



Building resilience

The Rio declaration underlined the cohesion within BRICS

The 17th Summit of BRICS emerging economies, which ended on Monday, came at a time when the organisation was in the global spotlight. This was the first such meeting that included all the newly inducted members (Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, Iran and Indonesia; Saudi Arabia has not joined so far). It also followed the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran's nuclear programme, and the escalation in Israel's bombardment of Gaza. This was the first summit since the four-day India-Pakistan conflict in May, and also after the G-7 summit in Canada. The BRICS grouping, seen as the next challenge to the global financial order, is in U.S. President Donald Trump's cross-hairs, as he sees it mounting an alternative to the dollar in international trade. In addition, the group has several internal rivalries that have brought its sustainability into question. In April, the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting ended without a joint statement, as the African members held up the wording on the expansion of the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, despite India's clarification in March that it is not considering de-dollarisation of trade in any form, and that there is no "unified BRICS position" on the issue, Brazil's President Lula da Silva doubled down on rhetoric against the U.S., saying that BRICS proves the world "doesn't need an emperor". Mr. Trump has since repeated threats that BRICS countries would face an extra 10% tariffs due to the grouping's "anti-American stance" – an awkward moment for New Delhi as it attempts to conclude a trade agreement with Washington.

Despite all the challenges, the Rio declaration underlined the basic cohesion and consensus within BRICS members on a range of issues. In the joint statement, there was strong language against the attacks on Gaza and condemnation of the strikes on Iran, given the risks to nuclear safety. India was able to ensure a paragraph with tough language condemning the Pahalgaon terror attack and references to terror financing and "cross-border movement of terrorists". India and Brazil won endorsements of the whole grouping on playing a larger role at the UN, "including the Security Council". The absence of the Chinese and Russian Presidents allowed more space for the non-P5 countries to promote a common vision for the Global South, adding several important resolutions on energy security, climate change and re-ordering the WTO. The Rio declaration also took a stern view of the U.S.'s moves on BRICS. As India prepares for its leadership of the BRICS grouping next year, that now represents about half the global population, around 40% of the global GDP and a quarter of global trade, it can move forward with this consensus, fulfilling the vision for the grouping's acronym that Mr. Modi recast as "Building Resilience and Innovation for Cooperation and Sustainability".

Death by negligence

The Railways must ensure interlocked gates at all manned level crossings

Tragedy struck without warning recently when a van carrying children on their daily school commute collided with a train on the tracks. Three schoolchildren were killed on Tuesday when the Villupuram-Mayiladurai Passenger train, hurtling at 95 kmph, rammed into their school van at a manned level gate at Semmankuppam in Tamil Nadu's Cuddalore district, dragging it for 50 metres. Despite conflicting claims about how the gate at the non-interlocked level crossing remained open as the train approached, preliminary evidence points to human error. Southern Railway has suspended the gatekeeper – now arrested for criminal negligence – alleging that he yielded to pressure from the van driver and opened the gate in violation of established protocols. However, accounts from a surviving student and eyewitnesses contradict this version. The survivor has stated that the gate was already wide open and the sound of the oncoming train was not heard. There are also claims that the gatekeeper had fallen asleep. Yet, some reports suggest that just minutes before the collision, he had changed the secret private number on the station master, indicating the train's approach to Alappakkam – a detail that may not go unverified in the inquiry. Even if this is true, this would only show partial adherence to protocol. He failed in the essential duty of keeping the gate closed until the train had passed – as clearly laid out in the Indian Railways Permanent Way Manual.

At the heart of this accident is the continued use of non-interlocked manned level crossings. Unlike interlocked gates – where train signals turn green only when gates are securely locked – non-interlocked systems rely solely on the alertness and judgment of the gatekeeper. As of October last year, 11,053 manned level crossing gates in India are interlocked. In the Southern Railway zone, over 300 gates remain non-interlocked. Railway unions have long flagged the pressure gatekeepers face from impatient motorists. The only foolproof solution to prevent such fatal incidents is the construction of road overbridges or underpasses. However, these projects are often delayed due to administrative hurdles and land acquisition issues. In this case, Southern Railway has accused the Cuddalore Collector of not having cleared a railway-funded demand for over a year – a serious charge that demands scrutiny. Until permanent solutions are in place, the Indian Railways must urgently prioritise the conversion of non-interlocked crossings to interlocked ones. Human lives depend on it.

The wedding of Edmore Tully and Roslin Frey at The Twins in the northern riverlands is one of the most consequential events in Game of Thrones. Known as the Red Wedding, it is the setting for the massacre of Robb Stark, King in the North and Lord of Winterfell, along with his pregnant wife, his mother, and most of his banner-men. This brutal betrayal shattered the Starks' military power and ended their bid for independence from the Iron Throne, reshaping the political landscape of Westeros, the fictional continent in the series. When Israeli fighter jets began bombing Iran, in the early hours of June 13, 2025, Israeli generals reportedly dubbed a part of the operation as the 'Red Wedding' – a pointed reference to what they wanted to achieve in the strike.

Israel's primary target was Iran's nuclear facilities. But Israel knew that if it started a war, Iran – a country many times its size and armed with thousands of ballistic missiles – would strike back. So there were three targets – Iran's nuclear facilities, nuclear scientists and the leadership of Iran's armed forces. Much like House Frey slaughtered the banner-men and the leaders of House Stark, Israel had the aim of wiping out Iran's military command, believing that it would cripple Tehran's military response. Israel had pulled off a similar strategy in the past. On June 5, 1967, it launched a massive air strike against Egypt's air force, causing much damage to it on the ground. Egypt never recovered from the initial blow, and Israel claimed a sweeping victory over Egypt, Jordan and Syria in just six days. But in June 2025, the outcome was different.

Operational success

From an operational standpoint, Israel's attack can be seen as a success. Israel had been preparing for a strike on Iran's nuclear programmes for years, a plan that gained momentum after the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas. Israel, which immediately launched a war against Hamas in Gaza, eventually expanded it to a mini-regional war that was aimed squarely at Iran. It dealt a blow to Hezbollah. It bombed the Iranian embassy in Damascus in April 2024, and killed several Iranian commanders in Syria. Its relentless bombings in Syria expedited the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The return of Donald Trump to the White House further hardened Israel's resolve to test the military option.

On June 13, while Tehran was still engaged in talks with the Trump administration, Israel struck Iran's Natanz and Isfahan nuclear facilities, killed at least 10 nuclear scientists, and assassinated many top commanders. Executing such a complex operation in a vast country about 2,000 kilometres away was no small feat. Yet, the problem for Israel was that this operational



Stanley Johny

success failed to deliver the desired strategic outcome. For Israel, which has established credible deterrence against the surrounding conventional Arab armies, Iran has always remained a puzzle. Despite its sanctions-hit economy and enduring hostility from the West, Iran managed to build a wide network of influence in the region through non-state actors, while developing an advanced ballistic missile programme and pursuing its nuclear ambitions.

Israel had long nurtured the idea of regime change in Iran – if the Islamic Republic falls, Israel's last remaining conventional threat in West Asia would vanish. Israel prefers a weaker, broken-up Iran, much like today's Iraq, Libya, Syria or Lebanon, which would set the stage for a unipolar West Asia that is dominated by Israel and the U.S. The post-October 7 wars substantially weakened Iran's allies in the region. Still, Iran, with its ballistic missiles and nuclear programme, remained a rebel counterweight to Israel.

In the early days of the 12-day war, Mr. Netanyahu declared that Israel's operation "could certainly" lead to regime change, insisting that "Iran is very weak". He also urged the Iranians to "to act, to rise up" against the "evil regime". During the war, Israel killed at least 30 Iranian security chiefs, threatening to disrupt the entire chain of command. But the Iranian government and the military recovered with remarkable speed, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps taking the lead in mounting a counter-attack. Iran launched a sustained campaign of drones and ballistic missile strikes that exposed vulnerabilities in Israel's much-vaunted, multi-layered, American-assisted defence systems. Within days, Mr. Netanyahu was forced to turn to Washington for help.

That help came on June 21 when U.S. President Donald Trump ordered U.S. air strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites, including Fordow, the most heavily fortified facility. Mr. Trump, however, was not interested in a long war with Iran. After the strikes, he claimed that Iran's nuclear facilities had been "obliterated", declared victory and announced a ceasefire between Israel and Iran. Mr. Netanyahu had no choice but to accept the ceasefire, with the Iranian government still standing with much of its capabilities.

Strategic labyrinth

Early assessments by the U.S. intelligence community claimed that Iran's nuclear programme had not been destroyed by U.S. strikes, but set back by "a few months". Even if the nuclear facilities were destroyed, there is no certainty that Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium and all advanced centrifuges have been destroyed. These were reports, based on European intelligence assessments, that Iran had dispersed its enriched uranium well before the

Israeli-American strikes. According to Rafael Mariano Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran has the industrial and technological capacity to resume enriching uranium in a few months.

This leaves Israel in a strategic labyrinth. The Iranian state refused to flinch throughout the war despite the heavy blows it suffered. The air strikes failed to destroy Iran's nuclear programme, let alone its nuclear capabilities. Third, the war exposed Israel's over-reliance on the U.S., in both defence and offence, which was not the case in 1967 when Israel claimed its biggest victory.

Survival of the weak

Even though Mr. Trump joined the war on behalf of Israel, there is a clear distinction between the American and the Israeli approaches towards the Persian puzzle. Israel's ultimate objective is regime change but it does not have the resources or the capabilities to achieve regime change. The U.S. does not want a nuclear Iran, but it does not want to get entangled in another prolonged war in West Asia either. Mr. Trump's own MAGA (Make America Great Again) base was revolting against America's intervention in Iran.

For Iran, the Israeli-American attack was another Mosaddegh moment – a reminder of the 1953 Central Intelligence Agency-backed coup that toppled its elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Iran once made a deal with the U.S. and other world powers over its nuclear programme, only to see it torn up by President Trump in his first term. When Tehran returned to talks with Washington again, it ended up facing an Israeli-American war instead. Iran is now racing to rebuild its military capabilities and restore deterrence. Iran's leaders will also find a greater incentive than ever to pursue a nuclear weapon as many in Iran today argue that if Tehran had possessed a bomb, like North Korea, Israel and the U.S. would not have dared launch this war.

In Game of Thrones, the Red Wedding was not the end of House Stark. When Arya Stark, the younger sister of Robb Stark, extracts revenge for the Red Wedding by orchestrating a massacre at House Frey, she declares: "You didn't slaughter every one of the Starks. That was your mistake. You should have ripped them all out, root and stem." The 12-day war did not destroy the Iranian regime. Nor did it tear out the Iranian nuclear programme, root and stem. Beneath its rhetoric of victory, Israel, which is now asking the international community to stop Iran from getting a nuclear bomb, knows this all too well. It will only grow more paranoid, closely monitoring Iran's every move, while Tehran replenishes its arsenal, readying itself to fight another day. This war is far from over.

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End custodial brutality, begin criminal justice reform

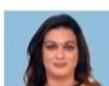
In the dark corners of police stations in Tamil Nadu, justice often dies before it is delivered. The recent custodial death of Ajith Kumar, a 27-year-old temple guard in Sivagangai, should shake the conscience of every citizen. But, tragically, his case is not an exception. It is part of a grim pattern.

Between 2021 and 2025, there have been a series of custodial deaths. Vignesh, a 25-year-old, who was detained in Chennai in 2022, died within hours, with his autopsy revealing multiple injuries. In 2024, Raja, a Dalit cook from Villupuram died in police custody after a petty theft allegation; his three children and wife still await compensation. A 30-year-old auto-rickshaw driver in Tiruchchi died of injuries in 2023 under suspicious circumstances. And now, Ajith, whose autopsy revealed 44 wounds, cigarette burns, and forced exposure to narcotics. His last words to his mother were haunting: "I didn't steal."

A normalisation of the use of force

These are not aberrations. They are the outcomes of a system that has normalised force over fairness. But beyond the moral horror lies another fundamental concern – we are failing citizens and the police force by investing in enforcement without investing in reform.

Each year, the Tamil Nadu government alleges thousands of crimes towards policing. Yet how much of this goes into welfare, training and psychological care? A disproportionate amount is funnelled into hardware such as vehicles, surveillance systems, and crowd-control



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India is failing its citizens and its police force by investing in enforcement without investing in reform

gear while the human element is left neglected. We equip officers with lathis and law books, but deny them the emotional tools to deal with stress, trauma and moral ambiguity. Policing cannot merely be about control. It must be about conscience.

Reforms to undertake

A sensible reallocation of the policing budget is long overdue. Even 5% of the current annual spend, redirected toward setting up district-level mental health units, mandatory quarterly counselling, and refresher sensitisation courses, would result in exponentially better outcomes – for detainees, for officers, and for public trust. We pour money into deterrence, but ignore the cost of dysfunction.

It is time to institutionalise mental wellness within law enforcement, not as a luxury, but as a necessity. Officers are human. They deal with domestic abuse cases in the morning, gang violence by afternoon, and politically fraught complaints by night. Without psychological support, that pressure metastasises; burnout becomes brutality. The baton does not punish alone, it often expresses accumulated trauma.

Parallely, police training needs transformation. A curriculum designed in the pre-liberalisation era cannot address the needs of modern India. Ethics, human rights jurisprudence, trauma-informed investigation methods and community policing models should be at the core, and not cosmetic.

Moreover, our criminal justice architecture

must include enforceable accountability. It is not enough to suspend a few constables after every tragedy.

What Tamil Nadu, and India at large, needs is legislative clarity; a comprehensive anti-custodial violence law with time-bound investigation mechanisms, mandatory video documentation of interrogations, and civil society involvement in oversight.

Technology must serve as a safeguard, and not be a silent spectator. CCTV cameras in areas where people are in custody should be operational, tamper-proof, and subject to real-time audits. Digital systems can help, but only if we are willing to confront the uncomfortable truths that they reveal.

A new path for law enforcement

Finally, we must reimagine the police uniform – not as a symbol of unyielding authority, but of service, restraint, and human responsibility. Ajith Kumar's death, like those of Vignesh, Raja, and so many others, tells us that power without empathy is violence by another name.

To break this cycle, we must invest not just in policing but also in the emotional, ethical, and structural reform of law enforcement. Until then, every custodial death will not just mark the end of one life but also the failure of the state's moral contract with its people.

Let us not wait for the next young man to cry out "I didn't steal" before dying in silence. The time for justice is not post-mortem; it is policy, and it is now.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Level crossing accident

The tragedy at a railway level crossing near Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu is symbolic of the Indian way of defying rules and regulations. I am now in the United States and in a neighbourhood that is very close to a railway track. I find no gatekeeper and no barriers but only a traffic signal light warning. Yet, citizens dutifully stop their vehicles and wait for the green signal before proceeding. People here are aware that one stands no chance before a mighty railway engine. Some time ago, I had an opportunity to interact with

the loco pilot of the Deccan Queen train, from Pune to Mumbai. He was cruising well over 90 kmph and on reaching Ambernath slowed down, well aware that this was the point in the journey where pedestrians begin crossing the railway tracks. Hence, a reduction in speed was essential. For loco pilots of the Rajdhani express, Vande Bharat, and of course the futuristic bullet train, they will remain in fear of irresponsible and daredevil 'track crossers'. Subramanian Sankaran, San Carlos Pl, Fremont, CA, U.S.

While conflicting versions

are being circulated about the accident, serious questions arise. How many more non-interlocked railway crossings across the country are there? Why does it take a tragedy for safety improvements? The upgradation of non-interlocked crossings to automated systems and strict enforcement of safety protocols in railways must be ensured.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

When the Indian Railways is spending crores of rupees in adding more trains to generate revenue, why is it counting its pennies when it

comes to safety measures? Murali Mohan PV, Chennai

Self nomination

It is shocking that we have a set of world leaders who keep hailing one another as 'great and mighty' and suitable recipients for the Peace Nobel. Giving the coveted prize to a person who has not done even the bare minimum to stop a painful war would be most terrible.

Layona Maria, Varapuzha, Kerala

Grass court calendar

In Wimbledon, will it different winners in eight

years in the women's field, unpredictability has become the norm. This diversity highlights the depth of the women's game but also suggests a gap in surface-specific mastery. The grass season remains too short for players to develop meaningful consistency. Administrators must consider an expanded grass-court calendar to reward adaptation and produce champions who can dominate, not just survive. Nagarajan M.V., Hyderabad

'Qualifying date' in the article, "The ECI does

not have unfettered powers" (Opinion page, July 9), there appears to be an incorrect detail – that the 'qualifying date' can be only January 1. Section 14 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, referred to in the article, was amended in the year 2021. As in the amendment, with effect from 2022, the 'qualifying date' means "the 1st of January, April, July or October of the year in which the electoral roll is prepared or revised".

Rangarajan R., Chennai

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

The end of humanity

A recent poll conducted in 24 countries by the Pew Research Center reveals that Israel is very unpopular in most of these countries. The main exception is India, where just 29% of the respondents had an "unfavourable" view of Israel. A slightly higher proportion (34%) had a favourable view, and the rest had no view.

Perhaps this was a biased sample, where privileged sections of the population are over-represented. But the popular sentiment may or may not be more critical of Israel among the underprivileged, because they are not necessarily well informed on this issue. Clearly, there is some passivity in the response of the Indian public to the horrific war crimes that are taking place in Gaza.

India's support of Israel

For nearly two years now, the people of Gaza have been mercilessly displaced, bombed, starved, and deprived of medical care. More than 50,000 people — mainly civilians — have been killed, and many more grievously wounded. Countless children have been shot, dismembered, burnt alive or buried under the rubble. Some of them had to be amputated without anaesthetics. More than 200 journalists and a thousand health workers have been killed. Schools, hospitals, mosques, and universities have been razed to the ground. Today, the entire population of Gaza is on the verge of famine. All this was deliberate, planned, announced, and livestreamed.

Against this background, one would expect Israel to be very unpopular in India, as elsewhere. One reason why it is not (judging from the Pew Survey) may be that the Indian government has firmly sided with Israel in this conflict. The main reason is not far to seek: India depends heavily on Israel for military and surveillance technology. The two countries have deep commercial ties



Jean Drèze

Development economist based in Ranchi

especially but not only in the defence sector. The Indian government has actively supported Israel's assault on Gaza in many ways: for instance, by subsidising joint ventures in the defence sector, sending Indian workers to Israel in replacement of Palestinian workers, casting an abstention vote in several United Nations resolutions critical of Israel, and — last but not least — suppressing public protests against Israel.

With the government and the corporate sector on Israel's side, the mainstream media know better than to take the other side. The public is kept in the dark. Social media could help, but Gaza gets lost in a torrent of attention-seeking trivia. Some social media algorithms, notably X's, are also likely to be biased against posts critical of Israel or supportive of Palestine. Many X accounts, for instance, have been suspended after exposing uncomfortable truths about Gaza.

Solidarity and selfishness

Meanwhile, the people of Gaza have been immensely inspiring examples of courage and solidarity. Hundreds of Palestinian journalists have risked their life, and often lost it, to report the events. Doctors and nurses continue to treat the wounded even as bombs rain down on them. Relief workers work around the clock to provide people with a semblance of shelter and food. Ordinary citizens are helping each other to pull people or bodies from under the rubble. Recently, a mother who had lost all her children risked her life to fetch food for other children.

It is another matter that the people of Gaza may start turning on each other soon, as famine intensifies. In the last stages of a famine, people stop being able to see beyond their own hunger. The same mother who risked her life to feed hungry children may start snatching food from them. For all we know, the real purpose of Israel's blockade may be to incite

Palestinians against each other.

There is a sharp contrast between the spirit of solidarity in Gaza and the selfish behaviour of the billionaires who recently took control of the United States, the world's richest and most powerful country. As soon as they came to power, these billionaires started redesigning public policies and institutions in their own interest, or rather in the interest of their class — the super-rich. This involved, first and foremost, eroding if not dismantling barriers to accumulate wealth: regulatory bodies, environmental safeguards, affirmative action, redistributive taxation, social security, political opposition, you name it. It also involved more imaginative projects such as taking over Greenland, raiding Ukraine's mineral resources, and converting the Gaza strip into a luxury resort.

It is not an accident that values of compassion and solidarity are found in Gaza, while the opposite values prevail at the other extreme of the spectrum of power. The race for power is not particularly kind to those who are distracted by the demands of empathy or morality. Nor is it surprising that greed and selfishness are celebrated in high places. Morality is like oxygen — the higher you get, the less there is of it in the atmosphere. It is this morality-free atmosphere that has made it possible for the governments of the U.S. and other countries to support the Gaza genocide.

Our own ability to feel, speak, or act for Gaza is being defused even as the Government of Israel scales ever-rising heights of brutality and cruelty. Most of the local journalists and other vocal witnesses in Gaza have been killed. The rest are too scared, hungry or exhausted to report what is happening there. In any case, communication facilities are minimal, and Gaza's agony is losing its "newsworthiness". Darkness and silence prevail as Gaza descends into hell. If we do not come to our senses, this will be the end of humanity.

Time to halt forceful acquisition of land

The Siddaramaiah government would do well to listen to the Devanahalli farmers

STATE OF PLAY

Clifton D' Rozario

For more than 1,100 days, farmers of 13 villages near Channarayana in Devanahalli taluk, Bengaluru Rural district, have been agitating against the "forceful" acquisition of their land by the Karnataka government for industrial development.

In 2022, the Basavaraj Bommai government notified 1,777 acres of land for a proposed hi-tech defence and aerospace park. This highly fertile region is the lifeline of Bengaluru's food and nutrition security. The farmers immediately took to the streets, demanding that the plan be dropped. They rejected offers of compensation and promises to drop part of the acquisition. The farmers say they want to continue farming and remain on their land that have sustained lives and livelihoods for generations. Their persistent struggle has not only brought them into national focus, but has also foregrounded the legitimacy of forcible land acquisition.

Over the past month, this agitation has taken an intense turn. On June 25, a 'Devanahalli Chalo (let's go to Devanahalli)' programme was organised, and various farmer, trade union, Dalit, student, and women's organisations came together to show solidarity with the farmers. The use of police force in dispersing the protesters only intensified the agitation under the aegis of Samyukta Horata Karnataka. Facing intense pressure, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called a meeting on July 4 and requested time to take a decision. He argued that there were legal hurdles in going back on land acquisition.



This is an exercise in obfuscation since the power of the State government to withdraw from the land acquisition process is legally settled. Nevertheless, the farmers have heeded his request and are awaiting his decision.

Before elaborating on this, it is necessary to mention that forcible acquisition, premised on the principle of eminent domain, is a colonial relic and has no place in a democracy. It is for this reason that informed consent found a place in the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. However, despite this enactment, there are many State expropriation laws that remain on the statute books. These are used indiscriminately to acquire people's lands. Despite several demands, the Karnataka government has shown no inclination in scrapping these laws.

The lands of the Devanahalli farmers have been acquired under one such law — the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Act, 1966. To date, lakhs of acres of agricultural land have been acquired under this statute for establishing industrial areas and for allotting them to individual companies. There is overwhelming evidence that acres of acquired land are lying waste. The Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the economic

sector for the year ending March 2017 confirmed this. The disastrous nature of forcible acquisition stands exposed, yet the State government is yet to undertake a comprehensive review of the status of all acquired lands.

The answer to the question of withdrawal from land acquisition proceedings can be found in the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Act. Section 4 allows the State government to exclude acquired land at any time it deems necessary. This flows from the settled legal position that the State can exercise its power of withdrawal from land acquisition unilaterally. Indeed, with regard to acquisition under the 1966 Act, the Karnataka High Court, in *Thomas Patrao Since Deceased by his LR and Anr. vs. State of Karnataka*, 2005, held that the State government can cancel land acquisition notifications before taking possession by virtue of its power under Section 21 of the Karnataka General Clauses Act, 1899. The unambiguous position is that the State government can withdraw the Devanahalli land from acquisition by cancelling the preliminary and final land acquisition notifications.

Incidentally, this is a power that successive State governments have exercised. Acquisition of hundreds of acres of notified lands were withdrawn on various counts including farmers' resistance, so the Siddaramaiah government has no real reason to seek time. Instead, it must listen to the demand of the farmers and drop the land acquisition. Else, talk of democracy and social justice will remain hollow words.

Clifton D' Rozario is a practicing advocate in the Karnataka High Court and the General Secretary of the All India Lawyers Association for Justice

Delhi's refuelling ban: simple policy, but imprecise

Delhi's fuel-denial policy reflects urgency to act on air pollution, but rules alone won't deliver clean air

DATA POINT

Alay S. Nagpure

On July 1, 2025, Delhi launched a policy: petrol vehicles older than 15 years and diesel vehicles older than 10 years were no longer allowed to refuel at city petrol stations. Over 500 petrol stations were fitted with Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras to identify non-compliant vehicles in real time. But implementation ran into trouble. Many ANPR systems could not accurately read high-security plates. Fuel station staff lacked training, and there was no integrated blacklist to share vehicle status across agencies. Drivers refuelled in neighbouring towns just outside Delhi's limits, bypassing enforcement.

The policy uses vehicle age as a proxy for emissions — simple to apply, but imprecise. Without fitness checks, odometer data, or emissions testing, age alone poorly reflects real-world pollution. Media reports have suggested that up to six million vehicles in Delhi might fall under the ban, but no official, disaggregated data exists. We don't know how many are still on the road, what fuel they use, or how far they travel.

To independently assess the policy's potential, we analysed vehicle registration records from the VAHAN portal for 2002 to 2025, covering all of Delhi's Regional Transport Offices. We cross-referenced this with resale platform listings to estimate how many older vehicles are still active. Travel survey data helped model typical daily distances by vehicle age. For pollution estimates, we used emission factors for particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) from the Automotive Research Association of India, adjusted for Bharat Stage norms.

Our findings show that only 8% of Delhi's current vehicle fleet (about 7.5 lakh vehicles) are covered by the fuel restriction

(Chart 1). This includes around 1.7 lakh two-wheelers, 3.5 lakh petrol cars, 1.8 lakh diesel cars, and 34,000 diesel commercial vehicles. Total PM_{2.5} emissions from Delhi's transport sector in 2025 — including both tailpipe and non-tailpipe sources — are estimated at 3,200 tonnes. If fully enforced, the policy could reduce this by approximately 8% of total in-boundary and transboundary vehicle movement emissions (Chart 2).

The projected impact is meaningful, but depends on sustained implementation. For a more sustainable solution, Delhi can learn from how other cities have tackled this challenge. Beijing paired diesel truck restrictions with scrappage incentives and retrofitting options. Tokyo enforced strict diesel standards while subsidising upgrades. Paris phased in low emission zones alongside public transport improvements and financial support for low-income users.

Delhi can also develop localised solutions. Vehicle exchange fairs, scrappage incentives, and legal interstate resale options could help owners retire older vehicles without hardship. Replacing the one-time lifetime road tax with annual conditional renewals would better align financial incentives with clean-air goals.

Public engagement is critical. A phased 12-18 month rollout with awareness campaigns would reduce confusion and build trust. A grievance portal could let citizens check compliance, contest errors, or seek exemptions.

Delhi should invest in scaling up environmentally sound scrappage centres and piloting retrofits like EV or hybrid kits. For small businesses, grants to credit or vehicle replacement plans will be essential to avoid hardship.

Clean air doesn't stop at city borders. Vehicles move across Delhi, Noida, Faridabad, Gurugram, and Gurgaon. A joint enforcement task force and emissions tracking platform would help standardise efforts across the region.

Past their prime?

The data is sourced from Google Mobility Insights and VAHAN portal



Chart 1: Distribution of on-road vehicles in Delhi by vehicle types and age groups in 2025. Our findings show that only 8% of Delhi's current vehicle fleet — about 7.5 lakh vehicles — are covered by the fuel restriction

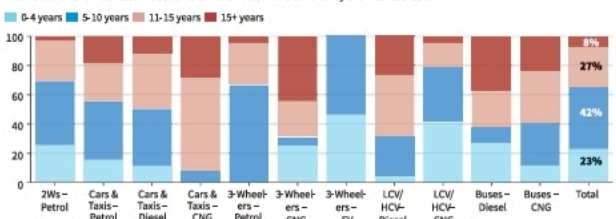


Chart 2: Estimated PM_{2.5} emissions in Delhi from different vehicle types and age groups in 2025. If fully enforced, the policy could reduce this by approximately 8% of total in-boundary and transboundary vehicle movement emissions

Alay S. Nagpure is urban systems scientist at the Urban Nexus Lab at Princeton University

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 10, 1975

Special IT squads to study posh houses

New Delhi, July 9: Special income tax squads have been appointed in the four metropolitan towns of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras to check unaccounted money invested in luxury houses. The special squads have been appointed in accordance with the Prime Minister's 20-point economic programme. The special squads will consist of a number of units depending upon the area to be covered in each metropolitan town. To begin with these squads will function in more posh and conspicuous localities where there has been a spurt in the recent past in the construction of luxury houses. The special squads will collect information about the land, its sale price, the plinth area, the number of stories constructed and other details. This will be followed by spot inspection by income-tax officers and executive engineers who will immediately report the variations in the estimated value of the property and the actual value of the property given by the owners. Where the properties are either not disclosed or where the difference in valuation is 15 per cent of the squad valuation or Rs. 25,000, whichever is more, action will be initiated for realisation of income-tax or wealth tax as the case may be, along with arrears and penalties. Each inspection squad and the income-tax authorities concerned have been asked to submit fortnightly reports of the action taken. The appointment of the special squads is in addition to the similar initiative by income-tax authorities to discover tax evasion through under-valuation of properties for purposes of sale.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 10, 1925

Madras Suburban Railways

Trichinopoly, July 10: Mr. G.C. Sim, Financial Commissioner of Railways, arrived here from Ooty yesterday. He discussed with the Agent the question of the electrification of the Madras Suburban Railway. The Agent had recently submitted an estimate for about 125 lakhs for the said purpose, soliciting the Railway Board's sanction. This is being discussed at length. It is also understood that the informal discussion included the introduction of steam power, with additional lines to facilitate suburban traffic. The Financial Commissioner also discussed the construction of minor lines through the agency of the S.I. Railway.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of elephants that died in Assam during 2000-2023

1,209 Conflicts between humans and elephants in Assam have claimed over 1,400 lives from 2000 to 2023, while more than 1,200 pachyderms died in the State during the same period, a Wildlife Institute of India (WII) report has said. **PH**

Power sector workers who participated in the general strike

27 In lakh. As a protest against privatisation and anti-labour policies, these workers across India have observed a one day strike on July 9. In Uttar Pradesh, nearly one lakh power staff, contract workers and engineers staged a protest against the privatisation of two DISCOMS. **PH**

Number of Naga tribes protesting for reservation reforms

5 Agitators belonging to five major tribes — Ao, Angami, Lotha, Rengma and Sumi — came together and staged a protest outside the Nagaland Civil Secretariat. They demanded either the scrapping of the current job reservation policy or to reallocate the unfilled reserved positions to these five major tribes. **PH**

Countries which are allowed visa-free entry to China

74 Foreign tourists are trickling back to China after the country loosened its visa policy to unprecedented levels. Citizens from 74 countries can now enter China for up to 30 days without a visa. The government has been steadily expanding visa-free entry in a bid to boost tourism. **PH**

Cases of illegal transfer of tribal land which are to be probed

1,628 More than 1,600 cases of the illegal transfer of tribal lands to non-tribal people have been identified for investigation in Maharashtra and a report will be submitted, Minister Chandrashekar Bawankule said. **PH**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How can cat bonds plan for a natural disaster?

How do catastrophe bonds operate? Who issues and sponsors them? Why should a financial investor add catastrophe risk to their portfolio? Can cat bonds offer financial relief during extreme weather events? Could India be a lead sponsor for a South Asian cat bond?

EXPLAINER

Safi Ahsan Rizvi

The story so far:

While life insurance is a ubiquitous term in India, disaster risk insurance is not. A low penetration of disaster risk insurance for individual property and livelihoods leaves much of the population exposed to irretrievable damage and loss. Most peoples' assets and means of income remain largely uninsured. Globally, after the hurricanes of the late-1990s in the U.S., when even re-insurers suffered losses, catastrophe risk was farmed out to financial markets through catastrophe bonds (cat bonds).

What is a cat bond?

Cat bonds are a unique hybrid insurance-cum-debt financial product that transforms insurance cover into a tradable security. These bonds transfer hazard risk from the at-risk state to not just the limited stock of global re-insurers, but to deep-pocketed global financial markets through securitisation, opening up a much larger quantum of funds for post-disaster relief and reconstruction. Cat bonds are effective in transferring pre-defined risk to bond investors, ensuring quicker payouts and a much-reduced counter-party risk.

Players that create cat bonds are sovereign nations, which sponsor the bond and pay the premium, with the principal being the sum insured. The sponsor requires an intermediary to issue the bond to reduce counter-party risk. Intermediaries can include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank or a reinsurance company. If a disaster does occur, the investor runs the risk of losing a part of the principal — a key reason for higher coupon rates of such bonds, compared to regular debt instruments. There is much variation in coupon rates for a cat bond depending on the risks — earthquakes garner lower premiums, as



GETTY IMAGES

low as 1-2%, compared to hurricanes or cyclones.

Are cat bonds profitable?

Nobel Prize-winner Harry Markowitz had famously stated that risk diversification is "truly the only free lunch in finance". Risk-seeking investors find the disaster risk curve most attractive for diversification, since climate or geological hazards are historically not related to financial market movements, being mutually exclusive and independent of the financial risk curve. Probabilistic and deterministic financial risk curves move differently from cat-risk curves, in effect de-risking the entire portfolio of an investor. Leading the pack of cat bond investors are pension funds, with a minority share being occupied by hedge funds and family offices, seeking to de-risk their market-centric risk profiles for sovereign-sponsored cat bonds.

Observers assess that since the onset of

cat bonds, there have been \$180 billion worth new issuances of cat bonds globally with about \$50 billion currently outstanding.

Does India need a cat bond?

In these times of climate change, disaster risk can become unprofitable for insurers and re-insurers, as is increasingly evident in the U.S. with the rising intensity of hurricanes and forest fires. This causes premiums to rise and demand to fall, leading to risk ratcheting back to the harried victim of disasters. This is where governments can step-in, sponsoring instruments like cat bonds. The unpredictability and increase in frequency of extreme weather events like cyclones, floods, forest fires and devastating earthquakes in South Asia have increased India's exposure to disaster-risk. India needs to ring-fence its public finances for post-disaster reconstruction. Given the credit standing

of the Indian sovereign and the scale of India's hazard risk profile, it could be cost-effective to sponsor such an instrument, through an intermediary like the World Bank, utilising its established bond curves. Apart from assessing the existing risk curve, insurance companies typically build clauses requiring disaster mitigation into contracts with countries, in the absence of which coupon rates rise. On that count, the Indian government is far ahead, having already demonstrated pro-active risk reduction by allocating mitigation and capacity building funds worth \$1.8 billion per annum since FY21-22.

Given India's size and financial stability, India could be lead-sponsor for a South Asian cat bond, given that most such regional risks remain unhedged. In addition, the regional hazard matrix reveals an interesting variety of hazards, each with their own risk curve and a different flavour of history, vulnerability, and exposure. Imagine a regional cat bond for high-impact hazards like an earthquake in Bhutan, Nepal and India; or for a supra-cyclone or tsunami in India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. A South Asian cat bond would spread risk, reduce premium costs and over time, make the region financially stronger to face disasters.

What are the disadvantages?

A defectively designed cat bond could lead to no payout despite a significant disaster. For example, an earthquake cat bond designed for a magnitude threshold of 6.6M for a certain grid may fail if a 6.5M event occurs and causes extensive damage. In addition, despite a contract if a disaster doesn't occur, it could lead to questions on the desirability of such expense. Hence, comparison of premium to be paid discovered through transparent government procedure, with historical annual costs of post-disaster reconstruction could be the best way forward.

Safi Ahsan Rizvi is an IPS officer and adviser to the NDMA.

THE GIST

▼ Cat bonds are a unique hybrid insurance-cum-debt financial product that transforms insurance cover into a tradable security.

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▼ A defectively designed cat bond could lead to no payout despite a significant disaster.

How did Himachal achieve a high rank on the NAS?

How was Himachal Pradesh able to reach the top five States of the National Achievement Survey?

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

When the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2025 results were released on July 2, few expected Himachal Pradesh — which ranked at a modest 21st place in 2021 — to leap into the top five. While Punjab and Kerala retained their leading positions, it was Himachal's 16-rank jump that garnered headlines.

What is the NAS?

The NAS is a nationwide assessment conducted every three years by the Ministry of Education, measuring the learning outcomes of students in government and government-aided schools in Classes 3, 5, 8, and 10. It tests core subjects such as language, mathematics, and science, providing States with data to inform policy.

While it serves as an important diagnostic tool, the NAS has its limitations. It measures what is easily testable — not necessarily what is most meaningful. The broader aims of education such as critical thinking, emotional growth, civic awareness, and equity, are not captured. So, while Himachal's success in NAS is laudable, it should not become the sole benchmark for educational excellence.

Why is Himachal's rise significant?

Himachal's rise on the list is still significant because it signals a reversal of decline. For years, Himachal's public education system — once a model for all hill States — has struggled. Despite the foundational work done under Y.S. Parmar, the State's first Chief Minister, who spearheaded a massive expansion of schools in the post-independence period, where serving society meant going back to the villages and teaching the young

ones, the post-liberalisation era saw the erosion of public schooling.

Contractual hiring of teachers, inadequate recruitment, and compromised academic standards led to an exodus of students to private schools. Even in remote villages, private institutions mushroomed as public confidence in government schools waned.

What changed in recent years?

Since taking office, the Sukhvir Singh Sukhu-led government has pursued a mix of rational restructuring and renewed commitment to public education. Faced with demographic shifts — most notably, the declining fertility rate highlighted in the NFHS-5 — the administration acted to consolidate resources. More than a 1,000 under-enrolled schools were merged, allowing for the better deployment of teachers and infrastructure. The school education system was unified under a single directorate from pre-primary to

Class 12, enhancing focus and accountability.

School-level decision-making was encouraged, boosting students' sense of ownership and identity. Teachers and meritorious students were given opportunities for exposure visits, both national and international, to learn from innovative practices. A cluster-based model of school management was adopted to encourage peer learning, share resources, and community participation.

Does the NAS reflect these efforts?

Not entirely. The NAS gives us an important signal — that Himachal is back on track. But it tells us little about the socio-emotional well-being of students, the quality of teaching-learning relationships, or community engagement. The danger lies in mistaking performance in standardised tests for education itself. Himachal's achievement lies in rekindling faith in the idea of public education.

What lies ahead?

As Himachal rides this wave of reform, it must now deepen its commitment by regularising teacher appointments, expanding holistic assessments, and ensuring that rural and marginalised students are not left behind.

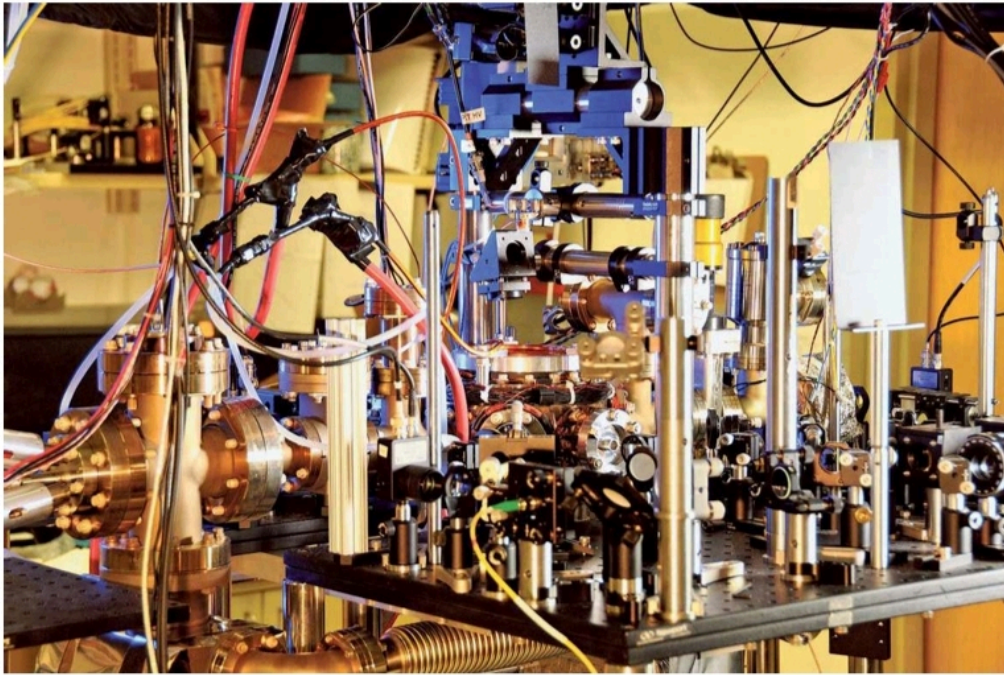
Tikender Singh Panwar is former deputy mayor of Shimla, and member of the Kerala Urban Commission.

THE GIST

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An ultra-stable ytterbium lattice atomic clock at the US NIST in 2013. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Intercontinental clock comparison sets stage to redefine the second

Because they can enumerate one second up to 18 decimal places, scientists expect optical clocks will become the world's new time standard around 2030. Until then, however, optical clocks will have to pass rigorous tests attesting to their ability to work in step from different parts of the world

Vasudevan Mukunth

Researchers from around the world have completed the world's largest, most demanding head-to-head comparison of clocks in history to build confidence for the upcoming redefinition of the second.

The duration of a single second is currently defined by caesium (Cs) atomic clocks. Lasers "count" the radiation emitted by Cs atoms in these devices to measure one second, give or take a few billionths. As the applications of atomic clocks have expanded – including GPS navigation, climate science, and radio astronomy – expectations of their performance have also increased, necessitating the more advanced optical clocks.

Scientists around the world have been studying and testing these next-generation devices. Because they can enumerate one second up to around 18 decimal places, scientists expect optical clocks will replace Cs atomic clocks as the world's new time standard around 2030. Until then, however, optical clocks will have to pass rigorous tests attesting to their ability to work in step from different parts of the world.

The new effort presents the largest, most sophisticated such test to date. It involved 10 optical atomic clocks on three continents and 65 researchers.

SI unit of time

To measure the passage of time, strike up a conversation with the person next to you. If it's riveting, time will fly. But if it advances in painstaking steps, time will slow to a crawl.

For better or for worse, this isn't good enough for scientists. To understand how much time one second denotes, they use natural phenomena. In the early 20th century, the definition of a second was one 86,400th of a mean solar day. The first quartz crystal clocks that appeared in the late 1940s could measure time more accurately than the earth's rotation. So scientists switched to the earth's revolution around the sun. In 1956, one second became equal to one 31,556,925.9747th of the time the earth took to go once around the sun from January 0, 1900.

Since then, scientists have been building better clocks that, at each step, also incentivised them to refine the time standard. The current standard is based on atomic clocks. These clocks don't directly measure time. Instead, they are complicated setups scientists put together to generate radiation of a fixed frequency. (Frequency is nothing but the inverse of time.)

In 1967, the SI unit of time was defined thus: "the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to

the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom". This verbose definition really communicates a simple meaning.

Pass the last one

An atom's internal energy comes in fixed steps, like rungs on a ladder. It can jump up a rung by absorbing the right amount of energy and jump back down by giving that energy up again.

In a Cs atomic clock, the energy that makes the jump is supplied by a finely tuned microwave signal. The atoms react most strongly when the microwave frequency is 9,192,631,770 Hz. Electronics watch how many atoms make the jump. If that number slips below a peak, the equipment nudges the microwave setting until the jump rate is back to the maximum. When that happens, the microwave signal itself is guaranteed to be exactly 9,192,631,770 Hz, i.e. composed of 9,192,631,770 waves per second.

Chips called frequency dividers count these microwave waves and pass on only every 9,192,631,770-th one. This wave comes along every one second – and is the SI definition of the second.

Around the world, many countries have set up their own Cs atomic clocks to disseminate to various applications around India via the INSAT satellites, telecommunication signals, and fibre links. Scientists, however, are already at work refining the next big thing: the optical atomic clock.

Good for 15 billion years

The wall clock hanging in your house is likely powered by two AA batteries and uses a quartz crystal oscillator. After a few months, the clock will start losing a few seconds. The Cs atomic clock that defines the US national time standard loses only one second every 300 million years, however.

This is stupendous, yet in some cases it isn't good enough. As their application in defining the time standard suggests, atomic clocks are used in many technologies that we encounter every day. The American GPS network, Russia's GLONASS, Europe's Galileo, and India's NavIC constellation use atomic clocks onboard satellites to accurately measure distance and location data for both civilian and military use. Astronomers use it in radio-astronomy to piece together signals received on different parts of a large telescope. This is how they captured history's first photograph of a black hole in 2019. Climate scientists use atomic clocks for ultra-precise measurements of the earth's gravity that reveal where ice and water have been lost.

As these applications have expanded,

In India, the National Physical Laboratory maintains five Cs atomic clocks. Their output is disseminated around India via satellites, telecommunication signals, and fibre links

the expectations of atomic clocks have, too. The definitive emission in Cs atomic clocks, of 9,192,631,770 Hz, is in the microwave range of the electromagnetic spectrum. In optical atomic clocks, it's in the optical (or visual) range. The radiation emitted when a strontium atom jumps between two particular energy levels is 429,228,066,418,009 Hz. When a ytterbium-ion jumps between two levels, the radiation has frequency 642,121,496,772,645 Hz. Because this radiation contains 10,000-times more waves per second, a device that can count them out can also measure one second more precisely.

The frequency of the radiation emitted is also proportional to the clock's stability. In 2014, one optical atomic clock that used strontium atoms would reportedly drift by less than one second in 15 billion years. This is why optical atomic clocks are set to become the next global time standard.

But ahead of the milestone, scientists must prove that clocks in different countries agree with one another to the 18th decimal place.

Across three continents

Enter: the new test. It involved 10 optical clocks based on five atoms: strontium-87 (Sr), ytterbium-171 (Yb), charged ytterbium-171 ions in two states (Yb⁺ E2 and Yb⁺ E3), charged strontium-88 (Sr⁺), and indium-115 ions (In⁺). The clocks were located at six national metrology institutes in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the U.K., and Japan.

The two clocks participating from Germany were in the same building, so the scientists linked their outputs through short optical fibres. The clocks across France, Germany, and Italy were linked with telecommunication fibres that already run through these countries. To prevent any noise or distortion from corrupting the data, scientists installed bespoke repeaters and amplifiers. Finally, to link the clocks across the English Channel, the Baltic Sea, and all the way to Japan, the teams used an advanced GPS technique called integer precise point positioning (IPPP).

Because optical clocks occasionally take breaks for maintenance, the teams set up simpler backup clocks that stepped in temporarily to keep time using GPS data. When the optical atomic clocks were back in operation, the backups would handover and step back.

In this way, all the clocks ran for 45 days between February 20 and April 6,

2022. Every time two different clocks were running and connected, the researchers divided their laser frequencies to make a ratio. In total, the teams reported 38 independent optical-frequency ratios, far more than any earlier project. Four of these ratios – Yb⁺(E3) to Yb, In⁺ to Yb, Sr⁺ to Sr, and Sr⁺ to Yb – had never before been measured directly. The tightest single result was the ratio between the In⁺ and Yb(E3) clocks in Germany, measured locally with an uncertainty of just 4.4 × 10⁻¹⁸.

The teams found that the fibre and satellite links told the same story for most results. For example, the Sr clocks in Germany and France differed by a factor of less than 2 × 10⁻¹⁶ via both technologies, showing that long fibres and IPPPP could both support ultra-precise timing in good conditions. Similarly, same-atom ratios – Sr to Sr, Yb to Yb, and Yb⁺ to Yb⁺ – confirmed that many clocks were healthy. The German and the U.K. clocks were compared by GPS across the North Sea and matched within 3 × 10⁻¹⁶ even after accounting for downtime.

Combine results responsibly

The researchers were also able to reveal gaps they will have to fix before 2030. Every GPS-based ratio that involved the Italian Yb clock was off by about 4 × 10⁻¹⁶ compared with fibre measurements, pointing to a previously unnoticed signal distribution glitch at the Italian facility. The strontium clocks in France and Germany showed small but real offsets, up to 2 × 10⁻¹⁶, when the teams checked them against other clocks and each other. These shifts were large enough to matter for a future definition of the second and will need further study.

The authors of the paper describing the test, published in *Optica* on June 12, noted that recognising such hiccups is exactly why large, redundant campaigns are valuable.

Because many ratios shared the same clocks, fibres, backups or GPS receivers, the teams noted that their errors were correlated. To address this, they developed a 38 × 38 matrix capturing 242 non-zero correlation coefficients. These coefficients captured the degree to which any two variables were related, e.g. it was 0.94 when two ratios shared a common clock on the same fibre. The teams said publishing these correlations will allow future analysts combine results responsibly instead of double-counting information.

In the final analysis, by showing that 10 heterogeneous clocks across three continents could agree with each other within a factor 10⁻¹⁶ to 10⁻¹⁸, and by identifying the rare cases when they didn't, the test has cleared many obstacles en route to redefining the SI second with optical atomic clock standards.

(mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)



A view of TMCI captured by the European Space Agency's Herschel Observatory. ESA (CC BY SA)

Organic molecules survive in space thanks to energy release 'valve'

Vasudevan Mukunth

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are ring-shaped molecules of carbon and hydrogen. Astronomers think they make up a fifth of all carbon in interstellar space. There is a hypothesis that meteors brought PAHs from space to earth and created the first building blocks of life, attaching important value to their ability to survive in space.

In Taurus Molecular Cloud 1 (TMCI), small closed-shell PAHs – molecules whose electrons are in pairs – appear in greater quantities than theory predicts even though they are constantly exposed to starlight that should have destroyed them.

Now, researchers from Australia, Sweden, and the UK have cracked this puzzle by studying the indenyl cation, C₉H⁺, a charged fragment of a PAH called inden (C₉H₆). The team found that the ions have a mechanism to cool rapidly, letting them accumulate in TMCI over time.

The findings, published recently in *Physical Review Letters*, mean astronomers can refine their models of how PAHs grow from fragments to eventually seed planets with prebiotic carbon.

TMCI is a collection of gas, dust, and plasma about 430 lightyears away.

When PAHs absorb high-energy radiation, they can have more internal

Researchers studying the indenyl cation, C₉H⁺, a fragment of a PAH called inden (C₉H₆), found that the ions have a mechanism to cool rapidly, letting them accumulate in TMCI over time

energy than their weakest chemical bond can handle. If the molecule doesn't lose this energy, it will disintegrate.

Previous research on open-shell PAH cations has shown that recurrent fluorescence – light emitted as the molecule's electrons jump repeatedly between ground and excited states – can allow the molecule to shed energy. But C₉H⁺ is a closed-shell PAH with a different electronic structure, so scientists weren't sure whether recurrent fluorescence could protect it.

The researchers injected C₉H⁺ ions with a lot of vibrational energy into a pair of ion storage rings at Stockholm University. When such a hot ion broke apart, the neutral fragments flew out of the rings and hit a detector. By counting those neutrals over time, the team recorded how fast the ions were breaking up. This way, they found that the ions' characteristic cooling rate was noticeably higher than that reported for several PAH cations.

Then the team put together a model that juggled three competing ways in which the ion could lose energy: dissociation, the probability that a bond snapped; infrared emission, the rate at which the molecule could lose energy by shaking or twisting its bonds; and recurrent fluorescence. When the team ran simulations, it found that including recurrent fluorescence produced data closely matching the rings data.

"The net effect is that many of the PAHs – in particular the small ones, think less than 50 carbon atoms – can efficiently cool rather than decompose," study coauthor and University of East Anglia associate professor James Bull said. "These small ones are important as there has been a surge in their discovery in space over the last few years through radioastronomy observations."

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

Combating corruption

Investigators need more power with safeguards

RK Raghavan

A recent Madras High Court decision that struck down a Central government order permitting anti-corruption agencies to monitor the telephone of a bribery case suspect should cause dismay among officers of CBI and similar agencies.

In taking exception to what it considered secretive intrusion into the privacy of a citizen the HC relied heavily on a strict reading of Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act which permits monitoring of an individual's telephone after obtaining the permission of the authorised official under special circumstances impinging on the security of the State, public emergency, public safety, etc. The circumstances provided for monitoring of phones ("tapping") by the Act does not include investigation of routine crime or acts of corruption.

There is near consensus over the need to combat corruption in high places. But the conflict arises over the mechanics used by the government bodies in fighting corruption.

RESPECTING RIGHTS

Some argue that the government investigative agencies must avoid harsh methods given that these are white collar crimes.

Experienced public servants believe that aggression in tackling corruption will need to be combined with a respect for human rights as often these cases are dogged by lack of conclusive proof.

It is acknowledged widely that political corruption and civil service misconduct go hand in hand. Corrupt politicians often operate through pilot civil servants.

It is very disturbing to see young IAS and IPS officers getting corrupted early in their careers.

In recent times, dishonest government officials, acting sometimes in tandem with a few in the private sector, have acquired incredible finesse in the art of lining their pockets. With their thorough knowledge of investigative process, they often outwit the investigative agencies.

While there are still a few unscrupulous officials who are artless and crude, a majority are shrewd in hiding their misdeeds. They operate through middlemen to disrupt the chain of illegal transactions.

Also, receipt of bribes takes place unobtrusively in the most



CURBING CORRUPTION.
Empowering officials (JOTACAPHO)

unlikely of venues. There is further the offer and receipt of favour in imaginative forms other than cash, making the job of unravelling corrupt acts more difficult. The investigative agencies need to adopt more sophisticated methods to combat corruption.

Given the scale of corruption, hawks in the CBI and State anti-corruption agencies tend to resort sometimes to questionable methods, including telephone monitoring, without the authorisation of the Home Secretary (both in Central and State governments) and for purposes not envisaged by law. This leads us to the age old ethical question: Does the end justify the means?

The Madras High Court was right in coming down heavily on unauthorised eavesdropping. But then should it not have taken into account the travails of anti-corruption agencies in producing credible evidence before courts against individuals who were suspected for robbing the exchequer?

EMPOWERING OFFICIALS

Since the law is often unable to deal with the growing sophistication of corruption, the higher judiciary should step in and direct governments to amend the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 to give greater discretion to anti-corruption officials in securing crucial evidence for fixing the corrupt.

It must be remembered that telephonic conversations could yield a lot of information that is vital to successful investigation and which will stand rigid judicial scrutiny.

The percentage of success in corruption cases remains shockingly low and we need to equip agencies with stronger tools, after providing the needed safeguards against abuse of authority.

The writer is a former CBI Director

Indian economy at crossroads

STRUCTURAL ISSUES. Long-term growth is likely to be range-bound at 6.5%. Private investment needs to revive quickly



The GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2024-25 at 7.4 per cent and growth for full year of 2024-25 at 6.5 per cent have exceeded the consensus expectations making the immediate impact of global tariff war not consequential for India.

Higher Q4 growth has largely been fuelled by impressive growth in fixed capital formation. Overall average GDP growth of 6.14 per cent from 2012-13 to 2024-25 has only been a shade lower than private final consumption expenditure averaging 6.18 per cent and a shade higher than gross fixed capital formation of 6.07 per cent.

This indicates that growth in GDP has broadly been aligned with its two most important components, private consumption and fixed capital formation and a sticky Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR).

RESILIENT ECONOMY

Long term trends indicate that the Indian economy is resilient to shocks generated internally and occasionally globally, but its long-term growth is also likely to remain range bound and under 6.5 per cent per annum. We examine here acceleration in growth, structural shifts in consumption, sectoral share in production and investment.

Rising growth and consumption expenditure are interrelated and independent of lead and lag and one feeds the other. But sectoral shifts in consumption have welfare and distributional implications.

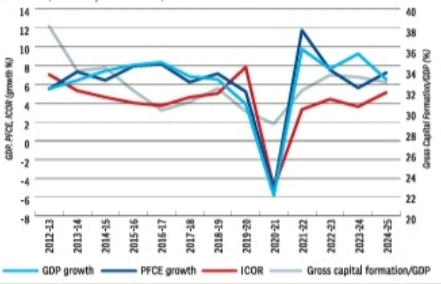
Between 2011-12 and 2023-24, there has been a decline in share of expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverages from 30.4 per cent to 26.4 per cent, while there is a corresponding increase in share of expenditure on education, health, transport & communication from 24.8 per cent to 31.4 per cent, indicating a shift towards capacity development.

The consumption of bottom 30 per cent of population has increased from 14.5 per cent to 15.8 per cent and Gini coefficient declined only marginally. Though various studies indicate a sharp decline in poverty ratio (particularly extreme poverty), there is hardly any significant increase in consumption share of bottom 30 per cent of population, despite a moderately relatively higher growth and direct transfers.

The sectoral share in GDP since 2011-12 has also not changed significantly. While there has been a decline in the share of agriculture &



Growth of GDP & private consumption, GCF/GDP ratio (all in per cent) and ICOR



allied activities from 18.5 per cent in 2011-12 to 14.1 per cent in 2024-25, this decline in share has shifted to services, particularly professional services rather than to manufacturing or basic services of health and education.

Manufacturing which has been conceived as the lead sector for employment generation has not seen a breakthrough in share increase despite special emphasis on this sector. The share of manufacturing continues to be stagnant at around 17 per cent in gross value added.

Increase in share of professional services is driven by various factors and their spillover effect on the rest of the

sectors is hardly significant. We note that the share of financial services, with increase in banking and financial penetration remains stagnant at 6 per cent. Construction, despite an emphasis on infrastructure and civic amenities including housing, has seen its share witnessing a moderate decline.

CAPITAL FORMATION

The story with regard to the sectors' share in gross capital formation over the years is not different. While the share of agriculture & allied sectors in gross capital formation has narrowly moved in the range of 8-8.5 per cent, there has been an increase in the share of capital formation in communication services from around 17.7 per cent in 2011-12 to close to 5.7 per cent in 2023-24.

Contrary to expectations, the share of capital formation in manufacturing (from 19.2 per cent in 2011-12 to 16.1 per cent in 2023-24) and professional services (from 25.5 per cent in 2011-12 to 18.7 per cent in 2023-24) has moderated considerably.

For manufacturing services, this is consistent with declining R&D share of GDP since 2008 and supply chain

constraints due to rising tariff walls. Despite share of GDP increase of professional services, fall in capital formation leads to possibility of predominance of low technical level of professional services. There has been a sharp increase in the share for other services comprising primarily education and health from 4.7 per cent to 8 per cent, which is bound to raise their quality of outcomes.

The three sectoral distributions of consumption, GDP and capital formation suggest an uncertain pattern. The sectors whose share in GDP is increasing are witnessing a decline in the share in capital allocation indicating either there was excess capacity earlier or the entrepreneurs see an uncertain future.

In construction and transportation, where one would like to see greater capital penetration because of logistic concerns, but there is also lesser allocation of capital. We see the same in the crop sector.

While the expectations are for a moderation in labour absorption in agriculture, capital formation does not seem to be growing at any significant rate. All these are bound to impact productivity, growth and income in the economy.

Data suggest Indian economy is at a crossroads with clear signs of welfare changes (in terms of changing consumption of commodities or in terms the share of bottom 30 per cent), innovation and emerging sectors (a stagnant share of manufacturing with poor R&D expenditure and critical infrastructure) and acceleration in growth (in terms of stagnant or declining shares in manufacturing, professional services). Policy options in such a situation are not unambiguous.

During the planning era, directions were provided from the top and policy paradigms were appropriately adopted. In the changed scenario, there are multiple choices — manufacturing or services; large oligopolistic structure which could globally compete or MSMEs; institutional finance led or debt free conglomerates; mom-pop stores or e-business; agriculturally dominated workforce or a more diversified empowered one; a 30 per cent labour force in 15-29 age group waiting to be absorbed in salaried jobs or entrepreneurship.

Question is not of either or, but of for the Government to take a lead in accelerating investment, especially private investment, improving capacity creation, emphasising deregulation, improving credit to micro sector for capital formation, reducing tariff walls and reorienting its own expenditure.

Gopalan is former Secretary, Economic Affairs, and Singh is former Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance. Views expressed are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

July 10, 2005

GoM clears proposal to restart Dabhol

An empowered Group of Ministers looking into the restart of the \$2.9-billion Dabhol power project on Saturday cleared a Cabinet note entailing the settlement package, including payments to be made to the majority equity holders, GE and Bechtel, and overseas lenders of the project.

Panel may offer 2-3 options for oil PSU's merger

The Krishnamurthy Committee on synergy in energy, which is expected to submit its report on Monday to the Petroleum Minister, Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar, is likely to propose two or three options for the merger of oil public sector undertakings, instead of suggesting a monolith structure bringing all PSUs under one umbrella.

Left to meet Sonia to end impasse on BHEL divestment

While maintaining that they would not dilute their stand on the proposed 10 per cent disinvestments of BHEL stake, the Left parties today indicated that there could be a way out of the current impasse after their meeting with the UPA Chairperson, Ms Sonia Gandhi, on Sunday. Prior to that, the four Left parties met here today to chalk out their strategy for the Sunday meeting.

Powell's successor may struggle to deliver 'Trump rate cuts'

Maria Eloisa Capurro
Edward Bolingbroke

Close Federal Reserve watchers have a message for anyone who thinks the next leader of the US central bank will deliver lower borrowing costs on a silver platter: Don't count on it.

While it's an unlikely outcome, some investors have staked out positions in futures markets that will profit if interest rates drop immediately after Jerome Powell's term as chair ends in May 2026. The trade has been fuelled by US President Donald Trump's pledge to nominate "somebody that wants to cut rates."

Those investors have targeted futures contracts linked to the Secured Overnight Financing Rate, or SOFR, which closely tracks the benchmark federal funds rate. They've sold off contracts that expire prior to Powell's exit and piled into contracts that expire just after the expected arrival of a Trump-appointed chair.

It's a trade that takes a chance on Trump getting his way, shrugging off how the central bank goes about setting rates.

A chair "can't act like a dictator," said Mark Gertler, an economics professor at New York University who has co-authored papers with former Fed Chair Ben Bernanke and former Vice



Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell REUTERS

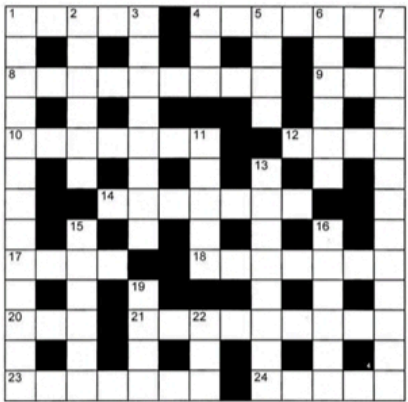
Chair Richard Clarida. "He can't call in the Marines or anything like that."

Adjusting rates, Gertler pointed out, requires the support of a majority on the Federal Open Market Committee. Nineteen policymakers participate in

FOMC meetings and 12 vote. In other words, the new chair will have to win over their colleagues with a reasonable case for cutting.

Contenders for the Fed chair job include former Fed Governor Kevin Warsh, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett, Bloomberg has reported. Current Fed Governor Christopher Waller is also an option, and former World Bank President David Malpass has also been floated. Hassett on June 26 echoed Trump's call for lower rates, and Warsh similarly said borrowing costs should come down in an interview with Fox Business on Monday. Bloomberg

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2736



EASY

ACROSS

- 01. No longer fashionable (5)
- 04. Mouldable (7)
- 08. Unmarried women (9)
- 09. Managed; raced (3)
- 10. In the open (7)
- 12. Scandinavian capital (4)
- 14. American legislator (7)
- 17. Remorse, sorrow (4)
- 18. Makeup for lashes (7)
- 20. Little devil (3)
- 21. Composing family: Domenico, etc (9)
- 23. Smeared, lubricated (7)
- 24. African nation (5)

DOWN

- 01. Putting out of countenance (13)
- 02. A score and ten (6)
- 03. Find out, make known (8)
- 04. Writer of tales of mystery, verse (3)
- 05. In addition (4)
- 06. Missel-, song-bird (6)
- 07. Rearrangement, military strengthening (13)
- 11. Domain, kingdom (5)
- 13. Takes professional advice (8)
- 15. Curved bar attached to hasp (6)
- 16. Stopped marching (6)
- 19. Invites, puts question (4)
- 22. Go on to say (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- 01. Old-fashioned way one had year of origin ascertained (5)
- 04. The final one in a postcard to be mouldable (7)
- 08. Non-uniform ladies (9)
- 09. Dye wasn't fast - or was it? (3)
- 10. Leave via this exit in the garden (7)
- 12. Capital turned into endless loss with nothing added (4)
- 14. No rest a politician might take abroad (7)
- 17. In the OT she could have been hurt by remorse (4)
- 18. A mark of a wound Mother got around using makeup (7)
- 20. Mischievous fellow taking part in trim pantaloon (3)
- 21. Cat trails worked out by family of composers (9)
- 23. Cupidity as included when bribed (7)
- 24. The South of France puts an end to the country (5)

DOWN

- 01. I'd sing confusedly about musical performance that's upsetting (13)
- 02. Number to try to make a hit with (6)
- 03. Find that the record has been finished (8)
- 04. Mystery writer was also an endless versifier (3)
- 05. In addition to the half-real, almost a sou (4)
- 06. Songbird gives one a sore throat (6)
- 07. Making good of what one has to study, so laid into it maybe (13)
- 11. The right to a meal perhaps offered by the kingdom (5)
- 13. Takes advice from expert with our man abroad on backstreet (8)
- 15. The settled market for a U-shaped fastener (6)
- 16. Stopped death being dealt out when about fifty (6)
- 19. Makes a request for the chores not to be begun (4)
- 22. Put on the ends of opera and galliard (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2735

ACROSS 2. Blurb 5. Tick 7. Flag 8. Trampled 9. Bracelet 11. Form 12. Manageability 15. Flue 17. Reflects 19. Frighten 21. Hall 22. Shop 23. Colon
DOWN 1. Malaria 2. Bug 3. Until 4. Bran-tub 5. Tip 6. Clear 10. Crave 11. False 13. Erratic 14. Tattling 16. Lurch 18. Final 20. Gyp 21. Hen

Big, bold reform

'Beautiful Bill' could help US growth but at a cost

Part A of the Indian Budget is always criticised for its extensive coverage of practically everything under the sun. But now comes Donald Trump's OBBA or One Big Beautiful Bill Act that, to all intents and purposes, appears to cover everything in the solar system. Although it is certainly very big, whether it is beautiful depends on which side of the political divide you stand, Left or Right.



If Left, OBBA is a regressive piece of legislation with its Medicaid cuts and permanent extension of estate duty and gift tax exemptions. If Right, it will make America great again by extending the 2017 income tax breaks, expanding standard deductions and allowing more liberal expensing of corporate spends. But the truth, as always, lies somewhere in the middle. The net impact of the OBBA will depend on the productivity of American labour and capital. A quick reading suggests that both can rise, as the Act reduces state-sponsored incentives to stay off work. But the positive effects of this can be offset by sharp reductions in the incomes of, and welfare payments to, the poor and the not-so-well off. Sweeping reforms always create current losers and future winners. It happened in America with the Reagan tax reforms and in the UK with the Thatcher reforms, both in the 1980s.

Concerns are being expressed on the massive increase in the budget deficit of the US because it will entail higher borrowings and national debt. But the US prints the dollars in which the debt is held. It is worth recalling here that US public debt at the end of the Second World War was 125 per cent of its GDP. High inflation was expected to be the consequence, but the opposite transpired as American industrial capacity had become highly productive during the war. This can very well be repeated now, provided American immigration policies don't end up pushing up the floor level of wages by squeezing the supply of semi-skilled labour, in which the US is woefully short.

The impact of the Act on financial markets will be mixed. Stock markets may welcome the corporate and income tax breaks, which are expected to prop up US GDP by between 0.5 and 1.2 per cent over time. But bond markets have already voted negatively, with estimates suggesting that the Act will peg up the US deficit by \$3 trillion over a decade. Worries about the sustainability of US debt have kept US bond yields elevated in recent months and the OBBA seems to have pushed up yield on 10-year US treasuries up by another 20 basis points this week. This makes it harder for the Fed Chair to resume policy rate cuts. The Indian diaspora can cheer the watering down of remittance tax from 5 per cent to 1 per cent with wide-ranging exemptions. Overall, OBBA is likely to increase American growth rates, but this will come at the expense of incomes and welfare on the one hand and financial smooth sailing on the other. But if it shifts the balance away from financial markets to the product and labour markets, the world economy will benefit.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump calls out the Putin charade

The biggest news from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the White House Monday is what Donald Trump said about another part of the world: The US will resume arm shipments to Ukraine in its war for survival against Vladimir Putin. The President is grasping what some of his staffers don't: Arming Kyiv is realism rooted in America's security interests. "We're going to send some more weapons," Mr. Trump said to a reporter. "We have to. They have to be able to defend themselves. They're getting hit very hard." The President on Tuesday followed up by unloading on Mr. Putin at a cabinet meeting: "We get a lot of bulls — thrown at us by Putin, who is 'very nice all the time, but it turns out to be meaningless.' Yes it does. The US last week held up shipments of everything from artillery to air-defence missiles. (NEW YORK, JULY 9)

The Island

A classic catch-22

Sri Lanka, which is struggling to put its worst-ever economic crisis behind it, finds itself in another dilemma. It had to ban vehicle imports to rebuild its foreign currency reserves. That method proved effective in the short run. But the adoption of extreme measures, such as import restrictions or bans, to tackle a foreign exchange crisis only provide short-term relief; they are unsustainable and need to be tapered off for the long-term economic health of the country. Vehicles were not imported for nearly two years, and a significant amount of much-needed roads could be saved, but the ban on vehicle imports took its toll on the government's tax revenue, which has to be increased to resolve the rupee crisis. (COLOMBO, JULY 9)

Don't let US prise open agri market

HOLD FIRM. This must be resisted as it will hurt the livelihoods of farmers, and pose a threat to our food security



BISWAJIT DHAR

One of the most contentious issues in the India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA) negotiations is the Trump Administration's attempt to pry open India's agricultural market. This has been evident from President Trump and his Cabinet colleagues' systematic push for lowering India's high tariffs, especially on key products like rice and maize, to enable US agri-business to significantly expand their presence in India. Opening India's agriculture to imports would create livelihood uncertainties for farming communities and pose a serious threat to its food security.

On their part, the US farm lobbies have consistently demanded greater access to India's agricultural market. The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) has been the most forthright in demanding market access in India. The NCGA has argued that India's restrictions on genetically modified corn have blocked access for American corn imports, as 94 per cent of the corn produced in the US is genetically modified. The lobby has pointed out that India imposes technical restrictions that prevent access for distiller dried grains with solubles (DDGS), a byproduct from ethanol production used in animal feed, and also limits ethanol imports from the US. The corn growers have, therefore, been urging the Trump Administration to include corn and corn co-products, such as ethanol and its byproducts, in any final agreement with India.

The corn producers' contention is that India's trade restrictions put US farmers at a distinct disadvantage and that addressing these barriers would yield the following benefits to American farmers: (i) if India were to drop its restrictions on genetically modified corn, it could create the possibilities of \$235 million worth of US exports each year; (ii) if the US could access India's sustainable aviation fuel market, it would provide \$434 million opportunity for US corn farmers in the first year of access; and (iii) if India agreed to import dried distillers grains, it would result in \$1.75 million in imports in the first year, growing to an estimated \$137.5 million within five years.

The NCGA estimates show that the corn lobby is eyeing a market valued at about \$683 million through the India-US FTA (<http://bit.ly/4KjBpIK>). Importantly, the US Commerce Secretary, Howard Lutnick, lent his voice in support of the corn lobby by calling for reduction in India's trade

barriers and to import US corn (<http://bit.ly/4AM1Oo>). The American Soybean Association (ASA) was equally insistent that India lowered its tariffs to facilitate import of its members' products. Though this lobby was equally apprehensive of India's restrictions on genetically modified products, which includes American soybeans, the Association received a fillip in mid-April this year as India took ownership of a massive order of US soy oil. According to the ASA, an unknown buyer transferred a sale of 42,000 tonnes to India. The US also shipped 42,000 tonnes of soy oil to India during that same period (<http://bit.ly/4y4ydmr>).

The wheat lobbies, comprising the US Wheat Associates (USW) and the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), have been backing the US government to target India's subsidies on rice and wheat in the WTO (<http://bit.ly/4H4Krf7>). Besides seeking access to the market for its agricultural products in India, the US has been systematically targeting India's agricultural subsidies in the WTO. In a series of submissions to WTO's Committee on Agriculture, the last of which was made in November 2024, the US and four other WTO members argued that India's minimum support price (MSP) for rice and wheat far exceeded the permissible limit of 10 per cent of the value of production of the two cereals.

FLAWED METHODOLOGY

This assessment of India's subsidies regime is made on the basis of a flawed methodology that WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) uses for calculating the level of price support provided by a member. According to this methodology, international prices prevailing almost four decades back, namely 1986-88, are compared with the current MSP for calculating the level of price support. India has repeatedly argued that the correct assessment of the level of price support would require either adjusting the 1986-88 international prices for inflation, or to use international prices from a more recent period.

Expectedly, the AoA's flawed methodology would never be rectified as the US farm lobbies like the USW and NAWG are using it as an instrument to exert pressure on India to reduce its farm subsidies. If the government of India succumbs to this pressure and reduces/removes MSP, the already distressed farmers would be forced to

Unless Trump agrees to reduce farm subsidies, India must refuse to cut tariffs on commodities

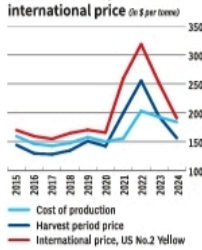
abandon production of the critical food crops, providing opportunities to the US agri-business to capture the Indian market, and jeopardising India's hard earned domestic food security.

The irony is that India's farm subsidies are being targeted by the country whose subsidies are the highest among the WTO members. The US farm subsidies have consistently increased over the past two decades, from \$61 billion in 1995 to \$215 billion in 2022. Though India's subsidies have also increased, especially in recent years, totalling \$92 billion in 2023-24, the two countries provide subsidies for completely different purposes. Almost half of India's subsidies were directed towards supporting poor farmers (the "low income and resource poor farmers" in US parlance), and according to the government, their share was 99.43 per cent (<http://bit.ly/45WDTGf>). On the other hand, US farm subsidies are being used to maintain its position as a leading exporter of agricultural commodities. This implies that while India provides farm subsidies to protect livelihoods and food security, the US has been subsidising its agriculture to enable its agri-business to expand its global footprint.

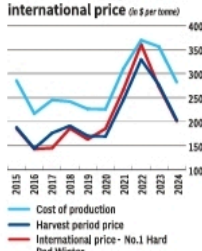
Data available from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on costs and returns of major commodities show how the subsidies have acted as the trump card for the US agri-business in international markets. Subsidies allow the US producers to keep their harvest period prices of major commodities systematically below their costs of production, in other words, they dump their products in the international markets. More interestingly, the harvest period prices, which can be taken as a proxy for domestic prices, have also been below the international prices. The cost-price trends for corn, wheat and soybeans during 2017-2024 are shown in the charts to illustrate this phenomenon. These figures show that while the US could easily penetrate global markets for these commodities by maintaining its domestic costs and prices below the international prices, its domestic producers were priced out of US's domestic market. Since it used subsidies to keep domestic prices of major commodities below their corresponding international prices, the US could do away with tariff protection.

It is, therefore, quite clear that unless Donald Trump agrees to significantly reduce US farm subsidies, India must refuse to reduce its tariffs on major commodities. India had steadfastly maintained this position in the WTO negotiations on agriculture and was able to stave off US pressures to reduce its tariffs. Though agricultural subsidies are not on the table in the BTA negotiations, India must continue to argue in the same

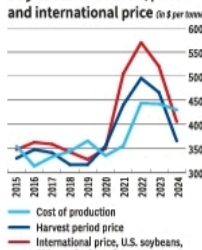
Corn: US costs/prices and international price (in \$ per bushel)



Wheat: US costs/prices and international price (in \$ per bushel)



Soybeans: US costs/prices and international price (in \$ per bushel)



Source: USDA, ERS Commodity Costs and Returns, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/commodity-costs-and-returns>

The writer is Distinguished Professor, Council for Social Development

Are quality rules disrupting the toy industry?

Implementing Quality Control Orders without addressing domestic inefficiencies isn't doing local manufacturers any good

Purna Prabhakar
Nancy Gupta

India's manufacturing sector continues to lag behind many of its Asian peers in terms of competitiveness. While this structural inefficiency has often been obscured by high trade barriers, recent trends suggest a growing reliance on non-tariff measures (NTMs), particularly Quality Control Orders (QCOs), as a policy tool. Though QCOs are intended to strengthen the domestic manufacturing ecosystem by enforcing quality standards, their implementation often impedes the import of critical inputs. This occurs either through the denial of certification to key importers or due to delays caused by complex testing procedures. Since 2019, the issuance and enforcement of QCOs have accelerated significantly, underscoring the need to scrutinise their broader economic impact. The toy industry provides a compelling example. In 2020, India introduced QCOs in the toy sector to curb the influx of substandard imports. However, these regulations were accompanied by sharp tariff increases, from 20 per cent in 2019 to 60 per cent in 2021, and further to 70 per cent by 2024.

As a result, toy imports plummeted by nearly 90 per cent, falling from \$279 million in FY 2020 to just \$35 million in FY 2023. While this might appear to signal a policy success, the scale and speed of the decline triggered unintended consequences.

SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTION

Rather than bolstering domestic self-sufficiency, the abrupt restriction in toy imports disrupted supply chains and consumer access. India's trade composition shifted rapidly: imports of finished toys collapsed, while imports of components, such as parts of electric toys, emerged for the first time in 2023. This pivot illustrates that manufacturers are attempting to circumvent QCO restrictions by importing parts and assembling toys domestically. However, this workaround does not reflect genuine self-reliance; India's domestic production capacity has not scaled adequately to meet rising demand.

Export trends also highlight these constraints. India's toy exports peaked in 2021-22 but declined thereafter. Reports from 10 of the country's largest toy manufacturers indicate a 55 per cent drop in sales between 2022 and 2024, with many firms seeing either shrinking profits or net losses. These outcomes



IMPORT RESTRICTIONS. Not bolstering domestic self-sufficiency

underscore the fragile state of domestic manufacturing, particularly MSMEs, which dominate the sector.

Demand-side pressures are intensifying. With 25 per cent of India's population aged 0-14, rising disposable incomes, and increased consumer interest in STEM-based toys, domestic demand has surged. However, in the absence of sufficient supply, this demand-supply mismatch has led to price inflation. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for toys and sports goods recorded an unprecedented 10 per cent rise in 2022, followed by another rise of 1.1 points in 2023, translating into fewer choices and higher costs for consumers.

The intended goal of de-risking from China has also produced mixed results.

While China's share of India's toy imports fell from 86 per cent in FY 2019 to 46 per cent in FY 2023, imports from Vietnam grew by over 1,300 per cent in FY 2024 alone. This suggests that supply chains are being rerouted rather than fundamentally diversified.

Compounding these issues are high compliance costs. The BIS certification process involves licence renewals every 1-2 years, with fees ranging from ₹59,000 to ₹98,000, costs that are particularly burdensome for MSMEs.

The experience of India's toy industry illustrates the risks of implementing QCOs without addressing domestic inefficiencies. Far from achieving self-reliance, these measures have created supply disruptions, fuelled inflation, and undermined the competitiveness of local manufacturers, particularly small-scale firms.

A more effective strategy for strengthening and building capacity in the toy sector lies in attracting both domestic and foreign investment, particularly in research and development, high-tech manufacturing, and scaling up production.

Nancy is Research Associate and Purna is Associate Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress. The views expressed are personal

SEBI's excessive activism

It is indeed a case of concern that the F&O volumes have dipped substantially, thanks to the market manipulators like Jane Street and earlier Hindenburg. The F&O segment is essentially meant to serve as a hedging mechanism for equity investors. But unfortunately, this segment is misused by intra-day operators and some traders, and sometimes even by corporates under the guise of investors. SEBI is vested with the onerous responsibility of spreading the investment culture in the stock

market, and for doing this the brokers' community serves as the pivotal intermediary. But brokers' discretion has been largely withdrawn. It is time SEBI liberalised the draconian guidelines and allowed brokers to function more liberally. If only such steps are initiated, manipulation of the stock market can be curbed

B Venkateswaran

Chennai

Strengthen EV infra

This refers to the encouraging news on the phenomenal growth in EV

sales (July 9). However, extensive work is needed on charging infrastructure and the regulatory framework. Housing societies should not restrict residents from installing charging points. National and State highways should display the locations of EV charging stations. Also, software issues in EVs should be resolved at car owner's place instead of workshop.

Vinod Johni

Delhi

Proposing ELI scheme

Appropos 'hard job ahead' (July 9),

ideally the ELI scheme should be a stepping stone for the youth to have a sustainable and long-lasting career, and that will only happen when they are imparted soft skills and a good basic education along with domain-specific skills. Vocational training is only complementary to basic education. It is a given that companies will only absorb these youths if they foresee strong demand for their products. Though the subsidy is provided by the government, selection of youth should be the sole prerogative of the company concerned, otherwise

Rad Govind

Bombay

Erratum

The first line of the article 'Why renewable energy needs rapid adoption of grid-forming inverters' (businessline, July 7) should read as "Growing at a fast clip, wind and solar power installations in India — at 162,126 MW — today form 35 per cent of total electricity generation capacity," and not as published. The error is regretted.



A thought for today
If the other fellow sells cheaper than you,
it is called dumping. 'Course, if you sell cheaper
than him, that's mass production
WILL ROGERS

Smelt This

After copper, Trump looks set to tariffharma.
India must protect its turf with a deal

Copper entering America will be taxed at 50%. Will the tariff apply to all exporting nations, will it apply from Aug 1, or immediately? Details are fuzzy in standard Trump fashion, but the rate is fixed, and jitters have spread, even though the tariff wasn't entirely unexpected. Trump showed intent when he ordered an investigation in Feb to find out whether "unfair trade practices" or dumping were stunting the growth of America's copper industry. He also set precedent by imposing 50% tariff on steel and aluminium imports. If copper producers and exporters still feel blindsided, it's because of all the noise the Trump admin generates day after day.

That said, a 50% tariff on copper is no small matter. Every electrical appliance needs tonnes - sometimes literally - of the first metal known to humans. Gasoline cars use about 20kg each, some EVs more than 80kg. And if China continues stalling the supply of rare earth magnets, the demand for copper to make powerful induction motors will only rise. US customers may therefore foot higher prices for all things copper. It's a hefty tax premised on the need to increase US production of copper, which has reduced by a fifth in just a decade. America imports roughly half of the copper it uses every year, worth a modest \$8bn, but the fear - confirmed by the rare earths squeeze - is that this might be a vulnerability. While China does not sell much copper directly to US, its humongous refining capacity lets it manipulate global prices. It stands eighth globally in terms of copper ore reserves, but refines more than the next 10 countries together, which includes India in ninth place.

India is a minor player in America's copper market, with exports worth only \$31mn, but most of these are in the form of value-added goods like pipes and wires, and may hurt producers, unless India swings an exemption under its gestating trade deal. Of greater concern is Trump's off-the-cuff warning about 200% pharma tariffs - again on grounds of national security. He hasn't imposed this tariff yet, but an investigation has been on since April, and the tariff may materialise soon. If it does, India's \$8bn pharma exports to US could be in jeopardy. Alternative markets would likely be less profitable, so pushing for tariff concessions as part of the trade deal is our best option.

Yemens Of The World

Migrants must be made aware of the perils of
employment in risky destinations

New Delhi is racing against time to halt the execution of Indian nurse Nimisha Priya in Yemen. But it's a tough job. First, the execution, ordered under Sharia law, is scheduled for July 16. Second, all legal appeals have been exhausted. Third, even the option of paying blood money to halt the death sentence isn't working. Adding to complication is the fact that India does not have official diplomatic relations with Yemen's Houthis who control the capital Sana'a where Nimisha is being detained.

Nimisha has been sentenced for killing a Yemeni man who was her business partner but was abusing and exploiting her. Her case is a cautionary tale for Indian migrants seeking jobs in countries where rule of law and security systems are far from modern, fair or stable. This applies as much to today's Yemen wracked by civil war as it does to Russia engaged in the Ukraine war, and lawless parts of Myanmar and Cambodia. Indian nationals have been victims of unscrupulous middlemen and human traffickers who promised lucrative jobs. Instead, they were forced to fight in the Russian army or operate cyber-fraud schemes from compounds in Southeast Asia.

What makes things even more tricky is that recruiters are getting sophisticated. They are using social media to lure their victims. A 2020 UN Office on Drugs and Crime report details how traffickers are recruiting using standard webpages, online advertisements, and video streaming services to trap and blackmail their victims. The share of social media usage in confirmed trafficking recruitment cases has jumped from 32% in 2009-2011 to 52% in 2015-2018. Of course, people in search of better employment will travel abroad. In fact, this is the strength of the Indian diaspora. But better checks and govt counselling of migrants are needed before they head for risky destinations. GOI must redouble its efforts in this direction.

Water ways

An exhibition to Thirst after

Bachi Karkaria



Our 2018 TOI 100th and my volume for the tricentenary of Mumbai's mystical Parsi wall last March were both titled 'Watermanah'. This week I again immersed myself in the 'story of water', at 'Thirst', a Welcome Collection exhibition in London. Across Aridhy, Rain, Glaciers, Surface Water and Ground Water sections, past artefacts, present-day videos and future scenarios proved that freshwater is the source of a crisis which goes way beyond climate - indeed way back into antiquity.

If WWII was predicted to be over water, the oldest exhibit was on the first recorded war - a tablet on Sumerian epic, 'Gilgamesh and Aga' (c. 2000 BC). King Aga enslaves the subjects of King Gilgamesh of Uruk to dig wells for his own city else he will cut off Uruk's supply upstream on the Euphrates. Rivers have always been politicised by those having the 'upper' hand. Unsurprisingly, only three per cent of the earth's bounty is freshwater, two-thirds of it locked in ice caps.

Thirst isn't just physical. Jeesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta/Raqs Media Collective tell us 'Across South Asian philosophy, the word is associated with craving, aspiration, longing and desire'. The exhibition keeps presenting their darker manifestation, shared loss, but also human resilience. All three coalesce in Gideon Mendel's wall-wide, cinematically silent video, Deluge 2007-2024, looping images of people from five countries across continents struggling through waist-high waters.

So much resonance of our own reality. Efforts to save the Ganga could learn from the featured 'sacred activism' ritual at Betru River where individual fragile threads were braided into a strong prayer belt, symbolising the potent connection between individuals, communities and nature. Maybe, Ganga-Jamuna culture too could be thus revived? Or take the video of Malaysian fisherfolk despairing over their catch-rich mangroves dying from pollutants spewed by a nearby Chinese factory.

Move over, mosquitoes. Humans are the vectors of water-related killers jeopardising not only our own existence but all life on the planet. 'Thirst' advises a strong gulp of restraint.

Alec Smart said: "Preamble says 'sovereign, socialist, secular'. How about 'sacrosanct'?"

Air India Sucks, Tata Hotels Rock

An Indian company gives us world-class hotel experience but low-quality airline experience.
Preliminary report on the Ahmedabad air crash should give some explanation for this oddity

Chetan Bhagat



Preliminary investigation findings for the horrific AI 171 crash that took 260 lives a month ago, are expected to be made public by Friday. The airline is presumably processing this accident as a wakeup call. Policymakers should be doing the same. What do they need to do to give India a truly world-class airline? It is what Indians deserve and it would give the country a big strategic advantage too.

Consider, by contrast, that anyone who has visited a Taj hotel - whether for a cup of tea or a long stay - is likely to share positive memories. Taj gets it right. The hotels are clean and luxurious, staff is courteous, food is delicious. The lobby, rooms, facilities, services, and restaurants are consistently top-notch. Be it a Taj property in Kerala, Mumbai, Lucknow or New York, be it summer or winter, day or night, it's always excellent. They even speak of something called 'Tajness' - a unique, elevated feeling experienced at any Taj location.

And no, this column is not sponsored by Taj or its parent, the Tata Group. But Taj is genuinely one of the few Indian brands that competes at a global level. Which makes it all the more baffling that the very same Tata Group also owns Air India, one of the most poorly rated airlines in the world.

There are many who refrain from bashing Air India in public, for the sake of its staff's feelings. There's also the patriotism angle, where Air India is seen as a national flag carrier. But things aren't getting better.

So, how to explain Tata Group running world-class Taj Hotels on the one hand and whatever-class Air India on the other? A key point is that Air India is a recent purchase. Not long ago, it was a bloated, unloved, public sector behemoth losing thousands of crores annually. Tatas took it over and merged it with Vistara, a wonderful little airline that had been well on its way to make a mark in the world. People expected Air India would now transform into Vistara, at least the opposite happened.

Air India quality standards continue to decline. There are non-stop news about filthy planes, broken air conditioners and planes turning back due to technical issues. Then came the shocking crash of the Ahmedabad-London flight.

What suddenly happens in the sky that even the Tatas who run first-rate hospitality businesses become third-rate?



It is a combination of factors - Air India's history, our aviation policies, and maybe even the Indian consumer. Kingfisher, Jet, Vistara - all are gone. All aspired to deliver a high-quality experience.

The only true winner in Indian aviation is Indigo, an efficient, point A to point B, no-frills airline. The high point of an Indigo flight is eating dehydrated upma and boring tomato and cucumber sandwiches, which make you feel like a grade IV child eating tiffin prepared by a neglectful parent.

India deserves a world-class airline. A great airline delivers more than comfort. It's a national branding tool. Investors, business travellers and tourists get their first taste of a country through its flag carrier. Just look at what Singapore Airlines, Emirates and Qatar

Airways have done for their respective countries.

What does it take to have a world-class airline? Here are the top five elements, all of which need to be on point and consistently delivered each time.

Cleanliness and aesthetics: At present, the Air India planes seem dank and dirty compared to other global airlines or even Indigo. Are most of the carpets and seats dirt-coloured to hide the dirt? The staff's govt school teacher look could also do with a refresh.

Safety: A world-class airline by definition has a good safety record. Air India's Ahmedabad crash will be hard to erase from public memory. However, new safety-first procedures will help.

Connectivity, punctuality and transfers: Almost all good global airlines have good transit hub airports supporting them. The airports, regulators and airlines work in tandem to provide a seamless experience for the traveller. In India, even at major airports, you have no idea when there will be congestion, when you will not get an aerobridge and when will you be stuck for hours. If we are serious about achieving a world-class airline, our airports and policymakers need to support our airlines.

Service: World-class airlines benchmark extraordinary service standards. This, actually, is one area where Air India still does a decent job.

Profitability: All of the above becomes irrelevant if the airline isn't profitable. Most Indian airlines that have tried to deliver high-end quality have failed. It seems most Indians don't want or can't afford anything nice when it comes to flying. Reconstituted dried poha is okay, but a few hundred rupees more for better flying is not. All those savings shouldn't be kept aside just for big fat weddings.

The only way forward for Air India is to do what most high-end brands do in India - keep most of India out. Taj hotels work because they only serve a high-end clientele.

Of course, Air India has the added role of providing national connectivity. It follows that the only solution is to split Air India into two. There can be one high-end, international airline (like Vistara used to be) and one super-efficient local airline that competes on the blandest sandwiches and lowest costs.

For profitability it's also important that our regulators rethink air policy and taxation. The massive failure rate of India's airlines clearly suggests that they're being overtaxed. And of course, if we want a world-class carrier, we need to take active steps to fix Air India.

India's Many Mafias & The Damage They Do

From gangs mining sand, selling blackmarket kerosene to running illegal parking, they control a vast shadow economy. They steal govt revenues, damage environment & intimidate citizens

Abhishat Gaur@timesofindia.com



Think 'robber baron', and America's history of robber barons of the 19th century comes to mind. Ruthless builders of railroads, oil and steel empires. While they lacked scruples, the likes of Andrew Carnegie and Charles Crocker were a cloak of legality. But the original robber barons - the 'trust busters' of the early 20th century - were changing extortionate, unauthorised tolls on the Rhine, like the 'octroi mafia' that bedeviled Indian highways before GST.

Octroi thugs are gone now, but other species of the genus 'mafia' are thriving across India. Sand mafia, tanker mafia, parking mafia, coal mafia, slum mafia, to name a few. Like the robberbaron, they grab and exploit a collective resource without the state's permission. Of course, they have to bribe, and connive with, officials - instruments of the state - but they're not the same as working with the state.

That's a problem, firstly because mafias deprive the state of revenue. KY's recent 'Shadow Economy Exposed' report says India's underground or unaccounted economy was over 26% of GDP in 2021. Some of it involves felony - drugs and human trafficking, for example - but a large part involves useful activities like sand mining, done illegally. And while India's shadow economy reduced considerably between 2000 and 2021, it's grown a tiny bit again since 2019.

That means over \$1tn of economic activity isn't recorded in India's GDP today. In Germany, the shadow economy is less than 7% of GDP. So, accounting for the non-felonious part of the shadow economy, India's real

GDP could be larger than Germany's \$4.7tn. Forget rankings, the taxes govt loses to mafias could be used to improve healthcare, education, and even defence spending. India's defence budget is \$75bn, China's \$250bn. But lost taxes isn't the only reason that makes mafias undesirable.

Environment: India's construction boom has pushed up demand for sand, spawning a massive illegal industry. Sand mining is rampant across the country. Haryana's ended octroi mafias - its yearly profit was estimated at \$250mn. Not surprising then that every district has its own sand mafia, destroying streams. In Haryana's Sonpat, over-extraction has changed the Yamuna's course. In Nagpur, Maharashtra, the sand mafia built a 400m bridge in just 15 days to remove sand from the Kanhan river.

Corruption: Sonpat abuses Delhi, Nagpur is Maharashtra's third largest city. How do officials not know when sand is mined illegally on an industrial scale? Recently, Haryana's chief secretary got a rap from the Supreme Court over the illegal construction of a road through forestland for transporting illegally quarried sand from Rajasthan. Later, a drone survey revealed

not one but three unauthorised roads in the area. SC remarked: "It appears that (mining) mafia is strong enough to protect not only its members but also the officers of the same govt who acted in collusion with them."

In 2013, while reporting on the murder of a coal don in Jharkhand, Reuters found that "between a fifth and half the production at some (Coal India) mines was going to the coal mafia. S Narsing Rao, Coal India chairman at the time, estimated that 5% of the company's

overall 450mn tonne output was pilfered. "Obviously it happens with the connivance of our own guys, in collusion with our own guys," he said.

Violent crime: In 2020, NHAI engineer Sayendra Dubey was shot dead for exposing links between officials and the mafia involved in highway projects. In 2011, the kerosene mafia burnt alive Yashwant Sonawane, the additional collector of Malegaon in Maharashtra. In Chhattisgarh, a constable was crucified under a sand mafia tractor in May. Stories of mafia brutality are legion.

National character: Every mafia stands on a foundation of collusion. When a market springs up on a busy road, or an office street turns into an unauthorised parking, the current of pelf is flowing between the terminals of mafia and officialdom. And research shows that in countries where organised crime groups - the mafia - are widespread, people have fewer qualms about dodging taxes and paying bribes. If the collusion among mafia, police, politicians and other corruptives for a long time, and on a vast scale, without consequences, it dents people's trust in institutions and reduces civic honesty.

National security: The Bombay blasts of 1993 forced India to face up to the problem of mafia and official collusion. A committee headed by then home secretary NN Vohra studied the matter, and pointed out that "the activities of Memon Brothers and Dawood Ibrahim... could not have happened without these elements having been protected by the functionaries of the concerned (sic) govt departments, especially customs, income tax, police and others."

The committee said a mafia or syndicate always started small, "indulging in petty crime at the local level", and used its money to build contacts with bureaucrats and politicians. Next, it invested in "muscle power" that could be lent to politicians during elections - a cheque to be encashed later in patronage.

It's a vicious circle - mafias exploit resources, steal govt revenue, corrupt officials, intimidate citizens, and buy political patronage that allows them to do all of it again with impunity. And so, it must be broken.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacred space

Let each
man take
the path
according to
his capacity,
understanding
and temperament.
His true guru will meet him along
that path.

Swami Sivananda

Guru Purnima: Time To Celebrate Sacred Bond

Anandmurti Gurumaa

As known as Vyas Purnima, Guru Purnima is a truly significant day for seekers and disciples. It is a time when we express our love, devotion, feelings, gratitude to our revered guru. The celebration prompts us to reflect honestly: Have I fulfilled my duty as a good disciple, or have I been dishonest? Have I followed the guru's words in my life, or have I, driven by delusion and laziness, chased worldly pleasures, befriended the impermanent world by misreading it to be stable, and forgotten the friendship I forged with my guru? If I have been this day serves as a reminder to introspect and ask, 'Where am I?'

Have we given importance to the material world, to objects, money, position and prestige? Or have we practised meditation before sleep and thanked the guru? Have we, every morning, resumed our spiritual practice, and lived

each day in such a way that we neither harm nor hurt anyone, be it through words, thoughts, or actions? Have we maintained a constant awareness within, an unbroken vigilance, recognising that life is not for accumulating material comforts?

This life is not for fulfilling desires or creating a materialistic sense of purpose, but for understanding desires and releasing our attachment to them. Even as we engage with the world, our sense of discernment must remain active. Get married, adorn yourself as a bride, but remember that the one you are marrying and the body that participates in the marriage ceremony are both transient. They are impermanent, and you must not lose yourself in the pursuit of bodily pleasures. For householders, this understanding becomes essential, as they often

surround themselves with a world where honour and respect are granted only to those with wealth and power.

A seeker lives knowing that life's duration is unknown, and so is the guru's continuity. Time is limited. Those who adhere to the discipline of morning and evening practice may accomplish several tasks in a day. Yet, within them, remains an unshakable joy, a subtle fragrance, an enduring happiness.

An excellent householder can only become one who practices diligently. Without such practice, one can be consumed by greed, anger, pride, which can destroy relationships. A person who never finds time for meditation, contemplation, or breathing exercises cannot be considered a disciple. The sacred bond is fractured. Guru Purnima reminds us that this is a precious opportunity for self-realisation.

for strengthening discipline and perseverance.

Bodies will perish, but knowledge endures. The tradition of knowledge, beginning with Mahadev, was carried forward by sages like Rishi Veda who shaped the Vedas, gave us Brahmantras, and illuminated the essence of the Bhagwad Gita. Sage Vyas traversed the whole country, preparing sages and teachers to disseminate wisdom of Vedanta.

This Guru Purnima is the day of Sage Ved Vyas. Today, we remember him and all spiritual luminaries who have held the title of guru. We bow before them, seeking their blessings, aspiring to be blessed with a guru or a teacher. May we not squander our lives in indulgence or false pride but make them meaningful. This is a day of prayer and supplication to the Guru, a time to seek divine grace, so that no obstacle may hinder our journey.
Guru Purnima is on July 10

FATF at Catch Up With eTerror-Funding

New paradigm in social media, crypto assets

The global response to terror financing is inadequate, reports Inter-governmental organisation Financial Action Task Force (FATF), with majority of countries exposed to security gaps. Funding of terrorist activities, including those perpetrated in India, is moving online where tracking protocols are not as robust as in mainstream financial channels. This raises the regulatory bar for countries where e-commerce is growing rapidly. Digital funding of terrorism presents a new paradigm in decentralisation that fans out into social media and crypto assets. It's now relatively easy for individuals to raise funds through crowdsourcing on instant messaging platforms and transfer the money into cryptocurrencies through digital payments systems. It's also easy to purchase online and ship materials used in acts of terrorism through logistics networks created by e-commerce marketplaces.

Digital channels that can be used by terrorist outfits has enlarged the risk assessment methodologies for enforcement agencies. It also requires building institutional capacity for detection. Online reporting structures must go beyond those imposed in physical commerce to incorporate decentralisation.

And the regulatory framework must be able to adapt to technological advances that open up newer areas of digital commerce to abuse by rogue elements. In many aspects, online activity has higher traceability — the proverbial paper trail — which should make the job easier for investigators. But legislation is required to throw light on what remains of dark areas of digital transactions, such as crypto havens.

India must address its vulnerabilities to increased radicalisation in its neighbourhood, and new forms of terror funding by harmonising its regulatory framework with international best practices. It should also continue to lead the charge for global regulation of cryptocurrencies that pose both security and financial stability risks. Yet, the biggest effort must go into enforcement action, which can detect and deter terrorist activity within the country.

Clean Cooking's Still Not Plug and Play

If kitchen is the heart of a home, clean cooking is what keeps it healthy. But it's not just about fresh ingredients and spotless utensils — it's also about keeping the air free from smoke and toxins. For many that's a luxury. In India, around 500 million people rely on polluting fuels like wood, biomass, dung cakes, crop residue and kerosene, leading to environmental and health issues.

India, like many developing nations, has launched clean cooking initiatives. Expanding piped natural gas (PNG) access is one such step, alongside promoting household biogas and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), which focuses on LPG connections. Yet, none have been effective in ensuring sustained clean-fuel use or fully replacing biomass. Despite

GoF's ambitious push — the operational PNG pipeline network expanded from 15,340 km in 2014 to 24,945 km as of September 2024 — nearly a third of the licensed city gas distribution areas remain unconnected to the grid, hampering adoption. Major roadblocks include lack of last-mile infra and distance between pipeline tap-off points and authorised zones.

To boost uptake, India needs infrastructure investment, streamlined regulation, LPG distribution partnerships, and greater public awareness of clean cooking's health and environmental benefits. Yet, for a country as vast and diverse as India, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. Alongside PNG, biogas and PMUY, electric cooking must be part of the clean energy mix. A subsidy for induction stoves and the PM's endorsement of solar PV e-cookstoves signal that electric cooking could be the next frontier. The path to truly clean kitchens lies not in one technology but in offering flexible, region-specific solutions that make clean cooking a right, not a privilege.

Who Needs Mars When There's an Isle!

In a move that's part crime lord ban from Bruce Lee-starring Enter the Dragon, and part Burning Man brochure, tech-crypto entrepreneur Balaji Srinivasan has bought a private island near Singapore to inaugurate his 'Network State' — a society that revolves around 'building online communities united by shared values, which would eventually acquire physical territory and seek global recognition as a sovereign entity'. So, Srinivasan wants to be a (Bruce) Lee Kuan Yew with WiFi, AI and yoga mats.

Armed with a vision, a router and possibly a \$600 ergonomic hammock, Srinivasan is set to prove that physical geography is optional when your citizenship depends solely on agreeing to terms and conditions. Citizens will be digitally onboarded, geofenced and gently nudged to read William Rees-Mogg and James Dale Davidson's 'The Sovereign Individual' under palm trees — only available in NFT format, obviously. So, is this deregulation with sunscreen? Hell, yeah. Wouldn't you want to be part of an opt-in technocracy where tax potholes and infinite Discord servers, where taxes are negotiated via DAO votes and your passport doubles as a .eth address? Rumour has it that Srinivasan's plan to out-Musk Martian Musk will ultimately lead to the island's GDP measured by daily GitHub commits. If Plato dreamt of Republic 2.0, Balaji may have just launched its beta.

CHAPATI As India urbanises, Indians will be less uptight about language wars and obsessions

HER LANGUAGE-UTTERED



Ashok Malik

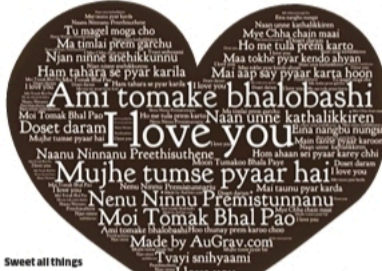
My father would have turned 100 this year. He never met my father-in-law, having died about a decade before I met my future wife and her family. If the two men had been introduced, in which language would they have conversed? The answer is piquant and complicated. It calls for a process of explanations as well as elimination.

My father knew, and my father-in-law knows, multiple languages. Both emerged from distant corners and linguistic traditions of the subcontinent. My father was born in Rawalpindi, and the first language he heard and spoke in was Punjabi. It was the vernacular language used at home in the middle-class mohalla, amid a bustling wholesale market, where the family lived.

When still a small child, my father was sent off to the madrasa attached to the local mosque. Here, the maulvi taught him Urdu, as he had taught my father's older brothers and sisters. Urdu became my father's primary textual language. He was to use it all his life in writing letters and notes to his brothers.

English came after a few years, when he entered school. It was the language of education and work. But it was decidedly a second language. My father's engagement with English was formalistic. As a child, it struck me that he was more comfortable typing in English — on his rusty Olivetti typewriter — than while putting pen to paper.

My father-in-law began life in a village in Derogon, a plural nation.



Upper Assam. His earliest language was Assamese, learnt in a local madrasah school the headmaster of which was a Hindu Brahmin. English and Sanskrit arrived later, with 'proper' school. English evolved to become the language of higher education and office.

Both men came to Hindi in Delhi, through different routes and in different decades. For my father, Hindi was gingerly approached through Urdu — familiarity with which also allowed him a smattering of Pashto, and even the odd Persian line. For my father-in-law, Hindi was thrust upon him through the common root words that came from Sanskrit and significant but not entirely contributed to the vocabulary of Assamese.

My father could have watched the film Pakeezah and understood every syllable and nuance. Doodarshan news left him confused. For my father-in-law, it's the opposite. Doodarshan news Hindi is about the only Hindi that he doesn't understand.

Both knew Hindi after a fashion. But their Hindis would have been mutually unintelligible. They could only have communicated in English — a second, even

third language for both, and certainly not the language they instinctively counted, thought or dreamt in. Halfway across the world, English is my first and natural language. I use it to form my innermost thoughts and talk to myself. Educationists define 'mother tongue' as the language the child most uses and hears around him or her in formative years. This need not be the same as an ancestral language. That is a popular fallacy, frequently exploited in political rhetoric.

For a peculiar mix of reasons — growing up in a certain milieu in Calcutta, with school, neighbourhood, social and community influences — my 'mother tongue' is English. This need not be the same as my ancestral language. I was sent to separate, but similar, educational institutions. To this day, my sisters and I talk to each other in English, but not necessarily to other members of the (extended) family. Response to this has been both puzzling and mirthful. You speak English even at home?

English is my 'mother tongue', but not my ancestral language — which is Punjabi, a language I barely know. I am fluent in Bengali, but that's another story and should not detain us here. While my 'mother tongue' and ancestral language are distinct, it is not so for my wife. Assamese is both her 'mother tongue' and her ancestral language. For our children, born and

raised in Delhi, it is a third experience altogether. Given their formative environment, they self-identify with Hindi as their 'mother tongue'. The ancestral languages are Assamese and Punjabi.

All this is an anecdotal argument at home when the census official visited in 2011 and asked what she thought was an innocuous question: 'Which is your mother tongue?' It has also triggered memories of childhood episodes that, seen from another perspective, could appear strange. As children, it was not uncommon for my son and daughter to speak to each other in Hindi and then translate what they had just discussed to English for their parents' benefit. This was not a slight or a dig, or a joke. It was just an understanding and consideration shown to two external individuals who happened to be their parents, and who the children realised were not as comfortable.

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What does one make of a family of four that has, between its members, three different 'mother tongues'? As India rapidly urbanises, facilitates internal migration, and fosters an increasing number of inter-regional and inter-state marriages, examples of such families will only grow. Hopefully, this will make us Indians less uptight about language wars and 'mother tongue' obsessions. Plural families, after all, build a plural nation.

The writer is partner and chair of India Practice, The Asia Group

Can Eon Really Play Party Pooper?



Atanu Biswas

It's not long ago that Eon Musk contributed \$300 million to Donald Trump's re-election campaign and subsequently rose to prominence in Washington DC. But their relationship soon devolved into sour animosity. The Trump-Musk feud has intensified after Tesla boss announced the launch of America Party On July 4. Musk asked his X followers if they wanted independence from the US two-party system. Over 1.2 million replied. By a factor of 2 to 1, you want a new political party, you shall have it! he posted. A party to represent 60% in the middle, Musk added. However, who are these 60%? Are Americans? Do they belong to the middle class financially, or are they people who don't think the Republican or Democratic parties see or represent them?

The One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) recently rekindled the Trump-Musk dispute. But capturing the Oval Office isn't the target of an enraged Musk. Rather, he continued a potential political strategy to seize a few delicate Senate and House seats to have the deciding vote on important legislation. It would be to lower focus on just 2 or 3 Senate seats and 8 to 10 House districts, Musk wrote on X.

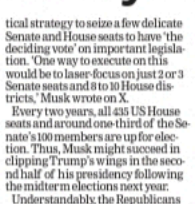
Every two years, all 435 US House seats and around one-third of the Senate's 100 members are up for election. Thus, Musk might succeed in clipping Trump's wings in the second half of his presidency following the mid-term elections next year. Understandably, the Republicans appear more concerned than the Democrats. Trump considered Musk's new party strategy 'ridiculous' and claims that he has gone 'completely off the rails'. But how, if at all, can Musk succeed? On multiple occasions, Musk has made comparisons with Greek general Epaminondas' victory at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC. 'By using a variety of how Epaminondas shattered the myth of Spartan invincibility at Leuctra, extremely concentrated force at a precise location on the battlefield', Musk said.

However, it's easier said than done. Every American president for more than two centuries has belonged to one of the two political parties: Federalists or the Democratic-Republicans, the Democrats or the Whigs, or since Abraham Lincoln's time, the Democrats or the Republicans. Independent third-party candidates frequently spice up election coverage. Demonstrating how ingrained the two-party binary is in American politics, in the run-up to the 2000 elections, the Hallmark Special 'Treasure of Horror VII' episode 'Citizen Kang' of The Simpsons suggested that Americans would vote for an alien from space rather than a third-party candidate. Don't blame me — I voted for Kodos', Homer Simpson said.

French sociologist Maurice Duverger proposed the famous Duverger's Law, which states that two-party systems are typically preferred in single-ballot plurality rule elections (like first-past-the-post held in single-member districts). Duverger's Law has generally held up in the US throughout history and doesn't appear to be about to fail, even though it doesn't hold in places like India. Musk's handling of federal employees and job cuts as DOGE boss made him unpopular. His Nazi salute also created controversy. Additionally, Musk ought to have realised that money is not the only ingredient in winning votes. He contributed at least \$1 million to a Wisconsin Supreme Court election campaign in March. By framing it as a people's vote versus Musk's contest, the Democrats rallied voters. And the Musk-supported Republican candidate lost by a margin of 10%.

Nevertheless, the Progressive Party of Theodore Roosevelt won 22% of the vote share in 1912, and Ross Perot received 19% of the vote in his 1992 independent presidential campaign, which contributed to the defeat of George H.W. Bush's re-election campaign and the triumph of Bill Clinton. Undoubtedly, Musk has too much money to spend on a political gamble. In addition, he has a prominent social media platform that can be an X-factor in today's world.

Thus, Trump's popularity, present MAGA dominance, America's age-old political system, Duverger's Law and Musk's financial clout are all being tested.



Exciting times ahead

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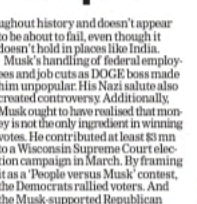
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French sociologist Maurice Duverger proposed the famous Duverger's Law, which states that two-party systems are typically preferred in single-ballot plurality rule elections (like first-past-the-post held in single-member districts). Duverger's Law has generally held up in the US throughout history and doesn't appear to be about to fail, even though it doesn't hold in places like India. Musk's handling of federal employees and job cuts as DOGE boss made him unpopular. His Nazi salute also created controversy. Additionally, Musk ought to have realised that money is not the only ingredient in winning votes. He contributed at least \$1 million to a Wisconsin Supreme Court election campaign in March. By framing it as a people's vote versus Musk's contest, the Democrats rallied voters. And the Musk-supported Republican candidate lost by a margin of 10%.

Nevertheless, the Progressive Party of Theodore Roosevelt won 22% of the vote share in 1912, and Ross Perot received 19% of the vote in his 1992 independent presidential campaign, which contributed to the defeat of George H.W. Bush's re-election campaign and the triumph of Bill Clinton. Undoubtedly, Musk has too much money to spend on a political gamble. In addition, he has a prominent social media platform that can be an X-factor in today's world.

Thus, Trump's popularity, present MAGA dominance, America's age-old political system, Duverger's Law and Musk's financial clout are all being tested.

Thus, Trump's popularity, present MAGA dominance, America's age-old political system, Duverger's Law and Musk's financial clout are all being tested.

Judging Gurus

JANKI SANTOKU

The word 'guru' literally means dispeller of darkness. A guru dispels darkness of ignorance from our lives. He is not merely an instructor or disciplinarian. His role is to guide us to the Supreme. People find faults in spiritual masters, too. In the imperfect world, perfection lies only in enlightenment.

Our question with reference to a guru is not whether he has a flaw, but whether he can help remove our ignorance of the Self. According to scriptures, Dattatreya had 24 gurus, including the teacher, and identification with the Self. When one identifies with the Self, one finds oneself with all living beings. This is the state of self-realisation or perfection. Criminals masquerading as gurus must be dealt with sternly according to the law of the land. However, there is no point in judging authentic spiritual masters. Even the most genuine teachers will not live up to our expectations. This error-seeking attitude spoils all our relationships, including the one with the teacher.

Guru Puranima is on July 10

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Arca Tulam, Mexico

In Mexico, open-fire cooking is a traditional culinary practice, encompassing techniques such as barbecuing, grilling, and cooking over a brasa (fire). You want to try out this cooking style, book a table at Arca — a contemporary palapa-style dining room built on sand and surrounded by palm trees, overlooking the ocean.

Chef Jose Luis Hinojosa, hailing from Tijuana in Baja California, reinvents Mexican street food with a modern twist. He brings the flavors of his hometown's street food to the Caribbean beach, crafting unique recipes with a refined Mexican soul.

Top of the list is roast pork marinated with pineapple and passion fruit, served alongside green chutney, corn, and avocado. The cocktail offering works in tandem with the kitchen — shaking up bold drinks with all natural ingredients and a whole lot of character, plus a wide range of Mexican spirits. And, yes, it all comes with a side of beach vibes.

Chat Room

AIMless Chore to Seamless Vocation

'More Than Just Camp Geeks' by TK Arun (Jul 9) shows a way to integrate career and education from the existing narrow and curricular computer-focused perspectives. To make this transition seamless, it demands a 24-month internship in each of the key domains, such as RE, defence, sustainable farming, power engineering, exploring rare-south alternatives, mining, etc. It is not only the students to pursue vocation aligned to their avocation, it will also act as a potent recruitment tool for companies to grab the right talent. A third-party oversight mechanism for the trained student and the training company would bring out the best outcomes from such efforts. Such an approach can derisk jobs and growth from further technological evolution, well beyond the current hype of AI. Prasad Anand Kumar (Mumbai)

DECCAN Chronicle

10 JULY 2025

Peace Nobel for Trump: It's a very long stretch...

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's longest foreign trip that took him to five countries in Europe, the Caribbean, South America and Africa was a diplomatic success of the new kind that seems to work more on personal charisma than on nation-to-nation relationships. That he returns with a clutch of the highest civilian honours the nation has visited conferred on him may principally be an index of India's rising economic heft and its positioning as a strong voice of the Global South. But the sheer numbers of them collected in the last 10 years is an indication of the vices he personally shares with many of the leaders.

With two of the five original members of the BRICS lineup absent — Xi Jinping preoccupied with home affairs and Vladimir Putin supposedly afraid of an ICC arrest warrant — it was Mr Modi's turn to lead the assembly to discuss matters that should interest them all, including climate change that may, however, be going out of fashion elsewhere thanks to changes at the top in the US.

State visits are no more just the culmination of years of hard work behind the scenes in the foreign office of nations where career mavens chip away at the framework of international relations and came up with voluminous dossiers for leaders to study and shape their interactions with the rulers of other nations.

Some of the shows may even seem orchestrated; they are nevertheless a grand display of bonhomie among leaders that is expected to spread cheer while upholding the standards expected of international optics in these days of connectivity through the images of the all-seeing TV cameras that beam pictures across continents in real time to larger audiences than ever before.

It can be said that diplomacy itself is changing, certainly since January 20, 2025, a day on which not just the occupant but the entire global outlook of the White House inextricably transformed into something of a different, if unpredictable, dimension. The US President Donald Trump inherited the mantle of not just the leader of the free world but also became the emperor they are now fawning over.

It is scarcely believable that even the Canadian Prime Minister Mike Carney, who was critical of Trump and called him out as a "bully" at a time when the US President cast eyes on Canada as a prospective 51st state, should laud his leadership of the US. That may be transactional considering tariff battles were raging then. But what could have provoked Benjamin Netanyahu to propose Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize except flattery that seems to be increasingly the currency for dealing with the head of the nation that plays the global policeman.

There is an argument that since the Nobel Prize for Peace eluded Mahatma Gandhi, the ultimate apostle of peace of the 20th century, it should matter little who its recipients have been over the decades. But some on that list have been war hawks too and others like Barack Obama who went along on the same war path set by his predecessors should have earned demerit points.

It is an even more of a travesty of justice that the US President who sent his bombers flying nonstop for 10 hours to annihilate nuclear fuel processing sites in Iran with bunker-busting mother of all bombs should not be nominated. Even Pakistan, with its known love for state-sponsored violence, withdrew its Nobel nomination with a mea culpa. The Peace Prize is not for bomb dropping leaders who think nothing of crimes against humanity.

Do we ever learn from mishaps?

The death of three school children when their van was hit by a speeding train while crossing a manned level crossing in Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu and that of another nine persons when a 40-year-old dilapidated bridge in Vadodra in Gujarat collapsed are instances of governmental apathy leading to the loss of precious human lives. There will be official mourning, routine explanations and a couple of suspensions and the cases will be forgotten forever.


The Railways has come up with a ludicrous explanation that the railway gate was indeed closed when the school van approached it. According to its explanation, the van driver pressured the gate keeper into opening the gates as he was getting late for school. The van driver and the injured surviving student claim that the gate was indeed open while the local residents have a litany of complaints against the man for dereliction of duty.

The Railways should at least be honest about the tragic episode and see if there are lapses on its part so that they are remedied. There used to be several instances of accidents where people in their cars were killed at unmanned level crossings. The Railways has almost ended that history by years of planning and investment; it must now look honestly into the latest episode and take steps to ensure that no unsuspecting passenger lost their lives for lack of safety measures. School children, or for that matter, no human being, should be made to pay for the lapses of the institutions.

Reports suggest the people of the region have been complaining about the condition of the bridge on Mahisagar river and its maintenance for quite some time but to no avail. Here, too, unsuspecting men and women rushing to their places of work in the morning are made to pay for the laxity done by irresponsible people. The political leadership has also failed in this case as it played deaf when local residents raised the alarm.

Safety standards and their audit must be made a part of governance should we wish to avoid a repeat of the Tamil Nadu and Gujarat accidents.

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu

Can anything be done to stop exodus from IAS in Tripura?

It's hard not to see the flight of over a dozen IAS officers from Tripura's cadre as a crypto-threshold moment. Between 2019 and 2023, young administrative talent from IAS batches of 2019, 2020, 2022 and even 2023 have been migrating, often in tandem with life changes such as marriage, to other states, including Rajasthan, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana.

While cadre transfers for marriage aren't a scandal, what happens when they turn into a slow haemorrhage? Tripura's government is increasingly borrowing IAS (Tripura Civil Service) officers to fill gaps, pulling extra roles such as acting SDM onto younger, local babus juggling too much, while swallowing senior-level responsibilities.

This isn't simply a numbers game. It is chipping away at institutional memory, weakening leadership at the district level, and leaving key developmental schemes rudderless. When the reserve pool dries up, you end up propping up the admin with less experienced folk playing catch-up.

That's not all. Sources have informed DRD that Sonal Gole, the one uniform face that should offer assurance, has reportedly been MIA in Delhi, supposedly on childcare leave since July 2023, and no one in Agartala seems certain she's even in office. That's not just puzzling, it's symbolic of a wider shrug of accountability.

The CM's office hasn't issued a peep on the

Subhani



Brics, mini-NAM balance and the new bipolarity



K.C. Singh

The 126-paragraph Rio de Janeiro Declaration, issued on July 6, leaves no issue affecting the emerging and developing economies uncovered. US President Donald Trump's shadow lingered over the summit, but his threat of higher tariffs on any nation adopting an anti-American position made it tangible. The declaration avoids naming the United States, but it addresses the issues arising from Mr Trump's disruptive stance.

Brics, a group of initially four and then five countries, when South Africa joined, all emerging economies from different continents, was founded in 2009. It seeks 'peace, a more representative and fairer international order, a reinvigorated and reformed multilateral system, sustainable development and inclusive growth'. The sheer ambition of these objectives is head-spinning.

With the dominant power, the US, disrupting the existing order governing trade, security and international finance, some norm-setting was essential. Strategic thinker Joseph Nye says the group faces 'intra-organisational rivalries'. The 2020 India-China armed hostilities across the Line of Actual Control, starting with Chinese intrusion at Galwan, is one example. Similarly, the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia, with the war still going on, has forced the group's members to balance diplomatically between Russia and Ukraine, the latter supported by Western nations, including the US. Also persisting is the Gaza war. Finally, the Israeli air attacks on Iran, starting June 13, with the US pitching in and dropping 'bunker-buster' bombs on three strategic Iranian nuclear facilities, complicated the scenario. The Brics summit had to address these developments, but without provoking the US.

The declaration has five sub-headings on diverse themes. It begins with 'Strengthening Multi-lateralism and Reforming Global Governance'. It maintains that contemporary power realities are not reflected in the multilateral organisations. The rivalries amongst Brics members affect this debate. While China and India agree that sharing in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) needs review, their interests diverge over the UN Security Council reform. The current host Brazil and India are part of a four-nation group along with Germany and Japan, which lobbies for additional permanent members in the UNSC. China is a four-nation group along with Germany and Japan, which lobbies for additional permanent members in the UNSC. China is a four-nation group along with Germany and Japan, which lobbies for additional permanent members in the UNSC.

India's hopes of perennial American support, with New Delhi balancing China's rise or moderating SCO and Brics, looks highly debatable. The government has to recalibrate its diplomacy.

finalising trade deals coincided with the Rio summit. Unable to bully most interlocutors into signing trade deals, he has shifted the deadline to August 1.

Ideally, Brics could become an alternative trading bloc, with each member reducing dependence on the US market. But mutual rivalries hamper that. The declaration proposes cooperation to regulate Artificial Intelligence, encourage a Partnership on New Industrial Development, the use of robotics, digital technology, next generation communications, etc. India managed to slip in 'national food reserves' under food security. That is one of the sticking points in the India-US trade deal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the session on 'Environment, COP30 and Global Health'. India, he said, abided by the Paris Agreement commitments on schedule. The overall objectives are not achievable, he added, without facilitated technology transfers and affordable financing. President Trump, instead, has an anti-climate change agenda. He is withdrawing incentives for electric vehicles and green energy.

Brazilian President Lula da Silva, attacking President Trump's threat of tariffs on the Brics countries, asserted that 'we are sovereign nations' and can impose tariffs on the US. The US announced supplementary trade on 15 nations, excluding India. It feels like a Cold War déjà vu.

The Non-Aligned Movement was created to escape the Soviet-US rivalry. After the Cold War, India had hoped for a multipolar world. But now, a new bipolarity is emerging between the US and the China-Russia combine. India's hopes of perennial American support, with New Delhi balancing China's rise or moderating SCO and Brics, looks highly debatable. The government cannot afford to let its policy of non-alignment and non-alignment be undermined. The Brics' primary focus has always been on economic and financial issues. President Trump's tariff war on the global trading architecture, overseen by the World Trade Organisation, needs to be countered. Ironically, Mr Trump's July 9 deadline for

the Russian role. The declaration refers to the national positions of different members, without criticising Russia. Regarding Palestine, a more aggressive anti-Israel position is adopted. The Israeli attacks on civilians in Gaza are termed violative of the international humanitarian law. A ceasefire is demanded, besides the withdrawal of the Israeli defence forces from the occupied territories. The release of hostages and detainees is desired. Similarly, regarding Syria, where the US has combined with the new Syrian government, a sovereign, independent and united Syria is sought. The danger of a revived Al Qaeda and ISIS again spreading terrorism regionally is observed.

The demand for a nuclear weapon-free Middle East, which Iran strongly advocates, is supported. This targets Israel's right to nuclear weapons when other nations are denied even peaceful nuclear programmes. Three other sub-themes are: 'Deepening International Economic, Trade and Financial Cooperation'; 'Combating Climate Change and Promoting Sustainable Development'; and 'Partnership for the Promotion of Human, Social and Cultural Development'.

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LETTERS PREVENTABLE DEATHS

The tragic van-train collision at a gated level crossing exposes long-standing failures in rail safety infrastructure. Whether the gate was opened under pressure or due to misjudgement, such incidents are not mere accidents — they are preventable. Despite years of expert recommendations, many busy crossings still lack automatic barriers, CCTV monitoring, or real-time alerts. Gatekeepers, often underpaid and overworked, are left to handle enormous responsibility without adequate support. This is unacceptable. Instead of ad hoc measures after each tragedy, the Railways must fast-track the construction of road overbridges or underpasses at all vulnerable points. Human error is inevitable; the system must be designed to absorb it — not amplify it. Every life lost is a result of delay.

Avinashiappan Myilsami
Coimbatore

UNDEMOCRATIC ORDER

The alleged action of the Narendra Modi Government of blocking more than 2,000 accounts of users of social media platform X is nothing short of infringement of freedom of expression. The sovereign party order to central agencies to initiate action against users of X if found spreading news or any content which the agencies feel were seditious or anti-national is undemocratic. It is a matter of concern and shame that the BJP and its leaders who speak about emergency and excesses at the drop of hat indulges in curbing and muzzling the media.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR
Chennai

TRANSPORT FINANCES

The recent Madras High Court directive barring TNSCT buses from crossing toll plazas due to 726 crore arrears starkly exposes a deeper crisis — the financial rot within State Transport Corporations. Justice N. Anand Venkatesh rightly noted that only drastic measures seem to provoke action from authorities who have normalised default. This institutional apathy is not limited to toll dues. Thousands of retired employees await rightful retirement benefits — gratuity, leave encashment, and commutation — despite years of service. Worse, statutory deductions for PF and cooperative loan EMIs, collected diligently from salaries, remain unremitted, compounding employees' financial distress and legal entanglements.

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broader implications. So, if replenishing talent isn't a high priority, then perhaps bold steps like offering retention bonuses, incentives for rural postings or fast-tracking leadership development for PCS officers should be on the table. Public service shouldn't feel like a revolving door where the state loses while others gain.

IN KERALA, SENIORITY DOESN'T WEAR THE STARS
Nitin Agarwal can't seem to catch a break. Kerala's senior-most IPS officer from the 1989 batch has once again been overlooked for the state's top police job, this time in favour of a junior, 1991-batch officer, R.A. Chandrasekhar. That's two supersessions in two years.

And this wasn't some routine reshuffle, sources have informed DRK. Mr Chandrasekhar's appointment as Kerala's DGP and head of police moves him to the Cabinet Secretariat as secretary (security) for exactly two weeks. From there, the Kerala government snapped him up. Smooth. Seamless. Suspiciously well-timed.

For Mr Agarwal, it's déjà vu. In 2023, the state picked Shankar Narayana Saheb from the 1990 batch over him. And now, with Mr Chandrasekhar's entry, he's once again reporting to a junior officer,

perhaps until retirement in July next year.

What's fuelling this pattern depends on who you ask. Some say Mr Agarwal lacked the right political backing. Others hint at past run-ins with influential parties. The Congress has slammed Mr Chandrasekhar's appointment as a compromise between the Centre and the CPI(M). The Left is nervously defending it, given that Mr Chandrasekhar has a controversial past. It includes his alleged involvement in the 1994 Koodalparamba firing case, where five DYFI activists were killed. He was acquitted, but the ghosts linger. At the end of the day, seniority, service, and spotless records mean little if you're not in favour. In Kerala's DGP musical chairs, what matters most is not the batch year, but who's got the better orchestra.

CHHATTISGARH'S CHIEF SECRETARY DRAMA

It was supposed to be a send-off soaked in sentiment with a shawl, coconut and speeches. The full retirement ceremony for Chhattisgarh's chief secretary, Amitabh Jain, was all set to walk into the sunset, complete with warm words from governor Ramen Deka and a cabinet full of farewells. Then came the twist.

Just as the state's top brass gathered to mark Jain's last hurrah, a call from Delhi hit pause on the goodbye. In a move that's unprecedented since Chhattisgarh became a state in 2000, the Centre

extended Mr Jain's tenure by three months, reportedly with just a phone call. The farewell speeches were shelved, the shawl suddenly looked premature, and the babus were left blinking in disbelief.

Jain now holds the distinction of being the first chief secretary in the state's history to receive a post-retirement extension. While the corridors of power scramble to adjust their plans, the rest of Raipur was left wondering: Why the extension? And who's next?

Until that call, the guessing game was in full swing. Four senior officers, including Renu Pillay, Subrat Sahoo, Ankit Agrawal and Manoj Prasad, were in the running. Two names had apparently already been nixed. But the big question was whether Delhi would reappoint Union pharmaceutical secretary Ankit Agrawal or leave the choice to the state.

The extension may have given Delhi more time, but it also gave Raipur a political potholer, scripted by the Centre. For now, the state has a chief secretary who got to retire and un-retire in a single day. Not many babies can claim that on their résumé!

Lost them, hate them ignore them at national level, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com

14 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
RARE AS IS TRUE LOVE, TRUE FRIENDSHIP IS RARER.
—JEAN DE LA FONTAINE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

IN NO CLEAR TERMS

Given the unpredictability of Trump's approach, uncertainty in the global trading system is likely to persist

THE 90-DAY pause granted earlier on Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs has come to an end. While Trump's team may have been hopeful of signing quick deals—in the initial days, there was talk of closing 90 deals in 90 days—the actual progress made by the administration has been considerably below expectations. Agreements have been struck only with the UK and Vietnam and a framework has been agreed upon with China. More deals are on the cards. Revenues, though, have surged. According to reports, US tariff revenues soared to \$22.8 billion in May. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is hopeful of revenues touching \$300 billion by the end of 2025. But, marked by unpredictability, Trump's tariff policy, on which questions of legality have also been raised, has only increased uncertainty in the global economy.

The last few days have seen a flurry of tariff announcements. On Monday, Washington sent letters to 14 countries detailing the tariffs imposed on them. These are now effective from August 1. According to reports, US imports from these countries stood at \$465 billion last year. The tariffs levied range from 25 to 40 per cent. Even US allies like Japan and South Korea have not been spared. Six of the 14 countries belong to ASEAN—Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar—a grouping that has deepened integration with China. As per reports, the letters, in line with the US-Vietnam agreement, which doubles the tariff for transhipped goods, also say that "good transshipment to evade a higher tariff will be subject to that higher tariff". This seems to be aimed at China. A recent note from Nomura, an investment house, had pointed out that "Asia is experiencing a significant surge in imports from China, raising concerns about potential transshipment activities". Countries such as Japan, Thailand and Malaysia have responded by saying that they'll continue to hold discussions and negotiate with the US. Trump, however, has not stopped there. Following his levies on commodities like steel and aluminium on Tuesday, he announced 50 per cent tariffs on copper. The markets reacted immediately—copper futures soared around 9 per cent. That's not all. The US President has also threatened to impose up to 200 per cent tariffs on pharmaceuticals. He has also warned that members of BRICS would face a 10 per cent tariff.

Trump's tariff policies have upended the global trading architecture. The Global Trade and Research Initiative, a Delhi-based think tank, has underlined that these agreements do not meet WTO standards for FTAs. If Trump's past approach is anything to go by, there is a possibility that the tariffs imposed today could be revised tomorrow. The uncertainty in the global trading system is, therefore, likely to persist.

BLOCK, UNBLOCK

Row over Reuters accounts points to takedown orders too freely given, unreasonable restrictions on free speech

ON SATURDAY NIGHT, X (formerly Twitter) blocked the two official accounts of a global news wire service in India "in response to a legal demand". Soon after, a Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology spokesperson insisted that the government had made no such demand, it had reportedly asked for some posts of Reuters to be taken down on May 7 and 8, during Operation Sindoor. The accounts were restored shortly after. X, however, insists that it was acting on a notice from the Centre, and Reuters handles were among the over 2,000 that it was instructed to block. The quarrel over who was responsible—the Government of India or the social media platform—for blocking Reuters accounts flags larger issues, not least the ease and frequency with which takedowns are being ordered. They raise questions about unreasonable restrictions on free speech and whether many such orders violate Supreme Court judgments, including in the landmark *Shreya Singhal* case.

There are occasions when posts and even accounts may be legitimately taken down. False information and images that incite violence, particularly when they risk making a precarious situation, such as a communal riot, worse. There can be circumstances when national security is at stake that may require intervention by the government on what is posted online. Examples of misinformation and disinformation in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack underscore that in every conflict, now, the digital sphere is a front. Having said that, takedown orders must be the exception and not the rule. And they must conform to the letter and spirit of Article 19, Section 73(b) of the IT Act is particularly problematic—central and state governments of various political hues have issued takedown orders under this provision. Whether or not it constitutes a violation of the *Shreya Singhal* judgment—which struck down Section 66A as unconstitutional—is currently being heard by the Karnataka High Court. However, by any reckoning, blanket orders that seek to censor thousands of accounts at a time constitute state overreach.

Governments must realise that "reasonable restrictions" on free speech must be infrequent, justifiable and narrowly defined. Blanket orders are blunt instruments—they will likely do little to curb bad actors, who have various means at their disposal, such as dummy accounts, bots, etc., while sending a chilling signal vis-à-vis a fundamental right in a constitutional democracy. Episodes such as the controversy over the Reuters handles dent the government's credibility. Going forward, it should not issue orders that are so broad, and target so many accounts that it invites distrust about its intentions on free speech.

JUST FRIENDS

A global study shows that friendzone isn't a dead end. It is where respect and empathy take root

BETWEEN MEN and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, emotion, worship, love, but no friendship," noted Oscar Wilde in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In Bollywood speak, that would be "Ek ladka aur ladki kabhi dost nahin ho sakte"—a dictum generations of Indians have grown up with and that has been the default script for friendships between men and women in films and IRL: Doomed, delicate, and perpetually flirting with something "more". But a recent NYU Stern-MetLife study, which analysed 1.8 billion friendships across nearly 200 countries, finally bursts that bubble. It turns out that men and women do forge genuine, deep friendships, especially in societies where gender equality is strong. And the more liberated a culture is from old-fashioned gender roles, the more natural it becomes for men and women to simply enjoy each other's company without a romantic subtext.

The implications are more radical than they appear—and rooted in the long arc of feminism. Given the deeply entrenched gender inequality, in the 18th century, early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft recast friendship between the sexes as a revolutionary force—the emotional and intellectual bedrock of equal relationships, and the foundation of a happy marriage in which partners enjoyed more than just physical compatibility. It would take another century and another wave of feminism to get sex out of the way and push it into the realm of the platonic—not very successfully, going by popular culture. To paraphrase Nora Ephron's blockbuster *When Harry Met Sally*, "the sex part" still "gets in the way".

But what if it didn't? What if friendship between the sexes could finally shrug off its nudge-nudge-wink-wink baggage? When men and women meet as equals, they model respect, empathy, and emotional openness in workplaces, families, and communities. Sure, attraction can flutter in the background, but mature friendships absorb it with grace. As the study shows, affection doesn't have to moonlight as romance. Sometimes, it just shows up as camaraderie. And honestly, isn't that happily ever after enough?



S Y QURAISHI

I WAS RECENTLY surprised to receive an invitation for a conference on "supply chain operations". When we think of a supply chain, what comes to mind are factories, cargo ships and planes, and e-commerce delivery vans—not ballot boxes, voter slips, and polling tents pitched on Himalayan slopes. But the sheer logistical complexity of conducting elections in India, equalling almost 90 countries, transforms the world's largest democratic exercise into one of the most expansive supply-chain operations. It is powered by what drives every successful supply chain: Strategy, efficiency, will to deliver. In a time when an EC-directed exercise of electoral roll revision is sparking fears of disenfranchisement of a large number of voters in Bihar, the story so far—for the electoral supply chain and EC's painstaking efforts to ensure last-mile coverage—is worth telling.

In 2024, nearly 978 million voters were enrolled. They were physically visited to collect their application form and photograph and deliver to them their photo identity card. Over 12 million polling stations were set up, serviced by 5.5 million EVMs, 15 million personnel, and a medley of transportation modes ranging from helicopters and elephants to mules and boats.

Elections in India are not merely about voting—they are about reaching the last citizen, wherever they may be.

Few would associate democratic participation with altitude or archipelagos. But consider Indira Point, the southernmost tip of Great Nicobar Island. This booth lies 1,400 km from the Indian mainland and just 145 km from Indonesia—but election officials ensure it is equipped like any booth in Delhi or Chennai. At the other extreme is Tashigang in Himachal Pradesh, perched at 15,256 feet, the world's highest polling station. Accessible only via a hair-raising mountain drive from Kaza, it serves a mere 65 voters. Temperatures drop to -35°C, oxygen is thin, and satellite phones are often the only link to the outside world. Before Tashigang, Hikkim, another village in Spiti, held the title, standing at a still-impressive 14,400 feet.

Equally astounding is Warshi, a village near the Siachen Glacier. Here, officials travel 180 km from Leh simply to keep the EC's promise that no voter has to travel more than 2 km. It ensures that five citizens of the village get to vote. In Almi, Himachal, a 15-km trek over seven hours connects officials to a village of 185 voters.

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ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

INDIA'S CULTURAL LEGACY is rich in values, wisdom, and timeless teachings. In many cosmopolitan festivals are celebrations of cultural consciousness, reflections of our connection with nature's rhythms, backed by scientific insights. Guru Purnima, whose significance spans religions, disciplines, and centuries, is one such occasion, giving us a moment to pause and reflect. It encourages us to ask what has changed—what we have carried forward, and what have we left behind? And who played the most profound role in the journey, holding our hands on the muddy, slippery path of life? A mentor's hand, a divine thought, a mother's care, a teacher's word, a friend's faith—any can become our guiding light. Guru Purnima is a sacred opportunity to honour every element that guides us, moulds us, and walks with us on the path of growth.

Guru Purnima, observed on the full moon day of the Ashadha month, marks the day Lord Shiva (Adiguru) imparted the knowledge of yoga to the Saptarishi, the seven sages. It also commemorates the birth anniversary of Maharshi Veda Vyasa. Additionally, it marks the beginning of Chaturmasya, a four-month holy period during the monsoon when sadhus and monks stay in one place and teach their disciples. It's considered an ideal time for deep meditation, chanting, fasting, and connecting with divine energy.

The word "guru" in Sanskrit is a combina-

IN GOOD FAITH

The saint Kabir beautifully compares the guru (teacher) to a kumhar (potter) and the shishya (disciple) to an unbaked clay pot: "Guru kumhar shish kumbh hai, garhi garhi kadhe khot/Antar hath sahar de, bahar mare chot." Just as a potter uses one hand inside the pot to support it gently, and the other hand outside to beat and shape it, a true guru disciplines, corrects, and refines the disciple.

tion of *gu* (darkness) and *ru* (removal of darkness), meaning the one who dispels darkness. In ancient Vedic traditions, the guru-shishya parampara (teacher-disciple lineage) was the foundation of learning, which went hand in hand with character building, a continuous process of imparting values through actions. A guru is not just a teacher; their presence is a living force, a feeling, a constant source of strength, direction, and inspiration. The mother, as the first guru, introduces a child to this new world and guides the first steps of life. The guru imparts knowledge to the seeker, while the sadguru nurtures wisdom.

The saint Kabir beautifully compares the guru to a kumhar (potter) and the shishya to an unbaked clay pot: "Guru kumhar shish kumbh hai, garhi garhi kadhe khot/Antar hath sahar de, bahar mare chot." Just as a potter uses one hand inside the pot to support it gently, and the other hand outside to beat and shape it, a true guru disciplines, corrects, and refines the disciple from outside—through strictness, challenges, and feedback. At the same time, the guru supports and strengthens the disciple internally, with love, compassion, and understanding.

The bond between Vishwamitra and Lord Rama, Guru Ravidas and Meera Bai, Ramanand and Kabir, Guru Nanak Dev ji and the successive Sikh gurus—all exemplify the enduring legacy of spiritual and intellectual exchange in Indian civilisation. These sacred

relationships offered a moral framework to society, as did the bonds between Samarth Guru Ramdas and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Swami Virajanan Sarawati and Swami Dayanand Saraswati in the modern era. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa transformed Swami Vivekananda into a spiritual giant who carried Indian philosophy to the West. Similarly, the divine lineage of Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Sri Yukteswar and Paramahansa Yogananda continues to inspire seekers worldwide.

Guru Purnima is a celebration of learning, wisdom, and gratitude. In an era often overwhelmed by information and competition, the presence of a true teacher—parent, spiritual master or coach, educator, warrior, or even a digital mentor—becomes more crucial, going beyond religion and rituals. The absence of ethics has shattered the social fabric; the mere shadow of the guru keeps one from the path of wrongdoing.

As we move further into the digital age, the timeless message of Guru Purnima encourages us to seek knowledge, rediscover inner guidance, honour our mentors, and become sources of light for others—helping to build a value-driven humanity.

The writer is Union Minister of State for Law and Justice (I/C) and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs

The reliability of India's electoral logistics stands in stark contrast to several advanced and developing democracies where last-mile failures have derailed entire elections. In Nigeria, the presidential election in 2019 was abruptly postponed just hours before polling because materials could not reach polling stations in time. In the UK, the US and Australia, voters were turned away in recent years when ballot papers ran out. Such breakdowns are virtually unimaginable in India, where the scale is exponentially greater, yet even the most far-flung booth—from Himalayan ridges to oceanic islets—is operational on time, with full supplies, and fail-safe alternatives.

It reflects not just planning prowess but a deeper national commitment to the sanctity of the vote. It is not for nothing that the Election Commission of India is considered a Vishwaguru!

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of *An Undocumented Wonder – The Making of the Great Indian Election*

THOSE WHO SHINE A LIGHT

Guru Purnima is an opportunity to honour people who guide us

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JULY 10, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON PUNJAB PROBLEM

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi said a solution to the Punjab problem was definitely much closer than it was four or five months ago. In an interview with Karan Thapar, Gandhi pointed out, however, that the Punjab problem started off with the "morcha" organised by the Akali Dal and that would not end if the government gave further unilateral concessions. "There will have to be some agreement between the two parties for the morcha to be lifted," he said.

INDIA-GERMANY TIES

INDIA AND WEST Germany have agreed im-

prove bilateral relations and cooperate in fighting against terrorism and war in the international arena. An understanding to this effect was forged at the talks between the Foreign Minister of Germany, Hans Dietrich Genscher, and the Minister of State for External Affairs, Khurshed Alam Khan, in New Delhi. Khan hoped Genscher's visit would provide an impetus to mutual economic relations and raise them to the level of "political expectations".

GUJARAT SHAKE-UP

IN A MAJOR administrative shake-up, the Gujarat government shifted its chief secretary, M Shivgnanam, along with five other senior

civil servants, and also appointed Julio Ribeiro as the state's director general of police. The shake-up in the civil police set-up is apparently aimed at giving a face lift to the state administration.

DOWNED AIR INDIA JET

A BRITISH SHIP chartered on behalf of Indian aviation authorities has been withdrawn from the search for the flight recorders of the downed Air India jumbo jet because of congestion at the crash site, according to a British government spokesman. In Cork, Ireland, the crash investigators said that the search was continuing off the southwest Irish coast.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Troubled times: Jayaprakash Narayan leading a march to Parliament in Delhi in March, 1975. THE HINDU ARCHIVES



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"You look terrible. Are you feeling O.K.?"
"I haven't been sleeping well. I have a big test in Physics tomorrow and I've been preparing all weekend."
"Preparing all weekend! That's great. So, do you feel confident?"
"Confident? No! I am anxious to take the test."
"That's nice to know. I've never..."
"...what do you mean it's nice to know! I'm telling you I'm worried about the test and you..."
"...if you are worried about the test, then you are not 'anxious to take the test', but you are 'anxious about taking the test'.
"Anxious about', 'anxious to', what's the difference?"
"Well, when you say you are 'anxious about' something, it means, you are worried about it. For example, if I say, 'I am anxious about having dinner with my boss', it means I'm worried about having dinner with him."
"But why are you worried?"
"It could be any reason. Maybe, I'm afraid that he's going to tell me that I'm not doing a good job or something."
"I see. If I say, the Prime Minister is anxious about meeting the reporters, it means that he is worried about meeting the reporters?"
"That's right. He's not looking forward to meeting them."
"I see. But if I said, the Prime Minister is anxious to meet the reporters, what does that mean?"
"If you are 'anxious to do something', it means that you want to do it very much. So, in the example that you just gave, it means that the Prime Minister wants to meet the reporters very much. There's nothing more that he would rather do."
"So, if I say, 'I'm anxious to have dinner with my boss', it means that I'm looking forward to having dinner with him?"
"That's right. You're not worried about it but looking forward to it. You're eager to have dinner with your boss."
"I see. So 'anxious to' is the same thing as 'eager to'?"
"I guess you could say that! But some people object to the use of 'anxious to'. They think it's wrong to say, 'I am anxious to meet the Prime Minister'. They feel that you should say, 'I'm eager to meet the Prime Minister'.
"Is it wrong then to say, 'I'm anxious to meet...?'
"...no. So many people use the expression 'anxious to' instead of 'eager to' that it would be silly to object to it."
"So, it would be o.k. to say 'I'm anxious to become a politician'?"
"Yes, it would. Besides, politics would be right up your street."
"Right up my street?"
"When you say something is 'right up someone's street', it means it is ideally suited to his/her interests or abilities. For example, I could say, doing crossword puzzles is right up my street. I love it."
"Attending parties is right up Suman's street. Can I say that?"
"Sounds o.k. to me."
Published in *The Hindu* on March 18, 1997.

Turbulent history: lessons from the dark days of Emergency

From bulldozer action, torture in custody, draconian rule, to acts of resistance both at home and abroad, new and old books examine the forces that led to the imposition of Emergency in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, its aftermath and the learning for contemporary times

Ziya Us Salam

April 1976 was a month with long nights and no dawns. Fear hung in the air. There had been reports of an impending doom in Delhi, when a bulldozer would arrive at people's doorstep, demolishing all that they had earned, nursed and nurtured for generations. The worst apprehensions soon came true. "Early on the morning of 13 April 1976, a rusty old bulldozer wheezed and creaked down Asaf Ali Road towards Turkman Gate...," John Dayal and Ajay Bose documents in *For Reasons of State: Delhi Under Emergency* (India Viking/2018).

Kalan Mahal, Turkman Gate, Dujana House all bore the brunt of the machine that spared no brick and mortar structure in its way. As the bulldozer demolished houses that had stood there for generations, a million dreams were crushed. Clearly shaken, women and children soon climbed on to the waiting trucks as commanded by a lower level functionary of the DDA to literally start life from scratch in Nand Nagri, Trilokpuri, Seelampur, and Ranjit Nagar – places they did not know existed. The men protested, some loudly, most feebly.

Many held Jagmohan, the DDA chairman, to be the villain. Others felt Rukhsana Sultan, the enthusiastic proponent of coercive family planning programme to be responsible. She, after all, had Sanjay Gandhi's ear. A few turned to Subhadra Joshi, the local MP of the Congress. Most knew it was the doing of one man: Sanjay Gandhi. No one had the courage to say so. Finally, a thousand residents signed a memorandum

addressed to the Gandhi scion, pleading for the bulldozer action to be halted.

Mountain of complaints

Dayal and Bose wrote: "A small band of Youth Congress workers...met the prince himself. Sanjay Gandhi greeted them coldly when he heard what they had to say. They presented him with a memorandum signed by more than 1,000 people of Turkman Gate demanding the end of the demolition drive. The prince...noddled once and the meeting was over. After they left, the prince tore up the memorandum into little shreds. He had little time for the rabble. He had to catch a plane to Simla. Delhi, apparently, was too hot. For him. And for the unfortunate bulldozer victims, now left to pick up the pieces of their life again. They were among the less fortunate ones.

The victims of police brutality were worse off. The Justice Shah Commission received a multitude of complaints about police excesses. Seasoned politician-lawyer and Governor of Goa, P.S. Sreedharan Pillai, who was a first year law student at Kozhikode Law College at that time, has written in detail about it in *Democracy Enchained Nation Disgraced: Dark Days of India's Emergency* (Konark Publishers/2025). "Hundreds of pieces of evidence were presented before the Justice Shah Commission, clearly implicating Sanjay Gandhi and his coterie in the brutal actions in Turkman Gate and other areas across Delhi....The infamous and brutal torture method known as *uruttal* (rolling) was implemented in most police stations."

Pillai goes on to write of other torture methods, including 'fanning' where the

victim's hands were tied to the blades of a fan which was then turned on. All along he seeks to highlight how the common citizen was dispossessed of all rights, even the basic dignity of food and clothing. Understandably, as Pillai writes, "Foreign nations began to question whether India still deserved to be called a 'civilised community'." Of course, there were Indians abroad whose heart beat for the nation. This is written in much greater detail by Sugata Srinivasaraju in *The Conscience Network: A Chronicle of Resistance to a Dictatorship* (Vintage/2025).

International pressure

Srinivasaraju undertakes a painstaking exercise to chronicle the two years when India was under Emergency rule where the author's scholarship and vast experience comes to the fore. While focussing on many of the international developments around Emergency, he makes space to talk of the challenges and the troubles of the likes of Indians for Democracy founder Anand Kumar who was threatened with deportation for raising his voice against Emergency.

He also writes about Anand Patwardhan, documentary filmmaker who hailed from a family of freedom fighters, and whose film *Waves of Revolution* became an effective means of protest against the Emergency, and Subrahmanian Swamy, the 'maverick academic' who had disguised himself as a Sikh driver of Nanaji Deshmukh in India, and then on a lecture tour across the U.S. stated, "It was completely false to suggest that only a handful of Western-educated elite were complaining about the

Emergency."

Defiance at home
By November 1975, there was resistance in 300 districts across India, Swamy revealed. In the U.S., there were posters highlighting the ongoing wrongs in India, seeking the help of common citizens with posters like, 'Support Political Freedom in India' and 'Support Human Rights in India'.

Meanwhile, the government in India alternated between using its long arm of pliant diplomats and the inevitable recognition that the move had failed written all over. People could not be silenced forever. Writes M.A. Baby in his foreword to Sebastian Joseph's *The Emergency: Twenty-One Months of Draconian Rule* (Konark Publishing/2025), translated from the Malayalam by Radhika P. Menon, "It was a dark chapter in Indian democracy as fundamental rights were suspended, the press was censored, and thousands of political opponents were detained without trial." Then the seasoned politician has a word of caution for contemporary times, writing, "Today, even though there is no formal suspension of civil liberties or censorship of the press, we are witnessing a disturbing trend: people exercising their liberties are often attacked – physically and digitally. The mainstream media, by and large, appears reluctant to question the powers that be."

It reminds us of L.K. Advani's words in 1975, and reproduced in Pillai's book about the media then, "You were merely asked to bend but you chose to crawl." The Emergency's lessons remain valuable.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Some movies revolve around the medical conditions of their protagonists, or their plots are sharply influenced by the onset of illness. A quiz on such films

Ramya Kannan

QUESTION 1

In this biographical film on the life of a Nobel winning mathematician, what was the diagnosis the doctor makes? It was also panned for allowing the portrayal of the rejection of drugs as essential for cure. Name the movie and the condition.

QUESTION 2

In the Tamil movie *Thenali*, Kamal Hassan plays the titular character, a Sri Lankan with all kinds of fears, crashing the holiday of his psychiatrist. What condition is Thenali suffering from?

QUESTION 3

In *Finding Nemo*, one character, Dory, is portrayed as a fish with short term

memory loss. What is the scientific term for this condition?

QUESTION 4

In his role as Christy Brown, Daniel Day Lewis delivers an Oscar winning performance of a young man diagnosed with _____ at birth, which affects most of his body. However, he learns to paint and write with the only unaffected limb in his body, his left foot. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 5

This film is loosely inspired by the writer's own experience with cancer. He reportedly wrote the lead character Adam based on himself. What kind of rare cancer does the protagonist, played by Joseph-Gordon Levitt, have in the delightful and heartwarming drama 50/50?



Visual question:

The female protagonist in this film, Satine, is a courtesan and star performer. She is diagnosed with what condition?

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

1. The screenplay of *Boaz* was written by this Indian cinematic legend. **Ans: Balraj Sahni**
2. This flick made in 1953 is a period piece set in the 16th century depicting an uprising against the Portuguese. **Ans: Boaz**
3. In *Aar Paar*, this is Guru Dutt's profession and this silencing aimed him the direction. **Ans: Taxi driver; Atmaran**
4. This popular star is said to have rejected a role in the romantic comedy *Mr. & Mrs. 55*. **Ans: Vijayanthimala Bai**
5. *Sailaab* made in 1956 was produced by this man. **Ans: Mukul Roy**
6. In *Pyossa*, these actors were supposed to play the roles Mala Sinha and Waheeda Rehman enacted. **Ans: Nargis and Madhubala**
7. Name the Oscar-winner who designed the costumes for *Koogaz Ke Phool*. **Ans: Bhanu Athaiya**
8. Visual: Name this Dadasaheb Phalke awardee. **Ans: V.K. Murthy who was the cinematographer for all the films**
9. **Early Birds:** Mohan Lal Patil [Piyali Tulji] Tom Alan Faith [Tamanjit Bisla] Parimal Das

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

Word of the day

Pan (used as a noun and a verb): cooking utensil consisting of a wide metal vessel; make a sweeping movement; express a totally negative opinion of

Synonyms: tear apart, trash

Usage: The critics panned the performance.

Pronunciation:
newth.live/panpo

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pæn/

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

THE IDEAS PAGE

Minding the minerals gap

Critical mineral clubs can help India secure and diversify supply chains, without becoming extractive or overly reliant on great power blocs



ANINDITA SINHA AND
POOJA RAMAMURTHY

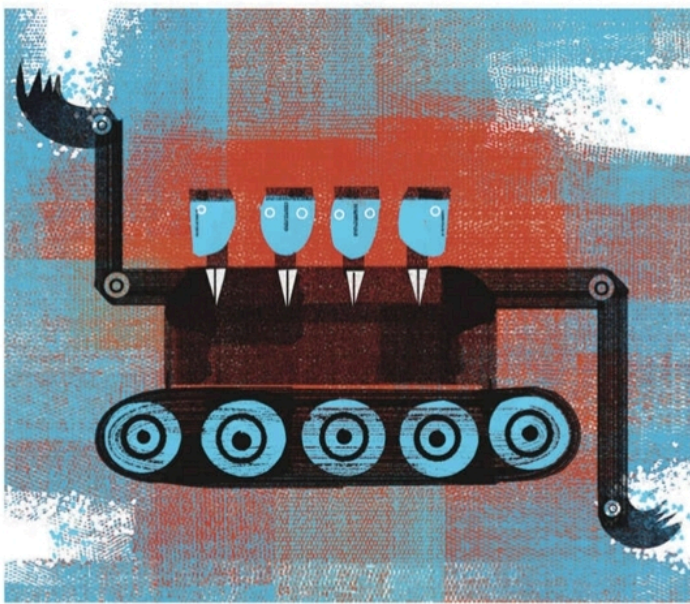
ON JULY 3, the foreign ministers of the Quad countries — India, Japan, Australia and the US — announced the launch of the Critical Minerals Initiative for collaboratively 'securing and diversifying' supply chains. These multilateral groupings or 'clubs' form a key part of India's minerals diplomacy. We analyse why India engages in mineral clubs and how to ensure that these engagements are strategic.

A recent global crisis in rare earth magnets after Beijing's imposition of export controls has shown that India's green industries face significant strategic and economic risks due to heavy dependence on China. Essential enablers of India's green transition, critical minerals are vital for manufacturing technologies such as electric vehicles, solar panels, batteries, and semiconductors. With unexplored domestic reserves and a late start in the global race, India has recently signed a flurry of bilateral minerals partnerships. Agreements with resource-rich countries such as Argentina and Zambia aim to facilitate exploration and mining by the Indian government and firms overseas. However, Indian companies often lack advanced extraction technology and sufficient financial capital to commercialise domestic mining as well as operate competitively in foreign markets. Moreover, their hesitancy about investing abroad in politically unstable jurisdictions highlights the urgent need for de-risking mechanisms and concessional finance to support overseas ventures.

Meanwhile, India's partnerships with countries like the UAE, the US and the UK focus primarily on joint ventures for mineral processing and recycling. Yet, without assured and stable supplies of critical minerals, such processing hubs risk becoming economically unviable, raising the possibility of stranded assets. These agreements must, therefore, be backed by long-term arrangements and embedded in broader supply-chain strategies to ensure their sustainability.

Minilateral, or 'clubs', offer a unique solution where India and partner countries coordinate and co-develop projects. These small groupings of like-minded partners allow for joint technical, financial, and diplomatic resources to support innovation across the minerals value chain. They overcome financial constraints for Indian ventures by tapping into a broader pool of capital, blended finance mechanisms and export credit agencies. Indian companies can also leverage advanced technological expertise from countries such as Australia and Japan regarding exploration, mining and processing. The Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), of which India is part, offers ready-made structures for co-financing and strategic project selection.

Clubs allow India to ensure economic security, diversify supply chains, forge resilient partnerships, and secure its place in the emerging clean-tech order. Yet, India needs to be strategic when engaging in such groupings, to understand how it can balance international partnerships without limiting its national interests and domestic priorities.



C R Sasikumar

There is a risk that India will be labelled a destination for storage, transit and processing, while higher value-added activities such as refining and manufacturing of components could be situated in developed countries. India, once again, risks becoming a demand centre and market for finished goods. There are discussions around shared scientific advancements and R&D in these 'minerals clubs'. However, as seen in the case of vaccines and clean technology, developed countries are hesitant to enable technology transfer and share intellectual property rights to the Global South. India must ensure that it prioritises domestic capacity building and scientific innovation by negotiating and including clauses for investment in R&D and academic exchanges. Further, commercialisation and scaling up of existing ventures in refining, recycling and clean-tech manufacturing — batteries, EVs, advanced materials — must be integrated into a multi-pronged approach along the entire value chain.

The agreements also encourage 'friendly stockpiling of reserves', where member countries share resources. However, as seen with the rise of protectionist leaders such as Donald Trump, a change in administration can alter global trade dynamics, with amended trade rules including increased tariffs and quality controls. India should ensure that there are robust protection mechanisms to prevent such disruptions in resource-sharing without imposed conditionalities or restrictions, pushing for clear terms of access, transparent governance, and reciprocal obligations.

India's ambitions under 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' seek to make the country self-reliant on critical minerals

India's historical ties and growing influence with Africa and Southeast Asia are a key reason for Western countries to engage with it for the extraction of minerals. Indian stakeholders have a better grasp on the local business contexts, relying on their extensive diaspora networks. India can champion the concerns of Global South countries, calling for inclusive growth and developmental sovereignty. India should leverage its role as a bridge between the Global North and South, to position itself as a credible economic and developmental partner for mutual benefit.

als and green technologies, while creating incentives for exports-based minerals industries. However, increasingly, this requires compliance with global environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards. Through participation in these clubs, India can influence discourse around ESG standards, presenting the Global South perspective as opposed to unilateral imposition from Western countries. Membership also encourages India to take a more structured approach to its own domestic ESG practices, aligning industry with partner countries. While improving India's ESG standards may set a period of growing pains, in the long term, it will help make domestic manufacturing competitive.

Finally, India's historical ties and growing influence with Africa and Southeast Asia are a key reason for Western countries to engage with it for the extraction of minerals. Indian stakeholders have a better grasp on the local business contexts, relying on their extensive diaspora networks. India can champion the concerns of Global South countries, calling for inclusive growth and developmental sovereignty. India should leverage its role as a bridge between the Global North and South, to position itself as a credible economic and developmental partner for mutual benefit.

As India seeks to become a global green power, it must remain true to its developmental ethos while engaging strategically to create equitable global value chains, without becoming extractive or overly reliant on great power blocs.

Sinha is a researcher on India's resource diplomacy and Ramamurthy is a climate and energy expert. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The end result of this US withdrawal is that now, as BRICs and other international alliances work to further their own interests, the US sits alone, reduced to barking threats that, if implemented, will spell disaster for its own citizens."

— THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, PAKISTAN

A strategy of exclusion

CAA, NRC and now, Special Intensive Revision — the current government is following a path that leads to disenfranchisement



M A BABY

THE CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar seek to disenfranchise citizens, and change the nature of citizenship in India. Collectively, they carry echoes of the most disturbing episodes of 20th-century history and augur a dangerous, exclusionary path that independent India has consciously avoided thus far.

Two main perspectives exist regarding citizenship: Citizenship by birth (*jus soli*) and citizenship based on race and culture (*jus sanguinis*). Of these, the Indian Constitution upheld the modern perspective of citizenship by birth, after the discussions on citizenship that took place in the Constituent Assembly in August 1949. Even in those discussions, arguments were raised in favour of making religion the basis for citizenship. However, the Constituent Assembly rejected this argument and adopted the position that the granting of citizenship based on religious identities does not befit a modern democratic society. Thus, Articles 5 to 11, which deal with the question of citizenship, were formulated, and Article 5(a) unequivocally stated that anyone born in the territory of India would be an Indian citizen.

With the CAA, religion is a factor in deciding Indian citizenship. The Sangh Parivar claims that the CAA will not affect existing citizens. However, the Union Home Minister stated both inside and outside Parliament, "chronology samjhaye" — that is, to understand the chronology. What is that chronology? First the CAA, then the NRC, that's the order. Those who are unable to produce proper documents will have to undergo verification based on the CAA criteria in order to be included in the NRC. How can one then say that the CAA will not affect existing citizens? During the preparation of the NRC, the citizenship of those who are unable to provide precise details, including the birthplace of their parents, will fall under the shadow of doubt.

We saw a clear picture of this when the NRC was implemented in Assam. Around 19 lakh people were excluded. Two-thirds of those excluded were women. Although the Sangh Parivar's primary targets are religious minorities, even others — especially Adivasis, the poor and uneducated, transgender people — may not possess the requisite documents. Their citizenship, too, will come under question.

It is estimated that about 42 per cent of people in India do not have birth certificates. Crores of our brothers and sisters could cease to be Indian citizens for want of necessary documents. They will either be locked up in detention centres or become a

populace devoid of civil rights. This is the dark reality that is staring us in the face.

The recent moves by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the guise of the SIR of electoral rolls in Bihar suggest that a backdrop effort is underway to prepare the NRC. The SIR process has raised concerns about the disenfranchisement of marginalised groups, especially minorities. This has to be seen as part of a broader pattern of using bureaucratic processes to exclude certain sections from political participation.

Against the backdrop of these developments, we need to recall that the *Kaushitrya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) drew inspiration from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during its formative years in the 1920s and 1930s. Balkrishna Shivram Moonje — president of the Hindu Mahasabha and mentor of RSS founder KB Hedgewar — visit to Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in 1931 was a pivotal moment in the cross-pollination of ideas between Italy and Hindu nationalist circles in India. In his diary, Moonje praised Mussolini's vision for the "military regeneration of Italy" and explicitly stated that "India and particularly Hindu India need some such institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus".

Inspired by what he saw, Moonje established the Central Hindu Military Education Society in 1935 and the Bhoonsali Military School in Nashik in 1937, aiming to militarise 'Hindu India'. The RSS later adopted aspects of this model, with notable similarities in recruitment and organisational structure to the Opera Nazionale Balilla — the Italian fascist youth organisation. Moonje's efforts and admiration for Mussolini's methods have left a lasting impact on the organisational development of the RSS.

Early RSS leaders, including their second chief, MS Golwalkar, and ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, openly admired aspects of Adolf Hitler and Mussolini's regimes. They were especially influenced by the concept of "cultural nationalism" and the fascist model of organising society around a dominant ethnic or religious identity. Golwalkar's book *My View on Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) explicitly referenced admiration for Hitler's policies, arguing that India should be defined as a Hindu nation and that minorities should be treated similarly to how Nazis treated Jews. This book played a key role in shaping the RSS's ideology and the organisation to fascist thought. In his *Bunch of Thoughts*, Golwalkar described Muslims, Christians and communists as India's "internal threats".

Those who lament that progressive values of secularism and socialism are foreign concepts are in fact using regressive foreign ideas and methods to carry forward their divisive communal agenda. Soon after enacting the discriminatory Nuremberg Laws in 1935, Nazi Germany completely abolished all democratic rights and stopped conducting elections. Taken together, the CAA, NRC and SIR of electoral rolls in Bihar that are being implemented and deemed appropriate for present-day India are a disturbing portent.

The writer is general secretary of the CPI(M)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RELEASE THE REPORT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Address misgivings' (IE, July 9). The report of the committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on environmental clearance to the Great Nicobar project must be in the public domain in order to divulge details to all the sections of society. The Great Nicobar Island project has strategic importance when it comes to countering China's increasing military engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, the government can't withhold the report in the name of national security. It is directly affecting the indigenous Shompen and other tribes. Transparency can't be clouded amid enhancement of infrastructure.

Indrajeet Shukla, Lucknow

RIGHT TO VOTE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'It's not just about a voter list' (IE, July 9). The Special Intensive Revision of the electoral roll in Bihar cannot be made light of as a mere routine exercise of updating the voters' list. The enormity of the exercise can be gauged from the very real risk of lakhs of eligible voters being disenfranchised. Disenfranchising lakhs of citizens for want of documentary proof of citizenship as prescribed by the Election Commission in the name of a "clean-up" goes against all logic. Citizenship and voting rights are not something to be undervalued or trifled with; they are of paramount im-

portance and must not be made a casualty to bureaucratic convenience. The Election Commission is not let justified in demanding documentation that many voters do not possess and threatening them with the deletion of their names from the electoral roll in case of noncompliance.

G David Milton, Marathanchode

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'It's not just about a voter list' (IE, July 9). Of the 11 documents prescribed by the Election Commission of India for the voters in Bihar to convince of their citizenship, it is shocking that Aadhaar is not one among them but a Domicile Certificate is. Now, there is a deadline before the respective district revenue authorities to get 125 million certificates — which is said to be issued on the basis of Aadhaar. What an irony!

Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

BEAT THE HEAT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cool clothing in times of heat' (IE, July 9). The week-end has been a revelation for me about the choice of clothing we have to day-keeping in view the geographic reality. The government's efforts, however scanty, are steps in the right direction. Wholehearted participation by the citizens of India is the requirement of the day to avoid another warmer year and decade for humanity. Constantly improving technology and better fabrics should pave the way for a cooler India.

Sanjay Raina, Greater Noida



MOHAN KUMAR

Not pulling the punches

BRICS declaration reflects a united stand of Global South

THE BRICS SUMMIT took place in Rio de Janeiro under the chairmanship of Brazil on July 6 and 7, the first after the commencement of US President Donald Trump's second tenure. Also, this is effectively the first BRICS summit with its expanded membership, which includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The leaders' declaration is 125 paragraphs long and covers every relevant and important topic.

The fact that the BRICS leaders were able to come up with a declaration based on consensus is noteworthy. The bloc now comprises members of all hues and colours, and there was some talk before the Rio meeting that its diversity would prevent the forum from taking united positions on controversial issues. The declaration reflects the strong views held by the Global South countries on a range of issues. Their leaders arguably demonstrated more unity than the G7 leaders of the West, who met recently in Alberta, Canada. The BRICS leaders produced two specific statements: One on climate finance and the other on Agglomeration.

Before the summit, Trump had warned BRICS countries that if they took anti-American positions (for example, proposing an alternative to the dollar) they would attract additional tariffs. In the final declaration, there is no ex-

PLICIT mention of replacing the dollar, but serious concern has been voiced within BRICS about the rise of unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures that distort trade and are inconsistent with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules. While the US was not named, there are no prizes for guessing the country in question. Perhaps, to balance things out, the declaration also talks of protectionism under the guise of environmental objectives threatening international trade. A subtle but indirect reference to the EU's proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

Reforming the UN finds prominence in the declaration. Perhaps for the first time, however, China and Russia stated their support for the aspirations of Brazil and India to play a greater role in the UN, including the Security Council. Their support just falls short of explicitly endorsing the candidature of both countries for the permanent membership of the Security Council. The urgent need to reform the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO also finds a mention, including the restoration of the two-tier system of dispute settlement. On the conflict in Ukraine, the declaration basically recalls the national positions of all BRICS members while supporting the principles of the UN Charter. There is talk of allowing

diplomacy and mediation to prevail.

It is the situation in the Middle East that elicits strong language from the BRICS leaders. It is possible that this shift is due to the newly accepted member states, namely Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE? The declaration expresses grave concern about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, the continuous Israeli attacks against Gaza and the obstruction of the entry of humanitarian aid. Describing the Gaza Strip as an inseparable part of the occupied Palestinian territory, the BRICS leaders exhort the parties to engage in good-faith negotiations to achieve an immediate ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. They go on to endorse an independent Palestinian state comprising a unified West Bank and Gaza Strip.

For India watchers, the issue in question was what kind of formulation there would be on terrorism. The leaders condemned, in the strongest terms, the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir that took place on April 22 and reaffirmed their commitment to combatting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. In a clear victory for India, there are references to combatting the cross-border movement of terrorists and terror financing. This should strengthen India's case against Pakistan at the Financial Action Task

Force (FATF) meetings in Paris.

It is well known that the G20 forum is under some stress because of serious bilateral differences between the US and South Africa. Indeed, US participation at the G20 summit in Johannesburg later in the year is doubtful. In the light of this, the BRICS leaders reiterated their conviction that the G20 is the premier forum for international economic cooperation, while expressing their strong support to the South African presidency.

It is clear that BRICS has not pulled any punches in its final declaration. This is despite the absence of China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin. Of course, the leaders of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE also did not show up, choosing to send their representatives. Still, it is a remarkable declaration with a lot of plausibility on a range of important issues.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated in February this year that it's not normal for the world to have a unipolar power. He went on to add that eventually, a multipolar world would emerge. BRICS could not agree more with Rubio.

The writer is a former Indian ambassador to France and currently dean/professor at OP Jindal Global University. Views are personal

Is palm oil bad for health? Here's what the science says

ANONNA DUTT NEW DELHI, JULY 9

A FOOD and beverage industry association has said that use of labels such as "palm oil free" or "no palm oil" are misleading, and rooted more in marketing than science.

The Indian Food and Beverage Association (IFBA) said in a statement issued on Tuesday that palm oil has been consumed by Indians since the 19th century, and that the oil has a well-rounded fatty acid profile.

Palm oil is among the most affordable and versatile edible oils globally, valued for its long shelf-life and neutral taste. Most packaged foods, including potato chips, biscuits, ice cream, and chocolates use palm oil.

Of late, the oil has been getting a bad rap from online influencers, celebrities, and fitness gurus. For instance, actor-producer Jacky Bhagani recently called palm oil "the most dangerous thing in life". "It's suicidal to consume palm oil," he said.

Are such claims scientific? Or are these just a marketing gimmick, as the IFBA claims?

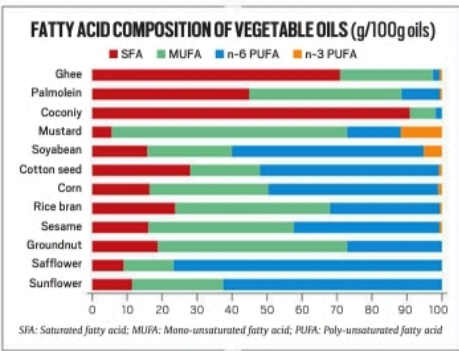
High in saturated fats...

All oils mainly contain three types of fatty acids: the "bad" saturated fatty acid (SFA) and the "good" mono-unsaturated fatty acid (MUFA) and poly-unsaturated fatty acid (PUFA).

Consumption of oils with high SFAs is known to increase the levels of bad cholesterol (low density lipoproteins) which in turn increases inflammation in the body, decreases insulin sensitivity, and enhances the tendency of clot formation. Therefore, consuming such oils can increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as the onset of type-2 diabetes.

Fats that remain solid or semi-solid at room temperatures – including palm oil, coconut oil, ghee, butter and land are high in saturated fatty acids (See Chart).

According to the Indian Dietary Guidelines, prepared by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), coconut oil and ghee have the highest SFA content, around 90 grams and 70 grams respectively per 100 grams of oil. Palmolein, the liquid part of palm oil, contains around 40 grams of SFA and 40 grams of MUFA, with the rest being



PUFA. Mustard, safflower, and sunflower have the lowest SFA content, less than 10 grams per 100 gram of oil.

drogenation of liquid vegetable oils. The addition of hydrogen atoms into such oils converts liquid oil to semi-solid, and increases their shelf-life.

Studies have shown that the consumption of TFAs can increase the risk of diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy), and disorders of the nervous system.

Since palm oil is semi-solid at room temperature, it does not need to be hydrogenated. In fact, the rise in popularity of palm oil from the 1990s onwards was driven by health concerns about hydrogenated oils.

Most oils also contain minor components such as tocopherols and sterols – naturally occurring antioxidants that give oils their distinct flavours. Palm oil contains tocopherols, which help lower blood cholesterol levels.

Mix of oils, in moderation

According to the ICMR's guidelines, a mix of oils that are low in SFA and high in PUFA should ideally be used. This would mean avoiding palm oil as much as possible.

But the alternatives that are often pushed by influencers are not necessarily much healthier. Some of them swear by ghee and coconut oil, which have an even higher content of SFAs.

At the end of the day, an individual's health outcomes are determined by a number of factors that go beyond just the type of oil consumed.

The ICMR's guidelines suggest that consumption of oil should be limited to between 20 and 50 grams (four to 10 teaspoons) per person per day. Those living sedentary lifestyles should stick to the lower end of this range (20-30 grams).

The guidelines recommend getting most of one's fat requirement from nuts and seeds such as walnuts, flaxseed, chia seeds, soyabean, and fenugreek seeds. Marine fish, other sea foods, and eggs are also good natural sources of PUFA, they say.

The ICMR recommends that oils should not be reheated. This is because once heated, PUFAs in the oil start to oxidize, and form harmful compounds that increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancers. If one does have to reuse oil, such oil should not be used for high-temperature cooking, and should be consumed within a day or two.

THIS WORD MEANS NETZAH YEHUDA BATTALION

Battalion of ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jews; accused of committing human rights violations in Palestine

ALIND CHAUHAN NEW DELHI, JULY 9

FIVE ISRAELI soldiers were killed and 14 wounded during an operation in northern Gaza, the Israeli military announced on Tuesday. Four of the deceased belonged to the Netzah Yehuda battalion.

Battalion of Haredi Jews

Formerly known as Nahal Haredi, the Netzah Yehuda ("Judah's Victory") battalion was raised in 1999 for young Jews who dropped out of ultra-Orthodox or Haredi religious schools. This was to accommodate the community's stringent religious practices, such as avoiding interaction with women who are also required to serve in the Israeli military.

The battalion is a part of the Kfir Brigade, the largest infantry brigade in the Israel Defense Forces. Most of the recruits come from underprivileged backgrounds, or are settlers who have been born and raised in Israel-occupied Palestinian territories.

The motto of the battalion is "And your camp must be holy," a line taken from Torah, the compilation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

Allegations against unit

Carlo Aldrovandi, assistant professor at Trinity College Dublin, wrote in *The Conversation* that the members of the Netzah Yehuda battalion literally believe that they are in a "holy mission".

"This contributes to a culture that encourages unrestrained violence against non-Jewish populations," he wrote.

Over the years, the battalion has been accused of a number of human rights violations, such as abusing, killing, shooting dead, sexually assaulting, and torturing Palestinian civilians.

In January 2024, a 78-year-old Palestinian-American died after being captured by Netzah Yehuda soldiers in an Israel-occupied area of the West Bank. The autopsy revealed that he died of a heart attack after the soldiers left him tied up and gagged.

In April 2024, an opinion piece by *The Haaretz* described the battalion as "a kind of an independent militia that doesn't obey the army's rules".

Role in Gaza

The Netzah Yehuda battalion has seen combat across Gaza since October 7, 2023. In July 2024, an investigation by CNN revealed that former commanders of the battalion had been promoted to senior positions in the IDF, and were training Israeli ground troops and running operations in Gaza.

A whistleblower told CNN that the battalion's soldiers "pretty much get a carte blanche, where they can do more or less whatever they want" in the Strip. He also said that these soldiers get two weeks off as compensation for killing a "terrorist" which was "quite an attractive reward for someone that's spending a lot of time in the military".

In April 2024, the United States sought to sanction members of the battalion for abuses committed in the West Bank. These sanctions, however, never came through.



Soldiers during the Netzah Yehuda battalion swearing-in ceremony in 2013. The NYT



UDIT MISRA

A GOVERNMENT release over the weekend claimed that "India is not only the world's fourth largest economy, it is also one of the most equal societies today". Using data from the World Bank's latest Poverty and Equity Brief, it said India's Gini Index was at 25.5, which made it the world's "fourth most equal country...after the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Belarus", reflecting how fruits of economic progress were being shared "more evenly across its population".

The Gini Index or Gini coefficient, named after the early 20th century Italian statistician Corrado Gini, has historically been the most commonly used measure of inequality. It measures inequality on a scale from 0 to 1 (or 0% to 100%), with higher values indicating higher inequality.

The government's claim has been contested both by academics who study inequality, as well as observers who see India as a country with high and rising inequality.

An incomplete picture

The paragraph in the World Bank's *Poverty and Equity Brief* referenced by the government includes important qualifiers that the release did not mention:

"India's consumption-based Gini index improved from 28.8 in 2011-12 to 25.5 in 2022-23, though inequality may be underestimated due to data limitations... The World Inequality Database shows income inequality rising from a Gini of 52 in 2004 to 62 in 2023. Wage disparity remains high, with the median earnings of the top 10 percent being 13 times higher than the bottom 10 percent in 2023-24".

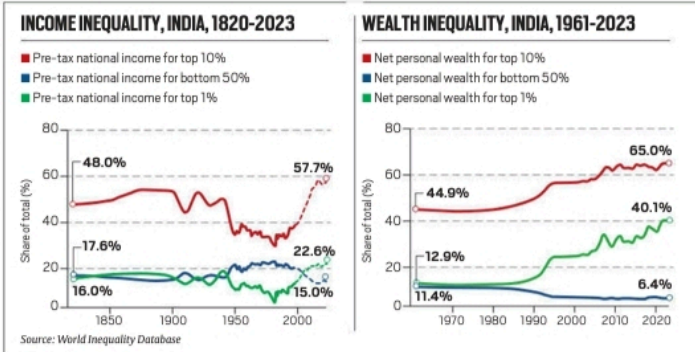
The government release does not mention the "data limitations" that the World Bank itself has flagged, and does not take into account the Gini Index value calculated by the World Inequality Database, which shows a rise in the Gini Index from 2004 to 2023.

Consumption-based Gini

To map income inequality, countries often conduct surveys on income data. India, however, collects data on consumption, not income.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS Measuring inequality

Referring to a World Bank brief, the government has claimed India is world's 'fourth most equal country'. What does this conclusion miss? What are pitfalls of relying solely on consumption-based Gini Index?



When it comes to inequality, this makes a big difference because variation in income is far more than variation in consumption. As people earn more, the bulk of their additional income is turned into savings. As such, a Gini Index of inequality using consumption data underestimates the level of inequality in a society.

Also, economists such as Anmol Somanchi, who works at the World Inequality Lab (run by the Paris School of Economics and University of Berkeley, California), have pointed out that it is misleading to compare India's consumption-based Gini Index value with that of other countries, which use an income-based Gini.

In short, the use of consumption-based Gini underestimates inequality and undermines comparability with other countries.

Limitations of survey data

It is widely acknowledged that the gap between the bottom 10% and top 10% of the population is widening, even if it is assumed that everyone in the country is becoming better off.

However, the calculation of inequality is unlikely to capture the widening gap. This is because surveys, whether they are about consumption or income, typically fail in capturing the data of the richest. This is for two broad reasons.

One, the rich exhibit what is technically called a "differential non-response",

Somanchi said. In other words, the rich tend to decline to participate in surveys much more than the poor do.

Two, the way the sampling of these surveys works, the chances of the richest persons in the country being drawn in a random sample are pretty low. This becomes a big reason for underestimation of inequality if just a handful of the extremely rich are driving up inequality.

Thus, if 90% of the population is not "unequal" while most of the inequality is being driven by the top 1%, any survey that fails to sample the top 1% will fail to capture the real picture on inequality.

Researchers have flagged this underestimation in several other countries such as the US, the UK, and many other European countries as well.

A way to correct for this lapse in sampling is to use the survey data in conjunction with income tax data, which is uniquely accurate in capturing the incomes of the top earners in a country. Studies that did this in the UK, the US, and elsewhere found that relying solely on survey data underestimated inequality.

The World Inequality Lab Gini Index, which shows that inequality in India has increased, uses income tax data to correct for this gap.

Problems with Gini Index

The Gini Index too does not capture all aspects of the inequality picture. This is because

it is not "sensitive" to changes at the extremes of a population, but is overly sensitive to changes in the middle.

This has to do with the way the Gini Index is calculated – and experts have been urging for close to 50 years now that other measures should be considered. One option is the Palma Ratio, named after a Chilean economist who suggested looking at the shares of income (or wealth) at the extremes – the bottom 50% and the top 10%, for instance.

When such comparisons are calculated with the use of income tax data (apart from survey data), the emerging picture is grim: it shows income inequality is now worse than in the colonial period, and the top 1% earn far more than the bottom 50%.

Bigger picture on inequality

The point of studying inequality is to allow governments to tailor appropriate policies to alleviate excessive inequality. However, an inaccurate reading of inequality can lead to policies that actually exacerbate existing inequalities. If high inequality is not contained, it can create social unrest and eventually militate against sustained economic growth.

Relying solely on the Gini Index, that too with severe data limitations, can obscure the reality. As explained above, a given version of the Gini Index could be falling even when inequality between the two extremes of the population may be rising.

In India's Global South outreach, give-and-take, and a delicate balance

SHUBHAJIT ROY NEW DELHI, JULY 9

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's visit to Brazil for the BRICS leaders' summit was one of the longest he has made in the last 11 years.

While he has usually included a stopover visit to a country on the way to the summit destination and another on the way back, this time he included as many as four destinations. The PM arrives in India on Thursday morning from Namibia, his last stop.

The PM's July 2-9 visit, which also included stops in Ghana, Trinidad & Tobago, and Argentina, has been framed as India's outreach to the Global South.

India and the Gaza war

The Global South outreach has its context.

Turn away from Israel

At the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting in Russia in June 2024, India joined in grouping in expressing "grave concern at the deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular the unprecedented escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli military operation that led to mass civilian displacement, death and casualties, and destruction of civilian infrastructure".

This was the sharpest statement by Delhi criticising Israel in a multilateral grouping till then. Its positioning was intended to protect its leadership position in the Global South, for which China is a contender.

This was repeated during the BRICS leaders' summit in Rio de Janeiro this week in the

context of both the Israeli-American strikes against Iran and the continuing war in Gaza.

On Iran, the BRICS declaration said: "We condemn the military strikes against the Islamic Republic of Iran since 13 June 2025, which constitute a violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and express grave concern over the subsequent escalation of the security situation in the Middle East." The declaration also expressed "grave concern about the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with the resumption of continuous Israeli attacks against Gaza and obstruction of the entry of humanitarian aid into the territory".

These more recent statements are seen as strategic hedging and a balancing act by New Delhi. While Israel is an important strategic

partner with which India has a deep defence and security relationship, it also has an important constituency in the Global South, where many view Israel as the aggressor.

Pak, terror concerns

While Israel stood firmly with India during Operation Sindoor, not many countries from the Global South did. India conducted military strikes against terror locations and military bases in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, but several countries took Islamabad's claims of civilians and civilian infrastructure being targeted at face value and without questions.

New Delhi then despatched multi-party political delegations to various capitals to explain its position, and to display its internal political unity against Pak-sponsored terrorism. The target audience was the po-

litical class in these countries, many of which are part of the Global South and currently members of the UN Security Council.

It is important in this context that the BRICS leaders' declaration adopted in Rio late on Sunday night condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack "in the strongest terms", and reaffirmed the commitment of BRICS "to combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the cross-border movement of terrorists, terrorism financing and safe havens".

The Pahalgam paragraphs are a gain for New Delhi – having succeeded in persuading the other powers in the grouping, including China, to sign off on them – even as it has yielded on the paragraphs on Gaza and Iran. China has previously blocked attempts to sanction Pakistan-based terrorists and terrorist groups at the UN.

EXPLAINED DIPLOMACY

[OUR TAKE]

Right intent, wrong policy

Reactive vehicle bans can't fix Delhi's toxic air. Long-term planning, sustained investment in public transport, and equitable policy will help

On Tuesday, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) amended its controversial order banning refuelling of end-of-life vehicles (ELVs) in Delhi, deferring its implementation to November 1. The initial order—targeting diesel vehicles over 10 years old and petrol ones older than 15—was enforced starting July 1. Citing technical glitches in the number plate recognition system and integration failures in vehicle databases, the Delhi government had argued that such a policy, enforced in isolation, would only push vehicle owners into neighbouring National Capital Region (NCR) towns to refuel, defeating the very purpose of the crackdown. CAQM revised its plan to include five other high-density NCR districts in the initial rollout. The rest of NCR will follow from April 1, 2026.

The intent—to tackle Delhi's toxic air—is honourable, but the approach is flawed. The primary flaw in the plan lies in using the age of the vehicle as the singular criterion for mark pollution levels. An older vehicle need not necessarily pollute more. A well-maintained but older car that travels limited distances is likely to be less polluting than a relatively new but constantly running SUV that has logged the miles. Then, the plan isn't new (only the enforcement is); it dates back to 2015 and was validated by the Supreme Court in 2018, and by some estimates almost 80% of Delhi's older vehicles were already off the roads before the UT's government decided earlier this year that this was one of the magic spells required to address air pollution; CAQM dutifully followed with an order. The fact that all these vehicles going off the roads hasn't resulted in a reduction in air pollution tells the story. While enforcing Supreme Court-validated orders is laudable, the Delhi government has burnt precious financial and political capital chasing a mirage.

Rather than reactive bans, Delhi needs proactive planning. That means continuing to expand the city's electric bus fleets, fixing last-mile metro connectivity, and making the city safer and friendlier for pedestrians and cyclists. Also, the other polluters—construction dust, burning waste, and unregulated industrial units—must also be held to account. Environmental regulation has to be fair and broad-based, not selectively enforced on the most visible. Delhi's pollution problem will not be solved by technocratic quick fixes. It demands cultural change, sustained investment, and equitable policy. If the administration succeeds in combining public participation with smart governance, it could still clear the air in the choking Capital.

Slipping on heritage conservation in India

A UNESCO advisory body recommending deferral of India's bid to put 12 forts associated with Maratha king Shivaji on the World Heritage List should serve as a wake-up call for the country's heritage governance authorities. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos), which vets applications for inclusion in the Unesco list, said India's nomination had "management, documentation and impact assessment" deficits. The current application, therefore, could not establish Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the forts, a key criterion for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

This is a sharp indictment of India's heritage conservation and points to a larger capacity deficit regarding documentation and preservation. Icomos's assessment reveals that there are lingering gaps, especially in the management of sites and monuments, as well as collating and analysing documentation in keeping with rigorous historiographical standards and principles. India already has 43 World Heritage Sites, and more could be added to the list, which raises their tourism prospects and, thereby, revenue potential, if the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and other authorities get their act together. The ASI has limited means and trained personnel and is spread too thin, given the size of the country and its rich and layered inheritance. These deficits need bridging: Heritage conservation helps to showcase India's civilisational inheritance and can help boost local economies.

Conservation needs expertise and the involvement of trained personnel. States and local bodies must partner with the Centre and ensure heritage is preserved for posterity. In the case of the Maharashtra forts, the need is, as Icomos has suggested, for more robust protection for the smaller forts, better conservation practices, integration of GIS mapping for risk management, and improved upkeep to prevent structural degradation. That task should be taken up immediately.

Navigating a tricky new era for Brics

The bloc has expanded and gained global heft. But its ability to articulate a singular vision will be tested during a period of global uncertainty

The 17th summit of the Brics group of emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, offered insights into an institution undergoing profound changes amid an extremely disorderly and unsettling international situation.

In form and shape, Brics is a transformed entity today. With the admission of Indonesia this year as a full member, Brics has morphed from a minilateral club of five nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—into a medium-sized multilateral entity with broader representation. The admission of Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates inside the tent, and the presence of 10 more partner countries including Nigeria and Vietnam, which are apparently waiting in the wings to also come in, mean that the Brics family has multiplied and is embarking on a second innings since it was first founded in 2009.

Counting full members and partner countries together, Brics has 20 nations under its ambit, as if it were a parallel G20 comprising only EMDCs. It is in recognition of this expanded reality that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi has called for redefining the very acronym Brics so as not to indicate the initials of the names of the five core members but to convey a shared functional purpose of 'Building Resilience and Innovation for Cooperation and Sustainability'.

The present-day Brics has more collective heft and legitimacy than before as a powerful bloc of EMDCs which is doubling down on the twin goals of advancing multilateralism and multipolarity. With the strength of numbers lending greater self-confidence and bringing more issue areas under its ambit, the Brics we saw in Rio appeared bolder in critiquing and opposing unilateral actions and coercive measures ranging from trade tariffs and economic sanctions by the US, to military attacks and violations of international law by Israel against Iran and the Palestinians.

Although Brics did not make massive headway on the long-standing push by China and Russia for creating an alternative global currency for de-dollarisation of the international financial system, the front it put up at Rio against US President Donald Trump's trade wars and its emphatic call for multilateral solutions through consultation and inclusion of EMDCs and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), did get Trump's goat. His threat to impose additional trade tariffs on countries "aligning themselves with the anti-American policies of BRICS" was timed as a pre-emptive strike to rattle leaders at the Rio summit.

As many Brics members are bilat-

erally negotiating with the US to ease Trump's wave of tariffs, a dual game is underway.

On the one hand, Brics as a whole is denouncing American trade protectionism and seeking to boost intra-Brics trade and investment flows. On the other, the bloc members are responding to Trump's warnings by professing that they are not seeking confrontation with the US and that Brics "will never be directed against any third countries."

In light of Trump's attempted forlorn shift in the modalities of the international system to bilateralism, Brics is rallying around the principle of multilateralism. But in practice, individual Brics countries are pragmatic and are seeking to pacify the US on a one-on-one basis to preserve their respective economic interests. It will be a tricky balancing act and will place limits on Brics becoming overtly anti-American or anti-western.

India, in particular, has been wary of turning Brics into an ideological crusade against western imperialism. However, this does not mean India is status quoist and happy with the western-dominated global institutional architecture. At Rio, Modi presented the Global South as a "victim of double standards" on developmental and security matters and likened international institutions lacking adequate representation of poor nations to a mobile with a SIM card but no network." He even cited the expansion of Brics as an inspiration for implementing long overdue reforms in the United Nations and the Bretton Woods bodies.



Sreeram Chaulia



In the light of Trump's attempt to force the international system to shift to bilateralism, Brics is rallying around the principle of multilateralism. AP

Lobbying to mainstream the concerns and interests of the Global South is only going to increase as Brics expands and draws in more countries into its circle. The Global South is being put at the forefront of Brics not merely for rhetorical reasons but because it is the common denominator on which each and every Brics member will unhesitatingly concur.

Still, in spite of the clear signs of unity and consensus as reflected in the Rio Declaration of Brics, internal strains and divisions persist as the institution steps into a new era. The competition and rivalry between India and China is the central geopolitical fault line of Brics and will stay that way.

Modi shot two unmistakable arrows at China in Rio. His call that no country should use critical minerals "solely for its own interests or as a weapon" was aimed at China's hardball tactics of imposing export restraints on rare-earth metals which have caused panic among businesses worldwide. He also slammed the

strategy of "giving silent consent to terrorism for personal or political gain", a dig at China's unrelenting support and shelter to Pakistan. While the Rio Declaration avoided logjam on countering terrorism, unlike what happened at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Qingdao, China, the reinforced perception of Beijing as a stumbling block to New Delhi's rise means that this factor will inevitably impact intra-Brics politics and internal balancing within the expanded grouping.

It is fair to conclude that Brics has grown more relevant in world affairs as a result of its expansion. But its new avatar will be acutely tested, pulled and hauled in different directions during a period of global uncertainty and widening conflicts. Whether a brave new Brics has arrived to fundamentally and rapidly reorder the world remains to be seen.

Sreeram Chaulia is dean, Jindal School of International Affairs. The views expressed are personal.

Bihar SIR threatens the credibility of elections

Without any warning, on June 24, the Election Commission announced a month-long Special Intensive Revision (SIR). At the behest of SIR, 80 million Biharis are being asked to fill forms.

Many also have to produce documents to "prove" their citizenship within 30 days to be eligible to vote. The electoral rolls were cleaned just six months ago. So, what is the urgent need for this new revision? How can the onus be on existing voters to "prove" their citizenship?

Oddly, on the ground, district offices are invoking the Constitution to ramrod this draconian exercise. The EC also has an impossible deadline.

After an uproar, the Commission has clarified that in case of local investigation "the ERO can take a decision on the basis of local investigation". But this is an open invitation for corrupt officials, middlemen and petty gatekeepers to have a field day.

As of July 2025, Bihar has generated 114 million Aadhaar cards for its projected 130 million population; 83 million Biharis also have their names included on ration cards. But the EC is neither accepting Aadhaar nor ration cards as identity proofs.

The 11 documents enlisted by the EC, from passports to matriculation certificates, are hard to come by for most people. For example, the 2022 caste survey shows that only 15% of Biharis have graduated from Class 10. Nearly 40% of Biharis women of reproductive age have never been to school as per the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey (NFHS). Elderly women have even higher levels of illiteracy. 75% of eligible women voters above 45 years were illiterate in the 2011 Census. As a result, the largest exclusions are expected to be amongst the most downtrodden.

First, the unlettered; 29% of Biharis men

could not read a form in 2011. Even amongst the younger age group of 15-54 years, 24% of men were illiterate in the 2019-21. Biharis women are nearly twice as likely to be uneducated. So, a callous state which has for generations not bothered to invest in mass education in Bihar, now has glib civil servants and harried booth-level officers going door-to-door distributing forms to a largely semi-literate electorate.

Second, Bihar also has high levels of poverty and out-migration. More than half of Bihar households have at least one earning member who is a migrant, mostly within India. When they are working hard in the fields in Punjab and metro lines in Bengaluru, expecting them to rush back to their home villages in Bihar and produce citizenship documents at short notice is ludicrous. Most will now be deleted from electoral rolls, unless they can magically submit.

Third, Bihar also has a large young population. 47% of Biharis are under the age of 40. Most of them will now be expected to provide not only proof of their own birth, but if below 38 years then of one and if below 21 then of both their parents.

How can rural Biharis, especially in flood-prone areas, be expected to preserve parchments of paper from half a century ago? Even in 2005-6, only 5.8% of births in Bihar were registered. Despite improvements, by 2019-21, at best 56% of children born were issued a birth certificate. After all, even now only 76% of deliveries (and 71% among Dalits) take place in a health facility.

Fourth, caste discrimination in Bihar is rife. One of the acceptable documents for SIR is land records. But 86% of Dalit households do not own land. As per the 2022 caste survey, 43% of Dalits in Bihar are poor. Musahars are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and amongst the most discriminated. There are 2.7 million Musahars in Bihar, but in 2011 only 17% of Musahar women were literate.

Fifth, Bihar has a sizeable 18 million Muslims (17% of the population). They are the most excluded from public services, often even more than Dalits.

For example, only 26% of Muslim children attend an anganwadi compared to 34% of Dalits. Muslim children in Bihar are also less likely to be vaccinated, receive supplementary nutrition and be delivered in a public health facility.

The SIR exercise comes after the Congress and its allies alleged that electoral rolls were tampered with in Maharashtra before the assembly elections. The bogey of illegal immigrants has also been invoked to justify SIR. The previous Bihar assembly elections were decided by a wafer-thin margin. The NDA polled 37.26% votes and secured 125 seats while the Mahagathabandhan finished with 37.23% votes and 110 seats. Any arbitrary disenfranchisement of voters will cast a shadow over the sanctity of the elections.

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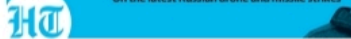


The 11 documents enlisted by the EC, from passports to matriculation certificates, are hard to come by for most people. PH

[VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY | PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE]

Our partners know how to apply pressure in a way that will force Russia to think about ending the war, not launching new strikes

On the latest Russian drone and missile strikes



In West Asia, India could be the impartial arbitrator

The renewed escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since October 7 has dominated global headlines, but beneath this crisis lies a significant diplomatic opportunity for New Delhi. Amid heightened global tensions and complex regional rivalries, India is uniquely positioned to facilitate dialogue among Iran, Israel, and the US. Strategically located at the new geopolitical crossroads, India holds distinctive economic and political leverage.

India enjoys historical and civilisational ties with Israel, Iran, and the Gulf States, reinforced recently by a strategic partnership with the US. Crucially, India's diplomatic posture is not viewed as partisan, granting it a rare legitimacy and trust in this scenario.

Under Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, India has redefined and strengthened its international role, increasing its global reputation, particularly as a leading voice for the Global South. Leveraging longstanding civilisational connections across Asia, West Asia, and Africa, India has revitalised partnerships in the Gulf region. Its growing soft power, amplified by a talented global diaspora, further enhances India's regional standing and insights.

Historically, India's relations with Iran have encompassed trade, economic collaboration, and cultural exchanges. For centuries, Persian was a lingua franca across the region, reflecting deep civilisational bonds. Concurrently, India's relationship with Israel has expanded significantly, encompassing defence collaboration, technology exchanges, agricultural innovation, and strategic investments in ports like Haifa in Israel and Chabahar in Iran. India's robust partnership with the US, built upon shared democratic values, strong trade ties, and aligned security interests, further solidifies its potential role as a mediator.

From personal experience, I have seen how effective diplomatic facilitation is achievable amid deep-seated tensions. My late father, MCV Pinto, served for nearly three decades as the founding secretary-general of the Iran-US Claims Tribunal in The Hague, established after the 1979 Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis. For many years, this was one of the few forums where the US and Iran governments met face to face. This tribunal provided a rare venue for structured dialogue, illustrating how impartial arbitration could bridge entrenched divides.

In my capacity as a cabinet minister of Sri Lanka, I engaged with Iranian leaders, business communities, and civil society, encountering a nation driven by pride, cultural depth, and a genuine desire for constructive global engagement. Likewise, my interactions in Israel revealed a resilient society committed to safeguarding its sovereignty through innovation. I believe these nations can find common ground with respectful and balanced diplomatic engagement.

The current scenario presents a narrow but critical window for diplomatic action, which India should seize. A meaningful initial step would be for PM Modi to appoint a senior Indian diplomat as special envoy tasked with discreet outreach to Tehran and Tel Aviv. The immediate objective would not be to resolve deep-rooted issues but to open reliable channels, reduce risks of miscalculation, and sustain diplomacy.

Current tensions between Tehran, Tel Aviv, and Washington threaten regional stability, energy security, and international peace. A phased diplomatic initiative led by India could first establish confidential dialogue channels, evolving gradually into more structured and transparent interactions. India's established credibility across relevant capitals uniquely positions it to help mitigate tensions before they escalate.

Stability in West Asia directly impacts millions of Indian expatriates and underpins India's energy and economic security, making this diplomatic initiative a strategic imperative. PM Modi's diplomatic engagements, from India's leadership roles in the G20, Brics, and soon Q4, as well as participation in forums such as I2I2 and IMFC, highlight India's willingness to undertake bold international outreach. The time is ripe to translate India's growing global stature into tangible diplomatic influence.

Traditionally cautious, India's diplomatic establishment now has an opportunity to embrace a more proactive stance, by stepping forward as a facilitator. India could redefine engagement with West Asia, enhance its international standing, and meaningfully contribute to global peace.

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Linguistic othering

Divisive cynical politics can threaten Maharashtra's position as one of India's biggest engine of growth

MARATHI PRIDE HAS long been a fruitful political plank for the Shiv Sena, whose nativist roots are inseparable from the movement that led to the language-based creation of Maharashtra. Yet, as civic polls return to the state after a hiatus, an ugly political row over language and attacks on Hindi speakers should be in the bud. Nowhere is it more urgent than in Mumbai, where the Shiv Sena's breakaway group, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), has targeted Hindi-speaking people including a share market investor whose office was vandalised. The recent row comes in the wake of a decision of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government in the state to introduce Hindi as a third language in schools. After a back and forth, the government tactically withdrew the resolution while forming a panel to recommend steps to implement the three-language formula in schools, a contentious issue that has drawn resistance in other states too. The government's retreat has allowed estranged cousins Uddhav and Raj Thackeray to claim a moral victory as they seek to recover lost political ground with the civic elections later this year. Except briefly in the mid-90s, the undivided Shiv Sena has ruled the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in Mumbai since 1985. The BMC's last term ended in March 2022, after which it has been led by a state government-appointed administrator—a practice that has been in force in other municipal bodies in the state, until the apex court in May ordered the conduct of civic elections within four months.

Language has been and will always remain an emotive issue in a pluralistic country like India. Prior to Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu too objected to the three-language formula. In fact, in response to policy steps or even utterances of the BJP at the Centre and states, justified fears are expressed over the current dispensation's proclivity to impose order and uniformity that extends to the idea of "one nation, one language". But that should not be an excuse to reignite linguistic chauvinism or misplaced subnationalist pride that can quickly turn hostile to fellow Indians who are deemed outsiders. In Mumbai's chequered history, the Shiv Sena-MNS brand of politics has over time targeted various groups, from South Indians to migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In the 2017 BMC election, Shiv Sena had edged out the BJP but its strength was later reduced as the party splintered. The MNS, meanwhile, won only a handful of seats, all of which except one it lost as its corporators jumped ship. Given that and the drubbing in last year's Assembly polls, there is a need for soul-searching. The state prides itself on being one of India's biggest engines of growth. That pride can't be retained with this brand of divisive cynical politics.

Instead of linguistic othering, a better game plan for all parties involved would be offering practical solutions to BMC's gnawing challenges. Despite boasting financials that are bigger than some small states in India—BMC resolved ₹74,427 crore budget for FY26—the country's richest civic body is yet to resolve pressing issues like water scarcity and plug sanitation gaps. Besides, it is dogged with infrastructure hurdles linked to road especially, corruption charges, staff shortage, project delays, and failure to generate revenue. With the resumption of direct representation of citizens later this year, the political parties should focus on fundamental issues concerning all citizens, including the migrant who is an equal partner in Mumbai and Maharashtra's economy.

When coffee shops buy Bitcoin, things get frothy

ECONOMIST CARLOTA PEREZ once described the peak frenzy of boom-and-bust investing cycles as the moment when capital gains are copy and pasted, with financiers indulging in "the intense repetition of the same successful recipe"—from building camps to launching dot-com start-ups. It rarely ends well.

Perez was writing over 20 years ago, but it's easy to see the similarities with the latest froth on financial markets: companies that tap capital markets for cash use that cash to buy cryptocurrency, watch their shares rise and do the whole thing again. What began with Michael Saylor's MicroStrategy Inc. (now just "Strategy"), a software company valued at more than 200 times revenue because of the 597,625 Bitcoin (\$64.8 billion) it owns, has now gone viral as hundreds of new and existing businesses build their own cryptocurrency stash. It probably won't end well either.

A look at some of the most recent converts to so-called "Bitcoin corporate treasury" tells you that the froth is real. Shares of Spanish small-cap Vanadi Coffee SA—which fell 90% in 2024—have doubled since it announced its first Bitcoin buy in May, a venture with little connection to its unprofitable core cafe business. The company's latest filing reports a holding of 69 Bitcoin with a longer-term target of 10,000 —a strategy explicitly modelled on firms like Saylor's Strategy and Tokyo-listed Metaplanet Inc., with Vanadi pointing out that those companies' own pursuit of "asset diversification" has delivered premium valuations. (Never mind that those premium valuations will make less sense as more corporates emerge.)

Talk of diversification is, let's face it, a hand-wave. Most corporate treasurers are a risk-averse lot; their idea of managing cash doesn't usually involve buying volatile tokens that are neither useful for paying wages nor selling wares. These "treasury companies" look more like the latest time and repeat crypto grift, similar to initial coin offerings a decade ago and non-fungible tokens five years ago, which attracted players wielding increasing amounts of leverage until the inevitable crash. The only difference this time is that publicly listed companies (and not retail traders) are the ones lining up to help separate whales from their crypto.

Those of a more forgiving bent will argue this is exactly the kind of speculative trial-and-error that self-correcting markets can handle. If there is investor demand for exposure to cryptocurrencies—and clearly there is, judging by Citicore's initial coin offering a decade ago and non-fungible tokens five years ago, which attracted players wielding increasing amounts of leverage until the inevitable crash. The only difference this time is that publicly listed companies (and not retail traders) are the ones lining up to help separate whales from their crypto.

But there are risks that deserve more than a shrug and an eye roll. One is that this is exactly the kind of thing that turns a crypto sell-off into a crash. Weak, indebted companies stuffed with overpriced tokens could create a wave of forced selling. The crypto-speculation complex is also pushing to embed itself in the TradFi system with banking license applications, which could make those waves worse. And while Bitcoin maximalists like to believe that their favourite token is a safe haven, it fell more than 50% in the last crash.

Then there's the question of whether this is all a sign of wider irrational exuberance. The best-performing S&P 500 company in the second quarter was Coinbase Global Inc. and since the start of the year was Palantir Technologies Inc.—nothing to do with the Make America Great Again manufacturing renaissance that the Trump administration is hoping to create. Is this being driven by useful innovation, such as the new financial services that might be offered by a blockchain-native ecosystem? Or is it, as Perez wrote, the speculative take-off "making money from money"? The canal boom left us with canals and the dot-com boom with Big Tech—it feels like Bitcoin treasury companies will leave us with not much at all.



LIONEL LAURENT

Bloomberg

WHAT BROUGHT TOGETHER Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), along with six new members—Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia—at the latest BRICS+ summit in Rio de Janeiro was their common desire to explore new ways of dealing with their development problems. At its annual leaders' summit held in Brazil on July 6 and 7, the group urged new partnerships in pursuit of multilateralism, trade, and development—rather than a world driven by military alliances or ideology. As a loose grouping that includes authoritarian (China, Russia) and democratic (Brazil, India, South Africa) states, BRICS is not unique: the United Nations (UN) and the Commonwealth also comprise autocracies and democracies. BRICS is not synonymous with a new world order. That unfortunately has been marked by Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Israel's use of starvation as a tactic in its war against Gaza, and US President Donald Trump's disruptive foreign and economic policies which have led him to deal with the US's European allies as enemies while threatening most countries with trade and tariff wars. Trump's attack on the nuclear facilities of Iran—one of the new members of BRICS—has also sent international shockwaves. So has what Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva described as "the genocide carried out by Israel in Gaza". However, while appearing to criticise the Trump administration's tariffs and foreign policies, the BRICS final statement did not directly mention him or the US. In short, the ending of one international order—signified by the US's sudden retreat from multilateralism, interna-

ANITA Inder Singh
Founding professor, Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi

AGRI EXPORT AIM
Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal
We can increase our exports from ₹4 lakh crore to ₹20 lakh crore (by focusing) on food processing, better quality of packaging and branding

DOMINANT VS EMERGENT

IT REMAINS TOO DIVIDED TO GAIN THE SPOTLIGHT AS THE CHAMPION OF MULTILATERALISM

BRICS can't set off new world order

tional law, and global governance—is not necessarily making way for the sudden arrival of a brave new world led by a larger BRICS group. Brazil rightly argued that unilateralism was more disruptive than multipolarity. It claimed that US policies on tariffs and sovereignty were accelerating the transition to multipolarity in different ways. But Brazil's proposals on the effect of the climate crisis on developing countries, green energy transition, cooperation on vaccines, and expanding the most-favoured-nation status to all countries in the World Trade Organization were overshadowed by Trump's economic threats to raise tariffs on BRICS countries by 10%.

Trump is unnecessarily sparking yet another international row. BRICS member states are dissatisfied with the policies of western-led financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. They are also frustrated with the dollar's status as a reserve currency, but there is no intention to de-dollarise. Hosting the BRICS summit in Kazan in 2024, Russia had called for a reassessment of the dollar's central role in global finance. But in Rio de Janeiro, Russia denied that a BRICS currency for payments between members had ever been discussed. Meanwhile, de-

dollarisation would not be in the interests of India and China because the US is their largest trading partner and they are struggling to keep Trump's tariffs against them at bay. In principle, the enlarged BRICS has the potential to become a major geopolitical and geo-economic force. The group represents more than 40% of the world's population and produces 30% of its oil. BRICS countries have established considerable intergovernmental cooperation. Significantly, China is the largest contributor to the group's New Development Bank which challenges Western-dominated institutions of global economic governance.

There is considerable uncertainty about whether BRICS+ could become a coherent, anti-Western bloc. Such an outcome would only complicate prospects for multilateralism and may not be attractive to many of its members. Not all of them are hostile even to Trump's US, which is antagonistic to any country that disagrees with it. India, for example, is a member of the Quad and is currently negotiating a trade deal with the US. China, the greatest challenger to the American superpower, will not move against the US for the sake of the developing world but it will do so to advance its own

interests. At another level, China will block India's accession to permanent membership of the UN Security Council or any criticism of Pakistani-exported terrorism—both were omitted from the final communiqué of the BRICS+ summit. And a group as divided as the BRICS cannot replace Western capitalism represented by the G7.

China's President Xi Jinping did not attend the BRICS summit in Brazil; China's premier Li Qiang replaced him. That did take some of the shine off the meeting since Xi has played a major role in making his country the US's greatest world challenger.

The potential of BRICS members and partner countries to fulfil their individual aspirations via the grouping hinges on which vision of the future of the world order will ultimately play out. Will they be able to create a more egalitarian mode of global governance, hedge against Western instability while maintaining a geopolitical neutrality, or participate in an alternative international economic system outside the reaches of American sanctions? Much will hinge on the degree of common purpose shown by the US's European allies, whose like-mindedness and solidarity the second Trump administration has suddenly called into question.

Over the past two years, BRICS has significantly expanded its list of members and partners as countries pursue new economic opportunities, political influence, and greater resilience while Washington retreats from key international institutions. That has raised more hopes about BRICS. However, BRICS remains too divided by a mix of national interests and economic weaknesses—and a continuing dependence on Europe and the US—to gain the spotlight as the champion of multilateralism.

Framing India's 2047 goals

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

Basic policy failures are partly due to distorted incentives related to the way India's democracy functions. But the distortions can be reduced by careful decentralisation of govt

THE ANNUAL India Policy Forum (IPF), which recently concluded, brought together academics and policymakers from India and elsewhere. The conference is hosted by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and co-sponsored by the World Bank and NTI Aayog. Implicitly and explicitly, the government's goal of transforming India into a developed nation by its centenary of independence, namely 2047, framed much of the discussion. What follows are my own impressions and opinions, rather than a literal account of any individual analysis or presentation.

One striking feature of the conference was the power of an ambitious target to frame people's thinking. Importantly, 2047 is far enough away to allow for hope, though extrapolation of the recent past and the current situation does not necessarily suggest that the goal is achievable. On the other hand, the goal leads to analysis of how India may fall short. Clearly, India has to accelerate its growth rate, and ultimately, the question is how to do so. If anything leapt out for me from the discussions, it was the need for India to have more firms that grow rapidly. Most firms in India stagnate. Only the top 5% grow at rates comparable to developed countries. Of course, stressing the importance of firms that grow (and must be productive to do so) is just restating what

development is, but it shifts the focus to an aspect of the economy that is often neglected in India, for complex reasons.

The good news in the conference (as I interpreted it) was that the corporate debt problem in India has been largely dealt with, clearing the way for new financing of investment and growth. There are still questions about the trade-off between the quality and quantity of investment, and aspects of India's financial sector, such as the efficiency of public sector banks. But it may be time to focus on other factors that hinder the creation and growth of firms in India: land, labour, and the regulatory environment, including the functioning of the judiciary in cases that involve business functions, such as contract enforcement. Frictions and distortions are still high in many parts of India, and chipping away at those has to be an unrelenting process of kaizen—continuous improvement—by government officials at all levels. In the case of labour, one needs more skilling, from top to bottom—factory workers as well as managers. Paralleling what we know of the growth of Indian firms, the top firms have management practices comparable in quality to those in

advanced countries, but the lower tail of that distribution is thicker and extends further down.

A presentation on India's progress with respect to the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs) indicated achievements overall, but with the weakest areas being health, education, and gender equality. To the extent that these areas are the most basic ones for claiming to be a "developed" nation, the massive SDG exercise reminds us that India is still not getting the basics right. Health and education are obviously valuable in their own right, as well as being instrumental in worker productivity. Treating women better is also just as important instrumentally as it is in terms of human rights. An impassioned presentation by a medical expert from the government reminded us that the health of young women (even prior to pregnancy) is crucial to the health of their children. One could make the same case for women's education.

Such basic policy failures are partly the result of distorted incentives related to the way that India's democracy functions. But those distortions are not inevitable, and can be reduced by careful decentralisation of government. Decentralisation efforts also

have to navigate political constraints, but there are enough positive examples in the Indian context of some state governments managing to decentralise more effectively than others. Cities and towns, in particular, are low-hanging fruits for decentralisation.

It may be that the topics discussed in the IPF are familiar ones. However, the world does not stand still, and old questions can require new answers. One area of discussion at the conference that optimised this situation was the current turmoil in the international economic and political order, though it may be difficult to craft reliable policy responses. But perhaps the largest and most important message of the conference was a perennial one. Speakers repeatedly illustrated the value of detailed, high-quality data, including for employment, firm performance, intrastate inequality, and progress in the SDGs. A case was made for making it easier for researchers to use such data, making an effort to increase the quality and coverage of data, and enabling the combination of different data sets to answer more complex questions concerning the drivers of and barriers to development. To the extent that the IPF identified a unity of purpose along these lines among academics, policymakers, and practitioners, it represented at least a small step toward the vision of where India should be in 2047.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Preparing for monsoon

Apropos of "Good showers" (FE, July 9), this year's kharif season has gained more than the expected momentum, thanks to the early onset of the southwest monsoon prevailing across India. It brings a lot of rains covering mainly the western, central, and eastern parts of India, but it also leaves trails of damages due to excess rainfall and floods. Unfortunately, no lessons are learnt. Roads and weak bridges

get damaged affecting goods transport and people movement. Dams and lakes in fragile conditions are breached causing flash floods. Downstream riparian states like Tamil Nadu have not learnt any lessons on the significance of storing excess water from upper riparian states. We have been spending a lot on creating infrastructure but fail to give equal importance in maintaining or rebuilding the weak structures which pose a threat to humans, cattle, and

crops. States have a greater role to proactively play in bridging this gap. —RV Baskaran, Pune
Trump's Nobel claim
The hypocrisy of global leaders who praise peace while enabling war has been blatantly exposed with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest visit to Washington and his nomination of President Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize, even as Gaza burns, highlighting the moral

bankruptcy at the heart of US-Israel relations. The US has undeniable leverage over Israel—military, economic, and diplomatic. It used this leverage effectively during the Iran-Israel conflict. Why not now? President Trump's empty words on ceasefire fall short. If he truly sees himself as "a man of peace", he must act like one. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Analysis

A Vedic Perspective on “Guru Purnima”

Celebrated on the full moon of Ashadha, Guru Purnima honors Maharishi Ved Vyas, the sage who gave structure to the Vedas and authored the Mahabharata. This sacred day represents the timeless bond between Guru and disciple, where knowledge, guidance, and spiritual awakening flow. Rooted in the Vedic tradition, it reminds us of the Guru's divine role as creator, sustainer, and liberator. More than a ritual, Guru Purnima is a celebration of inner transformation through the grace of the Guru.

By Hemraj Tiwari

Guru Purnima is observed on the full moon (Purnima) day of the month of Ashadha according to the Hindu calendar. It commemorates the birth anniversary of Maharishi Ved Vyas, the great sage who compiled and systematized the Vedas into four distinct parts and authored the Mahabharata along with numerous Puranas. This sacred occasion is celebrated as a festival of wisdom, spiritual reverence, and deep gratitude toward the guiding force known as the Guru. In the Vedic tradition, the Guru is regarded with the highest spiritual importance. A well-known verse from the Guru Gita—“Gurur Brahma, Gurur Vishnu, Gurur Devo Maheshwarah, Guru Saakshat Param Brahma, Tasmai Shri Gurave Namah”—proclaims the Guru as the embodiment of the divine trinity: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Mahesh (destroyer). The Guru is seen as the very embodiment of the Supreme Brahman. Another verse from the Yajurveda Upanishad—“Achintyam Avyakta Anantaram Gurum Namami Punisham Mahantam”—describes the Guru as the infinite and unmanifest form who reveals the highest truths hidden from ordinary perception. The role of the Guru in human life is both transformative and essential. The Guru is the illuminator of true knowledge, removing the darkness of



ignorance and guiding the seeker on the path to self-realization. As a spiritual guide, the Guru leads the disciple through the principles of Dharma (righteousness), Karma (action), and eventually to Moksha (liberation). The Guru awakens inner consciousness, not just by transmitting information, but by triggering a deeper awareness within the disciple. Through the Guru's teachings, one imbibes essential values such

as truth, discipline, service, and faith. Celebrating Guru Purnima holds both traditional and spiritual significance. Rituals like offering flowers at the Guru's feet symbolize surrender and devotion, while bowing before the Guru reflects humility in the face of divine wisdom. Listening to discourses helps in absorbing scriptural knowledge, and practicing restraint and celibacy on this day encourages discipline and spiri-

tual refinement. The Vedas also emphasize the importance of approaching the Guru with reverence. A verse from the Chandogya Upanishad (6.14.2) says, “Upasannaya Si'yaya Brahmanidya Pradiyate,” meaning that only a student who approaches the Guru with humility is granted the supreme knowledge of Brahman. Similarly, in the Bhagavad Gita (4.38), it is said, “Na hi Jñāna Sadṛśam Pavitrām Iha Vidyate”—there is no purifier in this world like true knowledge, and that knowledge can only be received through the Guru. Revered Gurudev Shri Indramani Ji Maharaj has beautifully expressed the essence of a Guru: “A Guru is not one who merely gives sermons, but one who awakens the divine within you. A Guru is not one who shows the world to you, but one who gives you a glimpse of your own soul. A true Guru connects you with your higher self.” Guru Purnima is not just a date on the calendar; it is a sacred opportunity for self-purification, spiritual awakening, and complete surrender. It reminds us that while human effort is important, the true journey toward realization becomes possible only when guided by a Guru. With this spirit, we offer our countless salutations at the lotus feet of Revered Gurudev Shri Indramani Ji Maharaj. On this auspicious occasion, may the spirit of knowledge, devotion, and service awaken in all of us.

Plastic Pollution: A Growing Threat to Human and Planetary Health

Plastic pollution is rapidly spreading across Earth's ecosystems, posing an escalating threat not only to wildlife but also to human health. A recent United Nations (UN) report warns that unless immediate action is taken, the consequences for both the environment and public health could be catastrophic. The urgency of the situation has intensified with a shocking new discovery: microplastics have now been found in human blood. Researchers conducting the study detected tiny plastic particles—less than one-thousandth of a millimeter in size—in nearly 80 percent of the 22 individuals tested. These microplastics are small enough to travel freely throughout the human body, potentially lodging in vital organs. Experts warn that their presence may damage cells and tissues, triggering diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and other chronic



conditions. Analysis of the blood samples revealed that half contained PET plastic, which is commonly used in soft drink bottles, food packaging, and clothing. One-third of the samples contained polystyrene, a material widely used in packaging, while a quarter contained polyethylene, the plastic used in carrier bags. Interestingly, the concentration and types of plastic particles differed between individuals, suggesting a wide range of exposure and vulnerability—an area that now requires deeper scientific investigation. The study was co-funded by Common Seas, a social enterprise committed to combating plastic pollution. Jo Royle, the organization's CEO, expressed concern, stating, “I was shocked but not surprised. We already knew microplastics have been found in human placentas and organs. The body struggles to break these particles down. They trigger inflammatory responses and are linked to chronic diseases.” Adding to the gravity of the issue is the fact that plastic takes over 400 years to decompose—if it ever does. According to scientific projections, even if plastic production had stopped entirely in 2020, the quantity of microplastic particles in the oceans alone would still rise to nearly 1.5 million metric tons by 2050. The United Nations further estimates that by 2050, the plastic load in oceans, lakes, and rivers could more than double the current amount, severely endangering aquatic life and food systems. This growing crisis demands urgent global action—from governments, industries, and individuals alike—to curb plastic production, invest in sustainable alternatives, and clean up the environment before the damage becomes irreversible.



Supercomputers and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing the development of next-generation materials. These powerful computational tools enable scientists to simulate and test millions of potential materials rapidly, paving the way for stronger alloys, more efficient chemical catalysts, and advanced plastics. By drastically reducing the need for human trial and error, researchers can fast-track innovation and bring high-tech materials into real-world applications much sooner. In the race to create a fossil fuel-free future, speed is critical. Climate scientists have warned that global emissions must peak by 2025 to avoid severe environmental consequences. By combining computational modeling with rapid prototyping from manufacturers, scientists are developing game-changing technologies like high-performance solar cells and longer-lasting batteries at an unprecedented pace. One groundbreaking initiative in this field is a supercomputer named Michael, based at University College London. Named after the famed physicist and chemist Michael Faraday, Michael is exclusively focused on discovering the most efficient battery systems. Researchers will use it to virtually design and test thousands of battery prototypes—evaluating their performance, cost, and durability—all without building a single physical model. Explore the power of next-gen computing at QuantumGrid Technologies. From AI-driven simulations to material discovery tools, we help industries innovate faster. Visit QuantumGridTech.in to learn more. The search for a solid-state battery design that is lightweight, safe, and long-lasting could transform electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage systems. Unlike traditional lithium-ion batteries, solid-state versions promise faster charging times, greater energy density, and lower costs. Such innovations would make solar and wind energy storage significantly more efficient, helping bridge the gap between

Supercomputers and AI: Powering the Next Revolution in Material Science



clean energy production and practical usage. The lithium-ion battery, now widely used in EVs, laptops, and mobile devices, was originally developed in the 1970s through U.S. and U.K. research. However, it wasn't until Sony commercialized the technology in 1991 that it entered mass production. Today, new collaborations between universities and industries are pushing the envelope further to build better, safer alternatives. One such example is a UK-based consortium featuring Britishvolt, Johnson Matthey, and Oxford University, which aims to lead the global race in solid-state battery development. Their mission is to overcome existing technical challenges and create a durable, commercially viable product. However, they are not alone—many global players are competing to unlock the potential of solid-state technology. Replacing the liquid or polymer electrolytes in current lithium-ion batteries—which are vulnerable to overheating—with solid conductors like ceramics

poses complex challenges. To address these, companies like Mercedes-Benz are teaming up with IBM to leverage quantum computing. Their goal is to identify efficient, low-cost materials, potentially sourced from abundant resources such as seawater. Nissan is also stepping into the fray by working with NASA to launch a solid-state battery manufacturing facility in 2024. The collaboration aims to eliminate rare and costly metals from battery production, while creating a massive database of materials that can be combined to find the best-performing compositions. But the role of computational materials isn't limited to batteries alone. Supercomputers and AI are poised to transform nearly every industry by rapidly analyzing millions of substances for key properties like conductivity, strength, or reflectivity. This approach can dramatically accelerate the design of materials for electronics, construction, energy, and even healthcare. Researchers at Duke University

have successfully used supercomputers to develop two brand-new magnetic materials from a pool of over 200,000 candidates. One is suited for hard drives and memory devices, while the other is rare-earth-free and heat-resistant—crucial for sustainable electronics. In another breakthrough, scientists at the University of Toronto utilized computing power to identify 17 new chemical catalysts capable of converting carbon dioxide (CO2) into ethylene—a base material for fuels and plastics. Using an algorithm that scanned thousands of molecular combinations, they opened the door to a Rs. 5 lakh crore (\$60 billion) market that turns waste CO2 into valuable raw materials using only renewable energy. From battery breakthroughs to carbon capture and beyond, supercomputers and AI are redefining how materials are created, tested, and used—bringing us closer to a more sustainable and technologically advanced future.

Chikungunya: A Mosquito - Borne Threat That Demands Urgent Attention in the Rainy Season

During the rainy season, mosquito-borne diseases rise sharply, and among them, chikungunya stands as a serious health concern, alongside dengue and malaria. Although not as widely discussed, chikungunya can be just as deadly if not treated promptly and properly. A large number of people in Asia and Africa suffer from this disease, which is transmitted through the bite of infected mosquitoes. The virus spreads rapidly in waterlogged and poorly maintained areas, and once it infects a person, the symptoms begin to appear within seven days. The initial symptoms of chikungunya can often be confused with other viral illnesses. The patient experiences a sudden onset of high fever accompanied by intense joint and muscle pain, which is a signature trait of this disease. Along with these, symptoms like fatigue, headache, vomiting, and dizziness become evident. What makes chikungunya particularly challenging is that there is no specific

During the rainy season, mosquito-borne diseases surge, and chikungunya is one of the most dangerous among them. Often overlooked compared to dengue or malaria, it can become life-threatening without timely care. It spreads quickly in regions like Asia and Africa through the bite of infected mosquitoes.

antiviral medicine to cure it. Doctors mainly focus on treating the symptoms, providing relief from fever and pain. One of the alarming facts about chikungunya is that even after the virus subsides in the body, its after-effects can last for several weeks. Joint pain and weakness may linger, making daily activities difficult for the patient. In some cases, skin rashes also appear, and inflammation throughout the body can increase. If ignored, the disease can lead to complications such as liver disorders, kidney problems, and even issues in the brain. Vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and individuals with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of severe complications. The disease's

mode of transmission further complicates the situation. When an infected person is bitten by a mosquito, that mosquito also becomes a carrier. It can then spread the virus to others, starting a chain of infections in a very short time. That is why controlling mosquito populations and preventing bites is critical in curbing the spread. Chikungunya mosquitoes are particularly active in areas with stagnant water—such as construction sites, slums, and places where broken pots or containers are left uncovered. Preventive measures play a vital role in protecting against the disease. Regular cleaning of water storage containers, avoiding water accumulation on rooftops, and maintaining overall cleanliness are essential. Planting mosquito-

repellent plants like lemongrass around homes can also help. Doctors typically prescribe medicines to reduce fever and relieve muscle and joint pain. It is extremely important to keep the patient hydrated during recovery. Coconut water, lemon water, and oral rehydration solutions should be given in sufficient quantities to prevent dehydration. Equally important is ensuring proper rest and avoiding physical exertion during recovery. Diet plays a significant role in healing from chikungunya. Certain foods can worsen inflammation and delay recovery. The patient should avoid sugary items such as soft drinks, packed fruit juices, sweets, and cakes, as they weaken the immune system. Fatty foods, red meat, spicy and acidic dishes,

and alcohol should also be strictly avoided. Instead, the diet should focus on strengthening the immune system and reducing inflammation. Fruits like oranges, papaya, and berries are especially beneficial, as they are rich in antioxidants and vitamins. Green leafy vegetables like spinach, and vegetables such as carrots and bananas, are recommended. Proteins from sources like lentils, boiled fish, and skinless chicken can be included in the meals. Among dry fruits, almonds are particularly helpful in aiding recovery. In conclusion, chikungunya is more than just a seasonal nuisance. It is a potentially dangerous viral illness that can leave long-lasting effects on the body if not addressed with caution. Prevention through mosquito control, early detection of symptoms, proper medical care, hydration, and a nutritious diet are all key elements in tackling this disease effectively. Public awareness and timely precautions are our best defense against the rising threat of chikungunya, especially during the monsoon season.