

# THE ASIAN AGE

13 FEBRUARY 2025

## India-France hunt for AI consensus seems elusive

As seat at the head table of the global AI Action summit is not so much a privilege as an essential function for an emerging AI player like India in the current era when to be alarmist over artificial intelligence is fashionable. At a time when all leading nations must forge a consensus on the regulation and utilisation of AI for the common good to ensure that it ensures lives rather than imperil them, India and France acted as the voice of reason in ensuring the technology builds confidence in the people and, more importantly, is safe.

With the two competing superpowers United States and China in the race and representing the two extremes of liberalisation and tight regulation for total control, India's call for a collective approach through Prime Minister Narendra Modi to setting standards for AI that will be for the benefit of everyone, particularly the Global South that cannot afford the billions of dollars of investment called for in developing the technology, makes the most sense.

The great difficulty now is that no one knows, or has gauged, fully what are AI's benefits and dangers. Will it develop to an extent that it will make most human beings jobless or become a tool in the hands of the oligarchs who could potentially destroy the world that humans have harnessed and built? There are three models that are currently taking aim at AI — the US's most liberal way with no controls, Europe's desire to regulate Big Tech to retain control over its bad effects and China's iron grip on technology to dictate how it will progress.

India's approach as the fourth highest rated AI power in the world today in AI vibrancy rankings has tended to lean towards the conservative European model of backing progress but with controls lest the technology causes social disruptions through cybercrimes and deep fakes that are AI's deleterious aspects that PM Modi brought up at the summit.

PM Modi's admission that the Global South is lacking the capabilities in computing power, energy to drive the programmes, talent, data and the financial resources reflects a reality that the AI leaders like the US and the challenger China will probably not bother about. Sharing resources in high tech areas is going to be a touchy issue going forward as the US already has placed embargoes on export of the most powerful chips and China strives to build a fortress against Western pressures and develops its own programmes.

So complex are the different stands on AI control that the US and the UK did not sign the joint communiqué, which spells out the foundation for open-sourced sharing of technology. India's approach as the fourth highest rated AI power in the world today in AI vibrancy rankings has tended to lean towards the conservative European model of backing progress but with controls lest the technology causes social disruptions through cybercrimes and deep fakes that are AI's deleterious aspects that PM Modi brought up at the summit.

Consensus may have been hard to achieve in the globally fragmented approach to AI. However, the first leg of Mr Modi's trip to France and the US was testimony to the ideal state of India-France ties that may have gone a step further in the bilateral meeting between French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. France reiterating its support for a permanent seat for India in the Security Council is just one point among many that reinforces the strong relationship.

## IAF chief's HAL rap overdue

Indian Air Force (IAF) chief Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's plain-tail censuring the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for delay in the delivery of long-overdue Light Combat Aircraft Tejas has come at the most opportune time, when all major global defence suppliers are in the country to take part in Aero India 2025.

Though the Air Chief Marshal's remarks could be considered insulting for HAL, it spotlights the seriousness of the depletion in fighter aircraft that the Indian Air Force has been facing for quite some time. India has around 41 combat squadrons or around 556 jets, as against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons or 756 jets — reflecting a shortage of 200 fighter jets. This compares with 142 squadrons our neighbouring countries have — Pakistan 20 squadrons, Bangladesh's 12 squadrons and China's 110 squadrons.

HAL was supposed to deliver 40 Tejas Mk1 jets, which it ordered in 2010. The PSU also needs to deliver 83 Tejas Mk1A jets, upgraded variants of the fighters currently in service, which IAF ordered in 2021 — together making for about seven squadrons for the air force. However, Air Chief Marshal Singh's lack of confidence in HAL hints at desperation among Indian air fighters.

The LCA project, which was conceived in 1984 during the Indira Gandhi government, faced significant technology apartheid. The pace of research in India on aircraft is so slow that by the time our companies come with something it gets outdated.

Regardless of the complexity of the project, the government must not make the IAF perennially wait for HAL's Tejas aircraft. The most important issue for the government is restoring IAF's minimum deterrence — with at least 75 squadrons — against Pakistan, Bangladesh and China, either through locally-produced jets or foreign produced ones. The government should also reform India's defence research establishment and manufacturing capacities to match with the global trend, without which India can never be called a global power.

### THE ASIAN AGE

Kishore Mishra

Editor

The Asian Age office is located at: New Delhi: Jansatya National Youth Centre, 219 Dines Deyal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 011-23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for:

Jansatya Chhatra Hridaya Limited, Jansatya National Youth Centre, 219 Dines Deyal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 011-23211124. C. S. Section 25. India-2012031.

Printer: Jansatya Chhatra Hridaya Ltd, 8th Floor, Block C, Eklabhai House, 25 Park Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 32350494

Maleeha Lodhi



## Multipolar world will make it hard for Trump to win tariff war today

A perfect storm was threatened by President Donald Trump's announcement of sweeping tariffs on imports from Canada, Mexico and China. Additional tariffs of 25 per cent were imposed on goods from Mexico and Canada and 10 per cent on goods from China. Trump justified invoking emergency powers to apply tariffs "because of the major threat of illegal aliens and drugs including fentanyl".

He also threatened tariffs on EU imports. He is set to announce "reciprocal tariffs" on more countries in coming days. In the past, Trump often said he would act against countries that have a trade surplus with the US and tariffs will make the American economy stronger and replace income tax. He has long favoured pursuing a protectionist economic agenda. America's three biggest trading partners react quickly and furiously. Canada and Mexico hit back with retaliatory levies. China imposed counter-tariffs on a range of US products, including crude oil, LFG and farm equipment. Beijing ordered an antitrust investigation of Google and said it would file a lawsuit against the US in the World Trade Organisation.

The impact of Trump's tariff move was immediate. Markets around the world tumbled over the spectre of escalation in the global trade war. Across Asia and Europe, shares slumped while investors expressed alarm over the disruption of global supply chains and fears of volatility ahead. International investment firms anticipated a reduction in global growth and depressed business

sentiment. Economist and Nobel laureate Paul Krugman described Trump's action as "really destructive" and "like throwing sand in the gears of international commerce and manufacturing". But just before the tariffs on Mexico and Canada were to be enforced, Trump paused them for a month following phone calls with leaders of the two countries in which negotiations were agreed between them. Both countries also announced they would reinforce the border to clamp down on drug smuggling and stop illicit migration.

This U-turn was quintessential Trump, who uses swift changes of course as a bargaining tactic to put other governments off balance in order to secure a deal. This bullying approach of pressure-and-negotiation holds up against concessions by other countries as 'wins' to his political base.

Trump plans to speak to President Xi Jinping to enter trade negotiations while delaying tariffs on low-value packages from China. Markets across the world reacted with relief to the pause in the tariff war, but that didn't end uncertainty about what comes next.

No one expects Trump's game of brinkmanship to end with this, and fears persist of a trade war. He repeated his familiar mantra last week that he would use tariffs to get other countries to meet his demands. Uncertainty on this count will take a heavy toll on the global economy as well as on Washington's ties with friends and competitors alike. The use of coercive economic power to browbeat

smaller countries is one thing. But deploying it against a big power and the world's largest exporter, China, is a different matter. Beijing also has the means to inflict damage on the US economy even as it grapples with the blow to its trade.

"Bullies," wrote *The Economist* last week, "rarely pick on any target their own size." That is why Trump has so far desisted from levying 25 per cent additional tariffs on China he frequently promised during the election campaign.

For its part, the European Union said it will respond firmly to any new tariffs and may use its anti-coercion powers if necessary. In anticipation of Trump carrying out his threat of imposing "very substantial" tariffs, the 27-member economic bloc is redrawing retaliatory measures against Silicon Valley. In what is being described as the first use of a punitive tool against a service industry, this would mark an escalation in the trade war. At an informal summit in Brussels last week, European leaders declared their intention to fight back if Trump slapped higher tariffs, while calling for negotiations. Affected countries in Europe and beyond will respond to tariff rises in the longer term by finding other markets to trade.

Apart from retaliation by other countries, Trump's tariff war will come at a price to the American economy, contrary to his disingenuous claims that they will bring the US only benefits.

The most obvious would be the impact on American consumers by way of more inflation as

business costs go up. And this at a time when inflation is high, which Trump promised voters he would curb. Higher tariffs would upend supply chains, dampen growth and investment, increase the cost of borrowing and even reduce US exports.

Several sectors such as the automobile industry and agriculture would be particularly hit. Business groups representing agriculture, automakers and those dealing with consumer products are already worried to have sounded the alarm over how tariffs will fuel price rises. The adverse economic impact on the US will be greater if Trump expands the tariff war to Europe.

But beyond economic implications, there will be obvious diplomatic costs. Even if allies are coerced into making concessions, actions that antagonise them will leave diplomatic ties considerably damaged. The global standing of the US and its credibility would be damaged. Adversaries hit by tariff rises will have even less of a reason to be responsive to Washington on other issues.

Trump's rash tariff actions, threats to 'own' the Palestinian territory of Gaza, take over Greenland, and seize the Panama Canal are part of his belief that the US has the power to do whatever it likes, grab whatever it wants, and get away with it. But he will soon find the unipolar world passed into history long ago, and the multipolar world today will not so easily bend to Washington's will.

—By arrangement with Dawn

Subhani



## In Manipur, don't allow history to repeat itself



Monideepa Banerjee

History, they say, has a habit of repeating itself. But not always.

In 2023, after nearly two months of Manipur's worst ethnic conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities, chief minister N. Biren Singh headed for Raj Bhavan in Imphal to submit his resignation to the governor. But the road was blocked by Meira Paibis, Manipur's powerful all-women's group, who purportedly forced the chief minister to tear up his resignation letter and throw it away.

This dramatic history did not repeat itself last week.

On Friday, hundreds of Meira Paibis gathered near the Imphal airport, not to block the road to stop Mr Biren Singh from flying to New Delhi to resign. Far from it, blaming him for a spate of arrests of village volunteers, for failure to stop the looting of arms from police armouries, for letting Manipur turn into a war zone divided so sharply on ethnic lines they seem beyond reason. There are also reports that armed groups of nationalist Meitei youth who were allowed to run wild, like Arambol Tengol and Meitei Leijun, had Mr Biren Singh's blessings. But for still unfathomed and unexplained reasons neither the BJP nor the Centre acted.

Two days later, on Sunday, February 9, Mr Biren Singh went to New Delhi and put in his papers.

It is not as if the Meira Paibis protest was the last straw that broke Biren Singh's back; they had been protesting against the crackdown by the AFSPA-armed Central and state police forces on the VVs for months. But Friday's protest was possibly just the latest in a concatenation of circumstances that left him no option. With 250 people dead and 60,000 displaced in the bloodbath that followed May 3, 2023, Biren Singh would have known his fate was sealed.

The BJP and Amit Shah certainly gave N. Biren Singh a long rope. Concatenation of circumstances: Then, out of the blue, on New Year's Eve, Mr Biren Singh said "sorry" to the people of Manipur. "This entire year has been very unfortunate. I feel regret and I want to say sorry to the people of the state for what is happening till today, since last May 3. Many people lost their loved ones. Many people left their homes. I really feel regret. I would

like to apologise."

Why the apology is not known. Possibly Mr Biren Singh began to feel the pressure. Days after violence in Jiribam, an area that had remained calm in the past, the NIP, an ally in the BJP-led NDA, government with six MLAs withdrew support. The BJP had a majority of 37 in the 40-member House. But seven Kuki BJP MLAs had already distanced themselves. So, the numbers began to look shaky.

Then dissensions began within the BJP, with around a dozen MLAs cosying up to Manipur Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh and state minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, all of them disenchanted with Biren Singh's handling of the 21-month-old crisis. They began frequenting the BJP headquarters in Delhi. Some even went to the PMO.

Two other factors combined. The Manipur Tapes case — audio recordings which a Kuki group claims establishes Biren Singh's role in the violence in the state. The Supreme Court on February 3 had asked the CFSI to confirm by March 24 if the voice on the tapes is indeed that of Biren Singh. A confirmation could put Biren Singh behind bars.

Meanwhile, the Congress, which has five MLAs in Manipur, announced a no-trust motion against Biren Singh on February 10. Rattled and unsure about how many MLAs would stand by him, Biren Singh called a meeting of NDA MLAs last week. When only 20 MLAs showed up, he knew his time was up.

The BJP leadership in New Delhi didn't try to dis-

**What next? President's Rule is a distinct possibility. Or a new BJP CM, someone from the dissident group. Satyabrata Singh or Khemchand Singh are both in the running.**

suade him. The plug was pulled.

**Kuki-Zo reaction:** What next? President's Rule is a distinct possibility. Or a new BJP chief minister, someone from the dissident group. Satyabrata Singh or Khemchand Singh are both in the running. If no consensus is reached on an alternative, then a prolonged spell of a suspended Assembly with Biren Singh as the caretaker chief minister. If neither works, then President's Rule.

In all this uncertainty, one thing is certain: the Kuki-Zo-Hmar group's determination to stick to its demand for a separate autonomous administration of the hill areas that the community dominates.

For the tribal community, Mr Biren Singh's resignation is too late and too little. Another BJP chief minister in his place would merely be old wine in a new bottle. The Kuki group would rather see President's Rule imposed. At least then the governor would be running the state and not the BJP.

At least they could start using Imphal airport. Today, if Kuki want to go to New Delhi or elsewhere, they have to drive to Aizawl airport in neighbouring Mizoram. That is a 12-hour drive from Churachandpur and the cost per passenger in a taxi is ₹5,500. Why not use Imphal airport, which is much closer? Unlikely, say the Kukis. We would be killed for venturing into Meitei territory.

There are some Kuki optimists who hope that Mr Biren Singh's exit could finally open the door to a dialogue on the way forward for the bitterly estranged ethnic groups of Manipur. But that could be months away. In a few months, Manipur's tragedy will turn two. Come what may, that is one slice of history that should never be allowed to repeat itself.

**Monideepa Banerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata who has extensively travelled in and reported from India's Northeast region**

### LETTERS

LATHIS &amp; VALENTINES

Despite all attempts made by the groups 'protecting' Indian values to stop the Valentine Day celebrations, its popularity increases with every passing year. Blame the clever marketing tricks for trying to sell the 14th of February as an occasion for romance but secluded corners with lovers whispering sweet nothings are thoroughly checked and severely dealt with. While frustrated middle aged dudes doing such sort of things can be attributed to envy, it is sad to see even young people follow their example and instead of having a pretty lass on their farm prefer lathis to separate the romancers.

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai

### STAY TOGETHER

AFTER THE defeat in Delhi, AAP has some priorities to meet. The top-most is to keep its leaders together. AAP enjoys a wider majority in MCD and the anti-defection law is not operative on municipal councilors and hence Arvind Kejriwal has to keep an eye. The Punjab Assembly is also vulnerable as some MLAs there are reportedly not happy with the leadership of Bhagwant Mann. The threat in Delhi that the Congress will erode its core voter base is also very real. The coming days will be a test for Mr Kejriwal. AAP cannot afford to take these challenges lightly and has to pass this test in order to stay relevant.

D.B. Madan  
New Delhi

### NOT UNIFORM

THE CHIEF MINISTER of Uttarakhand, Pushkar Singh Dhami, has announced that if anyone in a live-in relationship is an advocate, that is if they belong to the Scheduled Tribes, they are not obliged to register their relationship under the uniform civil code. That's how uniform the uniform civil code then is! It is sad that "exception proves the rule". Over time the rule will exempt all categories of citizens, except one! It will then be revealed why in the first place we wanted the uniform civil code!

Anil Bagarkar  
Mumbai



BIBLIOGRAPHY



Against the current: Konyak tribes perform at the inaugural day of the Hornbill festival in Kisama village, Kohima on December 1, 2024. RITU RAJ KHOWARI



# Easterine Kire: chronicler of the lives and fables of Nagas

Shunning media stereotypes of the northeast, the Sahitya Akademi-winning novelist and poet from Nagaland writes about the cultural life of her people, who refuse to be defined by conflict. Kire has also documented their oral history and spiritual world view

Radhika Santhanam

Years ago, when I asked a classmate what she was reading, she simply replied, "A book from the northeast." It was a lazy, unhelpful description. Ever heard anyone say they are reading Jerry Pinto, a "writer from the west"? That was in 2010, but little has changed since. The northeast is still described in many everyday conversations as a homogenous region – an anthropological paradise where "strange" and "exotic" cultures thrive, and complex, ethnic conflicts play out amid natural beauty. Easterine Kire, a novelist from Nagaland who lives in Norway, spoke of her exasperation with the broad portrayal of the region in an interview to *The Hindu* in 2019. "The media stereotype of the northeast has done so much damage that the true cultural life of the Nagas and their rights have been overlooked," she said. In her works, Kire portrays a people who refuse to be defined by conflict. "We are saying there is more [to Nagaland]," she said in another interview to *The Hindu* in 2015. "There is great beauty, not just the breathtaking landscapes of mountains and rivers and cloud-covered villages, but the beauty of the people who live there and the stories they have to share. The spiritual world is a big part of the Nagas world view and it comes naturally to me to write about it."

**Writing about the spiritual**  
*Spirit Nights* (2022), which won Kire the Sahitya Akademi award in 2024, is a shining example of how the writer is a chronicler of the lives and fables of the

Nagas. The novel's protagonist is Tola, a wise woman and the daughter of a seer. She is warned in a dream of impending doom. Dreams are the gateway to the spiritual world. When a taboo is breached in the spiritual world, intense, all-encompassing darkness descends on her village. Only one person, Tola's grandson Namu, can bring back light. Kire's book is inspired by the story of darkness narrated by the Rengma Naga and Chang Naga tribes. Just as the sun resuscitates a fading leaf, it is the breath of Kire's storytelling that brings an oral tale to life. When *The River Sleeps* (2014), which won The Hindu Prize in 2015, is also steeped in Naga folktales and myths. A middle-aged hunter named Vile lives inside a forest. He dreams that a "heart-stone" lies on the bed of a river, which will give him expansive powers. Vile sets out on his quest, encountering fellow beings, sorceresses, and spirits on the way. The poet K. Satchidanandan described the book as "a sample of how the mythopoetic imagination can work in our times". Kire had written elsewhere: "My generation of Nagas accept that our territories are shared between human and spirit inhabitants." These works are rooted in the folklore of Nagaland, but Kire skillfully draws out the deeper meanings of these beliefs and they are universally instructive.

**Nagaland over the years**  
When Kire was a child, every night one of her grandparents would tell her a story. She grew up in an estate in Kohima, where trees were laden with fruit, wild

flowers bloomed, and she woke up to dawn chorus. Her love for the oral tradition of storytelling, and for beauty and nature, which she infuses into her writing, likely came from these early childhood experiences. But not all of Nagaland was peaceful and picturesque. Kire recounts how the small town of Kohima was suddenly thrust on the global map when the Japanese invaded the hills in 1944. In 1958, the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was imposed to deal with the Naga insurgency. In the 1960s and '70s, Kire recalls in interviews how the Army would patrol the streets and clamp curfews. Nagaland came to be imagined by the rest of India as a land of trouble-makers. In her works, Kire also traces the lives of different generations to reveal the transformation of a people and a State. For the book *Mari*, which she began writing in parts at 16 and completed in 2003, she sat with her aunt Mari, gently unspooling her memories of Kohima before and during World War II. The war cleaved the history of the region: Kire says it was "remarkable" that "people have little memory of what they were doing before the war years." In *A Respectable Woman* (2019), too, she writes about the conflict: "Many of our people had not known any government other than the British. So, when they left our hills, many people felt orphaned..." A *Respectable Woman* is also about another war; this time, against the Indian state. Kire says, "Even while the few educated Nagas felt that they had the right to fight for Naga sovereignty, the Indian government sent in armed police

who began a reign of terror... We were no longer safe in our own homes." Where there is war, there is always resilience. In *Mari*, Mari becomes a refugee in her own homeland and is nearly crushed by the weight of recurrent loss. She bounces back again and again, left with no other choice. As the grandmother says in *Bitter Wormwood*, "If life is hard to you, you simply harden yourself so its griefs are easier to bear." Kire's protagonists are often women but they are not all "strong women", which makes them relatable. Women, like men, contribute to maintaining the patriarchal order (*A Terrible Patriarchy*). They show their vulnerabilities and express their fears (*Spirit Nights*). Kire does not romanticise their fights and the journeys of their survival (*Mari*). Women assert their agency through micro-feminist acts (*A Respectable Woman*). They are ordinary women who often find themselves grappling with extraordinary circumstances. Kire's style is to write crisp, short, unadorned sentences and narrate unsettling parables, which reflect her love for allegories. By staying close to their roots, writers like Tensula Ao paved the way for Easterine Kire who is making the road easier for voices of the next generation like Avinuo Kire and others. If works by writers such as Kire find their way into classrooms across India, there may be greater understanding of regional literature from the States of the northeast; stories which encapsulate the tragedies, aspirations, and cultures of a people who have for too long been typecast, and which have been systemically erased from our hegemonic imagination of the nation.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
S. Upendran

"Let's discuss the two passages given last week. Passage (a) is written in conversational or colloquial English. This is the kind of language we use in our daily conversation. The language of passage (b) is formal, a little too formal. This is the language we use on formal occasions. The whole passage is one sentence. It could have been split into two or more sentences for easier comprehension, (a) is too colloquial, (b) too formal. So long as you are able to communicate your ideas clearly, you can use any language appropriate to the context. You should not mix levels. Don't mix the formal with the informal language. When you introduce a person at a public meeting, you generally use formal language. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure in introducing to you Mr. X, a distinguished scientist.... Now I request the fellow to give his speech." In this context, the word 'fellow' is inappropriate. 'Fellow' is a colloquial word. The audience would be amused when we use the word on formal occasions." "But we say 'Fellow of the Royal Society.'" "Sure. Here we are talking about the person's academic achievement." "I can't say at a condolence meeting: – We have assembled here to condole the death of X who kicked the bucket three days ago." "No. 'To kick the bucket' means 'to die'. It is slang. It is not used on formal occasions." "Is 'colloquial language' inferior to other kinds of language?" "No. It is not inferior but different. It was introduced into English in 1751 by Dr. Johnson in an essay in *The Rambler*. But he did not include it in his Dictionary published in 1755. It didn't have pejorative overtones." "But some think it has." "True. That's why some dictionaries use the label 'informal' instead of 'colloquial'." "Before you proceed any further, please tell me the difference between 'forego' and 'forgo'." "Forego" means 'go before'. 'Forgo' means 'to abstain from, do without'. The foregoing remarks were made by John. He decided to forgo his lunch on the advice of his doctor." Published in *The Hindu* on May 16, 1995.

### THE DAILY QUIZ

The International Cricket Council (ICC) Champions Trophy 2025 is scheduled to start from next week. Here is a quiz on the tournament

Sindhu Nagaraj

- QUESTION 1**  
What was the tournament formerly called?
- QUESTION 2**  
Which is the format played in the tournament?
- QUESTION 3**  
In which year was the tournament inaugurated? Which country hosted it first?
- QUESTION 4**  
Where was the second edition of the ICC tournament held? It was held in this country to increase the popularity of the sport here?
- QUESTION 5**  
Which two countries have won the tournament twice?



**Visual question:**  
Identify this cricketer. What is the feat he has achieved in this tournament? AFP

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. Many people living in this city call it "Chitagon". **Ans: Chittagong**  
2. In 1989, one conflict in this (now erstwhile) country was over whether the two halves of its name should be hyphenated. **Ans: Czechoslovakia**  
3. Political efforts to rename this region led to a two-word name in 2020, one representing the local Pashtun people and the other the non-Pashtun. **Ans: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**  
4. In the Turkish language, this water body is called the "Gulf of Basra". **Ans: Persian Gulf**  
5. The name of this country is also the historic name of a region in Iran. Specifically, it was the name of a region south of the Aras river. **Ans: Azerbaijan**  
Visual: This British Overseas Territory in the south Atlantic Ocean is an archipelago. **Ans: Falkland Islands**  
Early Birds: Tito Shiladitya| Erfanally Oosmany| M. Suresh Kumar| Prashansa Lohumi| Ayush Jainwal

### Word of the day

**Acquiesce:**  
to agree or express agreement  
**Synonyms:** accede, assent  
**Usage:** He gradually acquiesced to the demands of the opposition.  
**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/acquiescepro  
**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /əˈkwiːs/

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



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Death toll in the 2024 crackdown on protests in Bangladesh**

**1,400** The figure was estimated by the UN human rights office. In a new report, it stated that security and intelligence services "systematically engaged" in rights violations that could amount to crimes against humanity. *AP*

**Degraded forest land identified for Green Credit Programme**

**57,700** in hectares. Seventeen States have so far set aside degraded forest land for tree plantation under the Green Credit Programme. It rewards environmental actions by individuals, communities and the private sector. *PII*

**Passenger traffic through European airports' increases**

**2.5** in billion. European airports welcomed more passengers last year than in 2019, surpassing pre-COVID levels for the first time since the pandemic, industry figures showed on Wednesday. Passenger traffic reached 2.5 billion in 2024, up 7.4% from the previous year. *AFP*

**Israel's first sale in government bonds to the U.S.**

**5** in \$ billion. Israel has sold this amount in dollar-denominated government bonds in international markets to bring down its budget deficit and finance the costs of the war. In the first debt sale of 2025, the Finance Ministry offered two new series of five-year and 10-year government bonds. *FTI*

**India's imports of palm oil dip to a 13-year low, says SEA**

**65** in per cent. India's palm oil imports dipped as buyers shifted to cheaper soybean oil, industry body Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) said. Vegetable oil imports dropped to 10.49 lakh tonnes from 12 lakh tonnes a year earlier. *FTI*

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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

## Should convicted persons contest elections?

What does the Representation of the People Act, 1951 stipulate with respect to electoral candidates convicted of criminal offences? What are the various judgments of the Supreme Court which favour the decriminalisation of politics? What is the case for a lifetime ban on convicted individuals standing for office?

### EXPLAINER

Rangarajan, R

The story so far:

The Supreme Court is hearing petitions filed by Ashwin Upadhyay and others, seeking a life time ban on convicted persons from contesting elections.

**What are the legal provisions?**

Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act, 1951), provides for the disqualification of a person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years. Such a person is disqualified from contesting elections for a further period of six years from the date of release. Section 8(4) further stipulates that a person convicted under criminal laws for heinous crimes like rape, the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) act for preaching or practice of untouchability, UAPA for unlawful association; Prevention of Corruption Act etc., will be disqualified irrespective of the period of their sentence and six years after release.

**What were past decisions?**

The Supreme Court has delivered notable judgments in favour of the decriminalisation of politics. In the *Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) case* (2002), it mandated the disclosure of criminal records of all candidates contesting elections. In the *CEC vs Jan Chaukidar case* (2013), it upheld the creative interpretation of the provisions of the RP Act, 1951 by the Patna High Court. One of the qualifications as per the act to contest elections is that a person should be an 'elector'. Section 62(5) stipulates that a person in jail is not eligible to vote in elections. The court interpreted that persons who are under trial prisoners, therefore cease to be 'electors' and hence not qualified to contest elections. However, the Parliament amended the act in 2013 to overturn this judgment



GETTY IMAGES

allowing under trial prisoners to contest elections. In *Lily Thomas* (2013), the court struck down section 8(4) of the RP Act, 1951, that allowed a sitting legislator to continue as a member even after being convicted if they filed an appeal, as unconstitutional and against political justice. After this judgment, a sitting legislator is disqualified immediately after the sentencing for a conviction.

It is pertinent to note that Section 11 of the RP Act, 1951 provides that the Election Commission (EC) may remove any disqualification or reduce the period of disqualification of a convicted person. It utilised this power in September 2019, to reduce the disqualification period of Prem Singh Tamang, incumbent Chief

Minister of Sikkim, from six years to 13 months which allowed him to contest and win a byelection.

It was a questionable decision of the EC to have reduced the disqualification period of a person convicted under the Prevention of Corruption Act, considering its various recommendations to curb criminalisation of politics.

**What is the current petition?**

The current petition seeks a life time ban on convicted persons from contesting elections. The petitioners argue that if a convicted person is not eligible for even a junior-grade government job, how could they become law makers six years after serving their sentence. However, the

Central government in an affidavit filed before the court in 2020 had mentioned that MPs and MLAs are not bound by any 'service conditions' unlike government servants, and hence the present disqualification period of six years after serving the sentence is adequate.

The Supreme Court has again sought the response of the Central government and the EC on the current petition.

**What can be the way forward?**

A report by ADR states that 251 (46%) of the 543 elected MPs in 2024, have criminal cases against them, and 171 (31%) face serious criminal charges including rape, murder, attempt to murder and kidnapping. It added that chances of winning for a candidate with a criminal background was 15.4% as against just 4.4% for a candidate with a clean background. The Law Commission in 1999 and 2014, and the EC on various occasions have highlighted the need to curb the criminalisation of politics. They have recommended that even persons against whom charges are framed by a competent court for an offence that entails punishment of more than five years should not be allowed to contest elections.

However, there has been no consensus on this recommendation amongst political parties considering the risk of its misuse. As regards the current petition, there may be convictions that do not involve moral turpitude for which permanent disqualification would be inappropriate and disproportionate. With respect to convictions for heinous crimes and under statutes like the Prevention of Corruption Act, there may be a case for life time disqualification as it is directly linked with probity in public life.

Meanwhile, the powers vested with the EC for reducing or removing the period of disqualification of a convicted person should be reviewed by the court for its constitutional validity.

Rangarajan, R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. Views expressed are personal.

### THE GIST

Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act, 1951), provides for the disqualification of a person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years.

Petitioners argue that if a convicted person is not eligible for even a junior-grade government job, how could they become law makers six years after serving their sentence.

A report by ADR states that 251 (46%) of the 543 elected MPs in 2024, have criminal cases against them, and 171 (31%) face serious criminal charges including rape, murder, attempt to murder and kidnapping.

## What is contributing to the downturn in Indian markets?

How are U.S. President Donald Trump's recent directives affecting Indian stock markets? What is the relationship between bond yields and stock markets? Will the rupee strengthen?

Saptarnano Ghosh

The story so far:

For the sixth consecutive day, BSE Sensex closed lower on Wednesday reflective of a major sell-off among foreign institutional investors and portfolio investors (FIIs/FPIs), mixed earnings and apprehensions about the tightening of the (imports') tariff regime in the U.S.

**Why is Trump affecting markets?**

On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump issued directives to restore tariff on steel and elevate the tariff on aluminium to 25%. The White House held these were to protect America's industries which "have been harmed by unfair trade practices and global excess capacity".

However, the directive was not well received in the Indian markets. This is primarily due to apprehensions about a

potential dumping of Asian exports to India, potentially culminating into downward revision of prices and increased competition. Indian steel manufacturers are already amidst a revision in steel prices. For perspective, Indian manufacturer JSW Steel stated in its Q3 earnings about its Net Smelting Return (NSR) in India falling by close to ₹1,800 compared to the preceding quarter. Additionally, with respect to the alleged dumping, India's Directorate General for Trade Remedies (DGTR) has an ongoing investigation into the imports of 'non-alloy and alloy steel flat products'.

**Why is foreign money moving away?**

FII and FPIs have been increasingly moving towards U.S. bonds, seeking a haven away from the current domestic Indian markets with potentially lesser returns. According to Devarsh Vakil, Head of Prime Research at HDFC Securities, the

current situation in the market emanates from tepid domestic earnings growth, elevated valuations in mid and small cap segments, and persistent inflation exceeding the RBI's lower threshold of 4%, and uncertainty around trade and tariffs. It is imperative to note here that bond yield and stock markets have an inverse relationship. This is because both vie for investor funds, aspiring to outdo the other by offering more returns. Therefore, when U.S. bond yield rises, foreign investors transit from Indian equities to U.S. bonds. Domestic, economic and political certainty alongside monetary policies are other contributing factors. All in all, the entire paradigm contributes to making the dollar stronger and the rupee weaker because of the flow of money. V.K. Vijaykumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial observed that while the downturn in markets has been because of

a combination of factors, the major among them has been the "relentless FII selling". He told *The Hindu* about FIIs having sold in the cash market every day, except for two days, so far this year – totalling to ₹93,907 crore. He further noted that while domestic institutional investors have been compensating for the FII outflows, "market sentiments have been impacted." Apurva Sheth, Head of Market Perspectives & Research at SAMCO Securities pointed out that dollar denominated returns of Indian equities "have not been impressive at all".

Mid and small cap stocks are also experiencing a correction due to the self-off spree.

**What is outlook for the near-term?**

Tightening of trade policies with the probability of a trade war under Trump, geopolitical tensions and slowing global growth could influence markets going forward. According to Mr. Vijaykumar, "FIIs will return to India, only the timing is uncertain." He further adds, "Indications of a growth and earnings recovery in India and dollar decline – we do not know when it will happen, will make FIIs buyers in India." Additionally, Mr. Vakil holds that deep uncertainty about President Trump's tariffs plans may keep investors on the "defensive". As for the outflow, he contends SIP flows are likely to remain strong and should be able to absorb bulk of the selling.

### THE GIST

On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump issued directives to restore tariff on steel and elevate the tariff on aluminium to 25%.

FII and FPIs have been increasingly moving towards U.S. bonds, seeking a haven away from the current domestic Indian markets with potentially lesser returns.

Tightening of trade policies with the probability of a trade war under the Trump administration, geopolitical tensions and slowing global growth could influence markets going forward.



For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'





## Wilful violation

Supreme Court's queries expose pattern of obduracy in T.N. Governor's conduct

The Supreme Court of India's probing questions to the Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, have exposed a pattern of wilful violation of constitutional duty on his part. The questions related to the lawfulness of Mr. Ravi's act in referring to the President of India a set of Bills for which he had earlier "withheld assent", but was constitutionally bound to grant assent after their adoption for a second time by the State Assembly. The Bench was speaking on behalf of everyone when it asked whether Mr. Ravi had referred these Bills to the President only to avoid granting assent, as required by the first proviso to Article 200 of the Constitution. The earlier understanding that the withholding of assent puts an end to the life of a Bill was altered by the Court's judgment in 2023, holding that whenever Governors opt for that course of action, they should return the Bill to the legislature, as required in the proviso, and if passed again by the House, they were bound to grant assent. Faced with queries, the Attorney-General of India (A-G) raised the issue of possible repugnancy with central law. He argued that the Governor had rightly referred these Bills to the President due to an apparent conflict with UGC Regulations, as these Bills seek to change the manner in which university vice-chancellors are appointed. The A-G also maintained that when the Governor had earlier withheld assent, the Bills ceased to exist and the Assembly had presumed that these had been "returned" by the Governor and adopted them a second time. In a related contention, he has also argued that the requirement to return a Bill does not hold good if the issue of repugnancy is noted.

These arguments may appear fascinating in determining the right course of action to be followed by Governors in dealing with Bills, and the Bench, which has reserved its judgment, may come up with answers. However, the fact that the Governor has been using his powers to scuttle legislation is quite obvious. He had not acted on some of these Bills for a year or two or expressed his reservations relating to the repugnancy aspect while withholding assent. Also, he ignored the fact that he was bound to grant assent when the Bills were presented to him a second time, but referred them to the President. Even in a 2023 hearing, the Court had questioned whether a Governor, having chosen to withhold assent, could exercise another option by referring the same Bill to the President. Mr. Ravi appears bent on scuttling any law that does not suit his world view. It is time the Union government took note of the challenge his continuance in office poses to constitutional governance in Tamil Nadu.

## Averting Engels' pause

Energy sustainability, labour markets emerge as key priorities in AI Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted India's stance on the evolving Artificial Intelligence (AI) landscape at the AI Action Summit in Paris on February 11, stressing the need for "governance and standards that uphold our shared values, address risks, and build trust". This perspective is also reflected in the joint statement signed by India and over 50 other countries. Commitments to trust, safety, and universal access align well with India's efforts to advance AI technologies while mitigating risks. The nation's approach to AI will be crucial as the technology progresses and costs decline. Innovations such as Chinese firm DeepSeek's breakthrough reasoning models underscore the growing risks to labour markets. The IT and services sector constitutes a significant portion of India's economy but employs a relatively smaller workforce. AI-driven efficiency gains present an attractive business proposition, yet the potential for job losses or stagnant wage growth in this sector poses serious risks. The Prime Minister rightly pointed out that technological advancements historically create new employment opportunities. However, as noted in the Economic Survey, there is a valid concern regarding an Engels' pause, a phase where firms reap the benefits of new technology while real wages stagnate. India cannot afford even a brief period of such economic strain, making proactive policy responses essential.

The summit's emphasis on sustainable AI growth and energy efficiency is equally timely, given global climate imperatives. The United States produces more than twice the electricity of India, despite having just a quarter of its population. A growing share of this energy is now consumed by data centres, which power AI training and deployment. As AI-driven energy demand surges, ensuring that this growth is powered by renewable sources is critical. Commercial AI success remains elusive, with substantial investments flowing into top market players but offering limited financial returns. While India may not replicate this high-investment, low-return model, developing foundational AI models that are tailored to Indian needs is imperative. Leveraging emerging efficiencies and maximising AI's potential must remain central to India's strategy. The India AI Mission's initiatives, such as subsidised access to Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) clusters and funding for promising projects, are encouraging steps toward this goal. Looking ahead, integrating AI education and skills training at scale will be essential. Even if a significant share of top AI talent moves abroad, India must ensure that its domestic industry retains sufficient expertise to remain competitive. AI will undoubtedly reshape industries, and preparing a robust talent pipeline will be key to ensuring that India not only adapts but also thrives in this transformation.

# Nuclear energy — dangerous concessions on liability

In the Union Budget speech on February 1, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government's intention to take up "amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act..." This announcement is likely to please Washington, where successive administrations have been unhappy that the law places some minimal responsibilities on nuclear manufacturers in the event of an accident. But, in India, any move to indemnify suppliers should be a matter of serious concern since this could undermine nuclear safety.

Moreover, the reactors that the American government is pushing India to buy are extremely expensive and their import makes no sense on economic grounds.

Any nuclear reactor carries the risk of accidents — some of which, such as the multiple reactor meltdowns at Fukushima, Japan, in 2011, can be catastrophic. Such a disaster affects three parties: the victims, the operator of the nuclear plant (which, in India, is likely to be the public sector company, Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited or NPCIL) and its supplier, which might be a large multinational corporation.

Following the Bhopal gas disaster (1984) the Supreme Court of India ruled, in 1986, in the Delhi Oleum gas leak case, that any enterprise engaged in a hazardous activity is "absolutely liable" for harm suffered by the victims. However, in 2010, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government created a special law for nuclear accidents that diluted this principle. Under this law, primary liability is channelled to the operator and capped at ₹1,500 crore.

This is unfair to victims because the economic damage caused by an accident can be much higher. The Japan Center for Economic Research estimated that the eventual cleanup costs of the Fukushima disaster could range from ₹35 trillion to ₹80 trillion (or ₹20 lakh crore to ₹46 lakh crore) — more than a thousand times the cap on operator liability in the Indian law.

### Assigning responsibility

Despite this gross mismatch, the law did have one slightly redeeming feature. Under pressure from civil society groups and the political opposition, the UPA government was forced to include a clause called the "right of recourse". This allows the operator to recoup compensation paid to victims from the supplier if the accident was caused by "supply of equipment... with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services".

Because of the historical monopoly enjoyed by U.S. nuclear companies, liability laws in many other countries lack this feature. Instead, they completely indemnify suppliers. This simply reflects the influence of powerful corporations and is not based on a scientific analysis of



M.V. Ramana

is a physicist with the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP)



Suvrat Raju

is a physicist with the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP)

previous accidents. In fact, design defects have played a role in every major accident to date. A weakness in the Mark I containment used in the reactors at Fukushima contributed to that accident. This defect was flagged as early as 1972, when a U.S. Atomic Energy Commission official warned that General Electric (GE), the reactor's designer, had used "data from tests not applicable to accident conditions" in safety assessments. The official recommended that "such designs not be accepted for construction permits" in the future. GE simply brushed aside this concern and, because it is indemnified by the Japanese liability regime, has not paid anything for the Fukushima accident.

Indemnity removes any direct economic incentive for suppliers to ensure reactor safety once a sale is completed. This is not a hypothetical concern. Following the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island, the Kemeny Commission established by the U.S. government noted that Babcock & Wilcox, the supplier of the reactor, had identified a safety hazard in an "earlier accident, bearing strong similarities to the one at Three Mile Island". Even though an engineer at the company had "urged, in the strongest terms, that clear instructions be passed on to the operators" to mitigate this hazard, the supplier failed to do so.

### Backtracking on progress

Nuclear suppliers were furious at the idea that they might have to pay for accidents in India. To appease these companies, the UPA government made farcical attempts to dilute the right of recourse, both during and after the parliamentary debates on the law. This led the Bharatiya Janata Party leader Arun Jaitley to write that a "leopard never changes its spots".

However, after assuming power, the National Democratic Alliance government has pursued precisely the same policy of prioritising nuclear corporations over potential victims. Following U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to India in 2015, the Ministry of External Affairs issued a set of "frequently asked questions" downplaying the operator's right of recourse, and disingenuously suggesting that it could be bypassed using a contractual arrangement between the supplier and the NPCIL.

These machinations have not satisfied U.S. suppliers who are unwilling to expose themselves to any legal hazard in India. Their concerns are easy to guess. Although the current liability cap is low, a future government might rationalise it to reflect the true cost of an accident, exposing these companies to large financial risks. Moreover, accepting even minimal liability in India endangers their cosy arrangements in other countries where they have successfully demanded complete indemnity.

The line in the Union Budget on the intent to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act should be a matter of serious concern

Finally, if the liability law mandates an assessment of the supplier's culpability, this might allow victims to hold corporate executives to account using criminal laws in the event of a disaster.

U.S. officials have actively lobbied on behalf of these politically influential companies. The outgoing U.S. Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, recently indicated that he had been in touch with leaders from both the ruling party and the Opposition in an effort to have the law amended. He also lamented that U.S. corporations had been unable to sell a single reactor to India nearly two decades after the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement. However, this has allowed India to avert a costly mistake as the troubled track record of these reactors in their home country shows.

The leading American reactor design on offer is called the AP1000. Electric utility companies commenced construction on four such reactors in the U.S. Two of these reactors, in South Carolina, were abandoned after repeated delays and cost escalations even though more than \$9 billion had already been spent. Two other reactors, in Georgia, were completed at an eye-popping cost of \$36.8 billion, over 250% of the \$14 billion estimate provided at the start of construction.

These high costs translate to expensive electricity. Even taking into account lower labour costs in India, the cost of electricity from such reactors would be several times higher than competing sources as the writers of this article showed in a 2013 study in the *Economic & Political Weekly*. Small modular reactor designs, such as those offered by the U.S.'s NuScale Power corporation, are likely to be even less economical since they lose out on "economies of scale".

### Hollow safety claims

The debate on liability also exposes the exaggerated safety claims made by suppliers. Westinghouse claims that a large release of radiation from an AP1000 reactor would happen only once in 50 million years. If reactors are so safe, why would nuclear vendors take extreme precautions to protect themselves from the consequences of an accident? If companies such as Westinghouse recognise that the risk of an accident is real and are unwilling to risk financial losses, why should Indian citizens who live near a reactor be willing to risk their lives and property?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi projects an image of a strong global leader. However, the government's announcement on the liability law is a revealing commentary on that message. When faced with pressure from the U.S. government, which puts the profits of U.S. corporations above all else, Mr. Modi's government seems unable to stand up for the basic rights and the safety of Indians.

# Budgeting for a gender-inclusive 'Viksit Bharat'

The Union Budget 2025-26 emphasises the government's commitment to inclusive development, balanced growth and prioritising the well-being of four key population groups: the poor, youth, farmers, and women. In a welcome announcement, the Finance Minister set forth a holistic vision for Viksit Bharat (or Developed India) with "zero poverty, universal good quality school education, 100% skilled labour with meaningful employment, 70% women in economic activities, and India as the food basket of the world". The explicit inclusion of women as a priority group within this national development framework is commendable and reinforces the government's pledge towards women-led development.

### Gender budget allocation

One of the most notable advancements in the Budget is the increase in the gender budget to 8.8% of the total Budget, a significant jump from 6.8% in the previous year. This is the highest allocation in two decades, with ₹4.49 lakh crore spread across 49 Union Ministries and departments. It reflects a strong commitment to creating a more supportive and empowering environment for women and girls. Further strengthening this commitment, 12 additional central Ministries — many from non-conventional sectors such as railways, ports, shipping and waterways, land resources, pharmaceuticals, and food processing industries — have integrated gender budgets, reflecting a whole-of-government approach to gender mainstreaming.

As in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) measured at usual status has steadily risen, reaching approximately 42% in 2023-24 from 33% in 2021-22. This is approaching the global average of 47%, as reported by the International Labour Organisation. However, a 37-percentage point gap remains when compared to men's labour force participation of 79%. Achieving the ambitious target of 70% women's participation in economic activities by 2047 necessitates increased investment in skilling, employment,



Susan Ferguson

is Country Representative at UN Women India

entrepreneurship, access to productive resources, and social security entitlements — areas that the Budget has acknowledged through its various schemes. Key initiatives such as the Skill India Programme, Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme (ESDP), National Skill Training Institutes, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), PM Employment Generation Programme, PM Vishwakarma, and Krishonnati Yojana have seen a combined increased allocation from ₹1.19 lakh crore to ₹1.24 lakh crore this year. Approximately 52% of these funds are directed toward women and girls. Additionally, new schemes such as the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, first-time entrepreneurs' scheme, sustainable livelihood for urban workers initiative, and Centres of Excellence for Make in India, will play a critical role in fostering women's workforce participation.

### A focus on gig workers

With 90% of India's working women engaged in the informal sector, the Budget's proposal to formalise gig workers by issuing identity cards and registering them on the e-Shram portal is a significant step. This initiative has the potential to empower millions of women by providing them with formal identity, access to social security entitlements, and financial inclusion benefits.

While the gig economy has offered women financial independence and flexible work arrangements, it often comes with low wages, job insecurity, and a lack of employment rights, including maternity benefits. The enforcement of labour codes and the provision of comprehensive social security measures, including progressive parental entitlements across informal and formal sectors, will be critical to ensure women's economic security.

The establishment of a Centre of Excellence on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the education sector and a dedicated ₹600 crore gender budget under the India AI Mission, demonstrate the

government's intent to harness AI for social good. As technological advancements redefine the future of work, investing in digital education, skills, and enterprise training for women will be imperative to ensuring equitable outcomes in the workforce and benefits for the entire economy.

### A diversity of economic roles

Financial institutions must recognise women's diverse economic roles, particularly in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and employment. For example, simplifying documentation requirements for economic and social security provisions, such as delinking Kisan Credit Cards from land ownership, would help women farmers avail loans and credit facilities that they can use to improve crop yields, productivity and expand their agricultural and allied operations. Tracking access and usage of such schemes through gender-disaggregated data would further enhance their effectiveness.

As per the government's Udyam portal, 20.5% of the micro, small and medium enterprises are women-owned employing about 27 million people. Unlocking finance for women-owned enterprises through collateral-free loans, alternative credit scoring models, and targeted financial literacy programmes will catalyse economic growth. Bain and Company, and Google, claim that establishing 30 million additional women-owned businesses could generate 150-170 million jobs, accounting for over 25% of the job creation needed for India's working-age population by 2030.

Budget 2025-26 provides a robust foundation for advancing women's economic participation. Realising the vision of Viksit Bharat requires sustained efforts in policy implementation, infrastructure development, and social norm transformation. By ensuring gender-responsive budgeting, strengthened social protection, and by fostering a labour market which includes both women and men, India can pave the way for women to become key drivers of national growth, ultimately achieving the ambitious target of 70% women in economic activities by 2047.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### AI, the job market

With a large and growing population, India faces significant employment challenges. The advent of AI could exacerbate these issues. Once hailed as a major job creator, the IT sector has seen a decline. This serves as a cautionary tale about the impact of

technological advancements. While AI has advantages, it is also essential to acknowledge its limitations and boundaries. The Prime Minister's speech at the AI Action Summit in Paris seems to be overly optimistic (February 12).  
C. Raghavan,  
Chennai

### Pages of history

I happened to read the Editorial in this daily, "India with Indonesia" (January 27), which prompted me to rummage through some old papers that my father had. My father, (the late) T. Govindarajulu, joined the editorial department in 1944, and was posted to

Singapore as *The Hindu's* Staff Correspondent in 1946. He was the only Indian correspondent to have covered the Renville talks between the Dutch and the Indonesians under the auspices of the United Nations in 1947.  
Lakshmi Raghavan,  
Chennai

### Domestic cricket

The interview with Saurashtra cricketer Sheldon Jackson, who announced his retirement after a successful career in domestic cricket, underlines the greatness and value of the well-structured Indian domestic cricket system, especially the Ranji Trophy,

which gave cricket a pan-India impetus. If the former format of the game has to survive, then the cradle of Indian cricket cannot be overlooked.  
R. Sivakumar,  
Chennai

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



# Implications of the AI Diffusion Framework

The Biden-Harris administration unveiled a flurry of policies in their last week in office. The most extraordinary among them is the Framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Diffusion. It has many goals: preserving U.S. hegemony in AI technology, balancing innovation and national security, and deterring U.S. adversaries from harvesting the strategic rewards of AI. These goals signal the U.S.'s strategic vision for AI, heralding its transformative potential to advance economic prowess and military dominance in the coming years.



Ashwin Prasad

Research Analyst in the High-Tech Geopolitics Programme at The Takshashila Institution

**Mechanism of the framework**  
Compute capacity using advanced AI chips is a key infrastructure necessity in developing advanced AI systems. Leveraging the U.S.'s dominance in chips and the AI supply chain, the framework extends the prevailing export controls to cover the entire gamut of AI technology stack, including AI chips, chip-making tools, and closed AI model weights – the key to a trained AI system's learning and decision-making abilities. Countries are placed in three tiers, each subject to different levels of restrictions. The first tier comprises key allies, irreplaceable in the AI supply chain. They are unconstrained in their freedom to import AI technology. The third tier covers key adversaries such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran. The framework perpetuates the entire spectrum of export controls and prevents the diffusion of advanced AI systems to these countries. The second tier encompasses the rest of the world, including India. The framework establishes a system of limited access to these countries. Companies from the U.S. can tap into the commercial opportunities of AI in these countries as long as they maintain only a tiny share of their total compute capacity there and safeguard against unauthorised access. The prevailing export controls

The Framework for AI Diffusion evaluates India solely by its technological capabilities in AI, while ignoring the strategic value of the India-U.S. partnership

have always been restrictive against U.S. adversaries. At first glance, this framework seems to extend some of these restrictions on all but closest allies and partners. Indeed, major allies such as Austria and Israel and other strategic partners such as India are not exempt from the rules. However, the limits and caps imposed are free-handed in satisfying any near-term demand for AI chips from anyone but the countries of concern. Even the export restrictions on model weights are for closed models that far exceed any existing advanced AI systems. So, it will be business as usual in the short term. The entire system is designed to ensure that if advanced AI systems that are more powerful and capable than the prevailing ones are ever developed, it will happen only in trusted American geographies. The framework will likely succeed in its objectives in the short term and accrue the benefits of cutting-edge AI to the U.S. and its closest allies. But it will influence and reshape the global technological and strategic landscape in the long term. Through a series of executive actions, the U.S. has mandated the concentration of global AI technological capabilities within its borders and those of allied countries. American companies seeking to establish frontier-scale AI capabilities outside the U.S. – whether motivated by lower costs or more favourable policies – will now face significant barriers. Even among key allies exempt from export controls, this policy sets a concerning precedent of unilateral American executive action that could potentially deny them their strategic priorities in the future. These allies and American corporations will likely hedge against such possibilities, developing contingency plans to protect their technological interests and maintain competitive advantages. In fact, as AI technology advances in the long term, the likelihood increases that America's plans may yield

unintended consequences. Countries, including U.S. allies, will become more motivated to develop independent supply chains and sovereign AI innovation to circumvent U.S. technological constraints. This could fragment the global AI ecosystem that the U.S. currently dominates. **Eroding goodwill with India** The policy framework disadvantages India, positioning it less favourably than anticipated. By discouraging the development of cutting-edge AI systems beyond U.S. borders, the framework may disincentivise investments and operations of Indian subsidiaries of leading American AI companies. This could create conditions that risk drawing away India's pool of top AI talent and impeding knowledge transfer and technological innovation within the country. This could be a major point of contention for India, given the implications on its technological and economic interests. The framework evaluates India solely by its technological capabilities in AI, while ignoring the strategic value of the India-U.S. partnership. It also disregards the substantial social capital built between the two countries through recent technology cooperation, including advances in semiconductor manufacturing collaboration. Instead, it serves as a stark reminder of the U.S.-led technology denial regimes that restricted India's access to nuclear technologies for three decades following its nuclear tests. There is a disconnect between America's export control policies and its strategic partnership with India regarding Indo-Pacific cooperation and shared goals of countering Chinese influence in the region. This misalignment risks undermining the bilateral relationship both nations have carefully cultivated in recent years. It could compel India to hedge against its technological and economic dependence on the U.S.

# Reopening fiscal wounds

The Union Budget has left the Kerala government deeply disappointed

## STATE OF PLAY

Tiki Rajwi  
tiki.rajwi@thehindu.co.in



The Union Budget sparked anger in Kerala over the Centre's "continued neglect" of the State on the fiscal front. For some time now, there has been deepening distrust between Left Front-ruled Kerala and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre in the financial realm. The Kerala government has repeatedly accused the Centre of initiating lopsided policies that have worsened the imbalances in the sharing of revenue resources and of weakening cooperative federalism. The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) criticised the Budget for "ignoring" the State. Predictably, the Kerala unit of the BJP was quick to describe the Budget as a windfall for Kerala. But its narrative was drowned in the controversy which erupted over Union Minister George Kurian's remark that if the State wanted more funds, it should perhaps declare itself backward in terms of infrastructure, education, and social welfare so that the Finance Commission can make helpful recommendations. Apart from demanding again a ₹24,000 crore special economic package for overcoming financial distress, the Kerala government also pleaded for a ₹2,000 crore package for relocating the survivors of the landslides that occurred in July 2024 in Wayanad, and for ₹5,000 crore of special assistance for the Vizhinjam port project, which it calls a game-changer for maritime trade. These requests were ignored.

Kerala's Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal described the Union Budget as "extremely disappointing" and said that it lacked a pan-India perspective that was sympathetic to the diverse needs of the States. Expectedly, the State Budget presented by him on February 7 allocated the first tranche of ₹750 crore for the landslide-affected people of Mundakkai and Choorimala in Wayanad. The Post Disaster Needs Assessment document prepared by experts had estimated the cost of post-landslide reconstruction and rehabilitation to be ₹2,221 crore. The Railway Budget, too, left the State disappointed. Although Kerala has been allocated ₹3,042 crore for developing rail infrastructure, none of the projects specifically demanded by it, including long-pending ones such as the Nilambur-Nanjangud line or the Sabari rail, were announced. The Left's narrative that Kerala has been punished yet again for its hard-earned progress in sectors such as education, health, and social welfare was inbuilt in the criticism. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan again accused the Modi government of failing to honour the federal principles upheld in the Constitution. This is the latest episode in the long-drawn-out struggle between Kerala and New Delhi over what the southern State describes as its dwindling allocation from the divisible pool and unfair curbs on borrowings. Kerala had moved the Supreme Court last year, challenging the Centre's decision curtailing its borrowing capacity. Before the 16th Finance Commission's tour of Kerala in December 2024 for drafting recommendations, the Left government hosted a conclave of Finance Ministers of non-BJP-ruled States for establishing common ground on shared fiscal grievances. Kerala has repeatedly drawn attention to its divisible tax pool share that has shrunk from 3.88% under the 10th Finance Commission to 1.92% under the 15th Finance Commission. In the face of diminishing central transfers, Kerala has, however, managed to improve its own-tax and non-tax revenues, though it faces tough financial questions that have no easy answers. The NTI Aayog Fiscal Health Index 2025 placed Kerala among "aspirational States" that have "consistently" faced fiscal challenges over the past nine years. "These States face high debt, large interest payments, weak revenue generation, and inefficiencies in capital expenditure, with reliance on non-tax revenue impacting their fiscal health and rankings," said the report, which ranked States for the 2023 fiscal. It termed "low quality of expenditure" and "debt sustainability" as two of the significant challenges in Kerala's path. It remains to be seen how the 16th Finance Commission, which is expected to submit its recommendations by October 31, 2025, will play out for Kerala and its tax devolution concerns. That said, it is evident that delicate negotiations on the financial front with the Centre will continue to be the State's top priority, at least in the short term.

# A 11-year high of 55% urban residents report stagnant income in 2025

Concerns over stagnant income levels overshadowed optimism about reduced expenses among urban consumers

## DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Urban consumers in India began the new year with both hope and concern. On the one hand, India's retail inflation eased to a five-month low of 4.31% in January, providing some relief to consumers by reducing the pressure on their household expenses. On the other, worries about the employment scenario continued to weigh on them. Income levels too have been stagnant – in January, 55% of urban consumers reported that their income levels had remained unchanged compared to the same period last year. This is the highest such share in nearly 11 years. As concerns over stagnant income levels overshadowed any optimism about reduced expenses, a growing share of urban consumers remained pessimistic about the broader economic outlook as the new year began, says the Reserve Bank of India's Consumer Confidence Survey, which was conducted across 19 major cities in January. It covered 6,081 respondents, of which 52.4% were women. **Chart 1** shows the share of respondents who said that the prices of commodities had increased/decreased/stayed the same in January 2025 compared to a year ago. The share of respondents who reported an increase in prices in January this year (93%) was the lowest since July last year. Around 1% of the respondents said that prices had declined, which has been the case since the pandemic. An increasing share said that prices had continued to remain the same. **Chart 2** shows the spending perception on essential items. The 87.6% who said that spending on essential items had increased was the lowest since September 2024. Less than 2% of the respondents felt that spending on essential items had declined, aligning with the past trend. Close to 1% felt that

it had remained the same.

**Chart 3** shows perceptions of spending on non-essential items. There was a slight increase in the share of respondents who reported that their spending on non-essential items had remained unchanged compared to a year ago. The share of those who stated that their spending had increased declined marginally in January 2025. Overall, on the spending front, conditions have slightly improved or have at least not deteriorated further, as reflected in Charts 1, 2, and 3.

**Chart 4** shows perceptions of income levels. The share of respondents who reported that their income levels had remained unchanged compared to a year ago reached a record high in January. There was a decrease in the share of respondents who indicated a decline or an increase in their income.

**Chart 5** shows urban consumers' perceptions of employment. About 42.7% reported a decline in job opportunities compared to a year ago. Following the sharp drop in the employment sentiment during the pandemic, there had been a steady recovery since, with an increasing share of respondents reporting improved job opportunities. However, this trend reversed in mid-2024, as pessimism about the job market began to grow. This pessimism has deepened further in the current year. **Charts 4 and 5** reveal growing challenges on the income front. Job opportunities are becoming increasingly scarce, and those who are employed are grappling with stagnant income levels, highlighting the mounting financial pressures faced by urban consumers.

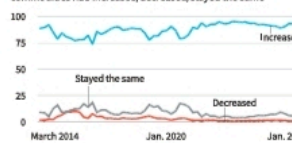
Pessimism over stagnant income levels has had a significant impact on consumers, with 43% of them stating that the overall economic situation had worsened in January compared to the same period last year. This is the highest such share in at least a year (**Chart 6**).

## Mixed feelings

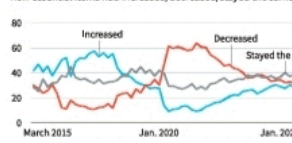
The data for the charts were sourced from the RBI's Consumer Confidence Survey - January 2025



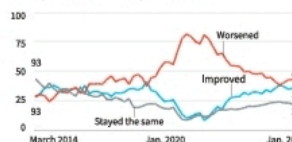
**Chart 1:** Share of respondents (%) who said that the prices of commodities had increased/decreased/stayed the same



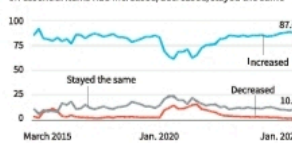
**Chart 2:** Share of respondents (%) who said that the spending on essential items had increased/decreased/stayed the same



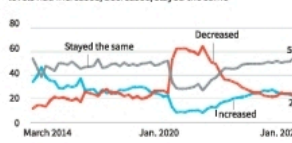
**Chart 3:** Share of respondents (%) who said that spending on non-essential items had increased/decreased/stayed the same



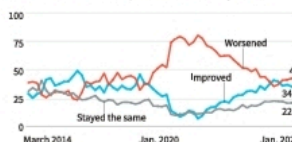
**Chart 4:** Share of respondents (%) who said that their income levels had increased/decreased/stayed the same



**Chart 5:** Share of respondents (%) who said that job opportunities had improved/worsened/stayed the same



**Chart 6:** Share of respondents (%) who said that general economic situation had improved/worsened/stayed the same



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 13, 1975

## U.S. Congress probe into hiring of military trainers

Washington, Feb. 12: Rising unemployment in the U.S. and the lure of high pay and adventure in exotic lands is persuading a number of American ex-servicemen, who had fought in Vietnam, to seek jobs as military mercenaries in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The latest disclosures show that a 1,500-strong American private force, commanded by a former Major-General, is in Iran to help create a helicopter strike force known as the Iran Sky Cavalry Brigade. It will be modelled after a similar American unit that fought in Vietnam.

The Bell Helicopter International, a private American company which has a five-year contract with the Iran Government to provide this tactical training force, is a sister firm of the Bell Helicopter Company, which sold over 450 attack helicopters to Iran two years ago.

Though the U.S. Government is not involved in this particular training contract, it was revealed early this week that another private company, the Vinnell Corporation of California, had a \$77 million (Rs. 61.6 crores) contract with the U.S. Defence Department to provide a 1000-man special force unit to train Saudi soldiers to protect their oil fields from invasion by foreign troops.

Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been buying huge quantities of arms from the U.S. with their oil riches, and some of the weapons supplied are so modern and sophisticated that even the U.S. armed forces have not started to use them.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 13, 1925

## Indians in E. Africa

Bombay, Feb. 12: Opposition to an Indian official being sent out to East Africa to inspect an area in the Lowlands of Kenya for Indian Colonisation, was voiced by Mr. C.F. Andrews who was interviewed this afternoon by the Associated Press. The African population of Kenya, said Mr. Andrews, needed all available lands for their expansion and their paramount interest should be respected, for too much land had already been alienated from them in the Highlands and if possible some of this land ought to be recovered for African use, because Native reserves were already proving too small.



# Bullying, stress, digital exposure and a troubling teen transformation

**DATELINE**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM  
ARJUN RAGHUNATH

A class II student of a school in Palakkad district, Kerala, was recently caught on camera threatening to kill his teacher in front of the school principal after the teacher confiscated his mobile phone. Even before Kerala could process the shock of this incident, another tragic story emerged—the case of a 15-year-old boy from a school in Kochi, who allegedly suffered relentless bullying by his classmates. On January 15, he ended his life by jumping from the 26th floor of his apartment. These two incidents serve as a reflection—or rather, as stark warnings—of the troubling transformations teenagers are undergoing. If ragging and bullying were once confined to college campuses, schools are now increasingly witnessing more vulgar and aggressive versions of such behaviour.

While many attribute this to the influence of the digital world, others blame the pressures of academics. However, experts point to deeper underlying factors—the changing dynamics of parenting and the decline of moral values in society. Although only a few cases of brutal ragging and bullying in schools have so far surfaced, experts in the field point out that these may be just the tip of the iceberg. There is also a tendency among teachers to suppress such incidents to protect their reputation, which only exacerbates the stress on victims, sometimes pushing them to take extreme steps. Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights Chairperson K V Manoj Kumar notes a rise in aggressive behaviour among teenagers after the Covid-19 lockdowns. “It seems the post-Covid stress within families is reflecting on children. The commission is even considering a detailed study on the issue,” he said. According to Kumar, a key problem is the failure of parents and teachers to recognise,

understand, and address their children’s basic problems. “In one of the recent widely discussed cases, we found that the child had Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), but neither the parents nor the teachers had identified it. It seems to be the outcome of the diminishing parent-child and teacher-student relationships,” he explained. In the Palakkad incident, teachers were widely criticised for sharing the video of the student’s violent behaviour on social media instead of addressing the issue constructively. School managements too admit the fact that teacher-student relationships are not as strong as they once were but argue that parents are more responsible for this. “There have been cases where parents address teachers disrespectfully in front of their children. Some well-educated parents have even insisted that teachers apologise to their children after blindly believing false narratives about classroom incidents. In such a scenario, it is no surprise that student-teacher relationships are diminish-

ing,” said Indira Rajan, secretary general of the National Council of CBSE Schools. She also emphasised that the character of a child is moulded at his or her home. In most cases, students who face disciplinary issues lack parental attention. Primary caregivers, mostly mothers, are key figures in noticing even subtle changes in their children’s behaviour. “This is crucial these days, especially as drug mafias are targeting students. To address this, the council has initiated a programme to form groups of mothers at all 1,500-plus recognised CBSE schools in Kerala. A healthy interaction of mothers with their children is one of the best stress-busters for children,” she said. Child psychologists attribute rising aggression and diminishing tolerance among students to increased exposure to digital media and lifestyle changes. Dr Jayaprakash R, a professor at the Behavioural Paediatric Unit at the SAT Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram Government Medical College, said that too much

exposure to video games could create a sense of aggression and urge to win among children. It will affect their ability to negotiate, eventually leading to a tendency to go to any extent to win. Unrestricted access to the cyber world, which most children now enjoy, provides limitless options to fulfill desires by any means. Many children even initiate the brutal acts they see online, he said. He also noted that even upper primary class students are now requiring counselling due to persistent ragging and bullying. “Children are now getting everything they need at their doorstep through simple processes. Whether it is food of their choice or even a book or pencil. This indeed affects the tolerance capabilities of children,” said Kumar. Advocate J Sandhya, former member of the Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, blames the changing behaviour of children on stressful academics. “Schools focus primarily on academic activities. Students go for personality development training after their schooling. That

needs to change. Personality development should be integrated into the curriculum right from an early stage so that children develop the capability to understand what is good, and what is bad,” she said. She also expressed scepticism about steps such as installing surveillance cameras in classrooms as a deterrent. “Instead of a coercive approach, a cordial approach could work better in addressing the issue,” she suggested. Experts also point out that the lack of an easily accessible forum for students in distress to confidently share their grievances is a reason for the mounting stress, leading students to take extreme steps. “If instances of ragging and bullying continue to rise, we also need to seriously consider setting up anti-ragging cells in schools as well,” said the chairman of the Child Rights Commission. Most students at the school level remain unaware of a host of telephonic support for reporting abuse and seeking support.

DHNS

## India is acutely aware that trade and immigration issues are a potential double whammy. But it believes it can preserve growing ties

MUJIB MASHAL

As he prepared to go to Washington this week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of building on the warm relations shared with President Donald Trump. But Trump can be a fickle friend. So when Modi meets with him today, he is expected to bear offerings designed to ease emerging points of friction and preserve growing US-India ties. One major focus is trade. Indian officials have said that domestic companies are in talks to increase purchases of American energy supplies, particularly liquefied natural gas. The two leaders are also expected to discuss expanded spending on US defence equipment and potentially announce new deals. In addition, Modi can point to recent reductions in Indian tariffs on almost all American motorcycles—namely Harley-Davidsons—and the prospect of lower duties on goods like bourbon and pecans, which are produced mainly in Republican states.

These moves, though largely symbolic in some cases, are intended to placate Trump’s irritation over the American trade deficit with India and the high import duties that make India a difficult market to enter.

On another big source of tension, illegal immigration, Modi has already offered concessions. India accounts for the largest group of migrants to the US outside Latin America. The Indian government has made clear it will cooperate with Trump’s deportation drive, even as it caused political headache for Modi last week.

The arrival of 100 shackled and handcuffed Indians on an American military plane, just days before Modi was to go to Washington, left his government scrambling to play down the episode and contain a domestic backlash.

India is acutely aware that the trade and immigration issues are a potential double whammy in Trump’s universe of preoccupations. So far, while Trump has threatened even close allies with punitive tariffs over these issues, India has managed to stay out of his cross hairs. If any country can walk the tightrope of Trump’s hurricane-force return to power, India believes it is the one.

The two countries, the world’s largest democracies, have grown more closely aligned economically and geopolitically as they see a shared threat in an increasingly assertive China.

Modi will be the fourth world leader to meet with Trump since he took office about three weeks ago, after a visit to the White House by the Japanese prime minister and talks with the Israeli and Jordanian leaders over war in the Middle East.

Trump and Modi share much in common. Both are strongman leaders who hold largely transactional views of foreign policy, with a populist’s sense of what plays well with the base.

Even as Modi has shown a willingness to go along with Trump’s muscle-flexing, he is working to get what India needs out of the relationship. That is particularly true with Trump’s push to undo a recent Biden-era legacy.

There has been speculation that the Justice Department could drop criminal



ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

## What Modi can offer Trump on tariffs and trade

### How big is the tariff on that Harley?

charges of fraud and bribery against Gautam Adani, a billionaire ally of Modi. India is also hoping to move on from US legal actions related to accusations of an Indian government plot to assassinate an American citizen on US soil.

Even during the Biden administration, officials took pains to deal with the assassination case largely privately, a sign of how important the countries’ trade and defence ties have become.

The relationship has enjoyed bipartisan support in Washington, including among lawmakers who are now in Trump’s inner circle and view India as important in sharing the burden of containing China.

In addition to the “very close rapport” between Trump and Modi, Vikram Misri, India’s foreign secretary, has listed several areas of “convergence of interest” between the two nations.

Misri pointed to expanding technology and trade connections, as well as joint efforts on counterterrorism and on security in the Indo-Pacific region. He also highlighted the increasingly influential Indian diaspora in the United States, as well as the large numbers of Indian students studying there.

An important area of alignment that could help both leaders claim victories is defence cooperation, particularly weapons spending.

India is the world’s largest importer of military arms, accounting for nearly 10% of the global total, according to the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research. For decades, cheap and reliable Russian equipment made up the bulk of India’s defence purchases. American equipment was expensive and out of reach because of long-standing US suspicions over India’s ties to Russia.

The New York Times

The economic relationship between India and the United States is widely seen as good for both sides. Two-way trade is growing and, alone among Asian countries, India routinely trades more with the United States than it does with China, its neighbour and rival.

Yet under President Donald Trump, trade is a point of friction. Like virtually all countries that do business with the US, India runs a surplus. Last year it shipped about \$87 billion worth of goods and imported \$42 billion, adding \$46 billion to America’s trade deficit. Trump does not like those kinds of figures. He has raised against countries that sell more to the US than they buy.

During his first term, Trump called India “the tariff king.” He pointed to Indian duties as high as 100% on some American goods. He was particularly focussed on a tariff he said was blocking Harley-Davidson from exporting more motorcycles. When India’s trade officials reduced that tariff, Trump paraphrased them: “We want to keep your president happy. Isn’t that nice?”

This week, when Trump sits down in Washington with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, tariffs are expected to be a topic of conversation again. Here’s what you need to know about the trading relationship between

India and the United States. Is India really taking advantage of American trade? India’s trade surplus with the US has been growing under Modi. What had been about \$20 billion to \$24 billion annually shot up to \$33 billion in 2021. But importantly, back-and-forth trade between the two has been growing at a similar rate. As a percentage of the total, the surplus has stayed nearly steady.

India has a complicated list of tariffs. There are hundreds of categories taxed at different rates, which can change wildly from year to year.

What does India trade with America? Most of what these two countries’ trade falls under the category of oil and petrochemicals, or that of gems. In both cases, the US ships vast quantities of raw or semi-processed material to India, where refineries or gem-cutters process them in their workshops. In some cases, the finished goods go right back to the US.

What could India do to satisfy Trump? India has spent between \$1.5 billion and \$4 billion on American defence imports in recent years, and would have trouble taking on expensive new systems, like fighter jets. It has outstanding orders from Russian and French suppliers. Still, weapons and gas hold promise as a way to tamp down the trade imbalance.

NYT

## Paatal Lok 2: Streaming the subaltern

HARISH S WANKHEDE

In the landscape of contemporary Indian cinema, OTT platforms have become a vital space for bold, intellectual storytelling, offering audiences the opportunity to experience cinema as an art form rather than mere entertainment. For too long, mainstream Hindi cinema—along with its regional counterparts—has shied away from confronting the social responsibilities of filmmakers. Stories that critically engage with socio-political realities remain rare, as the industry often focuses on spectacle, melodrama, and sensational narratives. Yet, there is a growing appetite for films and series that offer deeper, more thought-provoking inquiry. *Paatal Lok 2* does just that, delivering a gripping crime thriller that impresses not only with its rich performances and stunning screenplay but also with its sharp social critique.

Hollywood has long explored the intersection of crime, capitalism, and politics, from *Chinatown* (1974) to *A L.A. Confidential* (1997) to *Erin Brockovich* (2000). In contrast, mainstream Hindi cinema has offered few comparable nuanced storytelling—*Sangham* (2012) being a notable exception. *Paatal Lok 2* firmly establishes itself within this tradition, offering a complex exploration of crime, class, and politics that resonates with today’s socio-political climate. Its outstanding performances, moral depth, and intricate narrative make it a standout in the crime thriller genre.

At the heart of the series is Jaideep Ahlawat’s remarkable performance as Hathiram Chaudhary, the gritty, morally conflicted cop. This season presents a more complex side of Hathiram, one that embraces his *Jazir* identity with newfound audacity while retaining his humanity. He’s a loving husband, a dedicated father, and a man of moral conviction. Ahlawat’s performance is both physically and emotionally grounded: his bulk, ragged attire, and raw tone make him a convincing presence. His character arc culminates in a quietly powerful moment in the final episode, where a fleeting smile reveals the weight of his journey through violence, corruption, and betrayal.

Another significant achievement of *Paatal Lok 2* is its portrayal of Nagaland—a region rarely given centrality in mainstream Hindi cinema. The show immerses viewers in the region’s breathtaking landscapes, the sounds of the Nagaland language, and its complex socio-political realities. Rather than reducing Nagaland and its people to exotic backdrop stereotypes, the series presents them as fully realised characters with many more deeper spiritual lessons.

*Paatal Lok 2* should be celebrated as a brave attempt at repositioning the idea of responsible cinematic art. Director Avinash Arun has crafted a work that is both an exciting crime thriller and a sharp social commentary. *Paatal Lok 2* succeeds in offering a layered, nuanced exploration of India’s socio-political realities without sacrificing its entertainment value.

(The writer is an assistant professor at the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences in JNU, New Delhi)

### OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: FEBRUARY 1975

Sheikh and Karunanidhi discuss autonomy

Madras, Feb. 12  
Kashmir leader Sheikh Abdullah had a 45-minute discussion with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi at the latter’s residence here this afternoon on State autonomy and other “problems of mutual interest.” The Sheikh told newsmen, “We tried to understand each other’s views on many issues, including State autonomy.” Asked whether the views were identical, the Sheikh said that on some issues they were, and on some others, there was a difference of opinion.

25 YEARS AGO: FEBRUARY 2000

27 killed in Bihar, Manipur

New Delhi, Feb. 12  
At least 27 people, including 14 security personnel and two presiding officers, were killed and several injured in landmine blasts and military attacks as violence, rigging and snatching of ballot papers marred the first phase of polling in Bihar and Manipur with an estimated voter turnout of 60 to 70 per cent. A truck carrying a CRPF contingent and poll officials was blown up by banned PWG extremists who triggered a landmine blast at Jharia village in Kaimur district hours before the polling began in Bihar.

### OASIS | SANDHYA VASUDEV

## The divine experience

remain the same despite the gap of thousands of years.

The Gita, being sprung out of Lord Krishna due to an unexpected streak of weakness and a reluctance displayed by warrior Arjuna as the war was about to commence. Krishna’s language is set high in standard, and style of delivery is exceptionally beautiful in the form of couplets, that need careful decoding of the Sanskrit language, to grasp the true meaning. For a layman it is best learnt through listening from learned scholars or reading interpretations by

renowned Vedic scholars.

A few points raised by Arjuna and explained by Krishna led to an overcoming guilt whilst on the battlefield, tolerating sorrow of death of beloved relatives, abiding strictly by one’s duty despite other choices, reining in of one’s mind and control of one’s senses to lead a disciplined life, winning over one’s inherent tendencies of desire, greed, anger, lust, jealousy, attachment, ego as they all tend ultimately to victimise a person and make a fool out of him, to coordinate one’s plans with the divine will for a peaceful life, and

many more deeper spiritual lessons. It can be seen that any of today’s problems can be addressed by referring to the principles contained in the Gita. So it does one good to go through this scripture at least once in one’s lifetime and also write down the verses, paying homage to Lord Krishna’s divine words. His Holiness Sugandharatree the swami, reigning puritana puttige nara can be addressed by referring to this appeal worldwide and motivating every individual to the divine experience. The fruits of one’s labour will not be hard currency in one’s bank account, but divine ethereal experience enriching one’s spiritual life.





## Skill gloom

The L&T chief has raised a critical point, but welfare schemes alone are not the reason for labour shortage

**L**&T CHAIRMAN SN Subrahmanyam's angst that labourers are unwilling to work or relocate for jobs due to the availability of government welfare schemes and a preference for comfort is understandable as he was merely articulating the feelings of a lot of his peers in corporate India. Subrahmanyam may in fact feel vindicated as even the country's apex court has come down heavily on governments and political parties announcing freebies ahead of elections, and said it is disincentivising people from working and, in states like Maharashtra, drying up the labour force. Even the most sympathetic observers would agree that the dividing line between freebies and welfare scheme is getting blurred by the day.

With L&T employing around 400,000 labourers, Subrahmanyam obviously knows what he is talking about. In any case, this is not the first time he is raising the labour shortage issue. Industry players say that the construction sector never fully recovered from the exodus of migrant workers during Covid; many didn't return, and those who did were not equipped with the required skill sets. Extreme weather conditions, especially in north India last year, further aggravated the situation.

So the point is that welfare schemes or freebies alone are not the reason for this reluctance of workers to relocate. Periodic Labour Force Survey data shows the share of workers in manufacturing has come down to 11.4% from the pre-pandemic level of 12.1%. And, the share of people in agriculture has increased to 46.1% from 42.5% during the same period. Experts have pointed out that the reverse migration from industrial states during the pandemic led to a proliferation of nearly 60 million people in agriculture. Successive policy shocks like demonetisation and lockdown reinforced a reversal of the structural transformation that India's economy was undergoing, where people were moving out of agriculture to manufacturing.

The real elephant in the room is skilling or the lack of it. According to a report from consulting firms Knight Frank, over 80% of the workforce in the construction sector, which is the second largest employment generator, is unskilled. This is at the root of the problem. A study conducted by the National Skill Development Corporation revealed a significant gap between the demand and supply of skilled workers in India. The study pegged the demand for skilled workers at an astonishing 103 million, while the current supply stands at just 74 million. This imbalance underscores a pressing need for focused efforts in skilling and training across various sectors in the country.

Some large companies like L&T are trying to counter the problem through extensive skill training facilities and housing scheme for migrant workers. But isolated endeavours are not going to solve the systemic problem. There is an urgent need to create policies and support systems to encourage labour mobility across regions. Investing in vocational training programmes to equip the workforce with the necessary skills for emerging industries and partnerships between educational institutions and companies to align curriculum with industry needs is yet another yawning gap. Industry should also focus on the lack of support systems for migrant labourers in the urban and peri-urban areas where construction is concentrated. Labourers need safety nets. While the Union Budget has taken some steps such as the establishment of five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling, they don't signal the urgency that is required to impart skill education to a large section of the young population.

## To win the global money game, US has to play

**FOR FAR TOO** many people, moving money around the world is much more difficult than it should be. If President Donald Trump and Congress want to maintain US's economic leadership — and to defend the dollar's role as the dominant reserve currency — they should make a greater effort to address this obstacle to global prosperity.

Within most countries, it's easy enough to pay for goods or services, or to send money to a friend. But making payments across borders or currencies is often a lot slower and more expensive. This is particularly true for migrant workers, who can face costs of 6% or more to send money home. It's also a growing problem for people and businesses in lower-income countries, which are increasingly viewed as too risky by the correspondent banks that process international payments — an unintended consequence of measures to crack down on money laundering and terrorist financing.

Potential solutions range from linking national instant payment systems to creating a global "Plinternet" in which digital representations of money (and other assets) could travel among participating countries through a mutually governed hub. Politically, though, progress has been slow. Goals set by the Group of 20 developed and developing nations — like reducing the average cost of retail cross-border payments to less than 1%, and the duration mostly to less than an hour — won't be met by the target year, 2027. The US has a crucial role to play in getting things moving — as noted in a new report that I helped write for the Bretton Woods Committee, which I chaired.

Let's focus for now on instant payments, which are much closer to fruition. Individual countries need to establish viable domestic systems before they can be interlinked. Some jurisdictions — notably Brazil with Pix and India with the United Payments Interface — have successfully done so, aided perhaps by the lack of entrenched systems that needed to be displaced. Not so the US. Its two instant-payment systems, FedNow and RTP from The Clearing House, do very little business; people are content enough with credit cards, debit cards, Venmo, and PayPal, none of which entail true instant settlement; banks have little incentive to upset the status quo, which earns them sizeable merchant interchange fees.

Given the dollar's central role in international payments, it's hard to see how any global instant payment system can work until the US has a robust one of its own. To jump-start the process, it should require banks to provide the service to customers, enabling money transfer to vendors or friends with immediate and final settlement — the strategy used in Brazil, India and more recently Europe. Fees should be no greater than those charged for other forms of payment.

The next task will be to link national systems together. The G20 initiative, the Financial Stability Board and the Bank for International Settlements have already documented the necessary steps. The BIS has made a good start with Project Nexus, which is developing an Asian regional system. Yet it's clearly not enough. What's needed is a framework to facilitate agreement among disparate nations on the rules of a global system — including governance, enforcement of anti-money-laundering standards, and standards for participants.

The response to the 2008 financial crisis suggests a way forward. The G20 mandated setting up central clearinghouses for over-the-counter derivatives, which had wreaked great havoc during the crisis. The BIS Committee on Payments and Settlement Systems worked with the International Organization of Securities Dealers to establish the principles that clearinghouses and other financial market infrastructures had to meet, leaving the question of how to individual countries.

One key challenge would be ensuring that all participating jurisdictions prevented money launderers and terrorists from accessing the payment system. The current regime, in which each financial institution must bear responsibility for its customers and file innumerable reports on suspicious transactions, is duplicative, costly, inconsistent, and often ineffective. Instead, a central repository could verify identities, maintaining information on who could be trusted. This would be valuable in matters where form the system took, allowing it to function much more smoothly and reliably.

America derives immense benefits from the dollar's dominance — a position that countries like China and Russia are seeking to contest. By addressing cross-border payments, the US could boost the global economy and cement its central role therein.

Regd. No. TN/CPM/722/2000 R.N.I. Reg. No. 3782/180 Printed and published by HS Gadhadar on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd. Published at New No.34/47, Eldorado building, Unit No.1C, 1st floor, Nungambakkam High Road, Chennai 600 034. Phone: (044) 6679 1000. Printed at HNS Printers Pvt. Ltd. No.76/1, Bhuvan Nursery Avenue, Velappanchavadi, Poonamallee High Road, Chennai - 600 077. Chairman of the Board: Vivek Goel, Editor: Bhavani Majumdar, Editor (Content): Shobana Subramanian. \*Responsible for selection of news on the FRAC Act

Copyright: The Indian Express (P) Ltd. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without express permission is prohibited. The Financial Express

## ● THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

### A NEW BILL POSITIONS INDIA AND GIFT IFSC AS A STRONG CONTENDER FOR LEASING AIRCRAFT ASSETS

# A boost to aviation leasing

**I**ndia's civil aviation sector, one of the largest and fastest-growing in the world, is a cornerstone of its economic transformation. With India's aspirations of becoming a developed economy by 2047, civil aviation will play a critical role in connecting geographies, enabling trade, and fostering tourism. Over this period, the capital outlay required for acquiring commercial aircraft is expected to run into hundreds of billions of dollars: the financing ecosystem will hence play a critical role in the growth of the local aviation industry.

Globally, the aviation financing value chain includes various stakeholders such as leasing companies, institutional investors, financial institutions, and export credit agencies. India is developing an aviation leasing and financing ecosystem by encouraging global as well as domestic investors to establish aircraft leasing and financing companies in Gujarat International Financial Tech City (GIFT) International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). We believe that the introduction of the Protection of Interests in Aircraft Objects (PIAO) Bill, 2025, in the Rajya Sabha marks a milestone in reshaping the landscape of aircraft leasing and financing in India.

#### Aviation as a catalyst for growth

Supported by rising demand, competitive market dynamics, and progressive policies, the Indian aviation industry has transformed in recent years to become the third largest domestic market in the world after the US and China.

The number of operational airports in the past decade has almost doubled to 137 with a stated aim of the government to increase it to more than 350 by 2047. Compared to other large economies, consumption of seats per head of population in India is still low. Apart from the growth of the domestic market, international connectivity from India is expected to rise as Indian airlines and airports build large symbiotic hubs.

#### AKHILESH TILOTIA ASHUTOSH SHARMA

Respectively member, standing committee for the development of aircraft leasing and financing ecosystem at GIFT IFSC, & chief general manager (development), IFSCA

Major Indian airlines have already placed orders for over 1,900 aircraft with manufacturers globally. With each aircraft requiring investment upwards of \$50-100 million, these large aircraft orders amount to a requirement of hundreds of billions of dollars of financing. Airlines have the option to either buy or lease aircraft. With more than 58% of the world's commercial aircraft fleet being leased, leasing has emerged as a preferred option among airlines. The ratio in India is much higher than the global average, with around 80% of India's commercial aircraft being leased from foreign lessors.

Considering the strategic importance of the industry and the critical role of financing, India is developing an aircraft leasing and financing hub at GIFT IFSC.

#### Role of GIFT IFSC

GIFT City's IFSC is emerging as a hub for aircraft leasing and financing, both for Indian airlines and potentially regional ones too. With its tax incentives, regulatory agility, access to global financial markets, low operating costs, and a progressive approach by the IFSC Authority, GIFT IFSC is swiftly positioning itself as a compelling value proposition for aircraft financing and leasing.

Over the past few years, the IFSCA has introduced a specialised framework tailored for aircraft leasing to bring the aircraft leasing and financing business



onshore. As of December 2024, 33 aircraft leasing companies had established their presence in GIFT IFSC and leased more than 60 aircraft including wide-body, narrow-body, commercial and corporate jets and a similar number of aircraft engines.

The proposed Bill can add another layer of strategic advantage to GIFT IFSC-based aircraft lessors and can make India a more attractive destination for leasing activities. Like other countries, India too has seen bankruptcies of airlines lessors, who are the aircraft owners, need an ability to pull their assets out in such a corporate event.

#### A game changer for financing

The Cape Town Convention (CTC), which India signed in 2008, establishes a global framework for protecting the rights of lessors and financiers. The CTC is a treaty that is designed to facilitate asset-based leasing and financing of aircraft: its implementation can potentially reduce the cost for the airlines or lessors, by increasing the legal predictability in the transaction.

The implementation of PIAO Bill improves mechanisms for lessors' protections, including repossession rights in case of defaults, reducing disputes, and fostering investor confidence. Implementation of the CTC is expected to elevate India's rating in the Aircraft Working Group's (AWG) compliance index. A higher AWG rating can lower financing costs for Indian air-

lines, enhancing their competitiveness. By reducing risks and financing costs, the PIAO Bill should enable airlines to access more favourable lease terms, supporting fleet modernisation and expansion.

The Bill's enactment can attract global lessors and financiers to GIFT IFSC, providing more regulatory certainty in case of default and recovery mechanisms, fostering the growth of a domestic aircraft leasing and financing ecosystem. This can be a good diversification of funding sources for Indian airlines that are dependent on foreign jurisdictions. They can benefit from reduced lease costs, streamlined financing processes, and a more resilient supply chain that is critical to achieve ambitious expansion plans to cater to growing demand. A more efficient and cost-effective aviation ecosystem ultimately benefits passengers, as reduced financing costs can translate into lower airfares, better connectivity, and enhanced travel experiences.

#### A holistic vision for the future

The PIAO Bill represents a strategic step to integrating India into the global aviation financing ecosystem and complements the positioning of GIFT IFSC as a financial centre. To sustain this momentum, it is essential to promote awareness among global aviation stakeholders about the advantages of operating from GIFT IFSC, strengthen collaborations between airlines, lessors, and financial institutions, and invest in capability and capacity-building by creating a talent pool specialising in aircraft financing and leasing.

As India charts its course towards becoming an economic behemoth by 2047, the PIAO Bill and GIFT IFSC can provide the perfect runway for India's aviation financing ambitions. By creating an enabling environment for aircraft leasing and financing, India can unlock opportunities for fostering economic growth and creating high-value jobs locally.

Views are personal

## Evolving contours of India-US statecraft



**RAM SINGH**  
Professor & head (CDOE), Indian Institute of Foreign Trade  
Email: ramsingh@iift.edu

**WITH ECONOMIC WEIGHT** shifting towards Asia-centric emerging economies, Western nations, especially the US, have keen interest in India for two reasons — counterbalancing China, and ensuring geostrategic dominance in the Indo-Pacific. India fits in the most suitable partner in the entire ball game.

With Donald Trump's return as the 47th US President, hyper-activism is evident in abrupt, individualistic, and transactional decisions. This evolving scenario necessitates reassessing geo-economic and geostrategic statecraft, particularly in light of Prime Minister Modi's US visit.

Trump's business-centric, transactional, and unpredictable nature prioritises bilateral over multilateral deals under "America First." His administration shifts focus from institutional frameworks to direct negotiations, disregarding global governance structures (G20, WTO, UN), engaging in transactional diplomacy (Mexico, Canada), tech and tariff wars (China), coercive diplomacy (Gaza, Panama Canal, Greenland), and unilateral military actions (Somalia, Syria). He employs tariffs, tech bans, economic sanctions, and trade wars, reshaping diplomatic relations purely on economic calculus favouring the US.

Trump perceives the US as exploited geopolitically, economically, and geostrategically, while adopting a coercive trade policy. He has threatened Panama over Chinese investments and floated ideas of annexing Greenland and even Canada for its resources. He prioritises bilateral negotiations over lengthy multilateral protocols, ensuring economic bargains

favour the US, even at the cost of strategic allies like the European Union, Canada, and Mexico. His approach deepens global divides, pushing nations to align with either the US or China/Russia, as seen in his stance on India's Chabahar port.

The US has aggressively pursued financial and economic sanctions with limited success. Recognising threats from de-dollarisation and financial digitalisation, Trump has proposed tariffs up to 100% on adversarial markets. He is simultaneously reducing domestic corporate taxes and increasing import duties to attract investments, strengthening the dollar but making US exports uncompetitive. His transactional diplomacy is evident in postponing tariffs on Canada and Mexico after receiving better counteroffers. However, this strategy has risks, as seen in China's reciprocal tariffs and Iran's defiance of US pressure.

Promising to end the Russia-Ukraine war, Trump seeks unrestricted access to Ukraine's rare earth reserves worth \$26 trillion in exchange for continued military support. He rejects multilateral commitments on global public goods (climate change, sustainable development goals) and exited the Paris Climate Agreement. Advocating fossil fuel expansion, he pushes US crude oil reserves and deregulates the energy sector.

He pressures US allies to increase defence spending to 5% and promotes arms sales to India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indone-

While India respects America First, transactional diplomacy requires mutual benefit. India should be seen as a partner in making America great again

sia, Jordan, and NATO members. Declaring that the US geostrategic outreach is transactional, he questions G20's role in global governance and favours bilateral economic nationalism. His protectionist economic policies disrupt trade relationships and erode the rules-based global order, prioritising US economic returns.

India must adopt a pragmatic approach in engaging the US. A mini-trade deal strategy can create a win-win economic relationship, aligning America First with Make in India. To address US concerns over trade deficits, India can increase oil and liquefied natural gas imports not only from the US but from American firms operating in third countries like Guyana and Norway, strengthening energy security and trade balance.

Defence cooperation should focus on high-performance US platforms enhancing India's Indo-Pacific strategy. However, India must avoid obsolete platforms like F-16 fighter jets and F-21 combat aircraft, ensuring all procurements align with Make in India and involve full technology transfers. The US deep state's "give and take" mindset necessitates caution, as seen in extra-financial demands on the GE F-404 engine and Apache helicopter deals despite delays.

India must also be wary of US efforts to confine it to lower-value supply chain roles in semiconductors (testing, packaging), critical minerals (limited tech access), space sciences (secondary roles), nuclear

cooperation (empty promises), and cybersecurity (Five Eyes basis). The US also prioritises strategic Asian allies like South Korea over India in defence diplomacy. Indian negotiators must demand reciprocity, leveraging US urgency to counterbalance China and advocating for free trade or at least unrestricted defence trade among Quad partners (Australia, Japan, US).

India remains committed to geostrategic autonomy through humanitarian statecraft rooted in "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam." It should advocate global institutional reforms, rule-based engagement, and expanded India-US economic ties via free trade agreements, increased US investments, and recognition of India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean. A cooperative climate change diplomacy with a renewable energy focus is also vital.

On illegal migration, India must highlight the contributions of Indian Americans to the US economy, advocating for streamlined visa policies and stronger structural and economic ties. While India respects America First, transactional diplomacy requires mutual benefit. India should be seen as a partner in making America great again.

In short, America First ties in with Make in India despite Trump's coercive and unpredictable nature as he is, after all, a businessman who understands risks well. An engaging diplomacy can offer ultimate solutions to the world's largest democracies, ensuring well-being and prosperity for people of both nations.

Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### GST off track

**APROPOS** of "Is GST a broken promise?" (FE, February 12), the bulk of the indirect tax burden of goods and services tax (GST) is borne by two-thirds of the population. GST rates get tweaked often and with little logic. It impacts the cost dynamics for manufacturers, retailers and even consumers. While efforts to step up health insurance have lagged, a high

GST on its premise is a dampener. We are seen veering too far from the very ethos of GST. With GST revenues outstripping direct tax revenue, the rates need to be rationalised. Bring in three rates: 3%, 6%, and 12%. With the increasing affluence of the upper strata, even levying of sin tax to 18% is logical. After all, we should welcome increased consumption at higher income levels to propel the economy. —N.R. Narayan, Navi Mumbai

### Adopt best practices in implementing GST

**BY** subsuming 17 indirect taxes of the country, the goods and services tax (GST) had emerged as a tax reform to bring up "one nation, one tax" to increase ease of doing business with greater investment across sectors. But the reverse has transpired over time. Taxpayers face hurdles in terms of compliance with multiple slab rates

and complex input tax credit accounting. India's post-pandemic recovery has been slowed by tightened GST. Removing artificial classifications and adopting global best practices in the implementation of GST will reduce inequality and will resolve taxpayer conundrums over compliance and solving tax disputes. —N.R. Nagarajan, Sivakasi

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



## FIRST COLUMN

### ONE FAITH ONE WORLD

It's easy to point fingers when things go wrong,  
but true growth begins with self-reflection



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJJI

All of us have heard the famous phrase "United We Stand, Divided We Fall" during our school days through the simple story of an old farmer who, on his deathbed, taught the importance of unity to his disunited sons through a bundle of sticks. That story still holds an important place in our society and has even gained popularity because discord, disunity, strife and warfare have assumed unprecedented proportions in the modern world. Today, one of the most arduous challenges that face humanity is to establish harmony among people of different religions.

There is no doubt that political and religious leaders have time and again endeavoured to bring people onto a common platform and find ways and means to forge better understanding and acceptance of each faith. But despite their hard efforts, not much has changed. Hence, the greatest question of all at present is whether can the diverse religions and faiths ever be united. If so, then how? If we walk down history lane, we would find that one of the important reasons why the need for religious harmony originated is that the most



violent wars and conflicts in human history were based on religious intolerance and hatred. It might be a shocking statement, but it's the harsh reality that religions, which are supposed to make people more peaceful and loving, have today become the biggest cause of discord and bloodshed in the world. It's so appalling to see organized groups across the globe sworn to spread terror in the name of religion and carry out ethnic cleansing in the name of removing evil from the world.

If we closely examine the growth of each faith through the centuries, it reveals an interesting pattern. Even though there are some common values and tenets in all faiths, there are far too many misconceptions and conflicting beliefs that have continually fanned mistrust and hostility among the masses. It's quite imperative to know that, at the time of their inception, every religion had the power of purity, truth, and unity.

Gradually, cracks, factionalism, shallowness, delusion, deception and ritualistic adherence devoid of spiritual significance began to appear. Hence, instead of empowering spiritual values, religions perpetuated dogmas, disciplines, and barriers that segregate people on many lines. Many fall prey to the very evils they preach against, such as the lust for power, pleasure and money. There can be better understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of each faith, but there cannot be unity unless there is a single or common belief. So, what's the best way to reach a common solution acceptable to all faiths? According to divine knowledge imparted by the Supreme Almighty, everything in the eternal cycle of the human world drama goes through a change, which means that everything degrades from a perfect state to an imperfect, fragmented state. Be it human souls, nature, religions, or civilisations, almost everything passes through the sato (pure), rajo (mixed) and tamo (impure) stages as the time cycle spins from the Golden Age to the Iron Age.

As of today, we are witnessing the tamo-pradhan (most degraded) stage of all aspects of human existence, and religions are no exception to this process of change. Hence, we can envisage a unified faith only in terms of the spirituality inherent in all faiths. It is said that God is Truth, and true religion embodies that truth. Hence, when humans embrace that truth in their hearts, there will be a unified world. So, let us all stand united with one unified faith to welcome the new world where truth, peace and harmony will prevail.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

## The MBA dilemma: Why degrees alone no longer guarantee success

Once considered a guaranteed gateway to lucrative careers, the MBA is under scrutiny as unemployment rates rise—even among graduates from elite institutions



DINESH SOOD



The job market for MBA graduates has reached a critical juncture, sparking conversations that resonate with a growing number of aspirants and professionals grappling with the changing realities of employment. Once seen as a surefire ticket to high-paying corporate roles, the MBA degree is scrutinised for relevance in an evolving economic landscape. This issue is not confined to India alone; even graduates from elite institutions like Harvard, Stanford, and Wharton feel the squeeze. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that in 2024, 23 per cent of Harvard Business School's MBA graduates were jobless. Other top-tier business schools like Stanford and Wharton have seen similar dips, with unemployment rates hovering around 20 per cent. The problem is not just limited to the United States. According to the International Labour Organisation's Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, 13 per cent of the global youth labour force was unemployed in 2023—a staggering figure representing nearly 65 million people. This unsettling trend makes traditional, generalist MBA degrees less appealing than targeted skill certifications. A recent Forbes report highlighted how some MBA graduates have succeeded by lowering their expectations and opting for less conventional roles. In an era where industries are shifting dynamically, the rigid, cookie-cutter MBA model is struggling to keep pace. The need for a 360-degree reimagining of this degree has never been more pressing.

**Degrees Alone Won't Cut It Anymore** One fundamental truth is becoming evident: degrees alone no longer guarantee job or entrepreneurship security. The future belongs to professionals who continuously upskill and adapt to meet the ever-changing demands of the workforce. What used to be a clear, structured career trajectory for MBA graduates—typically leading to consulting, finance, or management roles—is now blurred. The stark reality is that a prestigious qualification, while valuable, no longer provides

immunity against unemployment or underemployment. Even more telling is the global shift in job seekers' mindsets. While travelling to Canada, I recently observed an MBA graduate running a salon branded "MBA Barber Shop." This reflects an important reality—many skilled gig jobs are vital for holistic growth, but traditional academic pathways have often dismissed such careers as unworthy. Yet, most developed nations respect one's skills rather than qualifications or family background. We must ask: Why doesn't Indian society do the same? **Skill Respect Over Degree Prestige** The changing job landscape demands a fundamental shift in how we perceive employment, education, and career success. Skill acquisition is about individuals learning new competencies and families being sensitised to alternative career paths. It is about communities understanding the implications of an evolving job market. It is about cities and regions acknowledging and respecting those who possess the skills necessary to sustain a livelihood, irrespective of whether they hold an MBA or a B.Tech degree.

The MBA has been a gateway to professional and financial success for decades. However, the economy's evolution demands a departure from this narrow thinking. In India and many other countries, social conditioning has led to an unspoken hierarchy of professions. White-collar corporate roles are celebrated, while vocational or blue-collar jobs are often overlooked. This mindset is outdated and damaging in a world where adaptability and skills matter more than mere academic credentials. **A 360-Degree Skills Revolution** What we need now is a complete rethinking of education and skill development. The traditional MBA

must evolve from a broad-spectrum business degree into a dynamic, skills-focused program that integrates emerging industry trends. A 360-degree approach should include everything from finance to marketing and HR. MBA programmes must incorporate niche skills such as data analytics, digital transformation, sustainability management and entrepreneurship in beauty-wellness, the most emerging sector. Instead of theoretical coursework, there should be a stronger focus on apprenticeships, live projects and problem-solving in real-world business scenarios.

Understanding AI, automation, and emerging technologies should be a core part of the curriculum to prepare graduates for future-ready roles. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as an alternative, business schools should actively promote and equip students with the skills to start and sustain their ventures. Business schools must recognise the gig economy's rise and field students to navigate freelance and contract-based work models. **Beyond Livelihood—Dignity in Work** Redefining career success means placing equal value on all forms of work. Whether a person is an MBA graduate managing a corporate division, an AI consultant, a skilled tradesperson, or a self-employed burger, their ability to contribute meaningfully to society matters. The prestige of a job should be measured not by its title but by its impact and sustainability.

Parents, educators, and policymakers have a role in fostering this change. We must instil in young minds that success is not confined to traditional white-collar professions. Regardless of their chosen field, a skilled noble should be celebrated just as much as a corporate executive. If an MBA graduate decides to become an artisan,

a chef, a salon owner or a renewable energy technician, they should be seen as pioneers, not failures. **The Need for Institutional Change** Educational institutions must move beyond outdated frameworks and align themselves with industry demands. Business schools should foster adaptive thinking, preparing students for unconventional but lucrative career paths. The focus should be on problem-solving, digital proficiency, and entrepreneurial agility rather than rigid academic theories.

Governments and industries should also contribute by incentivising skill-based education. Scholarships, subsidies, and awareness campaigns can help shift societal perspectives on what constitutes a respectable and rewarding career.

**Conclusion: A Future Built on Skills** Once a golden ticket to corporate success, the MBA faces an existential crisis. If it is to remain relevant, it must undergo radical transformation. A degree is no longer a guarantee; what truly matters is an individual's ability to adapt, innovate, and deliver value in an ever-changing world.

As a society, we need to support and encourage young professionals and in their quest to discover their true potential—even in jobs that were once considered "odd." In reality, no job is odd; what matters is its necessity and impact. By embracing a 360-degree perspective on skills and careers, we can build a more inclusive, resilient, and future-ready workforce. The time for change is now.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation, and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres. View express are personal)

## Ethics-driven AI in predictive healthcare: Building a foundation of trust and accountability

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising predictive healthcare, offering early disease detection, personalised treatment plans and improved patient outcomes

In today's rapidly advancing healthcare landscape, Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a transformative role, particularly in predictive healthcare. AI's ability to analyse vast datasets enables early disease detection, personalised treatment plans and improved patient outcomes. The global AI in healthcare market, valued at approximately \$15.4 billion in 2022, is projected to surge to \$187.95 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 37 per cent. Yet, with this potential comes a responsibility to ensure that AI is used responsibly, ethically, and equitably. Establishing a framework prioritises privacy, fairness, transparency and accountability is essential to protect patient rights and



GERALD JAIDEEP

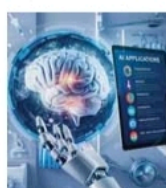
maintain public trust.

The Power of AI in Predictive Healthcare AI's role in predictive healthcare is primarily driven by machine learning and data analytics, empowering it to forecast diseases, assess risk factors, and recommend preventive measures. By examining patterns in com-

prehensive datasets, such as medical histories, genetic profiles, lifestyle information and real-time health data, AI can predict the likelihood of conditions ranging from diabetes and cardiovascular diseases to complex ailments like cancer and Alzheimer's. This shift from reactive to preventive care can ease the burden on healthcare systems and improve patient quality of life. For example, AI-based diagnostics for diabetic retinopathy have shown an accuracy rate of over 87 per cent, enabling early detection and timely intervention. Similarly, IBM Watson's Oncology AI has achieved 90 per cent accuracy in cancer treatment recommendations that align with those of human oncologists. However, to har-

ness AI's potential responsibly, it's crucial to address the ethical challenges it introduces. **Safeguarding Data Privacy and Security** The ethical use of AI in healthcare hinges on the responsible management of patient data. Predictive healthcare AI relies heavily on sensitive information, including medical, genetic, and behavioural data. Yet, the need for privacy is ever more pressing—72 per cent of Americans express significant concerns about data privacy in AI applications, particularly in healthcare.

In 2022, nearly 50 million healthcare records were exposed to data breaches in the United States, underscoring the need for strong data security protocols. To protect this information, AI systems must



prioritise rigorous security measures such as encryption, anonymisation and regular audits. Patients should also provide informed consent, clearly explaining how their data will be used and stored. By centring data protection in AI development, healthcare can ensure patient confidentiality and foster the trust necessary for AI's

continued adoption. **Addressing Bias for Fair and Equitable Predictions** AI's reliance on historical data introduces the risk of bias, which can lead to predictions that disproportionately impact certain demographic groups.

Research has shown that AI models trained on biased data result in 35 per cent more misdiagnoses for Black and Hispanic patients compared to white patients. In healthcare, such biases could exacerbate disparities for marginalised populations. Ensuring fairness requires AI systems trained on diverse, representative datasets, as well as continuous monitoring and adjustments to detect and correct biases. A study published in Nature Medicine found that AI systems trained on

inclusive datasets significantly reduce diagnostic discrepancies, underscoring the importance of inclusivity in training data. Collaboration with healthcare professionals and ethicists is also vital to developing AI solutions that are equitable and serve all patients effectively.

**Promoting Transparency and Explainability in AI Models** The complexity of AI algorithms often results in "black box" decision-making, where the reasoning behind predictions is not fully understood by users or developers. In predictive healthcare, this lack of transparency can hinder trust and adoption among patients and healthcare providers alike. In a survey by the American Medical Association, 67 per cent of healthcare providers

expressed reservations about using "black-box" AI systems, highlighting the need for explainable AI. Currently, only 23 per cent of AI-based diagnostic tools meet explainability standards to ensure transparency. By developing interpretable models, researchers can make AI decision-making processes accessible to healthcare providers, enabling them to communicate AI-driven recommendations clearly and fostering patient involvement in care decisions.

As AI continues to advance, a strong ethical framework will be essential to uphold public trust and ensure that AI-driven healthcare remains a force for good.

(The writer is CEO, Medvarity; views are personal)



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Yunus Govt in the crosshair

Bangladesh army shifts away from the Yunus Government as it calls for stronger ties with India amid chaos and downward slide

## Mann ki baat: Leading the global revival of radio



SANTHOSH MATHEW

As we celebrate World Radio Day, Mann Ki Baat reminds us that the essence of communication remains the same—connecting, inspiring and bringing people together

Radio is not just a medium; it is a lifeline that transcends borders, connects people and amplifies voices. On World Radio Day, as the world celebrates the power of this enduring platform, India stands at the forefront of a remarkable communication revolution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly broadcast, Mann Ki Baat, which recently aired its 118th episode, exemplifies how radio is experiencing a renaissance in the digital age, proving to be one of the most effective tools of governance, inspiration, and soft power diplomacy. When UNESCO designated February 13 as World Radio Day in 2011, the objective was clear: to recognise the influence of radio in fostering dialogue, spreading awareness, and bridging communities worldwide.

In India, Mann Ki Baat is a testimony to the enduring power of radio. Launched in 2014, this monthly programme has transformed into one of the largest and most effective communication experiments in the world, reaching millions of listeners not just in India but globally.

With an unparalleled ability to engage audiences through storytelling, Modi's initiative underscores the relevance of radio in an era dominated by digital noise. At a time when many predicted the decline of traditional radio, Mann Ki Baat has revived and redefined its significance. The programme's strength lies in its simplicity and reliability. Every episode delivers not just policy discussions but also inspirational stories of common citizens, grassroots innovations, cultural heritage and national achievements. The 118th episode was no different, weaving narratives that resonated with the spirit of nation-building, environmental consciousness, and collective responsibility. Beyond its national appeal, Mann Ki Baat has become an instrument of India's soft power diplomacy. The global Indian diaspora tunes in eagerly, fostering a sense of connection with the homeland. The broadcast's reach extends beyond national boundaries, often being



translated into multiple languages, including regional South Asian tongues, strengthening India's diplomatic and cultural ties with neighbouring nations. As India emerges as a global leader, leveraging radio as a tool for soft power projection enhances its image as a nation that values dialogue, shared heritage and cooperation. South Asia, a region bound by deep historical, cultural, and linguistic ties, finds an unexpected bridge in Mann Ki Baat. The programme's themes—self-reliance, community-driven initiatives, environmental sustainability and youth empowerment—are not just relevant to India but also resonate with India's neighbours. In an era where integration efforts in South Asia often face political roadblocks, the revival of radio as a medium of cultural and ideological exchange holds immense potential. India's radio diplomacy, through Mann Ki Baat, can become a catalyst for fostering deeper South Asian engagement, promoting shared developmental narratives, and creating common aspirations among regional populations. The 118th episode once again demonstrated how radio can be used as a participatory medium. Modi's interactions with citizens, his references to

AS INDIA EMERGES AS A GLOBAL LEADER, LEVERAGING RADIO AS A TOOL FOR SOFT POWER PROJECTION ENHANCES ITS IMAGE AS A NATION THAT VALUES DIALOGUE, SHARED HERITAGE AND COOPERATION

letters and messages from listeners, and his emphasis on people-centric governance make Mann Ki Baat an inclusive space for dialogue. Unlike social media platforms that are often fragmented and dominated by echo chambers, radio, through this programme, emerges as a unifying force that connects the masses uninterrupted and intimately. From the fishermen in Tamil Nadu to the farmers in Punjab, from students in Meghalaya to entrepreneurs in Gujarat, Mann Ki Baat speaks to every Indian, transcending linguistic, geographic, and socio-economic barriers. It harnesses the power of storytelling to amplify the voices of unsung heroes, small businesses, and cultural custodians. Radio has always been a tool of influence, but Mann Ki Baat takes it a step further by combining traditional broadcasting with modern digital integration. The programme is simultaneously aired on multiple platforms, including community radio stations, AIR (All India Radio), podcasts, and social media channels. This hybrid model ensures that the message reaches every demographic, from the rural farmer with a transistor radio to the urban professional tuning in via a smartphone app. On World Radio Day, as global discussions revolve around the revival and impact of radio, Mann Ki Baat stands as a shining example of how the medium can be harnessed for nation-building and diplomacy. Countries across the world can draw lessons from India's use of radio as a tool for constructive engagement, leadership communication, and global outreach. In an era where polarization is rampant, radio's ability to create a sense of collective consciousness is more valuable than ever. India, with its vast diversity, has found in Mann Ki Baat a unifying voice that reflects the aspirations of its people. The power of voice, the magic of words, and the intimacy of audio storytelling are elements that make this programme not just a political initiative but a cultural phenomenon. As the world looks for ways to reinvent traditional communication platforms, India's example showcases that radio is not just surviving but thriving in the digital age. Mann Ki Baat is leading this revival, proving that in the cacophony of digital noise, the human voice still holds the power to unite and inspire. (The writer is an Associate Professor Centre For South Asian Studies, Pondicherry Central University. Views are personal)

Bangladesh is currently facing a period of political uncertainty and unrest as the government led by Muhammad Yunus finds itself increasingly at odds with the country's powerful military establishment. The recent statements made by General Waker-uz-Zaman, the Chief of Army Staff, at the Dhaka International Marathon 2025, indicate a significant shift in the military's stance towards the civilian government. His emphasis on peace, stability and international cooperation—particularly with India—suggests growing dissatisfaction within the army ranks regarding the Yunus administration's policies and governance approach. The military in Bangladesh has historically played a crucial role in maintaining internal stability, often stepping in when political crises spiral out of control. With political tensions escalating under the Yunus government, the army appears to be distancing itself from the administration, signalling a potential realignment in the country's power dynamics. Several factors seem to be driving the military's dissatisfaction with the Yunus government. This indicates the military's concerns over the deteriorating economic conditions and increasing social divisions under Yunus's leadership. Persistent political unrest could be damaging to foreign investments and economic growth, both of which are essential for national development.

The military appears to be worried about governance inefficiencies and security concerns, especially as political violence and mass protests become more frequent. The Yunus government's inability to control these disruptions may be viewed as a failure to ensure stability, a key concern for the army. Bangladesh's military leadership values strong bilateral relations with key regional powers. General Waker's remarks about India underscore the army's desire for a pragmatic foreign policy approach that prioritises stability and mutual benefits rather than ideological stances or populist rhetoric. General Waker-uz-Zaman's statement emphasising India as an important neighbour and a key partner in regional security and economic cooperation suggests a strategic recalibration in Bangladesh's foreign policy. His remarks that Bangladesh "depends on India in many matters" and that both countries should respect each other's strategic interests signal a clear endorsement of closer ties with New Delhi. India and Bangladesh share deep economic linkages, including trade, energy cooperation and infrastructure projects. A stable relationship with India ensures continued economic growth and regional connectivity. Cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and border management is crucial for maintaining peace and stability. Bangladesh's military leadership might be viewing stronger ties with India as a means to maintain a balanced foreign policy, ensuring that Dhaka does not become overly reliant on any single regional power. The balance of power between the civilian leadership and the military will be crucial in determining the country's direction in the coming months.



Devotees perform rituals during the Thaipusam festival at Vadappamurugan temple, in Chennai

PTI

## Breaking barriers: Building a future for women in science

Trailblazing women scientists continue to defy the odds, proving that inclusion is not just a matter of fairness but a necessity for scientific and societal progress

In the 21st century, where scientific breakthroughs continue to shape our world, the persistent underrepresentation of women in science remains a glaring issue. Women have been at the forefront of some of the greatest scientific achievements across the globe in diverse fields from basic science to space science. Despite these inspiring role models, systemic barriers continue to stifle women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). It's time we confront these challenges and build a future where women can truly thrive in science. What kind of scientific world are we building if we exclude half of our population? Without the full participation of women, we lose access to a vast pool of talent, creativity, and innovative solutions that could address some of our biggest challenges. Many girls are discouraged from pursuing science from a young age due to stereotypes that frame these fields as "unsuitable" or "too difficult." The so-called "leaky pipeline" begins to take its toll as early



as high school, with fewer girls opting for science-related studies and careers. Even for those who break through these initial hurdles, the challenges persist in higher education and professional life. Women in research face a lack of mentorship, unequal access to funding and systemic biases in hiring and promotions. The numbers speak for themselves: UNESCO reports that only 35 per cent of STEM students globally are women, and their representation in leadership roles remains even lower. In India, the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) confirms that while the number of women pursuing science has grown, their presence in top research positions and leadership roles is still dismal. Despite these odds, many Indian women scientists have

defied the status quo and achieved remarkable success. Dr. Indira Hinduja revolutionised reproductive medicine by developing India's first test-tube baby in 1986 and pioneering the gamete intratubal transfer (GIFT) technique. Dr. Soumya Swaminathan's leadership as Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO) played a crucial role in global health policy. Kalpana Kalahasti, a senior scientist at ISRO, was instrumental in India's triumphant Chandrayaan-3 mission and earned a spot in Nature's list of notable figures in 2023. These trailblazers not only pushed the boundaries of scientific knowledge but also broke societal barriers, paving the way for future generations of women in science. Does this make any difference to the society? Society benefits from more inclusive and comprehensive solutions when women are at the forefront of scientific innovation. Areas like maternal health, gender-specific medicine and community health interventions often flourish because of women scientists who understand these challenges first-hand. Inclusion isn't just about fairness—it's about enriching science itself. So, how do we move forward? Building a future for women in science requires collective effort on multiple fronts. We must dismantle the structural barriers hindering women's advancement, provide mentorship programmes and promote policies that ensure equal hiring, funding, and career progression opportunities. Educational institutions should actively encourage girls to pursue STEM fields, while workplaces must offer flexible work environments that allow women to balance personal and professional responsibilities. It is time to tear down these barriers and build a future where every young girl who dreams of becoming a scientist can do so without limitations. When women are given equal opportunities to contribute to science, we all stand to gain—from groundbreaking discoveries to a more inclusive and prosperous world.



DHARMAPALAN

(The writer is the Dean Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bangalore, views are personal)

## AI FOR PUBLIC GOOD

Madam — Artificial intelligence has become a truly global technology. The adoption of AI in healthcare, education, finance, labour and transportation is impacting society on a global scale while fundamental breakthroughs are being facilitated by research collaborations around the world. Its rapid deployment also creates major challenges in terms of the reliability of information, the protection of basic rights and accessibility. It is the international community's responsibility to maintain balance in our societies and to craft AI that respects universal values. The Paris AI Summit has been focused on several key themes related to opportunities, benefits and governance of AI. Also, these themes include AI for public good, for global AI governance, for innovation and culture and for environmental sustainable AI solutions. The aim of the summit is to strike a balance between technological advancement and the preservation of universal values. The Paris AI Summit is of significant importance for the future of AI due to its focus on global governance, accessibility and ethical development of AI. The AI Action Committee at Paris, co-chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, shed light on India and France's joint work in the five dedicated working groups to tackle key issues for tomorrow: Public interest AI, future of work, innovation and culture Trust in AI and global AI governance. The role of India in the Paris AI Summit is laudable.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

US TARIFFS ON ALUMINIUM, STEEL Madam — US President Donald Trump has virtually dropped another bomb on the global economy with the announcement of levying a 25 percent duty on steel and aluminium imports and reciprocal duty on all other imports from all countries. India is one of the largest exporters of steel to the US. While the world was aware of Trump's unconventional policies, his blanket threat to impose reciprocal tariffs—without any exceptions—almost upends the World Trade

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Gandhi's insight on education



proposals the article "Rekindling Gandhian values in education." Mahatma Gandhi wrote a few articles in a simple manner on the value of education that should serve as a big motivation for the students of our country. If the students read those writings and apply them in the modern perspective, they will surely give a new dimension to our education system. Gandhi played a significant role in value

education by emphasising the importance of moral and ethical principles. He encouraged educators to teach values like truth, non-violence and respect for others. He felt that instilling these values in students would help them become responsible and compassionate individuals. Gandhi described himself as a curious and eager learner during his student days. He valued education and believed that it was essential for personal growth. We have to apply Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on value education as a demand of time. Gandhi's unique and refined views about value education are not only important but are worth applying not only in India but also in the rest of the world.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Organisations (WTO) mandate to promote free trade by eliminating tariffs, quotas and other restrictions. The free trade regime in the last 20 years kept inflation in manufactured products under control globally. However, Trump's populist agenda to find jobs for his support base consisting of semi-literate people in the US could damage the US-led alliance based on the Bretton Woods system. While the immediate threat from Trump's tariff on steel and aluminium could be negligible, the Indian economy could face the heat from fleeing foreign investors which could affect stock valuations and rupee weakness which could result in import inflation. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

AFFORESTATION NEEDED TO SAVE FORESTS Madam — It is indeed a matter of concern that a government agency like NHAI is overenthusiastic in felling a huge number of trees but not interested in attending to the compensatory afforestation. The government brought amendments in the Forest Act last year, which is sure to reduce the forest cover in the country. Already the country's forest cover has come down from the recommended level of 1/3 to 1/5 of the land area. Now we can expect further deterioration in the status, as using forest land is permitted for shikar and industrial activities. The centuries-old valuable thick forests in the Northeast are threatened with their very existence in the coming years. Mines are given to private players to hasten the process of exploiting the fossil fuels. This is an act that goes against the concern of everyone over the fast-changing climate. Every mine project begins with the destruction of forests in the vast sheet of hill areas, which will take many decades to reconstruct by afforestation efforts. It is high time the moments to save forests take the form of a people's movement to sensitise all the concerned and save the globe to make it fit enough to live. The apex court's concern conveyed to NHAI is welcome. Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[ OUR TAKE ]

## No defence for failing the forces

A comprehensive audit of defence PSUs would help to understand the reasons for delay in production and to fix accountability

The Indian Air Force (IAF) currently has around 30 combat jet squadrons, against a sanctioned strength of 42, a figure not achieved for decades despite the growing pressure on the force to secure the country's security interests in a neighbourhood with two major adversaries. In this context, to hear IAF chief, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, talk about his lack of confidence in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the country's sole manufacturer of combat jets, is a matter of concern.

HAL makes the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, which has replaced the decades-old MIG-21 as the IAF's main workhorse and take on a greater share of the functions of the combat fleet. IAF has had to put off the phasing out of two remaining squadrons of MIG-21s, with a design dating back to the late 1950s, because of delays in the delivery of LCAs by HAL. The LCA is considered a cost-effective and capable aircraft in its class, but the programme has faced repeated delays — the project was conceived in 1983, and the jet made its first flight in 2001. Over the years, the project has been hit by US sanctions, denial of equipment by Denmark and delays in delivery of equipment by both Russia and the US, which is supplying the all-important engine. While IAF has two LCA squadrons, HAL has already missed its delivery schedule for the more potent LCA Mk-1A, a development attributed to General Electric's failure to supply engines.

The IAF chief's blunt talk on HAL raises questions about the public sector behemoth, especially his comments that the firm is yet to address IAF's worries. IAF clearly has a lot at stake here, with plans to acquire up to 190 LCAs. The force's problems will become more acute by the end of this decade when it begins phasing out other combat jets such as the Jaguars and Mirage-2000s. There has often been a feeling within the armed forces that HAL — and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) — have bitten off more than they can chew, and the time has come for a comprehensive audit of their record and functioning. This is necessary to establish what ails these institutions, especially their poor record in meeting deadlines, and to fix accountability, especially since India intends to become *atmanirbhar* (self-reliant) in defence production and expand its export basket and footprint.

## High court's marital rape exceptionalism

Under Indian laws, if a person commits actions that result in the death of another person, they are liable to be punished for a minimum of five years in jail and a maximum of life imprisonment. But a 40-year-old man who allegedly indulged in brutal unnatural sex with his wife, which eventually led to her death, found himself exonerated by the Chhattisgarh high court (HC) this week because a man cannot be prosecuted for marital rape in India. Despite his conviction by a lower court, the Chhattisgarh HC found it fit to acquit the man of rape, unnatural sex and culpable homicide and order his immediate release — all because Exception 2 under Section 375 of IPC clears a husband from prosecution for raping his wife. The judgment by justice Narendra Kumar Vyas concluded that if the wife is not below 18, the absence of consent of the wife "loses its importance".

This is a miscarriage of justice in a case involving the death of a person. The marital rape exception cannot be used to obfuscate such a serious crime since this could give men the licence to brutalise their wives at will. It violates the principles of natural justice and is an affront to rational jurisprudence. Even people who feel the marital rape debate is a complex one must surely acknowledge that a provision that absolves a person of any consequences after the death of their partner only sullies the institution of marriage, not protect its sanctity. In addition, there are serious questions about whether the HC judgment is at odds with a 2017 ruling by the Supreme Court regarding the 15-year age limit. Irrespective of whether the marital rape case is settled by the apex court — and it should consider doing so at the earliest — this verdict cannot be allowed to stand. The top court must intervene.

## AI can reinstate India at the intellectual summit

By combining the wisdom of ancient texts with cutting-edge AI, India could unlock breakthroughs in philosophy, science, and medicine

Silicon Valley may have birthed the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI), but China has shown how it can become a culturally infused force. DeepSeek, the Chinese AI model that generated global attention, isn't simply replicating western capabilities. By training on a vast corpus of Chinese texts, it has absorbed the nuances of the nation's rich cultural, philosophical, and literary heritage. DeepSeek's superior performance in understanding Chinese philosophy, history, and classical literature underscores a crucial point: Training AI on homegrown data isn't just about language — it shapes the very nature of AI.

India has an even greater opportunity to redefine the future of AI. Our ancient texts hold advanced knowledge spanning mathematics, astronomy, medicine, governance, and philosophy. The Vedas, Upanishads, Arthashastra, and Tamil Sangam literature offer profound insights into topics ranging from consciousness to economic theory.

At its core, AI is a sophisticated pat-

tern recognition system trained on massive datasets. Large Language Models (LLMs) learn by analysing text, identifying relationships, and generating responses based on detected patterns. Consequently, their understanding of the world is a direct reflection of their training data. If an AI is predominantly trained on western scientific papers, corporate documents, and pop culture, its worldview will be inherently western. Conversely, training in Chinese literature and philosophy, as China has done, cultivates a distinctly Chinese way of thinking.

China's strategic approach involved training models on texts spanning Confucianism, Daoism, and classical Chinese medical treatises. This deliberate choice enabled DeepSeek to discuss the intricacies of Zhuangzi's paradoxes or interpret traditional poetry with a depth surpassing western AI models. Western AI, primarily built on English-language data, reflects a western worldview — strong in scientific and technological domains but comparatively weaker in spiritual, philosophical, and ethical dimensions.

Imagine the possibilities of an AI trained on India's intellectual heritage. Picture a model capable of analysing through the lens of Kautilya's Arthashastra, offering governance solutions rooted in realism as well as ethical leadership. Envision an AI steeped in



Vivek Wadhwa

ayurveda and sidha medicine, contributing insights into holistic healing. Consider a system that could interpret consciousness as described in the Upanishads and compare it with contemporary neuroscience. Such AI wouldn't merely answer questions — it would elevate our collective understanding.

While western AI models often prioritise materialist frameworks and China's AI integrates Confucian values, India has the unique opportunity to create AI that bridges science and spirituality, economics and ethics, technology and tradition. Yet this requires proactive data curation and the development of models resonant with India's civilisational wisdom.

Relying on western AI perpetuates a colonial mindset that has long dictated what Indians learn and how they think. If Indian businesses, universities, and policymakers continue to use AI trained primarily on western datasets, they are not just adopting a tool; they are adopting an external worldview. Much like India's education system once served British interests, leaning on western AI risks similar intellectual dependence, obscuring India's own rich heritage in the digital age.

Moreover, the dominance of American and Chinese AI raises critical concerns about data sovereignty. If India relies on AI systems built and controlled abroad, its data — its national asset — will enrich foreign entities while shaping AI models that

reinforce their own perspectives. This convergence creates a unique diplomatic space where both nations can reject each other's internal trajectories without the moralistic judgments that characterised earlier phases. In the liberal internationalist framework, the US often felt compelled to export its values as universal principles. This occasionally led to tensions with countries like India, which viewed such efforts as intrusive and dismissive of its distinct civilisational context.

In contrast, the post-liberal alignment can acknowledge that true partnership does not require ideological conformity. It is grounded in the recognition that each nation's internal policies are expressions of its civilisational character — worthy of respect, not reform.

The strategic advantage of civilisational realism: When nations operate from a foundation of civilisational realism, their partnership becomes more predictable, stable, and resilient. They are no longer hostage to the ideological mood swings that often accompany changes in political leadership. It reduces friction over issues like religious freedom, cultural policies, or social norms, fostering a principle of non-interference, and because the partners feel respected in their civilisational core, they are more willing to engage in deep, long-term cooperation.

This partnership can move beyond a fragile consensus built on superficial commonalities, to a robust convergence grounded in the understanding that true allies do not need to be identical — they need to be authentic. In a world increasingly defined by civilisational self-assertion, the Indo-US partnership becomes a model for how two civilisations can co-exist and thrive together.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US arrived at a critical juncture. As America revisits its own post-liberal transformation, Modi's visit can crystallise a partnership that draws on shared ethical values and cultural inspirations, ushering in a truly transformative relationship.

Swati Ramanathan and Ramesh Ramanathan are co-founders of Jago Group, committed to India's urban transformation. The views expressed are personal



India can make AI more than a tool for automation — it can become a catalyst for enlightenment.

not only align with India's best interests. Just as China restricted western tech firms to cultivate its own AI giants, India must assert control over its AI development.

A historical beacon of wisdom, India has too often viewed its knowledge through a western lens. From the concept of zero to the practice of yoga, our contributions have profoundly shaped human progress. Now, as the world grapples with existential crises — climate change, mental health epidemics, and economic inequality — it is flooded with information yet lacks true wisdom. AI trained on India's intellectual heritage could offer fresh perspectives on these modern challenges.

An AI steeped in Vedantic thought could revolutionise our understanding of consciousness and cognition, transcending current limits in western neuroscience. A model trained on Indian economic and governance principles could give developing nations alternative frameworks beyond western capitalism or Chinese State-driven models. And an AI rooted in Indian ethics could offer a vital counterpoint to the profit-driven systems dominating Silicon Valley.

To realise this potential, India must

take decisive action. Vast amounts of our classical and regional literature remain undigitised. Government and private institutions must prioritise scanning, transcribing, and structuring these texts into machine-readable formats. Indian companies and research institutions should develop AI models trained on both ancient and modern Indian data to ensure alignment with our cultural, ethical, and philosophical ethos. AI must be treated as a strategic national asset, akin to India's space and nuclear programmes. Policies should limit the unfettered export of Indian training data to foreign AI firms, ensuring that AI isn't merely a consumer technology, but a tool integrated into its universities and research institutions.

India can make AI more than a tool for automation — it can become a catalyst for enlightenment. By combining the wisdom of our ancient texts with cutting-edge AI, we could unlock breakthroughs in philosophy, science, and medicine. Now is the moment to reclaim our intellectual sovereignty and unleash India's wisdom to uplift and enlighten humanity.

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

## India-US partnership in a post-liberal world

American politics is undergoing a radical transformation. Trump 2.0 marks a seismic shift from the raw populism of 2016 to a post-liberal turn that is upending classical liberalism. Intellectuals like Patrick Denen (*Why Liberalism Failed*) and Adrian Vermeule (*Common Good Constitutionalism*) have long warned that liberalism is hollowing out America — eroding community bonds and cultural anchors, and celebrating an atomised individualism. These ideas have snowballed into a force that is fueling a return to sovereign primacy, cultural authenticity, and a worker-first economy. The debate in America now pits nationalism against globalism, cultural rootedness versus tech utopia, and traditional working-class values against elite cosmopolitanism. Trump remains an ideological horseshoe test, but there's no mistaking his current fan's post-liberal sympathies, markedly different from traditional Republican beliefs. Dan Vance, the vice president and author of the biographical bestseller *Hillbilly Elegy*, is an articulate mascot of this new intellectual vanguard. Yet, internal tensions persist. Populist nationalists like Steve Bannon have clashed with newer adherents — dismissively labelling the Silicon Valley leaders swarming around Trump as "techno feudal globalists". These ruptures show that the new globalists have not yet cooled and set into a coherent narrative.

Parallel to America's reawakening, India is experiencing its own transformation. Casting off its Nehruvian secularist framework, it is embracing an assertive Bharatiya identity. Focusing on cultural revival, economic nationalism and strategic autonomy, India is charting a path deeply rooted in its ancient ethos.

While far from complete, there's no denying that the decades-long project of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is becoming the national political currency, embraced by many other political parties. Most importantly, it is embracing an assertive Bharatiya identity. Focusing on cultural revival, economic nationalism and strategic autonomy, India is charting a path deeply rooted in its ancient ethos.

On the international stage, America First is the pragmatic lens through which to assess all strategic partnerships, trade deals and global conflicts. Canada and Mexico, two neighbours with large economic linkages, are being threatened with tariffs. The Israeli-Palestine crisis has been strong-armed into a truce. China is seen as a formidable global power competitor requiring aggressive economic and technological responses. Trump 2.0 is clearly a retreat from the Pax-Americana promise of the 1940s, replaced by a self-interested America that is focused on the western hemisphere.

This reallocation opens unique opportunities for India. Rather than merely weathering the storm of a brute-force, transactional regime, India could actually elevate its transactional partnership with the US into a structural, strategic one. The way to do this is by framing our relationship around the authentic alignment between America's emerging post-liberal outlook and India's own civilisational renaissance.

The two are deeply interconnected through a shared shift. Both reject the homogenising tendencies of liberalisation and embrace civilisa-

tional self-confidence rooted in a country's unique historical, cultural, and spiritual traditions. For instance, in the US, post-liberal thinkers advocate for a public ethos grounded in Judeo-Christian moral frameworks — not as an imposition of faith, but as an acknowledgement of the historical values that shaped the American republic. This worldview provides a cohesive moral foundation for policies relating to family, community, and governance without mandating religious conformity. In India, the resurgence of *sanskata dharmas* serves a similar role. It is not about establishing a theocratic State but about reaffirming the civilisational ethos that has guided India for millennia. The *dharma* worldview, with its emphasis on pluralism, duty and cosmic order, offers a framework for ethical governance and cultural revival.

This convergence creates a unique diplomatic space where both nations can reject each other's internal trajectories without the moralistic judgments that characterised earlier phases. In the liberal internationalist framework, the US often felt compelled to export its values as universal principles. This occasionally led to tensions with countries like India, which viewed such efforts as intrusive and dismissive of its distinct civilisational context.

In contrast, the post-liberal alignment can acknowledge that true partnership does not require ideological conformity. It is grounded in the recognition that each nation's internal policies are expressions of its civilisational character — worthy of respect, not reform.

The strategic advantage of civilisational realism: When nations operate from a foundation of civilisational realism, their partnership becomes more predictable, stable, and resilient. They are no longer hostage to the ideological mood swings that often accompany changes in political leadership. It reduces friction over issues like religious freedom, cultural policies, or social norms, fostering a principle of non-interference, and because the partners feel respected in their civilisational core, they are more willing to engage in deep, long-term cooperation.

This partnership can move beyond a fragile consensus built on superficial commonalities, to a robust convergence grounded in the understanding that true allies do not need to be identical — they need to be authentic. In a world increasingly defined by civilisational self-assertion, the Indo-US partnership becomes a model for how two civilisations can co-exist and thrive together.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US arrived at a critical juncture. As America revisits its own post-liberal transformation, Modi's visit can crystallise a partnership that draws on shared ethical values and cultural inspirations, ushering in a truly transformative relationship.

Swati Ramanathan and Ramesh Ramanathan are co-founders of Jago Group, committed to India's urban transformation. The views expressed are personal

ADMIRAL DINESH K TRIPATHI | CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF

There is significant increment in scale, synthesis and scope of capabilities in the maritime air domain... the domestic industry should work with us to invent, innovate, and indigenise

## For gig workers, e-Shram registration is just the start

In a major development for platform workers and the discussions on the 2025 Union Budget, four major aggregators — Urban Company, Zomato, Blinkit and Uncle Delivery — have registered their workers on the e-Shram portal, joining an initiative of the ministry of labour and employment to register themselves and their gig employees. e-Shram is the national database of unorganised workers, through which registered workers could avail of recognition and social security benefits. While the portal has been active since 2021 and has seen a few hundred million registrations until the end of last year, the efforts to formally build onboard platform workers by their aggregators came to fruition earlier this week. The move is expected to encourage more aggregators to register their workers in real-time, expanding coverage and potential benefits for the gig economy workforce.

Why is this significant? Given the ever-increasing number of platform workers (a Niti Aayog report expects gig workers to rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30), there is a need to bring them under a social security net. In India, platform workers are not recognised as employees and, hence, cannot avail minimum wages or benefits from other labour laws including provident fund or social security benefits.

Aggregators have long argued that gig workers operate on flexible hours across multiple platforms, making them contractors rather than full-time employees (although this has been changing with some aggregators offering full-time employment with minimum work hours). Several European countries have already recognised platform workers as employees in an effort to provide social security. Since India has not granted gig workers full employee status, welfare boards and national databases like e-Shram become critical for providing them with basic safety net. By consolidating worker information and ensuring platform companies take responsibility for registering their workers, e-Shram is a step toward formal recognition and better access to social security schemes like insurance, pensions, and financial assistance.

The digital nature of platform work makes registration on a portal-based much more seamless compared to traditional unorganised sector workers, who have historically struggled with bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, and low literacy levels. A stark contrast can be seen with construction workers, one of the largest segments of unorganised labour. Despite the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (BOCW) collecting a cess from builders to fund social security, most of the money

remained unutilised due to poor registration. Construction workers, typically migrants lacking contracts and formal employment records, were unable to access these benefits, as contractors rarely took the initiative to register them. Things can potentially be promisingly different for today's platform workers in transportation, home delivery and housekeeping sectors, or even for future construction workers who might work through platforms, thanks to the digital revolution. Apart from e-Shram, which is a national initiative, several state governments like Rajasthan and Karnataka have already been taking initiatives to create state-level welfare boards. Through e-Shram, the Centre will have a national database of unorganised workers. But this will serve more than just a registry. Workers can be linked to various government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) to enable obtaining benefits or get to know of employment opportunities through integration with other portals like Skill India Digital and Gati Shakti initiative and National Career Service (NCS) Portal.

On the e-Shram portal, 306 million workers have been enrolled until the end of January, the largest group being agricultural workers, followed by domestic/household workers, workers in construction, apparel, miscellaneous (including street vendors, salesmen and delivery persons), and automobile transportation. The highest number of registrations is from Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar and West Bengal. It is unclear from the dashboard as to what share of these are platform workers, but since the registration process now collects this information, the government can start publishing this data soon.

In the Union Budget 2025 speech, it was announced that gig workers would have easier registration on the e-Shram platform (which appears to be progressing), receive identity cards, and gain access to health care benefits under PMJAY. However, implementation challenges persist. The key issue will be to enforce aggregator accountability and make sure that all aggregators share data on the portal. But the real test will be whether the government and aggregators take concrete steps beyond registration — such as ensuring direct social security contributions, health benefits, and financial protections — to truly improve conditions of gig workers. For example, there is little clarity right now on how to ensure benefits even after de-registration. The details need to be ironed out.

Vidhya Soundararajan is a microeconomist and works on labour, development and finance. The views expressed are personal





THE GOAN EVERYDAY

You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.  
Abraham Lincoln

# Agri policy holds promise, follow-up action is crucial

After much dilly-dallying, the State government finally unveiled its 'State Amritkal Agriculture Policy 2025' on Tuesday. This ambitious policy comes as a breath of fresh air amid growing concerns over land degradation, urbanization-driven agricultural land conversion, and the alarming decline of the farming sector. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's vision of Swayampurna Goem aligns seamlessly with this policy that seeks to protect the state's agricultural land while revitalizing the faltering sector.

Lately, Goa has been witnessing a disturbing trend of land sharks appropriating agricultural land for development projects. In the face of rampant conversions, the government's decision to implement 'Conservation Easements' to permanently safeguard agricultural land is a commendable and timely intervention. This legal agreement, paired with strict penalties for unauthorized conversions, not only conveys the seriousness of the government's intent but also reflects an understanding of the intrinsic value of the agricultural heritage that should not be sacrificed on the altar of rapid urbanization.

The policy is particularly crucial when we consider that agriculture in Goa is not just an economic activity; it is deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric of the state. The launch of this policy serves as a reassuring message to the farming community, which has felt the brunt of insecurity and stagnation in recent years. By addressing legislative barriers and promoting modern farming techniques, the government aims to cultivate a vibrant agricultural sector that can attract youth back into farming — an essential prerequisite for the long-term sustainability of food production in Goa.

Furthermore, this new framework promises extensive support for allied sectors through subsidies, support prices, and infrastructural development. Such measures will provide much-needed financial security to farmers, enhancing their capacity to thrive in an increasingly competitive environment. The focus on creating an ecosystem that fosters farmer welfare, fair labour conditions, and youth engagement in agriculture signals a solid commitment to rejuvenating the sector from the ground up.

Another noteworthy aspect of the policy is its emphasis on agro-tourism and sustainable farming practices. By integrating traditional wisdom with modern innovation, the State government aims to not only protect its agricultural land but also utilize it as a tool for economic development. It presents an opportunity for farmers to diversify their income streams while inviting local and global tourists to appreciate Goa's agricultural diversity, all while promoting environmental sustainability.

However, the crux of the matter lies not just in the drafting of this comprehensive policy but in its implementation. Goa has seen numerous commendable policies relegated to bureaucratic limbo, their potential unrealized. Therefore, the onus now rests on the government transforming this blueprint into tangible action. Establishing monitoring committees and ensuring regular progress reports will be key in holding various stakeholders accountable. It would be interesting to see how the government negotiates areas that come under the ambit of law. A follow-up is crucial to take this policy to its logical conclusion.

The State Amritkal Agriculture Policy 2025 is a critical and welcome step toward securing Goa's agricultural future amid pressures of development and climate change. For the record, this document could be a legacy footprint of Agriculture Minister Ravi Naik as time moves on because it embodies a holistic approach that seeks not only to protect agricultural land but also to empower farmers — especially the youth — while ensuring food security for generations to come. If executed with diligence and commitment, this policy holds the promise of revitalizing agriculture in Goa.

## OPEN SPACE >>

### Need for less stressful and quality education

Melville X D'Souza In the letter 'Change needed in way we look at education' (TGE, February 12) has rightly questioned the need of degrees and education which do not provide sustenance. Today, the education pattern the world over has changed with time. In India, our students are unfortunately put through a stressful career right from Class V onwards that leaves them hardly any time for extra curricular activities. Undoubtedly, competition for engineering and medical seats has increased, and that is why we read of students with 100 percentile marks nowadays, when it was so difficult to secure even 60 per cent in the Arts section, and 75 per cent was considered high for admission to the best engineering colleges in earlier days. Unfortunately, due to the shortage of jobs, a few engineering graduates are forced to take up clerical jobs, while medical graduates are leaving the country for better prospects. We need to do an assessment of the Centre's 'New Education Policy' (NEP) and in what way it is improving the lot of students, and turning out more proficient students than those of the past.

AF NAZARETH, Alto Porvorim

# The rise and fall of Arvind Kejriwal

Whether he will script another comeback or succumb to the pressures of mainstream politics remains an open question



KS TOMAR

>The writer is senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist

Arvind Kejriwal's political journey is a dramatic tale of ambition, disruption, and turbulence. From being an anti-corruption crusader to becoming Delhi's Chief Minister and facing an existential crisis, his trajectory exemplifies both the power and pitfalls of disruptive politics in India.

Kejriwal burst onto the national scene through the India against Corruption (IAC) movement in 2011, alongside Anna Hazare. His demand for a Jan Lokpal Bill struck a chord with a disillusioned middle class fed up with systemic corruption. Unlike Hazare, Kejriwal saw electoral politics as the next step and, in 2012, founded the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), positioning it as a transparent, corruption-free alternative to traditional political forces.

Defying expectations, AAP stunned the establishment in the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections, winning 28 of 70 seats and forming a minority government with Congress support. However, his abrupt resignation after 49 days — citing obstacles in passing the Jan Lokpal Bill — earned him the tag of being an anarchist. Despite this misstep, Kejriwal staged a sensational comeback in 2015, securing 67 of 70 seats in Delhi, reducing the BJP and Congress to irrelevance in the capital.

Kejriwal's administration projected itself as a pro-people, welfare-oriented, focusing on free electricity, water subsidies, improved government schools, and mohalla clinics. These welfare schemes, along with efficient political messaging, won him a second term in 2020 with another landslide (62/70 seats). The AAP then sought national expansion, targeting Punjab, Gujarat, and other states, while challenging the BJP at multiple levels.

The Punjab win in 2022 — AAP's first full-fledged state outside Delhi — was seen as a stepping stone to national politics. With Bhagwant Mann as CM, Kejriwal projected AAP as a formidable alternative to both BJP and Congress. However, his national aspirations began to face serious roadblocks.

Kejriwal's expansionist ambitions put him in direct confrontation with the BJP, which controls the central government. His party's aggressive posturing led to escalating clashes with the Centre, including the 2021 Delhi riots, repeated run-ins with the Lieutenant Governor,



and ED-CBI probes into alleged corruption.

The most damaging blow came with the Delhi liquor policy scam, which ensnared key AAP leaders, including Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain. The corruption allegations shattered AAP's moral high ground and turned Kejriwal's anti-corruption narrative on its head. Arrests of party functionaries further weakened the party's credibility.

Simultaneously, the INDIA alliance, which Kejriwal had aligned with to counter BJP in 2024, began facing internal contradictions. AAP's refusal to concede space to Congress in Delhi and Punjab strained relations, reducing Kejriwal's negotiating power within the opposition bloc.

Additionally, AAP's national expansion strategy failed to yield desired results. While the party made electoral forays into Gujarat, Goa, and Himachal Pradesh, its performance remained unimpressive. The party's inability to penetrate large Hindi heartland states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan further dented its national ambitions. The BJP's stronghold remained intact, and the Congress, despite its decline, continued to be the principal opposition in many states.

As Kejriwal's governance came under scrutiny, his confrontations with central agencies escalated. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) launched multiple probes against AAP leaders, leading to high-profile arrests. While Kejriwal decried these actions as politically motivated, the legal troubles deepened, impacting AAP's governance and public perception.

The party also struggled with administrative control over Delhi. The ongoing tussle with the Lieutenant Governor (LG), seen as a proxy for the BJP-led Centre, hampered governance. Kejriwal's demand for full statehood for Delhi remained unfulfilled, further limiting his executive power. The Supreme Court's interventions provided temporary relief, but they could not completely shield AAP from central interference.

Kejriwal's carefully crafted image as an anti-corruption crusader took a significant hit due to these allegations.

Media scrutiny intensified, and his former supporters from the middle class began to distance themselves. His reliance on populist schemes also faced criticism, with opponents arguing that AAP's governance model was financially unsustainable.

While free electricity, water, and public healthcare schemes remained popular, critics questioned their long-term viability. The financial health of Punjab and Delhi governments came under pressure, raising concerns about AAP's economic policies.

Kejriwal's future now hinges on multiple challenges. The corruption allegations, administrative tussles, and shrinking electoral footprint could either lead to his eventual decline or force him to recalibrate his politics. His leadership within AAP is unchallenged, but the party's structural weaknesses — over-dependence on Delhi and Punjab — limit its national aspirations.

If Kejriwal can navigate legal troubles and reinvent his party's positioning, he may yet remain relevant. However, with the BJP's aggressive crackdown and Congress' resurgence, his space in Indian politics is shrinking. What began as an idealistic political movement now faces a credibility crisis, and Kejriwal's ability to survive this storm will determine whether he remains a key player or fades into political oblivion.

Arvind Kejriwal's journey has been marked by extraordinary highs and lows. From a grassroots activist to a three-time Delhi Chief Minister, his rise showcased the power of alternative politics. However, his confrontations with the Centre, internal party challenges, and legal troubles have significantly weakened his position.

Kejriwal now stands at a defining crossroads. If he successfully defends his governance model, navigates legal hurdles, and revives AAP's expansion strategy, he may emerge stronger. Conversely, if he fails to counter mounting challenges, his political journey may enter a phase of irreversible decline.

Whether he will script another comeback or succumb to the pressures of mainstream politics remains an open question, but one thing is clear — his story is far from over.

—FPJ

## THE INBOX >>

### Freedom fighters, children should speak up for Goa

Goans woke up to shocking news that about 35 armed goons broke into the house of Rajesh Sinary (Son of Goa freedom fighter the late Punshottam Sinary); and dispossessed the home of Rajesh, his wife and 6-year-old daughter! What is more shocking is the complacent attitude of the Anjuna Police in this matter. My particular request is to the freedom fighters/children to speak up. Recently, I have noted eminent freedom fighter(s) receiving National, State Awards and conversing comfortably with Goa's ministers; so surely I hope that they can also speak up about this outrageous attack, besides also speaking up on the other ills facing Goa including high corruption and the massive sale, conversion, destruction of Goa's scarce land, hills, water bodies, non development zones, eco sensitive areas, forests, trees, etc to real estate companies, land sharks, celebrities from outside Goa. I do not believe that the purpose of the freedom fighters ended in 1961. Law abiding Goans are now threatened by Indian, Goan goons and the establishment (including the govt/machinery and the police) Hope Goa's freedom fighters, children can speak up for Goa as this could make a big impact.

ARWIN MESQUITA, Colva

### Power disconnection sans notice is unfair

The ongoing state wide drive by the Electricity Department of Goa to recover pending power dues without due procedure has sparked widespread concern among consumers. It should be noted that the consumer should get an advance notice of an impending shut off.

### Show your love for Goa this Valentine's Day

Tomorrow, February 14, is Valentine's Day. The day is characterized by expressions of love and affection. However Valentine's Day is not limited to romantic relationships and is celebrated with friends, family, community members and even pets and plants. One does not need to be in a relationship to be loved. In fact, one of the most important forms of love is self-love. This Valentine's Day let us show our love for Goa. Our lovely state is at a crossroads. With deforestation, hill cutting going on unabated across the state, our green cover is depleting at a rapid rate. It is time to grow more trees and protect the existing trees from being chopped down. We need to clean the neighbourhood and more importantly not litter the surroundings. Our greenery, our fields, water bodies, hills, forests need to be conserved for future generations. We need to preserve the vast scenic natural beauty and paddy fields and swaying palms. We need to keep our beaches clean. The time to act is now. Valentine's Day could be the most opportune day to take a pledge to save Goa from further destruction.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

Domestic and commercial consumers must ensure payment of their bills within the stipulated 30 days. The government is keen on recovering pending dues to tide over its burgeoning economic burden. It should bring the policy that, if consumers fail to clear dues for three consecutive months, GED should terminate agreements. The reckless snapping of power supply to consumers for default in payment of bills is unfair. The consumers should be served notices before electricity supply is snapped for default in payment of bills.

KG VILOP, Choral

### Power dept needs to first set own house in order

The government has time and again issued warnings to internet service providers and TV operators to remove



Send your letters to us at [editor@thegoan.net](mailto:editor@thegoan.net). Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

their cables which have been unauthorised strung from electricity poles throughout the state. But despite this things remain the same in the coastal villages. The worst case seen is at Maria Hall crossroads in Benaulim. The Goa electricity department has added to the mess by leaving exposed multiple trunk cables leaning against the electric pole. This is not only ugly sight but also a fire hazard. Will the sarkar set its own house in order before asking ISPs to remove their cables?

VINAY DWIVEDI, Benaulim

### Future of Goa and its land is in hands of its people

India alliance to fight the BJP is fine, but if they come to power there will be a big drama to become CM and for the ministers portfolios. We have already seen the arguments a few months back where they were pointing fingers at each other and few were praising BJP government which clearly shows that the boat is sailing in the rough weather and the political game can change. Even if people show their power during the election, these double-faced politicians are cheating the voters in the name of development and joining BJP government and then for their protection the large numbers of police force keep citizens at bay. When will India get a strong law which ensures that persons whom we elect don't jump from one party to another for the greed of money and power? All are saying that we will save and protect Goa but the truth is that more than Goans today, there are outsiders who are settled down in Goa with large families. The future of Goa is in your hands think, run your own business in Goa, save and protect your lands and business and fight for Goa.

RONNIE DSOUZA, Chondor



# 14 E. EXPLAINED



#ieExplained

@ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## Ranveer Allahbadia row: What does law say about obscenity?

AJAY SINHA KARPURAM

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 12

ASSAM POLICE on Monday registered a complaint against Ranveer Allahbadia, founder of the YouTube channel *BeerBiceps*, for the allegedly obscene comments he made during a guest appearance on the YouTube show *India's Got Talent*. Comedian Samay Raina, the show's host, was also named in the complaint, which included charges of "obscene acts" under Section 296 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS). Allahbadia and Raina are currently under investigation by the Mumbai police.

**What are the laws that govern the offence of obscenity in India?**

Section 294 of the BNS punishes those who sell, import, export, advertise, or profit from obscene books, paintings, figures, and other materials. It also punishes the display

of obscene content "in electronic form".

The section describes obscene material as something which is "lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest" — meaning, overtly and excessively sexual — or which would "tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it".

Violation of Section 294 can be punished with up to two years imprisonment, and a fine of up to Rs 5,000 for first-time offenders. In the event of a second or subsequent conviction, one can be slapped with a prison sentence of up to five years, and a fine of up to Rs 10,000.

Publishing or transmitting obscene material online can also be punished under Section 67 of the Information Technology Act, 2000. The definition of obscene material in the IT Act is identical to that provided under Section 294 of the BNS. However, it provides a comparatively more rigorous punishment — up to three years imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh for a first-

time offence. Second or subsequent conviction can lead to five years in prison, and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh.

Section 296 of the BNS, under which Allahbadia and Raina have been charged, says: "Whoever, to the annoyance of others (a) does any obscene act in any public place; or (b) sings, recites or utters any obscene song, ballad or words, in or near any public place, shall be punished with imprisonment for up to three months, and/or a fine of up to Rs 1,000.

**How have courts interpreted obscenity over the years?**

Post 1947, one of the most important rulings on obscenity laws involved the book *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, written by English novelist D.H. Lawrence. The book, which was first published in 1928 in Italy, was considered scandalous for the times given that it contained details of sexual encounters.

In 1964, the Supreme Court of India held that the book was obscene under Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in *Ranjit D Udeshi vs State of Maharashtra*. The court used the "Hicklin test" to determine if a work was obscene.

The legal test was established in the case *Regina vs Hicklin* (1868) in which a British court held that a work must be regarded as obscene if it tended to "deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences", regardless of its artistic or literary merit.

This meant that the threshold for what could be considered obscene would be judged from the perspective of someone young and impressionable, or someone who had already sought obscene material.

However, years before the SC's judgement, the standard for obscenity in the UK had changed. The *Obscene Publications Act, 1959*, stated that a work must be considered

"as a whole" before considering its effect on likely audiences.

The United States also went on to discard the Hicklin test in *Roth vs United States* (1957). The US Supreme Court held that the test for obscenity was "whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest".

While the Hicklin test defined obscenity using the lowest common denominator, the courts in the US and the UK accounted for shifting and evolving societal mores.

The Roth case influenced the Indian SC's choice to adopt the "community standards" test in *Aveek Sarkar vs State of West Bengal* (2014). The SC quashed obscenity proceedings against magazines for carrying an image of tennis player Boris Becker posing nude with his fiancée. It held that applying the Hicklin test would result in the work being "judged for obscenity based on isolated pas-

sages of a work considered out of context and judged by their apparent influence on most susceptible readers".

**Have courts heard cases of obscenity in online content?**

In March 2024, the SC quashed proceedings against the creators of the YouTube web series *College Romances* under Section 292 of the IPC and Section 67 of the IT Act. The prosecution argued that the characters on the show used vulgar language and that the plot revolved around college students offensively discussing and engaging in sexual activities.

The SC applied the community standards test. It held, "While the literal meaning of the terms used may be sexual in nature and they may refer to sexual acts, their usage does not arouse sexual feelings or lust in any viewer of ordinary prudence and common sense. Rather, the common usage of these words is reflective of emotions of anger, rage, frustration, grief, or perhaps excitement".

### EXPLAINED LAW

### THIS WORD MEANS

#### EINSTEIN RING

A ring of light that forms around a massive celestial body; an example of gravitational lensing



A bright Einstein ring around galaxy NGC 6505, ESA

ALIND CHAUHAN

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 12

THE EUROPEAN Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid space telescope has discovered an Einstein ring around a galaxy some 590 million lightyears from Earth. Photos of the Einstein ring, taken by Euclid in September 2023 but released on Monday, show a ball of light (the galaxy NGC 6505) with a bright, cloudy ring around it.

Stephen Serjeant, an astronomer at the Open University, told *The Guardian*, "This is a beautiful, extraordinary, thrilling and lucky find in our first data."

**What is an Einstein ring?**

An Einstein ring is a ring of light that may form around dark matter, a galaxy, or a cluster of galaxies. It is essentially an example of gravitational lensing, a phenomenon which occurs when a massive celestial body creates a gravitational field which distorts and amplifies the light from distant galaxies that are behind it but in the same line of sight. The body causing the light to curve is called a gravitational lens.

In the case of the recently discovered Einstein ring, NGC 6505 was the gravitational lens which distorted and amplified the light coming from a distant unnamed galaxy, located 4.42 billion light-years away. A light-year (roughly 9.46 trillion km) is the distance light travels in one year.

Xiaosheng Huang, a professor of physics and astronomy at the University of San Francisco, told *NPR* that gravitational lensing can result "in several types

of image configurations", including an Einstein ring, which is perhaps the most striking of them all.

Einstein rings are named after Albert Einstein, whose theory of general relativity predicted that light could bend and brighten around objects across the cosmos. Several Einstein rings have been discovered since 1987, although it remains unclear how many such rings exist in total. Experts suggest that these are extremely rare, with less than 1% galaxies having an Einstein ring.

Notably, these rings can only be observed using powerful space telescopes such as Euclid.

**Why study Einstein rings?**

Einstein rings help scientists investigate dark matter, which has never been detected but is believed to make up 85% of all matter in the universe.

Conor O'Riordan, a postdoctoral scholar at the Max Planck Institute for Astrophysics (Germany), told *CNN*, "This dark matter does not interact with light, but it does have a gravitational effect. Gravitational lensing therefore is sensitive to the presence of this dark matter, allowing us to indirectly detect it."

Moreover, Einstein rings enable scientists to learn about distant galaxies, which otherwise might not be visible. They can also provide information about the expansion of the universe as the space between the Earth and other galaxies — both in the foreground and the background — is stretching, according to NASA.



### EXPERTS EXPLAIN

BASHIR ALI ABBAS & BANTIRANI PATRO

EXACTLY SIX months after former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's unceremonious ouster from Dhaka, a mob on February 5 razed to the ground the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi 32. The building had been previously targeted by vandals last year, hours after Hasina's exit on August 5.

Dhanmondi 32 was the residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh. It was from this house that Mujib led Bengali resistance against Pakistan throughout the 1960s till his arrest in 1971 — according to the museum's website, Dhanmondi 32 "was the center of all of Bangladesh's political activities".

And it was here that renegade officers of the Bangladesh Army murdered Bangabandhu, his wife, sons, and 10-year-old grandson. (Mujib's daughters Hasina and Rehana survived as they were abroad at the time.) In 1994, Hasina converted the building into a museum.

This makes Dhanmondi 32's demolition a watershed moment in Bangladesh's political history. But this is not the first time that anti-Hasina protesters have targeted Mujib's legacy.

**Mujib in Hasina's politics**

In the three years prior to his killing in 1975, Mujib attempted to reshape Bangladesh's national character, and de-link it from Pakistani traditions. This included an concerted effort to ostracise those Bangladesh Army officers who did not participate in the Liberation War, and containing Islamist tendencies in both the polity and the military.

But there was pushback from some quarters that ultimately led to Mujib's assassination and a military coup in 1975. General Ziaur Rahman took control — unofficially by late 1975, officially as President in 1977 — and undid many of Mujib's policies. Notably, he gave more space (including Cabinet positions) to parties like Jamaat-e-Islami in mainstream politics. This continued under subsequent Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) governments of Zia's wife Khaleda Zia in 1991-96 and 2001-06.

It is in this context that Hasina's personal politics must be understood. After coming to



A vandalised photograph of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman inside his demolished Dhanmondi 32 residence in Dhaka last week. Reuters

power in 2009, Hasina clamped down on Islamist parties, ensuring that they are effectively removed from the electoral field. She also targeted alleged raskars (or collaborators with the Pakistani state) for their war crimes in 1971.

Beyond reflecting Bangabandhu's political vision, the Awami League relied heavily on Mujib's legacy to legitimise Hasina's politics — which became increasingly controversial with each election since 2014. Much of what the Hasina administration did, good or bad, was in Mujib's name.

This made protecting Mujib's legacy of paramount importance. To this end, the Hasina administration passed laws like the Digital Security Act, 2018 whose Section 21 penalises "any propaganda or campaign against liberation war... Father of the nation [Bangabandhu]..." with imprisonment of up to 10 years, and a fine of up to 1 crore taka.

**During the 2024 protests**

By February 2024, as anti-Hasina protests gathered steam, anything and everything linked to the PM — from her strong India tilt to her reliance on Mujib's legacy — came under attack.

Hasina's years-long clampdown on the opposition, including the arrest of Khaleda in 2018 and ban on BNP's activities and publications in 2023, alleged corruption, and economic mismanagement had created significant resentment among the populace.

When the resentment boiled over, the people of Bangladesh rejected the very basis of Hasina's politics — an espousal of what she believed was authentic Bangladeshi nationalism based on the Awami League's and Mujib's role in the liberation struggle.

This is why Hasina's use of the term *raskar* while criticising student protesters did not work. "Ami ke? Tumi ke? Raskar raskar [Who am I? Who are you? Raskar raskar]", they chanted, proudly owning what had long been seen as the most terrible slur in Bangladesh politics.

Long suppressed fundamentalist and Islamist elements finding space in the protests ostensibly led by the Students Against Discrimination only made things worse. As protesters closed in on Hasina's residence on August 5, Mujib's statues were toppled and murals defaced.

Put simply, Bangladeshi reverence for Mujib as the founding father, was superseded by protesters' revulsion for his daughter's authoritarianism in his name.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

**Yunus' legitimacy bid**

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

What happened in Dhanmondi 32 in August was the result of anti-Hasina sentiments being extended to the instruments she used to sustain her rule. But its demolition last week was the product of a different process.

Over the last six months, the interim government has faced significant challenges, including questions regarding Muhammad Yunus' own legitimacy as "Chief Advisor", most notably from Hasina herself. To counter this, the Yunus government has mounted pressure on India — a fresh friction at the border, diplomatic spats, unprecedented defence and intelligence ties between Dhaka and Rawalpindi, among other things — and more importantly, prosecuted Hasina legally, politically, and socially.

Institutions that Hasina had erected, such as the International Crimes Tribunal in 2010, have also been turned against her. The ICT was originally meant to investigate war crimes from 1971. But the tribunal now looks for "evidence" that must be removed — is a key part of the government's strategy to legitimise itself, and sustain its rule.

This is best illustrated by the government cancelling eight Hasina-era national holidays linked to Mujib, including one on August 15, the anniversary of Mujib's assassination. At the same time, the government allowed the celebration of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's 76th death anniversary at Dhaka's National Press Club with Urdu songs and poetry, something that lies in the face of what Bangladesh's struggle against West Pakistan's linguistic and cultural imposition on Bengali Muslims stood for.

If the 2024 anti-Hasina protests targeted Hasina's father, the latest developments are against the Father of the Nation. The strong downstream effect of the government's moves is that extremists, many of whom destroyed Bangabandhu's house, now get a free hand to target Mujib.

That this does not represent the entirety (or even a majority) of the views held by Bangladeshis people, was reflected in what Mahfuz Alam, editor of *The Daily Star*, wrote on October 18, 2024: "We cannot malign Bangabandhu's historic and indisputable role with what Sheikh Hasina did in the 15-plus years she was in power."

Unfortunately, much like the politics of revenge that Hasina herself perpetuated, the Yunus administration now benefits from a reciprocal focus on revenge. Bangabandhu's legacy pays the price.

Bashir Ali Abbas is a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi.

Bantirani Patro is a Research Associate at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

## Story of Savarkar's attempted sea escape in Marseille, in his own words

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 12

WHILE in Marseille, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday night (Wednesday early morning in India) wrote about the port city's "special" connection to India's struggle for independence.

"It was here that the great Veer Savarkar attempted a courageous escape. I also want to thank the people of Marseille and the French activists of that time who demanded that he not be handed over to British custody," he posted on X.

**Savarkar's attempted escape**

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was arrested in London in March 1910, on charges of anti-state acts and abetment of Nashik magistrate A.M.T. Jackson's murder. While being brought to India for trial onboard the com-

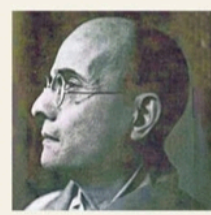
mercial ship *SS Morea*, Savarkar tried to escape from custody in Marseille.

*SS Morea* had sailed from London on July 1, 1910. It docked at Marseille a week later. According to the records of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), on July 8, 1910, Savarkar, who was being closely guarded, sought permission to use the washroom. He then bolted the toilet from inside, jumped out of the ship's port hole, and swam ashore.

However, Savarkar was soon apprehended by a brigadier of the French maritime gendarmerie, who handed him over to guards from the ship after mistaking him for a crew member. Savarkar's escape, however, sparked a dispute between France and Great Britain, which was settled by the PCA.

**Case before PCA**

The issue before the international tribunal was whether the British should



V.D. Savarkar was released from prison in 1924. Wikimedia Commons

hand Savarkar over to France.

"The French government did not approve of the manner in which Mr Savarkar had been returned to British custody and demanded his restitution to France, on the

grounds that his delivery to British authorities amounts to a defective extradition. The British government contended that, according to the arrangements made for the security of the prisoner while the ship was in port, the French authorities had been obliged to prevent his escape," the record of the case on the PCA's website says.

The matter was decided on February 24, 1911. The PCA concluded that the British government did not need "to restore Mr Savarkar to the French government."

"The Tribunal found that all those agents who had taken part in the incident had demonstrated good faith. The Tribunal concluded that despite the irregularity committed in the arrest of Mr Savarkar, such irregularity did not result in any obligation on the British government to restore Mr Savarkar to the French government," the website says.

Savarkar was brought to India and tried. He was sentenced to two life terms by the Bombay High Court for 25 years each in

December 1910 and January 1911. He would be sentenced to rigorous imprisonment in the Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, on July 4, 1911.

**Savarkar's account**

Savarkar references his attempted sea escape in his Marathi biographical work *Mazaj Janmathe*, first published in 1927. The book has been translated into English as *The Story of My Transportation for Life* by Prof V.N. Naik.

Savarkar wrote: "...[When] our army of prisoners was taken out to proceed to the Andamans... I was left behind. I wondered why a motor car came up to the door. Two big sergeants got down from it. I was put into it and they stepped in after me. The door was shut and the car started. I was not taken along the road like the rest because they feared that the crowd, who knew of my departure, had stationed itself on the road in scattered groups to have a sight of me. Besides I was the culprit who

ran away in Marseille.

Perhaps, I may be spirited away in the same fashion by some member of the secret societies, of which there were many in those days. A mine may spring up beneath me, and I, who know, may disappear all of a sudden. These and other reasons of safety had decided the authorities to take me to the station all by myself, in a car, and along a different route. They did not want to repeat the mistake that they had committed at Marseille."

He wrote, "Whenever I was taken from one place to another in a special car and under a special guard, my fellow-prisoners thought highly of me... My effort to run away from the steamer-boat at Marseille did me some good after all. It procured me a car to enjoy a long drive. It created in the mind of these prisoners a sort of reverence for me. And, further, right or wrong, the more the authorities tried to belittle me, the greater the respect they showed to me."



# THE IDEAS PAGE



C R Sasikumar

## For good and for all

India's national AI Mission is built on a foundation of accessibility and democratisation. And we are ready to share this experience and expertise with the world



NARENDRA MODI

LET ME BEGIN with a simple experiment. If you upload your medical report to an AI app, it can explain in simple language, free of any jargon, what it means for your health. But, if you ask the same app to draw an image of someone writing with their left hand, the app will most likely draw someone writing with their right hand. And, that is what the training data is dominated by.

It shows that while the positive potential of AI is absolutely amazing, there are many biases that we need to think carefully about. That is why I am grateful to my friend, President (Emmanuel) Macron, for hosting this summit. And for inviting me to co-chair it.

AI is already re-shaping our polity, our economy, our security and even our society. AI is writing the code for humanity in this century. But, it is very different from other technology milestones in human history.

AI is developing at an unprecedented scale and speed. And being adopted and deployed even faster. There is also a deeper dependence across borders. Therefore, there is a need for collective global efforts to establish governance and standards, that uphold our shared values, address risks, and build trust.

But, governance is not just about managing risks and rivalries. It is also about promoting innovation, and deploying it for the global good. So, we must think deeply and discuss

openly about innovation and governance. Governance is also about ensuring access to all, especially in the Global South. It is where the capacities are most lacking—be it in computing power, data, or the financial resources.

AI can help transform millions of lives by improving health, education, agriculture and so much more. It can help create a world in which the journey to sustainable development goals becomes easier and faster.

To do this, we must pool together resources and talent. We must develop open-source systems that enhance trust and transparency. We must build quality data sets free from biases. We must democratise technology and create people-centric applications. We must address concerns related to cyber security, disinformation, and deep fakes. And, we must also ensure that technology is rooted in local ecosystems for it to be effective and useful.

Loss of jobs is AI's most feared disruption. But history has shown that work does not disappear due to technology. Its nature changes and new types of jobs are created. We need to invest in skilling and re-skilling our people for an AI-driven future.

There is no doubt that the high-energy intensity of AI needs to be looked into. This will require green power to fuel its future.

India and France have worked together for years through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance to harness the power of the sun. As we advance our partnership to AI, it is a natural progression from sustainability to innovation to shape a smarter and responsible future.

At the same time, Sustainable AI does not only mean using clean energy. AI models must also be efficient and sustainable in size, data needs and resource requirements. After all, the human brain manages to compose poetry and design spaceships

### FOR THE RECORD

To do this, we must pool together resources and talent. We must develop open-source systems that enhance trust and transparency. We must build quality data sets free from biases. We must democratise technology and create people-centric applications. We must address concerns related to cyber security, disinformation, and deep fakes. And, we must also ensure that technology is rooted in local ecosystems for it to be effective and useful.

using less power than most lightbulbs. India has successfully built a Digital Public Infrastructure for over 14 billion people at a very low cost. It is built around an open and accessible network. It has regulations, and a wide range of applications to modernise our economy, reform governance and transform the lives of our people.

We have unlocked the power of data through the data empowerment and protection architecture. And, we have made digital commerce democratic and accessible to all. This vision is the foundation of India's national AI Mission.

That is why during my G20 presidency, we built a consensus on harnessing AI responsibly, for good, and for all. Today, India leads in AI adoption, and techno-legal solutions on data privacy.

We are developing AI applications for public good. We have one of the world's largest AI talent pools. India is building its own Large Language Model considering our diversity. We also have a unique public-private partnership model for pooling resources like compute power. It is made available to our start-ups and researchers at an affordable cost. And, India is ready to share its experience and expertise to ensure that the AI future is for good, and for all.

We are at the dawn of the AI age that will shape the course of humanity. Some people worry about machines becoming superior in intelligence to humans. But, no one holds the key to our collective future and shared destiny other than us humans.

That sense of responsibility must guide us.

The writer is the Prime Minister of India. This is an edited excerpt of the speech given by the PM at the Paris AI Summit on February 11

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"One wonders whether the institutional leadership realises the long-term ramifications of the ongoing 'remaking' of the judiciary in Pakistan."

—DAWN, PAKISTAN

## Some surprises, many challenges

After Telangana caste survey, state will face hurdles in tweaking quotas



KANCHA ILAIAH SHEPHERD

THE TELANGANA CABINET sub-committee released the data of the recently concluded caste survey on February 3. The cabinet approved the survey and placed it before the state assembly on February 4. The broad percentages of the survey show that non-Muslim Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitute 46.25 per cent and Muslim OBCs constitute 10.08 per cent of the state's population, while Scheduled Castes constitute 17.43 per cent and Scheduled Tribes 10.45 per cent. Non-Muslim general castes (Other Castes) are at 13.31 per cent. Non-Muslim OBCs also include Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists, not just Hindus, although their numbers are small. What is surprising in this data is the number of Muslim OBCs. Nobody expected that out of a total 12.56 per cent Muslims, only 2.48 per cent would not claim OBC status. The general castes, constitute 15.79 per cent.

It is also possible that the poverty levels of the Muslim OBCs match their caste position. As of now, Telangana Muslims have just 4 per cent reservation. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been opposing giving any reservation to Muslims.

The increase of the tribal population, broadly from about 7 per cent in united Andhra Pradesh to 10.45 per cent in Telangana is because of the concentration of Lambada population that lives in the plains, along with forest tribes, such as the Gonds and Koyas.

This state-level caste and socioeconomic survey has serious implications for national and local welfare policies. For the first time, a Congress state government has undertaken such a survey in the country. Rahul Gandhi had launched a national campaign on the issue, saying that 90 per cent of OBC/SC/STs are out of the power structures in India. During the Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipal to Mumbai, Rahul Gandhi promised that if Congress comes to power in 2024 elections, it will get a comprehensive caste census done at national level.

An important reason that Rahul Gandhi pushed the caste census was to put the BJP government in Delhi in an ideological fix. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP has won a substantial number of votes from the OBCs. It was this bloc in north India that helped the BJP retain power for a third term, albeit with the support of alliance partners. Rahul Gandhi wants to break this fortress of the BJP by pushing a much more radical pro-OBC agenda. The caste census is a key anchor in that fight.

The Revanth Reddy government's ef-

forts to conduct a caste survey within 14 months of coming to power are praiseworthy given the complications involved in the survey—not just at the level of states, but also at the national level. Normally collection of census data is done by the Union government. But so far, no national government has touched the issue of caste data in the national census, which is normally conducted once every 10 years. After the 2011 Census, the UPA government did a half-hearted socioeconomic survey, part of which was the collection of caste data. But this was never released. Once the BJP came to power in 2014, that data was dumped. The Modi government has shown total indifference to the caste census issue because of the RSS/BJP's long-term dependence on general castes.

The non-OBC general castes have usually opposed such an exercise, as the numbers would certainly bring in new political equations everywhere. In the post-Mandal decades, OBCs have slowly but surely become vote banks in themselves, creating a crisis in the old dependence of Congress on the Muslim and Dalit vote banks. It was the OBC vote bank that enabled the BJP to come to power.

However, OBCs have been demanding a caste census for a while, because once the caste data comes out, the Supreme Court's cap of 27 per cent on OBC reservation can be challenged. This position, taken by OBC leaders across the country, strengthened after the Modi government gave 10 per cent reservation to the economically weaker sections (EWS) of the general castes. The government brought an act and implemented it to begin with the All India Services. This was challenged in the Supreme Court, which then upheld the reservation.

The Nitish Kumar-led government in Bihar was the first state government to do its own caste survey. The survey showed that OBCs formed 63.14 per cent of the state's population. Based on this data, the Bihar government tried to increase the OBC reservation of the state but the Supreme High Court struck it down as "unconstitutional".

When it comes to the percentage of non-Muslim OBCs, the Telangana survey data is also expected lines. The immediate impact of these numbers, though collected by a state government through its state planning board, is that the government faces pressure to implement the party promise of 42 per cent reservation for OBCs in the local body elections, this year.

The OBCs—both Muslims and non-Muslims together—constitute 56.33 per cent of the population. However, given the 50 per cent cap on reservation, the OBCs get only 27 per cent. If the government wants to increase it to 42 per cent, it needs the approval of the Centre. How does the Telangana government overcome this hurdle? The government has also released its proposed sub-classification of SCs, which is also likely to face hurdles.

The writer is former director, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### RESPECT CHOICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'No impunity' (IE, February 12). The plight of the interfaith couples who suffered assault and harassment in a Bhopal court and in Uttarakhand is concerning. Such incidents betray the assurances by the Prime Minister, Chief Minister and the Home Minister that the UCC's provisions are for the protection and dignity of women. The audacity of right-wing outfits to beat up a person inside the court premises is shocking. That they were able to do this so brazenly stems from their sense of impunity due to political patronage. The incidents seem to prove true the apprehensions expressed by a Supreme Court bench comprising former Chief Justice of India D V Chandrachud, Justice P S Narasimha and Justice B R Gavai.

L R Murali, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'No impunity' (IE, February 12). The state has no role to play in the personal choices of individuals, especially with respect to their choice of partners. The very beauty of this country lies in its diversity of religions and practices, and any move towards enforcing "uniformity" over these is bound to face opposition from the young and the educated. The state would do well to maintain a distance from the personal choices of its people. It should, instead, focus on bringing in reforms that promote harmony within the diversity our country has to offer.

Deepak Sharma, via email

#### KEEP THE FAITH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Take a Deep Breath' (IE, February 12). Rohit Sharma has answered critics with a scintillating and flawless hundred in Cuttack. It was evident that he was confident in himself. In January, he said he was a father of two who is aware of his own potential and knows how long to play and when to retire. While those words reflected his self-confidence and were followed by a good day in the office, we as viewers should enjoy the game without getting too worked up about the dry spells all cricketers go through.

Krishan Chugh, New Delhi

#### STAY ON GUARD

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Deal-making with Trump' (IE, February 12). The upcoming meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump presents a crucial moment for India to assert its trade interests. Given Trump's aggressive negotiation style, India should be prepared to stand firm. Its average tariff on key US exports—such as crude oil, LNG, coal, and diamonds—is well below five per cent. India has already reduced tariffs in the budget, demonstrating flexibility without compromising on long-term goals. Cutting tariffs hastily under pressure could have unintended consequences. India must carefully evaluate the impacts before making any commitments.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



### IN GOOD FAITH

By DISHA NAWANI

## The problem with binaries

Should only insiders speak on their groups? Not all outsiders are insensitive

NO AMOUNT OF bookish knowledge can teach us about life we have to offer. I never imagined life would give me an opportunity to experience what I've often talked about. I want to point out two things through this essay about human tendencies, especially in research. First, looking at everything in binaries, be it problems, solutions or problem-solutions. Second, regarding the categories within them as fixed. While variables such as caste, religion or gender may be considered fixed, others like ability-disability may not be. What we define as abled today may become disabled tomorrow, due to reasons not under human control.

While conducting research, one often hears about the methodological dilemma of the insider versus the outsider in establishing the veracity or ingenuity of the data collected or voices heard. It's argued that those being researched or objectified should also become the subjects of the research—who could be more suitable than them to express what their experiences have been like and how they could be mitigated? It's difficult to counter this position as the supposed outsider is not so suitable, having neither the necessary experience/knowledge nor the desired empathy.

Temporarily losing my ability to speak due to a medical condition gave me the opportunity to become both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. Experiencing what it's like to become speech-impaired did leave me with frustration, suffering and a desperate urge to share or do something about these experiences. It was most annoying to see others misinterpret what I was trying to communicate, even if the issue was innocuous. I shudder to think what might happen when the implications of misinterpretation would be serious, involve others or have higher stakes. However, I cannot deny that there were also those who would understand what I was going through and speak my voice.

The more socially sensitive the matter, involving the representation of concerns of marginalised communities, the louder the clamour that they alone can best express their concerns. For example, if it is a women's issue or a Dalit issue, no one else can claim to represent their experiences better than they themselves. Going by that logic, it seems a Dalit writer—for instance, Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiography *Joothan*—to fully comprehend a Dalit boy's account of pain, dignity and misery. While there is not an iota of doubt in acknowledging that, there should also be no

hesitation in acknowledging equal empathy manifested in the work of non-Dalit scholars studying such themes. For example, Krishna Kumar's essay, 'Learning to be Backward', is a moving account of a tribal student's story of the shame that he goes through when his History teacher, with the help of a prescribed textbook, establishes in the classroom a connection between tantricism, orthodoxy and tribal culture. Kumar beautifully captures the dilemma the tribal student goes through upon being asked the "right" answer to the question "who were the people who practised superstitious beliefs". Whether he responds or not, his backward status (either as superstitions or dumb) will be reiterated.

Due to their shared experiences, insiders may be more invested in mitigating the conditions that cause suffering (because they go through the same suffering). However, it is also possible that as insiders, they are blinded by their concern, might become biased and lose perspective of the problem, or perceive all outsiders as people with vested interests. While insiders have a definite edge in terms of knowledge, this can't be the sole condition for choosing them.

That's the issue when we look at educational problems as binaries, oversimplifying

their causation, which leads to oversimplification of proposed solutions. For example, a teacher's background is often considered important, especially if her students are members of a tribal community. It has often been seen that a non-tribal teacher is far removed from the culture of the children and is therefore insensitive to the tribal children's needs. The solution is found in replacing the teacher. This is based on the premise that a teacher from a similar background is better than one who is not. Yet, it is also true that not all non-tribal teachers are insensitive as projected in several research studies. In addition, there are several other factors that contribute to the making of a good teacher: Training, service conditions, work environment. This, singling out a factor, no matter how important it may seem, and giving it undue significance while ignoring other factors, can be problematic.

Similarly, the realisation that the difference between abled and disabled is only a question of degree and not type, and it may just take a split second for one to jump around the spectrum, keeps us more grounded not only as researchers but also as human beings.

The writer is professor, School of Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai





# THE EDITORIAL PAGE

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## OPEN AND ROBUST

PM Modi's pitch for open-source AI aligns India's goals with global realities. Private players must be a part of this project

OPTIMISM, TEMPERED WITH a note of caution, marked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's opening address at the AI Action Summit in Paris on Tuesday. Co-chairing the event with French President Emmanuel Macron, the Prime Minister spoke of the "absolutely amazing" positive potential of AI in health, education, agriculture and other sectors, while also underlining the need to be alert to its potential for "biases". As he did so, he outlined a vision for the future where "open-source systems... enhance trust and transparency", where technology is democratised and "rooted in local ecosystems" — words that carry a special resonance in the post-DeepSeek world, where old certainties about capital- and compute-intensive models built in a closed ecosystem have been shaken by the open-source, cheaply made Chinese model.

The Prime Minister's pitch for the open-source route comes in the context of India's own growing ambitions on the AI front. It hints at the desire to strike out on a path that diverges from the one that has, so far, been laid by Silicon Valley behemoths like Google and Microsoft. It signals India's aspiration to be more than just a market for models developed elsewhere, such as the ones by OpenAI, whose CEO, Sam Altman, showed much excitement for the country's vast, and growing, user base on his visit last week. India, as the PM noted, is pushing to build its own large language model (LLM), and ensure a place for itself in a contest that has intensified in recent months. How intense, and indeed fraught, this race has become, was evident at the summit, with two participants, the US and the UK, refusing to sign the summit declaration — the former on the grounds that excessive regulation could stifle innovation and challenge its domination of the sector, and the latter because the statement did not go far enough in addressing global governance of the technology. Finding common ground between such competing visions and working towards a global concerted approach to AI is the challenge going forward.

India has offered to host the next summit. In the meantime, it must work towards realising its aspiration to lead the world in AI. Building a domestic LLM and procuring high-end GPUs — even building its own GPU, as Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw recently said — would be important steps in that direction. As it sets about executing the Rs 10,370 crore India AI Mission — for which Rs 2,000 crore was sanctioned in this year's Union budget — it must also ensure that private players, who have typically led the AI race in other parts of the world, including China, can grow and compete at the highest level. India, as the PM noted in Paris, has no shortage of talent — it must now show the will to act.

## A CLIMATE LETDOWN

Missed deadline on the Paris Pact is unfortunate. Countries should use extra time to draft more comprehensive plans

THE MOST IMPORTANT part of the Paris Climate Pact is that every country must renew its pledge, or the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), every five years. All stocktakes have shown that the last set of NDCs were inadequate to meet the treaty's target of keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Last year, a UNFCCC study showed that the combined NDCs would bring down temperatures only by 2.6 degrees by 2030. Countries were slated to submit their new pledges by February 10. However, only 12 countries have adhered to this deadline. Most G20 countries have missed out — the UK, Brazil, Japan and the US are among the notable exceptions. However, the US's document is largely academic given that President Donald Trump has withdrawn his country from the Paris Pact. The UNFCCC now expects all countries to submit their plans by September when the targets will be tallied in the run-up to the CoP30 in Brazil.

The sluggish response from more than 90 per cent of the signatories of the Paris Pact reflects a lack of political will to tackle the climate crisis. Countries should now use the extra time to draft responses that reflect substantially elevated ambitions compared to their first NDCs. More importantly, the NDCs should have detailed road maps of how the Paris Pact signatories plan to translate their words into action. These should not be a replica of the Net Zero plans of the Western world. A frequent — and valid — criticism of some of these plans is that they are short on details on ways to reduce emissions. Critics have also pointed out that the overwhelming reliance on carbon credits — companies can "buy" such credits by funding projects that theoretically offset their emissions — will undermine direct action to reduce emissions. A large number of Net Zero plans rely on technologies such as carbon capture and storage, whose efficacy has been called into question by scientific agencies such as the IPCC.

A new reckoning of the global warming challenge will have to factor in the disruption caused by the US President. Given the impetus in the US behind green technologies, the country's emissions trajectory may not change for some time. However, the absence of the world's second highest polluter from climate negotiation will require other countries to do more. The question is will they have the resolve to do so, keeping the imperatives of climate justice in mind, especially since the tariff barriers erected by the US President have added to the global economic uncertainties? The record-breaking temperatures of January are a warning that the window is closing fast.

## THE HERO WORKERS NEED

It is not the Chinese man who rushed to get back to work right after a heart attack

THE HUSTLE BROS have a new hero: A Chinese man, whose first words when he regained consciousness after a heart attack were, "I need to... go to work". The unidentified man, in his 40s, has joined the long list of people (workers? hustlers?) who have been forced to adapt to a world replete with job insecurity, rising costs of living and CEOs who have the last word on what qualifies as "hard work" (the answer, even though nobody asked for it, is a work week of somewhere between 70 and 90 hours). The end result? Near daily headlines announcing new casualties.

Coming back from the brink of death has led to many life-changing epiphanies. Generally, they run along the lines of, "I need to spend more time with family", "I need to travel more, make more time for myself". That for this man, the revelation was, "I missed work being sick", is, however, neither amusing nor life-affirming. According to a report by the WHO and the ILO, between 2000 and 2016, the number of deaths from heart disease and stroke due to working long hours increased by 42 and 19 per cent respectively. An ecosystem that champions harder work as the solution to economic uncertainty, then, fails to accurately locate the root of the problem. It also creates a damaging narrative where the onus is always on the individual. But then again, if the history of labour is any evidence, there is no amount of work that has ever been "enough" for the boss.

The curbs on work hours, codified in law today, were battles hard won by workers who had had enough. With a sprawling gig economy, depleted labour protections, and the introduction of technologies workers have to compete with, these trends are unlikely to abate soon. Taking some time out to "stare at one's wife", then, may help alleviate stress levels. Maybe, that is the hero the world needs instead.



S S MANTHA

IT IS PAINFUL to hear that a vice-chancellor, officials of the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), professors of prestigious institutions and office-bearers of an apparently "high-ranking" university were arrested recently for bribes allegedly given and taken in exchange for better rankings. It is doubly painful to see the system descending to the corruption that was once eliminated.

Transparency and accountability were brought into the accreditation system almost 13 years ago. Complete digitisation of every process that began with the receiving of applications, processing them and uploading deficiencies to generating the final approval letters was a path-breaking transformation that brought about great institutional credibility. All interaction with the management of the institutes was either curbed completely or kept to a minimum. All expert visits were replaced with online updating of data, with offline visits limited to the addressing of complaints.

Regulators have, by the nature of their work, opportunities for corruption. Someone breaks the rule and someone is expected to bring them to book. This is either done or not done for a price. The cycle is difficult to break when the stakes get higher. That said, corruption is an economic phenomenon which is judged on ethical grounds? AICTE, before the reforms, was often seen as steeped in systemic corruption that included conflicting incentives, discretionary and monopolistic powers, lack of transparency, and a culture of impunity. These stemmed from weaknesses in due processes, which some institutions exploited. New processes were developed with checks and balances and these were hard-coded into an e-governance system. The AICTE had a large contingent of employees who were on deputation, while the rest were entrenched in the old ways. This combination erased institutional memory on the one hand and encouraged impunity on the other. At AICTE, everyone on deputation was replaced and the permanent staff transferred. These decisions came at a price, with threats

# We owe this to the youth

Checking graft in the education ecosystem requires a combination of technology and value instruction

WORDLY WISE

HARD WORK BEATS TALENT WHEN TALENT DOESN'T WORK HARD.

—TIM NOTKE

both personal and professional. Today, the AICTE and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) enjoy a fair degree of credibility. The system is still not fool proof and securing it against corruption remains a work in progress. However, other regulatory agencies, especially in the education system, could still do well to learn from AICTE's experience.

Is corruption limited only to government establishments? There are any number of private companies that indulge in corruption. This is not a question of your corruption vs my corruption. The issue is a lack of values in the people who run the systems. That said, the government — with transparency and good governance as its supreme tenets — must lead the way to prevent all forms of corruption.

Transparency and accountability were brought into the accreditation system almost 13 years ago. Complete digitisation of every process that began with the receiving of applications, processing them and uploading deficiencies to generating the final approval letters was a path-breaking transformation that brought about great institutional credibility. All interaction with the management of the institutes was either curbed completely or kept to a minimum. All expert visits were replaced with online updating of data, with offline visits limited to the addressing of complaints.

The pressure to succeed today is immense. Technology can be a leveller. But it can only do so much. That's why the reforms initiated more than a decade ago require follow-up today, especially because society places a premium on education like never before. Our education system has done well to produce entrepreneurs, politicians, doctors, engineers, artists and actors. Even then, it is time to re-imagine it by keeping values in focus.

At times, corruption is hidden in our societies. All parties want to keep their transactions secret. For some, it could be doing someone "a friendly turn", for others it could be just minor "misbehaviour". Different people understand corruption differently. Incidents of corruption lead to calls for reform. However, reforms can only result from paradigm shifts.

How to effect this paradigm shift in the education ecosystem? The realisation that corruption is bad and must be dealt with is a good starting point. Second is to understand the political economy of the system. Agencies like NAAC and NBA must realise that the stakes are high for the management running these institutes. They raise the fees based on better rankings and hence, they will do whatever it takes. After all, rankings trans-

late into hundreds of crores each admission year, not to speak of the sale of so-called "management seats".

The NAAC's proposed binary accreditation may be an answer. However, it tends to gloss over the finer aspects of quality and puts everyone at an equal disadvantage. There is also the problem of visiting expert teams who are expected to verify the claims. This is a huge starting point for corruption. Data uploaded to the site instantly, verified through third parties and legacy data, with discrepancies flagged instantly, is an idea worth exploring. DigitLocker, a secure cloud-based platform for the storage, sharing and verification of documents and certificates, provides access to authentic digital documents to the citizen's digital document wallet. Why not make it mandatory for every institute to upload all their documents, both academic and administrative, that can be used as primary sources for verification?

The Mexican economist Angel Gurría, who was OECD secretary-general between 2016 and 2021, framed the problem aptly. "Integrity, transparency and the fight against corruption have to be part of the culture. They have to be taught as fundamental values," he said. By all accounts, individual action has proved insufficient to target systemic corruption. Experts like Gurría have, therefore, emphasised collective action. However, whatever the method, it will be naive to expect that corruption will disappear from society. Our efforts must be to rein it in and protect the vulnerable. Keeping the education system free of controversy is a critical pre-requisite for catering to the needs of an aspirational society. The costs of corruption are paid by the taxpayer. The costs of corruption in the education system are paid by the country's youth.

Corruption may be as old as human history. However, regulatory heads and vice-chancellors ought to lead by example. That could be the precursor to systemic change.

The writer is former chairman, AICTE



PRABHASH RANJAN

A RECURRING DEMAND from a section of Indian farmers is that India should exit the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They believe WTO rules hinder their ability to secure a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP). Under the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), MSP is categorised as a trade-distorting subsidy. The rationale is that if countries are permitted to provide such subsidies to their farmers, it would give them an unfair advantage in the global market, rendering agricultural products from other countries uncompetitive. As a result, trade-distorting subsidies like MSP are subject to specific limits.

The AoA has significant imbalances. The external reference price (ERP) — an average price established based on the base years of 1986-88 against which MSP is compared to determine trade-distorting subsidies — has not been revised in decades. Consequently, the gap between the MSP and the fixed ERP has widened dramatically due to inflation. India has been negotiating diligently at the WTO to rectify this issue but without success. Exiting the WTO, which can be accomplished by providing a six-month notice under Article XV of the WTO agreement, would legally allow India to set any MSP for as many crops as it wishes. Whether this approach would be fiscally feasible is uncertain. However, regardless of that, is this a sufficient reason for India to exit the WTO? The answer is a resounding no.

Within the existing imperious AoA, India already has some policy leeway to support

## DON'T GO IT ALONE

Rather than withdraw from WTO, India should strengthen trade multilateralism

farmers through higher MSP, especially for crops like wheat and rice, thanks to a peace clause. This clause prevents legal challenges against trade-distorting subsidies like price support, even if they exceed permissible limits. Additionally, India's farmers can be supported through other policy instruments, such as income support, which do not qualify as a trade-distorting subsidy under the AoA. Schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, which provides farmers with an annual income support of Rs 6,000 can be enhanced. Unfortunately, the 2025 budget missed the bus on this point.

It is also important to note that the WTO encompasses more than just agricultural trade. It plays a crucial role in international trade law, aiming to create a level playing field for all countries by safeguarding their goods and services against discrimination in export markets. If India were to leave the WTO, its exports would lose national treatment and most-favoured-nation treatment.

It is also important to note that the WTO encompasses more than just agricultural trade. It plays a crucial role in international trade law, aiming to create a level playing field for all countries by safeguarding their goods and services against discrimination in export markets. If India were to leave the WTO, its exports would lose national treatment and most-favoured-nation treatment (which ensures no discrimination between trading partners). India would then need to negotiate numerous bilateral or free trade agreements (FTAs) — a process that would be complicated, elevate bureaucratic costs, and harm businesses excessively. Moreover, FTAs typically present more stringent terms than those of the WTO, particularly when they involve a developing country negotiating with a developed country.

Another critical aspect of the WTO is that

it provides a relatively sophisticated mechanism for resolving trade disputes. Although its appellate function is currently non-operational, this system is generally more effective than the diplomacy-based dispute resolution offered by other trade agreements. If other countries fail to adhere to their international trade law obligations toward India, Delhi can challenge such actions at the WTO, as it has successfully done numerous times over the past three decades. If India were to exit the WTO, this recourse would be eliminated. Given that India is not a member of any major FTA, remaining in the WTO is even more crucial for Indian goods and services to access export markets.

The WTO is currently facing a significant crisis, especially with the US turning its back on it. A weakened WTO will enable the US to act unilaterally to confront the economic challenges posed by China. During such a critical time of rising trade protectionism, India should not withdraw but instead work to strengthen the WTO. This will ensure that multilateral checks and balances continue to function and help curb rising protectionism. Trade multilateralism — the principle that the WTO represents — is the best bet for developing countries like India. It is essential to communicate clearly with farmers and involve them in this process, as they are key stakeholders.

The writer is professor and director, Centre for International Investment and Trade Laws, Jindal Global Law School. Views are personal



## FEBRUARY 13, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

### HEAD PRIEST SLAPPED

GIANI PRITAM SINGH, head granthi, Akal Takht, was slapped by a Sikh youth, Gurmeet Singh, while he was reciting the holy Guru Granth Sahib at the Takht. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee survivors who were guarding the Akal Takht building overpowered and captured Gurmeet Singh, who was heard shouting, "The high priests are traitors to the panth and are holding secret meetings with the tormentors of the Sikhs."

### GRIEVANCES CELL

A CONSUMER GRIEVANCE cell has been set

up by the Civil Supplies Ministry to deal with complaints from consumer organisations and the public against various aspects of public distribution and the supply management system. Complaints can also be made by telephone during working hours.

### STUDENTS INJURED

NINE MEDICAL STUDENTS of the University College of Medical Sciences and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences were injured when a group surrounding the Union Health Minister's car was attacked by the security staff at Safdarjung Hospital. According to the students, they had gathered outside the

Safdarjung Hospital medical superintendent's office where the Health Minister was having a meeting. They wanted to meet her to discuss their problems.

### CIL VS RAILWAYS

THE COAL INDIA Limited chairman's charge that an adequate number of wagons were not provided by the Railways for the movement of coal from collieries was hotly contested in the Rail Bhawan. Sources, however, point out that it is the CIL itself that had detained upwards of 1000 railway wagons under demurrage over the past three days in the pileheads of four of its major collieries in the eastern region.



## TN Gov's action counters Constitution

Questions framed by the Supreme Court on the issue of Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi's handling of bills passed by the State legislature have again brought into focus the Governor's action on the matter. The Governor's position has not only been obstructionist; it has militated against the Constitution because he has failed to discharge his constitutional duty. The court's questions and observations came in response to a petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Government against the Governor forwarding bills to the President after they were passed by the Assembly a second time. Other states ruled by non-BJP parties have also approached the court raising similar questions about the actions of governors. It is to be noted that the court has in the past criticised the conduct of governors in connection with the issue but a resolution remains elusive.

The apex court has asked how the Governor could send to the President bills passed for a second time by the state legislature. Under Article 200, the Governor can give assent to a bill, withhold the assent, or refer it to the President. While withholding assent, the Governor should return the bill to the Assembly as soon as possible, giving reasons for its reconsideration.

Article 200 says: "If the Bill is passed again by the House... with or without amendment and presented to the Governor for assent, the Governor shall not withhold assent therefrom." The Tamil Nadu Governor has not abided by this provision. It was argued on behalf of the Governor that the bills were sent to the President because they were repugnant to a Central law. But the court rightly asked why that could not be communicated to the state government. It said the Governor could not sit over the bills based on a perception of repugnance to a central law, and asked how the government was expected to know what was in the Governor's mind.

The Governor's counsel suggested that the Governor had inherent powers and discretion in the matter. But the court said that "inherent powers will not override main provisions." The counsel also claimed that "once the bills were with the President, Article 254 came into play, and the bills ceased to exist." The court has not accepted the argument and asked whether it did not go against the Constitution's intent when a Governor repeatedly returned bills. It answered the question by stating that the Governor is constitutionally bound to approve a bill if the Assembly passed it a second time and quoted Ambedkar in support of it. That such a basic Constitutional mandate is not followed by some Governors, for obvious political reasons, calls for serious deliberation.

## Sluggish HAL needs urgent reform

The recent comments by Air Chief Marshal A P Singh about the Bengaluru-headquartered Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) have once again exposed the deep-rooted challenges plaguing the state-run aerospace giant. Singh's frustration is palpable as HAL has failed to meet the Indian Air Force's (IAF) demands, particularly the failure to deliver the promised 12 Tejas MK-1A aircraft. His words, "I am just not confident of HAL," highlight the gravity of the situation. The Chief of Air Staff's scathing remarks come at a time when the IAF is struggling with critical shortfalls in its fleet strength, currently operating with only 31 of the sanctioned 42 squadrons. While HAL has undoubtedly achieved some significant milestones, these are overshadowed by its systemic inefficiencies.

HAL was established with the ambitious goal of making India self-sufficient in military aircraft production. However, the company has faced numerous setbacks over the years. Its persistent inability to meet deadlines, coupled with the delays in the delivery of vital components such as the GE engines for the Tejas LCA MK-1A aircraft, has hindered the progress of indigenous defence production. HAL's inability to meet its promises has also dealt a significant blow to the centre's 'Make in India' initiative. At the heart of the problem lies a deeper malaise: HAL's culture has become synonymous with sluggishness, inefficiency, and lack of accountability. It is time for the undertaking to break free from its PSU mentality, one that is bogged down by heavy unionism and bureaucratic red tape. The consequences of HAL's underperformance are dire. The IAF, despite its strategic importance, is grappling with a depleted fleet. Earlier, the country faced threats primarily from Pakistan and China, but with relations deteriorating with other neighbouring countries, the IAF requires a fully functional and robust air power capability. With hostile neighbours and regional tensions continually increasing, India cannot afford delays in its defence modernisation programmes. HAL must not only meet deadlines but also exceed expectations in terms of quality and technological advancements.

There is an urgent need for reform within HAL. One possible route would be to bifurcate non-essential divisions to enhance focus on core aerospace manufacturing. The government must consider a comprehensive restructuring plan for the organisation, with clear timelines, accountability, and a focused approach to production. HAL should also infuse much-needed innovation into its operation to be able to compete with international defence majors. As it stands, HAL's shortcomings are a hindrance to the nation's strategic aspirations and India's defence security cannot be left at the mercy of bureaucratic inefficiencies. The stakes are high and the nation's security demands nothing less than a swift and decisive transformation.

**Defence PSU's limitations hinder indigenous production, strategic aspirations**

Japan plays a key developmental role in the region but situation in Bangladesh, Myanmar call for attention

RAJIV BHATIA

Those in Delhi often focus on the big picture: the US-China strategic rivalry, for example, and India's likely role in shaping it to its advantage. It is only when one moves out of the capital — as this author did recently — to spend a few fruitful days in the Northeast that one grasps the true picture of changes on the ground involving the people of states like Assam and Meghalaya due to their burgeoning engagement with Japan.

The opportunity to deliver a lecture on India's East Asia Policy at the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, followed by participation in the fifth India-Japan intellectual conclave on 'Co-Creating Ecosystems for Change' allowed this writer to assess how Japan's role in the Northeast and the Bay of Bengal region is turning out to be a game-changer. It could accelerate economic development, moulding the region's geoeconomics and geopolitics. But some concerns remain.

Asian Confluence, a Shillong-based think tank, hosted the two-day conference that turned out to be an enriching experience for many Japanese and Indian participants. Building on its past four additions, the conclave trained and lights on 'Kizuna', a deep heart-to-heart connection binding Japan and India. It is an arresting blend of strong emotion and pragmatism encompassing high-tech innovation, logistics, connectivity, and people-to-people cooperation.

Simply put, Japan is drawn to the Northeast by the bonds of Buddhism, shared history, and ethnic commonality. The Northeast and its neighbourhood comprising Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar have placed hopes on benefiting from Japan's economic assistance, trade, technology, investment, and enterprise. Demographic convergence where Japan's ageing population can be assisted by the youth, for example, Meghalaya, where 30% of the people are classified as youth (15-29 years), came into sharp focus at this dialogue.

Japanese Ambassador Ono Keichi highlighted his government's adherence to the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'

concept to argue convincingly that enhancing connectivity and building industrial value chains in the Bay of Bengal region is essential for creating "a future of shared growth, mutual benefit, and a stable society." In this context, much attention was accorded to Tata Electronics' collaboration with Tokyo Electron to build a semiconductor assembly and testing plant in Jorhat near Guwahati. Experts have felt that it could trigger a semiconductor "revolution" in India, much like what Suzuki's "people's car" achieved in the automotive sector in the 1980s. Notably, the Tata project is likely to create over 27,000 new jobs.



Underlining the Northeast's role in the overall architecture of India-Japan relations, Jaideep Mazumdar, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, observed that "the Northeast is not just a region; it is a gateway" to Southeast Asia. He expressed India's welcome to Japanese businesses, academia, youth, and cultural groups to explore the rich tapestry of India, especially the Northeast. He also voiced the government's support for strengthening various programmes of training and skill development through the greater involvement of Japanese companies.

In this larger context, the Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya made substantial presentations at the conclave. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, spoke about his recent visit to Japan, the possibility of establishing a Japanese industrial township in Assam, and invited a Japanese delegation to the Assam 2.0 investment and infrastructure summit to be held later this month. Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, on the other hand, attached priority to agricultural cooperation and skill development. He spoke of the goal to train 3,000 nurses from Meghalaya

for deployment in Japan in the coming years. "We are not a big state," he said, stressing, "We will do a few things, but we will do them well."

### Call for normalcy

Voices from the neighbourhood of the Northeast seemed stifled at the conclave, but there were two exceptions. The consul-general of Bhutan pointed to the relevance of the Golephu Mandfulness City project, and a former Bangladesh diplomat emphasised the indispensability of India-Bangladesh cooperation despite "the hiccup of history." Generally, participants seemed reluctant to talk openly about how the strained relations between Delhi and Dhaka since the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 have caused considerable anxiety to Japan. Clearly, as a friend of both India and Bangladesh, Japan would wish for normalcy to return soon.

Likewise, various proponents of regional connectivity have been concerned over the deepening political and security crisis in Myanmar. Its continuing fragmentation has been taking a big toll on the stability and economic prospects of the Northeast and the surrounding region. Perhaps Japan, India, and Malaysia, as the ASEAN Chair, could deliberate on crafting the way out of this quagmire.

Broadly, India's Northeastern states have been moving ahead on the path of political stability, social harmony, and economic development, but Manipur has been a notable exception. With the exit of Chief Minister Niren Singh, the state may re-discover a path to stability and peace. Besides, India's Bangladesh and Myanmar policies need serious introspection and consultation with the relevant experts. The perception that nothing is workable should be resisted.

As Anura Mani Pandey, Secretary General of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), mentioned in a video message at the conclave, this regional grouping is especially significant for the Northeastern states of India as they share land or maritime boundaries with five BIMSTEC member-states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand. Fostering close regional cooperation will be beneficial to them all. This message resonated well with the participants of the conference.

*(The writer is a Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House and a former ambassador of India to Myanmar)*

### RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

## Friends forever, time and space no bar

My father's enduring friendship taught me the true meaning of bonding

ROHINI S MURTHY

*'Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you have it, you'll learn the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything.'* — Muhammad Ali

The above quote can be modified slightly by adding the word 'true' before friendship. In today's times, relationships crumble quite fast as they hinge on thin threads of mistrust, insecurity, and jealousy. Even friendships reach their expiry dates within years or even months if they are built on shaky ground. However, every parent wishes for their child to develop friendships with good people, as they bring positive influence in their life. In many Indian

households, children have grown up listening to their parents or grandparents narrate stories about the eternal friendship between Lord Krishna and Sudama. In my case, my mother neither gifted me a comic book on this famous story nor did she narrate it as a bedtime read. My sister and I were lucky enough to witness such friendship at our home.

As a young girl, I was in awe of my father's friendship with Raja uncle, as we fondly call him. He has been a regular visitor to our house for as long as I can remember. Here are two individuals who may not have been constantly in touch with each other over the last few decades, but their friendship has managed to thrive despite gaps in time and space. This is probably because they communicated openly, followed through on promises they could fulfil, and most importantly, respected each other's boundaries.

Research says that happiness is contagious among friends. Happiness, joy, and laughter echoed in every corner of

our house whenever they met. Their penchant to walk down memory lane and reminisce about old incidents not only brought a smile to our faces, but it also helped us learn some important life lessons like positive mindset, resilience, forgiveness, and self-care. Subconsciously, my sister and I started emulating them by investing our time and effort in cultivating good friends. Likewise, we became mindful about staying clear of toxic friendships and people who walk with sticks in their hands but a smile on their face." This joy de vivre attitude reminds me of this quote by an unknown thinker: *Best friends are the people in your life who make you laugh louder, smile brighter, and live better.*

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Universities must retain their autonomy

Apropos 'UGC regulations: A degree of overreach?' (Feb 12), the author rightly criticises the central government's proposal to transform the University Grants Commission into the University Governing Commission under the Draft 2025 Regulations. This move opposes the government's attempts to exert control over universities, undermining their autonomy and propagating its ideology. The proposed guidelines, which intend to strip state governments of their power to appoint vice-chancellors and faculty members, blatantly disregard federal principles. As Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth." The proposed regulations are a far cry from this ideal. It is imperative that the University Grants Commission retains its autonomy rather than being reduced to a governing body.

M Basavaraj, Davangere

### Fare hike

The recent Metro fare hike by the BMRL has caused undue hardship for the common people, including employees, students, and the general public. The Metro, being a vital mode of transportation for the middle class, has become unaffordable due to this sudden increase. I urge the government to take immediate notice of this issue and direct the BMRL to reconsider the fare hike.

Satish Jaggi, Raichur

### SC must step in

The Supreme Court's question

about how individuals convicted of offences can be permitted to return to Parliament and legislatures is timely. The fact that 44% of sitting MPs face serious offences like murder and rape, is a damning indictment of our political system. The SC's 2013 ruling that convicted lawmakers would lose office immediately was a step in the right direction. However, political parties have failed to take cue, and now the SC must step in.

S V Venkatarishnan, Bengaluru

### K'taka as IT hub

I refer to 'India's tech capital isn't

top choice for large data centres' (Feb 10). Bengaluru, as India's IT capital, should ideally be a data centre hub. However, data centres require vast resources, including water and power. Karnataka should explore alternative locations, such as Mangaluru, which offers proximity to a seaport and a nuclear power plant. This could spur the state's growth as an IT hub.

H N Ramakrishna, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to [letters@deccanherald.com](mailto:letters@deccanherald.com) or only letters that are not abusive, defamatory, libellous, obscene, or otherwise in violation of applicable laws. All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

### SPEAK OUT

The (Tamil Nadu) chief minister has not learnt about the Union budget properly. Everyone is appreciating... They don't want to endorse the budget and give credit to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi...  
Tamilisai Soundarajan, BJP leader



It's clearly a budget. It's got a lot of numbers in it.

George W Bush

### TO BE PRECISE

CAN AI SPOT INTERFAITH COUPLES IN A CROWD? WE'RE CURIOUS!



### IN PERSPECTIVE

## No green for the ambulance

Right of way is a struggle as Bengaluru ambulances navigate burgeoning traffic, passive road users

SNEHA PRIYA YANAPPA

Bad roads, traffic congestion, adverse weather, and civic apathy in Bengaluru — all of these have one common ramification in that they affect emergency services in the city, especially ambulance services. Ambulances struggling to reach healthcare facilities on time have become a recurring issue in Bengaluru. Recently, an auto-rickshaw driver refused to make way for an ambulance carrying a critically ill patient. The incident sparked public outrage but these triggers eventually die down. It is crucial to understand measures taken by the authorities responsible for a safe right of way for ambulances and what we, as a society, have failed to do collectively.

Bengaluru records around 3,000 ambulance trips every day, including the 108 services and trips by private ambulances. In 2021, 175 accident victims died while being transported to hospitals for emergency treatment. This number rose by nearly 67% to 292 victims in 2023, according to data from the Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP). In 2024, at least 300 people died in the first hour after accidents, throwing light on existing gaps in emergency healthcare services. Numerous lives are lost owing to delays in receiving medical assistance, mostly because the victims are stuck en route to hospitals.

Bengaluru did make the transition from automated signals to adaptive signals designed to assist ambulances to seamlessly move through the traffic. Adaptive signals adjust signal timings based on the real-time traffic, thereby clearing the path for ambulances. The move is well-intentioned but there is a need for the BTP to assess the performance of these signals and extend them to traffic signal junctions across the city. There have also been previous efforts to launch an app to help ambulances that get delayed in traffic.

In the presence of adaptive signals and better coordination with the ambulances, what else could impede the movement of ambulances? Unfortunately, the biggest contributors to the delay are citizens themselves. What does the law say? Following the guidelines issued by the BTP, no challan can be imposed if one jumps the signal to make way for an ambulance.

lance to pass. What is then stopping the citizens from making way? One common trend observed is that when the ambulance is given way, there is typically a barrage of vehicles trying to slide through behind, with the intent of finding their way ahead or behind the ambulance. This opportunistic piggybacking often leads to collisions between vehicles, resulting in greater difficulty for the ambulances to pass.

Why is it important to make way for an ambulance? In 2023, an 18-month-old baby died while being taken to a hospital in an ambulance, owing to a traffic jam. A traffic-induced 20-minute delay stood between her life and death. Recently, Bengaluru also saw the driver of an ambulance carrying a baby to a hospital getting beaten up because he had overtaken another vehicle.

### Battling citizen apathy

Technological interventions coupled with enhanced coordination between the police and ambulance services can go a long way in ensuring that ambulances reach hospitals on time. The lack of awareness and sensitivity among citizens poses a challenge. Moreover, effective implementation of Section 194 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, which provides that failure to allow free passage to ambulances can attract a fine of Rs 10,000 or imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or both, will be a step in the right direction. There have also been efforts to discourage attempts by citizens who drive recklessly behind ambulances. This could include imposing fines on those who follow ambulances and create havoc, exacerbating the intensity of the crisis.

The government could also identify black spots where the frequency of accidents is high to ensure that the response is immediate. It is also important for the BTP to undertake training sessions to educate the public. The lack of awareness among the motorists and the general public on the seriousness associated with the movement of ambulances remains a concern. Ambulance drivers feel the pressure as they drive through the city's traffic. Left to themselves, moving through congested, battered roads, these drivers are battling it out there. Every Bengalurean has been a victim of the city's burgeoning traffic but it is when delays on the road stand between life and death that you truly comprehend the extent of the problem and understand how the congestion is failing all of us.

*(The writer is a senior resident fellow at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy)*