finance Corporation, which can help rebuild some of those assets.

Any government-to-government cooperation agreement is useful only if it stimulates investment by private mining companies, which develop those minerals into a form that companies like Apple and Tesla can use. But the world's most resource-rich nations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, are not easy places for businesses to operate. The US government can help mitigate those risks by supporting mining project negotiations and dispute resolution, and providing financing at below-market rates and political risk insurance.

China has long aligned its infrastructure investments to mineral investments. The 2007 Sino-Congolese des Mines agreement is a key example of a resource-for-infrastructure deal. Under this

arrangement, Chinese companies gained access to cobalt, copper and other minerals in exchange for the development of infrastructure, such as roads and hospitals. The Chinese consortium pledged more than \$6.5 billion for infrastructure projects, securing mining rights to deposits near Kolwezi in the southeastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which were estimated to be worth \$83 billion. As a result, China now owns or has stakes in 15 of Congo's biggest copper and cobalt mines.

The US needs to come up with a blueprint for how minerals diplomacy can play out in other parts of the world, not just Ukraine. The Democratic Republic of Congo recently proposed that it could offer the United States and Europe access to its mineral reserves in return for military assistance, amid its ongoing conflict with neighbouring Rwanda. Such an agreement is well worth considering and, if it is pursued, should be backed up with real investment.

Mining is a long and costly process. If America is to be a global leader in the minerals it needs for national, economic and energy security, it will have to go beyond signing agreements. In Ukraine and elsewhere, strategic diplomacy and substantial investment will determine whether such deals actually deliver the mineral security the United States is looking for.

The writer is a mining economist, is the director of the Critical Minerals Security Program at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. NYT

The failure of modern statecraft

CHANUKYA RAJAGOPALA

Diplomacy, at its core, has always relied on measured discussions, discreet negotiations, and carefully crafted messaging. Historically, the most significant agreements have been forged behind closed doors, away from media scrutiny and public spectacle. However, the current approach, where global leaders engage in overt power plays and performative diplomacy, undermines not only the credibility of their positions but also the strength of the nations they represent.

The recent meeting between US President Donald Trump, his deputy J D Vance, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was less a diplomatic engagement and more a unilateral, optics-driven approach to diplomacy. Trump's and Vance's attempt to impose a settlement on their terms exposed their inability to navigate complex negotiations. Their actions have not demonstrated strength but weakness. Diplomacy is about persuasion, incentives, and shared interests—not coercion. Rather than demonstrating dominance, they showed desperation, failing to acknowledge that sustainable peace cannot be dictated—it must be mutually constructed.

Unlike past diplomatic efforts that sought enduring solutions, the modern approach is reactionary, dictated by public perception rather than strategic foresight. Decisions made during World War II and its aftermath, although flawed, demonstrated a level of maturity, pragmatism, and long-term vision that is lacking in today's world order.

The post-war settlements—whether at Yalta, Potsdam, or in the formation of global institutions—were handled with an understanding that diplomacy is about balancing power, not grandstanding. Today, statecraft has been reduced to a media event, where the goal appears to be immediate optics rather than lasting solutions.

Flawed approach

A fundamental flaw in the current approach is the belief that one or two leaders can unilaterally resolve conflicts of global significance. The ongoing war against Ukraine, much like past conflicts, requires a collective and coordinated effort. Yet, recent attempts at brokering a settlement have been marked by unilateral demands rather than a genuine multilateral strategy.

Even if Trump and Vance had succeeded in forcing a settlement, it would not have brought lasting peace. At best, it would have resulted in a fragile ceasefire that could unravel at the slightest provocation. Imposed settlements breed resentment, making any minor incident—whether a perceived diplomatic slight or a border skirmish—a potential trigger for renewed conflict.

Sustainable peace requires a broader vision, one that considers the historical grievances, security concerns, and economic realities of both sides. It demands an approach that includes multiple stakeholders, ensuring agreements are not only signed but also respected and upheld over time.

EU Foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas' remark following the White House meeting—that "the free world needs a new leader"—was more than an observation; it was an indictment of the state of global leadership. The war continues not just because of the directly involved nations but because there is no coordinated global effort to resolve it effectively.

In past eras, global leadership was defined by strategic alliances, long-term planning, and the ability to command respect on the world stage. Today, it seems to be dictated by immediate political gain, domestic optics, and reactionary decision-making. The result is a fragmented approach to diplomacy, where no single power has the vision, credibility, or influence to drive a real resolution.

If the world is to move beyond cyclical conflicts, it requires leadership that understands diplomacy not as a series of media opportunities but as a carefully orchestrated, long-term process. It needs leaders who prioritise stability over short-term victories, who build coalitions rather than grandstanding for cameras.

True diplomacy has never been about dominance; it has always been about wisdom, patience, and the ability to craft solutions that endure. The current approach, reliant on singular leadership and public posturing, is fundamentally flawed. Unless global leaders return to the principles of strategic and inclusive diplomacy, conflicts will continue to be paused rather than resolved. The free world does not just need a new leader—it needs a new approach to leadership altogether.

(The author is a UK-based writer)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MARCH 1975

Lok Sabha approves Kashmir accord

New Delhi, March 4
The Lok Sabha today overwhelmingly approved the accord reached between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Jammu and Kashmiri leaders, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Only eight members voted against the accord when it was voted upon after an appeal by the Prime Minister, in her reply to the two-day debate in the House, to view the agreement in the larger context of the need for conciliatory approach in solving national problems.

25 YEARS AGO: MARCH 2000

State to form human rights panel

Gulbarga, March 4
Home Minister Mallikarjun Kharge today said the government had decided to constitute the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) with a view to ensuring more transparency in the functioning of the police department. He said with the constitution of SHRC on the lines of National Human Rights Commission, the alleged harassment if any by the police was expected to be minimised, he said. The minister said he had held discussions with Chief Minister S M Krishna on the issue.

OASIS | RESWARAN

A preacher is not a teacher

the path of discipline. In ancient times, there were no roads; paths were created by people walking on them. Similarly, an *acharya* creates a spiritual path by walking it themselves.

In most fields of study, the character of the teacher is unrelated to the subject they teach. However, in spirituality, the teacher's private conduct is inseparable from their teachings.

What does it mean to be private? What makes him an *acharya*. When in the company of a crowd, they may wear a mask to project an image of what they are not.

But an *acharya* lives authentically, embodying the principle of *achara*. *Acharya* means discipline, self-control. By him walking the path of Self-control he has shown the path to the disciple. That itself is enough for the student to know the value of the path.

The value of the path will be known to only when one feels lost. This sense of being lost is not about missing something external but about an inner desperation to reconnect with something greater. Imagine a child lost in the exhibition? What would be his state? A desperation to unite with

mother. What is the way to get back. This is called yoga. There is desperation, fear comes maybe I will never unite. A sense of loss is a desperation to unite, to get back. And you need a path to unite. That path he has shown by walking. For the disciple who has shown the way through their own practice. The feet of the *acharya* are revered because they represent the path they have walked. Disciples are inspired not by the teacher's words but by the way they live. This inspiration leads the disciple to follow the same path and, in turn, share it with others.



CONTRAPUNTO

A little morphine in all the air. It would be wonderfully refreshing for everyone
—DH LAWRENCE, Lady Chatterley's Lover

Don't Babysit

Some SC remarks on Allahbadia case may encourage more censorship. Creatives always push the envelope

SC has restored podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia's economic freedom but curbs on his freedom of expression remain. He may now make shows as long as they don't violate 'traditional Indian norms' on decency and morality. It's a conditional relief, and welcome as far as it allows Allahbadia and his large crew to earn their livelihood, which is part of their right to life. But it also raises questions about the direction his case has taken and the restraints placed on him. Allahbadia's fault was that he said — in a paywalled show — something that most people would consider disgusting, or distasteful, across cultures. When police complaints were filed, Allahbadia sought SC's protection. He got a chiding, a total ban on podcasting until further orders, and protection from arrest on the condition that he surrender his passport.

The blanket ban was unusual because it broke with precedent. In 2015's Shreya Singhal case, SC said restrictions "must be narrowly tailored or narrowly interpreted so as to abridge or restrict only what is absolutely necessary". In 2022, it refused to bar Mohammed Zubair from tweeting because "gag orders have a chilling effect on the freedom of speech". As far back as 1950, SC had rejected "pre-censorship" — which is what requiring Allahbadia to adhere to 'traditional decency and morality' amounts to. Besides, as SC said in the Zubair case, "If he posts tweets in violation of law, he would be answerable for it." So, Allahbadia deserves to be judged post-facto too.

The question before SC was whether Allahbadia's remarks were obscene — to be considered a criminal offence. His counsel reminded the court that disgust and revulsion are not tests of obscenity. SC, however, seems intent to fill the "vacuum" around the question of obscenity/vulgarity and has sought govt assistance, which seems only too eager that the "young generation must be protected from such shows". There lies the problem. Freedom of speech in India was fettered with "reasonable restrictions" 75 years ago. We don't need more curbs. Certainly not those based on "traditional" ideas of decency and morality, that can't accommodate anything from torn jeans to live-ins. Creatives — filmmakers, writers, podcasters — constantly push the envelope. Sometimes they go too far, in some people's eyes. That's the nature of creativity. But it shouldn't be a pretext to muzzle them or babysit us.



Auntie Dalit Politics

Mayawati ousted her nephew from BSP. Reasons are confusing. But her electoral irrelevance won't change

What a fall it has been. Once pundits used to speculate that Mayawati could become India's first Dalit PM. Dust is still thin on those columns and already everyone has to be reminded that she was the first UP CM to complete a full term. If she had grander ambitions, it was with reason. 2014 LS results, in retrospect, signalled how new politics would instead copy her in the opposite direction. BSP held on to a 20% vote share in UP, but scored 0/80 seats. By 2024, even the vote share dropped to 10%. Today, Mayawati is making headlines for political house 'cleaning'. But the kind of revival BSP well-wishers desperately wish for, isn't to be seen.



Not for the first time, she's freed nephew Akash Anand, otherwise understood as her heir apparent. Opinion's divided on whether this is because he was too big by his boots or too undersized. What's fact is that a series of BSP politicians have taken the exit, to grow out of Mayawati's shadow. As defeat has followed defeat, she's put the blame not only on her political rivals but also, variously, Jats, EVMs, Muslims... Most plaintively, she's observed "apne log", own people, drifting away. Much of the drift has been BJP wards — a social engineering success prefigured via a Dalit laying the first brick at the 1999 foundation ceremony for Ram temple. It's also true that no Dalit politician currently commands the political space like Mayawati once did, or Kanshi Ram. In other parties, they're arguably mere cogs in the wheel, no matter how important. For some experts, experimenting with various parties and politicians speaks to increased self-confidence among Dalits, a deepening of democracy. For others, such segmentation of Dalit representation and vote, amounts to a weakening. They hope a new Mayawati will rise from the new generation of Dalit-Bahujan politicians.

The Elon Ranger

Trump's hatchet man who fires from the hip is like a character from a Western comic book

Jug Surajia



Jottings from the White House diary:

Boy, have I had one helluva week. Did that video that's gone viral showin' my Gaza Resort with a sing-along jingle, a whopping gold statue of me, an 'me waltzin' with bearded belly dancers.

Then I did that arm twistin' with that Zelinko or whatever, to get him to stop invading my pal Pootie's Russia and to gimme all those minerals and stuff he's got.

Then I rolled out the Gold Card wheeze that gets you to stay in US of A if you can shell out five million smackeros, which I'll bring in megabucks, specially for folk in the buildin' business, like me and Jared.

So who's been runnin' the country while I've been busy doin' all this? What a dumbass question to ask! My buddy Elon I've been runnin' it, mostly by runnin' people out of their jobs.

He's already fired over 20,000 of 'em including those gonzos who were aidin' and abettin' all them foreign countries. The way Elon fires all those sad sacks, shootin' 'em from the hip sorta, he reminds me of that Lone Ranger fella who rode a white horse, shot silver bullets, and had a sidekick called Tonto.

second opinion

Come to think of it, if ya scaramble ELON it becomes LONE, so he's like the Lone Ranger. Maybe we could do a video of him too, firin' all those no-good bums who spend all them taxpayer dollars and do eff all in return.

My Elon Ranger says he meansta get ridda half the 2.2m gunvunt 'plovies who cost us 6.7m bucks a year, and by firin' them he's gonna save us a trillion greenbacks.

Ranveer takes out all those no-gooders of the Deep State even faster than the Lone Ranger took out all them baddies of the Wild West. Wham, Bam, Thankie Uncle Sam!

Oh, here he comes, walkin' towards me. I'll ask him who he's gonna fire next. But what's that he's holdin' in his hand? A slip of paper? A pink slip of paper? Wonder what it means...

Time To Trump-Proof Trade

Washington's tariffs will soon hit India. But New Delhi must not overreact or retaliate. Absorb small losses, think long-term and work with other nations

Ajay Srivastava



Trump is quickly raising import tariffs on more goods and countries. On March 4, US began charging 25% on all Mexican imports, 10% on Canadian energy and 25% on other Canadian goods, and 20% on Chinese products. From March 12, steel and aluminium from all countries will face a 25% tariff. From April 2, agri imports worldwide will be hit with 100% tariff. Subsequently, more tariff will be announced under the US reciprocal tariff scheme, targeting trade partners with whom US has a trade deficit. Trump has also warned EU of high tariffs unless it buys more US oil and gas. India is nervously preparing for its turn.

Thus, the world is once again caught in a storm of tariffs with Trump leading an aggressive push to reshape global trade. While major economies like China, Canada and EU have responded with retaliatory measures, India faces a critical choice: should it join the tariff war or chart its own course?

Trumpian logic on tariffs | US is the world's largest market and top importer, bringing in \$1.4tn worth of goods in 2024 when global trade was worth \$25tn. With exports of \$1.7tn, it faces a trade deficit of \$1.7tn. Trump believes this deficit is caused by other countries imposing high tariffs and trade barriers against US goods.

However, a closer analysis reveals that Trump's tariff strategy is not just about trade deficits. It's a calculated mix of economic pressure, political manoeuvring, and supply chain realignment. By imposing steep tariffs on Mexico, Canada, China, and global agri imports, he is forcing trade partners into quick concessions while energising his domestic voter base.

Here comes the pushback | China, Canada and Mexico have retaliated against Trump's tariffs. China has imposed 10-15% import tariffs on American agri products like soybeans, corn, dairy, beef, chicken and wheat. It has also restricted exports and investments for 25 US companies.

Canada, meanwhile, has imposed a 25% tariff on

\$30bn worth of US goods, including orange juice and peanut butter. Another 25% tariff will soon apply to 500 in American goods, covering autos, steel and aluminium. EU plans to impose tariffs on US products like bourbon, jeans and motorcycles if Washington escalates trade actions.

Will India duck and swerve? | Trump's 25% tariff on steel and aluminium, and 100% tariff on agri products, will impact India's exports to US. More tariffs may hit India under Trump's reciprocal tariff plan in April. India can work on a four-point framework.



First, avoid long-term harm. This means not negotiating a comprehensive FTA with US. Washington may demand not just tariff cuts but also additional concessions, such as opening govt procurement, reducing agri subsidies, weakening patent protections, and allowing unrestricted data flows — demands India has resisted for decades.

Moreover, Trump's decision on Monday to trash the US-Mexico-Canada FTA, which he himself finalised in 2019, and impose 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico, shows his disregard for negotiated FTAs. Given these factors, India should rule out a comprehensive FTA with US.

Second, approach Trump with a proactive plan.

What's Obscene? What About Free Speech?

The Allahbadia case has re-energised the debate on 'obscenity' vs censorship. Here's a short explainer on what judges over time have ruled on the question

Nandita Sengupta@timesofindia.com



The Supreme Court, hearing the obscenity case against Ranveer Allahbadia on Monday, reiterated the right to free speech as well as its disinclination towards censorship. But it also said such a view wasn't a licence for "depraved thoughts" and "filthy words".

Sounds neat? But it isn't.

Obscenity is a criminal offence that invites jail-time and a fine. Yet, it is impossible to define it. What is why a constant tussle to decide if what's perceived as 'obscene' ends up curtailing the right to free expression.

What makes 'obscenity' difficult to pin? | First, the law (IPC sections 292-294 / BNS sections 294 and 296, define obscenity in adjectives: lewd, repulsive, filthy, offensive. In dictionary terms that which is 'morally objectionable'. It could be words, acts, gestures, speech. Exemptions include religious stuff. Any law that would govern such an area can have no rigid boundaries. Thus, interpretation by courts, judges, cops plays a major role in deciding outcomes.

Second, the difficulty in determining whether the work falls within the ambit of the right to freedom of expression as laid out in Article 19(2A) or whether Article 19(2)'s 'reasonable restrictions' on such freedom, including 'morality and decency', are applicable. Again, that largely depends on court's interpretation.

What have courts said? Outcomes of several court cases have established what isn't obscenity.

Sex/nudity isn't obscenity | (Sex (see: Ka Babhas vs Uol, 1970) and nudity (see: Kerala artist Rehana Athias's case, 2023)) are "not synonymous with obscenity". In the first case, on a documentary with shots from Bombay's red light area, SC said: "Sex and obscenity are not always synonymous... wrong to classify sex as essentially obscene... immoral".

Fathima's case was over a video she uploaded of her teen son painting on her semi-nude body. Kerala HC set aside the criminal case: "Nudity should not be tied to

sex. Mere sight of a naked upper body of a woman shouldn't be deemed to be sexual by default."

Vulgarity isn't obscenity | In Samresh Bose vs Amal Mitra case, 1965, trial court found Bengali novel *Pranajati* obscene, but defendants in SC argued that words used may not be "literature" but were everyday parlance. SC ruled: "Vulgar writing isn't necessarily obscene. Vulgarly arouses feelings of disgust... whereas obscenity has the tendency to deprave... portions of the book may appear to be vulgar".

In the Allahbadia case, SC wants GOI to discuss norms for "vulgarity". While that idea is troubling in itself, the bottom line is the judge underscored a clear separation between vulgarity and obscenity.

A few offended isn't obscenity | Not all may agree with petitioners. In 2024, Andhra HC dismissed PILs alleging Big Boss Telugu 2024 promoted obscenity. HC said, like courts have repeatedly held, "what might appear to be obscene to the petitioner may not be so to a majority of citizens in contemporary times."

Cases have context, cultural overtones, and judge's own social mores, so precedent hasn't been linear. SC said as much in the Bose vs Mitra case. "Even the outlook of a judge may differ from another judge as it's a matter of objective assessment of the subjective attitude of the judge hearing the matter." Therein lies the rub — which explains inconsistency in outcomes.

Since 1960s, courts have held nudity isn't obscenity. Yet, in 2020, Goa cops booked Milind Sonar for posting a photo of him running naked on a beach. The 1995 Sonam-Madhu Sagar Tufts shoes ad — pytho-draped athleticism in the buff — also provoked a court case, which dragged on for 14 years. Consensual intimacy in ads was also seen as a "corrupting influence". A 1996 Dino Morea-

Bipasha Basu ad for Swiss lingerie, playful in their bare minimum, was pulled down without a formal case filed.

What's the measure? | Flashback. In 1960, a UK jury ruled 'not guilty' in an obscenity case against Penguin for publishing the full version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It was a test case that established the legal principle.

But in 1964, India's Supreme Court, in *Ranjit Udechi vs Maharashtra*, upheld his conviction for selling the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. SC used the 1968 Hicklin test, if

content tended to "deprave and corrupt" those "susceptible to immoral influence". US had rejected the Hicklin test in 1957 as unconstitutionally restrictive of freedom of speech. But in India, only in 2014 did SC junk it in

the 1973 Miller test, where three conditions have to be met for a work to be called "obscene". Obscene by contemporary community standards, depicting "patently offensive" sexual conduct, and lacking in literary, artistic, political, scientific value.

The 2014 case was filed against media and news anchor, whose newspaper published a semi-nude photo of Boris Becker and fiancée Barbara Feltus, covering her breasts with his hand. Feltus's father was the photographer. Judges ruled the photo was "not obscene", given "contemporary community standards".

But Miller test also allows judicial subjectivity since 'community' or 'community standards' are indefinable in India, given the strong influence of social conservatism. Plus, some critics have argued the idea of 'value' favours established authors, painters, playwrights vis-à-vis ordinary citizens.

The bottom line? India has some ways to go before protecting freedom of expression becomes more important than punishing 'obscenity'.

Calvin & Hobbes



Suggestspace

If someone thinks that peace and love are just a cliché that must have been left behind in 60s, that's a problem. Peace and love are eternal.

John Lennon

When Parental Love Is Not A Guiding Light

Sonal Srivastava

In a recently released film, *Mrs. on an OTT platform*, a mother suggests that her daughter 'adjust' in her in-laws' home, where she is unappreciated, because it is socially acceptable. Her daughter cooks, cleans and takes care of her husband's family as it is her duty, only to realise that she is forgotten in the grand scheme of things. The film is a reminder that most of us are caught in a bind, trying to follow our parents' advice, fulfilling familial duties, and social obligations, forgetting that we are seeking on a spiritual journey and can get home only through a spiritual preceptor's mentorship.

Yet another film, *Three Idiots*, depicts how parents' intentions, even though well-meaning, could be detrimental to children's growth. In the film, while Rancho is epitome of liberation, Farhan and Raju are burdened by familial expectations. Farhan

wants to be a wildlife photographer, but his father forces him to become an engineer. When a child is born, parents are the first and most natural mentors — hence family comes first.

While parents are innate guides, their mentorship styles can sometimes inhibit their grown-up children's progress towards becoming a parent. Often, parents forget that their children are adults — individuals seeking moksha — and burden them with social obligations. Kabir Gibran offers wisdom to such parents: "Your children are not your children... They come through you but not from you. They are sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you," he says.

In Bhagwad Gita, Krishna instructs Arjun to act in accordance with his role, emphasising Self-awareness over

external validation for even a mother's love could be selfish. For instance, Mahabharata's Gandhari, mother of Kauravas, passively wanted her son Duryodhan to succeed as King of Hastinapur, although she didn't voice her opinion openly, but just before the final battle, she tried to safeguard her son by blessing his unclothed body.

Eventually, Duryodhan dies. Gandhari could have stopped him, but she did not. Ramayan's Kaikkeyi had a burning desire to see her son Bharat as King of Ayodhya; she asked Dashrath to send his eldest son Ram into exile for 14 years, causing great emotional pain to Bharat.

Just as Krishna mentors Arjun, true mentors or spiritual preceptors teach their mentee that real wisdom lies in focusing on one's path while maintaining clarity of purpose and detachment from unnecessary obligations. Gita's

verse 3.17 says, "But one who takes delight in the Self alone, and is content in the Self only, has no duty." In Chapter 18, Krishna makes it clear that we do not have a duty to please our parents. He asks Arjun, "To abandon all forms of duty and surrender unto me alone. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions; do not fear."

Those who must be vigilant against those who preach fulfilling one's duties and obligations towards family, society, company, nation and the world. Moms can take a leaf out of Matsya Yashashree's parenting playbook. She raised Krishn with unconditional love and devotion, only to let him go when destiny called. We could also follow little Nachiketa's example. He confronted his father, Vashishtha, for giving away old sage towards Him. He was in Kathopaniashad. Likewise, we should stay alert on our spiritual journey and take delight in the Self alone.

THE SPEAKING TREE

KEYWORD



A unique landscape: Mount Ruang volcano erupts in Sitaro, north Sulawesi, on April 19, 2024. AFP

How the Wallace line explains the difference in species across continents

In the 19th century, Alfred Wallace noticed a shift in the composition of organisms as he moved from Asia to Australia. He posited an invisible barrier in the ocean running between the islands of Bali and Lombok, striking north between Borneo and Sulawesi before curving south of Mindanao

Rupsy Khurana

Kangaroos and cockatoos are synonymous with Australia and tigers and orangutans with Asia. Both these continents boast rich biodiversity that is also very unique. A simple yet popular way to understand these 'separate greatnesses' has taken the shape of the Wallace line.

What is the Wallace line?

In the late 19th century, the English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace noticed a dramatic shift in the composition of organisms as he moved from Asia to Australia, New Guinea, and other islands nearby. He posited an invisible barrier in the ocean, later called the Wallace line, running between the islands of Bali and Lombok, striking north between Borneo and Sulawesi before curving south of Mindanao. To him this line was like a fence between the different kinds of animals on the two sides.

Wallace and others conducted eight years of fieldwork to carefully plot the line across many kilometres, in the process laying the foundations of modern biogeography: the study of how species are distributed and how they got there.

Over the years, the line has attracted considerable research interest. "The Wallace line ... ties partly into the theory of evolution. Nowhere else on the earth do you see such a dramatic shift over such a narrow distance. Organisms are not just scattered randomly," Jason R. Ali, honorary associate researcher at the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research, Germany, said.

What did Wallace find on Sulawesi?

At their closest, the islands of Borneo and Sulawesi are just over 20 km apart yet they support very distinct plants, mammals, and birds. Wallace was more baffled by Sulawesi. It's one of the largest islands in the archipelago and home to species found nowhere else on the planet, including tarsiers (family Tarsiidae), the lowland anoa (Bubalus depressicornis), and the mountain anoa (Bubalus quaresii), which are both of Asian origin. Yet Sulawesi is also home to Australian marsupials like the dwarf cuscus (Strigocuscus celebensis).

The island frustrated Wallace, who repeatedly redrew his line because he was unsure whether it belonged to Asia or Australia. He wrote in 1876 that the animals here showed "affinities" to Africa, India, Java, the Maluku Islands, New Guinea, and the Philippines.

Why do Sulawesi have species from both sides of the line while most others didn't? Wallace had deduced the essential answer all those years ago but it has accrued greater depth with more research over time.

What does the ancient past say?

The line is part of the Malay archipelago, a geologically complex region with more than 25,000 islands.

Wallace figured that Sulawesi's animal distribution could be explained if some of these islands had been joined with the Asian mainland in the past. As the islands broke off and drifted apart, the ancestral species on each island would have become isolated and evolved independently, creating the distribution Wallace saw in the 19th century. Since

then, researchers have expanded this understanding by going further back in time. Millions of years ago, Australia broke off and drifted away from Antarctica. An ocean emerged in the growing gap and the water currents in its depths cooled the planet.

Meanwhile, Australia drifted north into Asia, creating the volcanic islands of Indonesia. Various studies found that variations in monsoons, aridity, and sea levels between these islands spurred island species to adapt to their new conditions and diversify, until as recently as four million years ago.

The movement of continents was one part of the puzzle. A study published in 2023 revealed another when scientists took a closer look at how species across the Wallace line were related. They analysed data of 20,000 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Despite global cooling, they found, Malay's tropical islands stayed warmer and wetter than Australia. Thus, Asian fauna used these islands as stepping stones to Australia whereas Australian species, having evolved in cooler climates, struggled to make their way across the islands to Asia. "Species from Asia can migrate through the rainforest-rich northern route, as the ecosystems are similar to their origins," Ali said. "Australian species can only move into Asia along the southern route, around Timor and nearby islands. This path emerged much later - only a few million years ago - making migration more challenging for Australian species."

Does the line matter?

By combining insights from multiple

disciplines, the aforementioned studies helped explain Wallace's findings to a degree that revealed the line to be a mirage: it was visible but the real reasons why it exists are rooted in the deeper facts of nature.

Today, even newer tools have joined older ones to further clarify the region's biogeography. "We are learning more about which adaptations allow species to move throughout the region by using advanced evolutionary modelling and computer simulations," Alexander Skeels, a postdoctoral research fellow at Australian National University, Canberra, said.

The factors that influenced species dispersal and settlement in the past are still relevant today.

The Indo-Malayan archipelago faces one of the world's highest rates of habitat destruction. Understanding its biogeography will be crucial for ecologists to predict how species will respond to the loss of their homes, compounded by the effects of climate change.

"New technologies are helping us understand that 'lines' that separate Asia and Australia may be simplifying the story," Skeels said. Ali echoed him, saying redrawing the Wallace line or any other line like it is "futile".

"Different datasets and methods will reveal different results. These boundaries will always be fuzzy. Instead of redrawing lines, it is more valuable to focus on how these species will be affected by habitat destruction in future," Ali added.

Rupsy Khurana is Science Communication and Outreach Lead at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Upendran

"What o'clock should I come?"
"You generally don't say 'what o'clock'."
"You don't? But I've heard many people saying it and..."
".... 'o'clock' is used when a specific time is mentioned. For example, I can say, 'Please be home by 6 o'clock if you'd like. But tell me, if I can't say 'What o'clock should I come?', what can I say instead?"
"You could say 'When should I come?', or 'What time should I come?'. But if you want to use 'o'clock', you could ask, 'Should I come at 7 o'clock?'"

"Or should I, like Gopa, come at 12 o'clock?"
"Don't talk to me about Gopa. He's a blockhead."
"A 'blockhead'! What does it mean?"
"When you refer to someone as a blockhead, it means that you think he/she is a 'stupid person'. For example, 'In my opinion, my next door neighbour is a blockhead.'"

"Most people think that their neighbours are a bunch of blockheads. Mine is not only a blockhead, but also an ugly blockhead."
"I don't think you should call Malathy 'ugly'."
"But she is ugly!"
"Still, you shouldn't call her that. Sounds too direct."
"O.K. You give me another word which means 'ugly' and ..."
".... you could say 'homely'."

"Homely!"
"Yes. In American English, when you refer to someone as being 'homely', it means he/she is 'plain, unattractive'."
"I see. So, can I say, 'Malathy has a homely face?'"
"Yes, you can. 'Homely' can be used with men as well. For example, I can say, 'Vijay is a homely boy.'"

"Meaning that Vijay is not good looking."
"Exactly! But remember, this is in American English."
"Do you think you have a homely face?"
"You'd better leave before I break your head, you blockhead."

"O.K. o.k.! What time should I come tomorrow?"
"Be here by 8 o'clock."

Published in *The Hindu* on August 29, 1995.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on various events that happened on March 5

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

This event, known in Great Britain as the Incident on King Street, was a confrontation, on March 5, 1770, during the American Revolution, in what was then the colonial-era province of Massachusetts Bay. What is this event called?

QUESTION 2

This person, a Chinese political figure, was born on this day in 1898. She was also known as Madame Chiang. Who is she?

QUESTION 3

This Venezuelan politician, a populist president of Venezuela who had adopted

an ideology that was rooted in the socialist political program of South American independence hero Simón Bolívar, died on this day. Who was he?

QUESTION 4

This Russian politician, revolutionary and political theorist led the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953. He established a totalitarian political system in the Soviet Union. Name the leader.

QUESTION 5

This British Prime Minister popularised the term 'Iron Curtain' describing the separation of the Soviet Union and its eastern and central European allies from Western nations. Who was the leader?



Visual question:

Identify this Nobel Prize writer, who was born on this day in 1955. What was his actual name and pen name?

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

1. Name the only person to win consecutive awards for direction in the 21st century. **Ans: Alejandro G. Iñárritu**

2. Name the film which holds a joint record for most nominations, won six awards but did not win Best Picture. **Ans: La La Land**

3. This person wrote, produced, directed, and edited a movie which won in all four categories. **Ans: Sean Baker**

4. The first non-English feature film to win Best Picture. **Ans: Parasite**

5. Name the first non-English film to win Best Animated Feature. **Ans: Spirited Away**

Visual: This director was nominated multiple times, but won his only award for a live action short film. **Ans: Wes Anderson**
Early Bird: Pradyut Arun

Word of the day

Supine:

lying face upward; passive as a result of indolence or indifference

Synonym:

inactive

Usage: No other colony showed such supine, selfish helplessness in allowing her own border citizens to be mercilessly harried.

Pronunciation:

newsth.live/supinepro

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/s(j)u:paɪn/

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The budget allocated for developing and renovating temples

161 In crore. The amount has been allocated for developing and renovating temples under the Devasthan department. Rajasthan Devasthan Minister Joraram Kumawat said there were 593 temples under the Department, out of which 552 are in the State and 41 in other States. PTI

The European Union's proposed plan to beef up defences

800 In billion euros. The chief of the European Union's executive proposed an 800 billion euro plan to beef up the defences of EU nations to lessen the impact of a potential U.S. disengagement and provide Ukraine with military muscle to negotiate with Russia. AP

State-run schools in Jharkhand functioning with a single teacher

7,930 As many as 7,930 State-run schools in Jharkhand are functioning with a single teacher each, Education Minister Ramdas Soren said on Tuesday. Around 3.81 lakh students are enrolled in these single-teacher schools. PTI

Number of tourists who visited J&K in the past two years

4.4 In crore tourists. Over 4.4 crore tourists, including 1.20 lakh foreigners, visited Jammu and Kashmir in the past two years. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said ₹35.08 crore has been allocated for the promotion of the tourism department over the past two financial years. PTI

The increase in SEBI's total income in 2023-24

48 In per cent. Markets regulator SEBI's total income rose 48% year-on-year to ₹2,075 crore in 2023-24, driven by increased earnings from fees and subscriptions. Of the total income, the regulator earned a fee income of ₹1,851.5 crore. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What are the issues around delimitation?

When was the last delimitation exercise done? What did the Home Minister state with respect to increasing the number of seats in States and how it will be done? Which States will be at a disadvantage should representation based on projected population come into being?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan, R

The story so far:

There has been a renewed debate about delimitation after the issue was raised by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the first Census after 2026.

What are constitutional provisions? Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. This exercise is performed by the 'Delimitation Commission' that is set up by an act of Parliament. Such an exercise was carried out based on the 1951, 1961 and 1971 Census. The number of seats in the Lok Sabha, based on the 1971 Census, was fixed at 543. However, since then, it has been frozen in order to encourage population control measures. This number is to be readjusted based on the first Census after 2026. As the 2021 Census that was originally postponed due to COVID-19 is yet to commence, there have been debates linking it to the ensuing delimitation.

What are the issues?

The population explosion that happened in our country during the last five decades has been uneven with some States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan having a greater increase than States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. There are two scenarios that are being discussed with respect to the revised delimitation exercise.

The first is to continue with the existing 543 seats and their redistribution amongst various States (Exhibit 1). The second is to increase the number of seats

Proportional representation

The number of seats in the Lok Sabha, based on the 1971 Census, was fixed at 543, when the population was 54.8 crore. However, since then, it has been frozen in order to encourage population control measures

Exhibit 1: If seats are retained at 543 and reapportioned among States based on 2026* population

State	Number of seats at present	Number of seats projected	Net Gain/Loss
Uttar Pradesh	80	91	11
Bihar	40	50	10
Rajasthan	25	31	6
Madhya Pradesh	29	33	4
Tamil Nadu	39	31	-8
Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	34	-8
Kerala	20	12	-8
Karnataka	28	26	-2
Punjab	13	12	-1
Himachal Pradesh	4	3	-1
Uttarakhand	5	4	-1
Northeastern States (excluding Assam)	11	11	-

*projected figures

Exhibit 2: If the number of seats is increased to 848 based on the 2026* population

State	Number of seats at present	Number of seats projected	Net Gain/Loss
Uttar Pradesh	80	143	63
Bihar	40	79	39
Rajasthan	25	50	25
Madhya Pradesh	29	52	23
Tamil Nadu	39	49	10
Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	54	12
Kerala	20	20	-
Karnataka	28	41	13
Punjab	13	18	5
Himachal Pradesh	4	4	-
Uttarakhand	5	7	2
Northeastern States (excluding Assam)	11	11	-

Source: Based on Vaishnav et al, Carnegie endowment

to 848, with proportionate increase among various States (Exhibit 2). Home Minister Amit Shah stated in a recent public meeting that the number of seats will not be reduced for any State and that it would be increased on a 'pro-rata' basis for all States including the southern States. The basis for this 'pro-rata' share for States – whether it will be based on the existing percentage in the share of seats or on projected population – is not clear.

As per Exhibit 2 which is based on projected population, it is evident that

southern States, smaller States in the north like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as the northeastern States are bound to be at a disadvantage when compared to the larger northern States. This may go against the 'basic structure' of federalism in our polity. It will lead to a feeling of disenchantment in the States that stand to lose in their proportional representation, and thereby political significance, despite controlling their population.

Southern States that have a 24% share in the number of seats at present would

see it decline by 5%.

What can be a solution?

'Democracy' means 'rule or government by the people'. It follows that the government is elected by the majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'. However, it is pertinent to note that this principle has been diluted, in the interest of population control, since 1976 when the delimitation exercise was postponed for the first time.

In a federation like the U.S., the number of seats in the House of Representatives has been capped at 435 since 1913, though the population of the country has increased almost four times from 9.4 crore in 1911 to an estimated 34 crore in 2024.

The main job of a Member of Parliament (MP) is to legislate on 'Union List' matters and hold the Union government accountable. Majority of the schemes of the Union Government are implemented by State governments. The country has functioned with 543 Lok Sabha MPs for the past five decades while the population increased from 55 crore to 145 crore. India's population is projected to peak at around 165-170 crore, an increase of around 15% from the current level, in the next three decades and then decline. Considering the above factors, the 543 MPs in Lok Sabha may be capped at the existing number. It would ensure status quo in representation from various States and uphold the federal principle. The MPs and leaders of both regional and national political parties from the south, smaller States in north and the northeastern States should consider it their responsibility to demand such a cap from the Parliament in order to protect the political interest of the regions they represent. The number of MLAs in each State may be increased in line with the projected population to address the democratic representational requirement.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. He currently trains civil-service aspirants at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.

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'Democracy' means 'rule or government by the people'. It follows that the government is elected by the majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'.

What is the current status of U.S.-Taiwan relations?

There has been a rise in Chinese aggression across the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, Donald Trump has hinted at Taiwan being too far away for the U.S. to be of any help should Beijing adopt a military route

WORLD INSIGHT

Gurjun Singh

The recent February 16 update of the U.S. State Department factsheet on Taiwan calls for a revisit of U.S.-Taiwan relations. The factsheet now does not assert that "we do not support Taiwan independence" and states that the U.S. will support "Taiwan's membership in international organisations where applicable". The deletion was termed a routine update by Washington and was welcomed by Taiwan. However, it did receive strong opposition from Beijing. As per China's Foreign Ministry, "The U.S. State Department's revision of the list of facts regarding US-Taiwan relations represents a serious regression in its stance on Taiwan... (and) sends a seriously

erroneous message to the separatist forces advocating for Taiwan independence". The driver of U.S. Taiwan policy is the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), 1979, which, "Declares it to be the policy of the United States to preserve and promote extensive, close, and friendly commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan... and to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character". This policy underscores the regular arms sales from the U.S. to Taiwan which has received ire from Beijing.

Trump on Taiwan

U.S. President Donald Trump has proven himself to be unpredictable, and talks of tariffs have made U.S.-China relations challenging. However, U.S.-Taiwan relations are also getting complicated.

Mr. Trump during his campaign had hinted that he believes that Taiwan has

stolen the chip industry from the U.S. He has also asserted that he is keen that Taiwan should pay the U.S. for protection, and that Taiwan should increase its defence budget. Taiwan today is in the process of negotiating a U.S. arms deal of 7-10 billion dollars. It has also increased its defence budget to 2.5% of its GDP. Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te has announced that he will be communicating more with Mr. Trump and will also be looking for increasing investments in the U.S. The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) has announced that it is planning to invest around \$100 billion in developing manufacturing in the U.S., raising its investments to around \$165 billion. Mr. Trump has also made statements to the effect of hinting at Taiwan being too far away for the U.S. to be of any help should Beijing adopt a military route. However, the fact remains that Mr. Trump's last

administration had approved arms deal worth \$10 billion and sold arms worth \$18 billion to Taiwan. He also signed laws which improved U.S.-Taiwan relations such as the Taipei Act, Taiwan Travel Act and Taiwan Assurance Act.

Taiwan's vulnerable position

There has been a consistent rise in Chinese aggression in the form of military exercises across the Taiwan Strait. Chinese President Xi Jinping has also been building a global narrative in the hope to further isolate Taiwan. Beijing has had a tough relationship with the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) government since 2016. During the last three terms of the DPP, Taiwan lost diplomatic allies to Beijing. Today only 12 countries have diplomatic relations with Taipei. The 2024 elections happened under excessive military exercises by China across the Taiwan Strait. Along with regular military drills, Beijing has also resorted to using spy balloons and cyber-attacks. These tactics have been an attempt to keep the threat of military invasion real.

A conflictual relationship between the U.S. and China can raise existential challenges for Taiwan. For Mr. Xi, it is about national rejuvenation, while for Washington, Taiwan matters as a chip hub and as a market for U.S. weapons.

The writer is Associate Professor, OP Jindal Global University.

THE GIST

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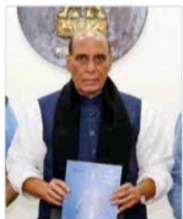
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Securing the skies

With adversaries rapidly upgrading to next-generation aircraft, India must prioritise air combat readiness

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is at a critical juncture, balancing the need for rapid modernisation with self-sufficiency under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative. A recent report by the Empowered Committee for Capability Enhancement of the IAF, has identified key thrust areas and provided recommendations to address shortfalls and enhance the force's capabilities. The IAF is currently operating at 31 fighter squadrons, significantly below the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. The delays in the induction of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk1A and the gradual phasing out of ageing Jaguar, MiG-29UPG, and Mirage-2000 present an urgent need for new acquisitions. The report underscores the necessity of accelerating the production of the LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2, and the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Besides, the need for additional Airborne Early-Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft, mid-air refuelers, and advanced missile systems is crucial for operational capabilities. The committee has stressed the role of the private sector in complementing efforts by Defence PSUs and the DRDO to boost production capacity and efficiency in aerospace manufacturing. The slow pace of domestic fighter jet production has led to gaps in operational readiness, particularly when adversaries like China and Pakistan are rapidly modernising their air forces with fifth- and even sixth-generation aircraft.



The complex procurement process and lack of streamlined decision-making continue to delay critical acquisitions compromising the air strength. While progress has been made in indigenous defence production, there are still gaps in high-end technologies such as jet engine development, advanced avionics, and stealth capabilities. The financial allocation for defence needs to align with modernisation goals, ensuring adequate funding for both indigenous projects and immediate acquisitions. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has directed that the committee's recommendations be implemented in a structured and time-sensitive manner to prevent further delays. The government must ensure the timely execution of the AMCA program and increase HAL's production capacity to meet annual fighter jet requirements. Besides, a reformed procurement mechanism, reducing bureaucratic delays, is essential to fast-track approvals and acquisitions. Strengthening collaborations with global aerospace leaders to bring in advanced technology while setting up domestic manufacturing hubs will help accelerate modernisation. Encouraging private defence manufacturers through policy reforms, incentives, and infrastructure support will boost self-sufficiency in aerospace production. The recommendations underscore call for urgent action and need for addressing systemic challenges, and fostering innovation through private sector involvement. Indeed, India must achieve a combat-ready and self-sufficient air force capable of countering emerging threats. The need for a modern and highly efficient Air Force is more critical than ever.

PICTALK



Women participate in bike rally 'Queens on the Wheel', in Bhopal.

Russia China help Junta hold the fort

Myanmar's civil war sees resistance forces making major gains, yet the Junta retains key cities and economic hubs with China and Russia's backing



ASHOK K MEHTA

Last week, Home Minister Amit Shah held a review meeting of Manipur under the President's Rule and also discussed the trade routes to Myanmar with the border areas no longer under Junta's control. Myanmar's resistance forces have ruled the roost since 1962. Their fourth coup February 2021, is the longest but one which has met with the biggest resistance and for the first time the Bamar (Burmese) joined the opposition which consists of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO), People's Defence Force (PDF) under National United Government (NUG), local militias and rebel groups all united in defeating the Junta.

Under Junta's rule organized crime of which it is beneficiary has risen phenomenally to USD 2bn in cyber scams and other frauds. Many Indians have been unsuspecting participants and victims. Never before has Resistance been so organized in its fight against the military; success has come without any unified command and what at best is coordinated operations like Three Brotherhood Alliance which launched Operation 1027 by three EAOs - TNLA, MNDAA, and AA.

The last of these - the Arakan Army - is militarily the strongest and operates in the Rakhine province in the south while the other two EAOs operate in the northern Shan state. Codename 1027 denotes the launch date of the massive offensive in the north on October 27, 2023. China plays a double role: supporting the Junta as well as some of the EAOs. Lately, there has been a policy shift - full support to the Junta. But Chinese pronouncements are deceptive; best to go by Chinese deeds, not words. On the ground, in the fourth year of the war, the Junta has lost considerable ground but is nowhere near being defeated. On the scale of conflict measurement, Junta holds 21 per cent of the territory which consists of the precious Irrawaddy heartland of Bhamars and includes the new capital Naypyidaw, Yangon and Mandalay, the two largest cities; and all sea ports and air bases. Only on the border the India-operated Sittwe is under threat sur-

rounded by the Arakan Army. Two military command headquarters and two air bases in the north and south have been taken by Resistance forces. Some 145 of 350 townships are lost by Junta which has also lost all trade routes/posts on the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand. Only one trade route Moosa, is with Junta. The Resistance controls 42 per cent territory with the remaining being No Man's Land. More importantly, 80 per cent of people especially Bhamars support resistance while only 20 per cent are with Junta. During previous uprisings, Bamar always supported the Junta. Corruption is endemic, top down and has eroded Junta's military capabilities. It has led to defections and desertions with fighting battalions down to 100 men against the standard 600 soldiers. Some 167 battalions appear to have been lost, and weapons sold resulting in low morale and scant will to fight. Casualties are numerous on both sides but no figures have been reported. Junta commanders have made false claims about facts on the ground. Some ghost units are on the Orbat. Most supply lines have been rendered unusable for reinforcements. All movement is by air and counter-attacks therefore also launched from air causing heavy casualties among the civilian population. The Resistance has been enriched



CHINA PLAYS A DOUBLE ROLE: SUPPORTING THE JUNTA AS WELL AS SOME OF THE EAOs. LATELY, THERE HAS BEEN A POLICY SHIFT-FULL SUPPORT TO THE JUNTA. BUT CHINESE PRONOUNCEMENTS ARE DECEPTIVE; BEST TO GO BY CHINESE DEEDS, NOT WORDS

by defectors who bring weapons and skills. Women now comprise 60 per cent of the force though they are mainly in support roles. In earlier uprisings, women constituted only 10 per cent.

This time diaspora support is unprecedented and a significant factor. Recruitment to PDF has also risen with support being provided by external players. PDFs are called 'watermelons' green outside and red inside. While green is the colour of the uniform, red is the colour of the National League for Democracy flag. Despite the high morale and momentum of success, Resistance requires a new military strategy, another 1027. Resistance is expected to attack Junta's defence infrastructure - their defence industries - near Mandalay and its loss will be a big blow to the military but still not enough to unhinge it. PDF has to reorganize into battalion/brigade formations under a command structure to be able to capture and hold ground and take strategic targets like airbases. China and Russia, two P5 members in the UNSC, are partners with No Limits but not military allies. Both support the Junta.

Russia is now the key military supplier and since 2021, has provided equipment worth USD 406 mn. Junta supremo Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia last year ostensibly for a medical check-

up. Russia supplied six Su30 aircraft while six Burmese elephants were sent to Moscow. The Sukhois will significantly enhance aerial capability and cause additional civilian casualties. China remains the key stakeholder in Myanmar and is supporting the Junta as it has made major military and economic investments in Myanmar. It eyes the rich minerals, oil, gas and hydropower. Its gas pipeline from Kyaukpadaung port on the Andaman Sea to Kunming in Yunnan provides Beijing access to the Indian Ocean. Gas pipelines are being supplemented by road and railway arteries. Along with Coco Island given on lease, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor constitutes an alternative route to China's Malacca dilemma.

With 20,000 new recruits with Junta, Beijing has calculated that Resistance cannot defeat it. So Beijing-brokered cease-fires with EAOs in Kachin and Shan states and Kokang region in the north and also with MNDAA in January 2025. Beijing will also support Junta to hold elections in November 2025 giving it the fig-leaf of legitimacy.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

RBI's Repo Rate cut: A golden opportunity for homebuyers

With the RBI lowering the repo rate by 25 basis points, home loan borrowers stand to benefit from reduced EMIs, making homeownership more affordable

Any time is a good time when it comes to buying a home. However, the recent repo rate cuts signal a lowering of interest rates in the future, thus, hinting at a possibly more stable economy and increased scope for real-estate investment. Home buyers in India are wondering whether they should consider purchasing a home following the recent repo rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The country's central bank recently lowered the repo rates by 25 bps from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first rate cut in five years by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which can result in significant savings for home loan borrowers.

Small and steady savings on EMIs
Home loan applicants stand to benefit from RBI's recent decision, as it will help them service loans at a lower cost. This reduction in EMIs would also make homeownership more affordable



for potential buyers. Let's illustrate this with an example. Suppose that you took a 20-year home loan of Rs 20 lakhs at an 8.75% interest rate. Your current monthly EMI would be somewhere around Rs 17,674. With the new rate, your monthly EMI drops to Rs 17,356, resulting in a total savings of Rs. 76,259. If you maintain your current EMI payments, you could pay off your loan 5

months earlier than originally planned. For those who are hesitant to enter the housing market due to high property prices and interest rates, this may be a good opportunity to take advantage of reduced borrowing costs. However, it is imperative to consider other factors such as market trends, location, and personal financial stability before making a decision. **Way to loan refinancing options**

Borrowers might feel that the savings from reduced repo rates are minimal when it comes to monthly EMI outgoings. As the saying goes, 'A penny saved is a penny earned,' and even a small saving on EMIs could contribute to larger savings in the long term. Additionally, borrowers with strong credit scores can take advantage of competitive refinancing options. Since they are considered low-risk by lenders, they are most likely to secure lower interest rates on refinanced loans.

Win for the housing sector
The RBI aims to stimulate the economy by making home financing more accessible. This can lead to increased demand in the housing sector, especially in areas where property prices have been sharply increasing due to infrastructure development and improved amenities. The reduction in the cost of borrowing can help mitigate some pressure from skyrocketing housing prices.

(The writer is CEO&Co-Founder, BASIC Home Loan; views are personal)

A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN MANIPUR

Madam - The editorial, "A Fresh Start..." (March 4, 2025), presents a positive outlook on the surrender of illegal arms in Manipur. However, as noted in the editorial, this is likely only a fraction of the weapons still in the possession of warring groups. Despite this development, nothing substantial has been done to bring lasting peace to the state - except for the resignation of the Chief Minister, who was widely seen as responsible for the unfortunate turn of events. The 60,000 displaced individuals forced into the forests must be allowed to return to their homes and lead normal lives. For this to happen, the government must establish an impartial administration that earns the trust of all sections of society. Symbolic gestures alone will not suffice; all looted and illegal arms must be surrendered to achieve real progress.

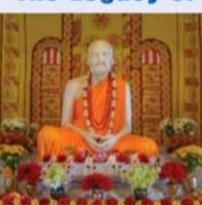
If both the state and central governments had been genuinely committed to fostering peaceful coexistence among the groups, the situation would not have deteriorated so severely for so long. Even after major incidents - including the looting of arms, around 250 murders, women being paraded nude, and places of worship being ransacked - the government's inefficacy remained glaringly evident. Yet, it took an inordinate amount of time to secure the Chief Minister's resignation. President's Rule alone cannot bring about meaningful change, as it operates under directives from the Home Ministry, which itself has been exposed for its lack of a clear strategy. True peace will return only when an impartial and competent administration takes charge. Unfortunately, neither the state nor the nation has a charismatic leader capable of inspiring a positive response from the people.

A G Rajmohan | Chandigarh

FORMER SEBI CHIEF IN TROUBLE

Madam - Apropos the front page news item, "Buch Booked", published on Mar 3, this is my response. With a special court directing the Anti-Corruption Bureau

The Legacy of Sri Ramakrishna



The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, according to the Bengali lunar calendar, was celebrated on March 1 this year. Sri Ramakrishna urged us to liberate ourselves from religious dogma. He

famously said, "There are many doors to God's house... No matter which door you enter through, you get inside." He did not merely preach tolerance - he practiced it. Sri Ramakrishna followed the path of Islam for some time and adhered to its teachings. Later, he practiced Christianity for a brief period, demonstrating his belief in the idea that "Many opinions, many paths." Swami Vivekananda, his devoted disciple, once said, "Each human being embodies God. This is what I have learned from my Master, Sri Ramakrishna." His teachings serve as a powerful antidote to inhumanity, religious hatred, and untouchability - values that remain profoundly relevant today.

Sujit De | Kolkata

REIN IN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS
Madam - In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that individuals engaged in social media influencing or podcasting must uphold morality and decency in their content before broadcasting it. The Court stressed that such influencers must recognize their responsibility towards society. Creating humor through vulgar slang and offensive language does not contribute positively to society. Instead, it fosters a negative mindset, particularly in the younger generation (Gen Z). Striving to appear as a 'cool dude' in front of an audience does not absolve influencers of their responsibilities as citizens. In his defense, Ranbir Allahabadia argued that his controversial statement was made purely in jest. Humor should not come at the expense of emotions or sensitivity. Instead, influencers should focus on fostering a respectful and thoughtful environment that contributes to a united society.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Ranganathan | Chennai

thehindu **businessline**

WEDNESDAY • MARCH 5, 2025

Incompatible duo

Insurance, MFs too dissimilar to be bundled together

The idea of bundling insurance cover with Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) in mutual funds, being discussed in industry for now, is a bad one. The mutual fund industry seems to be keen on this structure to sweeten the appeal of its products and ensure continuity of SIPs. The insurance industry seems to be pushing it to keep the gravy train going, as its products lose popularity owing to the phase-out of tax breaks under the new tax regime.

Insurance products in India have always been sold for their tax breaks rather than their protection benefits. In this proposed product, insurance premium is embedded into SIP contributions; therefore, in the event of an investor's ill health or death, his SIP can be continued with the insurance proceeds. The flaw here is that the investor or her nominee may have more pressing uses for the insurance proceeds in the unfortunate event of the ill-health or death of a breadwinner. On the occurrence of life-altering events such as illness, investors may also see a reduction in their risk-taking ability which may call for stopping SIPs and parking the money in safer avenues. Embedding insurance into SIPs may therefore not serve the industry's objective of ensuring SIP continuance. Handing over the death claim to the Asset Management Company (AMC) instead of investor nominees, a structure that was attempted in the past, would be wholly unfair to the dependents.

Bundling insurance covers with SIPs creates practical difficulties for investors too. For one, the decision on how much life or health insurance cover to buy is a personal one and should be taken by an individual based on his or her earning ability and dependents, among other factors. A bundled product would offer a standard cover for all, which could be unnecessary for some investors and inadequate for others. Two, insurance and mutual funds are inherently incompatible because of the widely different time horizons for which investors buy them. Indian investors typically run SIPs for two or three years at a time. Life and health covers are intended to cover the buyer's lifetime. If SIP stoppages end up interrupting insurance premium payments, the insurance cover will lapse with the investor forfeiting the premium paid by him and the insurer pocketing substantial penalties.

Three, settling insurance claims entails significant paperwork and multiple interactions between the policyholder and the insurance company. It is unclear whom investors in SIPs should turn to for claims processing, in the event of a health emergency or death of the investor. Given that AMCs and insurers have separate distribution channels, it is moot if AMCs or their distributors who sell the bundled SIP product to the investor, will co-ordinate with the insurer for claims settlement. Overall, insurance and mutual funds products are as different as chalk and cheese, and there can be no rationale for combining them.

POCKET

RAVICKANTH



GABRIEL ZUCMAN

Through a flurry of executive orders, US President Donald Trump has spent his first weeks in office trying to dismantle the international order that the United States helped create after World War II. Under the banner of "America First," his administration has withdrawn from the Paris climate agreement, the World Health Organization, and the UN Human Rights Council. And now, it is poised to go further. A sweeping review of all multilateral organisations is underway to determine whether the US should stay or go.

Trump is also determined to upend the international trade system. Less than two weeks after taking office, he announced steep tariffs: 25 per cent on imports from Canada and Mexico, and 10 per cent on imports from China (on top of the levies already in place). Since granting Canada and Mexico a one-month reprieve in early February, he has signalled that the tariffs are "going forward," though seemingly with another month-long delay. He has also announced a 25 per cent tariff on all steel and aluminium imports, and hinted at additional levies on automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and computer chips. Europe, too, could soon find itself in the crosshairs.

The consequences of the trade war Trump seems determined to stoke could be severe, and not just because of the sheer volume of trade that is at stake. Supply chains today are deeply integrated across borders, accounting for around 50 per cent of intra-regional trade. In many cases, components cross borders multiple times before final assembly, so paying a 25 per cent tariff each time an input crosses a border would quickly ratchet up costs.

Consider Mexico, which has surpassed even China as America's largest trading partner in goods. Beyond disrupting supplies of Mexican avocados (a well-known example), tariffs would have serious repercussions on an agriculture sector that supplies 63 per cent of US vegetable imports and 47 per cent of its fruit and nut imports.

The automotive industry — one of Mexico's key economic sectors, employing more than a million people and contributing around 5 per cent of GDP — would also take a major hit. A recent S&P Global report shows that Mexico is now the largest source of US light-vehicle imports, outpacing Japan, South Korea, and Europe. Nissan, for example, sources 27 per cent of its US



America's oligarchs are Trump's Achilles' heel

RETALIATORY MOVE. As Trump follows through with tariffs, the affected countries should tax US oligarchs who benefit the most from globalisation

sales from Mexico, while Honda sources nearly 13 per cent, and Volkswagen 43 per cent.

What should Mexico do? When Trump imposed tariffs on America's neighbours in 2018, Mexican authorities responded strategically by targeting products from politically significant US states, slapping tariffs on apples, bourbon, cheese, cranberries, pork, and potatoes. But this approach has limitations, especially given the vast size of the US economy relative to its neighbours.

Still, Mexico, Canada, and Europe have leverage. America's Achilles' heel is its highly internationalised oligarchy: a small group of ultra-wealthy individuals whose fortunes depend on access to global markets. This vulnerability gives foreign governments influence.

An oligarch tax shifts the economic conflict from a battle between countries — which fuels nationalist tensions and economic retaliation — to one between consumers and oligarchs

The most effective countermeasure is simple: tariffs for oligarchs. Countries should the market access for foreign multinationals and billionaires to fair taxation. As soon as Trump follows through with tariffs on Canada and Mexico, those countries should retaliate by taxing US oligarchs. In other words, if Tesla wants to sell cars in Canada and Mexico, Elon Musk — Tesla's primary shareholder — should be required to pay taxes in those jurisdictions.

EXPLICITLY EXTRATERRITORIAL. Of course, this strategy is explicitly extraterritorial, since it applies tax obligations on foreign actors in exchange for access to local markets. But rather than fearing extraterritoriality, countries should embrace it as a tool for enforcing minimum standards, curbing inequality, preventing tax evasion, and promoting sustainability.

Unlike traditional tariffs, an oligarch tax targets those who benefit the most from globalisation: billionaires and the corporations they control. It shifts the economic conflict from a battle between countries — which fuels nationalist tensions and economic retaliation — to one between consumers and oligarchs.

Moreover, this approach could trigger a virtuous cycle. Countries with major consumer markets could collect taxes

that multinationals have dodged elsewhere, gradually eroding the appeal of tax competition. It would become pointless for firms or individuals to move to low-tax countries, because the savings would be offset by higher taxes owed in countries with large consumer markets. The race to the bottom would soon be replaced by a race to the top.

Trump's return to the White House carries alarming implications. But it also presents an opportunity. This is a moment to rethink international economic relations, calmly but radically. The best response is a new global economic framework that neutralises tax competition, fights inequality, and protects our planet. Under such a framework, importing countries would enforce tax justice beyond their borders, ensuring that multinational corporations and their billionaire owners pay their fair share.

If it's a trade war Trump wants, consumers in Mexico, Canada, Europe, and beyond should unite to ensure that Musk and his fellow oligarchs feel the cost.

The writer is Professor of Economics at the Paris School of Economics and Ecole Normale Supérieure, Summer Research Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, and Director of the EU Tax Observatory. Copyright Project Syndicate, 2025

Key changes, unresolved questions in I-T Bill

Consolidation of TDS provisions and the adoption of clearer terminology are among the notable improvements

Himanshu Sinha
Aditi Goyal

The Income Tax Bill, 2025 (Bill) has been introduced with the objective of making the income tax "concise, lucid, easy to read and understand". The Government has emphasised that since the income tax law is updated regularly, the Bill does not bring major policy changes. However, as we take a closer look, certain changes stand out as particularly significant, warranting closer examination. We have discussed some of these below.

No deduction of inter-corporate dividends for companies under the 22 per cent tax regime: The Bill introduces a change to the provision allowing a deduction for inter-corporate dividends. Currently, under the Income Tax Act (ITA), domestic companies paying tax at 15 per cent as well as 22 per cent can deduct the dividend income they receive from other companies or business trusts, so long as they distribute these dividends to their shareholders before the prescribed date. However, the new Bill removes this deduction for companies under the 22 per cent tax regime, while preserving the benefit for companies under the 15 per cent tax regime. It is hoped that this discrepancy arises from an inadvertent drafting error which will be rectified during the legislative enactment process. If this issue remains unaddressed, it could have

significant implications for holding company structures from a tax efficiency perspective.

Provisions relating to the interpretation of tax treaties: The Bill proposes that any undefined term used in a tax treaty will have the same meaning as under the ITA or any explanation provided by the government. If the term is not defined in the ITA, the government can define it through a notification. The definition (as provided in the ITA or through a notification) will apply from the date the tax treaty came into force. Therefore, the Bill allows the Government to unilaterally define treaty terms by issuing notifications from time to time.

This could lead to inconsistency and conflicts with judicial interpretations, since courts typically interpret tax treaties based on their original intent. Such a provision would also not be consistent with the Vienna Convention, which provides that tax treaty partners are obliged to refrain from acts which would undermine the object and purpose of the tax treaty as intended at the time of signing. If enacted in its current form, this provision may be susceptible to judicial scrutiny.

Timely filing of income tax return for claiming a tax refund: The Bill proposes that taxpayers must file their income tax return on or before the due date to claim a refund. This is a departure from the current law, which only requires taxpayers to file a return



NEW BILL. Some significant changes

(including a belated return) to claim a refund. While the income tax department has clarified that there are no policy changes relating to refunds, the wording of the Bill suggests otherwise. It is hoped that the enacted law will be revised to address this concern.

Indemnity for TDS: The Bill introduces a concept that isn't found in the ITA — an indemnity for tax withholders. Clause 518 of the Bill provides that "Every person deducting, retaining, or paying any tax in pursuance of this Act in respect of an income belonging to another person shall be indemnified for the deduction, retention, or payment thereof". Questions are likely to arise around the scope and coverage of this indemnity, and if it will include interest and penalty as well. Also, it would be interesting to see if parties will need to agree to the process and timing of indemnification,

and if they can contractually agree to waive the indemnity, such as when the payer agrees to bear the TDS liability. These issues will need clarification.

Overlap of the ITA and the new law: The Bill proposes that the ITA will be repealed but still apply in certain situations. For example, assessments and appeals for financial years up to 2025-26 will continue to be governed by the ITA. Further, the definition of "income" in the Bill contains more than 20 sub-clauses, with the last clause providing that any other income referred to in the ITA will also be considered income under the new law. Essentially, even with the new law in place, parts of the ITA will still need to be considered. This could lead to some confusion or difficulty.

While the Bill is not intended to overhaul the ITA, it does introduce some key changes. Some of these changes are a clear departure from the current law, and a few provisions could use further clarification or reconsideration. That said, the Bill brings notable improvements, such as the consolidation of tax deduction at source provisions and the adoption of clearer terminology. The practical impact of these changes (once the Bill is enacted) will ultimately determine the success of the government's efforts to strike a balance between simplifying the tax regime and maintaining legal certainty.

The writers are Partners, Tax Practice, Trilegal

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

Credit score tracking

This has reference to the Monitoring in non-metro tracking credit scores than in metros. NITI Aayog (February 4). Per the NITI Aayog report, the share of women in business loan origination has seen consistent progress since 2019 which indicates good progress on women's empowerment. However, the practical challenges being faced by them in the areas of credit aversion, barriers to credit readiness and the concerns in raising necessary collateral and guarantors need to be addressed. Women's self-help group (SHG) concept is being abused by political parties. Innovative tailor-made

products to cater to women's financial requirements need to be introduced.

With more women seen driving autorickshaws, liberal finance to women looking to be engaged in such activities must be explored.

RV Baskaran
Chennai

Strengthen ties with EU

This refers to 'EU calling' (March 4). The Zelensky-Trump episode at the Oval Office has, as an off-shoot, opened up new possibilities for the eurozone, beyond its defence concerns. Now, with US weaponising tariffs, the EU is quickly focusing on trade

relations beyond a shrinking US sphere. An EU that is evidently more determined today on its own strengths is a partner worth cultivating, immediately on the trade front and subsequently in the context of larger areas of interest. The visit of the European Commission President to New Delhi last week should establish India as a stable partner for the EU in these unsteady times.

R Narayanan
New Mumbai

Calculating GDP

This refers to US wants to remove government spending from GDP (March 4). Macroeconomics

revolves around the canon "One man's expense is another man's income." If any government for that matter spends money on socio-economic welfare programmes, it becomes the productive income of many people which in turn creates multiplier effects on employment, output and, of course, income in the society. If it includes only productive expenditure (say, salaries, capital assets, repayment of loans, etc) in the calculation of GDP, then it will have meaning. US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick should not be oblivious to the fact that government expenditure is very significant to bail any economy out

of recession or even depression.

S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

Expand STEM

Agpropos 'Accounting in the era of STEM' (March 4). Including basic accounting with STEM is a desirable change. However, students must be given exposure to certain other important subjects to give them an opportunity to select an educational career without being limited to a few faculties. Specifically, the focus must be on rural students who have hidden talent but limited by fiscal constraints.

Rajiv Magal
Holkere Village, Karnataka

[OUR TAKE]

Battling India's obesity challenge

A large overweight young-adult population will be a burden on the economy. Policymakers need to plan for this looming crisis

India will have the largest population of obese or overweight adolescents/young adults (15-24 years) by 2050, as per an analysis published in *The Lancet*. It will also have the second-largest population of obese or overweight children (5-14 years). Throw in adult obesity at 450 million or close to 12% of the global overweight/obese population estimated in 2050, and the health care challenges for the country seem overwhelming.

From cardiovascular illnesses to cancers, from type 2 diabetes to hormonal imbalances, the health effects of being overweight or obese are physiologically pervasive. With such a large population facing these risks, the burden on health care will shoot up by many multiples from now, stretching the already inadequate health care capacity even more (not to mention quality deficits in the public sector). And, given that the prevalence of infectious diseases could rise or frequently assume scales that present a massive management challenge as planetary warming worsens, low- and middle-income countries will find their systems tottering under the combined weight. This obesity epidemic will also extract serious costs from the economy, with productivity losses and high costs of health care. The retarding effect of such imposts on the national income are well documented and India's policymakers, at the Centre and in the states (health is a state subject), need to cope with the hurdles these pose for the stated national target of India becoming a developed economy by mid-century.

Sedentary lifestyles, eating disorders, genetic conditions, and poor metabolism are among the several factors that contribute to obesity/being overweight. A State focus on encouraging physical activity/fitness, driving nutrition security, mapping diets and eating habits against levels of physical activity, and early diagnosis and intervention in case of genetic, mental health, and physiological factors that increase the propensity to accumulate body fat could help correct course. Given early obesity is a precursor for obesity and related complications in later life, focussed intervention among children, adolescents, and young adults will be key. Childhood undernutrition — still a challenge for the country despite improved showing — causes physiological shifts by making the body store nutrients in excess of requirements, anticipating a need to respond to starvation. Therefore, along with childhood obesity, ensuring nutritional security in the early years needs attention. Multiple stakeholders — parents, schools, civil society, and, of course, the government — will have pivotal roles in ensuring this.

A reality check for Bangladesh-India ties

Bangladesh interim government chief Muhammad Yunus has offered a candid assessment of the relationship with India — that there is no other way for the two countries but to have good relations, though ties have been beset by "some conflicts" in recent times. Yunus's conclusion that these conflicts or misunderstandings are on account of some "propaganda" is questionable. The caretaker administration in Dhaka got off to a bad start with New Delhi last year, primarily over its handling of attacks on Bangladesh's minorities, and there have been other irritants in recent months. For Dhaka, former premier Sheikh Hasina's presence in India, and her recent political activities, have become a cause of concern.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar's meeting with his Bangladeshi counterpart Touhid Hossain on the margins of an international conference in Oman last month and foreign secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka in December were opportunities for the two sides to clear the air on a range of issues — but neither Yunus nor his varied team appear to have tried too hard. One indication of this is the impact on people-to-people ties and a sharp decline in the number of visas issued to Bangladeshi nationals. As Yunus himself noted, India and Bangladesh need to have good relations. In India's case, this is especially important for the country's northeastern states, whose security and economy benefited considerably from closer ties with Bangladesh over the past decade. Dhaka would do well to show greater sensitivity to New Delhi's concerns and red lines, especially if it is keen to pave the way for a meeting between Yunus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the upcoming Bimstec summit that could help reset the relationship.

Power to devastate, power to germinate

The same technologies that disrupt governments also empower visionaries in the most unexpected places. This is our moment to reclaim control — to use technology as a force for unity and progress, not a weapon of division

The world watched in disbelief as Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky and United States (US) President Donald Trump clashed on live television, an unfettered spectacle that laid bare the absurdity of modern geopolitics. Allies watched. Adversaries watched. Millions of ordinary people — across continents — watched. This was not diplomacy behind closed doors, nor was it a carefully curated narrative spun by governments. It was raw, unscripted, and embarrassingly human.

What does this mean for humanity? Is our access to real-time political chaos going to lead us to a more unified world, or will it rip us apart? Will it force the world's leaders into accountability and reason, or will it amplify division and destruction?

We now have access to knowledge and tools like never before. The exponential advance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), computing, robotics, and

sensors has accelerated this transformation, making it possible for people at every level of society to tap into capabilities once reserved for the elite. A few weeks ago, when I was in India, a beggar approached me asking for money. I told him I didn't have any cash. Without hesitation, he grinned and said, "Koi bat nahi, bas UPI kar do!" I stood there for a second, unsure whether to be amused or impressed. Here was someone who probably didn't have a home, yet he was fully integrated into the digital economy. He was more financially savvy than some government officials I have met.

The poorest of the poor now have access to the same advanced technologies as the wealthiest. Digital payments, instant communication, and limitless information have collapsed barriers that once separated classes and nations.

For centuries, power was maintained through secrecy and control of information. Today, that control is slipping. The Zelensky-Trump fiasco — whether it leads to Ukraine's destruction or forces a peace deal — was witnessed by the world in real time. It exposed the weaknesses of leaders and the dysfunction of global diplomacy. Adversaries who watched now have leverage. Allies who watched now have doubt.

Could this radical transparency also be a force for accountability? Could it push leaders beyond their egos and

ambitions to do what is right? Trump, for all his bluster, may now have leverage over Putin. If he can humiliate Zelensky so publicly, what does that mean for Russia's strongman? Will he be willing to risk the same fate? Will it push him toward a reasonable negotiation? The balance of power is shifting in unprecedented ways.

We have faced similar moments in history, but never with such visibility. When the Berlin Wall fell, the world

saw it through television cameras. When the Arab Spring unfolded, social media amplified the voices of protesters. Today, the interconnectedness of information is even more profound. Anyone with a smartphone can document, broadcast, and influence global events.

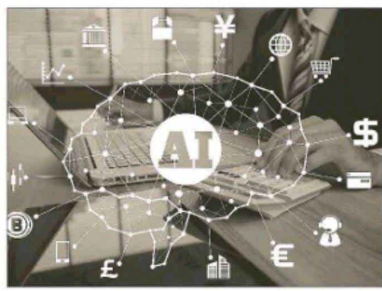
A single viral clip can shift public opinion or expose corruption in ways that once took decades.

In the *Driver in the Driver's Car*, I asked whether technology would lead us toward a utopian or dystopian future. We are now facing that choice, but at a scale that transcends industries and economies — it is a choice for all of humanity.

The same tools that connect us and allow a beggar to receive money through a mobile transaction can also be used to spread propaganda, incite violence, and manipulate reality. AI-generated deepfakes, misinformation campaigns, and algorithmic echo chambers distort truth and sow division. Yet these same technologies can



Vivek Wadhwa



The same tools that connect us can also be used to incite violence, manipulate reality and sow division.

empower individuals, hold governments accountable, and foster innovation. Blind trust in leadership, institutions, and media narratives is over. People are no longer passive observers; they are active participants in shaping reality. Leaders can no longer operate in darkness without consequences.

This new reality demands discernment — the ability to sift through noise and find truth. It demands responsibility — to use our access to information wisely rather than succumb to manipulation. And it demands courage — to push for the world we want rather than accept dysfunction.

The Trump-Zelensky confrontation may feel like just another episode in an ongoing geopolitical drama, but it is a symptom of something much larger. The world is changing. Power is shifting. The structures that held nations together are fracturing under the weight of new realities. The poorest of the poor now have tools they never had before. The most powerful can no longer hide their flaws. We are at a crossroads.

The choice is ours. Do we use this

moment to forge a better future? Or do we allow ourselves to be consumed by the very technologies that were meant to liberate us?

The best part is that transparency doesn't just expose dysfunction — it creates the possibility for reinvention. The same technologies that disrupt governments also empower visionaries in the most unexpected places. AI, biotechnology, and decentralised finance are no longer the domain of the privileged; they are tools for anyone bold enough to solve real problems. A single entrepreneur in a remote village can now develop breakthroughs that once required entire institutions. This is our moment to reclaim control — to use technology not as a weapon of division but as a force for unity and progress. The forces that challenge us can also be the ones that propel us forward — if we have the wisdom and courage to seize them.

Vivek Wadhwa is CEO, Vinita Biosciences. The views expressed are personal

In 1905 Bengal partition, the making of Bangladesh

The roots of Bangladesh go back to the 1905 partition of Bengal. Ostensibly an administrative measure to provide relief to an overburdened state, it laid down the footprint of a longer partition that changed the history of the subcontinent.

The idea of partitioning Bengal was neither new nor Lord Curzon's idea (Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905), as is generally believed to be. Nor was it part of a sinister plot to solidify British rule. For more than a quarter of a century before Curzon's arrival, there prevailed a belief that Bengal was too large under a single administration. In 1874, the province of Assam was stripped off from Bengal. The idea of transferring the Chittagong Division and giving a part to the Eastern province constantly cropped up but was never implemented.

When the scheme was suggested to Curzon's predecessor Lord Elgin, he agreed to it, preferring to tie a garland of old shoes around his neck. The severity of the agitation aggravated the growing divide, drawing the nabab of Dhaka into cooperation with Aligarh group of Syed Ahmed Khan, who had sought a separate platform for Muslims as early as in 1869. Pakistani historian Professor S M Ikram in his book *Modern Muslim India and the birth of Pakistan* (1950) was prophetic when he said, "The nabab's invitation brought the Aligarh leadership to the heart of Muslim Bengal, which marked the turning point in the history of the subcontinent. It was the genesis of Pakistan's 'Anar' state, Bangladesh."

A year later, the Muslim League was founded in 1906 with the blessings of the new viceroy, Lord Minto, with Nabab Salimullah playing the lead role. That evening Lady Minto smuggled in her diary that her husband's endorsement to the League had prevented "62 million people from joining the ranks of the seditionist opposition."

But the chain of political assassinations continued unabated. Lord Minto, like his predecessor had upheld the partition, convinced its revocation would lead to loss of prestige for the Raj. But when the revolutionaries exploded the first ingeniously produced bomb, the government recognised it as a wake-up call. The Minto had a narrow escape when his carriage was bombed in Ahmedabad. So did the next viceroy, Lord Hardinge, when he made a state entry into Delhi in 1912.

The British were now deeply conscious of the increasing threat posed by the aggressive new militancy in the land. Finally, at the glittering Durbar of Delhi in 1911, the visiting British monarch King George V made a royal proclamation in the form of a boon. It was to announce the reunification of Bengal but also the transference of the government of India from Calcutta to Delhi.

But the damage was done. The partition had opened a Pandora's Box. The communal identities it created eventually culminated into the end of British rule, the partition of India in 1947, with Bengal being divided into West Bengal and East Pakistan, and finally, into Bangladesh in 1971.

Lord Curzon was quick to pick up the idea of splitting Bengal, debating whether he should transfer out parts of Orissa and the Ganjam district of Madras.

enjoyed since the days of the old Muslim viceroys and kings. Then, as a special concession to the nabab, a loan of £100,000 was offered and after that there was little difficulty in gathering a large crowd of Muslims to set the seal of approval on the viceroy's plan.

October 16, 1905, the day of partition, became a turning point in British India's history. The legendary belief in the ultimate fairness of the British was shattered. People felt they had been insulted, humiliated, and tricked. In the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the lieutenant governor, Bampfylde Fuller was busy igniting the fires of separatism. When Fuller declared, "I was like a man who was married to two women, one a Hindu, the other a Mohammedan, both young and charming, but was forced into the arms of one of them by the rudeness of the other", angry Hindu agitators threatened to tie a garland of old shoes around his neck.

The severity of the agitation aggravated the growing divide, drawing the nabab of Dhaka into cooperation with Aligarh group of Syed Ahmed Khan, who had sought a separate platform for Muslims as early as in 1869. Pakistani historian Professor S M Ikram in his book *Modern Muslim India and the birth of Pakistan* (1950) was prophetic when he said, "The nabab's invitation brought the Aligarh leadership to the heart of Muslim Bengal, which marked the turning point in the history of the subcontinent. It was the genesis of Pakistan's 'Anar' state, Bangladesh."

A year later, the Muslim League was founded in 1906 with the blessings of the new viceroy, Lord Minto, with Nabab Salimullah playing the lead role. That evening Lady Minto smuggled in her diary that her husband's endorsement to the League had prevented "62 million people from joining the ranks of the seditionist opposition."

But the chain of political assassinations continued unabated. Lord Minto, like his predecessor had upheld the partition, convinced its revocation would lead to loss of prestige for the Raj. But when the revolutionaries exploded the first ingeniously produced bomb, the government recognised it as a wake-up call. The Minto had a narrow escape when his carriage was bombed in Ahmedabad. So did the next viceroy, Lord Hardinge, when he made a state entry into Delhi in 1912.

The British were now deeply conscious of the increasing threat posed by the aggressive new militancy in the land. Finally, at the glittering Durbar of Delhi in 1911, the visiting British monarch King George V made a royal proclamation in the form of a boon. It was to announce the reunification of Bengal but also the transference of the government of India from Calcutta to Delhi.

But the damage was done. The partition had opened a Pandora's Box. The communal identities it created eventually culminated into the end of British rule, the partition of India in 1947, with Bengal being divided into West Bengal and East Pakistan, and finally, into Bangladesh in 1971.

Nayana Goradia is the author of *Lord Curzon: The last of the British Moghuls*. The views expressed are personal

URSULA VON DER LEYEN | PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

'ReArm Europe' could mobilise close to 800 billion euros of defence expenditures for a safe and resilient Europe



Customising treatment for the mentally unwell

But I don't want to go among mad people, Alice remarked. "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat; "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." The Cheshire Cat of Alice in Wonderland acknowledged this fantastical reality long before something even remotely resembling a neuro-policy was being talked about in India. Now that the Economic Survey of India 2024-25 has declared that "Mental Health of Youth Will Drive Future Economy", maybe it will be taken seriously. Or perhaps, we'll just show it under the carpet after it has generated appropriate sighs and sounds, rather ironically, on social media.

Whatever we choose to do as a nation as we advance needs to be informed by the fact that we have taken an epidemic, a crisis even to acknowledge that we are collectively being ruined by neglecting mental health. Sample this. Even the pre-Covid Global Burden of Disease Study (2019) confirmed that mental disorders accounted for five of the top 10 causes of disability. Mental disorders like depression, anxiety, psychosis, and drug addiction are, collectively, the second largest cause of deaths globally.

Let alone the everyday darkness that comes with psychiatric disorders, life expectancy is reduced by 15 to 20 years owing to suicide and co-morbidities. Unfortunately, these statistics haven't meant very much, and mental health issues have been either getting fetishised by the attention economy or blindsided in the name of pride and propriety.

While the Indian government has finally acknowledged that "hostile work cultures and excessive hours spent working at desks can adversely affect mental well-being and ultimately put the brakes on the pace of economic growth", will the industry leaders campaigning for long work hours and weeks change their attitudes? Or will it become one of those things that look good only on paper but are rarely implemented in spirit? Like increased participation of women in the workforce. There are hardly any reactions from industry leaders and observers on the survey findings.

The emphasis that the survey lays on family and school level interventions is also problematic. Psychiatric experts across the world have been saying, of nausom, that mental health discourse needs to steer away from the one-size-fits-all approach. Kay Redfield Jamison, a dandy in the world of psychiatry and author of several books on the subject, has been on a mission of sorts to draw atten-

tion to the biological roots and the treatability of mental disorders. In her 1999 book, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, Jamison used numbers to demonstrate how suicide was a vast global public health crisis, which can be dealt with through preventive and curative clinical action matched with psycho-social maintenance.

The undue emphasis on the role of family/community in dealing with mental health crisis in individuals has had severe ramifications. Jamison notes in her book how, in a misguided attempt to prioritise civil liberties over lives, patients dealing with psychiatric disorders were left without any institutional care in the United States. "We have released the severely mentally ill onto our streets, and they have come to make up a third to a half of our country's homeless. They disturb the well who share their streets and perplex city managers. They make us uncomfortable, but not so uncomfortable that we protect or house, insure or lend or heal them." The "cradles" of the New York City subways and streets have had to find their own means to survive. Or not.

There is only so much we can blame social media for. Some time ago, a Hampshire family chose to reveal that an online suicide group encouraged their 17-year-old son to drink poison, which led to his death in 2024. Both good and bad faith actors on social media can indeed exacerbate the feeling of despair around one's life — often deviously through eliciting comparisons — and aggressively encourage ending it. Like in the Hampshire case. However, can spending more time with family, which can be equally judgmental and emotionally damaging, be prevention or cure for psychiatric disorders?

A 2023 policy brief prepared for Baker Institute by various stakeholders in Europe can act as a starting point. Underlining the importance of precision psychiatry, the brief recommends "multidisciplinary research between academia, industry, health economists, regulatory agencies, patient associations, policy entrepreneurs, ethicists, and philosophers" to "find the right treatment for the right patient". This is what the government needs to encourage instead of merely pontificating, rather dangerously and irresponsibly, that "returning to our roots may allow us to reach further for the skies in terms of mental health".

Nishtha Gautam is an author, academic and journalist. The views expressed are personal

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025

A hot topic

IMD's prediction on heatwave calls for better policy response on preparedness

THE INDIA METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT'S (IMD) grim weather forecast for the pre-monsoon months has come as no surprise. It, however, demands preparedness and adaptation to mitigate the adverse effects on agriculture, environment, and health. The IMD has said that most parts of the country will experience above-normal temperatures during March-May, while this February was recorded as the hottest in 125 years. In agriculture, wheat is likely to be affected the most by a heat surge. Wheat inflation has been persistently high in India in recent years amid strong demand and falling production, to which adverse weather conditions have contributed especially in the months of February and March when grain formation takes place. Studies by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research have earlier projected that an increase in temperature by 1°C could whittle down wheat output by 5%.

The government has tried to address challenges posed by weather. For instance, the Prime Minister released 109 high-yielding, climate-resilient, and bio-fortified varieties of crops including wheat last year. However, agricultural economist Ashok Gulati has pointed out that the challenge of their wide adoption remains a daunting task because the government's agri-extension network is the weakest link in the production system. Therefore, research and development as well as agri-extension and tweaks in farming methods need greater focus to contain climate risks to food.

The met department has predicted heatwave days exceeding the normal count across the country, except over the Northeast, extreme north India, and southwestern and southern parts of peninsular India. 2024, which was also the hottest year ever recorded in India, already served a sobering reminder of a mounting challenge, and climate experts have warned that 2025 could be even hotter. So, the lessons from last year bear repetition. While India is making steady progress to meet its climate goals, it remains one of the most vulnerable countries as a third of its gross domestic product comes from sectors that are highly dependent on nature. If adequate steps are not taken, some estimates suggest the climate crisis could cost India 10% of its national income and push 50 million people into poverty by the end of this century.

Climate-proofing agriculture is one aspect of addressing the challenge. But policymakers must also buttress preparedness by emphasising more on measures such as heat action plans. India has accounted for over one-fifth of the deaths linked to heatwaves since 1990, according to one study. But solutions are at hand to save lives, and are scalable. Ahmedabad, which became the first city in South Asia to develop a heat action plan, has done so by framing extensive, colour-coded, early warning systems, combined with community outreach, training support to healthcare providers, and reducing exposure and promoting low-cost adaptive measures. Such steps offer a pragmatic and humane approach; a similar example would be allowing flexible work hours, especially to outdoor workers. Other areas that policies should focus on include improving disaster management and weather alert systems, revamping drainage, and creating irrigation networks to address water scarcity. These will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders, most importantly the political class. It was refreshing to see that the election in Delhi, for a change, was also fought on the elephant in the room — air pollution. Beyond academia and civil society, climate change and vulnerabilities caused by weather should now become a part of the everyday political discourse so that solutions are not off the radar.

7-Eleven's time-wasting isn't so convenient

THE LONG-STANDING slogan of 7-Eleven in Japan for many years was *chikakute benri*, meaning "close and convenient". It neatly sums up the chain's value proposition: Sure, you pay a bit more to shop there, but the convenience more than makes up for it. These days, though, it feels like a lot of time is being wasted at Seven & I Holdings, the parent company that's the target of a takeover proposal from Canada's Alimentation Couche-Tard.

Months of attempting to bring together a coalition of unlikely partners to keep the firm in Japanese hands through a management buyout — which involved the founding family, local banks, private equity and, most unusually, *Itchu*, the owner of rival chain FamilyMart — have come to nothing.

And now, in what looks to be the next phase to stage off the takeover, Seven & I Chief Executive Officer Ryueichi Isaka is being replaced by an outside director, the American Stephen Dacus, as reported by the *Nikkei*. The move seems designed to put a fresh face on the firm's global expansion as it seeks to be rid of unprofitable domestic supermarket chains and other businesses that have contributed to its conglomerate discount.

It's possible that a new public look is what the company needs. Since first beginning to attract activist investors a decade ago, Seven & I has struggled in communication with the market. The change in price remains so low reflects scepticism that it can turn around revenue, judged by overseas expansion, into sustained higher profits. But retail is a fast-moving industry — and all these months spent playing defence against Couche-Tard's advances is time that management isn't spending on addressing strategic opportunities and threats.

Isaka became CEO due to support from Third Point's Daniel Loeb, who intervened in an attempted boardroom coup to remove Isaka in 2016. Loeb was encouraged by how Isaka built 7-Eleven's Japanese convenience-store business in the face of increasing competition. It's concerning that the takeover bid has now seemingly forced the firm to remove the man who helped develop its best-in-class sector, just when it needs his expertise.

Seven & I has been considering increasingly esoteric ways to avoid tackling the Canadian deal. In addition to the proposed management buyout, reports surfaced last year that it had also briefly considered the option of the "Pacman Defence" — turning the tables on Couche-Tard by acquiring it instead. The company ultimately concluded that it would be too difficult — ironically enough, partly due to the difficulty of working through Canadian takeover rules for foreign investors.

Since day one of the bid, the focus in the business press has been on the watershed nature of the prospective deal, and what it would mean for Japanese M&A going forward. M&A lawyers are salivating at the prospect of a country full of under-appreciated assets that could now be on the table for foreign bidders.

What seems most likely is an expensive merger that will saddle the new company with debt — and that's assuming that, after months of negotiations, the merger isn't struck down by antitrust laws in Japan or the US, or even both. And for what? While Couche-Tard has enviable margins, what evidence is there that it can run a better business — for stakeholders that include customers, suppliers, and franchise owners — than the Japanese firm can? Seven & I's transformation into a convenience store-centric business, something investors started demanding nearly a decade ago, is still in its infancy. Management should be given more time to see to its logical conclusion. Beyond a temporary bump for shareholders, the merits of this deal don't stack up.

All this precious time spent on activities that will add nothing to the business, in an era of rapid change, Couche-Tard has already rejected the idea of a hostile takeover. So, instead of working on various Plans B behind the scene, Seven & I should politely, but firmly, tell Couche-Tard to take its business elsewhere. After all, that's the beauty of the convenience store — there's always another option around the corner.



GEAROID REIDY

Bloomberg

IF THERE HAS been a fundamental problem facing the government, economy, and the financial system for the past eight decades, it is the funding of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The credit gap available to MSMEs has only been increasing. Whether it has to do with some structural issues confronting our system, such as emphasis on secured or asset-backed lending instead of cashflow-backed lending, or a lack of formalisation is a matter of interesting evaluation.

This article attempts to examine the issue and discuss the size of the problem, some structural reforms undertaken in the past few years, and their efficacy in addressing the problem at hand.

Let us examine the size of the challenge confronting the system. We now have a platform set up by the ministry of MSMEs to register the units who qualify as such. The total registration so far (as of March 2025) is more than 6 crore, providing employment to nearly 26 crore people. It constitutes more than 30% of the gross value added in India's GDP, and accounts for over 40% of the total exports of the nation.

Now let us turn to the financial need of the sector, credit available from the formal channels, and the credit gap. We also examine the rate at which the gap increases despite measures undertaken by policymakers, banking regulator, and trade bodies to address it. This will give us a correct assessment of the size of the problem and the rate at which it is growing.

Around five years ago, the report of the expert committee on MSMEs constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimated the credit gap to be ₹20-25 lakh crore. Now let us look at the latest numbers reported by the Small Industries Development Bank of India as of February 2024 under their platform, MSME Pulse. It has data from the banking companies alone and not from non-banking finance

corporations (NBFCs) and other lenders. The platform estimates the total credit demand to be around ₹70 lakh crore and current credit available from formal channels at only around ₹20 lakh crore. One can see the growth of the gap — it was ₹20-25 lakh crore and is now ₹50 lakh crore. It is increasing briskly and has more than doubled in five years.

The rapid increase in the credit gap may be attributed to various factors. One major factor that could possibly have played a significant part in the increase in credit gap is the shift of asset choice of the household and institutional savings. The choice of savers has gradually shifted away from the banking system by way of deposits to the security markets. This shift has led to a fundamental change in the extent of intermediation from the banking system, leading to a decline of credit. Large enterprises now turn to the capital markets to meet their funding requirements. The credit flow to MSMEs keeps on reducing and will be unable to meet the credit gap. The Mudra loans from public sector banks (PSBs), which are expected to participate in the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), shows that as of October 2024, PSBs and regional rural banks have achieved just 42% of their FY25 target. Against a goal of ₹2.3 lakh crore in loans, only around ₹90,000

crore has been disbursed.

For the first time since the pandemic, PMMY loan disbursements have shown a noticeable decline, raising concerns about the programme's efficacy. The RBI narratives and directives, including the changes in the risk weightages in November 2023, may perhaps have added to the issue. However, taking a holistic view, the regulators' concern about unsecured and small loans looks well-justified. When economic growth shows signs of gradual decline and the liquidity in the banking system is hardened to address inflation and exchange parity concerns, non-performing loans will rise. In fact, there is growing evidence to suggest the rise of non-performing assets in the micro-finance sector as well as small and medium enterprises. The recent monetary policy has reduced the

repo rate by 25 basis points and thereafter the RBI has reduced risk weightages. This is a bold effort to improve the credit flow to the MSME sector. This reduction will assist both the banking system as well as the NBFCs to expand the credit flow.

Now let us examine the recent initiatives by the policymakers and the RBI to prioritise the inclusion of MSMEs in the formal financial system through a range of targeted measures. One of the key initiatives is the priority sector lending (PSL) guidelines, man-

aging that a sub-target of 7.5% banks adjust new bank credit for micro enterprises, while all loans to MSMEs qualify under PSL. The RBI has also promoted collateral-free lending by requiring banks not to insist on collateral for loans up to ₹10 lakh for micro and small enterprises (MSEs), and encouraging financial institutions to lend under the credit guarantee MSE scheme which carries zero risk weight for guaranteed portions of loans.

The Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) addresses the delayed payment to MSMEs. The TReDS scheme will be very useful when, due to liquidity pressures, large enterprises delay payments to ancillaries and suppliers. There are several other measures by the RBI and the government to improve credit flow to MSMEs. These, however, look like incremental measures and are certainly not enough to bridge the credit gap, but the effort is commendable.

On the part of MSMEs, there is a dire need to formalise. Many operate informally, making it difficult for the system to evaluate their creditworthiness.

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On the part of MSMEs, there is a dire need to formalise. Many operate informally, making it difficult for the system to evaluate their creditworthiness. They should adopt formal payment systems and have adequate repayment records for good credit ratings. They must have a good order of governance and records to demonstrate their capability and intent to repay.

The MSME credit gap has been a vexing problem for a long time and calls for continuous effort on the part of all stakeholders. The hitherto practice of secured lending needs to be re-examined. At the same time, the abuse of credit and loan waivers by political interventions needs to be seriously checked. It may not be wrong to observe that there has been more effort on the part of the policymakers and the regulator to formalise the demand component of credit requirement of MSMEs as compared to their effort to augment the supply of credit.

Views are personal

Elusive peace prospects in Ukraine

N CHANDRA MOHAN

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

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE in Ukraine, which is fighting Russia on its own territory since February 2022, appear to recede by the day. Look no further than the humiliation suffered by its President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when he recently met US President Donald Trump. The latter earlier claimed that he can stop the war in a day and blindsided Europe, if not Ukraine, by talking directly to Russia's President Vladimir Putin to "immediately" end the conflict. Zelenskyy sought to sign a minerals deal in return for US security guarantees to deter further Russian aggression. No such deal was signed as the meeting swiftly unravelled, with Trump lashing out at Zelenskyy and issuing an ultimatum, saying that he would "make a deal (on the war) or we're out".

This ill-fated meeting took place against the backdrop of Washington and Moscow already having talks in Riyadh — attended by US secretary of state Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz, and special envoy Steve Witkoff. Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov — without Ukraine and Europe at the table. At the Munich Security Conference, US officials dismissed Ukraine's demands for a return of all seized territories and its NATO membership as "unrealistic", that Ukraine's security guarantees would henceforth be provided by Europe and not the US. Ukraine's interests appear to have secondary importance to the US President's primary intention to normalise relations with Russia.

Peace-making is problematic stemming, in good part, from how the warring parties perceive the interlocutors. The US is not a disinterested peacekeeper as it sought a price or payback for its support for Ukraine through securing 50% ownership of its mineral deposits, including graphite, lithium, and uranium. Zelenskyy initially rejected this (but later relented) as too focused on US interests without offering any specific security guarantees. According to Zelenskyy, "A ceasefire without security guarantees is dangerous for Ukraine. We have been fighting for three years and Ukrainians need to know that America is on our side." Trump hardly provided any assurances in this regard while trying to extract as much as possible from the minerals deal.

What is this minerals deal? Ukraine has huge deposits of lithium, graphite, cobalt, titanium, and rare earths that are essential for a range of industries, from defence to electric vehicles. Interestingly, a fifth of these are located in territories seized by Russia since the war began. Trump says that the US is owed \$500 billion of minerals in exchange for past military assistance, although it has only provided \$69.2 billion since 2014. This demand has been spun by US treasury secretary Scott Bessent as a partnership that will ensure revenues from natural resources will be allocated to a fund focused on the long-term reconstruction and development of Ukraine, where the US will have economic and governance rights in those future investments.

Russia, for its part, clearly sees Trump's peace initiative as an opportunity to return from the cold. The slanging match between Trump and Zelenskyy at the White House is music to its ears. Washington and Moscow's talks at Riyadh were extremely "positive" as they decided to appoint high-level teams to work on a path to end the conflict, restore full diplomatic ties, and explore de-escalations and economic cooperation in the future. No specific time has been decided for a one-on-one meeting between Trump and Putin. The concern in Europe, clearly, is of Trump conceding to Russia's demands to stop the eastward expansion of NATO and perhaps even dismantling the US-led western sanctions regime imposed since it annexed Crimea in 2014.

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The ongoing war that is in its fourth year can end only when both Kyiv and Moscow are party to the US-mediated ceasefire, if not peace, deal to silence their guns

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Russia, for its part, clearly sees Trump's peace initiative as an opportunity to return from the cold. The slanging match between Trump and Zelenskyy at the White House is music to its ears. Washington and Moscow's talks at Riyadh were extremely "positive" as they decided to appoint high-level teams to work on a path to end the conflict, restore full diplomatic ties, and explore de-escalations and economic cooperation in the future. No specific time has been decided for a one-on-one meeting between Trump and Putin. The concern in Europe, clearly, is of Trump conceding to Russia's demands to stop the eastward expansion of NATO and perhaps even dismantling the US-led western sanctions regime imposed since it annexed Crimea in 2014.

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Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Capital safety paramount

Apropos of "MF access made easy" (FE, March 4), the biggest risk to systematic investment plans (SIPs) are the market conditions. Smaller investors will be more worried than the larger ones because they may be putting their entire savings on the line. From the perspective of the mutual fund industry, this is a good move and it can enable them to have access to funds which could have not been

available otherwise. While eventually the SIPs will give better returns than debt instruments, what happens if the investor needs their money urgently in case of an emergency when the market is down? The State Bank of India name will inspire confidence because people have been duped by many schemes operated by crooks. The safety of the capital will have to be assured in some way to make the scheme popular.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Trade war volleys fired

Warren Buffett has openly criticised US President Donald Trump's tariff policies, describing them as "an act of war" that could trigger inflation and place undue strain on consumers. During an interview with CBS News, Buffett warned that these tariffs effectively function as taxes on goods, ultimately driving up prices. His remarks underscore the importance of carefully evaluating long-term

economic consequences before pursuing such aggressive trade measures. These actions have already prompted retaliatory tariffs from affected nations, heightening fears of a full-scale trade war. Buffett's concerns align with warnings he's voiced since 2018, emphasising the risks such policies pose to both businesses and consumers.

—Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

HENNAI/KOCHI

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

The joke's on us

Misinformation, hate speech are the new normal

A joke is just a joke, right? Not so in India, where even a casual wisecrack is taken far more seriously than lethal weapons such as misinformation and hate speech. Podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia has learnt it the tough way—he has been told by the Supreme Court to mind his errant tongue after all the self-styled moral inspectors came down on him like a ton of bricks for his controversial remarks. The court has allowed him to resume his online show, provided he maintains “morality and decency” and makes it suitable for viewers of all ages. Despite getting interim protection from arrest, he won't be having the last laugh, for sure. That's a privilege enjoyed by those who spew hatred and spread fake news—and get away with it.

The country's collective inability to take a joke—good, bad or ugly—is set to hit a new low as the SC has directed the Centre to formulate a mechanism to regulate social media content. Punishment for mocking the high and mighty would, of course, be an integral part of such a regulatory framework, which might come dangerously close to censorship. The inescapable fact is that we are not living in the US, where *Saturday Night Live* can afford to lampoon the US President and his deputy. Fact-checker Mohammed Zubair was bang on target when he stated that had this happened in India, the “police from Mumbai, Assam, Delhi, UP, MP, etc would have filed an FIR against them by now”. The formula here is simple: if you want to make comedians fall in line, drag them to court and bay for their blood.

It's a not-so-funny case of misplaced priorities. Not many are bothered or embarrassed by the World Economic Forum's finding that India is a global leader in misinformation and disinformation. We are lapping up fake news as if it were prime-time entertainment, but are unwilling to laugh at ourselves. No wonder we are becoming too serious for our own good.

Missing teachers

Haryana schools face systemic neglect

THE latest rationalisation exercise by Haryana's Elementary Education Department has laid bare the dismal state of public education in the state. A staggering 487 government primary schools function without a single teacher, while 294 schools have no students enrolled. If this is the picture of primary education, the state of secondary and higher education is even grimmer. The rationalisation process has resulted in the elimination of 5,313 teaching posts, despite a significant teacher shortage. The student-teacher ratio may seem manageable at 28:1, but the reality on the ground is much worse, with over 16,500 TGT and 11,341 PGT positions lying vacant. Even universities and colleges are reeling under a massive faculty shortage, with nearly half of the lecturer posts in government colleges unfilled.

Budgetary neglect further worsens the crisis. The Punjab and Haryana High Court had last year, while hearing a petition in a related matter, flagged the surrender of ₹10,675 crore in education funds due to under-utilisation. If the government is unable to use the allocated funds effectively, the promise of strengthening education under the National Education Policy (NEP) rings hollow. Not surprisingly, Haryana government schools are lagging behind Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in arithmetic and literacy skills. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 paints a grim picture—only 43.1 per cent of Class VIII students in rural government schools can perform division, a decline from 49.5 per cent in 2022. Punjab leads with 58 per cent, followed by HP at 44 per cent. Reading skills are equally concerning, with just 53.9 per cent of Class V students able to read a Class II-level text.

Instead of shutting down schools and cutting teaching positions, the government must prioritise recruitment, infrastructure and funding. Otherwise, Haryana's education sector will continue its downward spiral, leaving students at a disadvantage.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 1925

Communalism in the services

WE cannot help thinking that the pronouncement made by the Home Member in the Council of State on Monday regarding the representation of communities in the public services is open to serious exception from more than one point of view. In the first place, the Home Member said emphatically that “Indianisation will not be by the door of supersession,” an absolutely safe proposition in itself, but which the actual circumstances of the case can only be interpreted as an expression of the government's unwillingness to accelerate the pace of Indianisation. “What was offered to new recruits, whether Indian or European or of whatever race,” he said, “was a career open to talent, and once admitted to public service, his fortunes lay in his own hands. He must not rely for advancement on favour or favouritism but on his own industry, energy and capacity. Promotion must go by merit and selection for posts requiring special qualifications must be determined by strict regard for the necessary qualifications and general public interest.” How faultless is all this on paper, and yet in actual practice how admirably it serves the purpose of perpetuating vested interests and existing monopoly! A man of such outstanding merit as the late Ramesh Chandra Dutt was not considered fit for being made permanent in the office of the Divisional Commissioner, and Sir K.C. Gupta was sent out on a “fishing” errand so that a European member of the Civil Service who was junior to him might be appointed Lieutenant-Governor of his province.

Oils, fats and the obesity challenge

The national campaign should be extended to unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles

DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

IN his recent ‘Mann ki Baat’ broadcast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted a major public health challenge—excess weight or obesity. It is one of the risk factors for the rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. The PM said the country could address the challenge of obesity with minor efforts like reducing the consumption of edible oil. He said, “You should decide that you will use 10 per cent less oil every month... This will be an important step towards reducing obesity.”

Using less oil in food and dealing with obesity is not just a personal choice but also one's responsibility towards the family, he added. The PM then launched a public campaign on his social media handles, challenging 10 public figures to reduce oil in their food by 10 per cent and urging them to pass on the challenge to another 10 people. He hoped that this would help a lot in fighting obesity.

A public health message from the PM is important for raising awareness about NCDs and oil consumption, but it is only one part of the story.

The elephant in the room is excessive consumption of fats, mainly trans fatty acid or trans fats, that are considered one of the risk factors for a range of NCDs. Among the sources of trans fats are dairy products, ghee, meats and *vanaspathi*. A higher intake of other fats is also harmful. The proportion of saturated fats is the highest in coconut oil, ghee and palmolein oil, according to the dietary guidelines issued by the National



WAY FORWARD: There is a need to provide people with a basket of less harmful edible oils. STOCK

Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad. Reducing the consumption of visible fats—oils added to the food while cooking or dressing—as suggested by the PM is only half a step. We consume trans fats through processed food, fast food, fried snacks, cookies, etc. Sources of saturated and unsaturated fats, too, vary and include edible oils, among others. For a public health impact, cutting the intake of not just oils but ghee and *vanaspathi* as well as ultra-processed packaged food and dairy products is necessary. The campaign on obesity should be extended to unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles.

By asking people to voluntarily cut edible oil consumption by 10 per cent, the Prime Minister has put the onus of tackling obesity and NCD epidemics on individuals. This goes against the public health wisdom gathered over decades which says that adopting healthy dietary habits is both an individual as well as a societal responsibility. It is the duty of the government to come up with policies to build environments that enable and encourage people to consume a healthy diet, including low lev-

Public policies play a vital role in creating environments that promote physical activity.

els of fat. One can't expect people to start having a healthy diet and adopt a healthy lifestyle in an environment that promotes obesity—what scientists call an obesogenic environment. It is shaped by public policies and does not offer healthy choices for communities.

We need a population-wide and multisectoral policy approach to tackle obesity and NCDs, along with individual actions. For instance, India heavily depends

on edible oil imports, and public policies encourage the import of palm oil. It accounts for nearly 60 per cent of all imported oils. Palm oil is the darling of the processed food industry, even though several studies have linked its consumption with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. The public policies governing the production and import of edible oils should be designed in such a way that they provide people with a basket of less harmful edible oils.

Over the past few decades, dietary habits have changed in India with rising incomes, urbanisation and increased globalisation of food products—resulting in the popularity of ultra-processed foods high in salt, sugar and fats. These foods have changed the food ecology. Junk food is available everywhere—neighbourhoods, school canteens, offices, hospitals, cinema halls, slums, villages. Policies have contributed to this change in a big way. Governments provide subsidies to processed food companies making chips, colas, cookies, namkeen and so on (not to be confused with subsidies for agro-based industries). Road companies are incentivised even for the

branding of junk food products.

The availability of fresh fruits and vegetables at affordable prices should be encouraged since it is a healthy choice, but policies incentivise companies that process fruits and vegetables. On the other hand, any measure to regulate junk food, such as explicit health warnings or a ban on marketing directed at children is stalled by food regulators at the behest of the industry. Ironically, the food safety authority has been running an ‘Eat Right’ campaign for a few years in partnership with leading junk food companies. Instead of garnering support for harsher regulation on junk food, as advocated by public health and consumer experts, the food safety regulator partners with those it is supposed to regulate. In 2019, the regulator launched an initiative—‘India@75: Freedom from Trans Fats’—to eliminate industrially produced trans fats from the food chain by 2022. The goal remains unattained, thanks to stiff opposition from the junk food industry.

The same is the story with sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity, often cited among the key drivers of obesity, along with unhealthy foods. While remaining physically active and doing exercise are matters of personal choice, public policies play a vital role in creating active environments that promote physical fitness at the community level. For instance, providing public places conducive to walking and exercise goes a long way in encouraging physical activity. Public transport, dedicated pavements for pedestrians and cycling paths are all known to discourage the use of cars. These are all matters of public policies that shape individual choices. Individual actions like reducing edible oil consumption are a cog in the obesity wheel, but this should not divert our attention from the need for conducive public policies in multiple sectors.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

More die in the United States of too much food than of too little. —John Kenneth Galbraith

How teamwork won the day

OP GARG

SOME people are keen to do a good deed, but they don't go ahead with it as they presume that others may not cooperate with them. I remember an incident which illustrates that if you pursue a noble goal with determination, best results can be achieved.

I got an opportunity to attend the Gyan Yagna at Chinmaya Tapovan ashram, Siddhbari (Himachal Pradesh), in February 2005. During the camp, Swami Yogasthanada (Shri Shiv Swarup Agrawal) took yoga classes and Dr Sajjan Singh gave tips on health matters. One day, I had a chat with the doctor at the tea shop outside the premises. I came to know that the ashram organised ‘The Art of Graceful Living’ camps for the benefit of senior citizens at various locations. The only condition was that the welfare society concerned should have a strength of around 50.

I decided to make efforts for holding such a camp on behalf of the Senior Citizens' Welfare Society, Urban Estate, Patiala. The ashram facility was associated with the Central Chinmaya Vanaprastha Sansthan (CCVSS), Allahabad, for decades. Agrawal, a leading industrialist, had completed a two-year Vedanta course and served as general secretary of the CCVSS. He had attended more than 100 such camps and later got ‘*sanjay diksha*’. Dr Singh was also an active member of the *sansthan*.

During an executive meeting of our welfare society, I proposed that a CCVSS camp should be organised. It was decided to seek members' consent individually. The late RK Sharma, then vice-president of the society, and NS Ruprah, founder-president, accompanied me on a door-to-door visit in the neighbourhood. More than 30 members assured us of their participation. The good response encouraged us to take up the matter with Mohan Lal Garg, secretary of the Chinmaya Mission's Patiala unit. He helped us by spreading the word.

A request was submitted to the CCVSS faculty for holding the camp in Patiala in 2006. Finally, the dates were approved (October 24 to 27). I underwent a surgery for hernia in August that year and was hopeful of recovering well before the camp began. However, due to some complications, I had to be hospitalised for several days. Anyway, the local unit of the Chinmaya Mission, in collaboration with the Senior Citizens' Welfare Society, conducted the camp successfully. More than 50 senior citizens took part wholeheartedly. It was an honour that the Chinmaya team visited my home to enquire about my health. On the concluding day of the event, I attended the proceedings and presented mementos to the faculty members. My dream of holding the camp had come true, thanks to sincere teamwork and God's blessings.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EU-India ties get a boost

APROPOS of ‘A new dawn for India-EU relations’, India was among the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with the European Commission, which was headquartered in Belgium's Brussels as the European Economic Community in the early 1960s. But as India came close to the erstwhile USSR, there wasn't much room for productive engagement between Brussels and New Delhi. The European Commission President's recent visit to India bodes well for bilateral relations, with EU having given priority to India over China. Disruption in the historic US-Europe ties in the last few weeks has added a new dimension to our relationship.

MONA SINGH, BY MAIL

Stay ahead of cyber scammers

With reference to ‘Stop cyber scams before they occur with real-time monitoring’, cyber scams pose a significant and evolving threat to individuals and organisations alike. Real-time monitoring offers a proactive solution, enabling early detection, swift responses and comprehensive protection against cyber criminals. By investing in advanced real-time monitoring tools and fostering a culture of cybersecurity awareness, businesses and individuals can stay ahead of the threats. In the digital age, prevention is better than cure and real-time monitoring is the key to preventing cyber scams.

GAURAV BADIWAR, ROHTAK

Farmers' protests a nuisance

Agitations launched by kisan unions in Punjab cause inconvenience to the common man. Protesters block highways over minor issues that can be solved amicably. During the earlier phase of their agitation when they were invited by the Central Government for talks, they berated Union ministers at the meetings and now when the Central Government ignored them, they have been demanding an invitation for talks. CM Bhagwant Mann walked out of a meeting with them on March 3 due to their unacceptable behaviour. The Opposition parties in Punjab must be condemned for supporting these unions.

SOMAN LAL BHUMBKA, CHANDIGARH

Time for transformation

APROPOS of ‘Punjab CM Mann walks out of meeting with farmer leaders, SKM to go ahead with March 5 protest’, nobody can be blamed for such an impasse. The common man has been suffering for long due to the farmers' widespread agitation in Punjab and neighbouring states. The time is right for all stakeholders to understand that the present agro-economic conditions require a revolutionary transformation for which the Centre, state governments, experts and farmers unions need to deliberate comprehensively to reach a consensus. Meanwhile, farmers will have to abandon their stubbornness.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

Panchayat takes initiative

With reference to ‘Kullu's co-warriors’, tourism contributes in a big way to the economy of Himachal Pradesh, but unbridled construction activities are bound to backfire. The initiative of the Banjar panchayat to enforce construction norms under the Panchayati Raj Act in the area has come as a big breather. But bereft of government wherewithal, like technical staff, the panchayat may not be able to exercise effective control. The way forward is to declare these areas under the Town & Country Planning Department. Instead of hotels, the emphasis should be on promoting homestays in traditional houses. More ropeways, rather than roadways, can also help.

KR BHARTI, SHIMLA

Investors' confidence a must

With reference to ‘SEBI under scrutiny’, charges of collusion and corruption are difficult to prove against chiefs of regulatory bodies like SEBI. In the 1992 Harshad Mehta scam, Senex jumped four-fold in a year shaking investors' confidence for a long time. The stock markets are not new, but the participation of the middle class is just a decade old. Month after month, even when portfolio investors have pulled funds, the middle class has kept its faith in SIPs despite the over 10,000-point fall in the Senex in the last few months. A quick probe is necessary to maintain investors' confidence.

LJWANT SINGH, BY MAIL

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GK Editorial

Engaging People

The essence of democracy is the involvement of people in the decision making processes

Before presenting the budget in the J&K Assembly, chief Minister Omar Abdullah held a series of interactions with different stakeholders. Whatever the outcome of these deliberations with people across different professions, and whatever the final outlay in terms of budgetary allocation for different segments and sectors of economy, the mere fact that people were consulted for inputs is politically very significant. The essence of democracy is the involvement of people in the decision making processes. Since budget is the core decision for any government, taking people along sends a positive message. One may not be so sure about such consultations in terms of the outcome, but right now it is to be lauded for what it appears to be. Even if symbolic, given the constraints of the situation, these interactions can lead to cementing of the relations between the public representatives and the people at large. One can only hope that the Omar Abdullah led government takes the people's views, concerns and apprehensions along while taking any decisions.

There is a need to bolster such practice and engage more people in matters related to governance. In fact the initiatives taken by the central and the state governments like Back to Village strengthen the democratic participation and give people a sense of participatory politics. In today's world it is all the more important to meet people as we have a crisis of fading out of human connections. The profusion of digital way of living has, besides giving us millions of benefits, robbed us of the human connect. Now governments, political parties, institutions and individuals take recourse to on line ways of interactions. This has led to the over all weakening of human relations. In case of the political leadership it is extremely important to connect the people and be engaged with them in real human spaces. If we look at the above mentioned interactions through this prism the importance of the initiative taken by Omar Abdullah, as the leader of the civilian government can be better understood. The present budget in the J&K assembly would now be watched for how much it factors in the opinions and inputs generated in the wider public consultations.

Forecasting Hazards

Kashmir Valley is placed in a very active seismic belt

Fault Lines

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Kashmir Valley, a scenic but geologically complicated area, is situated between the great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal range. The valley has been formed over millions of years by the strong forces below the Earth's surface. Morphotectonic analysis assists us in knowing the way these forces, such as earthquakes and movements of land, have shaped the valley's landforms, rivers, and overall structure. Kashmir Valley is placed in a very active seismic belt because it is situated on the collision boundary between the Indian and Eurasian plates. The Indian plate began to move north, it collided with the Eurasian plate, that formed huge pressure. This pressure has led to the development of large fault lines, such as:

Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) - A fault dividing the Himalayas from the smaller mountain ranges.

Main Central Thrust (MCT) - A fault beneath the surface involved in mountain creation.

Zaskar Shear Zone - A tectonic fracture that is responsible for seismic activity in the northern valley.

These tectonic movements and faults not only generate earthquakes but also create the topography of the valley by uplifting mountains and changing river courses.

Landforms Formed by Tectonic Activity:

The landscape of the valley is a product of ongoing tectonic forces, erosion, and deposition of sediments. Some of the prominent landforms are:

Karewas - They are flat topped terraces that occur in the valley, developed through the deposition of sediments over millions of years. Karewas are very fertile and provide Kashmir's renowned saffron cultivation.

Hanging Valleys - Minor valleys occurring at higher levels, developed as a result of glacial action and tectonic uplift.

Alluvial Fans - Cone-shaped sediment deposits created by rivers transporting sediments from mountains to

the plains. The Jhelum River has formed a number of such fans.

Fault Scarps - The steep slopes or cliffs created by abrupt movement along the fault lines.

Rivers and Tectonic Influence

The Jhelum River, the lifeline of Kashmir, has been heavily impacted by tectonic movements. It winds its way through the valley, modifying its course with time due to elevation changes resulting from earthquakes and fault movement. Numerous minor streams and tributaries have also been altered, resulting in altered drainage patterns.

It is important for disaster preparedness, urban planning, and environmental protection.

Seismic Activity and Hazards: The Kashmir Valley has been subjected to numerous disastrous earthquakes, among them the 2005 Muzaffarabad earthquake, which was severely damaging. The region's high seismicity is hazardous and has the following risks:

Ground Shaking: Infrastructure and buildings are vulnerable to damage due to powerful earthquakes.

Landslides: Slopes of mountains lose stability, resulting in spontaneous collapses.

River Course Changes: River blockages or diversion may result from movements of faults, causing flooding.

Conclusion: Morphotectonic study of the Kashmir Valley makes us aware of how tectonic forces have formed and continue to shape the landscape of the region. It is important for disaster preparedness, urban planning, and environmental protection. Since the report exposed Russian war crimes in Ukraine and concluded that Russia was engaging in genocide? All hell would have broken loose, with Western media giving the report extensive coverage.

The headlines of newspapers and social media, as well as radio and television debates, would have drawn attention to Russia's genocide. But since it was Israel rather than Russia, nothing of that sort happened. However, the devastating 296-page investigation conducted by the largest and most trusted human rights organisation in the world, Amnesty International,

What if the UNHRC, International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, Amnesty International, and the UN released a report exposing Russian war crimes in Ukraine and concluded that Russia was engaging in genocide? All hell would have broken loose, with Western media giving the report extensive coverage. The headlines of newspapers and social media, as well as radio and television debates, would have drawn attention to Russia's genocide. But since it was Israel rather than Russia, nothing of that sort happened. However, the devastating 296-page investigation conducted by the largest and most trusted human rights organisation in the world, Amnesty International,

Greater Kashmir

Edit

J&K assembly budget session

Government's call for working beyond political affiliations

Coming time to determine its impact, if any

NEWS FOCUS

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At the beginning of the budget session of the legislative assembly on March 3, the elected government made a plea to all parties to work together beyond political affiliations for the welfare and holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir. In the appeal it was also hoped that through the collective efforts new milestones will be achieved and Jammu and Kashmir transformed into a beacon of peace, progress, and prosperity. The plea was part of the Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha's address to the assembly.

The coming time will determine to what extent the ruling party was serious about its appeal and to what extent the opposition heeded to it. At this time there is a need for better coordination and understanding, based on sincerity between the ruling party and opposition and also between the elected government and centre for the betterment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. But are all the stakeholders really ready for such type of coordination and understanding or they will prefer party interests as usual, will also become known later. Right now the focus is on the budget session proceedings and their outcome.

The LG's address described the demand for the restoration of statehood as one of the foremost aspirations of the people. The government stated that it is actively engaging with all stakeholders to facilitate this process of statehood restoration.

While the elected government will continue its efforts for statehood restoration, the discretion to restore the status finally lies with the central government. The centre has stated that the statehood will be restored at an appropriate time but has not revealed when exactly this appropriate time will come.

The LG's address also touched upon the status of various important sectors including health, education, tourism, economy, handicrafts, industries and development; for further improvement. The government also said that it is committed to the

digitised rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants back into the Valley by ensuring a safe and secure atmosphere.

While the treasury benches almost hailed the LG's address but came under criticism by the opposition parties on various issues. This is also being reflected from the ongoing discussion by the legislators on the address in the House. The Kashmir based opposition says that a complete silence was observed by the ruling party in the LG's address on which the NC got votes and majority in assembly polls. According to the opposition the ruling party has completely given up its agenda and is adopting the BJP line. During his brief interaction with media, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah stated that there is no need to bring the special status related resolution again in the assembly as it has been already passed in last session.

Chief Minister was also asked about some reports that NC and BJP may form an alliance in Jammu and Kashmir. He ruled out formation of any such alliance saying there is no such necessity and secondly the ideologies of NC and BJP are entirely different.

Going by the present scenario there is no need either for NC or the BJP to have an alliance with each other. The option of forming a coalition government would have been there if the people in last year's assembly polls had given a fractured mandate and the assembly was hung. But this was not the case. NC got the majority on its own with the support of a few independent MLAs. Technically, the party did not even need the support of Congress, CPI (M) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), who are supporting it from outside and are not part of the government. Immediately after the formation of his government, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah held meetings with central government leadership in New Delhi. After the meetings he said that he was assured that his government will not be destabilised and that BJP will play its role of an opposition party.

Now when the NC government is functioning in the dual power system (though not comfortably), it would not like for political reasons

“

At this time there is a need for better coordination and understanding, based on sincerity, between the ruling party and opposition and also between the elected government and centre for the betterment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Since Jammu and Kashmir is a union territory, the NC government is not as powerful as it used to be in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. Central government continues to have control over important matters through Lieutenant Governor. Political observers say that under all these circumstances not an alliance between NC and BJP seems needed or possible. But what is required is a better coordination and understanding based on sincerity and maturity between the central government and the J&K elected government. Such a coordination is in the interest of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. But can this coordination be possible when the ruling party at the centre is unhappy with the fact that it could not form its own government in Jammu and Kashmir despite taking all possible measures and making serious efforts, ask the observers. And on the other side the elected government here is sometimes feeling helpless and insecure due to lack of adequate powers, and talking about Plan A and Plan B if the statehood is not restored. But what is Plan A and Plan B, only the top leadership of NC knows.

Author is senior editor, Greater Kashmir

A conventional propaganda bias

Western media's silence on 'Hannibal Directive' and the normalisation of suffering



Indictment
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In today's media-driven culture, truth has become the first casualty. Given the blatant deceptions and erasures of the truth about the Gaza slaughter by the US media in particular and Western media in general, the media's influence on the public consciousness may finally be slipping. In an interview with Israeli television on February 6, former Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant stated that the 'Hannibal Directive' was implemented by Israeli military on October 7, 2023, the day Hamas and other Palestinian fighters stormed the territory that Israel had illegally annexed.

What if the UNHRC, International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, Amnesty International, and the UN released a report exposing Russian war crimes in Ukraine and concluded that Russia was engaging in genocide? All hell would have broken loose, with Western media giving the report extensive coverage. The headlines of newspapers and social media, as well as radio and television debates, would have drawn attention to Russia's genocide. But since it was Israel rather than Russia, nothing of that sort happened. However, the devastating 296-page investigation conducted by the largest and most trusted human rights organisation in the world, Amnesty International,

national, which claimed that Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, only garnered little mainstream media attention in the US and Europe.

The Israelis are aware of the fundamental premise behind propaganda that it spreads far more quickly than the truth. However, we are reminded of the prophetic statement made by the renowned African American civil rights and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth: "I feel safe in the midst of my enemies, for the truth is all powerful and will prevail," as the carefully crafted propaganda of Israel, faithfully carried out by the Western media, stands exposed. Palestinians living under violent occupation understood the power of truth, and sixteen months of slaughter in Gaza, half of them women and children, revealed the hidden reality and sinister aspect of Palestine's illegal occupation. Gallant stated in an interview with Israel's Channel 12 in February this year that the orders were issued 'tactically' and 'at several places' near Gaza. An English-subtitled video of the interview accessible on YouTube and has gone viral.

War on truth halted

The Israeli defence minister's admission is the most recent in a string of compelling evidence from journalists in Gaza, including reports from Al Jazeera and Israeli news outlets, that Israeli defence forces killed a large number of their own citizens in 'friendly fire' incidents or by enforcing the deadly doctrine: 'Hannibal Directive', which aims to prevent Israelis from being captured alive and used as leverage to negotiate the release of Palestinians detained in Israel. In March of last year, Al Jazeera TV, based in Doha, aired a thoroughly investigated report on the events of October 7th. It included

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The extent of panic raised by corporate media is how we are conditioned to identify a major catastrophe.

professional analysis of the likely application of the Hannibal Directive and related Israeli media lies about "beheaded babies" and "mass rape." The US and Western media, however, disregarded the documentary's meticulous findings, as expected. However, Sojourner's conviction that "truth prevails" in the end is reinforced by Al-Jazeera's succinct, and thoroughly researched report backed by sources and video evidence. This is the first confirmation from a senior Israeli official that the Hannibal Directive was implemented on October 7. However, if one searches online, in newspapers and in TV debates, Gallant's confession has not been reported. The US and Western news media, which has a long history of downplaying the actual horror of the crimes by the Israeli Defence Forces, appear to have completely buried Gallant's startling revelation.

Downplaying the Devastating Deeds

Such a strong indictment by the most prominent human rights group in the world would get extensive, continuous, and widespread news coverage and analysis in a civilised world where morality and ethics are fundamental to social and cultural values. However, there was conventional propaganda bias in the Western media when the mainstream media gave Israel's insane criticisms of Amnesty's report a plenty of space, rather than emphasising on the

organization's findings that Israel "has committed genocide against Palestinians."

The public finds it challenging to comprehend the reality of what has happened in Gaza as a result of covert whitewashing. Not to wipe out Hamas but forcing 2.3 million Palestinians from Gaza by violence to relocate elsewhere in the region was the covert goal of the sixteen months of full-scale invasion of Gaza. That is what the genocide in Gaza was all about. The extent of panic raised by corporate media is how we are conditioned to identify a major catastrophe. Therefore, for the West, the suffering in Gaza is not as severe as it appears. Otherwise, the human rights and civil rights warriors would undoubtedly have been more outraged.

The Western media never point out that the violent Israeli occupation and oppression that lasted for more than seven decades triggered the Hamas attacks. The Western media does not represent the Palestinian viewpoint. Neither they are factual, nor impartial. Media propaganda, intentional or unintentional, is a systemic problem and not just the work of certain individuals, as media academics have frequently emphasised. Lies spread more quickly and deeply in the digital era, and people frequently believe what they see on TV. People may be able to critically assess what the media portrays as objective truth if they can discover a method and the ability to decipher hidden meanings. However, reliable eyewitness accounts can help in thwarting the pernicious propaganda to rescue the intellectual and moral decay of the Western media.

Dr. Sarfaraz Nasir is an independent researcher, based in New Delhi.

Xi's campaign to purge and reform the PLA



JAYADEVA RANADE
PRESIDENT, CENTRE FOR
CHINA ANALYSIS & STRATEGY

INDISCIPLINE, wavering political and ideological commitment of officers and personnel and corruption in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are causing serious concern to Chinese President Xi Jinping and the senior echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and PLA.

The indiscipline and lack of ideological commitment, which includes questioning of the PLA's 'absolute obedience' to the CCP, will worry the CCP leadership more because the PLA is the 'party's army'.

Accordingly, a major new education campaign focussed on instilling political loyalty to Xi Jinping has been launched. This has been accompanied by a raft of measures intended to further tighten discipline.

On February 5, the People's Liberation Army Daily published a 'Notice on Deepening the Education and Practice Activities Focusing on Forging Firm Political Loyalty and Winning the Battle of Hard Work' issued by the Central Military Commission's Political Work Department — China's apex military body responsible for the political education and ideology of PLA personnel.

It heralded the launch of the 'annual major education of the entire army' and asserted that it would 'strengthen political guidance'.

Emphasising the leading roles of Xi Jinping and the CCP, it stressed that 'we must unrelentingly use Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to unite hearts and build souls' and 'must always regard the Party's innovative theoretical arming as the primary task of building souls and educating people...'

Significantly, the 'notice' specifically mentioned the need to strengthen learning and ideological transformation of the 'key minority'.

The reference to the 'key minority' implies there are officers at senior levels in the PLA who are not in step with Xi Jinping's thoughts or whose ideological commitment that the CCP leadership has assessed is wavering.

The PLA has been trying to recruit larger numbers of college graduates for more than a decade now, but senior instructors have been complaining that the young graduates question instructions and are not amenable to discipline.

The notice also added: 'We must closely follow the needs of cultivating officers and soldiers' values and growing up, and carry out special education focusing on strengthening the belief in strengthening the army...'



NOT IN SYNC: The weakening political ideology and corruption in the PLA has worried Xi Jinping, Reuters

The CCP Central Committee (CC) General Office 'recently' issued the 'National Party Member Education and Training Work Plan (2024-2028)' and instructed all regions and departments to conscientiously implement it.

The CMC was also instructed to implement it among party members in the PLA. The work plan highlights its main theme as 'of learning and implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.'

Also, last week, Xi Jinping signed an order to issue the newly revised Regulations on Internal Affairs of the People's Liberation Army of China, Regulations on Discipline of the People's Liberation Army of China, Regulations on Formations of the People's Liberation Army of China, which will come into effect on April 1, 2025.

The revised regulations aim to 'thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military... achieve the Party's goal of strengthening the military in the new era and build the people's army into a world-class army.'

The regulations emphasise Xi Jinping's thought and focus on training and discipline.

On March 3, the PLA Daily published an interview with leaders of the CMC Training and Management Department on the regulations.

They stressed that it included 'ensuring the military is always in complete ideological, political, and operational alignment with the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission, ensuring absolute loyalty, purity, and reliability of the armed forces.'

It added that the regulations further refine the officer-soldier relationship by promoting unity, friendship, harmony, and purity within the ranks and ensuring the military remains strong and cohesive.

Corruption remains a problem in the PLA and China's civil-military industry. Dozens of senior PLA rocket force officers have been dismissed since late 2023, with at least 13 PLA generals 'removed' from the National People's Congress (NPC) — China's version of a parliament.

The size of the military delegation to the NPC has fallen and may shrink further. Of the 283 deputies from the PLA appointed to the NPC, there are now only 267. Fourteen have been removed on charges of corruption.

Reports suggest that for the last six months, a quiet purge has also been underway and

at least eight senior executives in China's sensitive defence industrial complex have been removed.

This includes the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC), one of China's top 10 defence groups, that owns some of the most well-known Chinese shipyards which build warships for the PLA navy and China's aerospace and aeronautics sector.

There are indications now that this purge is likely to expand its remit and sharpen its focus to ensure that senior officials are politically and ideologically aligned with the CCP Central Committee and Central Military Commission, with Xi Jinping at the core.

The appearance of the 'notice' and the launch of a major political campaign clearly indicate problems in the higher echelons of the PLA.

There are indications of similar problems in the CCP with Politburo Standing Committee member and director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi convening an all-China conference on the 'need to continuously strengthen cohesion and forge the Party's soul' and 'enhance the Party's political building.'

The CCP leadership is likely to take progressively tougher measures to instill the CCP's ideology among PLA personnel and control corruption, especially as the next party congress draws near.

Reports suggest that for the last six months, a quiet purge has also been underway and

The appearance of the 'notice' and the launch of a major political campaign clearly indicate problems in the higher echelons of the PLA.

The heavy price of Pakistan's military obsession



SAAD HAFIZ
ANALYST AND COMMENTATOR

PAKISTAN stands at a decisive juncture in its history. Once recognised as a regional power with immense potential, the nation now grapples with a troubling decline in strategic flexibility.

This is largely attributed to short-sighted policies that have prioritised military strength over other national priorities. The consequences of these decisions are increasingly apparent, jeopardising Pakistan's political cohesion and economic development.

A unified, resilient political landscape is essential for enhancing Pakistan's strategic flexibility. However, the military's outsized influence over civilian governance has fragmented the political system, hindering the establishment of robust democratic institutions.

Political parties struggle to formulate stable, long-term strategies amidst this environment.

In recent years, Pakistan has faced numerous political crises, many escalating into

violent confrontations, widespread protests and growing distrust between the state and its citizens.

While some political tension is inevitable in any democracy, Pakistan's habitual reliance on coercive measures to resolve disputes has perpetuated a damaging cycle.

Historically, the state has employed force — through military interventions, police actions and other coercive means — to manage political crises.

Such actions frequently exacerbate the very issues they aim to resolve, leading to heightened polarisation, public unrest and enduring instability.

Although force may provide temporary suppression of dissent or a veneer of order, it fails to address the root causes of political conflict and often widens the divide between the government and the people.

Pakistan finds itself trapped in a damaging cycle, political repression stifles progress and fuels instability, undermining economic recovery.

The military's overwhelming influence over civilian leadership has created an environment that frequently suppresses dissent, restricting the free exchange of ideas and stifling democratic growth.

This political repression, ostensibly aimed at pre-



DAMAGING CYCLE: Unresolved issues, such as poverty, have undermined Pakistan's ability to formulate flexible and pragmatic policies, Reuters

serving control, has ultimately resulted in greater harm by cultivating instability that obstructs Pakistan's development across multiple fronts.

This predicament generates a paradox — while Pakistan projects military strength globally, its internal cohesion remains fragile. Ongoing military interference has prevented civilian leaders from adequately addressing critical internal challenges like poverty, corruption and unemployment, all of which are essential for national stability.

Consequently, these unresolved issues undermine Pakistan's ability to formulate flexible, pragmatic policies that can adapt to evolving global dynamics.

Ongoing military interference has prevented civilian leaders from adequately addressing critical internal challenges like poverty, corruption and unemployment, all of which are essential for national stability.

The consequences of political repression extend far beyond the economic sphere, profoundly impacting the daily lives of average Pakistanis in ways often overlooked by those in power.

Economic hardships like rising unemployment and inflation disproportionately burden the poor and marginalised, who must endure a political system that fails to prioritise their welfare.

The lack of political cohesion and accountability contributes to the neglect or underfunding of vital public services like healthcare, education and infrastructure.

This perpetuates a cycle of inequality where the struggling class becomes increasingly disenfranchised,

depriving future generations of opportunities for upward mobility.

The prospects of the Pakistani populace are, in many ways, compromised by a ruling elite that prioritises control over genuine progress.

To break free from Pakistan's detrimental political cycle, the country must undertake comprehensive reforms that prioritise democratic values, political inclusivity and expanded freedoms.

The political landscape requires decentralisation, allowing for the inclusion of a wider array of voices and ideologies. Such an approach would not only enhance political cohesion but also promote national unity.

This transformative process should begin by empowering civilian institutions and ensuring the military's role remains strictly within constitutional boundaries, enabling elected leaders to guide the nation's future.

Political reform would further contribute to increased transparency and accountability — critical components for restoring public trust in the system. Without a strong political framework that holds leaders accountable, Pakistan's future trajectory will remain uncertain.

For citizens to actively engage in the political system's development, they must have faith in

its integrity.

The time has come for Pakistan to move away from relying on coercive measures as the primary response to challenges. By cultivating a culture of dialogue and negotiation, the country can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, peaceful and stable future.

This does not imply abandoning the state's obligation to maintain law and order, but rather a reconsideration of conflict resolution strategies, favouring peaceful solutions over violent or coercive actions.

Both the state and citizens have essential roles to play in restoring this new social contract, emphasising dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution.

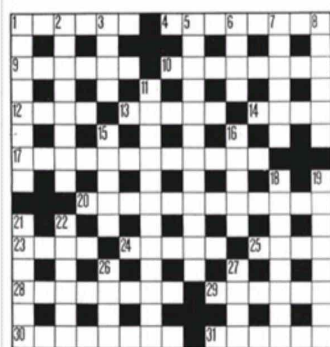
Pakistan possesses the capability to reclaim its strategic flexibility and influence, but it must first recognise that genuine security and sustainable growth stem from comprehensive solutions, not solely military strength.

By re-evaluating its policies and developing a more integrated national strategy, Pakistan can forge a path toward a future characterised by resilience, cooperation and innovation in addressing both internal and external challenges.

The urgency for action is paramount.

Courtesy: The Friday Times, Pakistan

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 In current fashion (6)
- 4 The joker, for instance (4,4)
- 9 Settle oneself quickly (6)
- 10 In a manner of speaking (2,2,4)
- 12 Limited extent of time (4)
- 13 Light quick meal (5)
- 14 Manner of contented cat (4)
- 17 Comprehensively informative (12)
- 20 See just briefly (5,5,2)
- 23 Hat's projecting edge (4)
- 24 Fame gained by achievement (5)
- 25 In addition (4)
- 28 Rapturous (8)
- 29 Eastern marketplace (6)
- 30 Deceitful (3-5)
- 31 Casual from indifference (6)

DOWN

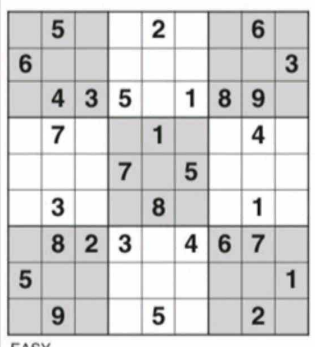
- 1 Medieval singer/musician (8)
- 2 Divert attention of (8)
- 3 Prevailing custom (4)
- 5 One after another (2,10)
- 6 A dark, oval stone fruit (4)
- 7 Means of access (6)
- 8 Cheerless (6)
- 11 Not settling the point debated (12)
- 15 Fight (5)
- 16 Burn superficially (5)
- 18 Unwavering supporter (8)
- 19 Naturally (2,6)
- 21 Wretched (6)
- 22 Humiliating failure (6)
- 23 Molten matter from volcano (4)
- 27 Drag forcibly (4)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Charm, 4 Senator, 8 Owl, 9 Lie fallow, 10 Enhance, 11 Dummy, 13 Pommel, 15 Ardour, 18 Poser, 19 On top of, 21 Operative, 23 Ill, 24 Gherkin, 25 Dated.

Down: 1 Close-up, 2 All thumbs, 3 Melon, 4 Skewer, 5 Mander, 6 Nil, 7 Rowdy, 12 Most potent, 14 Earmark, 16 Ruffled, 17 Notion, 18 Pong, 20 Tread, 22 Eye.

SU DOKU



EASY

FORECAST

SUNSET	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT	SUN
CITY	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN	MAX
Chandigarh	25	13			
New Delhi	26	12			
Amritsar	20	11			
Bathinda	25	12			
Jalandhar	20	09			
Ludhiana	24	11			
Bhivani	25	11			
Hisar	26	12			
Sirsa	27	12			
Dharamsala	21	05			
Manali	12	01			
Shimla	17	07			
Srinagar	13	0			
Jammu	24	08			
Kargil	-01	-13			
Leh	0	-14			
Dehradun	22	09			
Mussoorie	13	03			

Continued on 6



Telangana Today
FOR LOCAL & GLOBAL NEWS

Test for India's diplomacy

The rapidly changing global geopolitics has thrown up new challenges and opportunities in equal measure for India. New Delhi's diplomatic skills will be put to the test in the days ahead as the maverick United States President Donald Trump is seeking to dramatically alter the world order to suit his 'America First' agenda. India needs to do a tightrope walk while insulating the high-potential strategic relations with the US from reciprocal tariff threats on one hand and broadening trade relations with Europe, which finds itself dumped by America, on the other. Close on the heels of an explosive showdown with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the Oval Office in full media glare, Trump has ordered an immediate halt to military aid to an embattled Ukraine. This has taken the strained relations between the two countries to a new low, leaving Kyiv totally vulnerable. Under former President Joe Biden, Washington remained Kyiv's strongest backer, supplying weapons, intelligence and financial assistance. But Trump 2.0 is taking a starkly different approach that is more transactional than ideological. The failure to finalise a minerals deal between the US and Ukraine further underscores the growing rift. By siding with Russian President Vladimir Putin and blaming Zelenskyy for starting the war, the bloodiest in Europe since World War II, Trump has upended the geopolitical order in the region. His impulsive and unpredictable diplomatic manoeuvres have put him at odds with long-term allies in Europe, who had so far enjoyed America's support in isolating Russia.

India needs to do a tightrope walk insulating its strategic relations with America and broadening trade ties with Europe

The latest US action, suspending military aid to Kyiv, has infused a sense of urgency among the European nations to unitedly stand behind Zelenskyy and continue military support to him to fight Russian forces. Trump sees a resolution to the Ukraine war as an opportunity to secure alternative sources of critical minerals, reducing US dependence on China and allowing Trump to take a more aggressive approach towards Beijing. So far, India has maintained a well-calibrated policy of neutrality and equidistance in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and is rooted in the peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy, including engagement between both parties. Its focus has been to strike a balance between protecting its national interests and taking a nuanced position over emerging geopolitics. On one hand, New Delhi delivered a blunt message to Putin that a solution to any conflict cannot be found on the battlefield while, on the other, it remained committed to the robust and time-tested friendship with Russia, even at the cost of causing discomfort to Washington. Now, with both the UK and France taking the lead in drawing up a peace plan for Ukraine, India needs to step in and present a pragmatic solution. It is already on record expressing support for a 'just and lasting peace based on respect for international law, principles of the UN charter and territorial integrity and sovereignty.'

06

VIEWPOINT

HYDERABAD, Wednesday, March 5, 2025



CHOI SANG-MOK
South Korean acting President

"I have become keenly aware of the harsh international order, in which there are no eternal allies or eternal enemies. Relying solely on the goodwill of major powers will not fully protect our interests



LOU QINJIAN
Spokesperson of China's parliament

Over the past 50 years, facts have proven again and again that there are no fundamental clashes or geopolitical conflicts between China and Europe; rather, they are partners that contribute to each other's success



DONALD TRUMP
US President

America will not put up (warmongers) it. If somebody doesn't want to make a (peace) deal, I think that person won't be around very long. That person will not be listened to very long

Return of Dictators

The weakening of democratic institutions has led to the rise of populism and the deterioration of liberal democracies



GEETARTHA PATHAK

US President Donald Trump's second term has inspired visions of a global alliance of the far right, but his return to power has been a decidedly mixed blessing for the European faction. US Vice President JD Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference confirmed that the Trump administration's worldview broadly matches that of his ideological kin in Europe. Both largely oppose Muslim immigrants, push back against pro-climate policy and target the rights of the LGBTQ community. UN rights chief Volker Turk warned on February 25 of a return to an era of dictators, citing past atrocities such as indiscriminate attacks on civilians, population transfers and child labour. He urged urgent action to prevent such "very dangerous" events, cautioning that history could repeat itself.

Far-right Move
The record score achieved by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the recently held elections is a new boost for hard-right parties in Europe. The AfD, which was endorsed by senior figures in the Trump's administration, doubled its score in the legislative elections, reaching 20.8 per cent, behind the Christian Democrats, who ruled out forming a coalition government with them. The AfD has embraced a highly controversial policy called "remigration", which it defines as deporting migrants who have committed crimes. But the term can also refer to mass deportation of migrants and their descendants.

Germany's conservatives in the last week of January sparked fury when their leader, Friedrich Merz, the country's next chancellor, broke a long-standing pledge by relying on far-right votes to adopt a non-binding motion urging a drastic immigration crackdown. The leader of Alternative für



Deutschland, Alice Weidel, hailed "a historic day for Germany" as the Bundestag, for the first time in its history, passed a vote with the backing of her party.

In France, controversial remarks by centrist Prime Minister, François Bayrou, about French people feeling "submerged" by immigration were hailed by the far-right National Rally as evidence that it had "won the ideological battle."

"We're in a vicious cycle," said Tarik Abou-Chadi, an associate professor of European politics at the University of Oxford. "It starts with the radical right being more successful, winning more seats, entering government in more countries." When that happens, he said, "mainstream parties move right on immigration. It is strategic, to win back votes."

In Belgium, during the June 2024 legislative campaign, far-right Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) was predicted to win according to polls in Flanders, the most populated region. But the N-VA, party of Prime Minister Bart De Wever, eventually maintained its leadership. Belang's party was excluded from government talks, even though the anti-immigration party Reform UK led by Nigel Farage won just over 14 per cent of the vote and five seats in parliament.

Religious Pluralism
Several multi-ethnic countries, including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh where religious pluralism is part of the fabric of society, are witnessing the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies. In Asia, for example, several countries are seeing spikes of violence and intimidation against minorities. The common aspect is the desire to create a pure society based on a singular ethnic-religious identity whereby the minorities are considered outsiders or the "other."

Such rhetoric echoes those used in Western countries by violent far-right groups and white supremacist extremists,

who push acceleration theory to promulgate often-racist disinformation narratives and justify attacks on minorities they believe will eventually overtake their societies. In an era of artificial intelligence, unprecedented access to information — and disinformation, combined with instances of the use of counterterrorism legislation to suppress dissent and opposition, has exacerbated the threat.

In 2022, Giorgia Meloni's neo-fascist Brothers of Italy party achieved a historic victory in parliamentary elections. Portugal's far-right Chega (Enough) party strengthened its status as the country's third political force, increasing its seats from 12 to 50 in the March 2024 legislative elections. In Britain, Keir Starmer's Labour Party won after 14 years of Conservative rule. Anti-immigration party Reform UK led by Nigel Farage won just over 14 per cent of the vote and five seats in parliament.

Far-right Appeal

According to political theorists, the far-right appeals to those who believe in maintaining strict cultural and ethnic divisions and a return to traditional social hierarchies and values. In practice, far-right movements differ widely by region and historical context. In Western Europe, they have often focused on anti-immigration and anti-globalism, while in Eastern Europe, strong anti-communist rhetoric is more common.

The United States has seen a unique evolution of far-right movements that emphasise nativism and radical opposi-

UN rights chief Volker Turk warned of a return to an era of dictators, citing past atrocities such as random attacks on civilians, population transfers etc

tion to central government. Far-right politics have led to oppression, political violence, forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide against groups of people based on their supposed inferiority or their perceived threat to the native ethnic group, nation, state, national religion, dominant culture or conservative social institutions.

In her book 'Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right', Cynthia Miller-Idris examines the far-right as a global movement and representing a cluster of overlapping antidemocratic, antiglobalist, white supremacist beliefs that are "embedded in solutions like authoritarianism, ethnic cleansing or ethnic migration, and the establishment of separate ethno-states or enclaves along racial and ethnic lines".

We can understand better the divisive communal politics and its impact on societies under the Hindu nationalist regime in India or the violent conflict that lasted more than 20 months in Manipur from Idris' book.

Italian philosopher and political scientist Norberto Bobbio argues that attitudes towards equality are primarily what distinguish left-wing politics from right-wing on the political spectrum. "The left considers the key inequalities between people to be artificial and negative, which should be overcome by an active state, whereas the right believes that inequalities between people are natural and positive, and should be either defended or left alone by the state."

In a 1961 book deemed influential in the European far-right at large, French neo-fascist writer Maurice Bardèche introduced the idea that fascism could survive the 20th century under a new metaphysical guise adapted to the changes of the times. Sheri Berman, a Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University, is the author of scholarly books and articles on European social democracy, fascism, populism and the development of democracies and dictatorships.

She supports the idea that democracy if unchecked by liberalism can lead to populist — and in some regards dangerous — rule, but further says that liberal values unchecked by democracy can be just as dangerous, as she says, using historical examples, this can lead to oligarchic rule. Berman takes a different perspective on the role of populism and says that it is rather the weakening of democratic institutions that has led to the rise of populism and the deterioration of liberal democracies. The rise of the Modi-led populist government in India can be explained in terms of Berman's concept.

In sum, Berman is trying to demonstrate that populism has led to the rise of illiberal democracies, while populism has gained traction as a result of democratic institutions being too elite-led.

(The author is a senior journalist from Assam)

Letters to the Editor

Editor

Rope in rat miners

This is in response to the news item 'Only a miracle can save eight trapped workers', which appeared on February 26. As the rescue operations inside the SLBC tunnel in Telangana pose significant challenges with slush and water seepage hampering the work, perhaps the popular method of 'Rat mining' could be a positive solution to locate and extricate the eight workers trapped inside. Rat miners are skilled labourers, proficient in navigating and excavating narrow, hazardous underground tunnels. Their name reflects their capacity to move through tight spaces, similar to that of rodents. Although this practice is illegal due to safety and environmental issues, it continues, and the miners' skills are indispensable. When standard rescue techniques fail, rat miners come to the forefront. Their deep understanding of underground conditions enables them to accurately perform manual excavations, accessing locations that machines cannot reach. A striking instance is the Uttarakhand tunnel collapse in November 2023, where 41 workers were safely rescued after 17 agonising days.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

NEP opposition

The reasons adduced by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin for the State refusing to accept the National Education Policy and the three-language formula are indisputable. He has also listed the names of around 25 ancient mother tongues of the people of different States that have been swallowed by the imposition of Hindi and have become extinct in their respective States. Unfortunately, Hindi has become the single language formula followed in their educational and administrative systems. Fortunately, the people and the ruling dispensation of the State who love Tamil, their mother tongue, are well aware of this fact and hence are united.

THARCIUS FERNANDO, Chennai

Inclusive AI

It is encouraging to see that one of the key priorities of the Indian government is to ensure inclusivity and accessibility in AI adoption. Linguistic considerations are indeed crucial, particularly in making large language models (LLMs) more effective for elderly users, whether as voice assistants for daily interac-

tions or as tools to enhance healthcare and companionship. With Reliance investing in one of the largest data centres in Jammu, the private sector's growing involvement signals India's commitment to AI infrastructure. While we may not currently dominate the global AI market, our focus should be on sustainability, ethical regulation, and addressing Belang's challenges with meaningful social needs. If we proceed thoughtfully, India can emerge as a leader in responsible and impactful AI development.

AR KATTAMREDDY, Finland

Ban justified

Banning convicted politicians for life is a debatable issue. The Centre has opposed a plea in Supreme Court seeking a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting polls, stating that the decision to impose such a ban lies with Parliament, not the Judiciary (Feb 27). However, imposing a lifetime ban on convicted politicians would help maintain the true spirit of Indian democratic system and prevent those with a criminal record from holding public office.

GANTI VENKATA SUDHIR, Secunderabad

India in the

hotspot

■ BBC

USAID cuts shutter India's clinic for transgenders

India's first medical clinic for transgender people has shut operations in three cities after US President Donald Trump stopped foreign aid to it. Mitr (friend) Clinic, which was started in 2021 in the southern city of Hyderabad, offered HIV treatment, support and counselling services to thousands of transgender people.

■ The Straits Times

India's anti-cruelty robot elephants

It flaps its ears and squirts water from trunk, but this elephant is a life-size mechanical replica rolled out to replace the endangered animals in India's Hindu temples. Made of fibreglass the model is one of dozens that animal rights campaigners are trumpeting as an alternative to keeping elephants in captivity.

■ The Economist

The trouble with ancient Indians

Ababy born on the same day as the Indian republic—January 26th 1950, when the constitution went into effect—probably would not have lived to see the 75th anniversary celebrations last month. That year, life expectancy at birth was 41.2 years, half a decade less than the global average.

Keep Shining On Us, 'Crazy' Diamond

Work on traceability, more leeway unlikely

India has managed to buy more time from the EU on stringent traceability requirements for polished diamond imports — the deadline has now shifted from March 2025 to January 1, 2026 — because of its unique place in the industry's value chain. The plan to sequester the diamond business into certifiable nodes from mine to market addresses the issue of stones sourced from conflict zones or from Russia. As the largest centre for polishing diamonds, India can be a source of unwanted diamonds entering the system. But the state of the industry — beset by weak demand in principal markets and the growing popularity of lab-grown diamonds — strengthens the case for not allowing Indian processing capacity to dip below critical levels. The acceptable solution is to raise vigilance over Indian imports while setting a lower bar for re-exports.

India's contribution to the trade is not easily replaced,

given the labour intensity of polishing diamonds. But that does not give it indefinite leeway in enforcing traceability. Low-cost tech solutions abound. The industry will not reach governance objectives unless the Indian leg of the circuit is secure. It is welcome that the market-led initiative is sensitive to

India's concerns, both as a production centre and a potential market for finished diamonds. Job displacement due to hurried rules would have been on a massive scale. Worrisome the process could have become irreversible.

The pile-up of unpolished diamonds in India will ease with stricter monitoring of Russian diamond exports. India needs to reverse the situation in which its exports of diamonds are shrinking faster than imports. An extended export window without traceability conditions should help lower the inventory of raw stones. Yet, this does not address collapsing demand in the US, EU and China. Disruption in the supply chain due to sanctions against Russia is also raising price volatility, which affects inventory management in a pass-through economy like India. These factors will keep the Indian diamond processing industry under pressure, delaying the traceability initiative.

Take Sanskrit Out Of Its Old Ghettos

Over time, Sanskrit has got a bad rep, ironically because of its 'good reputation' as an ancient language of knowledge, philosophy and faith. The 'ancient' tag, while giving it a brand value, has scared most people away much after it stopped being only an 'in-language' solely for pandits and pundits, and was part of school curricula. Add to that Sanskrit's appropriation by those whose idea of the present and future are sculpted by a notional past. It must be freed from this 'Hindu' ideological and ivory-tower confinement that has made the likes of M K Stalin suspect it being pushed down throats — at the cost of other Indian languages like Tamil.

Sanskrit should be leveraged as a trendy 'subject' on a par with any other 'living' language that empowers. It has the special virtue of having an exceptionally strong in-built logical architecture. In an age of growing demand and interest in LLMs and AI, its potential value is barely ascertained. Reviving Sanskrit by bringing it into the classroom can make it accessible, unlocking a whole treasure trove of 'content' that need not be only past-caring. The revival in Europe and West Asia in the late 19th-century c. of Hebrew, a 'Biblical' language that fell into disrepair, to a spoken and written language happened after it was unyoked from its use purely as a sacred language in Judaism. A Sanskrit revival could follow a similar trajectory.

Sanskrit must be de-Latinised, in the sense of being taken beyond its current religious, academic and 'quotable' modern ancient texts for speeches' ghettos. For starters, modern accessible dictionaries from Sanskrit to Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil and English should go hand in hand with making the language be utilised for pursuing new domains of knowledge.



Skilling Them Softly With a Revelation

NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani is a sharp man. Last week, he bluntly observed, 'Job and skill are two sides of the same coin. If you have skill, then it becomes easier to get a job. This needs to be understood.' Wow. Yes. Understood. Who would have thought? Well, besides everyone... Let's journey through what may now seem blindingly evident with our aam adami of choice, Jatin. Once upon a time, Jatin thought a degree in Procrastination Arts would land him his dream job. Spoiler alert: it did not. Jatin was left contemplating why he wasn't the next Satya Nadella.

But one fateful day, our Gen Dem Div (demographic divider) discovered that skills — brace yourselves — actually matter. Our once-clueless hero decided to gain one. Now equipped with tech-savvy prowess, J-Man breezed through job applications like a hot knife through butter. He's now getting job offers left, right and centre. Turns out, when you can do a job, people want to hire you. It's like discovering an umbrella keeps you dry. Utterly groundbreaking, right? So, folks, if you're ever in doubt, just remember: skills = jobs. Now, go forth and go skill it. Because sitting around without the right skills and waiting for a job, as Virmaniji wisely says, is pointless. And, by skills, one is not counting impressive abilities like burping out the alphabet, or madly dancing in a barnat.

CURSOR Globalised growth's liberating potential must be accepted for economic rejuvenation

Judge the Great Again Trap

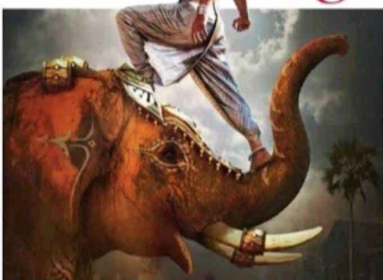


T K Arun

The popularity achieved by AID (Atheist India Democrats), National Rally (RN) in France, Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), testifies the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. Americans have lured right by electing Donald Trump. Labour won in Britain only thanks to the nationalist right abandoning Conservatives to vote for Reform UK (formerly Brexit Party). Why should we, in India, care?

A return to politics of the centre for similar strategies, whether in these countries or India, although the specific circumstances would differ. Globalisation and immigration are common sources of discontent in the US and Europe. Living standards have been stagnant in the US for the bottom 80% for the last 30 years. Low-skill manufacturing has migrated to Asia. Business services have been outsourced, or are waiting to be (Microsoft) Copiloted away. Globalisation feeds inequality. For entrepreneurs, capital, technology and talent are to be sourced globally. The world is their market. They prosper immensely. Share of wages in national income falls, and share of profit rises.

Average income in the US is \$82,000 a year. But the median income is only \$58,000, indicating stark income inequality. The average is what you get when you add up all the incomes of the population, including Musk, Bezos and Zuckerberg, and divide the sum by the number of people. The median is at the centre point, when all incomes are arranged in a descending order.



Wrong elephant in the room

ending order, so that there are equal numbers of people with incomes above and below that median income.) Most people live pay cheque to pay cheque. Any little inflation makes them feel their lives are precarious. Add the cultural discomfort that immigrants bring, speaking different languages, following diverse faiths.

For most Indians, religious diversity is a source of pride. For most Americans and Europeans, religious diversity is a source of fear. So are concepts like gender fluidity and racism embedded in social structure. Politicians find popularity when they blame the precarity of people's lived experience of immigrants and elite normalisation of deviance.

In Europe, entrenched national cultures make diversity seem even more deviant than in the US. Welfare states embed generous benefits through regulation and taxes. This makes European industry vulnerable to competition from low-wage, low-benefit economies, especially when the competition is from the US. The US has a departure from the previous government's approach, which was to ensure equity in taxes and that MNCs pay their fair share of taxes.

So, Shall We Do Tax Our Way?



Suranjali Tandon

Donald Trump's recent decision to withdraw the US from global tax agreements and negotiations, along with tariff policies, has raised concerns that trade and policy coordination could face several hurdles. Trump 1.0 saw retaliatory tariffs, which remain an enticing source of income despite accounting for only about 2% of total tax revenues. As a result, many tariffs were retained by the Joe Biden administration, despite their negative impact on GDP and the pass-through of price increases — especially in steel and aluminium sectors — to US consumers.

Trump 2.0 is unshaken and hopes to raise revenues to compensate for proposed corporate tax cuts. Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) of 2017 was intended to kickstart the US economy. But the outcome is debatable. In another attempt to bolster the economy, Trump has indicated a tax cut. This is a departure from the previous government's approach, which was to ensure equity in taxes and that MNCs pay their fair share of taxes.

In 2021, fate of the global tax deal remained uncertain due to US reluctance to commit. Then, secretary of treasury Janet Yellen came out in support of a global minimum corporate rate of 15%, putting the deal back on track. Countries, including India, began to labour on fine details, and 50 of the 140 countries have accepted a common convention to end tax competition.

This tax ensures that in each jurisdiction, a company with revenue of more than €750 million pays at least 15% tax. The top-up tax is collected through a rule that allows the country of the ultimate parent entity to collect taxes if the source country refuses to raise domestic taxes to the minimum level. With the US being a prominent country of residence, will Trump's executive order break the deal? Given that many countries have an alternative minimum tax, and many have raised their corporate tax rates, the US' lack of interest does not stall progress made so far.

It does leave open the question of what happens to under-taxed profits of American MNCs. There's a possibility that top-up taxes could be collected by third jurisdictions, which is possible under law, and these profits could end up being taxed again in the US. While the US suggests that the deal has 'no force or effect', it may introduce a law less aligned with OECD to prevent any such double taxation.

The US has also announced that it will take measures to address discriminatory taxes — such as digital services taxes — that many countries, such as India, have introduced — and their discontinuation depends on the acceptance of the other pillar of the tax pact that deals with the redistribution of taxing rights for large companies. In the past, the US has used US Trade Representative (USTR) investigations to thwart efforts of countries like India to unilaterally implement taxes by applying retaliatory tariffs on specific products.



Do your own reeling in

As Trump puts 'America first', countries, including India, must assess the consequences of this approach. Imposition of tariffs on some of India's key sectors means that the country will have to diversify into other export markets or lose some of its market share, only to the extent that it competes in the same market. If the war escalates, consumers in both countries will experience a price rise. It is unlikely that tariff increases will compensate for tax cuts, as is hoped, let alone lead to increased output and employment.

Washington's disinterest in global tax deals means that it is keen to introduce a domestic strategy tailored to its domestic tax policy, leaving other countries to figure out their own domestic strategy, rather than relying on the popular OECD approach. The vote in favour of a US tax forum already indicates that there are fissures between OECD and developing countries.

With the US stepping away from the international approach, it paves the way for a more bilateral approach. In that context, India's budget announcements reflect its independent and de-escalating approach. The interplay is a complex one, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP)

As Trump puts 'America first', countries, including India, must assess the consequences of this approach. Imposition of tariffs on some of India's key sectors means that the country will have to diversify into other export markets or lose some of its market share, only to the extent that it competes in the same market. If the war escalates, consumers in both countries will experience a price rise. It is unlikely that tariff increases will compensate for tax cuts, as is hoped, let alone lead to increased output and employment.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Chakravayuh Of Life

NARAYAN SIRDesai

Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, was an able commander of Pandava army and caused severe casualties to Kaurava army during Mahabharat war. Hence, Kaurava generals hatched a plan to eliminate him by trapping him in a chakravayuh.

Chakra means 'wheel' and 'yuh' means a battle formation. Chakravayuh is a seven-layered concentric arrangement of soldiers that keeps moving in circular motion. Soldiers from inner circle are more powerful than soldiers of immediate outer circle. Legend has it that Abhimanyu learnt about piercing chakravayuh while in his mother Subhadra's womb as he listened to his uncle Krishna explain war strategies. He could not know how to escape as his mother fell asleep midway through the conversation.

On the 13th day of war, Abhimanyu penetrated the sixth layer of chakravayuh and got trapped. Kaurava commanders attacked him simultaneously, which was against rules of war and killed him.

Our world of maya is also like a chakravayuh. Due to ignorance, we get trapped in it by enemies like misanthropy, anger, greed, attachment, jealousy, pride, and our temptations, addictions, phobias, negative attitudes, and self-hatred and depression. Studying scriptures, feeling inquiry, surrendering to God, satsang, yoga, dhyana and mindfulness in action are ways prescribed by sages to free ourselves from chakravayuh of life.



PEAS IN A PODCAST

More Than A Paper Trail

The 6-part podcast, Cotton Capital, delves into how transatlantic slavery shaped the British newspaper Guardian, the city of Manchester where it was founded, and Britain. The series traces the paper's ties to the cotton and textile industries through its founding editor, John Edward Taylor. Guardian journalist Maya Phillips Robinson talks to historians about how Manchester became 'Cottonopolis', the enduring myth that obscured the very role in Britain's prosperity and the challenges of documenting the city's links to the transatlantic slave trade.

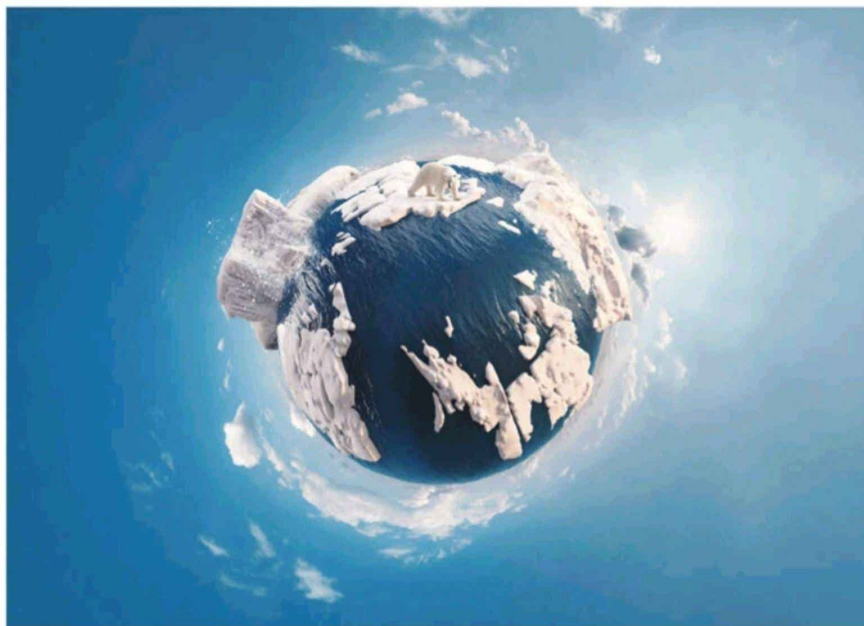
In the second episode, The Meaning of Success, she travels to Jamaica to locate former sugar plantation 'Success', once co-owned by Guardian founder George Phillips. She also visits Mount Gurney Church, where enslaved people from Success once worshipped. Other episodes look at the transatlantic slave trade to Jamaica, the US, Nigeria and Brazil — tracing the full arc of the slave trade before returning to Britain. History lovers. So does its reckoning.

Chat Room

Tariffs Get a New Sheriff

Apropos 'Make Trade Great Again' by Rachar Agrawal and Pravin Krishna (Mar 4), by announcing that 25% taxes on imports from Canada and Mexico would counter the effects of Tuesday Donald Trump has put global markets on edge and set the stage for a devastating trade war. With countries determined to respond to the tariffs being imposed by the Trump administration with their own import taxes, it could further escalate the tensions and increase the economic pain points. The tariffs have been increased in the garb of addressing illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Still, there's a possibility that tariffs will be imposed by the US economy suffers.

M. Jayaram
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu



Glaciers pulverised Earth's ancient rocks: Expert

CHRIS KIRKLAND

Imagine floating in space, gazing at a frozen white orb. The ball hangs in the void, lonely and gleaming in the light from its star. From the pole to the equator, the sphere is covered in a thick crust of ice. In orbit around the white planet is a single cratered moon.

You are gazing at Earth in the Cryogenian period, 700 million years ago. This is about three times as long ago as the earliest dinosaurs roamed – but still not long in the scheme of Earth's mind-bending 4.5 billion years of history.

During the Cryogenian, our planet was plunged into a series of deep freezes when enormous glaciers flowed across the globe.

In new research published in *Geology*, we show that these crushing rivers of ice, sometimes kilometres deep, pulverised the planet's rocky surface like enormous bulldozers. When the ice eventually thawed, the ground-up minerals washed into the oceans where they may have provided the nutrients needed for the evolution of complex life.

Into the fridge

According to the Snowball Earth hypothesis, Earth underwent at least two extreme global glaciations during the Cryogenian. Traces of these events can be seen across the globe in sedimentary rocks formed under glacial conditions, strongly suggesting that ice spread from the poles to reach the equatorial region.

Nobody is sure exactly what triggered these deep freeze events,

though scientists have proposed a range of possibilities. One key may have been a significant decline in atmospheric greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂).

The CO₂ levels in the atmosphere may have fallen because of increased weathering of rocks situated on a large tropical continent that existed at the time. When continents are positioned in tropical regions, warm, moist conditions accelerate chemical weathering, pulling CO₂ out of the atmosphere, and locking it away in carbonate minerals.

Tectonic activity during the breakup of continents that happened during this period may have also played a part. It could have created conditions such as shallow seas, leading to more removal of CO₂ from the air.

As ice sheets advanced toward the equator, they reflected more sunlight back into space, leading to further cooling.

How did Snowball Earth end?

Volcanic activity may have played a crucial role in ending these ice ages. As glaciers covered the planet, interactions between Earth's crust, oceans and atmosphere slowed dramatically. As a result, when volcanic eruptions injected CO₂ into the atmosphere, it would not have been re-absorbed but rather accumulated over millions of years.

These high levels of CO₂ created a runaway greenhouse effect, warming the planet and eventually melting the ice. The resulting thaw caused rapid sea level rise and an influx of nutrients into the oceans. Distinct rock formations were

created during this abrupt climate change, as the chemistry of the oceans responded to the new conditions. The surge of nutrients may have contributed to a cascade of biological changes, possibly setting the stage for the rise of complex life.

Many scientists have considered the idea that changing atmospheric conditions on the thawing of Snowball Earth led to changes in ocean chemistry. In our new research, we found that material scraped off the continents during the thaw may also have played a role.

Snowball to slushball, glacial bulldozer to planetary power hose

We studied sections of rock, from older to younger, through the snowball period to melt down. By doing this, we built up a picture of what the glaciers and the subsequent river systems were doing to the crust of our planet.

We explored minerals with these sequences of rock and found consistent distinctive changes during periods of time when snowball events started and also when thawing occurred.

Snowball Earth events were associated with a pronounced increase in older, deeper crust being exposed and ground down under kilometres of ice.

As the glaciers retreated during thaw periods, massive outflows of melt water transported mineral grains that had been trapped and stabilised under the ice. Once exposed to liquid water, fragile minerals dissolved, releasing chemicals.

This process – like the changes

in the atmosphere – would have changed the chemistry of the oceans. The glacial retreat helped shape the distribution of elements critical to ocean ecosystems.

Lessons from the past

The timescales of Earth's natural processes are important to keep in mind. Over thousands, millions and billions of years, processes such as plate tectonics, erosion, and atmospheric cycles will continue to shape the planet's future.

On shorter timescales, however, human activities have become the dominant force driving climate change.

While Earth itself will endure, the survival of complex human societies depends on our actions today. We are passengers on an extraordinary 'spaceship Earth', a planet that recycles its chemical building blocks through dynamic geochemical cycles, using matter originally forged in ancient stars.

These processes regulate Earth's surface and sustain life, even as our planet's fate is tied to the evolution of the Sun and the cosmos. Humanity, uniquely among Earth's species, has developed the tools and systems to mitigate existential threats such as climate change, famine, war and even asteroid impacts. Yet the effective use of these capabilities remains in our hands.

The deep past provides a guide on how chemical cycles on our planet operate. Whether we will be wise enough to use this information is yet to be seen.

The writer is professor of Geochemistry, and his research was published on www.theconversation.com

Raising awareness on rare diseases for early intervention

ASHOK CHATTERJEE

Many patients with rare diseases struggle to find specialised care, and the lack of awareness among healthcare professionals and the general public exacerbates the issue. To bridge the gap between lack of knowledge and awareness, many non-governments are working to raise awareness, support patients, and push for policy changes to improve the lives of those affected by rare diseases.

The Organisation of Rare Diseases India and Rare Warrior of Bengal Association has done several awareness programmes with Kolkata Municipal Corporation and even launched a programme called 'Kalyan Nirupam Yojana'. The civic body is also involving trained ASHA workers to conduct a survey through a questionnaire that would help them understand if the family is at risk. At-risk families will be asked to visit the nodal centre for further evaluation. It is being thought that diagnostics would be fine through crowdfunding. This thought is to end the diagnostic odyssey for rare diseases and a step forward for early intervention.

The Spine Research Foundation (SRF) is another organisation dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for underprivileged individuals suffering from spinal disorders. It is trying to raise awareness and share insights on adolescent idiopathic scoliosis. The NGO has already completed over 300 surgeries and 60 fellowships in super-specialty training and research programmes for aspiring spine surgeons.

Dr Saumyajit Basu, managing trustee of Spine Research Foundation said the organisation has trained technicians as well as junior doctors as training is an integral part of SRF as treatment requires skills in both bone and nerve surgeries. He stated, "We have speciality training programmes for spine surgery for two years. It is a very competitive test, and even the exit exam is very tough. Out of 50 seats in India, four are managed by our institution. We have programmes for physiotherapists and technicians. We have funding on education and research-based education."

Counting on the positives of developments in the last few years in treating patients with rare diseases, Dr Basu said, "Compli-

cations in surgeries have come down drastically with the advancement of technology and specialised training. With robotics and advanced anaesthesia techniques, we can do long 8-9-hour surgeries without much hassle. A lot of hospitals in eastern India use advanced technologies, but it remains inaccessible to the majority of patients because of high costs."

There are now a lot of government and non-government schemes for economically weaker sections of patients. Also, the demand versus availability gap is huge, feels Dr Basu.

Dr Amita Biswas, a member of the advisory board, SRF said awareness in the last five years has gone up a lot. "I arrived in Kolkata in 2012, and since then, there has been significant awareness. Earlier, people would get nervous when surgery was suggested to them. Not any more, as they have seen others get operated on for spine problems and get cured. This has alleviated their apprehensions. Eastern India is now turning into a subspecialty on the spine as we have a better understanding of the subject," said Dr Biswas.

Due to the funding from SRF, patients like Atiqua Noor and Ina are getting uninterrupted treatment and other support, and their parents consider themselves lucky to get the help.

Atiqua Noor is an 11-year-old from Topsis, studying in Class IV. She has had spine scoliosis. When she was diagnosed with the disease at a younger age, the treatment costs proved too much for her father Muhammad Noor Alam, who drives a cab.

"She was first given treatment when she was just five, and until now, she has been operated on three. Around Rs 30-35 lakhs has been spent on her operations. The amount is too big for me. I only could pitch in with a very small amount, the rest of the cost was borne by the SRF. As a result, she can walk on her own. Though her right leg is a little weak, the doctors have said that she will get normal as she grows up," said Mr Alam.

Ina from Kalimpong is another beneficiary. In her early teens, Ina goes to school after having 14 operations done on her. Her father, who runs a grocery shop, too felt it was impossible to get treatment for them without the financial help.



The biophilic revolution: Green arch. brings nature back

ANAND ACHARI

As cities expand, often swallowing up green spaces in favour of towering skyscrapers and sprawling roads, it feels as though the natural environment is becoming a rare and distant factor, resulting in evident and measurable degradation in human life and wellness. However, the design fraternity has been exploring a concept known as 'biophilic design' in an attempt to reverse this phenomenon. Biophilia, simply translated as 'love or affinity for nature', has been integrated into a design movement that focuses on reconnecting people to nature by incorporating natural elements into our built environments. This approach, known as biophilic design, is proven to not only help improve human well-being but also address environmental challenges like climate change and urban heat islands. Biophilic design engages some or all of the human physiological senses, be it sight, sound, smell, or the tactile,

in experiencing elements of the natural environment which are introduced into built environments meant for human habitation and activities.

A notable example of biophilic design in India can be found at the Infosys Pune campus, a model of green architecture that integrates nature in every aspect of its design. Spread across 275 acres, the campus incorporates green roofs, water bodies, and lush gardens that foster a sense of mental tranquillity as well as physical well-being for the employees. The emphasis on natural light, with expansive glass facades, not only makes the buildings feel more open and connected to the outdoors but also reduces the need for artificial lighting, contributing to energy efficiency. The surrounding gardens and water features create a peaceful oasis, offering spaces for relaxation and reducing the stress often associated with urban work environments. The inclusion of rainwater harvesting and sustainable water manage-



ment systems lends itself to the creation of biophilic spaces while further underscoring the commitment to environmentally friendly practices.

But biophilic design goes beyond just incorporating greenery into the buildings. It is about crafting spaces where natural elements are seamlessly woven into the very structure and function of the environment. In the case of Infosys Pune, the integration of natural materials like wood and stone creates a warm, inviting atmosphere that fosters a deeper connection with nature. This design philosophy

reflects a growing recognition that our relationship with nature is critical, not just to stall a possible climate disaster globally, but for our immediate physical and mental health, too. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated evidence that exposure to natural elements in our daily lives can reduce stress, enhance creativity, improve overall well-being, and even increase productivity.

One of the key tenets of biophilic design is the use of natural light. By placing windows strategically and introducing open spaces within buildings, minimises the

need for artificial lighting, creating a healthier environment while also reducing energy consumption. Natural light not only makes spaces feel more open and inviting but has been shown to improve mood and productivity, making it an essential element of biophilic design.

Water features are another hallmark of biophilic design. The large ponds and water bodies incorporated within biophilic designs are not only aesthetically pleasing but serve a functional purpose as part of the stormwater management system. These water bodies help mitigate the effects of heavy rainfall and flooding, making the place more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Additionally, they create an overall sense of calm, which is proven to enhance the well-being of those who work/reside in such spaces. While the presence of water in any space contributes physically by cooling the air around the sight and sound of water are said to rejuvenate the mind. Contrary to a popular critique that condemns bio-

philic design as a mere green washing of built spaces, it has been proven that even a limited increase in proximity to nature can have exponential effects on human wellness.

Biophilic design is not limited to individual buildings; it also extends to urban planning. As cities become more densely populated, urban heat islands—areas that are significantly hotter than surrounding rural areas due to human activity—are becoming a growing concern. By incorporating green elements, such as rooftop gardens, permeable pavements, and public parks, urban design can deliver cool cities, reduce air pollution, and improve stormwater management. This shift toward nature-centric urban spaces is essential for enhancing all-round sustainability i.e. human, socio-economic as well as environmental.

The writer is principal, VES College of Architecture



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.

Rumi

Some ethics in a sea of political corruption

In a political landscape marred by corruption and misconduct, the recent resignation of Maharashtra Minister Dhananjay Munde marks an important moment of accountability. Munde stepped down on Tuesday succumbing to mounting pressure after his aide, Walmik Karad, was implicated as the mastermind behind the shocking murder of Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh for attempting to thwart an extortion bid. In an era where most senior politicians cling to their positions despite criminal charges, Munde's decision sparks a crucial discourse on political morality and integrity. The resignation should be welcomed as a reference point of ethical leadership in an age where many in positions of power show defiant reluctance to step back, even when beset with formidable legal challenges.

Goa is no exception to this trend, a state grappling with the highest percentage of legislators facing serious criminal charges. With 40% of its MLAs tarnished by criminal records — some facing grave allegations like rape and murder — Goa stands as a testament to the urgent need for moral recalibration in politics. Unlike Munde, who voluntarily relinquished his office in light of ethical concerns, many Goan politicians have exhibited remarkable tenacity in their quest to remain in power, regardless of the potential repercussions of their actions, and instead justified their positions with statements like "innocent until proven guilty".

Prominent figures such as Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho and Revenue Minister Atanasio Monserrate, both embroiled in serious cases, illustrate that power supersedes all. Their steadfastness in retaining office despite charges of serious crimes raises a critical question: Does holding public office necessitate stepping down when moral lapses or legal troubles arise? For Goa, political morality seems distorted, with the nexus between power and impunity flourishing at the expense of accountability. Political leaders should prioritize the public's welfare and the moral implications of their actions over their thirst for power.

Munde's resignation, albeit delayed, serves as an essential reminder that leadership transcends mere titles and responsibilities; it is rooted in ethics and the ability to act honourably, even amidst overwhelming pressure. The contrast between Munde's resignation and the ongoing defiance of Goa's marred politicians highlights an urgent need for reformed political norms in our democratic framework. Leaders entrenched in corruption should face public scrutiny, engaging with the growing clamour for integrity and responsibility in governance. As citizens, we must demand more from our political representatives. Pressure should be mounted not only on those accused of crimes but also on those who choose to maintain the status quo, particularly when discernible moral lapses are at stake.

The Supreme Court has time and again taken a stern view of tainted individuals taking the political arena. Earlier this year the top court said that it is high time that the citizens of the country get a clean India, which means clean politics as well. Justice Pankaj Mishra said it was also necessary that people with tainted images, especially those who are in custody or under trial be restricted in the electoral process.

Munde's resignation illuminates a path of political morality that is sorely lacking elsewhere and should serve as an example to encourage more leaders to act with integrity and accountability. It is time for Indian politics to reflect on the true tenets of leadership and set a precedent of integrity that echoes through the corridors of power.

OPEN SPACE >>

Disconnection between Power dept and service providers

Some days back there was a flurry of activity in Panaji when shockingly the Electricity Department (ED) went wild by removing the overhanging and bunched cables from concrete poles. These cables, of several internet service providers and cable TV operators, were hindering the ED's maintenance work. Cables were severed presumably because the service providers had for 3 years either used the poles illegally, had no permission or not paid the dues running into crores of rupees.

The Executive Engineer, who had initiated the action, might have got a silent approval from the authorities to carry out the work else it is impossible to do what he did. Later he was cut to size, his powers were clipped and assigned different duties.

Cable cutting resulted in the slowing or death of internet services and to an uproar by citizens, service providers and establishments (homes, banks, post offices, govt departments etc). The High Court judges have asked the service providers to fall in line with the rules of the ED and to pay 20% of the arrears for the period between Dec 2022 and Dec 2024. A positive fallout of the "harsh" action by the ED is that now the govt has mandated the service providers to register on the national Gati Shakti Sanchar portal, and pay the fees for using the poles.

SRIDHAR D'IYER, *Caranavalem*

Nationalisation of Goa

How can Goa evolve while preserving the very essence that has defined it for centuries?



ADV MOSES PINTO

The writer is a Doctoral Researcher working under the Alliance of European Universities and has presented his research works at various Academic Conferences.

Goa has always stood at the crossroads of history, balancing tradition with change, local governance with national imperatives, and development with ecological responsibility.

However, recent events—from the forced relocation of a 200-year-old banyan tree in Porvorim to the rapid centralisation of Goa's criminal justice system and the monopolisation of its tourism sector—reflect a growing disconnect between Goa's unique identity and the governance model being imposed upon it.

As national priorities increasingly shape local policies, the State's character is undergoing a transformation that risks eroding its cultural integrity, environmental equilibrium, and democratic ethos.

While evolution is inevitable, this evolution must be organic, rooted in Goa's historical resilience rather than dictated by a homogenised vision of national development. The NH-66 six-laning project epitomises the uncompromising march of infrastructural nationalism.

The High Court's approval for relocating the banyan tree and partially demolishing the boundary wall of the Dev Khreshwar temple was framed as a necessity for modernisation. Yet, the local opposition, protests, and detentions tell a different story—one of discontent over the disregard for cultural and environmental concerns. Historically, Goa has developed through consensus, not imposition. Infrastructure should serve communities, not merely facilitate the swift movement of goods and people.

The current model of development, which privileges large-scale national projects over local ecological and cultural preservation, stands in stark contrast to the sustainable and inclusive vision that Goa has long upheld.

The environmental consequences of such projects—from deforestation to rising coastal erosion due to unchecked construction—highlight the need for a more balanced approach. Modernisation cannot come at the expense of the very landscape that makes Goa unique.

The recent directive from the Union Home Ministry for Goa to become a "model state" for the implementation of India's new criminal laws is yet another indicator of how governance in Goa is becoming increasingly dictated by national mandates rather than local needs.

As national priorities increasingly shape local policies, the State's character is undergoing a transformation that risks eroding its cultural integrity, environmental equilibrium, and democratic ethos



The expectation that Goa achieves a 90% conviction rate for crimes with punishments exceeding seven years could incentivise a prosecution-heavy approach at the cost of fair trials and due process.

The mandatory registration of Investigation Officers on the e-Sakshya platform and the push for 100% forensic sample testing prioritise efficiency over nuance, ignoring the realities of local law enforcement capacity.

The requirement for Superintendent of Police-level approval before registering cases related to organised crime, terrorism, and mob lynching could bureaucratise and politicise law enforcement rather than improve justice delivery.

While criminal law reform is essential, its implementation must reflect regional realities rather than serve as a national experiment in governance centralisation.

Nowhere is Goa's transformation more visible than in its tourism sector, where the term "Dehification" has emerged to describe the monopolisation and pricing-out of Goa's once-thriving hospitality industry.

Rising costs have made Goa less competitive than foreign destinations such as Thailand or Sri Lanka.

Taxi and resort monopolies—protected under weak regulatory frameworks—have replaced a fair and decentralised tourism economy with exploitative pricing practices.

The state government's shift towards high-end tourism, favouring luxury resorts and large-scale commercial interests, has alienated both budget travellers and local businesses.

Goa's tourism model has always thrived on diversity—welcoming backpackers, domestic families, and international visitors alike. The move towards high-spending exclusivity risks erasing this balance in favour of a corporatised and unsustainable tourism model that benefits a select few.

The increased nationalisation of Goa's governance—whether in law enforcement, infrastructure, or tourism—raises a fundamental question: How can Goa evolve while preserving the very es-

sence that has defined it for centuries?

Modernisation should respect Goa's traditions, not dismantle them. Infrastructure projects must integrate local environmental concerns, cultural heritage, and community consensus.

Legal reforms must be adapted to Goa's unique socio-legal framework. Criminal law enforcement should prioritise justice over quotas and centralised control.

Tourism policies should empower local businesses and promote sustainable models rather than monopolise resources for large-scale corporate interests.

Goa's strength has always been its ability to adapt without losing itself.

Its history of resilience, from Portuguese rule to post-liberation governance, is a testament to its ability to navigate change while holding onto its core values. The challenge today is not whether Goa should modernise, but how it should do so on its own terms—honouring its past, protecting its present, and shaping its future.

The preservation of Goa's identity is not a resistance to progress; it is a call for a more thoughtful and inclusive evolution. If Goa must stand as a model for anything, let it be a model for development that harmonises tradition with transformation, not one that erases it in favour of a singular nationalistic vision. The path ahead for Goa lies in fostering sustainable progress that respects its cultural and ecological heritage while embracing necessary reforms. Governance must adopt a consultative approach, ensuring local voices shape policy decisions rather than unilateral impositions.

Infrastructure expansion should be environmentally conscious, legal reforms must align with Goa's socio-legal framework, and tourism policies should empower local businesses over monopolistic ventures.

Goa's resilience lies in its ability to adapt without erasure, modernising without compromising its identity. The way forward must prioritise inclusive growth, where development and tradition coexist harmoniously, preserving Goa's essence for generations to come.

THE INBOX >>

Why roadworks during peak hours?

The Goa government often promotes itself as delivering good governance, but in reality, that is not always the case. Public convenience does not seem to be a priority. Take roadworks, for example. Why are they carried out during peak hours instead of late at night or early in the morning? This causes unnecessary inconvenience to the public. It seems like local MLAs, ministers, and the government want to showcase development (at taxpayers' expense) by ensuring these works are done when people can see them. The Goa government should learn from progressive cities and countries, where such works are managed with public convenience and safety as top priorities.

ARWIN MESQUITA, *Colva*

Online registration in govt hospitals for senior citizens

The Bho Medical College and Hospital, Bambolim, has reportedly introduced a dedicated queue exclusively for senior citizens, mainly to ease the challenges faced by them during the registration process. Additionally, it is learnt that a separate counter has also been set up to give preference to senior citizens holding a priority card for the Outpatient Department (OPD). A Public Relations Officer (PRO) will reportedly be present to guide senior citizens to their respective OPDs for check-ups and necessary investigations. These facilities need to be provided not only at GMC but should also be made available at government hospitals across the State since senior citizens visit other government hospitals as well. As per statistics, elderly citizens now constitute half of the hospital inpatient population. Elderly persons may have multiple health issues, could be malnourished, and may have impairments. These older adults are

Explaining hot and humid temperature in Goa

Although summer is just around the corner, Goa has already experienced extremely hot and sometimes very humid weather, with the mercury reaching 37.6 degrees Celsius on 16th February. Thereafter, by and large, the maximum temperatures have been around 35 to 36 degrees Celsius, bordering on a heatwave-like condition, causing distress to the people. It is known that on the 3rd of January every year, the Earth is closest to the Sun, and since the orbit of the Earth around the Sun is elliptical, this closeness explains why the temperature is high.

Another significant explanation for the high temperatures is the fact that the emission of greenhouse gases by approximately 15 lakh four-wheelers on the roads is also leading to a rise in temperature. It is known that one litre of petrol emits 2.3 kilograms of carbon dioxide, and at the least, if we consider that only 10 percent of the vehicles are in operation at any given time, then a minimum of 3.45 lakh kilograms of carbon dioxide, which traps the heat of the Sun, is contributing to a great extent to the rise in temperatures.

Additionally, the emissions from at least 14 lakh two-wheelers in Goa are further contributing to the rise in mercury levels. Being a coastal state, Goa experiences excess evaporation due to high temperatures, leading to an increase in humidity.

STEPHEN DIAS, *Dona Paula*

at great risk of suffering hospital-associated discomforts. Be that as it may, at a time when Information Technology (IT) is being used extensively in numerous aspects of the healthcare delivery system, why not introduce a system wherein senior citizens can register online at government hospitals from the comfort of their homes instead of having to wait in line, even if it is a dedicated queue? Senior citizens can upload their Senior Citizen card while booking an appointment online at a hospital.

ADELMO FERNANDES, *Vasco*

Stop the chaos: Ban rented cars for irresponsible tourists

Accidents involving rented cars in Goa

are rising. Yesterday, a second accident near Mahalakshmi Temple at 10:20 am saw delayed police response—45 minutes, without an alcohol test. Police focus on compromises instead of recording incidents for road safety improvements. Tourists freely drink, drive, and escape consequences. All accidents, big or small, must be documented, including cases of drunk driving, missing signboards, and poor road conditions. If drinking is allowed, young tourists should be banned from renting cars. They should use taxis for safety. The government must act—enough is enough. CM Pramod Sawant, let's make Goa India's safest state with strict road safety measures and transparent records.

GREGORY E DSOUZA, *Sisla*

Rachol – A neglected centre for learning

Rachol was once a well-known centre for learning and promoting humanity, besides being a place of worship in South Goa, similar to Pilar in the North. However, while Pilar has developed and maintained its importance as a religious destination with good connectivity to major cities, Rachol has been left behind. Rachol was once a fortress, and its history is still visible in the grand stone entrance gate. However, no traces of the surrounding walls remain. This beautifully planned location has suffered neglect due to poor infrastructure and lack of proper connectivity. As a result, religious events are mostly limited to locals, and it has not grown into a popular destination like Pilar. With the right efforts, Rachol can regain its significance without losing its rich heritage. If the local MLA takes the lead, along with the support of the community, this historic place can be revived and restored to its former glory, securing a prominent place on the map of Goa.

BHALCHANDRA VS PRIOLKAR, *Margao*

Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

Language Politics

Tamil Nadu's political landscape is once again dominated by a familiar debate - Hindi imposition. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has revived the decades-old resistance against the language, making it a central theme ahead of next year's assembly elections. His party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), has historically positioned itself as the guardian of Tamil identity, and this controversy plays directly into its hands. The Centre's actions, however, raise questions. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been trying to gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu, with its state president K. Annamalai emerging as a vocal opposition leader. Yet, by engaging in a public confrontation over language, the BJP risks alienating Tamil voters further. The decision to withhold Samagra Shiksha funds due to non-implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) only strengthens the DMK's narrative of Delhi suppressing Tamil Nadu's interests. The irony is that the three-language formula is not a BJP creation - it dates back to the policies of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi. NEP 2020 does not even mandate Hindi as the third language. Tamil Nadu could opt for Kannada, Telugu, or any Indian language. Yet, Mr Stalin's rhetoric frames it as a direct assault on Tamil identity, ensuring that language politics remains a potent electoral tool. Beyond the political theatrics, the real concern is the state of education in Tamil Nadu. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 presents troubling data - only 12 per cent of third-grade students can read a second-grade Tamil text. By eighth grade, a third of students still struggle with basic Tamil reading skills. While Mr Stalin positions himself as the protector of the Tamil language, these statistics indicate that his government is failing to ensure Tamil literacy among young students. Instead of only opposing Hindi, the state government should prioritise improving Tamil literacy first. Stronger foundational education in Tamil will empower students, regardless of the languages they choose to learn later. The economic reality of India demands multilingualism. Tamil Nadu's entrepreneurs, engineers, and professionals increasingly interact with Hindi-speaking counterparts in business and employment. Tech entrepreneur Sridhar Vembu recently pointed out that not knowing Hindi is a disadvantage for Tamil Nadu's workforce. While resisting Hindi imposition is valid, denying students the opportunity to learn it - if they choose - could limit their opportunities. The BJP, too, must reconsider its approach. If it truly believes in linguistic inclusivity, it should implement the Kohari Commission's recommendation - introducing Tamil and other southern languages in Hindi-speaking states. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promoted cultural exchanges like the Kaashi Tamil Sangamam, but real inclusivity requires policy action, not just symbolism. As Tamil Nadu heads toward elections, the Hindi debate will remain politically useful for both Mr Stalin and the BJP. Yet, the people of Tamil Nadu deserve more than just symbolic battles. A focus on strengthening Tamil education, while also giving students the freedom to learn additional languages, would serve them far better than another cycle of political posturing.

Nepal Policy

India's relationship with Nepal has always been complex, shaped by historical, cultural, and geographical factors. As a landlocked nation with India on three sides and China on the fourth, Nepal's strategic significance cannot be overstated. However, India's approach toward Nepal often swings between two extremes - either deeply engaged, risking perceptions of interference, or completely disengaged, allowing external players to fill the void. Neither approach serves India's long-term interests. A balanced, pragmatic policy is the need of the hour. One of the strongest yet underutilised aspects of the India-Nepal relationship is their deep-rooted military connection. The tradition of the Chiefs of Army Staff in both countries being honorary generals in each other's armies is a unique arrangement that fosters goodwill and enhances mutual understanding. This relationship should be leveraged more effectively to strengthen strategic ties, beyond symbolic gestures. The Gorkha connection, in particular, has long been a bridge between the two nations, yet India's Agnipath scheme has created uncertainty for Nepalese Gorkhas seeking service in the Indian Army. Addressing Nepal's concerns while ensuring a steady recruitment pipeline can prevent unnecessary friction. Border disputes, particularly over the Kalapani region, have also been a recurring irritant. While political leaders often use such disputes to rally nationalist sentiment, ground realities suggest a more practical approach. Local communities on both sides share cultural and economic ties, and their daily lives are rarely disrupted by the political tensions surrounding border claims. Engaging in backchannel diplomacy and people-to-people initiatives can help de-escalate tensions and build consensus. Track 2 dialogues, involving retired officials and experts, could pave the way for formal negotiations to avoid the public posturing that often hardens positions. India must also reassess its economic engagement with Nepal. While Nepal remains dependent on India for essential goods and fuel, Chinese investments and trade have been steadily increasing. Instead of viewing China's presence with suspicion, India should focus on competing more effectively. Strengthening Nepal's economic ties with India through better infrastructure, trade incentives, and cross-border connectivity will naturally counter external influence. Indian companies need to adapt to changing market dynamics, particularly in sectors where Chinese firms are making inroads, such as electric vehicles and consumer goods. Nepal, for its part, wants to maintain good relations with both India and China while safeguarding its sovereignty. This is a realistic approach, and India should respect Nepal's strategic balancing act rather than react defensively. Overreacting to Nepal's engagement with China only pushes it further away. Instead, India should ensure that its ties with Nepal remain strong through military cooperation, economic engagement, and cultural diplomacy. A pragmatic, steady approach - neither overbearing nor indifferent - will serve India's interests best. By focusing on shared history, strategic interests, and economic opportunities, India can reinforce its position as Nepal's most trusted partner, ensuring stability in a region where external influences are constantly at play.

Fatuous Sagacity ~ II

Till the Second World War, the discipline of economics was taught as political economy and the economists were basically political economists. Political science and economics have been twin sisters and were being taught together in universities all over the world including India. Development of the economics discipline radically changed in the post-WWII scenario when attempts were made to make economics more mathematical with the introduction of mathematical and statistical tools to explain economic phenomena and theories synchronizing with human psychology, sociology and demography

Among modern economists, the person who completely revolutionized economic thinking and practice during the Great Depression of 1930s had been John Maynard Keynes whose unconventional ideas contained in his book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, brought new hopes of salvaging war-ravaged European economies. Keynes has been one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all the modern economists who have had a lasting influence in the world economy.

Keynes was the prime mover and guiding light for the Bretton Woods Conference which led to the creation of the two world institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank).

Keynes opened new frontiers of macroeconomics, especially Public Finance, and his ideas were translated into economic strategy and policy formulation for many governments. His economic theories and ideas are known as Keynesian economics or Keynesianism. His macroeconomic theories also came into action during the world economic crisis in 2007-2008.

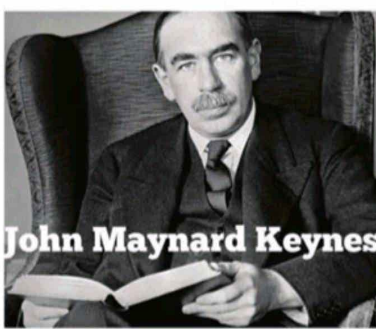
Keynes had a chequered career as a mathematician, philosopher, civil servant, administrator, negotiator, diplomat, economics teacher and an economic strategist. The invaluable experience he gained from the British Treasury and the banks greatly helped him to formulate successful economic policies and strategies for the British government.

Ironically, this genius had been an accidental economist as his heart lay in mathematics (he graduated in mathematics) and philosophy and it is Alfred Marshall who forced him to take up political economy as his principal subject at Cambridge.

Modern economists (other than Keynes) who have made seminal contributions to the discipline of economics include Paul A Samuelson, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Friedrich Hayek, Garry Baker, John Hicks, Kenneth Arrow, Joan Robinson, J K Galbraith, Gunnar Myrdal, Nicholas Kaldor, Joseph Schumpeter and Amartya Sen to name a few. Most of them had been Nobel Prize winners.

Paul Anthony Samuelson (1915-2009), an American of Jewish descent from Poland teaching at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT-1940-2009) is considered to be the founder of neo-Keynesian economics and a seminal figure in the development of neoclassical economics.

The book *Foundations of Economic Analysis* (1946) derived from his doctoral dissertation had been his magnum opus. Samuelson has had considerable influence on the American economy having served in the Councils of Economic Advisors to President John F. Kennedy



John Maynard Keynes

and Lyndon B Johnson and also as a consultant to the United States Treasury.

In their citation, the Royal Swedish Academy stated Samuelson "has done more than any other contemporary economist to raise the level of scientific analysis in economic theory." He received worldwide acclaim not only for his economic models, especially in the fields of

consumption, public finance and welfare, but also for his record-breaking book, *Economics: An Introductory Analysis* (1948) which is considered the best text book ever written on economics. The book, in multiple editions and reprints (19th by 2010) was translated in 41 languages and by 2018 it had sold more than four million copies making it the most popular economics textbook of all time.

While he considered mathematics as "the natural language" for the economists and laid the foundation for mathematical economics, in his *Economics*, Samuelson used mathematical tools to the minimum and only when their use was essential.

Milton Friedman (1912-2006) was another American economist who was himself an institution - the father of the Chicago School of economics, which produced a large number of winners of the Nobel Memorial Prize in economic sciences.

In his *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Friedman extolled the philosophy of free market economy with least interference by the government; this led to the popular slogan, "the government has no business to be in business."

Initially, Friedman wanted to be an actuary or mathematician but the state of the economy during the Depression led him to become an economist. This five-foot-tall scholar (Elfin Librarian) had to leave his job

as assistant professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison owing to anti-Semitic slurs (he had Jewish roots from Ukraine) and had to struggle hard before he could get a faculty position in the University of Chicago where he taught economics for 30 years and nurturing the Chicago School of economics.

Friedman made a huge impact on the monetary policy of the Federal Reserve as well as on the economic policies of the US government and many other governments of the twentieth century. He had been an advisor to the Republican US President Ronald Reagan and the Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

His books and essays considerably influenced a generation of economists. According to a survey (2011) commissioned by EIW (Economic Intelligence Watch), Friedman was found to be the second-most popular economist of the 20th century after John Maynard Keynes.

The Economist described him "as the most influential economist of the second half of the twentieth century." This writer, as a student, had the opportunity of interacting with Friedman during his visit to the Department of Economics of Calcutta University in 1963 when he expressed, among other things, his concern about the employment situation in the United States - a concern which still persists there.

No history of economics or economists would be complete without the mention of an extraordinary personality and a political economist named Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883-1950), who had a chequered career in Europe and the United States. Born in Trest (present-day Czech Republic), Schumpeter was an Austrian political economist belonging to the Historical School (he received his doc-

toral degree from the University of Vienna's faculty of law), and having worked as a professor of economics at the University of Czernowitz (Ukraine - 1904), University of Graz (Austria - 1911-13), Columbia University, (USA-1913-14), Harvard (USA - 1927-28, 1930), University of Bonn (Germany -1925-32) and also briefly working as the Finance Minister of Austria (1919), he migrated to the United States in 1932 to become a professor of economics at Harvard where he remained for the rest of his life.

As an 'evolutionary economist', Schumpeter was totally opposed to Marxism and socialism and believed in evolutionary capitalism and 'liberal capitalism' brought about by innovation, entrepreneurship and "constructive destruction." Three of his books - *The Theory of Economic Development* (1934), *Business Cycles* (two volumes - 1939) and *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942), especially the last one, created waves in the economic world and made him one of the most influential economists of the 20th century.

Christopher Freeman summed him up by noting "the central point of his whole life work: capitalism can only be understood as an evolutionary process of continuous innovation and 'creative destruction'." Schumpeter's 'dynamic, change-oriented and innovation-based economics' distinguished him from other contemporary economists.

His *History of Economic Analysis* published posthumously in 1954 has been a monumental work of scholarship (1322 pages, cost: Rs 16,000/- Amazon) in which he traced and analysed economic thoughts from the days of Greek civilization to the modern times. According to Schumpeter, the greatest 18th century economist had been the French economist Jean-Baptiste Say, while Adam Smith and Leon Walras of France had been "the greatest of all economists."

It will be seen that till the Second World War, the discipline of economics was taught as political economy and the economists were basically political economists.

Political science and economics have been twin sisters and were being taught together in universities all over the world including India. Development of the economics discipline radically changed in the post-WWII scenario when attempts were made to make economics more mathematical with the introduction of mathematical and statistical tools to explain economic phenomena and theories synchronizing with human psychology, sociology and demography. This started an era of creating economic models using mathematical equations and statistical tools. A hybrid subject called Econometrics was also born.

(To be continued)

MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

UK bolsters ASEAN's growth and stability through strategic programmes and partnerships

The UK became a dialogue partner with ASEAN just four years ago and we reached the first new dialogue partner for 25 years. As it's been a long time since ASEAN accepted a new dialogue partner, we were absolutely delighted. We're committed to working and partnering across all of ASEAN's priorities, but particularly those where there's a real overlap between what ASEAN is trying to do and where the UK might have expertise, or the other way around, where the UK has a particular interest in learning from what's going on in ASEAN and from ASEAN's expertise. We have partnered with ASEAN to design and devise a number of programmes, which we're rolling out in support of, not just ASEAN's priorities, but also the commitments that we've made in the plan of action that we've reached with ASEAN.

We are four years into that five-year plan of action and we are on track to meet over 80 per cent of the commitment in it, through these six programmes in particular. There's one economic integration, as there's a real sense amongst the ASEAN leadership that the responses to the changing global environment have to be the region's own economic integration and trade within the region. As we're known, UK has a very strong financial services sector, we're working with ASEAN on

Viet Nam News

financial services. We also have a programme supporting the advancement of girls in education at all stages. Under that programme, we've offered women in STEM scholarships to candidates from across ASEAN to study at two absolutely brilliant UK universities. The bulk of that programme is focused on foundational learning for young girls and children who find themselves excluded from school for one reason or another. We also have a health security programme, which is just beginning to ramp up. There will be many partnerships between research specialists and experts in ASEAN and the UK. We have a Green Transition Fund, which has also been a constant theme today. Additionally, we run a programme with UN Women, Canada and Korea on women in security.

The sixth programme is a new one, where we are working with Malaysia, particularly as chair, to develop a framework for ASEAN to harness the creative economy across the region. This isn't just scholarship to gain a degree but also about making it a real contributing factor to economic growth. The creative economy is a huge driver of growth in the British economy and, we're sharing our expertise in this area. I mentioned earlier that women, peace and security is one of our key programmes. When I joined, this was already underway, primarily led by UN Women, with support from the UK, Canada, and a few other partners. The original purpose of the programme was to support the development of the Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security.

There has now been established, and in individual countries, there is ongoing work to translate that international action plan into tangible outcomes, including here in Vietnam. We continue to support that work. In addition to that, we partnered with the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and brought together - not just women but also men - for a series of conferences to discuss aspects of women, peace and security. I emphasised this at the Women, Peace, and Security event preceding the ASEAN Future Forum. It's important to recognise that the issue works both ways.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Mutual trust

SIR, This refers to the article "As Tempers Flared In Washington..."

Recently, the dramatic conversation between U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been making headlines. Trump's economic, political, and foreign policies seem to lack any clear principles or guidelines. His sole objective appears to be conducting business and making a

profit. He wants to expand American trade and make the U.S. economically prosperous.

However, he seems to forget that economic, political, and foreign relations between two nations can only last if they are based on mutual trust and cooperation. Trump's approach of using threats, pressure, and coercion to intimidate and force other countries into trade deals will

ultimately prove harmful to the U.S. in the long run. Even during his first term (2016-2020), he propagated falsehoods through similar tactics. However, these

PLURALITY

SIR, The Punjab government's decision to make Punjabi a mandatory subject in all schools - public and private - goes beyond academia; it is a reaffirmation of linguistic and cultural identity. The move follows outrage over a CBSE draft that omitted Punjabi from its list of regional languages for Class X exams. Though the CBSE later clarified that its norms were only indicative, the controversy reignited concerns over the diminishing role of regional languages in national education policies.

This issue is not confined to Punjab. Across India, debates over language policies have intensified, particularly around the three-language formula. States in southern India have resisted attempts to impose Hindi, while many in the northeast continue to demand greater recognition for their indigenous languages. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes multilingualism, but its implementation remains inconsistent, often favouring dominant languages over regional tongues. Punjab's response, therefore, is not just about one language but part of a larger pushback against perceived linguistic homogenisation.

In a country as linguistically diverse as India, balancing national cohesion with regional linguistic rights is a complex challenge. Punjab's move reflects a broader demand - one that seeks not just recognition but also respect for India's linguistic plurality. The real challenge, however, is ensuring that this respect translates into policies that empower all languages, not just a select few.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 4 March.



Restrictive step that will alienate many

SHIVANSHU K SRIVASTAVA

In a move that is bound to reignite debates over national identity, immigration, and inclusivity, US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order declaring English as the official language of the United States. This is a historic first as, despite the country's 250-year history, the US has never had a national language, as is the case in India.

While English is undoubtedly the dominant language in American life, this executive order is far from a neutral administrative decision. It must be considered in the context of Trump's broader political agenda, especially his steps to disassemble diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The question before us is not just about language but about the fabric of a multicultural and multilingual society and whether such action supports harmony or leads to division.

Some people may consider the decision to make English the official language as a good step. The logic is that English is already the de facto language of government, law and business in the US. Supporters argue that making it a de jure language would help promote national unity and streamline government functions. However, such a perspective overlooks the ulterior negative implications of this decision.

At its core, language is not just a means of communication; it is a marker of identity, history, and culture. The United States, a nation built by immigrants, is home to more than 350 languages, according to the US Census Bureau. Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Arabic are among the most spoken languages besides English. The decision to impose English as the official language sends a clear message: linguistic and cultural diversity is no longer welcome.

This move does not occur in isolation. It aligns with Trump's broader crackdown on DEI programmes, which were created to address historical

inequities and ensure greater representation for minorities in education, employment, and governance. His administration's aggressive stance - eliminating equity-related grants, contracts, and requiring federal contractors to disavow DEI initiatives - suggests that this executive order is not merely about language, but about erasing policies that acknowledge diversity as a strength.

Ironically, many of the earliest settlers who laid the foundation of the United States were non-English speakers. German, French, Dutch and indigenous languages flourished alongside English in colonial America. The unwillingness of past governments to execute an official language originated from the belief that America was unique specifically because it adapted diversity rather than enforcing uniformity.

Even founding figures of the USA like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison never tried to impose English as the national language. The United States thrived for centuries without such a law because language assimilation occurred naturally over generations, without coercion. The assumption that an official language is necessary for national unity is therefore historically unfounded as evident from the situation in India which does not have a single official language but a total of 22 to respect the multilingual culture.

Moreover, multiple studies have shown that immigrants in the US overwhelmingly embrace English. According to research by the Pew Research Center, more than 90 per cent of second-generation immigrants speak English proficiently, and by the third generation, native languages often disappear entirely. If language assimilation is already occurring organically, what purpose does this order serve, if not to stigmatise linguistic minorities?

Declaring English as the only official language could have far-reaching consequences for millions



of non-English speakers in the US. It may pave the way for restrictive policies, such as reducing the availability of government documents and public services. Such measures could disproportionately affect Latino, Asian, and indigenous communities there, who already face fear of systemic barriers to equal participation in civic life.

The economic implications of this move are also worth noting. The US economy benefits significantly from its multilingual workforce. Industries such as healthcare, education, tourism, and international trade depend much on employees who can communicate in multiple languages. An English-only policy could inadvertently undermine these sectors by discouraging multilingualism rather than embracing it as an asset.

The debate over language policy is not unique to the United States. Many countries have grappled with similar questions, and their experiences offer valuable lessons which the US must consider. India, for instance, has a total of 22 officially recognised languages and over 1,600 dialects are

spoken in different parts of the country. Despite a huge linguistic diversity, English serves as a crucial link language alongside Hindi. Rather than enforcing a national language, India has adopted a pragmatic approach that allows multiple languages to coexist peacefully in governance, education, and daily life. This policy has helped maintain unity in a diverse nation, even as linguistic disputes occasionally flare up.

In contrast, the countries that try imposing monolingualism often meet with backlash. In Canada, the imposition of English in historically French-speaking Quebec led to huge political tension, ultimately resulting in a bilingual national policy. Similarly, in Spain, the suppression of Catalan and Basque languages under Francisco Franco's regime fuelled resentment and separatist movements that persist to this day.

Trump's executive order will not be final on this issue. Legal challenges are almost certain, particularly if the order is used to restrict access to government services for non-English speakers. Civil rights groups, advocacy

organisations, and pro-immigrant lawmakers are likely to push back against any measures that disproportionately harm minority communities.

Outside the courtroom, the real trial will be whether American nationals will accept or negate the idea of a monolingual country. The US has long prided itself on being a land of opportunity, where people from all backgrounds can contribute to society without being compelled to leave their identities. This order disagrees with that intent, substituting it with a narrow, exclusionary definition of American identity.

Ultimately, the strength of a country is not determined by the language it mandates, but by the values it upholds. The United States must decide whether it will embrace the pluralism that has defined it for centuries, or retreat into a dividing vision that seeks to erase the very diversity that has made it great.

The world, and history, will be watching.

(The writer is an advocate.)

100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE University of Delhi is young, and when the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Hari Singh Gour, in his address at the third Convocation deprecated "the multiplication of universities at present proceeding," many of his hearers doubtless smiled. The man who has arrived often looks forbiddingly at those who would follow. If education is improved and extended by new universities, they are to be welcomed. If not, there is no justification for them. The need of universities cannot be judged by quantitative standards, except in so far as the resources available for distribution affect the situation. It was probably this that Sir Hari Singh referred; his own university, like all others, has its financial difficulties. In his address he attempted to draw Lord Reading on the subject of compulsory military training for University students. His Excellency, however, would not be drawn. He contented himself with pointing out that the Territorial Force Committee's report recommended that the individual universities should be free to decide the matter. This same freedom should be extended to students. Though universities must have rules, freedom is of their essence, and while students should be encouraged in every way to undergo training and shoulder the implied liabilities, compulsion would destroy enthusiasm. There is much that young men should decide for themselves.

NEWS ITEMS

BOLSHEVIK HOPES "EMPIRE'S APPROACHING DISINTEGRATION"

(TIMES' SPECIAL SERVICE.) LONDON, MAR. 2.
THE Soviet Press appears to have obtained much satisfaction from the recent articles in The Times on the Dominions and foreign policy.

The Riga correspondent of The Times says these articles are described as containing "a series of most important avowals," clearly symptomatic of the Empire's approaching disintegration. Izvestia prints long passages, adding that they deserve the most serious attention as picturing the stupendous difficulties with which British foreign policy is confronted.

POLITICAL LEVIES GOVERNMENT COMPROMISE ON TRADE UNION BILL?

(TIMES' SPECIAL SERVICE.) LONDON, MAR. 3.

The Times political correspondent states that the position regarding the Trade Union Levy Bill is unchanged. The Cabinet cannot support a private member's Bill dealing with so vital an issue, and Mr. Baldwin will make clear the position of the Government early in the debate.

The supporters of the Bill still hope that the Prime Minister will be able to indicate general approval of the principle of the Bill and willingness to introduce Government legislation at a later stage if in the meanwhile, the trade unions have not started the necessary reforms. It is believed that such a declaration would satisfy most of the Unionists who pledged themselves to support the Bill before the position of the Government was defined.

ARMY EXPENDITURE FURTHER REDUCTION URGED

DELHI, MAR. 4.
GENERAL discussion on the Budget was resumed this morning.

Mr. Rangachari said the Budget showed that they had now turned the corner and he expressed gratefulness for the Government's having done justice to Madras. He thanked the Commander-in-Chief for economy in the Army Estimates but he felt that the steady reduction in military expenditure must continue until it was brought down to at least Rs. 50 crores. The further replacement of British by Indian troops would result in economy. He saw no reason, in view of falling prices, for addition to the emoluments of Army officers.

Mr. Rangachari regretted that the Government had taken no steps to pass orders on the North-West Frontier Inquiry Committee's report. The Government had failed to give protection to the minority community in Kohat. Whoever might have been at fault, the Hindus of Kohat should have been given full protection. They had to flee to Rawalpindi, and were passing there sleepless nights. What would have happened if an Asoka or an Akbar were ruling India? Mr. Rangachari did not wish to speak on political issues at that time but he asked how the British instinct of the Finance Member felt to find that the members of the House could not vote on a substantial portion of the budget.

Protecting children in the age of AI

VITIT MUNTARBHORN

The age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is very much here. The term "generative AI" is now commonplace, with the public fascinated that AI can actively produce content such as written and audio creations. In fact, the world is moving towards Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) whereby robots will be able to match and even outdo human intelligence. Aply, its relation with children (under 18 years) invites reflection and precaution.

On the one hand, AI can bring great benefits, building on the strengths of existing digitalization. It can be a useful educational tool, such as to help children who face learning difficulties or disabilities. It is a technology of connectivity and helps to facilitate communication and information dissemination. It can act as an instrument of leisure, such as to invent games. It can promote human efficiency, such as to deal with repetitive tasks in the medical field.

On the other hand, AI also brings risks. It might be a tool of exploitation, such as in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation. It is a technology of alienation used for bullying, hate speech, discrimination and violence. It lends itself to information distortion and manipulation, such as hallucinations, fakes and scams, misinformation and disinformation, propaganda and surveillance. It is an instrument of stress, replete with addiction and superficial self-validation. It is emerging as an instrument of human subjugation and dejection, especially when and where it controls human lives perhaps absolutely.

How then is the world community to handle that ambivalence? The international guiding framework is the Convention on the Rights of the Child

and its General Comment No.25 on children's rights in the digital environment, highlighting child protection.

In reality, implementation is open to a variety of orientations, bearing in mind that both AI and related responses are in a state of flux.

On one front, there is the two-track situation whereby a general approach is contrasted with a more specific approach in handling the relationship between AI and children. The former is exemplified by various laws and guidelines of a general nature, such as to protect children's privacy and safety and to highlight AI transparency, especially to help explain the pros and cons of AI to children.

The more specific approach is to target various sectors for action. Twenty-five years ago, the Online Privacy Child Protection Act of the US offered a preview. It imposed a condition related to minimum age: children under 13 years old cannot consent to have their data revealed. In 2025, California opted for this additional, specific intervention. Its recent Patients Communications' law stipulates that healthcare facilities using AI offered a preview. It imposed a condition related to minimum age: children under 13 years old cannot consent to have their data revealed. In 2025, California opted for this additional, specific intervention. Its recent Patients Communications' law stipulates that healthcare facilities using AI offered a preview. It imposed a condition related to minimum age: children under 13 years old cannot consent to have their data revealed.

On another front, there is the contrasting vision between ethical guidelines of a persuasive nature concerning AI utilization and the prescriptive approach of binding regulations with consequential accountability in the case of violations. The ethical approach has emerged from some international agencies and it highlights basic principles, such as "Do No Harm", safety and security, privacy

and data protection, responsibility and accountability, transparency and explainability of AI's functions.

The prime example of the prescriptive approach is the European Union (EU)'s AI Act, in force in 2025. There is a list of prohibited practices. Social profiling, where data might be used to discriminate against people, is forbidden. Subliminal targeting of children's emotions as a kind of manipulation is proscribed. The collection of real-time biometric data for surveillance purposes is not allowed, although there might be some leeway in regard to national security. With lesser risks, the business sector is called upon to have Codes of Conduct as a kind of self-regulation for policing itself, subject to linking up with the EU supervisory system as a whole. Violations can lead to massive fines.

Globally, certain realities are inevitable. Where there is illegal content, such as the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, for instance child pornography, national laws already prohibit such practices and they automatically apply to AI related actions. However, there might be differences in regard to whether children appearing in AI generated content are real children or merely digitally generated. The issue is not settled internationally, although child protection groups prefer to prohibit all images of children in such situations, without having to prove whether real children are involved.

From another dimension, there is the issue of how to deal with harmful content which is not illegal. For example, the mere fact that X hates Y is not necessarily illegal in international law or national law. Other actions may thus be required. At present, the digital industry, especially its developers



and employers, have already adopted some tools through self-regulation to moderate content and take down harmful content, at times with and through filtering. For instance, many platforms have Codes against homophobic messages and they delete them, even if the national law nearby does not prohibit such content. This might also cover various forms of bullying and grooming of children which might otherwise lead to discrimination or violence.

The key lies with digital and AI literacy so that the public, especially children, parents and teachers, are able to enjoy the benefits of technology safely, securely, "smartly" and sustainably. This can be helped by the AI industry where it ensures that its members are AI literate from the angle of assessing the risks as part of due diligence and mitigating them, with guardrails balancing between freedom of expression and child rights' protection. In essence, there can be no

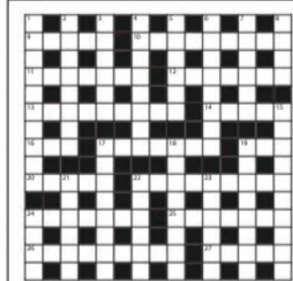
substitute for an educated and literate public with a discerning and critically analytical mind, as well as to have cognitive and affective means to protect itself from transgressions.

Urgently, families need to have options for "digital detox". This would enable parents to work with children to safeguard some spaces at home to be free from technology. There need to be periods of human interaction without technology, together with leisure time together as humans. Humane activities such as pro bono help for disadvantaged groups need to be nurtured, to generate the warmth of empathy which no technology can replace.

Hence, the community needs "Top-Tips for Digital Detox" or "TT-4-DD" now!

The writer is Professor Emeritus at Chulalongkorn University, a former UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children and is a member of the Advisory Group of UNICEF, Thailand.)
Special to ANI.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- 9 Collection of pictures almost entirely of poor quality (5)
- 10 Calling out pioneering woman about career? Not acceptable (9)
- 11 One newly in power backing criticism applied to location mostly (7)
- 12 Compelling work in the tropical domain (7)
- 13 Shortcoming not initially visible reproduction (9)
- 14 Hard for us for some time (5)

- 16 Pointer regularly indicating early afternoon? (5)
- 17 Trench to have an effect on railway (7)
- 18 Computer peripheral with no second function (5)
- 20 Yorkshire town certainly backed retaining ponds (5)
- 22 Attack dislodged tons, stifling scream? (9)
- 24 Half of us women's college close to missing American wilywood star (7)
- 25 Rector in church almost put off for ages? (7)

DOWN

- 26 Timepiece always keeping hour? How's it going? (4,5)
- 27 A chore, endless, capturing latitude - in this (5)
- 1 A Hindi soup cooked in the style of potato dish (10)
- 2 Mug in musical kept up being unsuccessful (8)
- 3 Simple creature, European, amongst crowd accepted by drivers' club (6)

- 4 Happen a story in universities will identify motor museum (8)
- 5 Information about earlier shining (6)
- 6 Has girly twists using bright colours (8)
- 7 One in distance beginning to upset environment (8)
- 8 Arctic explorer who's lost in ice formation (10)
- 15 Picks items out, showing doubt in LA (10)
- 16 Upstart over medicines dropping temperature? (8)

- 18 Eccentric person following big game producing visual chart (4,4)
- 19 You are texting cautiously - or otherwise? (8)
- 21 No expert bet - lots of people going short (8)
- 22 Irish writer working to consume cheese (6)
- 23 At sea? Runs up to sea location after sea voyage, perhaps (6)
- 24 Book with a weak line making you cry (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

FIRST COLUMN

PURIFYING THE MIND, RESTORING THE EARTH

If we truly wish to combat pollution, we must first cleanse our thoughts and correct spiritual imbalance



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us are very much aware of the word 'Pollution', be it a child, a youngster or an old person. However one could not contemplate the reasons or source from which this dreadful monster called pollution occurs. Today, globally every country is facing consequences of pollution, contamination or abuse of air, water, food & even Space on a very large scale, but they are not able to find a foolproof solution to this dangerous threat to humanity. Although many institutions & regulatory bodies have been established.

Today a fast-developing country like India stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we Indians live in a land of vanishing beauty, increasing ugliness, shrinking open spaces, and an overall environment that is diminishing daily by pollution noise and blight. So where does this take us? Would there be a solution to control or tackle pollution problems & save humanity? Well! The answer lies with the ones who are posing this question, i.e. we the humans, YES! Over the years, while discussing deeply about cause & effect of pollution, we smartly avoid looking at the actual problem that's deeply rooted in the mental sphere rather than the sphere of matter. If we look up the dictionary meaning of the word pollution, we may find something like 'to destroy purity of; to contaminate'. However, humans are only aware of the material pollution in the branches of the polluted tree & we have disregarded the seed or root of 'thought pollution' which gave growth to that tree. So without destroying the root basis of pollution, the source can never be purified. It won't be an exaggeration to say that the problem of environmental pollution is actually due to the pollution of man's mind which is full of selfishness, jealousy, greed, anger, etc. The problem of ecological imbalance is due to our mental imbalance, and the disequilibrium in nature is due to disequilibrium in man's mind. Another fact that is generally



unknown or is little realised is that the vibrations from a polluted mind contaminate or corrupt the atmosphere; they make it tense and vicious. Most of us make a mistake by thinking that our thoughts are invisible & psychic and hence they can't do anything, but actually, thoughts have both hands and legs, because one can control one's hand to rob nothing, control one's legs to kick nobody, but one can scarcely control one's thought without thinking as thought is too deep to be expressed, too strong to be suppressed, too fast to be drawn back, hence he who will not command his thoughts, will soon lose command of his actions.

The wars struggles and quarrels of mankind are very often caused by this. Deep thinking would reveal that most of the present global problems are due to thought pollution, for this pollution destroys a person's sense of being impartial, considerate and cooperative and makes him callous, inimical, violent-prone and vicious. It influences economics, politics, commerce, business, even friendship and all relationships.

The ultimate solution to this problem lies in realising the self and also our relationship with other human beings. Remember!! Great men are those who see that the spiritual force is much stronger than the material force. Hence without a spiritual orientation of the relationship between man and man, moral and spiritual values cannot be brought into play or be sustained, and, in the absence of these core values, no problem can be solved for a considerable length of time. It is, therefore, essential for all of us to understand the real and intrinsic nature behind the mask or the garment of the body to set the direction right. If this is not done, then possibly science without spirituality may dangerously lead mankind to a nuclear catastrophe population explosion or environmental upheaval. So, let us use the powerful weapon of spiritual wisdom to cleanse our souls from thought pollution & survive in harmony with nature & its elements without any kind of disturbance whatsoever.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Unlocking Punjab's export potential

With targeted policy support, infrastructure investment and global market integration, Punjab can play a transformative role in India's trade success story



A S MITTAL

India has vast industrial and agricultural capabilities across 800 districts, yet 40% of its merchandise exports originate from only 10 districts. Gujarat dominates this landscape with five key contributors: Jamnagar, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bharuch, and Kachchh. The other significant players include Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Bengaluru in Karnataka, Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, and Noida in Uttar Pradesh. Alarmingly, Punjab—home to a robust industrial base in textiles, bicycles, sports goods, engineering goods, tractors, agricultural implements and food processing—is conspicuously absent from this export powerhouse.

The One District One Product (ODOP) initiative was introduced to rectify this imbalance, but meaningful progress has yet to materialise. If India is serious about reaching its ambitious target of \$1 trillion in exports by 2030, it must expand its export landscape beyond this handful of districts. The next wave of growth will undoubtedly come from unlocking the potential of industrial hubs like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur and Mohali. These regions must receive robust, targeted policy support, a conducive environment and infrastructure development, and substantial financial support to enable Punjab's industries to compete with the country's top export-driven districts. India's Global Export ChallengeGIndia's share of global exports has stagnated for decades, hovering around 2% and currently at 1.8% as of 2024. Ranked 17th among the world's top exporters, India falls behind various developing nations like Mexico, which ranks 9th.

To achieve the goal of at least doubling India's merchandise export value from \$437 billion in FY 2023-24 to \$874 billion by FY 2030, a strategic overhaul is essential—one that prioritises the establishment of export hubs in underrepresented regions, particularly Punjab, entire of potential.

The Imperative for a Decentralised Export Strategy

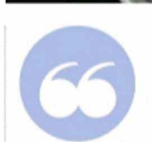
Punjab accounts for a mere 2% of India's total exports, but this share holds immense growth potential. To unlock this potential, the 'Districts as Export Hubs' initiative must go beyond paper & policy discussions and be actively and aggressively pursued. The government should prioritise transforming Punjab into a significant export player, leveraging the state's industrial cities, which are primed for expansion.

Punjab's Key Districts with High Export Potential

Ludhiana: The Unrivaled Textile and Bicycle Powerhouse Ludhiana dominates India's bicycle exports with an astounding 80% market share. However, India's presence in the global \$33.3 billion bicycle market is alarmingly low, standing at less than 1%, while China effortlessly commands 60%. Similarly, in the textiles, apparel, and hosiery sector—valued at \$1.7 trillion—India's share languishes at a mere 5%, compared to China's commanding 37%. With strategic branding, robust trade facilitation, and decisive policy support, Ludhiana is poised to become a global leader in these vital sectors.

Jalandhar: The Untapped Giant in Sports Goods

Exports Jalandhar produces an impressive 45% of India's sports goods and contributes 75% of the country's sports-related exports. Yet, India holds a mere 0.56% share in the global sports goods market, valued at \$220.57 billion, while China captures a staggering 42.2%. Jalandhar must actively integrate into international supply chains to aggressively penetrate markets in the USA, UK, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, and South Africa.



IF INDIA IS SERIOUS ABOUT REACHING ITS AMBITIOUS TARGET OF \$1 TRILLION IN EXPORTS BY 2030, IT MUST EXPAND ITS EXPORT LANDSCAPE BEYOND THIS HANDFUL OF DISTRICTS.

Hoshiarpur and Mohali: The Manufacturing Titans Hoshiarpur and Mohali are home to one-third of India's Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and are the undisputed leaders in tractor exports. The global tractor market, valued at \$62.7 billion, is dominated by Germany with a 16% share, while India barely scrapes by with 2.2%. Mohali is also emerging as a significant tech and pharmaceutical hub, which is crucial for high-value exports that will fuel economic growth.

Amritsar: The Strategic Gateway to Global Trade

Amritsar, a historic trade hub, can leverage its advantageous proximity to the Wagah-Attari border to significantly enhance cross-border trade with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. By expanding trade policies, Punjab and northern India can assertively access high-demand markets in the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will further solidify Amritsar's role as a pivotal player in global trade.

Basmati Export Zone:

A Major Global Opportunity Punjab leads the charge by contributing 40% of India's basmati rice exports, which account for 65% of the global market. Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur must be developed into a dedicated Basmati Export Zone under the One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme. With the correct branding

and compliance, Punjab has the potential to tap into previously unexplored markets.

Tackling Key Export Challenges Head-On

1. Infrastructure and Logistics: Access to ports is strategically essential to any state when engaging in international trade, as landlocked regions face the comparative disadvantage of high trade costs and hindrances in the freedom of transit from the seas. Punjab's landlocked status must not be a hindrance. The Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIC) needs to be expedited to enhance dry ports and logistics hubs under the Trade Infrastructure for Exports Scheme (TIES). Introducing state-owned wagons will be a game-changer for bolstering Punjab's exports and addressing the freight burdens associated with shipping.

2. Cost of Industrial Land: Land prices in Ludhiana and Mohali are prohibitively high, ranging from Rs. 5-7 crore per acre, stifling expansion. Authorities must prioritise the allocation of vacant industrial plots in focal points and Panchayat Raj-owned land for industrial use to establish a viable industrial land bank.

3. Global Market Compliance: With 18% of India's exports directed toward the European Union (EU), Punjab's industries require substantial support to meet evolving international regulations, including the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism and stringent deforestation laws.

4. Leveraging Free Trade Agreements: Many exporters in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are currently unaware of India's FTAs. Local chambers and business federations must launch aggressive awareness campaigns to maximise these agreements among entrepreneurs.

5. Boosting MSMEs: Punjab's micro, small, and medium enter-

prises (MSMEs) need targeted financial support and strong market linkages to thrive in global trade. District Export Promotion Councils (DEPCs) headed by respective deputy-commissioners (DCs) are underperforming as DCs are already overburdened with multiple administrative tasks, and dedicated senior officials to be assigned to formulate District Export Action Plans (DEAPs) to bolster MSMEs.

6. Promoting Geographical Indications (GIs):

Punjab's GI-tagged products, such as Basmati rice, Phulkari embroidery, Amritsari Papad, and Jalandhar sports goods, possess immense global potential. Establishing dedicated stalls at international airports and providing financial backing for branding will amplify their presence in international markets.

Visit Bharat Demands Viksit Districts:

India's ambitious export targets can only be realised through a decisive, decentralised approach centred around its more districts. With Punjab's rich industrial and agricultural heritage, it is positioned to emerge as a key export powerhouse. By fortifying district industries, enhancing trade infrastructure, and driving global market integration, Punjab will play a crucial role in India's export-led growth narrative. For India to achieve a truly 'Viksit Bharat', its districts must assume a more prominent role in export activities. This strategic shift will reshape India's global trade landscape and ignite widespread economic development and employment generation.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Unmasking the financial networks threatening national security

Illicit financial flows drive disruptive activities by foreign-backed dubious NGOs, influencing policies and protests that impact India's growth and development

India is at a pivotal moment in its history, reclaiming its status as a global leader. Our economic resilience, democratic foundation, and cultural unity have driven our progress, but hidden forces seek to undermine this advancement. This battle is not fought with conventional weapons but through financial manipulation, foreign influence, and strategic disruptions disguised as humanitarian aid, social activism, and policy advocacy. Foreign-funded networks have infiltrated India's socio-political fabric, threatening our sovereignty from within. One major threat is illicit financial flows fueling disruptive activities in India. Nepal's recent grey listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)



BINOD ANAND

highlights how money laundering networks in South Asia pose a significant security risk. Nepal has become a hub for financial irregularities, increasing the possibility of unregulated funds entering India through informal channels. This is not just an economic issue—it is a matter of national security, stability, and control over our developmental path. For years, foreign-backed

organizations such as USAID, DFID, Open Society Foundations, and the Ford Foundation have funneled substantial financial resources into India under the pretext of supporting human rights and social causes. While genuine welfare efforts are welcome, evidence suggests that some of these funds have been strategically diverted to disrupt India's growth, create internal discord, and propagate anti-India narratives globally. A glaring example is the farmers' protests, which began as a movement for agrarian reforms but quickly escalated into a global propaganda campaign. Foreign lobbying groups, anti-India activists, and Khalistani supporters exploited the movement to mobilize protests, shape media

narratives, and turn a domestic issue into an international crisis. Financial audits have exposed a complex network of foreign funding behind this orchestration. This raises the question—are these movements truly in India's interest, or are they calculated efforts to delay our growth? The infiltration of foreign narratives into India's civil society directly threatens our self-reliance and policy-making sovereignty. While India welcomes foreign investments aimed at development and genuine social progress, we cannot allow our policies, protests, or progress to be dictated by external forces with hidden agendas. The FATF's decision to place Nepal on its grey list is a direct consequence of its weak finan-



cing, unaccounted money transfers, and potential threat financing. Intelligence agencies have flagged instances where hawala networks in Nepal were used to channel funds into India to support destabilizing activities. One major concern is Nepal's financial exemption allowing investments in infrastructure without disclosing sources of funds, making it a conduit for dubious transactions. While FATF's grey listing does not impose sanctions, it signals global financial institutions that Nepal is vulnerable to illegal money transfers, potentially triggering reduced foreign investments and regional financial instability. Recognizing these threats, the Modi government has taken decisive action to curb foreign

interference. Over 20,700 NGOs have lost their FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) licenses due to financial irregularities, undisclosed foreign funding sources, and misuse of contributions. The tightening of FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) regulations ensures greater scrutiny of financial transactions linked to activism, political lobbying, and potential threat financing. Collaboration with FATF, INTERPOL, and global security agencies has enhanced India's ability to track cross-border fund flows and dismantle illegal financial networks fueling unrest. Strengthening oversight on foreign-funded NGOs, think tanks, and advocacy groups to ensure full transparency and

accountability. Enhancing security measures along the Indo-Nepal border to curb illicit financial transactions and smuggling networks. Promoting domestic funding mechanisms to empower local organizations and grassroots initiatives, reducing reliance on external financial aid. Our civil society is strong enough to drive change through indigenous resources and a vision rooted in national interests. The need of the hour is self-reliance—strengthening grassroots organizations and building an Indian developmental model based on internal merit rather than foreign charity.

(The writer is Secretary General, Confederation of NGOs of Rural India, views are personal)

THE ASIAN AGE

5 MARCH 2025

Can govt calibrate free speech on social media?

Freedom of speech and expression is critical to the very existence of the idea of democracy and India's Constitution is very clear on it. Some restrictions were subsequently introduced by the government of India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on the plea that "the citizen's right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) has been held by some courts to be so comprehensive as not to render a person culpable even if he advocates murder and other crimes of violence" and that "in other countries with written constitutions, freedom of speech and of the press is not regarded as debarring the state from punishing or preventing abuse of this freedom".

Seventy-four years later, the Supreme Court of India has now felt that there must be "regulatory measures" against the abuse of the right in such a way that the use of "filthy language" and "vulgarity" did not pass off as humour in programmes streamed online. There must be a way to ensure that the programmes adhere to "well known moral standards" of Indian society while it keeps off the idea of censorship of the fundamental right to speech and expression.

This may be the first time the court, a guardian of the fundamental rights, has suggested to the government to come up with measures which could end up curtailing them. The court may have been sharing the concern a section of society has for the uncontrolled freedom people enjoy when it comes for expressing themselves which breaks the conventional idea of humour or is in bad taste even. There has been a hue and cry in the southern state of Kerala where youngsters have been held for committing grievous crimes including murder, and the blame was laid at the door of a genre of movies which fetes violence as they have got a good following of late in the state. The criticism is so serious that the chief minister told the state Assembly that the government will initiate a discussion with film-makers on the topic.

All this shows that there is a felt need of steps to ensure that the freedom of speech and expression does not undo the good that is expected of it. However, there is a risk, too, that when the government wades into the area, it will be the proverbial bull in a china shop. Pertinently, another bench of the Supreme Court has pulled up the Gujarat police on the same day for unthinkingly registering a first information report against a Congress Member of Parliament on the basis of a poem which essentially espouses the cause of non-violence. But the police had charged him with promoting enmity among people of different faiths. The suggestion was that the government was unmindful of the fundamental right to expression of the citizen when it looked the MP.

However, as things stand, while courts have generally promoted the idea of self-regulation when it comes to this right, they are now compelled to call the attention of the government to power to frequent instances of its abuse, too. The government, while pondering over these prospective measures, must keep in mind the sanctity democracies attach to this right, and the court must ensure that whatever it suggests passes constitutional muster. It is the job of the apex court to assure that its invitation to the government to formulate these regulations for social media users and content producers do not end up like the bludgeon that gave Bhasmasura and burn the intended beneficiary who is the citizen.

Foot-in-mouth hits Cong again

The Congress Party has had a long history of its middle rung leaders and party spokespersons putting their foot in their mouth. Dr Shama Mohamed may have excelled in this eccentric game of shooting oneself in the foot with a wayward comment made on the Indian cricket captain that was so unnecessary that she put herself in the record books as being the one who committed an extreme faux pas by saying the wackiest thing imaginable.

What business is it of a political party spokesperson to make a public comment, on social media or otherwise, on the ebullient of Rohit Sharma, an accomplished international cricketer, who has been hit with tons of runs and captain who has won a couple of shiny silverware for the BCCI cupboard?

While the itch to post irrelevant things in the social media might be a common man's predilection or even passion in a medium with billions of users that seems to invite impulsive comment, political party's spokesperson is expected to stay well within the bounds of reason and relevance in any output that is likely to reach the public.

What the lady might not have understood while posting — "Rohit Sharma is fat for a sportsperson. Need to lose weight. And of course, he has an unimpressive Captain India has ever had" — is that cricketers' batmen are not necessarily tuned-to-the-minute athletes who must look lean and mean in appearance and do the 100 metres in under 10 seconds like Usain Bolt.

What makes it even more mysterious is, given her ignorance of sport, why she felt she had to post something on these lines. She has a captaincy record that holds up well in international cricket. Far from being apologetic for a major error of judgment, the lady was even trying to justify the senseless opinion she had stated while body-shaming a sportsperson.

The Congress Party, which has often had problems with loose cannons like Sam Pitroda and others making flippant remarks on all subjects under the sun, and has had to often disassociate itself from eccentric opinions stated or made public, must look to maintain a tight rein on members it picks for such tasks as official spokespersons. It is best the party reins them in and asks her to stay on subjects she may have knowledge of rather than seek notoriety through ignorance.

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Subhani



Row over delimitation: Will it alter the federal balance?



Shikha Mukerjee

Into the perpetually agitated political ecocycle of Indian politics, an increase in volatility by the anticipated effect of a fresh delimitation of constituencies in states like Opposition-ruled Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana, apprehensive of a reduction of the number of parliamentary seats relative to the percentage of seats these states have now, seems to have been deliberately seeded to initiate a new controversy. Like a whisper campaign, it is uncertain who tipped off chief minister M.K. Stalin that the state may lose eight of its 39 parliamentary seats, that is its Lok Sabha strength would be reduced by one-fifth.

The delimitation row is intriguing; the TN chief minister framed it as a "punitive" and "unjust" measure as South Indian states "have diligently followed the Union government's policies to control population growth". When K. Annamalai, the BJP's rising star, accused Mr Stalin of creating "fear among the public" to divert attention from the ideological battle that has erupted between the state and the Narendra Modi government over the three-language policy and imposition of Hindi by making it mandatory, a plausible cause has emerged to explain one part of the puzzle over the timing of the delimitation issue.

Instead of jumping the gun, chief ministers Stalin, Siddaramaiah and Revanth Reddy would be better off seizing the opportunity to shout out that it's not them but the Modi government that seems in a great hurry to get delimitation going.

The 84th Amendment adopted by the Atal Behari Vajpayee government in 2002 had set a target date for the next delimitation after the 2031 Census. The amendment kept the old freeze of 545

seats for the Lok Sabha going till 2026. If the BJP wants to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats, it must do so through another constitutional amendment. Instead of kite-flying, the Opposition-ruled states may gain some political advantage by running their own campaign demanding time-lines for the Census and busting the rumour that delimitation would be done before the 2029 Lok Sabha polls when the BJP hopes to strengthen its dominance over Indian politics with an unprecedented fourth successive win. The apprehension that states like Tamil Nadu would lose seats would be true only if the Centre decides to "kick the can down the road", that is, keep the 543-seat freeze going.

If the Modi government wants delimitation to begin before 2031, it has to get the deferred Census going. It hasn't done so yet. The problem is the Modi government's discomfort with data can be seriously harmful to the delimitation process. If the Census is actually done in 2026, the data for delimitation will not be available till 2028 at the earliest.

The Tamil Nadu versus Centre or Opposition-run states vs BJP tussle, however the dispute is framed, can be handled in other ways. It's a bit like a mischief-maker chucking a stone at a hornet's nest, knowing well the hornets will interpret the stone as an attack and go on a counter-offensive. The fundamentals of delimitation of seats are simple: every one of the past four successive delimitation exercises have been contentious.

Every delimitation exercise follows from legislation passed by the Lok Sabha initiating the process, including appointment of a Delimitation Commission. The legislation sets the time-line, whenever adopted by

It'll be problematic if the PM creates the legacy of a deeply divided country in terms of geographical representation. That may not be a desirable target for Mr Modi, the BJP and RSS in the long term.

the BJP and its allies. It will also reveal the Modi government's plan by laying down the terms of the delimitation exercise.

Mr Modi, through his three terms, has made bones about the primacy of the executive, which he controls. He has rammed through his choice, wielding the BJP's brute majority in the Lok Sabha, over appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner as the third director. He has tried changing the norms for the appointment of the apex judiciary. It is, therefore, likely that the delimitation Commission will be peopled by those who enjoy the PM's confidence.

Parliament building is as big a signal as there can be that the Modi government is on track to raise the number of MPs from 543 to an unspecified number. This will have to be worked out by the Delimitation Commission, the Central and state governments, MPs, MLAs, political parties and civil society. Instead of a slanging match, the Opposition would do better talking about federal equilibrium and hitting the streets to mobilise popular support. Once delimitation is done, the law is such that it cannot be challenged in court.

Over the years, there has been a growing demand for a more representative legislature at the Centre and in the states. The current population to representative ratio is a crisis.

Successive governments have upheld the principle of one vote-one value; to ensure that the number of constituents represented by an MP or MLA should be around the same in every state, barring exceptions. Nor can the federal equilibrium be upset.

If indeed, as the Carnegie Endowment's India's Emerging Crisis of Representation report intones, India should have an 848-member Parliament, the federal equilibrium will be disturbed. It could produce very lop-sided representation. States where population has grown enormously, both Hindu and Muslim, without controversy over who is an illegal and should be weeded out of the voters' list, like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, could make huge gains. Uttar Pradesh, a BJP bastion, could end up with 60 seats in addition to its existing 80 seats. Rajasthan could double its seats from 25 to 50. Gujarat could nearly double its seats and Tamil Nadu could end up with adding a paltry 10 seats, while Karnataka would get an additional 15 seats. And West Bengal would add 18 seats to its current 42 seats. Peculiarly, Kerala would neither gain nor lose; it would be stuck with 20 seats, as would most of the Northeast, barring Assam.

Every delimitation is contentious; a delimitation that is divisive and contentious is a dangerous exercise in a polity already riven with fault lines. If the BJP-ruled North has huge numbers in the Lok Sabha and Opposition-ruled states have disproportionately fewer MPs, it could turn the divide into a chasm over political, ideological and geographical terms.

India hasn't so far indulged in large-scale "gerrymandering" — the political manipulation of electoral constituency or district boundaries. The fear is that readjustments on constituency boundaries could be fixed to neutralise "vote bank" politics, based on caste, religion, community, group, ethnicity or language.

It will be problematic if the Prime Minister creates the legacy of a deeply divided country in terms of geographical representation. That may not be a desirable target for Mr Modi, the BJP and RSS in the long term.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

PAY PRAHLAD BACK

The remarks of the minister Prahlad Patel of BJP is typical of the disdain our politicians hold for the public. It is time for us, the people, to make the minister apologise. Stop asking for certain things and begin demanding them. The minister is not going to pay for anything from his own pocket and will give to the people what belongs to the people. Chances are he will get away without even a reprimand from the high command of his party. The people of India have been servile for too long and it is time to stop accepting such insults meekly. The next time the minister comes begging for votes, the people must pay him back in the same coin!

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

TRADE WAR BEGINS?

DONALD TRUMP'S 2025 tariffs — including a 10 per cent tariff on all imports from China and 25 pc tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada (with some exceptions for energy) — have triggered widespread concerns. Financial experts warn these tariffs could disrupt supply chains, increase production costs, and drive up consumer prices, potentially slowing economic growth as businesses face uncertainty and reduced investment. In response, China imposed retaliatory tariffs on \$3.9 billion worth of US exports, escalating tensions and adding to global economic uncertainty. Analysts estimate these policies could trim US economic output by 0.1-0.2 pc, leading to job losses and reduced consumer spending, while also straining diplomatic relations with key trading partners and accelerating shifts in global supply chains.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazratibagh

SEBI: WHY THE DELAY?

WHEN the allegation of stock market fraud committed by Sebi chief was in the air for quite a long time, why did the ruling party at the Centre not initiate an independent probe against her? Why she was allowed to continue her job making the market volatile? The high court has, however, stayed the investigation for a day with intent to hear the matter. A pertinent question may arise as to whether the investigation could not be carried out simultaneously along with the hearing.

Arun Gupta
Kolkata

Equality, dignity not possible in New Europe in era of Far Right

Europe has been marching rightward for some time, with voters in France, Portugal, Belgium, and Austria following this trend. Germany's election results continued this trajectory, as Friedrich Merz, leader of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union, was elected chancellor. Merz has yet to form a coalition and announced he would soon begin talks with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) to establish a government by Easter. A record-breaking 82.5 per cent voter turnout was recorded in Germany this year — the highest since the 1990s.

It was not just Merz's victory that is significant. While his bloc secured 208 seats, the far-right Alternative for Germany party won an unprecedented 150 seats. The AfD — often referred to as the 'Nazi party' due to its members' anti-Semitism and pro-Nazi leanings — was long considered a fringe group. Sunday's election proved otherwise. The party doubled its vote share from the last election, propelled largely by young voters aged 18 to 24 years. Among its campaign promises were harsher immigration policies and a better relationship with Russia, despite Germany's current hostilities with Moscow over the

Ukraine war.

Björn Höcke, a leader of the AfD, has previously used Nazi-era slogans. At a rally in May 2021, he invoked the phrase "everything for the fatherland" — a slogan used by Hitler — and played a pivotal role in the Nazi rise to power. Höcke was convicted for violating Germany's anti-Nazi laws and fined, though he evaded a three-year ban from public office. He claimed he had been merely expressing his sentiments and was unaware of the phrase's Nazi roots — despite being a history teacher. The judges who heard Höcke's case in court said they were convinced that Höcke was well aware of the ban when he made the statements.

Höcke was not the only AfD politician with ties to Nazi rhetoric. Maximilian Eugen Krahn, a member of the party's executive board, stated that not everyone who belonged to Adolf Hitler's SS was "automatically a criminal". The SS was responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews during World War II. Another AfD politician, Matthias Heilrich, once described himself in an online chat as the "friendly face of the Nazis", later claiming it was a joke. Both men had been sidelined by AfD's leadership but have

now returned following its electoral success — underscoring the party's growing confidence.

So far, mainstream German politicians, including outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz, have refused to collaborate with the AfD due to its extremist ideology. This exclusion has kept the party on the fringes of governance. However, if the far-right party continues its upward trajectory, it is a matter of how long this firewall will hold. Merz wants to form a government with the SDP, ensuring that, for now, the AfD remains out of power.

Europe's collective shift to the right signals two crucial developments. The first is that most of the far-right parties — from Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France to the AfD in Germany — stand accused of antisemitism. The persistence of this hatred suggests that Europe has never really dealt with its deep-seated anti-Jewish sentiment, even decades after the Holocaust. Six million Jews may have been murdered by Hitler, but rather than integrating the survivors, decades ago, Europeans with British assistance encouraged them to move to Palestine, where they established the Jewish state of Israel. The great irony of the moment is that Israeli

Jews consider poor and impoverished Palestinians a threat while ignoring Europe, some of whose leaders are not averse to mouthing Nazi slogans.

The second shift is that the post-World War II order — designed to prevent another mass atrocity — is crumbling. The hypocrisy of this system became evident as the world watched the mass killing of Palestinians with impunity.

The once noble facades of human rights and moral superiority have collapsed, revealing Europe's true face — xenophobic, racist and misogynist. This new Europe is uninterested in equality or human dignity; it is preoccupied with white supremacy.

For people in the Middle East and South Asia — regions with long histories of Western colonial oppression and political interference — this revelation is not surprising. Many never believed the West's claims of espousing human rights. If the past 25 years represented the 'better' face of Europe's contrast and left-leaning politics, one cannot help but wonder how much worse the next 25 years will be.

— By arrangement with Dawn

Relatives sans relationships

Pruning the definition of relatives is the way ahead

R Anand

The definition of "Relative" is contained in various legislations like Income Tax Act, Companies Act, SEBI regulations, Indian Stamp Act to name a few.

The length and breadth of coverage is sweeping and has expanded overtime.

It has now reached a stage where the person concerned has to go around and discover who and where the so called "relative" is.

The purpose of these definitions is to track transactions with relatives to ensure there is no misuse of concessions or resorting to any undue advantage of any sort.

For example the definition of "relative" under the Income tax Act is wide enough to cover lineal ascendant and descendant of the person.

If a person makes a gift to a "relative" it is exempt from income tax up to a limit.

The definition of "relative" in the SEBI regulations draws support from the definition under the Companies Act which is also wide.

Directors on Boards are nervous of some obscure relative with whom he is not in touch undertaking a trading transaction during the prohibited window period.

The Stamp Act has a definition of "family" instead of "Relative" where concessional stamp duty is applicable.

There are reported misuses in this area.

DWINDLING RELATIONSHIPS

With the steady disintegration of the joint family system over the years the contact with family members both immediate and remote has virtually gone.

While each one pursuing their own career and going abroad may be a factor but it is not a convincing enough reason.

Generational shift in thinking and approach and in some cases ideological differences coupled with ego clashes have had a devastating effect resulting in breakdown of relationships among relatives of families.

In family businesses the need to stay together is dictated by a limited agenda of protecting the entity and the



RELATIVES. Tax issues (STOCKPHOTO)

resources as also the positions attached to it.

Sometimes when these relatives meet in public functions, the underlying tensions in their relationships are barely concealed.

BIZ FAMILY RIPTS

History is loaded with reported cases of family disputes like — Birlas, Ambanis, Singhanias, Hinduja, Godrej and in the recent past Kirloskars, Lodha brothers and so on.

The list is only illustrative and endless.

These differences driven primarily on account of clashes among relatives demonstrate that beyond three generations it is difficult to keep family members together in continuing the business and hence the business split happens and along with it almost a permanent breakdown of relationships.

In some cases it could be the other way around.

WHAT NEXT?

Should there be a mass movement to ignite the spirit of togetherness among family members if not for anything else but at least to preserve the sanctity of the definition of "relative" in various legislations?

It would require a Herculean effort to make this happen.

While this long-term goal which is now a dream can be converted into reality through a sustained effort, the relatively easier option would be for the regulations should first prune down the list in the definition of "relative" to reflect the realities on the ground.

Alongside this there must be an attempt to standardise the definition of "relative" across regulations to achieve uniformity in approach.

The writer is a chartered accountant

Govt must curb import of pulses

FARMERS FIRST. With prices of most pulses ruling below MSP, the Centre must do everything it can to help farmers



MANCOMBU RA SUBRAMANI

Last week, the government decided to reimpose the import duty on yellow peas. It allowed duty-free imports from December 25, 2023, to February 28, 2025. Last month, the Centre extended the duty-free imports of pigeon peas (arhar or tur) until March 31, 2026.

Similarly, Food Minister Pralhad Joshi told the media a couple of weeks ago that his Ministry had recommended the reimposition of Customs duty on lentils (masoor). But no notification has been issued yet on this. It leaves chickpea (chana) and urad (black munge) as the other pulses on which the government has to decide by March 31 if it wants to extend the duty-free imports.

There are two data points to look at with concern over duty-free imports by India. One is the current prices of six key pulses and their minimum support prices (MSP).

The prices of all pulses are ruling below MSP (see chart). Though the weighted average price of gram (chana or chickpea) is a tad higher than the MSP, prices have dropped to levels of ₹50/kg from ₹83/kg a few weeks ago in most parts of the country.

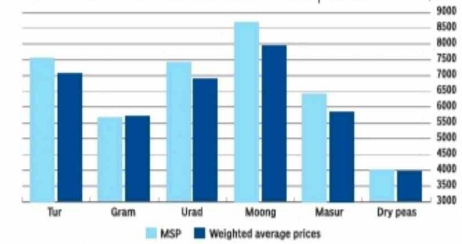
The second is imports. Data from Grains Australia show that since the marketing year began in October 2024, India has imported over one million tonnes of chickpeas by January. This was against a meagre 83,000 tonnes imported during the entire 2023-24 season to September. India has also imported about 1.5 lakh tonnes of lentils from Down Under during October-December 2024.

Statistics Canada data show that India imported 1.26 million tonnes of peas and 6.43 lakh tonnes of lentils between August (start of marketing year) and December 2024. Indian traders say India imported 3 million tonnes of yellow peas in 2024.

There has been a deluge of import of



Pulses MSP vs current domestic prices



Weighted average price as of February 28, 2025

Source: Agmarknet

pulses in India, with 2024 shipments pegged at a record high of 6.63 million tonnes.

PLUNGING PRICES

Given these imports, the prices of pulses have plunged in India. For example, urad prices dropped over 25 per cent since June 2024 from over ₹100 a kg. The fall continued despite the Ministry of Agriculture estimating urad crop 25 per cent lower in the 2024 kharif season.

With Indian prices falling, global prices dropped too. Urad prices in the global market have dropped below \$900 a tonne for the superior quality compared with ₹1,200 two months ago. Pigeon pea prices have declined to near

\$800 a tonne from \$1,400 in mid-2024. Prices of yellow peas have dropped to \$450 a tonne from over \$700 when India allowed duty-free imports.

"Yellow peas have taken away our peace of mind," say traders in the pulses

With inflation under control and the rabi crop harvest starting, the Centre needs to curb imports.

Higher prices for pulses will also encourage growers to opt for the legumes during the kharif season

industry. With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing a six-year "Mission for Aatmanirbhar in Pulses" focusing on tur, urad and masoor in her Budget proposal, farmers need higher returns to pursue the cultivation of pulses.

While Indian farmers are getting lower prices, growers in Australia and Canada are reaping rich rewards for exporting lentils, yellow peas and chickpeas to India. For example, Australian growers are getting ₹160 as returns for their chickpeas, while Indian farmers are getting only ₹100.

Canadian and Australian farmers are holding back their produce, awaiting higher prices. They can afford to wait as they are all well off, unlike the majority of Indian farmers who are small landholders.

India may have allowed duty-free imports as pulses were badly affected due to the El Niño weather in 2023-24. But with inflation under control and the rabi crop harvest starting, the Centre needs to curb imports. Higher prices for pulses will also encourage growers to opt for the legumes during the kharif season.

If there is any supply shortage, India can take a call during the latter part of the year, say August. Until then, it has to signal to the growers that it favours them getting good returns and expects them to continue sowing pulses rather than forcing them to shift to crops such as maize (corn). It is another story that ethanol manufacturing is favouring the cultivation of maize over pulses.

The government can come up with an import quota and a duty cut if there is any need after assessing the whole situation. Probably, it needs to take stakeholders into confidence and come up with a stable policy that will encourage Indian growers and keep prices stable.

The trade says urad imports could be permitted duty-free for some more time, but imports of chickpeas and lentils need to be curbed. For now, growers need protection. The Centre would do well to ensure they are protected against cheaper imports, through the imposition of a reasonable customs duty.

STATISTALK.

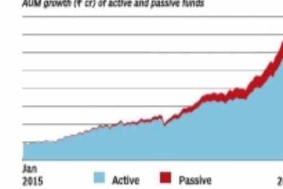
Compiled by Dhruval Gurnasekaran | Graphic: KS Gurnasekar

Passive MFs are making strong inroads

Passively managed mutual funds, including Index funds and Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs), are gaining increasing popularity in India. Over the past five years, the Assets Under Management (AUM) of passive funds have surged by 435 per cent, while active funds' AUM saw a comparatively modest growth of 148 per cent. The primary factors driving this growth are the consistent underperformance of active funds relative to their benchmarks, the cost efficiency of passive funds, and their simplicity in terms of understanding.

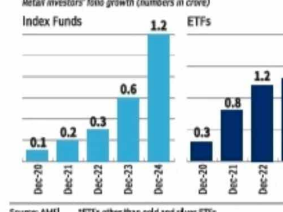
Passive AUM registered more than five-fold increase in the last 5 years

AUM growth (%) of active and passive funds



However, retail participation is on rise

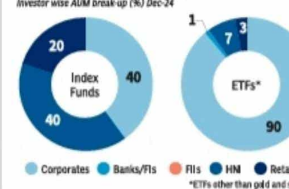
Retail investors' folio growth (numbers in crore)



Source: AMFI *ETFs other than gold and silver ETFs

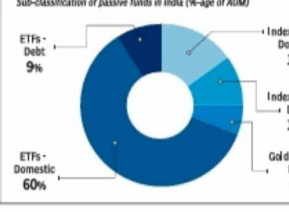
Large investors and corporates dominate the AUM of ETFs and index funds

Investor wise AUM break-up (%) Dec-24



ETFs tracking domestic equities hold the lion's share

Sub-classification of passive funds in India (%-age of AUM)



Source: AMFI *ETFs other than gold and silver ETFs

Short take

Borrowing plan for EU defence proposed +

Reuters

The European Commission proposed on Tuesday new joint European Union borrowing of €150 billion (\$157.76 billion) to lend to EU governments for defence as part of an overall €800 billion financing effort to boost Europe's defence capabilities. European leaders are under huge pressure to increase defence spending as US President Donald Trump's return to power has delivered a rude wake-up call that they cannot blindly rely on Washington.

The joint borrowing would go towards building pan-European capability domains like air and missile defence, artillery systems, missiles and ammunition, drones and anti-drone systems or to address other needs from cyber to military mobility, the Commission said.

"It will help Member States to pool demand and to buy together. This will reduce costs, reduce fragmentation increase interoperability and strengthen our defence industrial base," Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. She did not give a detailed timeframe, but said spending needed to be increased "urgently now but also over a longer period of time over this decade". EU leaders will discuss the proposal at a special summit devoted to defence spending on Thursday.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

March 5, 2005

Industry can help frame fringe benefit tax rules: FM

Addressing a CII post-Budget meeting, the Finance Minister, Mr P Chidambaram, invited industry to work with the Revenue Department for framing the rules on the fringe benefit tax besides ensuring that legitimate business expenditure is not brought within the ambit of this tax.

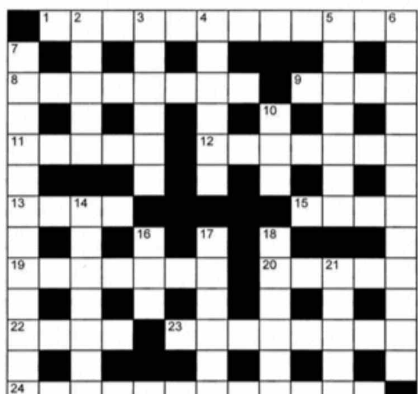
Tribunal dismisses Reliance Info petition

The Telecom Dispute Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) on Friday dismissed the petition filed by Reliance InfoComm against the Rs 150-crore penalty imposed by the Government and said that Reliance InfoComm has 'clearly and deliberately' breached licence norms and put national security in jeopardy by routing international long distance calls as local ones.

Rahul Bajaj to quit as Bajaj Auto MD

The mantle of Bajaj Auto Ltd is to now fall on the shoulders of the fourth generation. The Chairman and Managing Director, Mr Rahul Bajaj, 66, on Friday said he would like to step down as managing director of the company and make way for his sons to take hands-on control. He said elder son Rajiv Bajaj, who is Joint MD of Bajaj Auto, will take over as MD from April 1.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2645



EASY

ACROSS

01. Permission to neglect church rule (12).
08. Designed to punish (8)
09. One whose language is Russian, Polish etc (4)
11. Film award (5)
12. Early English writer (7)
13. Nominate (4)
15. Irritation (4)
19. Shelled invertebrate (7)
20. Put a tag on (5)
22. Rule, pattern (4)
23. Smirks (8)
24. Practice of fighting craft (6,6)

DOWN

02. Greek architectural order (5)
- 03,16. Dies away (6,3)
04. A newcomer (6)
05. Not lawful (7)
06. In spite of which (12)
07. Diary engagements (12)
10. Dried grass as fodder (3)
14. Mosquito-transmitted disease (7)
16. See 3
17. Sacred beetle (6)
18. A culmination (6)
21. Salted pig flesh (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. A dealing of Providence, hell to a writer: it's on a whirl (12)
08. I've to follow play on words it forms by way of punishment (8)
09. An Eastern European who stops short of being bonded (4)
11. Boy awarded nothing but the mark left by cut (5)
12. Church might have been a cure for this writer (7)
13. Such as 11 is Christian (4)
15. A tickle's might consider an impediment (4)
19. Gangster's girl gave us first course of snail (7)
20. Tag lord first gave to second son (5)
22. It's the standard held by seamen or marines (4)
23. Faces pulled show that I'm Grace's undoing (8)
24. What is cast actively doing but practising ringcraft? (6,6)

DOWN

02. Greek order one to destroy icon (5)
- 03,16. The boy isn't at home, he simply fades away (6,3)
04. Tyro to whom depravity is unknown (6)
05. It's not legal to be unwell with one twitch turning up (7)
06. Still, it will at no time be, lest she is put out (12)
07. Top men in past were responsible for the posts (12)
10. Starts harvest, acquiring your fodder (3)
14. The French badly need an operatic song, having the fever (7)
16. See 3
17. Credit Saab with producing Beetle? (6)
18. Culmination of claim made before ten (6)
21. Essayist brought home by bread-winner (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2644

ACROSS 1. Sapped 8. Loose 9. Mustang 11. Trundled 12. Jelly 15. Keen 16. Ink 17. Iris 19. Scope 21. Fuselage 24. Eyelash 25. Stick 26. Darned