



Need for a revamp

India's aviation industry must review crew resource management

The preliminary report flowing from the investigation into the crash of an Air India Boeing 787-8 at Ahmedabad, on June 12, 2025, has a focal point now. Released in the early hours of July 12, a month after the accident, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau's 15-page document has highlighted the fuel control switches of 'Engine 1 and Engine 2' having 'transitioned from the 'Run' to the 'Cutoff' position, one after another, with a time gap of one second'. That this happened just after flight AI71 had begun to lift off from the 3,505-metre-long runway, leading to the engines beginning to decrease from their take-off values as fuel starvation hit, has accentuated another detail. How did two separate switches that are guarded by brackets, feature a metal stop locking mechanism and have separate systems for redundancy move to 'cutoff'? And why? The element of bafflement by one crew member, and denial by the other pilot, over the cutoff, has compounded the issue, more so in the absence of the full and raw transcript of the cockpit voice recording. However, in the midst of the crisis, what must be acknowledged was a display of airmanship, with a partially successful relighting of the GEnx-1B70/75/P2 engines, which ended with the call of May Day.

While the key details in the report have evoked appeals by a pilot body for a revamped probe, especially to 'stop the bias towards pilot error', the investigation team must now stay the course to ensure that there is a sound, comprehensive and transparent investigation. There has also been focus on an FAA Special Airworthiness Information Bulletin of 2018 that concerns the potential for disengagement of the fuel control switch locking feature, and applicable to the Boeing 787 aircraft family. In a reaction to the preliminary report and its findings, there has been some expert commentary on the topic of crew well-being, but in a counter to this, the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association has said that "pilots undergo extensive psychological and professional screening... and operate under the highest standards of safety". However, the subject of Crew Resource Management and Line Oriented Flight Training may need to be revamped, more so with this being an unusual incident of dual engine failure. Finally, despite the preliminary report's pitch of there "not being recommended actions that concern the aircraft type and the engine manufacturer", India's expanding civil aircraft fleet requires greater vigilance in terms of maintenance and operations. Airport funnel zones and obstacle limitations must be reviewed too as it is given that air crew and passengers have safer flights.

Smoke and sulphur

There cannot be different environmental standards within India

The axe has dropped. The Environment Ministry has exempted the majority of India's coal-fired plants from mandatorily installing Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) systems, which are designed to cut sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions. In effect, this undermines its own mandate from 2015 that required all such plants – there are about 180 of them now, comprising 600 units – to install these systems. While these were expected to be in place by 2017, only about 8% of the units have actually installed FGD – nearly all by the public-sector National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). SO₂ is among the gases monitored by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) as exposure beyond a degree can be harmful. Less appreciated is its propensity to particulate matter pollution. In general, India's average ground-level SO₂ measurements have been below the permissible levels – one among several reasons that there has not been a sense of urgency in implementing FGD norms. The official reasons are the limited number of vendors in India, high installation costs, the potential rise in electricity bills, and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the latest deadlines flew by in 2024, the Environment's Ministry's decision – it follows consultations with scientific institutions and new commissioned studies – is a sharp disavowal of the current policy. An expert appraisal committee says that Indian coal is low in sulphur; SO₂ levels in cities near plants with operational FGD units do not differ significantly from those without these units, and all of these were anyway well below permissible levels. The committee had said that concerns about sulphates are unfounded. It also argued, echoed by the Minister for Power, that sulphates had a beneficial side-effect in suppressing warming from greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, reducing sulphates would actually worsen warming and compromise India's climate goals. While IPCC assessments do account for the heat-suppressing action of sulphates, nowhere is it projected as an unalloyed good.

A minority of plants, about a fifth – those within a 10 km radius of the NCR; in cities with a population of over a million, or known to be in pollution hotspots – must install FGDs by 2028. This seems to suggest that what determines their installation is the location of a coal plant and not whether FGDs are effective or SO₂ is harmful. This is a rare instance when there are different environmental standards within India on controlling exposure to a pollutant. While it is not unreasonable to revise understanding of the harms or benefits of substances, this needs debate in the public domain before a policy is changed. Otherwise it amounts to undermining India's commitment to scientifically informed public health.

Secularism – implicit from day one, explicit in 1976

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms...," said Friedrich Nietzsche. As many as 66 Constitutions make some reference to God in their Preamble. True, Nehru led from the front in India's adoption of secularism. He explicitly said in his autobiography of how what he called "organized religion" filled him "with horror... almost always it seemed to stand for a blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation". Nehru's strong views on religion did play a significant role in India's choice of secular polity. Unlike today's politicians, he did not need religion to succeed in politics.

Though the Supreme Court has said more than once that the term secular in India does not connote either strict separation between religion and state like in France or the non-establishment of religion like in the United States, the debate on the artificial imposition of secularism during the Emergency and the urgent need for its deletion continues though Indian secularism is rooted in Emperor Ashoka's Dhamma and is consistent with noble ideals of India's freedom struggle. Article 51A(b) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen "to cherish and uphold noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom". Secularism was one such ideal.

Secularism spells autonomy

The advocates of Hindutva think that minorities have got some special privileges through secularism and that the time has come to bring an end to neutrality of the state in religious matters. Unfortunately, supporters of a theocratic state do not understand that secularism is basically good for religions as it protects religions from state domination and interference. Religions remain independent and autonomous under secularism. If a religion becomes state religion, the state takes over the control of such religion.

Our secularism ensures autonomy of the Hindu religion and the proponents of Hindutva must understand this. Has not Islam been destroyed through various so-called Islamic states? Mahmud Ghazni and Iltutmish defiled the caliph and assumed the title of king. Zawabit or state-made laws prevailed over Shariah during medieval India. Did not Henry VIII defy Papal authority just to marry Anne Boleyn and create the Anglican Church with the King as its head. In the consecration of the Ram temple in January 2024, the state's decision prevailed over the theological view of the Shankaracharyas. The state, not religion, decided what is auspicious.

Is the salvation of souls really the mandate of a modern state? British political theorist John Locke in his famous 'A Letter Concerning Tolerance' (1689) forcefully said no because the state was brought into existence only for 'procuring, preserving, and advancing' citizens' civil interests. Care of souls, he argued, was not given to the state because the state consists of only outward force while religion consists of the inward persuasion of mind. Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, favoured separation of the church from the state to protect the garden of the church from the 'wilderness of secular order'.

Secularism could triumph in the 18th century



Faizan Mustafa
is a Constitutional Law expert and presently serving as the Vice-Chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna, Bihar

because reason triumphed over religions. While secularism is nothing but an idea of modernity, a non-secular theocratic state is the relic of the past. Even if we are fed up with modernity, the moot question is this: should we become a Saudi Arabia, an Iran or a Pakistan? An overwhelming majority of Hindus do not want to emulate these regressive countries.

The importance of the Ashokan edicts

Should we reject secularism because this term was not used in the original Constitution? To say that India's Constitution became secular in 1976 is a blatant lie. Like several other things borrowed from Ashoka the Great who ruled from 268-232 BC, the seeds of Indian secularism too can be traced back to Ashokan edicts. Rajew Bhargava has written extensively on the significance of these edicts. Rejecting the idea of one particular religion as a state religion, Rook Edict 7 said that all religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart. One of the biggest problems of today's India is hate speech. Rook Edict 12 prohibited glorification of one's religion and condemnation of others' religions. Ashoka's dhamma was not religion but the principles of governance, i.e., constitutional morality and ethics that a king must follow. He favoured the acceptance and co-existence of different religions and went beyond mere toleration.

The Motilal Nehru Committee's constitution (1928) which was the first attempt to lift the Constitution clearly stated in Clause 4(1) that "there shall be no state religion for the Commonwealth of India or for any province in the Commonwealth, nor shall the state either directly or indirectly endow any religion or give any preference or impose any disability on account of religious belief or religious status".

The Karachi Resolution of the Congress in 1931 which presented the blueprint of a future Swaraj in Resolution no 2(9), specifically declared that the "state shall maintain neutrality in regard to all religions". Even the Hindu Mahasabha's draft constitution of 1944 with V.D. Savarkar's blessings too declared in explicit terms in Article 7(5) that "there shall be no state religion or either centre or provinces". Why do we refuse to follow even Savarkar?

On October 17, 1949 when the Preamble of the Constitution was under discussion in the Constituent Assembly, H.V. Kamath proposed that the Preamble should begin with the words 'in the name of God'. We should thank god that in an overwhelmingly religious country, god lost by 17 votes in a tally of 68 to 41. Similarly, the word 'secular' was not specifically included; yet, members, in one voice, spoke of it being a fair accomplishment of a liberal democratic constitution and consistent with the ideals of our freedom struggle. No member of the Constituent Assembly ever proposed a Hindu Rashtra including Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

Three years prior to the insertion of the word secular, the Supreme Court had held secularism to be the basic structure in the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973). Silences of the Constitution are equally important. For instance, the words federal, judicial review, rule of law too have not been in the Constitution. But these ideas

have rightly been held as part of the basic structure.

On the jurisdiction model

If we are really fed up with the separation model of secularism, we should consider the jurisdiction model. We have several options from modern democracies. Certainly, we may declare in the Constitution that Hinduism (not Hindutva) is the dominant spiritual heritage of India – just like in England where the Anglican Church is the official Church of England and the king is the defender of faith but recognises equal rights to all citizens ensuring freedom of religion and prohibiting all discriminations on the basis of religion. The Irish Constitution is another model. Its Preamble begins with the name of the Most Holy Trinity, but the state cannot endow any religion or discriminate on religious grounds. Article 3 of the Greek Constitution declares the Greek Orthodox Church as the dominant religion. The opening words of the Preamble are – 'In the name of Holy, Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity'. But Article 4 talks of the right to equality. Article 5(2) guarantees the right to life, liberty and honour without any discrimination based on religion and gives freedom of religion to all faiths. Muslims of Western Thrace in fact have the right to elect their own Mufti (religious and judicial officer) and their disputes are resolved in accordance with Islamic law. They have an option of either using civil courts or sharia courts.

Article 2 of Pakistan's Constitution declares Islam as the state religion. Only a Muslim can occupy high constitutional office. But even the Preamble itself explicitly lays down that the 'adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess, practice freedom of religion and develop their culture'. Moreover Article 36 again says that the state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and the interests of minorities including their due representation in the federal and provincial services. Accordingly, the Constitution makes a provision of reservation for them.

Though Article 9 of the Sri Lankan Constitution falls short of declaring Buddhism as state religion, it does give "Buddhism" the 'foremost place' and places an obligation on the state to protect and foster Buddha Sasana. Of course, it not only guarantees freedom of religion but (unlike India) in Article 10, explicitly gives 'freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice'. Minorities are governed by their personal laws and sharia courts function within the premises of regular courts and High Courts.

Our secularism based on Ashoka's Dhamma was designed to allow people to live together in civility and promote equal respect for all religions. The state must remain religion neutral. India's opposition to Pakistan was based on the separation of religion and state. The framers of the Constitution too intended a secular state, and not a theocratic state. Even the Bharatiya Janata Party has been insisting on its opposition to the Congress's negative secularism and used to promise positive secularism. If what was implicit from day one was merely made explicit in 1976, 'Humama Hai Ku harpa' (what is the fuss about)?

The views expressed are personal

Assessing India's carbon credit trading scheme targets

The Indian government recently announced greenhouse gas emissions intensity of production targets for entities (such as a steel plant) operating within eight of the nine heavy industrial sectors covered in India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme's (CCTS) compliance mechanism. The eight sectors are aluminium, cement, paper and pulp, chlor-alkali, iron and steel, textile, petrochemicals and petro refineries. So, is there a way to understand whether these are ambitious targets or not?

The first question one needs to ask is this: should we measure ambition at the entity level, or at the sector level or the level of the economy? Our analysis shows that the ambition of India's carbon market targets should be assessed at the aggregate economy-wide level, and not at the level of individual entities or sectors.

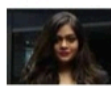
An economy-wide lens is more important

We can look at the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme, which is India's flagship energy efficiency programme for large industries. Under PAT, energy-intensive industries are given targets to reduce their energy use; those which exceed their targets can trade the excess savings with others. We analysed performance data from four sectors under the PAT Cycle I (2012-14) and found a mixed but interesting picture. In some entities, the energy used per unit of production (energy intensity) increased but decreased in others. At the sector level, energy intensity rose in two sectors (paper and chlor alkali) and fell in the other two (aluminium and cement). However, when we combined emissions, output and price data from all four sectors and adjusted for inflation, less energy was used, overall, to produce the same amount of economic output.

This shows that even if energy efficiency rises or falls in some entities or sectors, India's overall energy use can still become more efficient. We



Vaibhav Chaturvedi
is Senior Fellow at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)



Darshna Singh
is Research Analyst at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

The ambition of carbon market targets should be assessed at the aggregate economy-wide level, and not at the level of individual entities or sectors

found similar behaviour across other PAT cycles and sectors. These observations give us a useful insight – India's PAT scheme was able to effectively use market mechanisms to achieve energy intensity reduction at an aggregate level. The decrease in overall energy intensity, even as it rose for some entities, shows that the market mechanism worked; those companies were able to buy energy efficiency certificates instead of undertaking costly in-house changes.

But, this in itself does not tell us if the aggregate energy intensity reduction was aggressive or business-as-usual. This does, however, tell us that one should only analyse the aggregate target to infer whether it was aggressive or not. That is, for an externally-driven market, achieving reduction at an aggregate level is far more important than achieving the same at the entity level for 'all' entities. An emissions trading scheme does not bother about individual entities or sectors. It bothers about the economy-level aggregate effect, which is where, ideally, the ambition should be evaluated.

But are not entity or sector-level targets important to reduce emissions as well? A research paper by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) shows that entity or sector-level targets only determine financial transfers across entities and sectors, and not the overall emission intensity decline.

Comparing the new CCTS targets with historical sector-level performance under the PAT scheme also is not the most meaningful approach to assess ambition. Just because the reduction in emissions in the past has been modest at the industry level, it cannot be the case for the future. Our mitigation actions have to progressively become more ambitious than in the past. Therefore, only a comparison with a future trajectory aligned with a pathway towards India's stated Nationally Determined Contributions

(NDC) and a 2070 net-zero future is relevant. While the industry sector-specific CCTS targets cannot be directly compared with the economy-wide NDC target, economy-wide modelling assessments can give useful information in this regard.

Emissions intensity to decline

According to our recent modelling of a 2030 NDC-aligned emissions reduction scenario for India, the carbon dioxide emissions intensity of India's energy sector (per unit of GDP) is expected to decline at an average annual rate of 3.4% between 2025 and 2030. In comparison, the emissions intensity of value added (EIVA) in India's manufacturing sector is projected to decline by at least 2.53% annually over the same period. This suggests that in the near-term, industry may decarbonise at a slower pace than other sectors – particularly the power sector, which has more low-cost mitigation opportunities.

Against this backdrop, the combined average annual EIVA reduction for the eight sectors based on current CCTS targets – indicative of sector-specific commodity price data (a rough proxy for value added), and projected production growth rates – is estimated at 1.68% between 2023-24 and 2026-27. Early signs suggest that the industrial targets under CCTS may not be ambitious enough.

While this is not directly comparable since entities covered under the carbon trading scheme represent only a portion of India's overall manufacturing base, it is still the most relevant benchmark available until detailed modelling is done for all sectors. Ultimately, it is the aggregate decline that will determine whether India's effort is truly ambitious.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Systemic reforms needed

Custodial violence is not a new phenomenon. However, there continues to be violence against and the persistent torture of those

in prison, depriving them of basic human dignity and rights. The police hide behind the veil of the authority given to them. The call to action is clear –

introduce a comprehensive, anti-custodial violence law with strict investigation timelines.

Clinical Swaitak

Ruthless Igga Swaitak played immaculate tennis to crush Amanda Anisimova by serving a double bagel in the Wimbledon women's

final 2025 ('Sport' page, July 13). Swaitak has simply proved that she has all what it takes on grass. One felt very sorry for a disconsolate

Amanda Anisimova.

C.G. Kurukose, Kothamangalam, Kerala
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Worth of sanction letters given to 3,000 women by India Bank

1,011 in ₹ crore. "Such initiatives not only reduce the dependence on sources of informal credit but also help inclusion into the formal financial ecosystem," Ministry of Finance, Department of Financial Services, Secretary M. Nagaraju observed.

India's Russian oil imports hit 11-month high in June

2.08 in million barrels. India's crude oil imports in June were the highest since July 2024, according to Kpler. "More than half of these imports from Russia were made by three refineries in India, which also export refined products to G7+ countries."

Palestinians killed by Israeli airstrikes while seeking aid

59 There were no signs of a breakthrough in ceasefire talks following two days of meetings between U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Mr. Trump had said he was nearing an agreement between Israel and Hamas that would wind down the war.

Number of people arrested in Nigeria for financing terrorism

44 Nigeria slapped 44 Boko Haram jihadists with jail terms of up to 30 years, a spokesman for a counterterrorism agency said. Nigeria is listed as a "grey list country" by international monitors due to deficiencies in preventing money laundering and terrorism financing.

Growth in refunds issued to taxpayers from 2014 to 2025

474 In per cent. India's tax administration has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade, with taxpayer refunds growing at nearly double the pace of tax collections, Ministry of Finance sources said.

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Who are qualified as 'ordinarily resident'?

What does Section 20 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 state? Why are migrant workers vulnerable when it comes to classifying themselves as ordinarily resident in a particular constituency? Are NRIs allowed to vote? What does the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 govern?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far: The Election Commission of India (EC) has initiated a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Bihar. This has kindled the debate around the term 'ordinarily resident' for the purpose of being included in the electoral rolls of a constituency.

Who is 'ordinarily resident'? The electoral rolls are prepared by the EC as per the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RP Act). Section 19 of the RP Act requires that a person is 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency for inclusion in its electoral roll.

Section 20 provides the meaning of the term 'ordinarily resident'. It specifies that a person shall not be deemed to be 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency only because he/she owns or possesses a dwelling house therein. However, a person temporarily absent from his/her place of residence shall continue to be 'ordinarily resident' therein. Persons who are (a) members of armed forces of the Union, (b) armed police force of a State serving outside that State, (c) employed by the Government of India in a post outside India or (d) holding a constitutional office declared by the President in consultation with the EC are considered, along with their spouse, to be 'ordinarily resident' in the constituency where they would have been 'ordinarily resident' but for such posting. Section 20A was added in 2010 to enable non-resident Indians who have shifted out of India, even for long term, to register and vote in the constituency in which their address as per passport is located.

The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (RER), notified by the Central government in consultation with the EC, governs the preparation of, and



On a roll: An advertisement van for the SIR in Purnia, Bihar on July 9. SHASHI SHERKAR KASHYAP

inclusion/exclusion of names in the electoral rolls as per the provisions of the RP Act.

What are potential issues? The requirement of being 'ordinarily resident' for inclusion in the electoral roll of a constituency is to ensure that the voter maintains real ties with the constituency that preserves representative accountability. It is also aimed at preventing fraudulent registrations.

The Gauhati High Court in the *Mannohan Singh* case (1999), indicated that the term 'ordinarily resident' shall mean a habitual resident of that place. It must be permanent in character and not temporary or casual. It must be a place where the person has the intention to

dwell permanently. A reasonable man must accept him/her as a resident of that place.

The issue arises when it comes to migrant labourers. The Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2020-21 estimated that around 11% of our population migrated due to employment reasons. This translates to close to 15 crore voters being migrant labourers within or outside their States. Some of these migrations are seasonal in nature where the labourers return to their ordinary residence for some months of a year. Many migrant construction and security workers live in temporary shacks/residences at their place of work. They move from one location to another, within a State or even in different States, as part of their work. They return to the ordinary residence in

their home State at regular intervals. They exercise their right to vote in that place where their families and children live and where their properties exist. While they may not be residing permanently in such residence, the philosophy behind being 'ordinarily resident' as opined by the courts is broadly fulfilled with respect to that residence for such migrant workers.

Any migrant has the right to shift his/her vote to their new place of residence anywhere in India if they so desire. However, removal of migrant voters from the electoral roll of their original residence by following a strict interpretation of the term 'ordinarily resident' can vitiate the democratic process. It may result in their disenfranchisement as most of them would not be keen, and neither welcome, to register as voters in their temporary place of work.

What can be the way forward?

The RP Act provides the option to service voters, persons holding a declared office and NRIs to retain the vote in their constituency even though they may not be permanently residing in such place. While it may not be an apple-to-apple comparison, it must be noted that most labourers, short-term or long-term, migrate on account of lack of opportunities in their region. They continue to have close connections with their original residence and choose to retain their right to vote in such constituency. The RP Act or the RER may be suitably amended to preserve the choice of migrant labourers. Suitable mechanisms, acceptable to all stakeholders, to enable participation of migrant labourers in the elections should be explored. The issue of migrants enrolling more than once in different constituencies should be addressed separately through Aadhaar seeding.

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

THE GIST

Section 19 of the RP Act requires that a person is 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency for inclusion in its electoral roll.

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Why must India recognise its open ecosystems?

Why are lands classified as 'wastelands' important? Are pastoral communities dependent on them?

Abi Tamim Vanak
Anuja Malhotra

The story so far:

Deserts are often imagined as failures of nature, and barren wastelands in need of redemption. This worldview fuels grand ambitions to "green" the desert, through afforestation, irrigation schemes, or even climate engineering. This gives way to the idea that deserts are broken ecosystems. So pervasive is this vilification, that land degradation is also known as "desertification", and June 17 every year is celebrated as World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

Are deserts important?

In truth, deserts are ancient, diverse, and resilient biomes, finely tuned to extremes. They occupy nearly one-third of the Earth's terrestrial surface, and are home to uniquely adapted plants, animals, and

human cultures. It is ironic that humans disregard deserts, when several early civilisations were set in desert climates, whether in early Mesopotamia, Egypt, or the Indus valley. Indeed, some historians argue that it is these very harsh desert conditions that prompted humans to develop complex societies and technologies that could invent ingenious ways of irrigation to survive in otherwise inhospitable conditions.

What about other open spaces?

India's relationship with open spaces is full of contradictions. On the one hand, we fetishise them. Real estate ads routinely promise sweeping lawns with names like Savana or Utopia. But when it comes to the country's own vast open natural ecosystems such as grasslands, savannas, scrublands and open woodlands, we have done the opposite. These landscapes have been systematically ignored in policy or worse,

actively erased. On official maps, millions of hectares of these ecosystems are classified as wastelands, a term inherited from colonial land-use categories. In policy terms, a wasteland is land waiting to be fixed, often by planting trees, converting it for agriculture or paving it over for industry. What should be protected and stewarded has instead become a target for transformation. India's deserts, grasslands and savannas are home to species found nowhere else: the Great Indian Bustard, the caracal, the Indian wolf etc. These ecosystems also store carbon, not in big trees above ground but rather, deep in the soil.

Equally important are the communities dependent on them. Millions of pastoral groups such as the Dhangar, Rabari, Kuruba etc. depend on these ecosystems for grazing. When we fence off grasslands or plant "forests" on them, it's not just ecology we damage but also livelihoods, mobility, and local knowledge systems. In

many cases, pastoralist groups are also stewards of biodiversity and ecosystem health. However, Indian grasslands and pastoralist systems have not received the desired protection and management.

What should be the road ahead?

Rather than trying to turn deserts into forests, we should study how life thrives without abundance. This is not to say that land degradation should not be addressed. Reversing degradation in drylands requires careful restoration that respects native vegetation, focuses on soil and moisture conservation, and draws from indigenous knowledge of land management. Low-tech solutions like water harvesting, rotational grazing, and protecting natural regrowth offer outperform greenwashing projects that aim to plant millions of trees to "green" the desert. We need policies that recognise ecosystem diversity, reward soil carbon storage, and support pastoralist land use. A functioning desert or savanna, with its intricate food webs, seasonal rhythms, and cultural continuities, is far more alive than a failed monoculture plantation. Perhaps it is time to rename World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought to World Day to Combat Land Degradation, and give deserts their respectable name back.

The authors are with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment.

THE GIST

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The changing landscape of employment

Each year, lakhs of students graduate from universities, colleges, Industrial Training Institutes, and skill programmes in India. Yet the system continues to face challenges not only in accommodating them, but also effectively integrating them into meaningful employment.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) plays a central role in India's social security system by managing retirement savings for workers in the organised sector. With over 7 crore members, it remains one of the world's largest social security organisations. EPFO data serves as a valuable indicator of formal employment trends. The share decline in net new EPFO enrolments post-2019 reflected the pandemic effect on formal employment. However, the March 2023 data shows a steady increase in formal workforce participation. Young professionals, particularly fresh graduates, constitute a significant portion of new enrolments. The 18-25 age group consistently represents a large share with the 18-21 subgroup alone accounting for around 18%-22% of the total new subscribers in the recent months. The trend signals a push towards formalisation but demands a deeper analysis of job stability, wages and long-term financial security.

Youth unemployment

According to the India Employment Report 2024, published by the International Labour Organization and the Institute for Human Development, the youth account for 83% of India's unemployed population. Alarmingly, the share of unemployed individuals with secondary or higher education has nearly doubled over two decades.

The issue goes beyond unemployment; this is a crisis of unemployability. The Economic Survey 2023-24 states that only about half of India's youth are deemed job-ready after graduation. One in two lacks the



S. Irudaya Rajan
Chair, International Institute of Migration and Development, Kerala



S.P. Mishra
Founder, India Career Centre, Hyderabad

Urgent structural reforms are needed to address the growing disconnect between education and employment in India

digital and professional skills employers' demand, particularly in an economy undergoing rapid technological transformation. Moreover, the looming influence of AI threatens India's tech sector, putting several traditional job roles at the risk of displacement. Without adequate reskilling and upskilling efforts, the gap between graduate output and available opportunities will only widen.

Despite economic progress, India's workforce remains predominantly informal. The India Employment Report 2024 notes nearly 90% of employment is informal with the proportion of salaried, regular jobs declining since 2018. While contractual employment has grown, concerns about job security and social welfare remain unresolved.

Many young Indians struggle with technical skills. The report states that 75% of young people struggle with basic digital tasks such as sending an email with an attachment. Over 60% cannot perform simple file operations such as copy-pasting and 90% lack fundamental spreadsheet skills such as working with formulas.

These statistics are worrying given that the Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum forecasts major shifts in employment dynamics.

The report states that by 2030, an estimated 170 million new jobs will be created representing 14% of total employment. However, 92 million existing jobs (8% of total employment) will be displaced. This means there will be a new growth of 78 million jobs, or a 7% increase in total employment. While these projections offer optimism, they also highlight the urgency of bridging the skill gap to ensure that India's workforce is adequately prepared for the evolving job landscape.

What India must do

India stands at a critical crossroads. Without targeted policy interventions and expansive reskilling initiatives, millions of graduates will continue struggling to secure meaningful

employment. Investing in education, vocational training, and digital literacy is essential for aligning the workforce with future job demands.

Urgent structural reforms are needed. First, there should be stronger collaboration between industry and academia, if necessary, by law. Each higher education institution must ideally have at least one formal partnership with industry partners. Second, educational institutions need to be held accountable for placements and not just educational degrees. We need to create accreditation systems for educational institutions aligned with job placements for the outgoing students. Idea Labs and Tinker Labs should be made mandatory components of every high school and higher education institution. The integration of the humanities, foreign language learning, and soft skills should be made mandatory across all levels of education.

Third, India needs to extend its focus beyond national borders. Skilling and training programmes should be designed to meet the needs of ageing societies in many Western nations, where the demand for young professionals is expected to increase. This approach aligns with the Indian government's strategy for enhancing the international mobility of skilled workers. The International Institute of Migration and Development is currently working as the Indian partner in the European Union's Link4Skills project that utilises the migration corridor framework to evaluate the skill demands and labour shortages in various European countries and beyond. Fourth, to drive these transformations, an Indian Education Services, similar in stature to the Indian Administrative Services, should be established; it would attract the best minds into the education sector. Finally, the education system should open its doors to professionals from the industry. This would help bridge the gap between theory and application.

Time is apt to restore J&K's Statehood

Peace is contingent on harmonious relations between New Delhi and J&K

STATE OF PLAY

Anando Bhakto

When one travels from Srinagar to Uri, the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Lieutenant Governor (LG)'s overhaul of the region's challenging terrain is perceptible. His bureaucrats outline his main accomplishments: first, efficient transportation networks have facilitated better access to services, and tourism; and second, civilian killings and militant recruitment have considerably declined. The locals agree. Industrialists say the elimination of separatist infrastructure has allowed businesses to thrive. A section of the people appear to have moved on from the separatist discourse, but they do not explicitly admit it. They fear this would deflect from Kashmir's political questions, especially the need for a plausible political trajectory which remains elusive as New Delhi delays restoration of J&K's Statehood.

Political uncertainty culminating in political premonition serves nobody's interest. It needs to be replaced by an optimistic vision for the future, drawing from compassionate terms of engagement between New Delhi and J&K. Handing over full executive powers to J&K's elected government is the first step.

The Supreme Court (SC) in December 2023 recommended the restoration of J&K's Statehood but did not specify a deadline. Now is the apt time. Among many reasons is the urgency to not fritter the democratic participation that Kashmir Valley witnessed in last year's Assembly elections. A population reckoning with bureaucratic rule wanted to empower a regional leader. The people reposed faith in



Omar Abdullah's capacity for calibrated navigation, hoping the National Conference (NC) would negotiate a respectable arrangement for J&K, at the least Statehood.

New Delhi ought to engage with and empower a Chief Minister elected with a historic mandate. It is advisable to also engage with other regional players, especially former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and emerging youth leaders such as Waheed Parra. The mainstream leaders' secular politics is Indian democracy's asset. Trying to scupper them by facilitating political proxies will be preposterous.

Mr. Abdullah has shown political sagacity by repairing ties with New Delhi. But over a podcast recently, he lamented that he is unable to get work done as he has little authority over the officials. His presence merely as a custodian of status quo is causing dissatisfaction among the voters. It has also earned him accusations of pusillanimity, including from elements within his party, who are publicly advocating a more confrontationalist course, significantly expanding their personal appeal. Mr. Abdullah could also animate his constituency with lofty sound-bites, but he understands a collision course with New Delhi will not help J&K's case.

Sources say Mr. Abdullah is hopeful that Statehood will be restored in August. Acknowledging the people's will even when the Union government

has the power to perpetuate the LG's hegemony will generate far more political optimism than economic implements could alone.

Only twice in history has Kashmir witnessed relative peace: from 1948 to 1952 when Jawaharlal Nehru empowered Sheikh Abdullah to effect social and economic overhaul; and from 1975 to 1984, following the Indira-Sheikh Accord to when Indira Gandhi toppled Farooq Abdullah's government. Clearly, 'peace' is contingent on harmonious relations between New Delhi and the State government.

Recently, a daily in Kashmir reported that restoration of Statehood will be followed by fresh elections, as the previous elections were meant for a Union Territory. This created a furore in Srinagar. It is unlikely that there will be another Assembly election. But the lack of a political roadmap built on consensus is deepening public apprehension.

Particularly alarming is the regional divide between Kashmir Valley and Jammu. An example of it was the mob violence in Jammu against a Kashmiri man accused of stealing. Such incidents underline the urgency of setting up a State Human Rights Commission and the SC-recommended Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In the foreseeable future, the BJP will remain the predominant force in Jammu, and the NC in Kashmir. The NC made a noble gesture by anointing its lone Hindu MLA, Surinder Choudhary, from Rajouri as the Deputy Chief Minister. It is the BJP's turn to reciprocate. Infiltration in Poonch and Rajouri is alarming. There is hardly time for procrastination.

Anando Bhakto reports on Kashmir and national politics

Of half a billion mobile money accounts globally, most are in Africa

Mobile money allows people without banks to securely transfer funds via text message, and its adoption is growing rapidly

DATA POINT

Simon van Teutem

By the end of today, you will probably have used your bank account — maybe to buy groceries, pay rent, or send money to a friend. It is something many of us take for granted.

However, for more than a billion people globally, transactions only happen with cash. That means carrying around physical notes and coins, travelling long distances just to send or receive money, and facing the constant risk of losing it or having it stolen. The absence of formal banking services adds yet another hurdle for people trying to escape poverty.

However, in recent years, 'mobile money' has transformed how many people access financial services. Mobile money differs from traditional bank accounts; you don't need a physical bank branch or even an Internet connection. Instead, you use text messages for services such as deposits, transfers, and payments via a mobile phone. In this sense, it is not the same as standard Internet banking.

Many people might be unfamiliar with how mobile money works, so let me briefly explain. You dial a short code for the mobile money provider, choose 'send money', and enter the recipient's phone number (which serves as their account number). Next, type the amount and your secure PIN. That's it — both the sender and recipient get an SMS confirmation within seconds. If you need to add funds to your mobile money account or retrieve your PIN, you can visit a local mobile money agent, often found in small shops or kiosks, which can be easier to reach than traditional banks.

In 2010, there were just 13 million mobile money accounts in the world. By 2023, that had reached more than 640 million (Chart 1).

But the total number of mobile money accounts doesn't tell us what percentage of people use mobile money. A small portion of people could have many accounts. So instead of examining absolute numbers, let us look at the share of people with mobile money accounts in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Chart 2 shows, the percentage of people in Sub-Saharan Africa with a mobile money account grew rapidly from 12% in 2014 to 33% by 2021.

Chart 3 shows how mobile money has contributed to the growth of total account ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa and across three countries. In 2014, one-third of adults in Sub-Saharan Africa had a bank account. By 2021, this had increased to more than half. The share that only had an account at a financial institution did not change over that period — the line is flat, at 22%. That means that almost all of the growth in this share has come from those getting a mobile money account (either on its own or alongside one from a financial institution).

One major barrier to using mobile money is still not having a mobile phone. The Global Findex 2021 survey asked adults without bank accounts why they don't use mobile money. A lack of money was the top reason. But the next most common was the absence of a mobile phone (probably related to a lack of money). While three-quarters of Sub-Saharan Africans in the survey now own phones, many countries still have low ownership rates.

Chart 4 shows the share of adults with a mobile money account against the share of adults with a mobile phone for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The two are positively correlated: unsurprisingly, people in countries with more phones are more likely to use mobile money.

Simon van Teutem is a writer and contributor at Our World in Data

From cash to clicks: The charts were sourced from "There are now more than half a billion mobile money accounts in the world, mostly in Africa — here's why this matters" published at OurWorldinData.org (OWID). The text on the left is an abridged version of the story that appeared on OWID.

Chart 1: Number of active mobile money accounts (in crores). These are financial accounts managed via mobile devices.

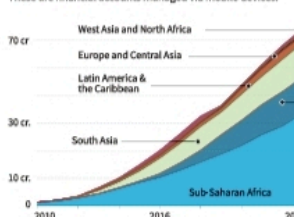


Chart 2: The share of respondents who personally used a mobile money service in the past year (in %)

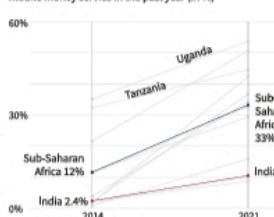


Chart 3: The share of adults who own a bank account at a financial institution only, as mobile money only, or both. The chart illustrates how mobile money has contributed to the growth of total account ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa and across three countries.

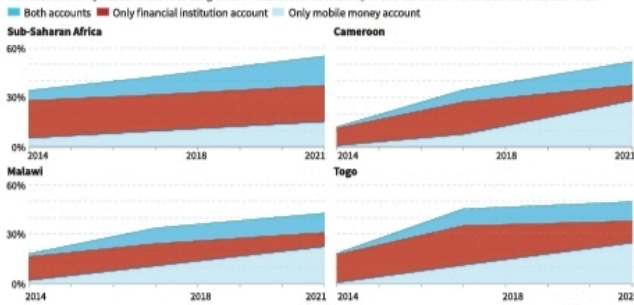
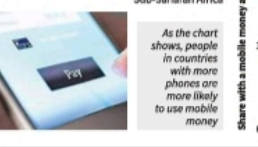


Chart 4: The share of adults with a mobile money account against the share of adults with a mobile phone for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa



As the chart shows, people in countries with more phones are more likely to use mobile money

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 14, 1975

CIA in White House: Issue being probed, says Ford

Chicago, July 13: Charges that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had penetrated the White House during the Nixon Administration were being investigated, President Ford said on Saturday.

He expressed confidence that the facts would become known as a result of his own efforts, the expected inquiry by Congress and digging by the American press.

Mr. Ford was replying to questions at a news conference here. Asked about alleged CIA penetration of the White House and other Government departments, Mr. Ford replied: "As far as I know personally, there are no people presently employed in the White House who have relationships with the CIA of which I am personally unaware."

Mr. Ford's denial came at the end of a week which heard allegations, during a Senate Committee Inquiry into alleged illegal activities of the CIA, that the Agency had men within the White House.

One report had linked Alexander Butterfield, a former high-ranking White House official to the CIA, but Mr. Ford said there was no precise information on this.

Mr. Butterfield disclosed to the committee looking into the Watergate scandals that Presidential conversations at the White House had been taperecorded.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 14, 1925

Bombay mills crisis

Bombay, July 13: The labour leaders of Bombay went round the Mill area on Saturday and Sunday to elicit the views of the workmen on the Textile Millowners' proposal to reduce wages by 16 to 20 per cent and it was ascertained that the operatives were not prepared to countenance a reduction of wages, but were in favour of working shorttime.

Some of the leaders are afraid that if the reduction is carried out there will be a general strike. One of them expressed the opinion that if this reduction is given effect immediately, the rowdy element will get an opportunity for creating trouble, but if this step be deferred there will be less chance of a disturbance. The Millowners' proposals are being explained to the men.

CACHE



REUTERS

How will YouTube’s new monetisation policy impact creators?

YouTube said that on July 15, it would be updating its guidelines to “better identify mass-produced and repetitious content,” leading creators to believe that low-effort Generative AI content may become harder to monetise

John Xavier
Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:
In an update to the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) that allows creators to make money from their videos, YouTube said that on July 15, it would change its guidelines in order to “better identify mass-produced and repetitious content.” The Google-owned video platform added that the change would better reflect what “inauthentic” content looks like. While YouTube did not directly mention Generative AI, many creators and content makers believe that the update will affect those who rely heavily on machine-generated media to make their videos.

What is the new YPP policy?
YouTube needs 500 subscribers in order for their channels to be eligible to apply for the Partner Programme. After securing 1,000 subscribers, partners can unlock ad revenue and start earning from the ads shown in their videos. This is one way the company ensures that trusted, high-quality content makers are rewarded for their efforts rather than throwaway accounts trying to make a quick buck.
There are multiple ways to monetise content as a YouTube partner, with varying eligibility requirements and regional restrictions. Some of these strategies include advertising revenue, shopping, YouTube Premium revenue, channel memberships, and Super Chat/Stickers/Thanks perks that fans can pay for.
Monetisation is a serious matter for creators, especially for those aiming to grow a large audience and make high-quality YouTube videos a major

source of their income. YouTube shared that it paid more than \$70 billion to creators, artists, and media companies from 2021 to 2023. Naturally, many creators also get frustrated when their videos are demonetised for regulatory reasons they do not understand or agree with.
What is YouTube’s monetisation history?
From its early days, YouTube’s approach to monetisation has steadily evolved, moving from a largely open system to a more curated environment that prioritises original, authentic content. This progression reflects the platform’s efforts to make the content stick for viewers so that more valuable space can be created for advertisers.
In the initial stages of creator monetisation around 2016, the rules were minimal. Channels could be monetised almost instantly upon creation without needing to meet specific subscriber or watch-hour goals. This allowed for the proliferation of “faceless” channels that primarily relied on low-effort content, such as compiling viral video clips without original commentary. These simple compilation videos could generate significant revenue with relative ease.
A significant shift occurred around 2018 when YouTube introduced its now-standard monetisation requirements – 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 hours of watch time. This policy was a clear signal that the platform was beginning to favour channels that could build and sustain a genuine audience. This update effectively demonetised many of the simple compilation channels that lacked original input. Following this, YouTube continued to refine its guidelines, targeting specific

niches that were considered low-effort and repetitive. In 2019, channels featuring rain sounds or ambient noise faced demonetisation as they were often seen as non-transformative. According to the U.S. Copyright Law, a transformative use is a kind of fair use that builds on original content and creates something new.
By 2020, YouTube had also cracked down on the wave of channels that used robotic, text-to-speech voices to read Reddit stories, flagging them as “mass-produced” and unoriginal.
This historical trend will culminate in the upcoming July 2025 policy change. This latest update aims to “better identify” content that is mass-produced, repetitive, and fails to meaningfully transform source material.
YouTube has clarified this is an enhancement of long-standing policies, intended to remove content that viewers often consider spam. This move targets channels that upload high volumes of templated or AI-generated videos.
Is YouTube banning Generative AI content?
While YouTube did not explicitly mention that it was taking action against Generative AI content, this is what many content creators took the policy update to mean.
The use of synthetic content such as visuals, voiceovers, and art now raises complex legal questions about whether YouTube is giving users the ability to monetise content that could one day be hit with copyright strikes or lawsuits.
YouTube noted that it always required creators to upload “original” and “authentic” content to monetise as part of its partner programme. Its new policy says it will identify “mass-produced and

repetitious content” but does not currently mention penalising such videos or banning them. Users will have to simply wait and see.
In essence, while genuine content creators who deliver well-produced original videos should not be impacted by the update, those who are simply pushing the same low-quality videos made with AI tools to rack up subscribers and views will face increased scrutiny in the future.
How does YouTube’s new policy affect content creators?
For content creators, this policy shift underscores the increasing importance of originality and transformative work. Channels that simply aggregate content without adding a unique perspective or commentary are at high risk of demonetisation. Creators will now have to adapt by focusing on original and authentic videos, where a unique voice and personality can be established. The key takeaway for creators is to move beyond mere aggregation and to use their content to tell a story, offer analysis, or provide a unique and engaging perspective.
From YouTube’s perspective, this new monetisation policy is a strategic move designed to improve the overall quality and integrity of the platform. By filtering out low-effort, repetitive, and spammy content, YouTube aims to keep users coming back to its platform regularly, which in turn encourages them to spend more time on the site. This is also good for its ads business.
A higher-quality content library not only makes the platform attractive to advertisers; it can also be used by its parent, Alphabet, as fodder to train its Gemini AI models.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

I like the hustle and bustle of big cities

Don’t rely on him for campaigning. He gets on the bandwagon only at the last possible minute

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of ‘get on the bandwagon’? (Jyoti Gulati, Rohtak)
When you ‘get on the bandwagon’, what you are doing is following in the footsteps of or following the example of someone else. You become involved in an activity that is successful, not because you are interested in it, but because everyone else is taking part in it – supporting the activity seems to be the fashionable thing to do. You are hoping to take advantage of the situation, and praying that some of the success will rub off on you. There is an ulterior motive for what you are doing; you are being opportunistic. People who get on the bandwagon, usually do so, only after someone or something has become successful or popular. For example, it is very common for people to get on the bandwagon of a candidate who is the frontrunner. It is also possible to say, ‘jump/climb on the bandwagon’.
Neethu gets on the bandwagon whenever the college team wins something. Otherwise, she has no interest in sports.
Americans coined this idiom. The bandwagon in the expression refers to the colourfully decorated horse-drawn wagon, with a live band sitting on top of it, that circus owners used to send around town to both entertain and attract the attention of the public. This was the owner’s way of informing the public that the circus was in town. When Zachary Taylor, a Presidential candidate, got on one of these circus wagons in 1848, the idiom began to be used in politics to mean what it does today.

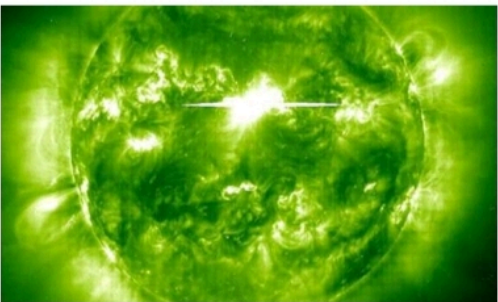
What is the meaning of ‘hustle and bustle’? (K. Saraswathi, Coimoor)
This is an expression made popular by the Americans. The ‘t’ in both words is silent; the two words rhyme with ‘muscle’ and ‘tussle’. The expression is normally used to talk about a noisy place where there are lots of activities going on. For example, when we enter a relatively big railway station in our country, we are struck by the noise and the numerous activities going on – people talking loudly and walking quickly, suitcases being dragged, vendors shouting, trains blowing their horns, etc. The noisy crowd and the constant movement produce an environment that is full of energy and excitement. It is possible to have this kind of energy and confusion in a smaller place as well. For example, when someone in the family is getting married, the week before the wedding, the house is full of hustle and bustle.
Every six months, I take a break from the hustle and bustle of daily life.
‘Hustle’ comes from the Dutch ‘hutselen’ meaning ‘to shake’. It was borrowed into English, and with the passage of time, both the pronunciation and the meaning of the word changed. upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Test your knowledge of the history, symbolism, and celebrations behind France’s most iconic national holiday – Bastille Day

Prathmesh Kher

- were held in the Bastille at the time it was stormed on July 14, 1789?
- QUESTION 1**
What was the original purpose of the Bastille fortress before it became a state prison?
- QUESTION 2**
Which American founding father was present in Paris during the early years of the French Revolution and observed the events surrounding Bastille Day?
- QUESTION 3**
How many prisoners
- QUESTION 4**
Who was the commander of the Bastille on the day it was stormed, and who was later killed by the mob?
- QUESTION 5**
Which radical newspaper editor and revolutionary figure was assassinated in his bath the day after Bastille Day’s first anniversary?



Visual question:
How is this solar flare connected to Bastille Day?

- Questions and Answers to the July 11 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. In this dystopian novel, this is the name of the omnipresent authoritarian leader. **Ans: Big Brother**
2. Name the fictional mysterious millionaire known for lavish parties and his obsession with Daisy Buchanan. **Ans: Jay Gatsby**
3. This book chronicles the Buendia family saga in this fictional town that symbolises isolation and cyclical history. **Ans: Macondo**
4. Known for its satirical take on the absurdity of war, _____ is named for a paradoxical military rule in its plot that traps soldiers in a no-win situation. **Ans: Catch-22**
5. The plot of this book was subversive to its stream-of-consciousness style and exploration of time and perception. **Ans: To the Lighthouse**
Visual: Name this British writer. **Ans: William Golding**
Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan | Piyali Tuli | Sukdev Shet | Arun Kumar Singh | Dodo Jayaditya

Word of the day

Veritable:
often used as intensifier; not counterfeit or copied
Synonyms: authentic, bona fide, unquestionable, regular
Usage: The meal was a veritable feast.
Pronunciation: vɛrɪtəbəl
International Phonetic Alphabet: /vɛr.ɪ.tə.bəl/

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

Household assets, liabilities

Joydeep Sen

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) publishes data on financial assets and liabilities of households across India.

A disturbing trend it shows is net financial savings of households, as a percentage of GDP, is declining. Let us understand more about it.

Q1 of 2020-21, i.e. April-June 2020, was peak of lockdown and economic slowdown. In these months, net financial assets i.e. incremental flows were, surprisingly, higher than usual. It was 15% of GDP. GDP was itself lower due to economic contraction which contributed to it. In absolute terms, people saved and invested in financial assets, so the ratio was higher. In July-September 2020, net financial assets were lower at 11.7% of GDP. In October-December, net financial asset flows slid to 8.5% GDP. This is counter-intuitive.

At the height of lockdown when people were losing jobs and small businesses closing down, how can savings be higher? This is not usual behaviour. In challenging times, we generate an 'emergency response'. Over, 2020-21, net financial asset flows were 11.5% of GDP. In 2021-22, it was 7.2% of GDP and in 2022-23, it was 5.1%. In 2023-24, it was slightly better at 5.3%. This also is an interesting trend: when economic growth has revived, why did net financial savings slide? People are availing loans to fund assets like house or cars. The dip in savings, is net of financial liabilities. In 2020-21, financial assets were 15.4% of GDP; net of financial liabilities of 3.9% of GDP, it was 11.5%. Financial liabilities, from 3.9% of GDP in 2020-21 and 3.8% in 2021-22, rose to 5.9% of GDP in 2022-23 and 6.4% in 2023-24. When economy is growing, why do people need more loans? This concerns behavioural aspect: when one feels more secure, it's time to improve lifestyle even with debt.

RBI report

As per a report released by the RBI on June 30, among broad categories of household debt, non-housing retail loans, mostly used for consumption, formed 54.9% of total household debt as of March 2025 and 25.7% of disposable income as of March 2024. Moreover, the share of these loans has been growing consistently over years outpacing housing, agriculture and business loans.

Share of mutual funds in the overall pie is increasing. In 2020-21, MFs were only 2.1% of financial asset flows. In 2021-22, it surged to 6.1% and stayed at 6% in 2022-23. In 2023-24, it moved up to 7%. Household allocation to MFs at ₹17.3 lakh crore in March 2023 rose to ₹33.9 lakh crore in March 2024.

Takeaways, suggestions

The data reflects collective financial behaviour of people. However, you should have your own justification for behaving the way you do. The basis must be financial planning, preferably with inputs from a professional financial planner. The basic tenets are:

1) When you consider leverage to finance an asset, it is about quality: is it likely to maintain value or depreciate fast or is it just to fund a lifestyle? Real estate is the only asset that may appreciate in value.

2) If you are leveraged, EMIs should not exceed 40% of income.

3) Having an emergency corpus, equivalent to six or 12 months income, is important. It should be built in times of peace, not in times of war.

4) Investments must be distributed more to 'growth assets' like MFs than contractual return ones like deposits.

5) Start systematic investment plan. 6) When you have surplus cash, it is better to pre-pay loans and cut EMIs. Return on investments, particularly contractual-return ones like bank deposits yield less than EMI interest.

Conclusion
Taking on liabilities to fund assets is a mixed bag. As long as EMIs are within a threshold of income and the asset is adding value, you may go ahead with it. However, assuming liabilities to fund lifestyle or conspicuous consumption is risky.

(The writer is a corporate trainer and author)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.



Only a guide: While shortcuts can be useful, one should be careful while taking important financial decisions. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Some rules to open the gates of financial freedom

Financial freedom is shaped by variables such as age, income levels and risk tolerance; so, these rules may not work for all but are like a financial compass to guide you in the right direction

WAY TO RICHES

Vaishali R. Venkat

A luxury flat, SUV, holiday tour abroad and at least ₹1 crore in bank balance are everyone's dream. However, only a few realise such kind of dreams and the remaining 'unlucky' lot end up thinking these are possible only for those born rich. Whereas most financial experts believe proper planning is all that is needed to become rich. Of course, financial planning could be a labyrinth of calculations and choices that might seem to be difficult to understand, but if you get a grip on the patterns and formulae, passed on by financial experts, it's much easier to attain financial freedom. Let's catch up with the numbers.

15*15*15 Rule

Not just the super-rich, even a salaried individual can accumulate ₹1 crore if he/she follows the 15*15*15 rule. Save ₹15,000 a month for 15 years continuously, without any single default in monthly savings, in a 15% CAGR generating mutual fund. If he/she wishes to continue the same for another 15 years, he/she would have saved a whopping ₹10.5 crore. The magic lies in compounding and consistency is the key.

Rule of 72

It's a simple trick or a calculation to find out how long it will take for your in-



Once you get a grip on the patterns and also the formulae, passed on by financial experts over time, it becomes much easier to attain financial freedom in life

vestment to double at a fixed rate of return. To find the number of years, just divide the number 72 by the interest rate you will receive on your investment. For instance, if you receive 6% interest per annum, money doubles in just 12 years (72/6). Not just this, with this formula, you can calculate the ideal rate of return if you want to double investment in certain number of years.

Say, for example, if you want to double investment in four years, you should get 18% interest per annum. Just divide 72 by the number of years.

Rule of 114

The Rule of 114 is much like Rule of 72 and tells you when investment triples. Just divide 114 by the annual interest rate received to find out how many years you need for wealth to grow threefold. If interest per annum is 6%, money triples in 19 years (114/6). If you want to triple investment in just five years, you should get 22.8% interest per annum (114/5).

Rule of 144

This Rule tells you when your investment quadruple



While the number-based thumb rules are shortcuts to crack the code of complicated personal finance decisions, one size doesn't fit all

ples in value – just a simple division.

50/30/20 Rule

Budgeting is crucial to the country and to individuals as well. It might be quite complicated with limited resources and vast goals; however, the 50/30/20 Rule comes in handy to make the budgeting process easier and sustainable. Divide net-income (after tax deductions) into three major categories: 50% for essentials such as rent or housing EMI, groceries, medicines, utilities etc.; 30% for wishes such as entertainment, tour, shopping etc. and balance 20% for savings and debt repayment. Some financial experts add the debt repayment in the first 50% category leaving the 20% category only for savings.

100 Minus Age Rule

The most fundamental question in personal finance is on asset allocation. That is, how much money is to be allocated to buy risky assets such as stock markets and how much should be parked in conservative investment products. The 100 Minus Age Rule answers this di-

lemma. As per this rule, one must subtract his/her age from 100 to determine the percentage of equity portfolio, and the rest allocated to low-risk assets or traditional fixed/recurring deposits. If you are 30, 70% (100-30) of your investment can be in equities, and 30% in bonds, FDs, or other debt funds.

However, this rule cannot be taken blindly and just gives a fair idea. A young man who is the breadwinner of his family with more commitments can't invest 70% in equities, whereas a septuagenarian pensioner without commitment and is well taken care by children, can invest more in equities.

10X Insurance Rule

The 10X Rule helps an individual calculate the amount of life cover his/her dependents would require in his/her absence. As per this Rule, the term life insurance cover should at least be 10 times his/her gross annual income. However, this rule has its own limitations and might not be suitable for everyone. The Rule doesn't consider factors such as age, specific family needs, number of dependents etc.

While these number-based thumb rules are shortcuts to crack the code of complicated personal finance decisions, one size doesn't fit all.

So, care must be taken while taking important financial decisions.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager)

Experience vs. passion assets

THINKINVESTOR

It is debatable if spending on experiences is better than spending on passion assets; you must determine which gives you more happiness; then, your spending can, indeed, buy you happiness

Venkatesh Rangarajwamy

Investment is what you do with your savings. Spending is what you do to maintain current lifestyle. Then, there is discretionary spending, including spending on experiences and material goods. Here, we see why discretionary spending on some material goods can be just as rewarding as spending on experiences.

Experience vs. passion assets

You can take a trip to the Antarctic or enjoy a portside cabin on a Caribbean cruise. Those are experiences you are likely to relive when you share them with friends who made similar trips. Buying material goods, it is argued, is different. After a while, you get used to owning the product. So, happiness from acquiring a luxury watch, for instance may not last for long. Indeed, money spent on material good, it seems, cannot buy you happiness. At least, not as much compared with spending on experiences. But that argument does not hold for passion assets. When comparing memorable experiences with material goods, you ought to look at rare products not at some high-end luxury products.

Consider spending on passion assets such as antiques, art and rare collectibles. The memorable moment occurs when you acquire the asset for your personal collection. It could have been a lucky salvage hunt or a bargain buy at an antique mall or a high adrenaline auction, where you beat other bidders to acquire the product. The point is the story behind the acquisition and provenance of the asset can help relive the memorable moment when you narrate the experience to like-minded friends. Also, consider this: specific experiences become generic memory over time. So, it is moot if you can consciously recollect an experience you had 20 years ago. Also, passion assets are investments; you can sell them later for a higher price.

Conclusion

Both experiences and passion assets are part of discretionary spending. You indulge in such spending to improve emotional well-being. That, in turn, impacts financial well-being. The argument is you must be emotionally happy to physically and mentally apply skills to generate active income during your working life. That is why spending on experiences and material goods (read passion assets) is important. It is debatable whether spending on experiences is better than spending on passion assets. You must determine which gives you more happiness. Then, your spending can, indeed, buy you happiness.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest	1-year	3-year	5-year
	Slab	Slab	Slab	Slab
Small Finance Banks				
AU Small Finance Bank	7.10	6.35	7.10	6.75
Equitas Small Finance Bank	7.60	7.25	7.25	7.00
ESAF Small Finance Bank	7.60	6.75	6.00	5.75
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.20	7.50	7.75	8.20
Slice Small Finance Bank	8.50	6.75	8.25	7.75
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.40	7.50	8.15	8.40
Ujivan Small Finance Bank	7.75	7.65	7.20	7.20
Unity Small Finance Bank	7.75	6.50	7.25	7.25
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.25	8.00	7.50
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	6.60	6.25	6.50	6.50
Bandhan Bank	7.40	7.25	7.25	5.85
City Union Bank	6.75	6.75	6.60	6.25
CSB Bank	7.40	5.00	5.75	5.75
DCB Bank	6.55	6.00	6.40	6.25
Federal Bank	6.85	6.50	6.70	6.50
HDFC Bank	6.60	6.25	6.45	6.40
ICI Bank	6.60	6.25	6.60	6.40
ICFC FIRST Bank	6.75	6.25	6.75	6.75
IndusInd Bank	7.00	6.75	6.75	6.65

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest	1-year	3-year	5-year
	Slab	Slab	Slab	Slab
Public Sector Banks				
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.30	6.75	6.75	6.50
Karur Vysya Bank	6.85	6.60	6.60	6.40
Karnataka Bank	6.75	6.60	6.25	6.25
Kotak Mahindra Bank	6.60	6.25	6.40	6.25
RBL Bank	7.30	7.10	7.10	7.00
SBI Bank India	7.50	7.05	7.05	7.50
South Indian Bank	6.70	6.50	6.20	5.70
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.05	6.80	6.25	6.25
YES Bank	7.10	6.75	7.10	6.75
Public Sector Banks				
Bank of Baroda	6.60	6.50	6.50	6.40
Bank of India	6.70	6.50	6.25	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	6.70	6.20	6.20	6.10
Canara Bank	6.60	6.50	6.50	6.50
Central Bank of India	7.00	6.60	6.50	6.50
Indian Bank	6.90	6.10	6.25	6.00
Indian Overseas Bank	6.95	6.70	6.30	6.30
Punjab National Bank	6.70	6.40	6.40	6.50
Punjab & Sind Bank	7.05	6.10	6.00	6.35
State Bank of India	6.60	6.25	6.30	6.05
Union Bank of India	6.60	6.60	6.60	6.40

Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)			
	Below ₹10 lakh	Above ₹10 lakh & below ₹25 lakh	Above ₹25 lakh & below ₹75 lakh	Above ₹75 lakh
Public Sector Banks				
State Bank of India	7.50-8.70	7.50-8.70	7.50-8.70	7.50-8.70
Bank of Baroda	7.45-9.25	7.45-9.25	7.45-9.25	7.45-9.25
Punjab National Bank	7.55-9.35	7.50-9.25	7.50-9.25	7.50-9.25
Bank of India	7.35-10.10	7.35-10.10	7.35-10.10	7.35-10.10
Canara Bank	7.50-10.25	7.45-10.25	7.40-10.15	7.40-10.15
Bank of Maharashtra	7.35-10.15	7.35-10.15	7.35-10.15	7.35-10.15
Punjab and Sind Bank	7.55-10.75	7.55-10.75	7.55-10.75	7.55-10.75
Indian Overseas Bank	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.35
Indian Bank	7.40-9.40	7.40-9.40	7.40-9.40	7.40-9.40
Central Bank of India	7.35-9.40	7.35-9.40	7.35-9.40	7.35-9.40
Private Sector Banks				
Kotak Mahindra Bank	8.20	8.20	8.20	8.20
ICI Bank	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00
Axis Bank	8.35-11.90	8.35-11.90	8.35-9.35	8.35-9.35
HSBC Bank	7.70	7.70	7.70	7.70
South Indian Bank	8.30-10.05	8.30-10.60	8.30-10.60	8.30-10.60
Karur Vysya Bank	8.45-11.40	8.45-11.40	8.45-11.40	8.45-11.40
Karnataka Bank	8.40-10.80	8.40-10.80	8.40-10.80	8.40-10.80

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)			
	Below ₹10 lakh	Above ₹10 lakh & below ₹25 lakh	Above ₹25 lakh & below ₹75 lakh	Above ₹75 lakh
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)				
Federal Bank	9.15	9.15	9.15	9.15
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	8.15-9.50	8.15-9.50	8.15-9.50	8.15-9.50
Bandhan Bank	8.41-15.00	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58
RBL Bank	8.20	8.20	8.20	8.20
CSB Bank	9.30-11.08	9.30-11.08	9.30-11.08	9.30-11.08
HDFC Bank	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50
City Union Bank	9.55-14.95	9.35-14.95	9.35-14.95	9.35-14.95
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)				
LIC Housing Finance	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50
Bajaj Housing Finance	7.40	7.40	7.40	7.40
Tata Capital	7.90	7.90	7.90	7.90
PNB Housing Finance	8.25-11.50	8.25-11.50	8.25-11.50	8.25-11.50
GIC Housing Finance	8.80	8.80	8.80	8.80
SAMP India Home Finance	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
Sameer Capital	8.75	8.75	8.75	8.75
Aditya Birla Capital	8.25	8.25	8.25	8.25
ICI Home Finance	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50
Goel Housing Finance	8.55	8.55	8.55	8.55

Source: Moneybase.com

HARYANA



(From left to right) Vijay Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Rajesh, with relatives outside the home of their niece Radhika, who was allegedly shot by her father Deepak, while she was in the kitchen. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Match point

A father allegedly shot his daughter dead in their home in Gurugram, Haryana. As speculations swirl about the reasons, family and friends say Deepak Yadav had always supported Radhika's tennis career, while some say he was controlling and conservative. **Ashok Kumar** reports on the family, who was from Wazirabad, a village within Gurugram city, a place where global-city lifestyles sometimes clash with rural mindsets

A vermilion tilak covers a large part of Pyare Lal's forehead. A long, grey beard cascades down his chest, like a river of wisdom, and his grey hair is tied in a knot on top of his head, like a mystic. It is an unusual appearance for a soft-spoken caretaker of an under-construction building in Gurugram's upscale Sector 57. In his late 50s, Lal says it has been more than 24 hours since he last ate.

"Jab aise phool se buchi ki hatya ho jaye, aur hatyara uska baap hai, to kaise khana gale ke neeche utar sakta hai (When a girl, sweet like a flower, is murdered, and the murderer is her own father, how can food go down the throat)," says Lal, a migrant labourer, staying in a shanty in the neighbourhood for over two years.

In a checked shirt that stretches taut over his stomach, accentuating his rounded midriff, Lal says he happened to be on the road outside on the morning of the day that Deepak Yadav allegedly shot his daughter Radhika dead. He recounts the sequence of events moments after the incident on July 10, to vividly describe how Radhika's mother rushed out of the house making frantic calls. Soon, he says, women from the neighbourhood gathered around her.

"Deepak appeared on the first-floor balcony of his house wielding the revolver. He raised the weapon in the air to proclaim that he had murdered his daughter and walked back inside. The police arrived an hour later," says Lal, the expression on his face gradually turning grim.

Described by his family, friends, and relatives as a "doting father", "a pillar of strength for his daughter", and "her guiding light", Deepak, 49, a real estate agent, who relatives say lived off a host of rented properties in and around his native Wazirabad village in Gurugram, had allegedly pumped four bullets into his 25-year-old daughter. She had been a tennis player, having played the international junior and women's circuit.

The day of death
Remembered as "one of a bunch of very good juniors" by her coaches and sports journalists, Radhika played 10 International Tennis Federation junior tournaments. On the women's circuit, she had played in 30 international tournaments from March 2017 to March 2024, in countries like Malaysia, Tunisia, Burundi, apart from at home in India. At the junior level Radhika had had a career best rank of 1,638 in the world. Once she entered the women's category, her best rank was 1,999 in the world.

Tension had been brewing between the father and daughter days before it culminated in her tragic murder, says Station House Officer, Sector 56, Inspector Vinod Kumar. For almost two weeks before the tragedy, the entire household — the man, his wife, the daughter, and son — were embroiled in tension over Deepak and Radhika's frequent heated arguments about her sports academy, claims the police officer. While the father wanted her to shut it down, Radhika, wanting to make it big in the sport, was vehemently opposed to the idea. "Two days prior to the murder, the situation had turned worse. The father was very angry, threatening to either end his own life or take his daughter's life," says Kumar.

The flashpoint came on Thursday (July 10) morning, when the father, in a rage, took out his licensed .32 bore revolver and fired point-blank at Radhika, say the police. She had been cooking food in the kitchen and had her back to him. The realtor fired five shots; one bullet missed her; the

rest pierced through her vital organs, say the police. She collapsed on the kitchen floor.

Two days prior to the murder, the situation had turned worse. The father was very angry, threatening to either end his own life or take his daughter's life

VINOD KUMAR
SPO, Sector 56,
Gurugram

rest pierced through her vital organs, say the police. She collapsed on the kitchen floor.

"I was at home when I heard gunshots, at 10:30. Hearing the noise, I rushed to the first floor of the house, where my brother Deepak resides. I went inside to find my niece Radhika lying in the kitchen and a revolver was in the living room. My son, Piyush, also followed me to the first floor. We both then took Radhika to a private hospital for treatment in Sector 56. The doctor declared her dead after a surgery," reads the FIR, registered by Kuldeep, Deepak's younger brother, staying on the ground floor of the same house, along with his family.

Partially bald, Deepak, a frail man with a slight frame, sports a grey moustache and a stubble. He did not try to escape.

A father invested in his daughter

Anil Handa, a friend of the family, says he was "appalled" to learn about the murder when his wife broke the news to him over a phone call. "It is tragic beyond words," says Anil, who runs a travel-and-tourism agency in Wazirabad.

Yet to come to terms with the tragic turn of events, Anil says, "It is hard to believe what happened" because Deepak shared a strong bond with his daughter.

"He always spoke highly of his daughter. He took pride and joy in talking to his friends about his daughter's achievements. Deepak stood firmly behind her all these years, supporting her financially and morally, accompanying her to the academy and also to tours on a few occasions during the initial years of her career," says the 51-year-old. "Deepak never got tired of talking about his daughter," he adds.

Deepak's cousin, Rajesh, says that he gave 18 years of his life to make his daughter's dream come true. "All these years, he missed family functions to make sure that Radhika did not miss her coaching classes. He spent crores to get her this far," says Rajesh.

Radhika's coach during her initial years, Vinod Kumar, also echoes these views. He remembers that Radhika was only 10 when she would come daily to his academy in Vasant Kunj along with her father. "To me Deepak came across as a mature man. In fact, it was at his advice that I shifted



Radhika Yadav in action at the ITF women's tennis tournament in Jhajjar in 2023. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to Gurugram, a city that had begun to rapidly urbanise then," says Vinod.

Over a decade ago, Deepak and his brother Kuldeep's families shifted to a house in Sector 57. But Deepak often visited his village, just a few kilometres away from his house.

Asking why

According to the police, Deepak was jeered at by fellow villagers for allegedly living off his daughter, who was said to be earning well.

"When I went to Wazirabad to fetch milk, people in the village taunted me for living off my daughter's earnings. This upset me. They also pointed fingers at her character. I told my daughter to shut the academy for this reason, but she refused. I was constantly tense over this. It hurt my honour and self-respect. I was very perturbed and tense for this reason. Due to this tension, I shot my daughter from behind when she was cooking in the kitchen," reads the father's statement to the police.

The police's theory has failed to find favour with Deepak's own family. Dismissing the motive attributed to the alleged murder, Deepak's eldest cousin Vijay and younger brother Kuldeep, say that Radhika did not run any academy.

Suman Kapur, CEO, Haryana Tennis Association, confirms that there was no academy run by anyone named Radhika Yadav that was registered with the organisation.

Vijay says Radhika had started imparting training to young upcoming players at Ryder's Academy, just across the road from her house, after she was injured, and later took up a coach's job at another academy in Sector 61. He says it was a stop-gap arrangement, as she was determined to make a comeback as a player. Vijay claims the shooting "was an accident".

Some media houses reported that Radhika wanted to marry a man from another caste, citing this as a motive, given that such incidents have occurred before in Haryana. Vijay says the family is educated and could discuss and sort out such issues amicably, stressing that that narrative was the media's creation.

In the days following Radhika's death, an old romantic music video titled *Karwaan* featuring her and actor-singer Inaam Ul Haq popped up.

Haq, in many interviews to the media, says he had first encountered Radhika at a promotional shoot of a team during Tennis Premier League in Delhi and members of his production team told him that she looked good in the frame, and that she wanted to work as an actor.

"Everyone feels that they are struggling hard in their field. Everyone wants to come to this industry for fame. She too was interested. We together shot a music video more than a year ago. During the shoot, she told my production head in my presence to let her know about more such projects. She told my teammates that she wanted to work in this industry as an actor, in ads, in movies, and music videos," Haq told the news agency ANI.

Inaam says Radhika had told him that her father had liked the song, and though he was not present at the shoot, her mother was.

"At the time of promotion, she accepted a collaboration, and posted a story, but after a long time. She did not promote the song later and deactivated her account. I asked her, but she did not give any reason. She uploaded a video about her grandfather's death. I thought this could be the reason. She deactivated and activated her account a couple of times," says Haq.

Inspector Kumar says that Radhika's mother told the police during the investigation that Deepak is "suspicious" and "eccentric". "He even objected to his wife talking to his own younger brother. Deepak is quick to believe rumours and tends to overthink. If someone puts something into his head, he finds it difficult to get it off his mind for days," says the police officer.

Posting a video on her Instagram account to "tell the truth about Radhika", her "best friend" Himaanshika Singh Rajput, also a tennis player, says that Radhika was a kind person and a good friend, but "she was suffering for long and felt suffocated at home".

The emotional video, shot after the cremation, says, "Who would like to live like this, when you have to explain everything. Even on video calls she had to show that she was talking to me. Her academy is just 50 meters away from her home, but she had to return home by a fixed time every day. She was a wonderful coach, and all her students loved her."

In the approximately-three-minute video, labelled Part I, Himaanshika says Radhika loved to get herself clicked and shoot videos, but it all stopped gradually as her parents are "orthodox", "too much worried about people's opinion" and felt society's pressure. In Part II she says her father's friends, jealous of Radhika, would taunt her father saying his daughter now wore makeup and short clothes, so he might as well "dhandha hee kara le" (get her into prostitution).

Sitting under a tent outside the house, Kuldeep is in a difficult place. "Deepak ko kaafi pashchattap hai. Woh kahi raha hai ki usne kanya vadhi kiya hai usko phasi per taang dena chahiye. Humne apni beti bhi kho de or apna bhai bhi. Hum logo ko ab dono ko kyun delane ke liye ladna hai. (Deepak is remorseful. He is saying that he has murdered a girl, and he should be hanged. We have lost our daughter as well as our brother. Now we have to fight to get justice for both of them)," says Kuldeep. He is flanked by his cousins, even as news reporters clamour to get in, for a possible scoop.

ashok.kumar@thehindu.co.in



Radhika Yadav's home in Gurugram, Haryana; (right) Radhika's father Deepak Yadav. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



KERALA



(Left) Equipment deployed to clear the rubble of the collapsed building at the Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam; (below) Navaneeth and Navami, children of D. Bindu, grieving over their mother's body. VISHNU PRATHAP



Hospitals on sickbed

The functioning of government medical college hospitals has come under scrutiny following the collapse of an ageing building at the Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam.

Hiran Unnikrishnan, C. Maya, Sam Paul A., Mini Muringatheri, and A.S. Jayanth

visit the five major medical college hospitals in Kerala to find out what is ailing the landmark public health institutions

Grief hung heavy in the modest house with its bare floor and unplastered walls. Outside, a few anxious faces looked up as Navami, 20, stepped out, flanked by her ageing grandmother Seethamma. Her father, Vishruthan, sat silently on a chair nearby, eyes brimming.

With a heavy heart, Navami bid a quiet goodbye and walked up the flight of steps leading to the road, where a car waited to take her to the Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam. She looked back at her house before getting into the waiting vehicle, as memories of her mother refused to leave her home.

Navami, a final-year BSc nursing student is heading in for surgery. And it is her second attempt. The first trip was on July 1 with her mother, D. Bindu, by her side. But that hospital stay was tragically cut short. Just three days later, on the morning of July 3, a dilapidated bathroom block in the hospital collapsed. Bindu, who was the caregiver for her daughter, was trapped under the rubble. It took over two hours to retrieve her body. By then, she was dead.

The tragedy triggered a political firestorm as the building had been deemed unsafe for over a decade. Opposition parties took to the streets pointing out that patients were forced to use it because of a lack of facilities. After the incident, the bulldozer could not reach the spot on time to rescue Bindu; they pointed out, clashing with the police, demanding the resignation of Kerala Health Minister Veena George.

Accusations flew thick and fast, only to be met with equally forceful counterclaims. But in Navami's home, there was no appetite for blame games. For the family, nothing mattered more than the devastating truth that Bindu was no more.

"They all came. Ministers, party leaders, and the District Collector. They consoled us and gave us assurances. That means something, yes... but we've lost her," says Vishruthan, his voice heavy with sorrow. Ahead of her return to the hospital, a team of doctors visited Navami to provide counselling. The young woman, who has already been assessed by neurologists and orthopaedists, will go under the knife shortly.

Disturbing questions

Amidst the outrage and questions over administrative failures, the disturbing question that emerges is what ails the State's famed Kerala model of health care. Questions are being asked with renewed vigour about patient safety, quality of health-care, ageing infrastructure, and shortage of manpower in government medical college hospitals (MCH) across the State.

Public health experts fear that underinvestment in the infrastructure sector and human resources is finally taking its toll. A recent social media post of Haris Chirackal, Head of the Department of Urology of Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital, on the shortage of facilities at the hospital and the resultant sufferings of patients had grabbed the headlines.

His post, raw with helplessness, struck a nerve with his colleagues across the State. The hospital, Kerala's first MCH, has grown well beyond its present infrastructural and human resources availability. Departments expand, new equipment is added yearly, but the staff strength remains frozen in time.

"It is ridiculous that the cumbersome and outdated procedures for equipment maintenance



Hospitals cannot run on government funds alone any more. We need functional autonomy and self-sustaining models

K.V. VISHWANATHAN
Director of Medical Education in charge.

and purchase that are generally applied to all government departments are brought to bear on the MCHs too, because these are hospitals which run round the clock, handling a huge patient load. For the purchase of any accessory above ₹1 lakh, the file has to be cleared by the District Collector, who heads the hospital development society (HDS). Red tapism is slowing the process and a department head will often have to spend a lot of time pursuing a file through various administrative sections to ensure that it reaches its destination for clearance," confides one of the department heads at Thiruvananthapuram MCH.

"Instead of going on a spree of constructions and purchase of fancy equipment, the government should focus on the timely maintenance of existing buildings, equipment, and facilities properly to improve the quality of health-care," he adds.

Lopsided investment in focus

Rosenara Beegum, Professor of Nuclear Medicine and president of the Kerala Government Medical College Teachers' Association, points out that health-care today is a resource-intensive and technology-driven one. "But the government invests only in infrastructure and not in people. What good is a catheterisation laboratory (a specialised medical facility equipped with advanced imaging and monitoring technology) without anyone to run it round the clock?"

Departments such as Gynaecology, Orthopaedics, and Surgery, with high patient load, haven't seen post creation in years. Frequent transfers prevent doctors from investing in departments long term and bureaucratic hurdles make even basic maintenance a nightmare, she points out.

Even the stopgap funding options are drying up. The hospital development societies are now cash-starved thanks to delayed reimbursements from the Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhati (KASP), the State's flagship health insurance scheme. The government owes public hospitals a whopping ₹1,203.59 crore as KASP reimbursement, say public health experts.

The only source of income for the hospital development societies is the meagre user fee collected for some procedures or CT and MRI scans from the paying category of patients.

"Hospitals cannot run on government funds alone any more. We need functional autonomy and self-sustaining models," says K.V. Vishwanathan, Director of Medical Education in charge. "Funds are never sufficient because people loath to pay any kind of user fee. A recent proposal to introduce an outpatient ticket fee of ₹10 was greeted with stiff resistance. The HDS has to find funds for waste management and annual maintenance contracts," he points out.

"We can't turn anyone away," Dr. Vishwanathan adds. "Unless secondary hospitals are strengthened, medical colleges will keep overflowing." The manpower crunch has hit the Alappuzha MCH hard. The posts of 80 Assistant Professors, 10 Associate Professors, and two Professors are lying vacant, including those on leave. This is one MCH in the State without a pay ward.

U.M. Kabeer, a member of HDS, says that patients have to wait up to six months for heart surgeries. Immediate steps should be taken to fill the vacant posts of doctors, he says.

Hospitals overstretched

"Over 1,500 patients undergo medical treatment daily as inpatients, which is more than the bed strength of 1,050 of the hospital. The construction of the pay ward is under way. We hope to fill the vacancies soon," says a hospital administrator.

The story is much the same in the Kozhikode MCH. Serving five northern districts of Kerala, the hospital handles 2,000 to 3,000 people in its outpatient department a day. But staffing levels remain stuck in the 1960s. Distributors of drugs and surgical devices stopped their supplies due to non-payment of bills at least twice in the past two years. Even though the supplies were resumed, the dues have not been completely cleared.

At the Kottayam MCH, however, the immediate concern is the future of the old buildings. Will they be retained or razed down? A safety au-

dit by the Public Works department is under way to determine the answer.

Official sources hold that the existing block, which collapsed, was constructed way back in 1964. "The existing building safety rules stipulate a sufficient pathway to bring in rescue machinery around the structure. Without a passage, an earthmover could not be brought in time to begin the rescue mission," admits a top official.

Everyone agrees on the diagnosis

With an ever-increasing number of patients, ageing infrastructure and paucity of funds and manpower shortage, the flagship public health institutions of the State are showing signs of severe stress. Experts suggest measures like administrative revamp, updating purchase rules, financial autonomy to institutional heads, and investment in human resources to resuscitate the system.

Jose Chathukulam, a public health expert and Director, Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam, notes that the MCHs are grappling by an efficiency crisis, riddled with restrictive practices and guarded by an iron shield of public affection.

"Even while the post of the Principal and the superintendent goes to the seniors, they should be supported by a professional team of administrators. Kerala shall raise funds to invest in infrastructure, health administration, and human resources in the health sector," he suggests.

Minister's stance

Veena George, Minister for Health, says the medical colleges together received over ₹3,500 crore during the last five years for improving the infrastructure. "The period also witnessed upgradation of treatment facilities, introduction of modern equipment, quality improvement in medical education, and opening of super-specialty blocks and departments in various colleges. The MCHs are poised for a huge leap in terms of quality and high-end treatment. We are constantly striving to cater to the ever-increasing needs of people, who are depending on the hospitals," she says.

"If the annual OP registration in government hospitals, including the MCHs, was eight crore in 2015, it's now 13.5 crore, which alone shows the trust the people have reposed in the MCHs. Though the MCHs are considered referral hospitals, a situation has emerged where any patient can walk in and get the required medical treatment. All the MCHs are handling patients three to four times their bed capacity. This has led to an unpleasant situation where people are forced to occupy every available space in the hospitals. The dependence of people on the public health system has also led to a situation where private hospitals are forced to slash their treatment costs," says Ms. Veena.

"We are at present handling a larger number of patients than the existing capacity of all the MCHs taken together. It is adding a huge load on the system. All the major medical colleges across the State saw development projects being implemented during the past few years. Dearth of funds is no longer an issue for the healthcare sector. The government is pooling resources from all possible sources to step up the quality of health-care," she asserts.

The solatium announced by the government may bring some relief to Navami, who lost her mother in the accident. Thousands of patients such as Navami are looking up to the government and the medical college hospitals to regain health and bounce back to life.



Health Minister Veena George consoling the family of D. Bindu. VISHNU PRATHAP

the hindu businessline.

MONDAY • JULY 14, 2025

Plane truth

Don't use Air India crash interim report to assign blame

The preliminary report of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) into the crash of Air India Flight AI 171 offers a chilling finding: fuel supply to both engines was cut off three seconds after take-off from Ahmedabad. Fuel-control switches for each engine, which are not meant to be touched during flight, were found to have moved from "Run" to "Cutoff", effectively shutting down both engines at a critical moment of ascent.

The simultaneous and unexplained cutoff of fuel casts a long shadow over the tragic incident, while also opening up several difficult questions. The AAIB has acknowledged the improbability of accidental activation, as the switches are spring-loaded and mechanically protected against unintended movement. It has not, however, established definitive cause or intent. Was it a mechanical failure? Was there an inadvertent signal from an external system? Or was there a moment of human error under duress that we still do not fully understand?

Further complicating the picture are technical advisories from the past cited by the AAIB report. While the report has not recommended "actions to Boeing 787-8" engine operators and makers "at this stage", it did refer to a 2018 US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) warning regarding potential issues with the fuel control switch locking mechanism on various Boeing models. The warning came after reports that these switches were sometimes installed without the locking feature engaged, potentially allowing for inadvertent movement during flight. This advisory is relevant to the Air India crash, as the aircraft involved, a Boeing 787-8, had the same type of fuel control switches with the same locking mechanism. The fact that such vulnerabilities were known and yet not addressed through binding regulation, raises questions about oversight and compliance.

Reactions from the aviation community have been sharp, particularly from pilots' associations. There is concern that the narrative emerging from the preliminary findings appears too quick to lean on the possibility of pilot error. Excerpts from the cockpit voice recorder, particularly one exchange where one pilot is heard asking, "Why did you cut that off?", have been interpreted by some as suggestive of blame. But without full contextual evidence, such fragments should not be used to cast aspersions, especially when the pilots are no longer alive to respond. Pilots' unions have rightly cautioned against what they perceive as a pattern: a tendency to shift focus towards cockpit error when systemic or design issues may be at play. There is discomfort with the possibility that conclusions may be drawn in ways that shield aircraft manufacturers from deeper scrutiny. The AAIB report is a preliminary document. To extrapolate blame or motive from it is to risk undermining the integrity of the investigation. The final report will hopefully be shaped by exhaustive technical analysis, consultation with experts and full transparency.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

Global manufacturing blues

Last month, amidst the 12-day Israel-Iran war and the US's heavy bombing of Iran nuclear facilities, one vital economic data that came out about the US slipped under the radar. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics said that 4 lakh US manufacturing jobs are being unfilled. This number, the Bureau says, is likely to go up with the Trump administration keeps up with the rhetoric of reviving US manufacturing and relying less on goods from abroad.

This crucial data reveals a key aspect about the US job market. Less and less Americans are interested in college education and getting into higher paid white collar jobs. Also, US companies cannot hire High School graduates and employ them on the shop floor. They need to be trained and US President Donald Trump's cuts in training programmes for blue-collar workers isn't making life easy for employers.

These vacant manufacturing

jobs are also unlikely to be filled by migrant labour given Trump's moves on the immigration front. This brings us to the larger question of the future of manufacturing in the global economy. A recent issue of *The Economist* magazine concluded that the "mania for manufacturing is not just misguided. It is self-defeating." *The Economist* cover story, evocatively titled "The Manufacturing Delusion", is critical of global industrialisation — by the US, Germany, Indonesia and India — to revive manufacturing. It cites India's high growth, despite manufacturing being stuck at 15-16 per cent of GDP, to prove its point. The article says that since 2013 manufacturing jobs have been shrinking worldwide, even in China, whose humongous industrial capacity is often blamed for the deindustrialisation of many parts of the world. Also, manufacturing jobs have become more specialised and automated.

Coming back to the US, if Americans are reluctant to return to manufacturing, how can manufacturing be revived without migrant labour?

LINE & LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Recently the Press Information Bureau of India embarrassed itself by putting out a note saying India is the "fourth most equal" country in the world. As the British saying goes, "and pigs have wings". The PIB guy who came up with this could have looked out of his window and seen the reality.

Since then a lot of people have pook-pooked this great discovery which was culled out of a World Bank study. The sleight of hand or mental confusion, it's hard to say which, was because of comparing income inequality with consumption equality. But even a like-for-like comparison would not have made India a haven of equality.

The purpose here is not to discuss the statistical aspects of inequality. On those a huge amount of discussion is already there.

Instead, I thought it might be useful to find out who came up with the idea of the Lorenz Curve and the Gini Coefficient, and why. It's quite an interesting story which, in a way, serves to somewhat reduce our blind faith in the latter number. It indicates the degree of inequality in a society or country.

Two American economists and an Italian statistician-cum-sociologist, called Corrado Gini, are responsible for it. All three are dead by the turn of the last century.

The first of them was called Max O Lorenz. After whom the Lorenz curve is named. This curve underlies the Gini coefficient, which measures what percentage of total income in a country goes to what percentage of people.

But guess how this Lorenz curve thing happened. Max O wrote an undergraduate essay, not even a paper, in which he talked about the curve that later came to be named after him.

It's a rather crude measure but an effective one. Its distance from a 45 degree line on an XY graph measures inequality. But there's one huge problem with it. The data has to be totally complete and fully reliable.

So what you get in, say Scandinavia where the data is close to perfect, isn't what you get in India where the data is as dodgy as can be. It is important to keep this in mind, but a majority of income scholars don't.

Xxxx In 1902 Lorenz enrolled for a PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which is now a top class research institution but wasn't so well-established in 1902. There his research thesis was on wages on American railroads and in it he made no mention of his curve. Not very much is known about him.

In 1912 another economist/statistician called Wilford E King, from the same university, immortalised Lorenz by coming up with the name Lorenz curve.

Hindi speaking States have a higher Gini than most of the non-Hindi speaking ones. Yet, spending more money there has made no difference at all

The rest, as they say, is history. King was a top class statistician. He was an early scholar of income studies. But he wasn't a lefty by any means and was, actually, quite conservative in his views.

He was opposed to government intervention in the economy and to monetary expansion. He also wanted the taxes on the rich to be reduced. In other words, his views were the opposite of John Maynard Keynes.

POLITICS AND THE GINI

The Lorenz curve and the Gini coefficient remained where they were for more than half a century. Then democracy raised its many-splendoured head and the idea of income inequality became a powerful talking point for politicians, especially of the Left who love misery, as Harry Belafonte sang, like a "pig loves a pool of mud".

Sometime in the 1970s the World Bank reoriented its efforts in the direction of gathering and analysing

more data. This happened because American politicians started demanding to know how impactful was the money being distributed by the Bank.

By the end of the 1980s it had become a massive repository of all sorts of data, including about incomes and their distribution. It was a logical step then to calculate the Gini coefficients, which could be used to justify all sorts of expenditure policies.

Hindi speaking States have a higher Gini than most of the non-Hindi speaking ones. Yet, spending more money there has made no difference at all. If anything the Gini has almost definitely worsened. There are some problems throwing money at what is futile.

It is like baldness which helps sell all sorts of cures for it even though everyone knows it will be of no use. In exactly the same way the Gini helps justify all sorts of political expenditures even though everyone knows it's a waste of taxpayer money.

Useless information has huge political utility

Like baldness, spending money is not a cure for inequality

India's strategic pivot in research and innovation

The Research Development and Innovation scheme bridges the gap between laboratory research and commercial viability

Aditya Sinha

The story of modern economic growth is the story of sustained investment in research and development (R&D). Between 1820 and 2000, global GDP surged 300-fold, and average incomes rose thirteenfold. This unprecedented economic acceleration was inseparable from the institutionalisation of science, protection of intellectual property, and rise of national innovation systems.

Britain's ascent was built on the foundations of legal and institutional reform. The Statute of Monopolies (1624) introduced modern patent rights, while the Glorious Revolution (1688) secured private property, encouraging innovation. By mid-19th century, British patent filings had tripled, while inventions such as the steam engine and spinning jenny revolutionised industry and agriculture. In the 20th century, the US took the baton, embedding innovation deep into its state architecture. From 1950 to 2020, federal R&D expenditure rarely fell below 2 per cent of GDP.

India, despite now being the world's fourth-largest economy, has historically underinvested in R&D. National spending remains stuck below 0.7 per cent of GDP, well behind China (2.4 per cent), the US (3.4 per cent), and even Brazil (1.2 per cent). However, over the past decade, India has made visible progress in expanding its scientific ecosystem, particularly in

biotechnology, space, ocean science, and rural technologies.

Yet the most important shift has come in the last two years. The government has begun re-engineering institutional architecture of Indian science. The establishment of Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) with a ₹50,000 crore outlay signals a clear intent to mainstream research into economic policy. ANRF's Advanced Research Grant (ARG) scheme provides competitive funding across Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 1-6), encouraging high-impact fundamental and applied research. Designed to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and bold scientific inquiry, ARG represents a departure from incrementalism and a move towards mission-driven innovation.

EXPENDITURE RULES

Equally significant are reforms in Ease of Doing Research. Earlier, expenditure rules inadvertently hindered R&D by enforcing generic accountability norms on complex scientific procurement. Last month, the Department of Expenditure corrected course by amending General Financial Rules (2017).

Procurement limits for scientific goods under Rules 154 and 155 have been doubled, while ceiling for Limited Tender Enquiries has been raised from ₹50 lakh to ₹1 crore. Importantly, vice-chancellors/directors can now independently approve Global Tender Enquiries up to ₹200 crore. These changes remove long-standing



FUNDING. Key to fostering R&D

bottlenecks that slowed acquisition of high-end scientific equipment.

The most transformative intervention came on July 1, 2025, when Cabinet approved the ₹1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme. For the first time, India has created a financing mechanism tailored to private industry in higher TRLs. The scheme offers long-term, low or zero-interest loans and equity support for sunrise sectors and strategic technologies. Anchored by ANRF and supported by a Deep-Tech Fund of Funds, RDI scheme addresses the chronic underinvestment by private industry in higher TRLs. It bridges the so-called "valley of death" between laboratory research and commercial viability. It redefines role of the Indian state from a passive funder to an active enabler of innovation.

To sustain momentum, financial thrust of the RDI scheme must be complemented by demand-side

interventions that create predictable markets for innovation. Funding alone is not sufficient. Innovators need assurance that their solutions will find buyers. This requires proactive procurement reforms that reduce risk for early-stage technologies, innovation-linked offtake mechanisms that guarantee market access upon meeting performance thresholds, and mission mandates that direct public spending towards strategic outcomes.

The Innovation for Defence Excellence (IDEX) platform exemplifies this approach, by linking defence procurement with start-up innovation, it reduces time-to-market and provides an assured customer in the armed forces. Expanding similar models across sectors can crowd in private R&D, lower adoption risk, and accelerate India's transition from lab-scale research to industrial deployment. Demand creation through public procurement thus becomes a powerful lever to convert research investments into scalable, market-ready solutions.

India now stands at a historic inflection point. Having secured a viable innovation ecosystem and begun correcting long-standing institutional rigidities, it must double down. No nation has achieved high-income status without sustained, large-scale investment in research and development. For India to meet its Viksit Bharat 2047 aspirations, it must become a producer of frontier science.

Sinha writes on macroeconomic and geopolitical issues

● BELOW THE LINE



PDF locks are the key

The buzz in bureaucratic circles is that a minister and his secretary are not getting along. But the two manage to keep cordial relations on the face of it. Recently, the bureaucrat was found grumbling in select circles about selective "information leak" on crucial meetings.

The ministry has been getting a "bad press". So, the minister and the top bureaucrat had a closed-door meeting on shutting down "selective information flow", while identifying some of the junior officers as possible leak-points.

A possible use of PDF locks and keeping "no written notes" of meetings/minutes of the meeting have been outlined as possible solutions.

Last word

As head of State government, a chief minister is often the last person to address a public event. Speaking at a Civil Aviation Ministry event in Mumbai on Friday, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis narrated the advantages and disadvantages that a speaker who

speaks last at an event faces.

The disadvantage is that everyone else has spoken everything about the subject and there is nothing much to be said and the advantage is as chief guest you can come unprepared. "Whatever (Civil Aviation Minister) Naidu ji spoke in Hindi I can speak the same in Hindi", Fadnis said, evoking applause and laughter from the attendees.

In reality, Fadnis's speech was not a copy of Kijarapu Rammoah

Naidu's speech; he gave a progress report on various airports projects in Maharashtra.

Payback time

A job search website recently published data on salaries across various cities in the country. It said Chennai offers the best salary for

entry-level jobs. But those in the know are dismissing it, saying the study could be misleading. In particular, it ranks Bengaluru after Chennai.

Bengaluru is reportedly offering better salaries for entry-level jobs compared to Chennai since the cost of living is higher in the Karnataka capital, particularly concerning housing. A little bird says the salary, even for a middle-level employee, is lower in Chennai compared with other cities.

Was the survey done with an eye on the State Assembly elections early next year?

Water debate

It was a week of political drama in Hyderabad, with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and BRS Working

President K Rama Rao trading barbs over a 'debate' on the row over the ongoing water allocation tussle with Andhra Pradesh.

Responding to the Chief Minister's challenge, KTR arrived at the Press Club with a large delegation of party leaders and workers, and even arranged a chair for the Chief Minister should he decide to grace the occasion. KTR flayed Reddy, who was camping in Delhi, for backing out of the debate. On his return, Reddy responded in his usual sarcastic tone and offered to go to BRS President K Chandrababai Naidu's farmhouse for the debate. The political stalemate continues, with both sides waiting for a debate that will likely never happen. **Our Bureau**

8 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

LEND A HAND

There are at least three reasons why India should consider stepping up its funding of Mexico-based CIMMYT

THE MEXICO-HEADQUARTERED International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) — synonymous with Norman Borlaug, the “father of the Green Revolution” — is seeking financial support from India. This comes as the Donald Trump administration has shut down the US Agency for International Development, which provided \$83 million out of CIMMYT’s total \$211 million revenue grants to fund its global breeding research and development programme in the two cereal crops. CIMMYT basically wants countries such as India to fill the void left by the US that, under President Trump, has adopted a transactional approach to foreign policy; it no longer sees value in cultivating soft power or projecting a positive image of the US on the world stage. There are at least three reasons why India should consider stepping up its funding of CIMMYT, or even the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

The first is that the money these organisations require isn’t all that big. A country with \$700 billion in official foreign exchange reserves can afford more than the \$0.8 million and \$18.3 million that it gave to CIMMYT and IRRI respectively in 2024. The second is the international goodwill this creates, consistent with the leadership role that India is increasingly taking within the Global South and given that it is also acting as a bridge with the developed North: There can be no peace and stability without food security. Third, India has stakes in both organisations that played a stellar role in turning it from ship-to-mouth to self-sufficient, if not surplus, in wheat and rice. But the challenge is to grow these crops using less water and fertiliser, besides making them tolerant to rising temperatures, salinity and other abiotic stresses. Breeding today for tomorrow’s climate is a strategic imperative for a country that cannot, beyond a point, depend on others to feed 1.7 billion mouths by 2060. This extends to maize too. As Indians consume more animal products with rising incomes, the demand for it as feed — and now also as a fuel grain — will only go up.

But it’s not only CIMMYT and IRRI. India must simultaneously strengthen its national agricultural research system that has suffered from a lack of resources (too little money spread across too many institutes), leadership and sense of purpose. The Green Revolution owed its success as much to Borlaug as to MS Swaminathan, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute and a minister like C Subramaniam, who could make tough calls based on scientific opinion and the current demand. Contrast this with the present procrastination, whether on commercialisation of genetically modified crops or allowing under-pricing of fertilisers, water and electricity. The Indian farmer today faces practical problems that only science and applied research, not subsidies, can address.

MOM’S NOT THE WORD

IT-Kharagpur must ensure that its ‘Campus Mothers’ proposal on mental health is not sheathed in stereotype

A UNRELENTING ACADEMIC culture, the isolation of hyper-competitive environments and a system fuelled by ambition that has little room for outliers — across India’s premier institutes of higher education, the mental-health crisis has become a tragic thread in a widening pattern of student distress. Against this backdrop, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur’s proposal to launch a ‘Campus Mothers’ initiative — appointing female mentors from among the women residing on campus, both faculty and non-faculty, to provide informal emotional support to students — presents itself as a compassionate intervention. However, its framing — the troubling tendency to offload responsibility and caregiving on women — raises concerns about gender stereotyping and carries the risk of substituting deeper, more difficult structural reforms with symbolic gestures.

To its credit, IIT-Kharagpur’s proposal is part of a growing acknowledgement within elite institutions that student wellbeing can no longer be treated as an afterthought. In 2025 alone, Kharagpur has reported three student suicides. In May, a 10-member committee was set up for a detailed intervention plan; efforts are under way to introduce AI-based support tools; and moves to ease attendance norms and reduce academic pressure have shown early promise. These efforts must be expanded, not eclipsed by a programme that conflates care with maternal instinct. By designating only women to serve as “campus mothers”, it inadvertently thrusts a disproportionate emotional burden on women on campus, often already balancing their own personal and professional challenges. It also reduces complex emotional labour to a function of gender. There are other conceptual deficits. The initiative has been conceived as an additional layer of social intervention to buttress formal mental-health services. But mental-health assistance is not a matter of intuition or goodwill. Rooted in the complications of gender, class, caste, language, and identity, it requires professional training, ethical grounding, and clear institutional frameworks to help students navigate systemic inequalities. Even with the best intention, informal mentorship can slide into moralising, paternalism, or breaches of trust. What the fraught journey of young adults trying to come to terms with their distress needs is a safe, confidential space to unpack their traumas.

This is not to say that community support within campuses is unimportant. Meaningful engagement can build trust and a sense of belonging, especially for first-generation learners venturing out into the world on their own. A more inclusive and thoughtful model that invites faculty, staff and residents of all genders to serve as trained “campus mentors”, for instance, would reflect the span of empathy, equality, and shared responsibility. It would ensure that care does not come sheathed in stereotypes and send out the message that nurturance is not a woman’s job alone; that kindness, and emotional intelligence are universal values, not gendered traits. IIT-Kharagpur has begun the conversation. It must now deepen it.

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



SYED AKBARUDDIN

RIVERS OBEY GRAVITY, not flags. Yet, as the snow-fed waters of the Indus system flow silently across borders, the roar of geopolitics now echoes louder than ever. The supplemental award of the Court of Arbitration in The Hague on June 27 has again turned attention to the simmering challenges confronting the Indus Waters Treaty.

The tribunal rejected India’s suspension of the Treaty and reaffirmed its jurisdiction despite India’s absence from the proceedings. India responded swiftly, it called the court illegal, the proceedings irrelevant, and reiterated that the Treaty stands in abeyance until Pakistan abjures cross-border terrorism.

The simmering dispute over the Indus Waters Treaty is not just about water. It is about sovereignty, security, and a Treaty that has withstood conflicts for over six decades but now strains under the pressures of asymmetric warfare. The question before India is not only legal. It is strategic, too. What happens when a peace agreement becomes a shield for a party that wages proxy war? What happens when rivers meant to irrigate fields begin to flood battlefields of perception?

The Indus Waters Treaty brokered by the World Bank in 1960, was hailed as a triumph of cooperative diplomacy. It partitioned the rivers of the Indus basin between India and Pakistan, granting India full rights over the eastern rivers and limited use of the western ones. Despite wars and political breakdowns, the Treaty endured because it insulated water from politics. But terrorism has no insulation. And India, bleeding from attacks launched across the very rivers it shares, reached the limits of forbearance.

The Hague tribunal’s award may be procedurally valid. It reflects the logic of legal permanence. Pakistan, which initiated the proceedings, argued that disputes over interpretation should be addressed legally and stated that India’s suspension was unjustified. The Treaty, the panel concluded, cannot be suspended unilaterally, and jurisdiction, once triggered, cannot be undone by later events.



GURVEER SINGH BRAR

STANDING BY the windswept shores of Ahakista in Ireland, where the debris of Air India Flight 182 fell on June 23, 1985, felt the weight of history and humanity converge. The Kanishka bombing, which stole 329 innocent lives, is not just a chapter in aviation history; it is a solemn reminder of how terrorism devastates families, communities, and nations alike.

This year we marked the 40th anniversary of this tragedy in Ahakista. I was part of an official Indian delegation led by Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, supported seamlessly by the Ministry of External Affairs. This was not to merely observe a date, but to reaffirm our collective promise: India will always honour its people, no matter how far they are or how many years have passed, and will continue to seek justice until it is delivered.

As I stood before the memorial, watching a local Irish resident place a white rose on the plaque, I was reminded that the power of shared grief transcends borders, turning remembrance into a bridge of empathy between nations. It was deeply moving to see how Ireland, despite not having a single citizen on that flight, built and continues to maintain this memorial. It is a reminder of the collective responsibility we share in standing against terrorism.

During the commemoration, Ireland’s Prime Minister Micheál Martin described the Kanishka bombing as a “cruel and horrific” act of terror, reminding us that “the passage of time does not dim the scale of this loss”. His words reflected how this tragedy has fostered a deepened bond between India and



Drawing a line in water

Hague ruling on Indus Waters Treaty revives legal debate. But trust cannot flow when terror does

The Hague tribunal’s award may be procedurally valid. It reflects the logic of legal permanence. Pakistan, which initiated the proceedings, argued that disputes over interpretation should be addressed legally and stated that India’s suspension was unjustified. The Treaty, the panel concluded, cannot be suspended unilaterally, and jurisdiction, once triggered, cannot be undone by later events. But the law cannot be blind to context. India did not act lightly. It placed the Treaty in abeyance after Pakistan-based terrorists killed dozens of Indians in a brazen attack in Pahalagam on April 22. When blood stains the snow of the Pir Panjal, the abstractions of international law ring hollow.

India has not cut off water or violated Pakistan’s share. Instead, it has frozen the instruments of cooperation as a wake-up call. The message is stark: Treaties are built on trust, and trust cannot flow when terror does.

Water is often called the last soft commodity, and experts emphasise that it must remain above politics. But Pakistan politicised water by sheltering groups that target Indian soldiers and civilians. India’s decision to place the Treaty in abeyance is not vengeance. It is a consequence.

The old order of water-sharing, insulated from politics, is unlikely to survive unchanged. As India plans for the future, it faces a range of strategic choices beyond the purely legal. It can continue boycotting arbitration to deny it legitimacy. It can withdraw from the Treaty entirely, though this carries risks. It might also maximise its legal entitlements, including the neutral expert’s forthcoming decision, and use structural advantages to pressure Pakistan without breaching the agreement. Another path is to offer conditional cooperation, using upstream geography as leverage, if Pakistan meets clear and verifiable conditions. A more cautious approach would involve keeping technical channels open while political tensions persist. Each course demands a careful balance of resolve and restraint that matches the stakes.

Other river basins offer cautionary tales. In the past, Egypt has threatened to use force over Ethiopia’s Grand Renaissance Dam. Thailand and Vietnam often complain about China’s control of the Mekong. These flashpoints offer ample proof that there are no outright winners. While geography sets the opening bid, legitimacy and transparency determine whether power

becomes a lasting advantage or an enduring grievance. India’s choice must blend firmness with foresight. India should expand its infrastructure and fully utilise both its entitled share of the eastern rivers and its permissible use of the western ones under the Treaty. It must do so with transparency, precision, and speed.

At the same time, India should craft a diplomatic path that links re-engagement to Pakistan’s demonstrable action on terror. This is not a compromise. It is conditional justice. If Pakistan wants the benefits of the Indus water system, it must stop using terror as a tool.

India must also speak to the world with clarity. It is not undermining peace. It is demanding that peace be real. It is not holding water hostage. It is refusing to be hostage to hypocrisy. If the international community wishes to preserve the Indus Waters Treaty, it must ensure Pakistan fulfils its obligations. That includes refraining from exporting violence under the cover of cooperative agreements.

The Indus is a lifeline. For Pakistan, yes. But also for India, not just as a source of water, but as a symbol of resilience, restraint, and rights. India’s policy must reflect that duality. It must be hard-headed in execution but clear-eyed in intention. It must signal that peace is not weakness and justice is not optional.

In the end, regardless of choices, the Indus and its waters will flow. The question is whether the nations they nourish will choose harmony over hostility. India has drawn its line. Now, Pakistan must decide whether to treat the Indus system as rivers of peace or allow them to become rivers of tension. By choosing a firm but just path, India can prove that strength and responsibility can still flow together.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kauliyo School of Public Policy, Hyderabad

FROM REMEMBRANCE TO RESOLVE

Forty years after Kanishka bombing, India stands firm in war on terror

Ireland, and Canada in the collective fight against terrorism. Echoing this sentiment, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney described the Air India bombing as “the deadliest terrorist attack in our country’s history”, reaffirming Canada’s commitment to stand firmly against violent extremism.

The Kanishka bombing was not an accident but a deliberate act of terrorism, carried out by extremist elements. It is a significant moment that Canada’s intelligence agency, CSIS, now publicly recognises Canada-based Khalistani extremism as a real and growing national security threat and not merely a foreign concern. This acknowledgment aligns with India’s longstanding position that terrorism must be confronted with unwavering resolve, wherever it arises. As Canada’s UN envoy Bob Rae stated at the memorial, “Canadians need to know that the bomb was placed in Canada, and this act of terror must be etched deeply into Canadian history.” His words underscore the shared responsibility of nations to transform remembrance into a call for accountability and collective action.

As Minister Puri aptly stated during the commemoration, the Kanishka bombing was “a crime against humanity”. This convergence of voices and acknowledgments strengthens India’s call for global cooperation to dismantle terror networks and eliminate the support systems that sustain extremist violence. It transformed our presence in Ahakista from a solemn tribute to a clear stand for global justice and a shared commitment to preventing such tragedies in the future.

As India moves forward under the New

greater autonomy was kept alive as the first phase of their talks in the Bhutanese capital of Thimphu ended with an agreement to resume on August 12. The Sri Lankan government is expected to bring up fresh proposals on devolution of powers to meet the autonomy demand when the talks resume.

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi made it clear that there was no question of imposing emergency now and he was in favour of settlement of all issues through negotiations. The PM pointed out that at no stage either at his press conference in Delhi or in the past had he said

that he would impose an emergency.

UNION CARIBBE SUE

A TOTAL OF 21,477 Indians were named in a new personal injury lawsuit, filed in a Federal court against the Union Carbide Corporation concerning the 1984 leak of a toxic gas in Bhopal. Melvin Bell, the first US lawyer to file a suit after the accident in India on December 3 that killed about 2,500 people and injured 200,000 represents nearly 25,000 Indians in two separate lawsuits. The suit asks \$15 billion in damages to compensate the victims and to punish the company for negligence.

The writer is a BJP MLA from Sadulshahar, Rajasthan

JULY 14, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

BLACK BOXES IN INDIA

THE BLACK BOXES of the ill-fated “Kanishka” Jumbo jet are likely to be taken to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) or the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) for analysis. The box is in the safe custody of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Both the BARC and TIFR had sophisticated computers to decode the messages recorded in the cockpit voice and digital flight data recorder.

SRI LANKA TALKS

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN the Sri Lanka government and its minority Tamils battling for

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Awkward questions remain over the implementation of the Starmer Macron Channel crossings deal."

— THE GUARDIAN

Proxies & missiles aren't enough

For Iran to transition from a reactive regional disruptor to a true strategic actor, it needs to reinvest in conventional power



SYED ATA HASNAIN

IN APRIL 2024, as Iranian missiles rained down across Israel and many were intercepted mid-air, analysts around the world took note of the sheer scale of Iran's ballistic reach. Many seasoned military minds could easily note what didn't happen — there was no Iranian "air power" to speak of. Not a single Iranian fighter entered contested airspace, no attempt was made to suppress Israeli defences through air dominance, and not one sortie altered the course of events. The long-standing asymmetry in Iran's force structure — a missile-rich, air force-poor doctrine — was laid bare. This was, surprisingly, decades in the making. It's the reality of war that is making this clear on us.

I recall with clarity that in 1992, as someone who regularly tracked military developments, I closely monitored Iran's acquisition of North Korean Hwasong-5 and 6 missiles and the building of the architecture of Iran's burgeoning rocket programme. At that time, too, our assessment was blunt — without a matching air force, Iran could not hope to counter Israel in any meaningful way. There was — and still is — no shared land border. Yet, a set of strong conventional armed forces — army, air force and air defence — was imperative, besides the maritime force. What mattered was the ability to deliver precision strikes from the air, both to deter and to punish, while adequately defending the airspace. Even then, it was evident that Iran was betting on the wrong horse.

Iran's defence posture since the 1990s has been shaped less by hard-nosed strategic logic and more by institutional interests — especially those of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC's progressively growing dominance over defence and foreign policy led to a doctrinal preference for asymmetric tools — missiles, drones, and proxy militias. This was driven by Israel's dominance of the conventional war environment in the Middle East and the reputation gained from major victories against Arab conventional armed forces. It led to Iran choosing to become the world's foremost practitioner of hybrid and grey-zone warfare, from Lebanon to Yemen, Syria to Gaza. Its missile arsenal expanded from basic Scud variants to precision-strike capabilities. Its drones progressed to become battlefield disruptors. But its air force — still operating pre-1979 US-made aircraft like the F-4 and F-14 — remained frozen in time.

Why did Iran, despite close defence ties with Russia and access to Chinese systems, fail to modernise its conventional forces? The answers lie in a mix of structural and doctrinal blind spots.

First, sanctions and isolation played their part. Western arms embargoes after the Revolution, followed by UN Security Council restrictions, effectively barred major transfers of combat aircraft. Even friendly suppliers like Russia and China hesitated, fearing



C.R. Sasikumar

diplomatic costs and technical dependency. This never applied to Pakistan, although one can presume that if the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had not taken place in 1979 and Pakistan had not acquired the status of a US frontline state, its fate, too, may have been similar. As late as 2016, Iranian negotiations for Russian Su-30s stalled due to international scrutiny and internal disagreements.

Second, there was a cost-complexity trade-off, which probably applies more to any air force. A modern air force is expensive, not just to buy but to sustain. Pilots must be trained, platforms upgraded, and supply chains secured. In contrast, missile systems — especially those based on solid fuel and deployed from underground silos — offer lower operating costs, greater survivability, and rapid retaliatory capability. Creating indigenous capability for aircraft manufacturing of the modern kind is almost an impossible challenge. Missiles can still be researched and manufactured.

The North Korean Nodong was Iran's most critical acquisition. It allowed Iran to target Israel and the Gulf with ballistic missiles for the first time. China's role was more discreet. Chinese entities were instrumental in helping Iran build its own production lines, especially for the Fateh-110, Zolfaghar, and later systems. Without these sources, Iran's missile programme would likely have remained a tactical artillery force, not the strategic arsenal it wields today. For a regime obsessed with strategic messaging and revolutionary self-preservation, missiles were the attraction, especially because the Arab nations had invested more in conventional forces and failed. Missiles and rockets also ensured a quasi-multi-front capability, taking some other Arab nations as potential adversaries, too.

Third, and perhaps most important, was strategic culture. The all-powerful IRGC probably viewed conventional force modernisation as secondary to its regional ambitions. Its influence on Iran's foreign policy ensured that Tehran invested in Hezbollah's arsenal, the Houthis' reach and Iraqi militias' re-

A revolutionary guard corps is an excellent mechanism for regime protection, internal security, and ideological enforcement. But when war calls for black-and-white outcomes — dominance, not deterrence — only conventional forces can deliver. Air power remains the centre of gravity in any future conflict, especially in the Middle East, where terrain and geography demand long-reach precision and rapid mobility.

silence, while neglecting its own conventional balance. All of them proved effective in their conflicts, fighting as Iran's proxies, convincing the IRGC that its decision was right. Fighting through proxies was smart, but it was never going to be decisive. It could bleed enemies, not break them. That is the bane of asymmetric proxy war.

The events of 2024-25 should force a review in Tehran. Iran's adversaries — especially Israel — have mastered the art of integrated deterrence: Layered missile defence, electronic warfare, and unmatched airpower.

A revolutionary guard corps is an excellent mechanism for regime protection, internal security, and ideological enforcement. But when war calls for black-and-white outcomes — dominance, not deterrence — only conventional forces can deliver. Air power remains the centre of gravity in any future conflict, especially in the Middle East, where terrain and geography demand long-reach precision and rapid mobility.

Perhaps now, more than three decades after it first chose rockets over wings, Iran will revisit that decision. The conflict dynamics have changed, but the fundamental truth has not: Strategic victory demands air superiority. No amount of missiles can substitute for it. Iran now faces the reality that asymmetry is being countered with global coordination — a major shift from the permissive environment it exploited earlier. Iran's strategic choice to privilege proxies and missiles has reached its upper limit. Israel is not its only adversary. Despite Chinese efforts at rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, the strategic competition in the Gulf remains unresolved. For Iran to transition from a reactive regional disruptor to a true strategic actor, it must reinvest in conventional power. Only then can it match ideology with capability — and rhetoric with reach.

The writer is a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps and member, National Disaster Management Authority. Views are personal

Not so beautiful bill

Its implications for low-income households and green economy shroud its positive effects



SURANJALI TANDON

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP's initiation at the White House was a promise contrary to the new world vision of stable diplomatic ties, greener economies, free trade and reversing decades of tax cuts. Embarking on a journey to "make America great again", Trump unveiled the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB). The Bill quickly turned friends into foes, not least among policy experts, who dread the large fiscal costs. The OBBB, now passed by both houses of Congress and soon to be a reality, proposes to raise the debt ceiling as well as extend tax cuts and deductions introduced by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, 2017, which are set to expire this year. The proposed tax cuts come at the cost of Medicaid, the food stamps programme and energy tax credits, all of which are expected to shrink. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a Washington-based non-profit, estimates that the tax changes, if temporary, will cost \$3.4 trillion in primary deficits over the next decade and add \$41 trillion to the current debt. In sharp contrast, the Joint Committee on Taxation, at the request of the Senate GOP, has pegged the costs at a far lower \$442 billion. This is mainly arrived at through innovative accounting.

Under all estimates, the Bill seems set to deliver a positive macroeconomic impact, although the optimism gets pared down when considering the implications of these measures for low-income households and the future of the green economy. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that the resources available to households in the lowest decile will decrease, whereas those for the top decile will increase. The reduction of taxes on overtime work and tips through 2028 is meant to ensure inclusivity. Yet this is quite insignificant in comparison to the fiscal impact of other tax measures.

With Trump's assurance that America was going to drill away, the removal of tax benefits to the clean energy sector is hardly a surprise. The OBBB is set to close the existing commercial and consumer tax credits under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The obsolescence of the meas-

ure could be ill thought-out, as the American shale industry is at the mercy of OPEC.

To "make America great again", Trump advocated recklessly for inward-looking policies such as tariff hikes, taxes on remittances and immigration control, all of which are attempts to negotiate trade deals bilaterally. This includes the retreat from the global tax deal while getting countries like India and Canada to stall their efforts to apply a digital services tax. The proposals to apply additional income taxes on payments made to persons of a jurisdiction applying "undue foreign taxes" — such as a digital services tax or top-up taxes on payments taxed less than the global minimum rate — are clever negotiation tactics that seem to pay off making it a propitious time for large US corporations.

Caught in the fire is the Federal Reserve, which has adopted a wait-and-watch approach. The tariff, if carried through, can set off inflationary effects that may transmit slowly and may be exacerbated where international oil prices spike again if tempers flare in West Asia. As the world watches the US manoeuvre through international political and domestic economic headwinds, there is no doubt that US debt is expected to rise, more so if defence budgets are to grow. But is the world willing to hold this debt? The US-Iran conflict has further compounded diplomatic ties in the region and has economists guessing about what this may mean for the future. If political stress flares, central banks will have to resume an attentive position. If that be the case, the US will also have to rethink its borrowing plans and tax cuts. The yield of the 10-year US Treasury is among the highest in its S&P rating class, and with the recent Moody's rating cut, the question is if it can borrow additionally at prevailing costs. A pause in interest rate reductions would raise the costs of borrowing. In spite of the elevated interest rates that pose a domestic fiscal problem, a third of US treasuries are held abroad and are largely with Japan, China and the UK. The willingness of these countries to buy the T-bills will also determine the US's prospects of delivering tax cuts. Given that the US is no longer playing a reliable arbiter, with policy driven by temperament, the currency of its government securities may not be unaffected. The promised return of economic glory may be delayed for the US, and for now, the beauty of the bill may only lie in the eye of the beholder.

The writer is associate professor, NIPFP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LITERARY GIANT

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Go, gently into the night' (IE, July 11). C M Naim was an internationally acclaimed man of letters who gave his life to Urdu literature, language, translation and history. He distinguished himself by translating into English the biographies of great Delhi poets like Mir Taqi Mir and Ghalib. He also did pioneering work on the hitherto unexplored territory of Urdu crime fiction, bringing to the fore the long-forgotten writers of the genre. A trip to Palestine in 1989 familiarised him with the ground realities there about which he wrote fearlessly with his characteristic candour.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

FIX ACCOUNTABILITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A bridge falls' (IE, July 11). Building roads, dams, tunnels and bridges is important for creating infrastructure but their regular maintenance and inspection should be of utmost priority. The recent bridge collapse in Vadodra showcased the lackadaisical approach of the government in maintaining old bridges, thus leading to the loss of precious human lives. Studies revealing that 2,130 bridges collapsed in the last four decades is indicative of the lack of accountability and sheer government negligence.

Amandeep Bains, Sirsa

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A bridge falls' (IE, July 11). Politicians, bureaucrats, engineers, and the officials who approved the quality of the bridge are all equally responsible for the tragedy. The state like Gujarat witnessing such mishaps with alarming frequency is very unfortunate. Public safety has taken a backseat. Having massive ambitions to create world class infrastructure is good but not at the cost

of quality, especially when the lives of citizens are at stake.

Bal Govind, Noida

BALL IN EC'S COURT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Listen to the court' (IE, July 12). The Election Court has given an opening to the Election Commission to go about the revision of the electoral roll in the correct way by asking it to consider Aadhaar, elector photo identity card and ration card as proof for voter registration. The EC should not miss the opportunity for course correction and make the "special intensive revision" people-friendly. All the 11 documents listed by the EC in its June 24 notification are meant to prove identity and not citizenship. As such, the EC cannot say that the Aadhaar is only a document for identity verification and not proof of citizenship. The EC cannot hold that Aadhaar, a document that is considered basic for getting other documents, is unacceptable while "dependent documents" obtained on its basis are acceptable. The EC should not try to give reasons for "discarding" the apex court's suggestion on the inclusion of the three additional documents.

G David Milton, Marathandode

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Listen to the court' (IE, July 12). Our Constitution allows only Indian citizens to vote. In an election, the Commission is required to ensure this. The question is: Is the Aadhar card proof of citizenship, and how far is it reliable? The answer to both questions is: No. Aadhar is a proof of identity only. Besides, reportedly, only 89 per cent of people have this card, and the number of fake cardholders is also noticable. If allowed as proof, it will not be a sufficient document alone. EC may have to ask for another document to decide, and this will conflict with the EC's directive to present just one document for SIR.

Y G Choudhry, Pune



MAMIDALA JAGADESH KUMAR

What CUET's critics overlook

System is evolving with each cycle toward a more inclusive admission process

LET'S TAKE A closer look at the policy rationale behind the introduction of CUET. A handful of elite schools dominated the intake at DU in yesteryears. Students from under-resourced boards and rural schools were locked out, not because they were less capable but because their boards followed a more conservative evaluation. CUET, despite its growing pains, attempts to correct that imbalance.

The claim of 5,000 empty seats in a year isn't surprising. With CUET's structured system, students now navigate a wider array of choices across top central universities, which naturally shifts how seats fill up and leaves some spots open in certain colleges. When CUET was introduced in 2022, it wasn't a knee-jerk response, but a step aligned with the National Education Policy 2020 vision. Concerns around coaching and proxy schools merit serious attention, but the blame cannot be laid at CUET's doorstep alone. The coaching culture in India has preceded CUET for decades. CUET has disrupted this space by designing a test that aligns closely with the NCERT curriculum, making it less dependent on external coaching.

CUET doesn't dismantle the federal character as claimed by the critics — it recalibrates it. By including regional languages, CUET decentralises access while maintaining a common evaluation baseline. While early hiccups are inevitable, these challenges open the door to real improvements, such as more test centres in remote areas and tailored help for students with disabilities. The accurate measure won't be this year's roll-

out. It is whether future graduates reflect a system that truly values inclusion.

Acknowledging the anxiety caused by shifting dates and delayed admissions is fair. However, in the context of large-scale national exams, occasional rescheduling is part of operational reality. Rather than disrupting Delhi University's academic calendar, CUET is gradually introducing a unified timeline — something DU has long needed after years of calendar drift, delayed results, and fragmented planning.

"Mop-up" rounds, far from being a sign of system failure, actually recognise the real-life messiness of student choices — adolescents navigating high-stakes decisions deserve second chances, not rigid deadlines. As for the science streams, the real question is whether undergraduate science education has kept pace with student ambition; CUET may streamline access, but revitalising these disciplines calls for better labs, inspired teaching, and fresh curricular thinking. Some say CUET is driving students toward private universities. Perhaps a few students are making that shift. A truly strong public university system won't collapse under this competition. It will adapt, invest, and elevate the learning experience.

Strengthening NTA's foundation means investing in better exam tech, harmonising university timelines, and widening the circle of access to students. Calling CUET a disruption overlooks the magnitude of what it's managing — across more than 250 universities, 13 languages, and lakhs of as-

pirants navigating multiple subject combinations. The system is evolving with each cycle toward a more responsive and inclusive admission process. Admitting 20 per cent extra students to DU was a step required to make sure no deserving student missed admission. Critics overlook the fact that Indian university calendars were never synchronised. By making admissions following a national timeline, CUET provides an opportunity for academic mobility and efficient scheduling.

Colleges shifting classes online due to a lack of classroom space to experiment with flexible delivery models is perhaps not such a bad thing. The previous DU system privileged a few with high board marks. Now, students from rural areas, tribal-dominated districts and government schools can access the same opportunity pool with a national entrance test. The very idea of a "normative" calendar, "normative" workload, or "normative" admissions model is being challenged, and rightly so. Teaching roles will need redefinition. Technology will have to become an ally. CUET isn't the problem. It's the mirror revealing all the things we've long postponed fixing.

CUET challenges outdated assumptions that all Class XII marks carry equal weight. It exposes hidden disparities and makes space for a more level field. Clubs, cultural fests, and co-curricular activities are integral to the university experience. However, their functioning has always had to navigate scheduling challenges, faculty availability, and examination pressures. CUET

did not invent these constraints. The idea that CUET is tilted toward CBSE doesn't hold up to closer scrutiny. CUET has subject-specific choices aligned to multiple state syllabi, multilingual papers, and an expanding network of test centres. CUET is evolving into a more inclusive system.

Attributing the dip in female participation in DU entirely to CUET oversimplifies the issue. If paired with clear information campaigns in aspirational districts, CUET can still become a powerful bridge for young women from small towns to access India's leading universities. CUET has not become a tool of over-centralisation. It is a shared national benchmark with space for regional languages and subject flexibility. The idea of normalising board scores sounds reasonable on paper. The problem is that no formula has truly levelled disparate systems across the more than 60 boards, each with its own curriculum design, marking leniency, and internal politics.

NTA is honestly confronting the paper leak allegations and logistical hiccups. It is working on safeguarding exam integrity. Scrapping CUET due to initial hiccups would be like abandoning a national highway because the first few kilometres were uneven. CUET isn't just an exam; it's a shift from fragmented access to national inclusion. It might take a few years to settle. But we can go back to a system that hid its exclusions behind the mask of Class XII scores?

The writer is former chairman, UGC and Former VC, JNU. Views are personal



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EXPLAINED AVIATION

Mandate of AAIB, probing Ahmedabad plane crash



The tail end of the AI 171 stuck on top of a medical hostel, Bhupendra Ramo

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 13

A MONTH after the Air India flight crash in Ahmedabad, which killed more than 250 people, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) released a preliminary report on Friday.

The 15-page report stated that the two engine fuel control switches onboard transitioned from RUN to CUTOFF position within a second of each other, moments after lift-off. One of the two pilots is recorded as asking the other why he cut off the fuel, to which the other pilot responded, saying he did not. The report has led to further questions and demands for greater scrutiny of the black box data.

Who conducts aircraft probes?

Matters of international civil aviation are governed by the Convention on International Civil Aviation, or the Chicago Convention, signed in 1944. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a UN agency with 193 member countries (including India), oversees its technical standards.

Annex 13 of this convention lays out the international protocols for investigating aircraft accidents and serious incidents. It bestows the responsibility for investigation with the 'State of Occurrence' — the country where the accident happened. Some other countries also have a formal right to participate, such as the 'State of Registry' (where the aircraft is registered) and the 'State of Manufacture' (of the aircraft).

What is the AAIB?

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), a government agency under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, is leading the investigation into the crash.

Until 2012, the Air Safety Directorate of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation investigated accidents and safety-related incidents. In line with the ICAO's Standards and Recommended Practices, and to provide independence to the investigation function from the regulatory function, the government established a new bureau.

What are the AAIB's functions?

In general, the AAIB classifies 'Safety Occurrences' involving aircraft operating in the Indian airspace into various categories. It investigates all 'Accidents' and 'Serious Incidents' with aircraft of an All Up Weight (the total weight of an aircraft with passengers and cargo) of more than 2,250 kg, as well as Turboprop aircraft. It can also investigate other cases.

Under the Aircraft (Investigation of Accidents and Incidents) Rules, 2017, the sole objective of such investigations is the prevention of accidents and incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.

The AAIB deputed investigators to reach the site and gather evidence soon after it receives notice of the incident. Its website states that initially, the aim is to gather and preserve perishable evidence for subsequent analysis. Next, the investigation team reviews evidence to assess the detailed examinations required. Further, documents and records gathered from the Operator, Regulator, involved Personnel, or other stakeholders are analysed. The AAIB is mandated access to all relevant evidence from any agency/organisation without seeking prior official consent.

After completion of the investigation, a draft report is presented internally and accepted by the AAIB Director General. Following further consultations and reviews, the final report is made public and published on the official website.



HARISH DAMODARAN

IT WAS William S Gaud, administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), who coined the term 'Green Revolution'.

In a speech delivered on March 8, 1968, Gaud delivered on the 'paramount importance of the world food problem' and how countries such as India were addressing it through planting of high-yielding varieties of wheat.

This development, he said, had the makings of a new revolution: 'It is not a violent Red Revolution like that of the Soviets... I call it the Green Revolution'.

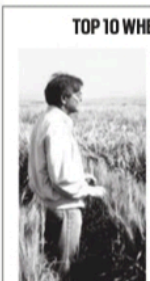
It's the same USAID that has been shut down by the Donald Trump administration from July 1. Among the institutions impacted by the closure of the agency — that oversaw civilian foreign aid and development assistance from the US government — is the Mexico-headquartered International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center or CIMMYT.

Synonymous with the renowned agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug, CIMMYT bred the semi-dwarf varieties Lerma Rojo 64A, Sonora 63, Sonora 64 and Mayo 64 that Indian farmers first sowed in 1964-65. Over the next few years, these varieties spread to more countries, heralding Gaud's 'Green Revolution'.

While CIMMYT originated from a Mexican government and Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored programme in the 1940s and 50s, USAID became its main funder. It accounted for about \$83 million out of CIMMYT's total \$211 million grant revenues received in 2024. With the USAID's dismantling, CIMMYT is now looking at India — one of its major beneficiaries — as a potentially significant beneficiary.

Cold War institutions

CIMMYT is to wheat what the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) — established by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations in 1960 — has been to the other big cereal grain crop.



Sanjay Rajaram, the prolific Indian-origin wheat breeder, CIMMYT

Both were key to the US cultivating soft power and projecting a positive global image, more so during the Cold War. That was the time the US saw the Soviet Union as a threat, and believed that the deteriorating food situation in developing countries could foment political instability and eventual communist takeovers. Increasing cereal grain production in these countries, then, became a geopolitical imperative as part of US foreign policy.

With Borlaug's varieties, Indian farmers could harvest 4-4.5 tonnes per hectare of wheat, as against 1-1.5 tonnes from the traditional tall cultivars prone to lodging (bending or falling over) when their earheads were heavy with well-filled grains.

IRRI's semi-dwarf varieties, such as IR 8, IR 36 and IR 64, similarly boosted paddy (rice with husk) yields from 1-3 tonnes to 4-5.5 tonnes per hectare with minimal fertilisers, and 9-10 tonnes with higher application. Moreover, they matured in 110-130 days, compared with the 160-180 days (from seed to grain) for the traditional tall varieties.

Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970. And it was fittingly for Peace.

How India benefited

The Green Revolution was seeded in India by CIMMYT and IRRI. Even the blockbuster

Chance to repay Green debt

The bodies that helped seed India's Green Revolution are looking at New Delhi for help after USAID was dismantled. This opens up the possibility for India to increase funding and have greater say in their running

TOP 10 WHEAT VARIETIES CULTIVATED IN INDIA					
Variety	Release Year	Developer Institute	Area** (hectares)		
DBW 187*	2019	IITVBR, Karnal	56,81,360		
DBW 327*	2021	-do-	35,00,080		
DBW 303*	2020	-do-	26,44,420		
DBW 222*	2020	-do-	22,98,040		
Raj 4238	2016	RARI, Durgapura	16,15,480		
HD 2967	2011	IARI, Delhi	15,18,200		
Raj 4037	2014	RARI, Durgapura	13,70,220		
WH 1270*	2021	HAU, Hisar	9,64,520		
HI 1634	2021	IARI, Indore	2,32,180		
PBW 826*	2022	PAU, Ludhiana	2,22,000		
TOTAL	-	-	2,00,46,500		

*CIMMYT-derived varieties; **Estimate based on breeder seed indent 2024-25; PWBIR: Indian Institute of Wheat Breeding; Barley Research: IARI; Indian Agricultural Research Institute; RARI: Rajasthan Agricultural Research Institute; HAU: Haryana Agricultural University; PAU: Punjab Agricultural University; Source: CIMMYT

Revolution succeeded in India and not in most other developing countries, specifically Africa. He is said to have replied that it was because 'they didn't have institutions like IARI and scientists like MS Swaminathan'. The latter was instrumental in devising the overall strategy and implementation plan for the Green Revolution, with the full support of the then political leadership — from agriculture minister C Subramaniam to Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi.

Significantly, IRRI's chief breeder Gurdev Singh Khush — his IR 36 and IR 64 varieties were planted in 10-11 million hectares (mh) each worldwide during the 1980s and 1990s respectively — was an Indian.

So was Sanjay Rajaram, appointed by Borlaug as head of CIMMYT's wheat breeding programme when he was just 29. The major varieties released during the 1990s in India — PBW 343, WH 542, Raj 3765 and PBW 373 — were all under his leadership.

Why India still needs them

The accompanying table shows that six out of the top 10 wheat varieties, accounting for over 20 mh out of the roughly 32 mh area sown by Indian farmers in 2024-25, were directly released from CIMMYT material.

The only notable indigenous bred wheat variety in recent times has been HD 2967, which covered a record area of 12-14 mh at its peak in 2017-18 and 2018-19. But the varieties released since then are predominantly based on CIMMYT germplasm.

CIMMYT and IRRI, to that extent, remain relevant to India, which has a vital stake in both institutions. With the US under Trump adopting a more transactional, if not coercive, approach to foreign policy, India has both scope and reason to step up funding of the global breeding research and development programme. In 2024, India contributed a mere \$0.8 million to CIMMYT and \$18.3 million to IRRI.

'We should give more, but it must be for basic and strategic research in areas such as identification of new genetic resources for heat and drought tolerance, nitrogen use efficiency traits, gene editing and use of artificial intelligence tools. And it should be collaborative, not at the expense of funding for our own national agricultural research system,' said Rajendra Singh Parda, former director-general of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

What is the Martyrs' Day row in Jammu & Kashmir

BASHAARAT MASOOD

SRINAGAR, JULY 13

MANY POLITICAL leaders in Jammu and Kashmir were put under house detention on Sunday, to prevent them from visiting Mazar-e-Shuhada (martyrs' graveyard) in the old city area of Srinagar.

July 13 was observed as Martyrs' Day in the erstwhile state. The official commemoration of the day stopped after J&K's special status was revoked in 2019.

This year, with an elected government finally in power, leaders across political lines had planned to visit the graves of the 'martyrs', but the police refused to grant permission. The police in the Union Territory reports to the Lieutenant Governor (L-G).

The history of July 13

On July 13, 1931, when Kashmir was under Dogra rule, 22 people gathered outside Srinagar's central jail as part of a protest were killed in police firing.

In the run-up to July 13, several incidents

had taken place to cause discontent against the rulers. It was in this backdrop that Abdul Qadeer Khan, in June 1931, gave a fiery speech against the Dogras and asked the people to rise against them.

Khan, whose origin is not certain, was a cook of a British Army officer vacationing in Kashmir. Khan was charged by the Dogra regime for sedition.

As his trial began in July 1931, a large gathering of Kashmiri Muslims assembled outside the court of the Session's judge in Srinagar. The trial was shifted to Srinagar central jail, which was put under heavy security protection.

On July 13, around 4,000 to 5,000 people assembled outside the jail to witness the trial. The people tried to enter the premises but were prevented, and they camped outside the jail. It was during this protest that the Dogra police opened fire, killing 22 Kashmiri Muslims and injuring many.

The slain protestors were taken to Srinagar's grand mosque and buried in the premises of the shrine of a Muslim saint,

Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshbandi. It was at this cemetery that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, then a top leader of Muslim Conference — which later became the National Conference — announced that July 13 would 'henceforth be observed as Martyrs' day'.

Official commemoration

July 13 was a state holiday till August 2019, and the Chief Minister and political leaders would visit the martyrs' cemetery in Srinagar to pay tributes. The BJP was always opposed to this.

In 2015, when the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) formed a coalition government with the BJP, then Chief Minister Mehbooba Muft visited the graveyard, but BJP ministers stayed away. They instead, demanded a holiday on the birth anniversary of Maharaja Hari Singh, who was the king when the 1931 killings took place.

After the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5, 2019, the holidays on July 13, as well as on December 5, the birth anniversary of Sheikh

Abdullah, were scrapped. In addition, the L-G administration in 2022 declared September 23, the birth anniversary of Maharaja Hari Singh, as a public holiday.

Omar Abdullah govt in a fix

Since coming to power, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has tried to avoid confrontations with the Centre, earning some criticism in the Valley.

For Martyrs' Day, while the National Conference as a political party had said it would visit the cemetery and had sought permission for an event, the government was silent.

The Peoples Democratic Party had accused the Omar government of 'shifting the onus from elected government to their party'. 'For the first time in 78 years, an elected government in J&K is distancing itself from the martyrs who laid down their lives against autocracy,' the PDP said.

However, on Sunday, after several leaders were detained, Omar called it a 'blatantly undemocratic move'.

'Speech problems among Black Fungus after-effects'

PEOPLE WHO suffered from mucormycosis continue to battle long-term health effects of the fungal infection, such as facial disfigurement and speech difficulty, an Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study said.

There was an uptick in cases of mucormycosis, a rare infection also known as 'Black Fungus', during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Published last month in the journal *Clinical Microbiology and Infection*, the study found that 14.7% of 686 hospitalised mucormycosis patients died within a year, with most deaths during initial hospitalisation.

Conversely, people who received both surgical treatment and combination antifungal therapy (particularly Amph-



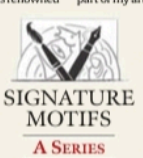
otericin-B formulations with Posaconazole) had significantly fewer survival rates, said Dr Rizwan Sulankatti, an ICMR's National Institute of Epidemiology, the lead author of the study. 'But survivors often faced disfigurement and psychological distress, with more than 70 per cent reporting at least one clinical sequela (complication or disability),' Rizwan said.

'These are not abstract complications. Facial disfigurement, impaired speech, anxiety, and loss of livelihood are lived realities for many survivors. It is time for India to move beyond life-saving interventions and focus on life-restoring systems of care, including mental health support and rehabilitation,' he said. PTI

Art in the everyday: How Subodh Gupta's utensils serve meaning and magic

VANDANA KALRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 13

SUBODH GUPTA, the first contemporary Indian artist to cross the one-million-dollar mark in an auction in 2008, is renowned for his ability to transform quotidian objects such as tin boxes, milk cans and bicycles into monumental and thought-provoking art installations. Kitchen utensils, old and new, have been a recurring motif in Gupta's art, used to comment on a range of subjects, from the political to the familial.



SIGNATURE MOTIFS
A SERIES

Kitchen shelves to art

Growing up in a railway colony in Khajauri, Bihar, some of Gupta's fondest childhood memories are from being in the kitchen with his mother.

The artist vividly recalls the moment in 1998 when he first discovered the artistic

potential of everyday utensils. 'As light suddenly entered the kitchen through the window, the shining utensils caught my eye. I brought all of them into my living room and began putting them together to create different forms. From then on they became part of my art,' Gupta, 61, recalled.

Sourced from shops, craft clusters, factories as well as junkyards, each utensil tells a different story, Gupta said. 'Every single one of them is unique. They carry so many memories, including those of who once owned them. As an artist, if I delve into each individual, I am bound to get lost. When I bring them together I give them another life, another meaning altogether,' Gupta said.

Finding new meanings

A graduate from the College of Art, Patna, Gupta has shaped kitchen utensils in diverse forms over the years, beginning with his first solo held at Chemould Prescott



in Mumbai in 1999.

One of his early works incorporating utensils was *The Way Home* (II) (2001), featuring a life-size white cow encircled with stainless steel utensils and bronze and chrome-plated country-made pistols. The work symbolised the changing political and economic landscape of India, and the political violence in Bihar in the 1990s.

His installation *UFO* (2007) comprised

brass utensils soldered together to resemble a flying saucer, which commented on 'notions of otherness'. Shaped like a mushroom cloud, his installation *Line of Control* (2008) served as a metaphor for conflicts and political tensions in Kashmir.

Among his most recognised works made with reflective stainless steel kitchen utensils, *Very Hungry God* (2006), featured a life-sized human skull to symbolise hu-

man condition and themes of consumerism and globalisation.

Outside of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi, meanwhile, is his banyan tree *Dada* (2007), borrowing its title from the Hindi word for grandfather, the installation reflects on the theme of rootedness and growth, as well as Dadaism, the avant garde art movement of the early 20th century.

For *My Family Portrait* (2013), Gupta took utensils from his brothers and sister to design hanging kitchen racks.

Different forms

Gupta has also explored utensils as conceptual tools, painting them on canvases and centering performances around installations. 'It's also exploring abstract ideas and thoughts... It's like *samudra manthan*, something new emerges every time,' Gupta said.

French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud wrote: 'the material used in most of your work is a veritable conceptual trap that reveals a cultural gap. What ap-

pears luxurious in the West is part of the lexicon of insecurity over there; your work can be compared to a trader who transports material that is plentiful in one place and rare in another.' (*On Cultural Precarity: A letter to Subodh Gupta*, 2008).

Gupta, at present, is preparing for another performance art piece. To take place at the Bukhara Biennial in Uzbekistan in September, this piece will utilise traditional ceramic utensils to construct a large dome structure to explore the culinary and architectural links between Uzbekistan and India. It will also see Gupta, in collaboration with Uzbek chef Pavel Georjanov, preparing a menu that will bring together Indian and Uzbek cuisine. He said: 'Art has a universal language, so do utensils and food... Here, I will be interacting with my audience as they become part of my work...'

This is a part of a series on Indian masters and the motifs that appear repeatedly in their works.

Next: M F Husain's Horses



A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody

Thomas Paine

newindianexpress.com

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Rammath Goenka

T'GANA QUOTA POLITICS: CONG STAKES CLAIM ON BACKWARD CLASS MANDATE

INCREASED reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have been a significant issue for the Congress, with its leader, Rahul Gandhi, frequently citing the Telangana government's approach and vowing to challenge the Supreme Court's 50 percent quota ceiling. The Telangana government passed bills in March to ensure 42 percent reservation for OBCs in education, employment, and local bodies. However, while awaiting the President's nod, the State Cabinet last week also approved an amendment to the Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, providing 42 percent reservations for OBCs in local bodies. There are reasons for it.

Obviously, of course, is the Congress policy. The other is the recent high court directive to the State government to complete local polls within three months. The question now is whether enforcing the quota, most likely through an ordinance, will get the Governor's approval. Constitutional experts believe otherwise, given the apex court verdicts in the *Krishna Murthy vs. Union of India* and the *Indra Sawhney & Others vs. Union of India* cases. The Cabinet's likely push for an ordinance before the local elections signals urgency and a clear political play. At the same time, the state has demonstrated due diligence by establishing a commission to study political backwardness and conducting a survey.

Still, legal liability may be secondary in the Congress's calculations. If the Governor stalls or rejects the ordinance, the party could exploit it, likely portraying it as central interference in a state-led effort to empower the backward classes. The party would expect the campaign to resonate electorally, especially among Telangana's numerically significant BC population, and sharpen the Congress's positioning as a pro-OBC force.

The BJP, meanwhile, is caught in a difficult bind. Despite its national OBC outreach, its recent choice of a Brahmin as state party chief—over expectations of a BC leader—may hurt its grassroots strategy. Inclusion of Muslims in the OBC category could be a tactical pivot, but it comes with political and legal risks. On the other hand, when the Bharat Rashtira Samithi was in power, it tried increasing the quota to 37 percent but ended up reducing it in local bodies. Although it is now battling for 42 percent and threatening agitation, the Congress appears prepared to take it head-on. Ultimately, persistent efforts to hike quotas will yield fruit only through a Constitutional amendment.

NIPAH REALITY: VIGILANCE MUST OUTLAST OUTBREAK

RECURRING outbreaks of the Nipah virus pose an unsettling challenge to Kerala's healthcare system. More than the scale, the frequency is worrying. In the eighth outbreak since 2018, a teen girl from Malappuram died on July 1, and a woman from Palakkad is battling for life. Earlier in May, a Malappuram woman tested positive. As many as 499 people have been identified as contacts of those who have been infected. Seventeen people had died in the most severe outbreak in 2018, and since then, Kerala has reported Nipah infections every year, except in 2020 and 2022. Alarmingly, there were two outbreaks in 2024, and two again this year so far. This increased frequency could be the new normal in Kerala's battle against Nipah.

The question that remains unanswered is why only Kerala appears so vulnerable to Nipah. One hypothesis is that the virus may have become endemic to the state. While the exact mechanism that leads to human infections and localised outbreaks remains poorly understood, experts say that deforestation has deprived fruit bats, said to be the natural reservoir of the virus, of their traditional habitats, leading to their shift to urban areas. A similar situation played out in Malaysia in 1998 when bats migrated to orchards following El Niño and deforestation in Kalimantan and Sumatra, leading to an outbreak. Factors like food scarcity, overcrowding, and the stress of habitat loss can also increase viral shedding, experts contend. It could also be a case of improved detection due to heightened surveillance and awareness; in Kerala, all acute encephalitis cases are also checked for Nipah.

Infectious diseases such as H1N1, Hepatitis A, and leptospirosis already infect thousands, killing dozens every year in Kerala. This underscores the need to strengthen disease monitoring systems, invest in early-warning infrastructure, and promote behavioural changes at the community level. Eradicating Nipah may not be realistic, but minimising its transmission is. Nipah cannot be seen as a consequence of man-animal conflict, but it does emphasise the need for a better understanding of the human-animal-environment relationship. The WHO's 'One Health' approach, which links human, animal, and environmental health, offers a roadmap for long-term preparedness. Kerala must integrate this approach more systematically into its health governance. Nipah is here to stay. Kerala needs to learn to live with the virus safely.

QUICK TAKE

SEMANTICS OF ADDRESS

BANGLADESH has annulled a decree of ex-PM Sheikh Hasina that she be called Sir. They're looking for a replacement title. Sir universally represents the patriarchal dynamic. Searches for female honorifics have narrowed down to Miss, Madam, or Ma'am, depending on the context and women's preferences. The matter doesn't end there. In India, the traditional habit is to address bosses in the security forces and bureaucracy as Sir. The warped logic is that Sir, or *Shriman*, is gender-neutral because it's a non-discriminatory default title for men or women in authority. Those who prefer that gender identities remain dissociated but equal should read IPS officer Manjari Jaruhar's book, ironically titled *Madam Sir*.

It is true that Indian social media influencers have come of age. They probably have more views and clicks than mainstream media practitioners and influence millions more.

However, here's the danger. First of all, their titles and headlines are misleading. Mere clickbait. They include, often misleadingly if not mischievously, the name of some important political bigwig or another US President Donald J. Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in reverse order, are their favourites.

They also claim, week after week, video after video, that some "big action" is being planned. Or some big crash, when it comes to influencers, is in the offing. "Modi check-mates Trump" or "Dedollarisation Underway" are examples of the kind of headlines I am talking about. Of course, few, if any, of their dire warnings or hopeful predictions pan out as promised. Instead, the viewer is taken for a ride through more dangerous drivel or speculative slosh. Worse, many content creators and handles are faking images and voices of famous personalities, such as Oprah Winfrey, Warren Buffett, or Jordan Peterson, in post content that has nothing to do with these worthies.

Some of this material is disinformation, plain and simple, weaponised and deployed for not-so-innocent and outright sinister ends. However, a lot of it is only boasting and bluster, good for business and profits. For, I am told, many of these channels are raking in huge bucks, some in stratospheric numbers exceeding ₹50 lakh or even ₹1 crore a month. With very little investment.

Even among the best of these influencers—whom I won't name, as some are friends—the content is variable and not always reliable. However, one clear trend among all the pro-government channels is a mocking of US President Trump and an exaltation of our own great leader. No harm in old-style patriotism, you say?

But there is a downside to this, which I must spell out. Instead of speaking softly and carrying a big stick, we may end up talking, even shouting and screaming too loudly, while holding a little one. This doesn't augur well for a rising power like India. Why? Self-delusion is sure to land us in a hole which we have to dig out ourselves. I am going to stick my neck out here: India, to go on doing well, probably needs the US more than the US needs us.

Strategic autonomy, another name for non-alignment and another one of India's proven past failures, isn't our best bet when it comes to global geopolitics. Strategic alignment, I can understand, but strategic autonomy means little. And an

The obsession of influencers with sensationalism, whether it's predicting the collapse of the US dollar or hyping up India's supposed geopolitical victories, is misplaced

THE AVERTIBLE INFLUENCE OF ANTI-U.S. BLUSTER

MAKARAND R. PARANJAPE

Author and a commentator

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE



SHOURY BOK

alignment with the US on several key and shared interests—economic, military, technological, political, and cultural—is, therefore, in India's interests.

I have said this earlier, and I will repeat—the arc of Democracy is the world's best bet against chaos and disintegration, not to mention authoritarianism and totalitarianism. And both the US and India, as the world's oldest and largest democracies, form a natural alliance. Instead of mocking Trump's bid for a Nobel Prize, India could have backed it. What do we have to lose? In fact, we should have edged ahead of Pakistan in this game. In exchange for trade and tech benefits, of course.

Our anti-US bluster, often cloaked in nationalist fervour, risks alienating a key

partner at a time when India's global ambitions demand pragmatic alliances. The influencers' obsession with sensationalism, whether it's predicting the collapse of the US dollar or hyping up India's supposed geopolitical victories, is misplaced. This barrage of boasting creates a distorted worldview.

Much of the propaganda is not just misleading but dangerous. The US remains the world's largest economy, with a GDP of nearly \$30 trillion, compared to India's \$3.5 trillion, which is already being projected to exceed \$4 trillion by 2025. US military spending dwarfs India's, and its technological edge, from AI to semiconductors, is hard to beat. It has bases all over the world and unmatched abilities on land, sea, or space.

A COURTESAN'S AWAKENING AND VYASA'S SUBTLE GENIUS

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE



daughter). To take Sita's name in their own weddings was their way of trying to make it up for her forevermore.

Pingala often thought of Sita, whose good character had not saved her from heartbreak. She had been born into a respectable family and had been taught her prayers. But her parents had died of an ill-

ness. She worried about it that evening in the soft purple twilight of Mithila as she stood at her door, and went on worrying until midnight, when she suddenly had a startling revelation. "Just what am I doing making myself unhappy, selling myself to men who are lamentable themselves, and desperately hoping that someone will love me and look after me?"

"Am I so unintelligent that I can't see how pointless this is? This body is but a cage of bones that will burn one day. Somehow, detachment has risen in my heart and set me free of my body."

"The best way to be happy is to be unafraid and live my life confidently with the faith that I'll cope; that 'someone' is with me already," she found herself thinking, amazed at her own clarity of thought. With that resolve, Pingala shut the door and sat down on her bed. No more would she look for affirmation outside when true happiness lay in self-possession and faith in God. Serene in her newfound realisation, she went to sleep happy. "And I learnt from Pingala that people can always remake their lives with independent reasoning," says the young ascetic to the fascinated King Yadu. Retelling the story of Pingala, it struck me that it could have been set in any kingdom. But not only does Videha mean 'bodiless', but also, when set in the realm of Vaidehi Sita, Pingala's story is textured with superb ironic depth. Realising the significance of that location made me feel close to the subversive mind of Vyasa. It was a 'Vyasa moment', as hundreds of thousands of people must have had before me, and always will.

Moreover, what shines through poignantly is that Vyasa, whom we honour on Guru Purnima, himself did not claim that crown but instead tells us very clearly that we should learn from the whole world. The profound humility of Vyasa's intent cannot but melt the stoniest of hearts. What a worthwhile person he is to celebrate. No wonder a stage of honour is called a 'vyasapeeth' or Vyasa's seat even today.

Views are personal
sheebaba09@gmail.com



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Retelling Pingala's story, I realised it could belong to any kingdom, yet Vyasa set it in Videha, the 'bodiless' land of Vaidehi Sita, adding layered irony and depth. That realisation brought me close to Vyasa's subversive brilliance. It was a Vyasa moment—one of many across the ages

ness, and there was no one left to care for her. She had been put to work as a maid in a merchant's kitchen and was seduced by the son of the house. Thrown out on the street when discovered, Pingala had lost all reputation and had nowhere to go. Mithila's richest bawd had picked her up and taught her the tricks of the trade. Pingala had done reasonably well for herself. She had a little house of her own and could employ a maid to cook and clean while she devoted herself to looking after her best.

But Pingala was acutely lonely and longed for a secure life. She fantasised every day about a man who would fall in love with her and look after her for good with affection and respect. She prayed every day for this and worried about it constantly

To pretend India can go it alone or that it has out-manoeuvred the US is to ignore the reality of our interdependence.

If the Indian public begins to believe that all the other powers are in steep or sudden decline but only India is rising, we not only risk antagonising some of our friends, but also make strategic miscalculations.

For instance, the narrative of "dedollarisation" is a favourite among influencers, but the reality is far less dramatic. The US dollar still accounts for nearly 60% of global foreign exchange reserves and is used in 88% of international transactions, according to SWIFT data from 2024. India's trade, particularly in key sectors such as energy and technology, relies heavily on dollar-based systems. To cheer for dedollarisation without understanding its implications is shortsighted.

Moreover, the anti-US rhetoric often ignores the tangible benefits of India-US cooperation. The Quad, comprising India, the US, Japan, and Australia, has become a cornerstone of India's Indo-Pacific strategy, countering China's growing influence in the region. The US is India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$500 billion. Key sectors such as IT, such as Apple and Tesla, are increasingly investing in India, creating jobs and boosting manufacturing. Mocking the US or its leaders risks jeopardising this partnership, which is critical for India's security and economic growth.

The influencers' selective patriotism also glosses over India's own challenges. While they celebrate India's rise, they rarely discuss the structural issues—education gaps, infrastructure bottlenecks, or unemployment—that still hold us back. Peddling a simplistic narrative of India's rise as an unstoppable force is not just misleading, it is, arguably a disservice to their millions of followers, who deserve better than half-truths and hyperbole.

The deeper issue, of course, is the influencers' lack of accountability. Social media influencers are often lone wolves, driven by views and ad revenue. The algorithms reward sensationalism, not accuracy. A video claiming "Trump Begs Modi for Help" might get a million views, but it contributes nothing to informed discourse. This isn't just a problem for India. It is a global challenge. However, Indian influencers, with their massive audiences, have a special responsibility to act with integrity.

Finally—and let us get this right—superpowers play all sides, have fingers in all pies. If we expect unwavering loyalty or simplistic solidarity, we would only be foolish.

(Views are personal)
(Tweets at @MakarandParanjape)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Bleeding taxpayers

Ref: *Bridges & Pathos: India's moonson economy stimulus* (Jul 13). Our crumbling roads and bridges reflect the administration's deep-rooted apathy. Taxpayers bleed twice: shoddy projects and recurring repairs. India urgently needs independent quality audits, penalty clauses for contractors and citizen oversight to ensure accountability. Without systemic reform, moonson tragedies will keep repeating.
Jennifer Joseph, Chennai

Grande dame

Ref: *Tulsi to titan: Performance politics* (Jul 13). Smriti Irani has presented herself as a calculated and crafty personality, executing precision planning to remain in the limelight. As rightly stated by the author, that image is ideology in India, her renaissance with resilience will certainly be celebrated as a queen of persuasive passion!
Nicholas Francis, Madurai

Cricketing testament

Ref: *The lords who flock to Lord's* (Jul 13). With Lord's rich history and meticulously maintained turf, it is indeed a special place where cricket is revered like nowhere else. The ground's ability to transcend generations beyond geographical boundaries is a testament to the game's enduring appeal.
Sridev Tejaswani K, email

Crash consequences

Ref: *Whodunnit: Fuel cut after 3 secs in air* (Jul 13). While the pilots' responsibility cannot be ruled out, we must wait for the final report. Only a detailed and fair inquiry can reveal the exact causes—whether it was a pilot or cabin crew mistake, or a plausible lapse in ground maintenance.
T Kailash Ditya, Hyderabad

Fertiliser ordeal

Ref: *Fields of despair* (Jul 13). The author, in his explanation, overlooked the fact that excessive amounts of chemical and poisonous fertilisers and insecticides are also used in agricultural fields, often applied without any protective measures.
Komal Brunschwig, email

Aadhaar's validity

Ref: *Democracy is not a privilege for those with the right paperwork* (Jul 13). The electoral roll revision in Bihar seems nothing but a cruel joke on the rural poor. Aadhaar remains the basis on which all other government documents are issued. It can be suddenly deemed invalid.
Arum Barik, Bargarh

[OUR TAKE]

Tracing the path to doom

Gaps in the preliminary report must be fully addressed to provide closure and reassurance

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)'s preliminary report has clearly identified the cause of the accident: Fuel control switches on Air India Flight 171 moved to "cutoff" position one second apart during take-off, starving both engines and causing 260 deaths in what is the deadliest aviation incident in the country in decades. The question is: How? Was the error human, mechanical, or caused by software?

The findings carry global significance because this represents the first fatal accident involving Boeing's 787 Dreamliner in 14 years of commercial service. While the report is silent on who, or what, caused the error, the exchange between pilots paraphrased in it—one asks the other why he moved the switches; the other responds that he did not—has been seen by many as a suggestion that the pilots were at fault. The Indian aviation community has reacted in anger over what it sees as an attempt to scapegoat the pilots. This is understandable. The report provides only a paraphrased account of the cockpit exchange, capturing confusion when engines began losing power. Exact words and other sounds from the voice recorder could provide crucial context that remains hidden. There's also a troubling precedent: Early theories speculated pilots hit the wrong levers during take-off—since ruled out by the report. More broadly, after the Boeing 737 Max crash in 2018, the company insisted it had provided adequate guidance in manuals for pilots to handle the situation. Only after a second plane went down did the industry recognise the fundamental software flaw that made such guidance insufficient. But, perhaps most importantly, the anger is meant to be a reminder that dead pilots can't defend themselves against conclusions that could suit corporate or regulatory interests over truth.

Yet the report's technical findings remain significant and demand rigorous follow-through regardless of implications. If evidence ultimately points to pilot error, that conclusion must be accepted, however inconvenient. Conversely, if mechanical or system failures emerge, manufacturers and regulators must face accountability. Truth-seeking serves everyone: Grieving families seeking closure, an industry requiring safety improvements, and pilots whose professional integrity depends on credible findings that consider all failure modes—human, mechanical, and systemic. The AAIB, having met its 30-day expectation, still faces a crucial test: It must demonstrate thoroughness and transparency. This requires releasing complete cockpit voice transcripts when appropriate, providing regular progress updates, and including qualified technical expertise—all while resisting pressure for premature conclusions. The aviation community must also exercise patience, recognising that credible findings demand time and methodical analysis. India's credibility ultimately depends on proving that evidence drives conclusions.

At Wimbledon, the Swiatek era begins

Just 57 minutes after the women's final began, Wimbledon had a new champion. Iga Swiatek beat Amanda Anisimova 6-0, 6-0—the first double bagel in a major final since Steffi Graf crushed Natasha Zvereva at the French Open in 1988. It isn't perhaps what you expect when you turn up for a final, but it is what it is. Swiatek, a five-time Slam champion, against Anisimova, the underdog, was always a mismatch, but the American admitted to being "a bit frozen there with my nerves". Swiatek is known for handing out bagels and breadsticks, and the Polish star caught on to her opponent's nervousness and sped through the match in the shortest time possible.

Swiatek, never a favourite on grass, will look back at this as a moment where she got back on track after a one-month suspension last year due to doping. Before her ban, Swiatek looked well on course to dominate the WTA circuit; now, she can perhaps step into that role again. As good as Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff are, their game is far from perfect, and there are areas of weakness that even lower-ranked players readily exploit. At her best, Swiatek can be invincible, and a player like that can inspire everyone on the circuit to newer heights. Wimbledon win secures her status as the best player in the sport since Serena Williams won 23 Grand Slam titles. At 24, Swiatek is the youngest since Serena to win major titles on all three surfaces. Consistency is the buzzword that the sport needs to draw in fans. Swiatek may well be the star women's tennis has been missing for some time now.

[STRAIGHTFORWARD]

Shashi Shekhar

Language row attempts to revive a dead horse

It can help a politician hiss, but doesn't offer enough political venom to bite

It was the "swinging sixties" in Allahabad (present-day Prayagrah). British rule had ended two decades ago, but in a city teeming with the old gentry, the colonial ways were still visible. The Civil Lines observed the tradition of a lunch break, and in many shops, salesmen wearing ties could be found speaking in English with their esteemed, genteel customers. The city was proud of its university, dubbed the Oxford of the East. The Indian Civil Service had been rechristened as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Yet the nomenclature change did nothing to dampen its power or its regalia. Admission to Allahabad University was considered the essential first step towards realising the goal of cracking the civil services examination. The city hosted many poets and writers. The city had enough reasons to feel snooty and entitled.

In such an atmosphere, the residents woke up to a surprise one day when they saw slogans written in coal tar on the walls of the local church, convent schools, and some other prominent places denouncing the English language exhorting, "Angrez hatao, Bharat bharao"



(remove English and save the country). In the initial days, people failed to fathom the long-term impact of a larger movement. The anti-English campaign was the brainchild of socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, who initiated it in 1957. It took a decade to gather steam, and received the support of the Jana Sangh and other political parties. Sensing an imminent public outburst, then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri made some critical moves in support of Hindi, leading to violent reactions in the Southern states, resulting in 70 cases of self-immolation or death by poisoning. Some died in the police firing on the protesters.

In 1967, for the first time, assembly elections led to the formation of non-Congress governments in eight states. The language row played a key role in this outcome. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. Language is the repository of our cultural moorings, and we shouldn't blame people if they feel emotionally attached to it, considering language as an integral part of their identity.

Language played a pivotal role in the formation of the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, both once a part of Punjab province. While creating these two states, India Gandhi wouldn't have imagined in her wildest dreams that the decision would in later years provide impetus to the rise of terrorism in Punjab. Earlier, the mobilisation to create Andhra Pradesh, based on Telugu linguistic

identity, witnessed extreme violence. Let's return to Allahabad. While studying in the state inter college from class 6 to class 8, Hindi, English, and one regional Indian language were compulsory for all the students. I chose Bangla. I am proud that through Bangla, I was able to connect with a great civilisation, its writers, their intellectual depth, philosophy, history, and the nuances of the Independence Movement. The Bangla language and Bengali people helped shape my personality.

This is the reason I was happy when the government of India launched the tri-language formula with some minor tweaks. I firmly believe that every young Indian, along with their mother tongue, should be well-versed in one regional language and in English.

There is no better way to bring Indians closer to their Indian roots. As far as English is concerned, let there be no doubt about its relevance and effectiveness in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

But politics and politicians are on a different tangent. This is the reason we witnessed the spectacle of Uddhav Thackeray and his estranged cousin, Raj, coming together on a public stage, 19 years after parting ways. They insisted they weren't against Hindi, but Marathi should be given its due and respected in Maharashtra. But is it the case?

If there were consistency in their words and deeds, they wouldn't have



Migrants to a state should try to learn the local language, but violence against those who can't speak it is simply unconstitutional.

uploaded viral videos of thugs beating unsuspecting shop owners, insisting that they speak in Marathi. While addressing his workers, Raj Thackeray told them that they can rough up those who fail to speak Marathi, but they shouldn't make and upload videos of this. It's a strange way of showing love for your language.

Unfortunately, this malady is spreading quickly in the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The cyber city of Bengaluru witnessed public shaming of Hindi-speaking people when they failed to speak in Kannada. I believe that those who relocate to a new state should make the effort to learn the local language, but perpetrating violence against those who can't speak the language is not only unconstitutional but a dangerous trend for the nation.

These incidents have opened a personal wound. In 1980, I went to Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) for the first time. At that time, whenever you asked the locals for an address, they would rebuff you, saying they didn't know Hindi. At such times, I would wonder how could talk in Bengali, but how will anyone survive in

the metropolis if they don't know the local language? During the coverage of the Punjab insurgency, I found that people in rural areas had difficulty understanding Hindi.

However, during the last two decades, the winds of encouraging change have been blowing in the southern states. Hindi Heartland isn't far behind. Some months ago, when southern superstar Allu Arjun came to Patna, a huge crowd gathered to welcome him. Can we attribute the miracle to central government services, the old tri-language formula, and the culture of corporatism?

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has tried to do the flames of the language row by insisting that every Indian language is a national language. However, the moot point is whether politicians will stop fomenting trouble? It pays to remember the language controversy has lost its sting. It can help a politician hiss, but doesn't offer enough political venom to bite.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

Air India crash report & unanswered questions

The release of the preliminary investigation report into the tragic crash of Air India Flight 171 on June 12, 2025, brings with it a fresh wave of confusion and suspicion.

The 15-page document, expected to clarify the early findings of the crash of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner at Ahmedabad, opens a Pandora's box of unresolved questions and incomplete disclosures. It paints a picture that is more fragmented than coherent.

Flight 171, operating a scheduled service from Ahmedabad to London, crashed moments after takeoff, killing all 260 people on board. The aircraft, VT-ANB, lifted off the runway and within seconds, both engines ceased to produce thrust. Within half a minute, the plane had descended into the nearby college hostels, engulfed in flames. According to the report, the aircraft reached a speed of 180 knots at approximately 08:08:42 UTC. Shortly after, the Engine 1 and Engine 2 fuel control switches were found to have transitioned from RUN to CUTOFF—just one second apart. Ten seconds later, the crew attempted to restart the engines, but by then, it was too late. The aircraft descended uncontrollably to the ground.

ICAO Annex 13 clearly states that the objective of a preliminary report is not to assign blame or determine cause—but to provide a factual sequence of events, highlight significant safety concerns, and issue urgent recommendations if necessary. It is meant to inform other States and parties involved about the early facts of the case, so that timely corrective actions may be initiated if needed.

However, while the A171 preliminary report adheres to the form of Annex 13, it falls short in spirit and substance. It avoids conclusions, as expected, but in doing so also omits a substantial amount of critical information that should have been presented.

The most glaring absence is of the comprehensive Flight Data Recorder (FDR) data. The report mentions the transition of the fuel control switches, which implies that this data exists and was retrieved. Yet, no graphical or tabular snapshot has been shared through the report. Nor is there any confirmation that 100% of the FDR data was recovered. Similarly, the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) is only referenced once—a vague statement about an attempted restart. There is no transcript, no clear timeline of the cockpit conversation, and no insight into the crew's awareness or state of mind.

In high-profile crashes worldwide—such as Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302—the preliminary reports have included detailed readouts from the FDR and CVR, graphical system schematics, warning messages, and pilot action logs. Those reports ran over 300 pages and offered transparency in the public interest. In contrast, A171's report appears hastily compiled, which should not be the case for an investigative report.

It describes the deployment of the Ram Air Turbine (RAT)—a small emergency turbine that powers key systems during engine failures, shortly after takeoff—but notes a slew of unrelated system alerts yet offers no explanation as to why these were triggered,

whether they were consequential or collateral, or how the aircraft's health monitoring system processed them.

Moreover, critical questions remain unanswered: Did the Engine Indicating and Crew Alerting System (EICAS) generate an ENG FAIL, or similar warning at any point? Why did both fuel control switches move to CUTOFF? Was it pilot action, inadvertent contact, or a system fault?

Did the pilots misinterpret any signal, or was the failure abrupt and total? Why did the Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) not activate? Why were crash-proof recorders (EFAR) damaged, especially when installed in parts of the fuselage designed to survive impact?

Adding to the mystery is the discrepancy in the aircraft's altitude. The RAT is said to have deployed at 60 feet, as inferred from the CCTV image, which again fails to produce a timestamp, which suggests that the onboard systems had already detected a power loss almost instantly after liftoff. Yet, the report timestamps this after the fuel control switch cutoff. Which came first: the RAT deployment or the engine shutdown? Absolute clarity about the sequence is necessary.

The report offers no safety recommendations. Despite multiple system anomalies, potential failure of critical safety features, and our institute's call for a switch behaviour, the report stops short of issuing a preliminary advisory to airlines, manufacturers, or regulators.

Compare this with Boeing's past actions. After similar incidents, safety bulletins and safety information bulletins were quickly issued. Was any such communication shared internally within Air India or to other 787 operators worldwide?

For the families of the 260 people killed, this report offers no reassurance on the investigation, no clarity on whether similar aircraft are safe, and no indication that anyone has been held accountable or that corrective measures are underway. Transparency is the cornerstone of trust in aviation safety. A preliminary report that fails to provide basic data may only fuel doubt, anger, and grief. In a country striving to become a global aviation hub, where air traffic is growing exponentially, this tragedy—and the lackluster handling of its investigation—signals that our institute's call for a switch behaviour investigation is still inadequate.

The A171 preliminary report is an opportunity to demonstrate transparency, integrity, and commitment to learning. Instead, even as it avoids speculation, it avoids detail too. It follows the letter of ICAO Annex 13, but not its spirit.

What we need next is not just a final report but a cultural shift where accident reports are comprehensive, timely, and made with the public's right to know in mind—where safety over commercial interests and where the data speaks for itself, because in aviation, the truth is a matter of life and death.

Amit Singh, a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society (FRAS), is the founder of Safety Matters Foundation. The views expressed are personal

[LARS KLINGBEIL] FINANCE MINISTER, GERMANY

If a fair solution can't be negotiated, then we must take decisive countermeasures.

On the US imposing 30% tariffs on the EU



How the young in India perceive global politics

The return of the Donald Trump administration to the White House at the beginning of this year earmarked the inception of a more uncertain and unstable world order. In addition to this, certain uncoupling challenges, such as the war in Europe, the crisis in West Asia, the rising spectre of terrorism in South Asia and most importantly, the growing assertiveness of China, raise further concerns about the state of international affairs. As India's role grows on the world, the aspirations of Indians to shape the global order have also been rising.

Now in its fourth year, the Observer Research Foundation's Foreign Policy Survey 2024: Young India. The central theme of the China Challenge attempts to bridge the gap between foreign policy and how policy decisions and challenges are perceived by the country's youth. An annual initiative, the survey of young Indians (18-35 years) collected data from 5,650 respondents spread across 19 cities in India in 11 languages, between July 22 and September 26, 2024. The findings of the survey are restricted to this period and do not capture major developments after that, particularly the impact of Donald Trump on the global order, the deterioration in India-Pakistan ties after the Pahalgaon terror attack in April, and the subsequent Operation Sindoor. But the survey sheds light on public opinion on India's approach towards major foreign policy concerns.

The overall support for India's foreign policy has increased consistently over the last four years, with 88% of respondents showing a positive perception this year. The central theme of this year's survey was to gauge the perception of China amongst India's youth. A higher 89% percentage considered border conflict with China as the biggest challenge for India, followed by cross-border terrorism (86%) and border clash with Pakistan (85%). Even as China and India have resumed the process to achieve a thaw in ties, the trust deficit mirrors any prospect of a big breakthrough. The respondents who have expressed dissatisfaction with the bilateral relationship have also increased since last year's survey. Five years after the Galwan clashes, there are still concerns about China's rise, with many youth viewing it as a military threat and regarding the occupation of Tibet as a major impediment in the relationship (81%). China's presence in the neighbourhood is viewed with concern (72%) and there is increasing support for countering its presence. The youth also prioritises national security over

economic partnerships (84%) and have shown support for imposing non-trade barriers on China and cutting down on imports from the country. They also deem India's decision to stay out of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative as beneficial to the country (79%).

The importance of the Indian Ocean region in terms of its strategic vitality has also increased, with 33% support followed by South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. This also explains the concern shown about China's growing presence in the maritime domain. India's Neighbourhood First policy is viewed favourably, particularly its development and connectivity initiatives. While Nepal (72%) is considered one of the most trusted neighbours, followed by Bhutan and Sri Lanka, for Bangladesh, the level of trust has decreased since 2022. The distrust for Pakistan and Afghanistan also outweighed the trust reposed in these countries (81% and 46% respectively). While the level of distrust for Afghanistan has decreased since last year, for Pakistan, the changed norms of engagement in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor and a new low in ties can lead to more caution.

There is also a growing appreciation for India's exercise of its strategic autonomy, vis-a-vis its ties with the Quad countries—the US, Australia and Japan and also its historical partner, Russia. The respondents expressed satisfaction with the US (86%) and also saw it emerging as India's leading partner in the next 10 years. While this is a subset of the growing synergy in the bilateral relationship in the last few years, the impact of Trump 2.0 will reflect in the coming iterations of this annual survey. The respondents also urge India to side with the US in its rivalry with China (54%). The youth see a permanent status in the United Nations Security Council as an important goal for India while also endorsing a permanent invitation status for the country in the G7 to leverage the strong ties New Delhi has with the member countries.

While the subsequent surveys will show how much the developments of the past few months have influenced people's perceptions, the China-Pakistan nexus and its impact on India's interests and the trajectory that the US-China ties take in the future have already been underlined as critical determinants of India's future foreign policy trajectory.

Harsh V Pant is vice president, studies and foreign policy, Observer Research Foundation, and Shivam Shekhar is a junior fellow at ORF. The views expressed are personal

Widening learning gap

Yet another reminder of how India is failing to use education to leverage its demographic dividend

THE RESULTS of the Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development Rashtriya Sarvekshen (PARAKH RS), formerly known as the National Achievement Survey (NAS), is deeply disturbing for a country that is banking heavily on the so-called demographic dividend to claim its place in the sun. Some of the most concerning insights include only 55% of grade 3 students assessed could arrange numbers up to 99 in ascending and descending orders; 29% of grade 6 students could represent and compare commonly used fractions in daily life (such as 1/2, 1/4) as parts of a whole; and a mere 28% of grade 9 students explored the idea of percentages and applied it to solve problems. Such insights are common even in non-mathematical aspects—only 56% of grade 6 students could explain the functioning of local institutions (family, school, bank/post office, etc.) and analyse their roles, while just 37% of grade 9 students were able to describe biological changes (growth, hormonal) during adolescence.

The pattern that emerges is startling. Even for indicators where results are somewhat favourable, the score does not exceed 69% for grade 3 (identifying and extending simple patterns in their surroundings, shapes, and numbers), 57% for grade 6 (describing basic safety needs and protection of humans, birds, and animals); and 54% for grade 9 (comprehending and summarising material). Put in perspective, not even seven out of 10 students are able to fare decently at the skills required at their learning level, and that number falls below six out of 10 as the students progress to higher grades. Two caveats should be considered—first, the survey assessed around 2.1 million students across grade levels, as opposed to the 2.48 million students in the Indian education system. Second, results vary widely across states—in Punjab, the highest score across grades and competencies was 88% (grade 3, identifying simple patterns), while it was 65% for Meghalaya (grade 3, sorting objects into groups and sub-groups based on more than one property). However, for a nation with a goal of a \$5-trillion economy by 2030 and developed status by 2047, India is certainly failing its future workforce and citizenry.

The writing has been on the wall for quite some time, and the government has indeed taken steps towards building a more holistic education system with the New Education Policy 2020. But such changes will take time to reflect, putting the 2047 deadline in jeopardy. Meanwhile, India has shied away from participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment since 2009 after an abysmal performance (ranking 73rd out of 74 nations), and its education budget is painfully far from the 6% of GDP envisaged in 1968. Its teachers are not faring well either—late last year, after identifying that teachers were a significant part of the reason why surveys show dismal results, the Central Board of Secondary Education floated the idea of launching an assessment centre for them by June—no further report of such a centre exists in the public domain.

Problems plague the Indian education system from every aspect at this point in time, and they have been festering over the years. It is high time that policymakers, the government, and other stakeholders alike take decisive action to bring it back from the brink of collapse. With the goals that we have, we owe our learners that much, and more.

JANE STREET LESSON
DEMOCRATISATION OF SECURITIES MARKETS MUST BE PROTECTED, REGARDLESS OF SOPHISTICATION OF THREATS

Protecting capital markets

ON JULY 3, THE Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) unleashed a significant enforcement action impounding ₹4,844 crore from Jane Street Group. The New York-based algorithmic trading firm was alleged to have systematically manipulated India's derivatives markets through an "intraday index manipulation" strategy, generating ₹36,671 crore in profits over 27 months through "marking the close", trading heavily near the close of the markets to push indices in desired directions—a move globally considered an illegal, brazen market manipulation tactic.

Jane Street's methodology was diabolically simple yet devastatingly effective. It allegedly "shaped the market" to win the "zero-sum game". Jane Street's trades were so large, and placed so aggressively, that they moved prices on their own. Sebi's findings are damning, and prima facie this appears akin to an algorithmic pump-and-dump robbery, representing a direct assault on the market's price discovery function. Allen and Gale (1992) identified three market manipulation types: "information-based" (disseminating misleading information), "action-based" (undisclosed operational changes), and "trade-based" (strategic buying/selling patterns). While regulatory interventions have partially addressed the first two, trade-based manipulation remains difficult to detect and appears legal on the surface. While Jane Street operated in derivatives markets, other miscreants manipulated cash segments.

The Bharat Global Developers case demonstrates classic pump-and-dump mechanics. The company's stock climbed 34.40% from ₹49.45 to ₹1,702.95 in 11 months despite minimal business operations, generating ₹271.5 crore in illegal gains through fraudulent preferential allotments. The Arshad Warsi-Sadhna Broadcast case shows how traditional schemes evolved to exploit social media platforms, using YouTube channels to generate false narratives about 5G licences and acquisitions, resulting in

ALOK PANDEY
The writer is an officer of the Indian Corporate Law Service

₹58.01 crore in disgorgement orders. Modern pump-and-dump schemes follow a theatrical structure: acquiring large positions in thinly traded stocks, systematically inflating prices through false information and coordinated buying, then dumping artificially inflated stock to unsuspecting retail investors. The final act sees prices collapse, leaving retail investors with worthless holdings while perpetrators profit.

Jane Street appears to be Sebi's first market manipulation case brought against a foreign high-frequency trading (HFT) firm. There are unmistakable parallels with the US Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) 2014 action against Athena Capital, another New York-based HFT, for alleged market manipulation involving "high-powered computers, complex algorithms and rapid fire trades", implementing the strategy dubbed as "gravy"—referring to flooding the market with massive buy or sell orders during the final moments of the trading day, a practice typically known as "banging the close".

Sophisticated manipulators possess real-time market data, high-frequency trading capabilities, and comprehensive surveillance of retail sentiment. These algorithmic assaults, using strategies like order layering and price injections, gain an unfair edge over vulnerable retail investors who operate with delayed information, limited analytical tools, and a belief of fair play.

Capital markets function as critical national infrastructure channelling household savings into productive investments. India's securities markets have

achieved unprecedented democratisation. India's ₹1.59-trillion initial public offering funding in 2024 is a testament. India now hosts 19.2 crore demat accounts—a 4.8x increase since 2020—representing one of the greatest financial inclusion successes. Mutual fund assets have grown from ₹12 lakh crore to ₹61.33 lakh crore, with systematic investment plans contributing ₹21,000 crore monthly.

However, while foreign portfolio investors and proprietary traders made ₹33,000 crore and ₹28,000 crore in gross profits, with 96-97% of profits from algorithmic trading, Sebi's study reveals 93% of individual derivatives traders lost money over FY22-FY24, with average losses of ₹2 lakh per trader. The demographic profile is concerning: 43% are under 30, 76% earn less than ₹5 lakh annually, and 72% come from beyond India's top 30 cities. Without casting blanket aspersions, it is important to understand that every rupee stolen through market manipulation translates into delays in homebuilding, education investments, and entrepreneurial dreams.

Advanced jurisdictions demonstrate how serious enforcement maintains market integrity. Singapore's response to the John Soh case resulted in 36-month prison sentences. The UK's Suspicious Transaction and Order Reporting systems based on the concept of "gatekeeper liability" makes the broader market ecosystem part of an integrated surveillance network, in the interest of the market integrity, benefiting all stakeholders. The US SEC's sophisticated surveillance capabilities extend globally through international

cooperation agreements. To its credit, Sebi has been implementing several reforms to address evolving threats, and it is true to say that regulatory thinking must keep evolving at an equal pace. The idea of real-time investor protection algorithms for analysing potentially manipulative trading patterns based on sophisticated cross-market strategies employed by well-capitalised actors, social media sentiment, and news flow, appears promising.

Second, creating joint investigation units, such as Singapore's Monetary Authority of Singapore-Commercial Affairs Department model, and combining Sebi's regulatory expertise with the Serious Fraud Investigation Office's criminal investigation capabilities could enable coordinated responses that maximise both deterrence and recovery of stolen assets. Establishing cross-border enforcement protocols with advanced jurisdictions would be a desirable enhancement.

Additionally, comprehensive investor education programmes remain essential to address information asymmetry and cognitive bias, teaching retail investors to recognise manipulation tactics as their first line of defence against sophisticated schemes, which is right up the alley of the ministry of consumer affairs' Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority.

The message to market manipulators must be unambiguous: India's securities markets are neither casinos nor hunting grounds where sophisticated predators can extract wealth from ordinary investors pursuing legitimate economic aspirations. Market discipline applies equally to algorithmic trading firms managing billions and social media influencers promoting penny stocks. The democratisation of India's securities markets represents a remarkable achievement in financial inclusion, and this must be protected with unwavering commitment to market integrity, regardless of the technological sophistication of threats or international prominence of perpetrators.

Views are personal

A bargain Rolex can still adorn your wrist

CRYPTO BRO'S ARE reaching for pricey timepieces once more. After a dramatic boom-and-bust in the values at which luxury watches changed hands over the past five years, the secondary market is past its nadir. But with persistent uncertainty about tariffs and a broader slump in the luxury sector, there's still time to get a decent deal on a Rolex. To recap: Interest in watches exploded during the pandemic, lockdowns prompted people to divert money they would have spent on vacations into luxury goods and the first choice for many men was a watch.

With the supply of new watches constrained—Rolex is expected to make more than 1.1 million watches this year with Patek Philippe producing about 70,000 and Audemars Piguet about 50,000, according to Bank Vontobel AG estimates—waiting lists to purchase new models from retailers grew, and many buyers turned to the second-hand market, sending prices for popular timepieces soaring.

Add in roaring stock markets and skyrocketing cryptocurrencies, and by spring 2022 the secondary values of the most hyped names—the Rolex Daytona, the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak and the Patek Philippe Nautilus—had risen to many multiples of their cost in a store. But then markets gyrated, crypto slumped and interest rates spiked, forcing many speculators who'd borrowed to amass large collections to sell.

There are signs that the market has stabilised and may be turning a corner. The Bloomberg Sublux Watch Index, which tracks prices for the 50 most-traded models by transaction value, has recovered from its post-pandemic low at the end of January, when measured in US dollars.

But the improvement isn't just down to currency swings. Research platform WatchCharts' Overall Market Index, composed of 300 watches from the top 10 luxury brands, fell 0.3% in the second quarter compared with the first, the slowest quarterly rate of decline since 2022. Luxury demand, particularly in the US, is correlated with the performance of financial assets. Stock markets have shrugged off April's tariff trauma, while Bitcoin is up almost 25% this year, reaching a record \$118,000 on Friday.

Tariffs may also be affecting the market. The levies aren't payable on a Swiss watch that's already in the US and then sold to a US buyer. This could be stimulating interest, particularly as prices for new watches escalate. Nine brands tracked by Morgan Stanley raised US prices in the second quarter. At the same time, much of the supply that was accumulated during the boom years has now been sold.

Finally, values fell to an extent that buyers' interest was piqued, particularly for the big three private brands—Rolex, Audemars Piguet and Patek Philippe, which account for about 60% of the secondary market. They led the previous boom and bust, and are at the forefront of the recovery this year. WatchCharts' Rolex Market Index, for example, has gained 15% over the past five years, compared with the 25% increase in US consumer prices between May 2020 and May 2023. Adjusting for inflation, a pre-owned Rolex is better value than five years ago.

But unless the threat of tariffs sends buyers scrambling for second-hand timepieces, creating a new bubble, there's probably no need to rush in. Even well-off consumers are more inclined to buy luxury goods when they feel wealthy and confident about the future. While stock markets have so far shrugged off uncertainty, continued nervousness around tariffs, the direction of global economies as well as instability in the Middle East could keep buyers on the sidelines. Demand from Asia, the biggest market for new Swiss watches, also remains in the doldrums reflecting China's luxury contraction. This potentially means more chance of getting your hands on a new in-demand timepieces in other parts of the world. While most steel Rolexes have wait lists, some precious metal models are available in stores.

Fashion may be playing a part too. Jewellery is booming across the luxury industry. This is led by the women's market, but more men are buying bracelets from Cie Financiere Richemont SA's Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels, for example. If this trend spreads, a timepiece may no longer be the first choice for many men.

The clock is clearly ticking on the slump in second-hand watch values. But it's not too late for discerning buyers to grab some bargain bling.

China pushback on India's GVC ascent

RISHI RAJ
rishi.raj@expressindia.com

CHINA'S RECENT MOVE to recall its engineers from Fracast's India plant, who were assembling Apple's iPhones, has been a long time coming. It had to happen sooner or later. Consider the facts: India is emerging as a genuine centre in electronics manufacturing. Obviously, Beijing is watching that with increasing discomfort, and Apple is the most high-profile symbol to target, the reasons for which are not hard to find.

At the end of FY25, India's share in global iPhone production reached 20%, up from 14% the previous year. Four years ago, that number was zero. Apple is now planning to shift more than 25% of its iPhone production to India by 2026. If one looks beyond Apple, the initiatives in the larger electronics global value chain (GVC), substantial progress has been made. Five major semiconductor projects worth ₹1.5 lakh crore are underway, backed by the likes of Tata Electronics, Micron, and CG Power. These span the full chip value chain, from design and fabrication to assembly, testing, and packaging. Roughly, ₹60,000 crore from the government's incentive outlay of ₹76,000 crore has already been committed.

The linkages are slowly taking roots. For instance, Apple's expansion plans go beyond iPhones. The company is reportedly exploring with Micron and Tata to locally source \$12 billion worth of semi-conductors by 2026, in line with its India-based production targets. That's no small vote of confidence as Apple alone consumes about 26% of Taiwan's TSMC's global chip output.

Electronics and information technol-

ogy minister Ashwini Vaishnaw recently highlighted the progress in domestic value addition. He said that while China took over 30 years to reach a 38% value addition threshold in electronics, India has already crossed 20% in six to seven years. Reaching 30% within the next two-three years and 38% in five seem to be within striking distance.

China's move should be seen against this backdrop. India isn't just assembling electronics, it's building capability. And that's where China has reasons to worry. With production-linked incentives and full-throated government support, Foxconn has ramped up iPhone assembly at its Tamil Nadu plant. Exports are growing month-on-month. Then, over 300 Chinese engineers, the key supervisors in the company's India operations, were recalled. No statements, no drama, just a cold, calculated move to restrict operations not at the line level but at the top of the knowledge chain.

This wasn't a fluke. It was a strategic signal. The Foxconn episode is only one part of a broader playbook. And it's being deployed across sectors, from electric vehicles (EVs) and renewables to semiconductors. The pattern is unmistakable—apply pressure precisely where India is starting to show export potential.

Take rare earth magnets, which are critical for everything from EV motors and wind turbines to smartphone speakers. China maintains a near-monopoly on these. In April, it introduced licensing curbs on key magnet materials which have already created supply chain disruptions for automakers.

The message from China seems to be blunt. If India wants to graduate to the global stage, it should expect the full weight of pushback. But one thing seems to have gone unnoticed. Chinese smartphone brands like Oppo, Vivo, Xiaomi, and Realme have not been touched. The reason being their India factories are catering to domestic consumption, not exports.

To stay on course, the govt must contain costs before ambitions derail. In the longer run, investing in resilience is required

Chinese smartphone brands have not been touched, as their India factories cater to domestic consumption, not exports

As long as the supply chain ends within India borders, China sees no threat to its dominance. But Apple is different. It ships iPhones from Tamil Nadu to Europe, West Asia, and the US. That undercuts China's grip on GVCs nurtured over decades. What we are witnessing isn't economic friction, but an economic doctrine. China isn't targeting Indian consumption. It's targeting Indian ambition.

Need capital equipment for solar fabrication? Face delays. Looking for high-precision machines? Stand there. Trying to import factory calibration engineers? Expect regulatory speed bumps. There's no formal embargo. Just a bureaucratic fog designed to slow things down.

India is trying to respond. The government is working with Taiwan, US, South Korea, and Japan to source engineers and capital equipment. But none of this is

cheap or fast. Replacing Chinese suppliers means bearing a 20-35% cost premium in the short term. European magnets cost more. American machines have longer lead times. Hiring skilled engineers from Korea or Taiwan is expensive and logistically complex.

What should the government do? It can't let go of either the progress made or the opportunities ahead. But if uncertainties arise and costs spiral, global markets looking at India for relocating their supply chains would think twice. The government's response must be two-pronged—one immediate and short-term, and the other on a long-term basis.

In the short term, containing cost is the most important. If India lets cost structures spiral out of control, the goal of becoming a global export base will fizzle. The government should adopt a surgical approach. It should provide targeted support to export-oriented sectors, offer short-term subsidies to offset non-Chinese input costs; ease capital import duties for equipment from friendly nations; expand and extend production incentive schemes; and create fast-track visa processes for foreign technical staff.

In the longer run, investing in resilience is required. Building long-term capacity, in rare earths, advanced tools, factory automation, technologies, skilled and technical workforce, are needed.

What needs to be acknowledged is that this isn't a supply chain dispute but a test whether India can contain costs while navigating the chokepoints China throws up. That's the real, immediate challenge.

been framed in terms of rivalry—but what if restraint is the real power? Modern problems need cooperation. When giants clash, the shockwaves reach the smallest nations.

—Md Hasnain, Mumbai



ANDREA FELSTED
Bloomberg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HUL's change of guard

Apologies of "Levers of change" (FE, July 12), Priya Nar, the first CEO at fast-moving consumer goods giant HUL takes charge when the company has not been able to clock growth numbers that it did in the past. The

discretionary spending of the consumer has picked up and it would be the new CEO's priority to ensure the growth is maintained in the coming quarters. The markets have cheered her elevation by taking the company around 4% higher. Since she is the first woman CEO of the company, more

attention will be focused on her.

Diplomacy amid tensions

The latest dialogue between Marco Rubio and Wang Yi offers a rare breath of diplomacy in an era of sharp rhetoric. US-China relations have often

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Low visibility

AAIB report needed more technical clarity

Last week's preliminary report by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) on the crash of Air India Dreamliner flight 7710 in London on June 12, killing 260 people, has raised more questions than answers. The probe by the AAIB, which was set up in 2012 to comply with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) recommendations, is significant because it comes a little over three years after the Tata group acquired Air India. But the report appears to raise a raft of speculative conclusions, which will neither bring closure to the victims' families nor offer clarity on safety protocols for the aviation industry. The report's lack of clarity on the role of the pilots is also troubling.

The plane crashed 30 seconds after takeoff from Ahmedabad, plunging into a doctors' hostel in a crowded locality. One of the pilots had submitted a Mayday call just before the crash. The AAIB's preliminary report said the fuel supply to the engines stopped moments after takeoff because the fuel-control switch had shifted from "run" to "cut-off" position. Recordings from the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) report one of the pilots asking the other why he had switched off the fuel switch, to which the reply was that he hadn't. The report does not identify the voices. It also cites a 2018 Special Airworthiness Information Bulletin of the United States (US) Federal Aviation Administration, which flagged a disengagement issue with the fuel switch-locking mechanism. Because the bulletin was advisory and the issue was not deemed an unsafe condition requiring a legally enforceable airworthiness directive, Air India had not conducted inspections on its fleet. Adding to the ambiguity is the statement in the report that there was no recommended action for Boeing or manufacturers of the GEnx-1B engine.

The problem with the AAIB's 15-page report is that it has sparked damaging speculation about "pilot error" or, worse, pilot suicide. Neither finding has bearing on compensation payouts to the families of victims. But experts have sharply criticised the report, pointing out that the issue of whether the fuel "cut-off" was a result of human error or a technical fault requires more comprehensive information. It has been suggested that the order of events presented in the report is confused. The report states that the fuel-control switches moved to cut-off position some seconds after the liftoff. But the report also notes that the Ram Air Turbine, or the backup power source that activates only after both engines fail, was deployed immediately after takeoff, suggesting that the engine ceased functioning before liftoff or the moment the aircraft's wheels left the ground. Without an analysis of the full transcript of the CVR and other technical data, it is impossible to gain clarity on the cause of the crash.

Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu has rightly urged the media and the public not to jump to conclusions since, as he has pointed out, these preliminary findings are just the beginning of a complex investigation, which will take at least a year. The question is why it was issued with such obvious gaps. The AAIB's investigation team is not lacking in expertise. It is led by the director general, who is a former Indian Air Force aeronautical engineer, and includes members from the US National Transportation Safety Board, an air traffic control officer, and an aviation-medicine specialist. India had also granted a request for observer status for an ICAO expert. Given this collective expertise, a report with clear findings would have been in order.

Exclusion errors

ECI must not leave out genuine voters

With the Supreme Court terming its special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Bihar as its "constitutional mandate", the Election Commission of India (ECI) has indicated plans to carry out the exercise across the country. It is likely to wait until July 28, the next date of hearing on the sundry petitions filed against the exercise underway in Bihar, before pressing ahead. But questions over the ECI enlarging its sphere of responsibility, including deciding on such issues as citizenship, and stepping away from its earlier motto of "no voter is left behind" by shifting the onus of being on the voters' list from the state to the citizens, remain unanswered.

On Sunday, ECI officials claimed that booth-level officers (BLOs), field-level functionaries, had found "a very large number of people" from Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar during their house-to-house visits as part of the SIR in Bihar. Questions have been asked as to the basis on which BLOs are determining "foreign" origins. The ECI does not have the jurisdiction to decide issues of citizenship and that also by a block-level officer. Apart from Bihar, which goes to the polls in October-November, four states and a Union Territory — Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Puducherry — are scheduled to have elections next year. At least in two of these, namely Assam and West Bengal, the issue of illegal immigration has been politically volatile.

Ever since it was set up, and without a definitive proof of citizenship issued under the Citizenship Act, the ECI has done a commendable job in preparing inclusive electoral rolls, which have expanded from about 180 million electors in 1951 to soon reach a billion. In its petition in the Supreme Court, the Association for Democratic Reforms questioned SIR's unreasonable and impractical timeline in Bihar since it is being carried out in close proximity to the state elections. It argued that there were millions whose names did not appear in the 2003 revision — people who either did not possess the documents as required under the SIR order or might find it difficult to procure such documents, given the short timeline. The petitions also flagged the ECI excluding identification documents such as Aadhaar, electoral photo identity card, or ration cards, adding to the threat of exclusion to the marginalised. The Supreme Court has suggested the use of these documents, which the ECI must adhere to.

It is worth noting that Bihar has one of the country's worst literacy rates. According to the National Family Health Survey 5, 40 per cent of women of reproductive age have never been to school. According to the 2011 Census, 29 per cent of men in Bihar could not read a form. More than half of Bihar's households have one earning member who is a migrant, and 47 per cent of Bihar's voters are under 40, most of whom would find it difficult to procure and submit in time one of the 11 documents. The ECI has claimed that more than 80 per cent of the state's voters have been covered under SIR, but it is unclear how many of them are migrants, who usually return to Bihar in the runup to the elections to cast their vote. Given the fact that questions are being raised on the ECI's functioning, the poll panel would do well to not just conform to the letter but also the spirit of India's inclusive democracy.



Explicit consent

A new era dawns online, and it could mean a shift in the balance of power from apps to users

I feel energised when, during my daily evening exercise walk in Colaba, I see fisherfolk from the nearby Sassoon docks whip out their mobile phones, point at the QR code at a pavement fruit shop, and pay for their mangoes. I feel immensely proud of our Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar card systems, which are helpful for all levels of Indian society.

However, my nationalist pride in India's digitisation was shaken last week, when I began reading Rahul Bhatia's well-written book *The Identity Project: The Unmaking of a Democracy*. It argues that Aadhaar, which I (like most Indians) love to showcase as an example of our country's advanced technology, has created an unprecedented infrastructure for state surveillance. He explores the dangers of having such a vast and centralised collection of personal and biometric data.

Then there is Jean Drze, a Belgian-born Indian development economist and activist, who argues that imposing a fragile, internet-dependent technology

on the poorest and most vulnerable populations is a "leap into barbarism" and it functions more as a tool of exclusion rather than inclusion.

In response to these critiques, the Centre has rightly pointed out that Aadhaar is an identification tool, and not one aimed at profiling. It has also said that Aadhaar does not collect sensitive information, such as caste, religion, health records, or financial details, and utilises "best of breed" encryption and security technologies to protect data.

We have also learnt an important lesson: The "political economy" of the Aadhaar/UPI success wasn't purely a free-market phenomenon. It required deliberate state action to create an ecosystem where this "instant gain" could be realised by millions. The Centre did not wait for private companies to build this system. It created the foundational digital public infrastructure: Aadhaar for identity and UPI as an open, interoperable platform. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana ensured millions of people had a bank account to link to these systems.

Then came this news last week: "A jury in San Jose, California, said on Tuesday that Google misused customers' cell phone data and must pay more than \$31.46 million to Android smartphone users in the state, according to an attorney for the plaintiffs." The report went on to say: "...the jury agreed with the



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

plaintiffs that ... Google ... was liable for sending and receiving information from the devices without permission while they were idle, causing what the lawsuit had called "monitory and unreasonable burdens shouldered by Android device users for Google's benefit".

For years, the tech industry has operated on a model of "implied consent". By using a service, we implicitly agree to a long and complex terms of service agreement, which often grants broad permissions for data collection. A verdict like the one described above would accelerate the shift to a model of "explicit and informed consent".

Does this mean that "permission" is not perpetual? Just because a user gave permission to an application (app) upon installation doesn't mean the app has the freedom to transmit data in the background indefinitely. Will this force companies like Google to build much more transparent controls for users and to justify every single background data transfer?

If explicit permission is required for every type of data transfer, and many users say "no", this could significantly disrupt these business models. It would force companies to find new ways to monetise their services or be much more upfront about the value exchange. For example, a potential new message from an app could be: "Allow us to collect this data to keep this service free, or pay a subscription fee for a private version."

When I asked a knowledgeable European friend why Europe had quickly embraced such "explicit permission" type of privacy regulation in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), her answer was: "Have a look at Europe's 20th-century history: The Nazi regime's use of census and personal data for persecution, the Soviet bloc surveillance (Stasi), secret police tracking citizens and other abuses under fascist and communist regimes ... all this has created deep societal fear in Europe of state and corporate misuse of personal data." I then asked her — is it also because Europe, unlike the United States (US), does not have native tech giants with a data-driven business model? Her answer was: "Yes, that too."

The move to "explicit permission" could also shift the balance of power. It would legally reinforce the idea that users are the ultimate owners of their data and must have simple, straightforward, and continuous control over how it is used. The burden of proof would shift from the user having to figure out how to opt out, to the company having to justify why it needs the user to opt in. Does this mean a significant shift away from opaque, implied consent and towards a future where user permission is explicit, granular, contextual, and continuously managed?

Does this mean that India will also soon need new legislation in this area regarding "user permission", even for data collected by public institutions such as Aadhaar and UPI?

The author (ajitb@rediffmail.com) is devoting his life to unravelling the connections between technology and society

F&O market: The real issues

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) last week issued a damning preliminary order against Jane Street, a New York-based trading firm, accusing it of orchestrating large, synchronised trades across the cash, futures, and options markets to manipulate equity-index levels. The trades allegedly profited Jane Street handsomely while inflicting losses on India's ever hopeful retail investors. In righteous indignation, Sebi declared that "the integrity of the market and the faith of millions of small investors ... can no longer be held hostage to the machinations of such an untrustworthy actor". Sebi has banned Jane Street from India's securities markets and imposed a ₹4.84 crore as alleged unlawful gain. We will watch with interest how the case progresses. The Indian judicial system has allowed "untrustworthy actors" to escape due punishment. But what does the episode reveal about India's derivatives market itself? Popular reformist responses to the Jane Street saga are both predictable and misdirected. Suggestions include beefing up surveillance, raising margin requirements, curbing expiry-day trades, and educating retail investors about the risks of options trading. Foreign and domestic traders should be treated equitably in tax matters. All sensible — but peripheral.

Cui bono?

Asking, as Romans would in a similar situation, Cui bono? (who gained an advantage which can help to identify suspects or motives), the answer becomes clearer. Remember we have been here before. Sebi's own study from 2023 laid bare a sobering statistic: Over 90 per cent of individual traders lost money trading futures and options in FY22. The regulatory response? Pop-up warnings on trading platforms — a useless daily irritation while logging in. I had mentioned then, nothing will really change for investors because whether traders win or lose, one group always gains: The rent collectors of the stock-market system, who

also happen to be the rule makers. The answer to Cui bono is in plain sight, not even hiding. According to Sebi's 2023 analysis, in FY22, over and above the net trading losses incurred, losers in the group of active traders were out of pocket by an additional 28 per cent of net trading losses as transaction costs. Even active traders making trading profits incurred 50 per cent of such profits as transaction costs! Transaction costs for traders are in turn revenues for three entities. This trinity — the state, exchange, and regulator — feeds off the steady churn of hopeful punters in the derivatives market. The incentives for meaningful reform are misaligned at best.

The central government: Securities transaction tax (STT) revenue has exploded, from just ₹6,426 crore in FY15 to an estimated ₹55,000 crore in FY25. More than 40 per cent of this likely stems from futures & options (F&O) trading. That's compound annual growth of 24 per cent! Whether a Jane Street gameth the system or not, or whether 90 per cent of F&O traders lose money or not, the government has been the biggest beneficiary of the F&O segment.

The exchanges: Derivatives are also the golden goose for the Indian exchanges, with almost all the money going to the National Stock Exchange (NSE) due to their near-monopoly status. The NSE began offering colocation service to high-frequency traders in 2009 and now racks in colossal revenue from derivatives — estimated at ₹5,000 crore-16,000 crore in FY25, accounting for 90 per cent of its income. Its March quarter net profit jumped 47 per cent; its dividend an eye-watering 3,500 per cent. Operating margins stand at a near-cartelistic 78 per cent. In 2015, the NSE was raked by a colocation scam and in 2025 it had to be goaded into sending a warning letter to Jane Street by Sebi. This is no surprise: The NSE has every incentive to expand the game, not regulate it. It has even less of a motivation than the Ministry of Finance to cut down on F&O.

Sebi: Even the regulator has a stake in the status quo. In FY24, Sebi earned ₹1,851 crore as regulatory fees and subscriptions. Of this, ₹1,066 crore came from turnover-based fees — driven largely by the F&O segment, which accounts for roughly 90 per cent of the trading turnover.

So, the real problem statement is ...

Venture capitalists often ask startup founders for a crisp "problem statement" or "what is the problem you are going to solve?" What is the problem statement then in the F&O market? It is not how to prevent Jane Street type of market manipulation, or how to "protect" innocent traders from losing money. It simply is: What is the socioeconomic benefit we are deriving from the current derivatives market? Sebi claims that F&O enables efficient price discovery and improved market liquidity, and permits investors to manage risk. I humbly state that it does not do any of these. The cash market runs parallel to the F&O market and hence does not aid in price discovery or liquidity, and only a small number of investors use F&O for hedging. The rest is socially harmful speculation. In July 2024, stock derivatives volumes were ₹22 trillion, of which 90 per cent was cash market. In F&O, India has created a standalone, highly speculative market which has catapulted India to the top of the global league tables: The NSE is now the world's largest derivatives exchange by volume; in early 2024, perhaps 84 per cent of all global derivatives trading was occurring in India. That's a peculiar badge of honour for a poor country where 800 million or 87 per cent of the citizens receive government food ration every month. One might forgive sceptics for wondering if India has built the world's most energetic trading sector in the name of financial development. Until India honestly confronts the question of *who benefits* from its frenzied F&O market, the answer to *what to fix* will remain elusive. For now, the wheel spins on.

The author is editor of www.moneylife.in and a trustee of the Moneylife Foundation; @Moneylifers

How the Democrats lost the White House



SAM ADLER-BELL

In 2024, the latest 400-page dispatch from last year's presidential contest, the authors, a trio of veteran journalists from different august papers — Josh Dawsey (*The Wall Street Journal*), Tyler Pager (*The New York Times*) and Isaac Arnsdorf (*The Washington Post*) — write that "there was a view popular among some political insiders that this election had been over before it was started."

The authors end up arguing that things were not so fated, but reading what they have to report, I couldn't help feeling those political insiders had a

point. In this account, Joe Biden's operation resembles its candidate: Listless, semi-coherent, sleepwalking toward calamity. It exists for its own sake, impervious to outside input, pushed along by inertia alone. The Trump campaign — at least after his first indictment provides a burst of energy and purpose — appears driven, disciplined, capable of evaluating trade-offs and making tough decisions. Trump seems to want to win; Biden just wants to survive.

Things do change when Kamala Harris enters the fray. She gives Donald Trump a run for his money, but her campaign is held back from the start by the slow-moving disaster that made it necessary in the first place.

2024 is a well-paced, thorough and often (darkly) humorous account of the two-year campaign season that began when Trump announced he was running — at a Mar-a-Lago launch so disorganised and half-hearted, the authors write, that

even sycophantic Trump allies admitted it was "a dud."

I cannot say that I enjoyed reading this book. I often winced at the generous — at times, egregious — use of dramatic irony, and I was not terribly eager to relive the fateful twists and turns of the 2024 election, which so recently deposited us in our dismal present. But that's hardly the authors' fault. (It's mine, for being a Democrat.)

Trump was interviewed for the book; Biden answered a call briefly, before his aides evidently ran interference. Harris declined. Success, it is said, has many fathers, and Biden an orphan. In 2024, failure also has many present users who knew better, weren't listened to and thus can't be blamed for how the kid turned out. So it's no surprise that elected officials — the California representative Nancy Pelosi, the South Carolina senator Lindsey Graham — and aides from both campaigns go on record, or that many more provide background and

anonymous swipes at their colleagues.

There are also moments of levity. We hear that when an aide delivered a message from the Democratic convention production team to the second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, asking him to smile more, he replied that he'd just gotten off the phone with his wife, who called from backstage to admonish him for laughing and talking too much! We also learn that an internal Trump strategy memo, designed with the candidate's sensitivities (and delusions) in mind, referred to his defeat in the 2020 election as "our reported raw vote shortage."

The portions of the book covering the weeks after Biden's disastrous debate, however, are not funny. I was struck by Biden's hope that the pro-



2024: How Trump Refooked the White House and the Democrats Lost America
by Josh Dawsey, Tyler Pager and Isaac Arnsdorf
Published by Penguin Press
400 pages \$32

gressives, with whom he had collaborated on domestic policy, would save his campaign. A little over a week after the debate, the authors write, Biden made a personal appeal to the New York representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. AOC and other progressives stuck with Biden in the days ahead as his political stock sank — apparently calculating that by buying Biden low, they could win his support for their policy goals. In 2024, Bernie Sanders, for his part, repeatedly advised Biden to change his position on Gaza to shore up support from young Democrats.

Biden's behaviour, his saviour complex and mega-argument that only he could beat Trump, his inner circle's refusal to believe in flattening data and his growing impulse to blame the media — all of it brings to mind the worst qualities of

his rival. At one point, the authors report that Democratic aides schemed to have the political talk show host Joe Scarborough deliver the tough love. "Staffers believed Biden would see the information if it came from *Morning Joe*," the authors write, just as Trump would often defer to the hosts of programmes like "Fox and Friends" over his own advisers.

Biden even has his own stolen election fantasy. In 2024, he repeatedly tells his allies that he could've beaten Trump. (The data suggests otherwise.) Mike Donilon — a long-time adviser who is something like Biden's id — tells the authors that pushing Joe out "was an act of insanity by the Democratic leadership."

For liberal readers, 2024 is a book of what-might-have-beens. That makes for a punishing read. But if we refuse to look for lessons in this depressing book, we might just keep becoming our own worst enemies.

The reviewer is a co-host of the podcast "Know Your Enemy" @2025 The New York Times News Service

THE ASIAN AGE

14 JULY 2025

Subhani

No clear indications in prelim air crash report

How intriguingly tragic the events are that led to the crash of the Air India plane in Ahmedabad and have just come to light. But the findings of the preliminary probe into one of Indian aviation's devastating tragedies have left behind more questions than answers. The sequence of inexplicable happenings that led to both engines having their fuel cut off will be the medium of intense speculation from here on. The suspicion is, like the Kennedy assassination, this may remain an unsolved mystery.

Why the engine fuel cutoff switches transitioned from 'Run' to 'Cutoff' will remain in the realm of speculation until and unless the fuller probe reveals how it came about. Having been designed in such a way as to preclude two distinct and opposite movements, beginning with having to pull them up to unlock before flipping them, it is unlikely that the switches were moved without human involvement.

In determining whether this was accidental or intentional will lie the key to solving the riddle. The lever locks are designed to prevent accidental activation with protective guard brackets to shield from accidental bumps. But what if there was a mechanical or electrical failure or malfunction, or even a software failure somewhere in the precision electronics of modern, fly-by-wire standards?

What if there was a mechanical or electrical failure or malfunction, or even a software failure somewhere in the precision electronics of modern, fly-by-wire standards?

It must be particularly hurtful to the whole community of pilots if some experts have concluded already that the mental health of one of the seasoned pilots in charge of the flight may have led to his nursing suicidal thoughts and so cutting off the fuel flow. How specious that line of argument becomes can be gauged from the fact that the engines were reignited virtually instantly with the switches engaged again after one of the pilots pointed to the fuel being cut off.

What the crash itself should teach us, however, is that the state of Indian aviation, the third largest in the world, is far from ideal. The corners that we fear are being cut to ferry passengers to their destinations, overlooking minor equipment problems like worn out tyres, skipping rigorous safety checks and ensuring that sufficient numbers of trained pilots and air traffic controllers are recruited to conform to safety protocols, do not fill us with confidence that premier travel in the air is a very safe proposition in this country.

Taking preliminary steps towards safety is not India's strongest suit. And this is not only in aviation but universally in any field of endeavour. The price that India pays as a society can be clearly seen and yet expediency is considered an overriding virtue to keep things on the move and meet profit estimates. It remains to be seen if the Air India crash would have changed anything in the attitude towards safety.

Emergency in school education

The findings of the nationwide student survey have laid bare a disturbing reality. Nearly half of India's school students lack foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and situational awareness. From Class III students (45 per cent) struggling to correctly arrange numbers up to 99 to Class IX students (66 per cent) unable to distinguish between living and non-living features, the data reveals a systemic crisis in learning outcomes that could derail India's economic and developmental ambitions and tear the social fabric as the nation gets older.

This is not just an educational challenge. It is a national emergency. If 69 per cent of Class IX students cannot understand basic number systems and percentages, how can one expect them to be employable and contribute to the country's development? If two-thirds of Class IX students do not know the difference between living and non-living features, the demographic dividend that the government boasts of today could turn into a demographic disaster.

The learning gaps in rural areas are greater than average numbers. Similarly, private schools often have relatively ill-equipped teachers and poor infrastructure.

With the world embracing artificial intelligence and machine learning, people must be strong in fundamentals to get a decent job. However, India's future youth with such glaring learning gaps threaten to hollow out the very foundations of our future workforce.

The government must, therefore, treat education reforms at par with infrastructure or defence and introduce measures to ensure that the crisis in the learning gap is addressed. School education is a subject of national importance and should not be politicised either for the benefit of the ruling party or the Opposition parties — anything to the contrary would be a disservice to the future generations of India and jeopardise India's rise to superpower status.

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KASHISH MITTAL

Editor

K. SUBHANI

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SWITCH ON

SWITCH OFF

The Dalai Lama's final call: China faces Tibet challenge

Indrani Banerjee



The People's Republic of China, forged in the crucible of war and in the aftermath of Mao Zedong's Long March, emerged in 1949 as a powerful military state bent upon establishing its authority over all territory it considered its own. The irredentist agenda of China's new rulers led to the invasion of sparsely populated Tibet by battle-hardened Chinese troops in 1950.

Ruled by an ancient theological order of Buddhist monks, Tibet had no army worth its name and was quickly overrun. China's Communist commissars initially assured Tibetans that their autonomy would be honoured, but soon reneged on their commitment, ultimately forcing the 14th Dalai Lama to flee in 1959 to India, where he has resided ever since.

That was 66 years ago, but the consequences of that flight resonate to this day. The years have not diminished the determination of China's intractable leaders to completely annex Tibet and obliterate every trace of its traditional theological and temporal authority. The Dalai Lama, who had fled with a small group of loyal monks and yak loads of sacred manuscripts, has been relentlessly harassed, hounded and reviled by China's commissars and every attempt had been made to annihilate the institution he represents. Over the decades, thousands of Tibetans who have risen in revolt from time to time have been killed by Chinese soldiers, ancient monasteries burnt to the ground and buildings full of ancient manuscripts burnt.

Last week, Tibet's exiled

leader dropped another bombshell by announcing that even his passing would not end the institution of the Dalai Lama, which continues to embody the real authority and sovereignty of Tibet. According to Tibetan traditions, the Dalai Lama is Tibet's only true head and is believed to reincarnate after death, thus ensuring an uninterrupted lineage. During his 90th birthday celebrations held at McLeodganj, near Dharamshala, where his modest headquarters is situated, he declared: "I am affirming that he would reincarnate as the next Dalai Lama. In a video message circulated all over the world, he declared: "I am affirming that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue". He announced the setting up of a non-profit trust called the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which would be the sole authority to decide on a future Dalai Lama after his death. "I should accordingly carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition... no one else has any such authority to interfere in this matter," he clarified. In other words, the present Dalai Lama has completely repudiated Beijing's official view that the next Dalai Lama could only be chosen by the explicit nod from the PRC's Marxist functionaries. His supporters add that the Dalai Lama has also stated that his reincarnation would be in a free country and not China, which he says is not free.

Thus, the present Dalai Lama, who is the fourteenth in a line that stretches back to the 13th century, has ensured that the tradition he represents will continue, no matter how hard Beijing tries to extinguish it. He has never accepted Beijing's view that Tibet's traditions are an anachronism that ought to be consigned to his-

While China's militaristic state can do little against the Dalai Lama, who enjoys global support, it continues to target India for harbouring him and allowing his unfettered activities

tory's dustbin. Over the years, the present Dalai Lama has attained great honours and is now regarded as one of the world's most influential religious figures. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. To the Chinese, however, he is a hated figure, termed a "splittist" or separatist. He has been reviled by the Communist leadership as a "wolf in monk's clothes", a puppet of foreign anti-China forces, and so on.

His latest statement unsurprisingly has further incensed the Chinese leadership, which reiterated Beijing's authority over any decision to appoint a Dalai Lama. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman insisted that the correct way to select any future Dalai Lama could only be through a Beijing-approved process. "The child reincarnation of a major Living Buddha such as the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama needs to be identified through lot-drawing from a golden urn and approval by the central government." This of course has been rubbished by the Tibetans.

While China's militaristic state can do little against the Dalai Lama, who enjoys global support, it continues to target India for harbouring him and allowing his unfettered activities. India has always upheld freedom of religion for all in India and will continue to do so, a foreign ministry statement added. This effectively sidestepped the issue avoiding any possible confrontation. However, in the bigger picture, the Dalai Lama remains a contentious issue in India-China relations and his latest pronouncements will ensure its continuation in the foreseeable future. The Dalai Lama, for all its fragility, has stood up to China's powerful state with remarkable fortitude and success. This fight seems destined to pass on to the next era.

The 1962 India-China war was a warning to India not to persist with its colonial-era

geopolitical views on Tibet and its borders. The Indian government has been circumspect on the Tibetan issue and has tried not to provoke Beijing despite its constant objections to the Dalai Lama's activities, including his travels to parts of India which the Chinese claim ownership over.

This time around too the official Indian reaction to the Dalai Lama's historic declaration was diplomatic even as Kiren Rijiju, India's minister of parliamentary and minority affairs, who is an ardent Buddhist and a follower of the Dalai Lama, declared: "No one has the right to interfere or decide who the successor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be... Only he or his institution has the authority to make that decision. His followers believe that deeply. It's important for disciples across the world that he decides his succession."

This remark was instantly contested by Beijing, which sternly pointed out: "We hope the Indian side will fully understand the highly sensitive nature of Tibet-related issues, recognise the anti-China separatist nature of the 14th Dalai Lama." India's external affairs ministry responded by saying that India does not take any position or speak on matters concerning beliefs and practices of faith and religion. "The Government of India has always upheld freedom of religion for all in India and will continue to do so," a foreign ministry statement added.

This effectively sidestepped the issue avoiding any possible confrontation. However, in the bigger picture, the Dalai Lama remains a contentious issue in India-China relations and his latest pronouncements will ensure its continuation in the foreseeable future. The Dalai Lama, for all its fragility, has stood up to China's powerful state with remarkable fortitude and success. This fight seems destined to pass on to the next era.

The writer is an independent commentator on political and security issues

LETTERS

DAD WAS 'RIGHT'?

It is shocking that there is a big base which actually supports the actions of the father who shot his own daughter Radhika Yadav. It is sad to see so many Indians living in a time warp. Just because a child, especially a girl child, has been sired by an individual, it does not give him lifetime rights over his child's conscience and life and have her obey him until the so-called responsibility for her decisions has been shifted to her husband, who is again chosen by the father. Neighbours may have taunted the father but why didn't he teach a lesson to them instead of committing this heinous act? If custom and cultural values of which we are very proud of can incite a father to kill his own daughter, and one who has made him proud at that, isn't it time to dump them?

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

WONDER LOST

IN A WORLD torn by conflict, propaganda, and digital noise, one trait is quietly fading — child-like learning. Today's global channels teach far before curiosity, suspicion before understanding. Where is the wonder that once made children ask "Why?" before "What side?" From war-torn lands to AI labs, climate talks to classrooms, we desperately hide the humility to unlearn and relearn. Hope is not a strategy — it's a mindset. The question is not what we are teaching, but how we are learning.

Hassain Rabbani
Mumbai

INDIA FALLS BEHIND

THE US MOVE to ease export restrictions on Electronic Design Automation software to China has resulted in major American firms like Synopsys, Cadence and Siemens EDA re-engaging with Chinese clients. The competitive landscape has thus shifted sharply, especially in chip design and packaging, areas where India had hoped to gain momentum. This exposes a strategic gap in India's semiconductor ambitions. We must urgently invest in indigenous EDA tools, R&D and talent pipelines. While the \$76.00 crore Semiconductor Mission seeks to boost domestic capabilities, China is poised to leave India far behind.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazariabagh

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Bhagwan Thadani (July. 11). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Jayanta Roy Chowdhury

Turmoil in B'desh: Secular voices are facing crackdown, economy declining

On Friday night, Prof. Abul Barkat, a respected economist and a leading Bangladesh voice on de-radicalisation and minority rights, was arrested from his home under startling charges, including alleged links to Indian intelligence agencies. Barkat, who started life as a young freedom fighter in 1971, was advised to leave Bangladesh last year by friends worried at the way the new Dhaka regime was veering towards radical Islam. However, he refused to leave his motherland for the safety of India or the West, where his work has many admirers.

His internment is the latest in a series of mid-night arrests of academics, journalists, writers and actors who were the voices of reason and secular thought in an increasingly chaotic and fractured Bangladesh, since August last year when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India for safety in the face of frenzied mobs in what some called a 'colour revolution'. The number of such intellectuals, charged with crimes ranging from murder to corruption by the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus, who came to power with support from Islamic parties, are now in several hundreds. From outside, Dhaka seems calm after months of protests by students demanding the resignation of Mr Yunus' advisers for not being able to improve law and order, by women protesting religious policing of their right to dress freely and by cadres of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party demanding early elections.

Public discontent was also palpable over reported plans to create an "Arakan Corridor" from Chittagong to Myanmar's rebel province of Rakhine for supplies from Western nations. Many felt it would draw Bangladesh into a regional conflict where rebels and Myanmar's military junta are fighting for control of mineral-rich areas in a proxy war between global superpowers.

After a meeting between BNP's exiled leader Tarique Rahman and Mr Yunus last month in London, where some kind of a political compact appears to have been reached, BNP cadres have gone off the streets while the party's spokespersons have stopped attacking the Yunus regime. Other deals seem to have quietened down Bangladesh's armed forces, which were earlier in a state of near revolt over the appointment of a Bangladesh-born US citizen as national security adviser over the heads of the service chiefs and over the proposed Arakan corridor.

However, the still waters of Bangladesh's current politics in some ways resembles the calm before a tropical cyclone. The streets are still seething with discontent over the capricious nature of the arbitrary rule that Bangladesh has faced over the last year, marred as it has been by mob violence against secularists, minorities, women and ordinary citizens who have some amount of voice but are without political protection. Sobel, a trader, was killed last night by Miffood in the heart of Old Dhaka in broad daylight by extortionists owing allegiance to a political party. Elsewhere, bomb blasts were reported in the

Bangladesh capital, while at press conference held at the National Press Club of Dhaka on July 10, the Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council revealed that Bangladesh had seen 258 incidents of recorded violence targeting the minorities in the first half of 2025.

The irony that this trend of arrests and chaotic rule is occurring exactly 54 years after Pakistan's then military junta headed by Gen. Yahya Khan, and assisted by local Islamists, had similarly "weeded out" these who spoke out for reason, democracy and secular values as also Awami League activists and minorities in erstwhile East Pakistan. In contempt after cantonment, before the victorious armies of India and Bangladesh's Mukti Bahini could march in, intellectuals were rounded up and murdered in cold blood, depriving a new born country of what counts most in developing a nation — human capital. Since then, Bangladesh has come a long way. From being described infamously as a "basket case" to being hailed as a new "Asian tiger" was a journey which can do any nation proud, much of it through the last 15 years when Sheikh Hasina was in power, when per capita income soared from below \$700 to \$2,700, according to World Bank data.

However, that story is now faltering. Since 2024, a wave of factory shutdowns has ripped through Bangladesh's garment sector like a storm, shutting down 113 factories and erasing 96,000 jobs in its wake. Industry watchers cite the example of the once-dominant Beximco Group, now a shadow of its former self after axing 16 units and sending

40,000 workers home by March 2025. The carnage isn't confined to sewing machines and cutting tables. The ripple effect is hitting packaging and logistics chains, support industries and the finance sector, which depends on income from loans to the garment industry. Global banks, once bullish on Bangladesh, have now slashed GDP growth forecasts for 2024-25 to a sobering three per cent plus.

Even as unemployment rose, inflation spiralled to double digits. At the same time, outboard migration from Bangladesh, which has been one of the big earners from remittances coming in from abroad, has faced curbs as the US, European and Gulf countries, and Southeast Asia have started restricting visas, partly because too many "guest workers" from that country have landed over the past decades and partly because of the uncovering of a suspected Islamist terror ring among Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia. A 35 per cent tariff slapped on Bangladesh by US President Donald Trump on exports to America, if implemented, could mean more economic pain for Bangladesh and added angst on the streets against the Muhammad Yunus regime, whose popularity seems to be flagging.

However, whether the streets will eventually burst into violent protests bringing in another regime change, or will be diverted by radicalisation unleashed by myriad Islamist groups, is a million-dollar question which only time can tell.

The writer is a senior journalist

Climate change is deciding where and how rural Indians are living

Climate migration, which is the movement of people forced to leave their homes due to climate-related disasters, has led to widespread and often involuntary migration to urban areas and other regions, eroding social structures and worsening living and working conditions for migrants

Savyant Datta

Two features mark the geography of Bundelkhand, the region in Central India spread over 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh: the steep hills of the Vindhyas and progressively scanty rainfall and increasingly frequent droughts.

Consider Panna district in Madhya Pradesh. According to data from the India Meteorological Department, Panna has been receiving progressively less rainfall even as temperatures have been rising. According to one estimate, the average temperature in Bundelkhand is expected to rise by 2-3.5°C by 2100.

The region has thus become a hotbed of droughts. Data in Madhya Pradesh, for instance, faced nine droughts between 1998 and 2009. In the same period, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts in Uttar Pradesh suffered eight.

The region's farmers have been the worst affected. As their crops have failed more often, they have struggled to make ends meet and slipped deeper into debt. Agricultural workers have taken up other jobs, such as working in the region's diamond mines. When that too hasn't sufficed, the men have left their families behind and migrated. Surendra Singh Jatav, assistant professor of economics at the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU), Lucknow, said. Their destinations are "Surat, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai."

Jatav has studied the impact of climate change on farmers' lives in Bundelkhand since 2012. The most significant change, he said, is in the social fabric of Bundelkhand's villages.

Climate migration

A little more than 1,500 km away from Bundelkhand is Charpauli village in Bangladesh. Located along the banks of the Jamuna river, Charpauli has a starkly different problem. Every year during the monsoons, the Jamuna swells and devours the land on its banks. Large chunks of the land break off and are washed away, taking the homes of people with them.

According to some media reports in Bangladesh, in one week in May 2022, riverbank erosion in Jamuna destroyed around 500 houses in Charpauli, leaving thousands homeless. In a 2023 study, researchers at the Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology used satellite images to find that between 1990 and 2020, the river's left bank had dwindled by roughly 12 m every year and the right bank by about 52 m every year.

Scientists have suggested that climate change leads to a greater volume of water flowing through a particular river channel at a particular time, in turn increasing the risk of flooding and erosion. The parched lands of Bundelkhand and the flooded banks of the Jamuna share one similarity. As their houses are consumed by the ever-swelling river, people first try to move away from the bank, at times building fresh houses on arable land. Then, when it is no longer possible to survive in the village, according to ETH Zürich researcher Jan Freihardt, entire households migrate to nearby cities like Dhaka as a last resort.

Freihardt, a postdoctoral researcher, has studied climate migration in Charpauli and other villages.

Climate migration refers to the movement of people resulting from climate change-related disasters, which may be sudden (floods, cyclones, etc.) or gradual (increasing temperature, sea-level rise, etc.). According to a 2022 report by the International Refugee Assistance Project, climate and weather-related incidents force about 20 million people to migrate every year to other areas in their own countries. This is called internal migration.

While migration away from the Jamuna's banks is permanent, climate change can also exacerbate seasonal migration in many areas. One such case is that of migration from Vidarbha and Marathwada, two famously drought-prone regions of Maharashtra.

Sugar cane and bitter endings

The Vidarbha and Marathwada regions lie in the rain shadow of the Western Ghats.

A rain shadow forms when a region is located on the side of mountains facing away from the sea. As water evaporates from the sea, the warm, moist air rises up. When it reaches the top of the mountains, it condenses to form clouds, which eventually rain down on the side facing the sea. By the time the air crosses over the mountains to the other side, almost all the moisture has been



A woman draws water from a well at Mahoba in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

exhausted, thus the side facing away from the sea receives little to no rainfall, aridifying over time. This has happened with Vidarbha and Marathwada.

Climate change is worsening this situation. Both regions have been recording erratic rainfall of late.

"The number of rainy days are coming down and rain on a particular day is increasing. But the gap between two rainy days is long," Ramanjaneyulu G.V., executive director of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, said in September 2024. Satellite data has also revealed that temperatures in the two regions already surpass the 50°C mark in May.

Those who live here pack their belongings on bullock carts and travel for hundreds of kilometres to sugar cane plantations in Western Maharashtra and Karnataka. There, they stay for four to six months, working as "cane cutters" in these fields, Ankita Bhatkhande, head of communications at a social-impact consultancy named Asar, said.

Bhatkhande has been involved in research projects that study the extent and impact of droughts in Maharashtra. India is the world's largest producer and consumer of sugar cane. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution reported that in 2021, the country produced 50 crore tonnes of sugar cane, generating a revenue of more than ₹20,000 crore.

This flattering number does not reflect the reality of the migrant labourers who harvest the country's sugar cane fields.

According to Bhatkhande, cane cutters are hired typically as a couple: the husband cuts the sugar cane and the wife stacks them. Together, the couple is called a *kotta* – a Marathi word for the sickle used to cut the sugar cane. These



Migration may be the most effective way to allow people to diversify income and build resilience where environmental change threatens livelihoods

labourers are hired by a contractor known as the *mukaddam*, who pays the couple an advance: a sum that can range anywhere between ₹5,000 to ₹5 lakh depending on the couple's financial requirements, the size of the sugar cane plantations, and the quantity of sugar cane expected to be harvested that year.

"The precarity and conditions of this migration and the wages that they get have worsened year on year," Bhatkhande added.

Because they are paid an advance, the labourers are required to work until they have cut enough sugar cane to match the payment. For example, if a couple has been paid ₹50,000 at the rate of ₹367 per tonne of sugar cane harvested, they must cut 136 tonnes of sugar cane in the harvesting season. However, erratic rainfall and dry spells have brought down the production of sugar cane, which is a water-intensive crop. This means the labourers have to return the next season with no extra payment to make up for the deficit, creating a cycle of debt bondage.

The worsening precarity also reflects on who is migrating: "Earlier, people in their 30s and 20s were the ones who were migrating. Now, people who are nearing their 70s and 80s are also migrating for work," Bhatkhande said.

The younger people cut the sugar cane and load stacks of it onto tractors while the elders are hired to remove weeds



Farmers load harvested sugar cane to be transported to a sugar mill, at a village in Karad. PTI

from the farm and sort and stack the cane before it is loaded.

When the migrants reach the sugar cane fields, they are given "an extremely dirty and shabby patch of land where they can set up their homes," she added. These, according to her, typically take the shape of plastic sheet tents with no electricity, toilets, or water.

Adaptation v. displacement

The conditions are no better for migrants from Bundelkhand. Jatav, the BBAU economist, said that in the metropolitan cities to which they migrate, they work as daily-wage construction workers, security guards, and at *dhabas* (roadside restaurants). Only those who are highly skilled get jobs that pay them enough money to rent a room. Others accommodate themselves in slums, where poor sanitation leads to a deterioration of their health, Jatav added.

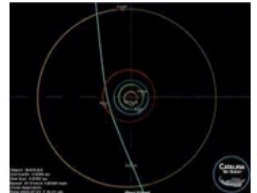
Back home, the struggle is different. As the migrant's family waits for its remittances to arrive – which can take around six months after a person has migrated and set up shop in the city, per Jatav's estimate – they struggle to make ends meet. The worst hit are the women and the children. With the women left to manage "everything on their own," they are unable to effectively monitor even whether their children are going to school, according to Jatav. He added that women also become increasingly vulnerable to sexual assault.

For the migrants from Charpauli and other villages on the banks of Jamuna, what they do after migration depends on where they migrate to. Some villagers migrate to other villages, Freihardt said. There, they insert themselves into jobs that are reminiscent of their life in their previous homes, which now lie underwater: "agricultural work for other people's lands". Those who migrate to cities take up more informal jobs, such as rickshaw pulling, construction work, and daily-wage work in brick kilns.

In a 2011 commentary in *Nature*, researchers from the University of Sussex and the UK government, argued that migration "may be the most effective way to allow people to diversify income and build resilience where environmental change threatens livelihoods." That is, they suggested, migration could be a form of adaptation against climate change-induced loss of livelihoods.

Jatav disagreed, however: at least in the context of Bundelkhand, he explained, migration is a form of "forced displacement" that lowers the "social security of the migrants and their family." "Migration is not an adaptation. It is a crisis."

(Savyant Datta is an independent journalist and a faculty member at Krea University. They tweet @queersprings. The author thanks Annu Jalais, Chirag Dhara, and Jaideep Hardikar for their inputs. dattasavyant95@gmail.com)



A snapshot of the orbit of 3I/ATLAS (light blue) through the solar system. The concentric rings at the centre depict the orbits of the solar system's inner planets. The orange ring is Jupiter's orbit. CSS, D. RANKIN (CC BY-SA)

Possibly oldest known comet streaks through solar system

The Hindu Bureau

On July 1, scientists using the ATLAS survey telescope in Chile reported they had discovered an object in space they called 3I/ATLAS, after tracking it since June 14. They quickly recognised the object was interstellar: its highly elliptical orbit around the sun and how quickly it was moving through space, at about 57-68 km/s relative to the sun, were clear giveaways. In fact, its path was found to trace back to the direction of the constellation Sagittarius.

NASA has already said 3I/ATLAS won't pose any threat to the earth. Its closest approach to our planet will be about 270 million km. Its closest approach to the sun itself will be on October 29-30, 2025, at about 210 million km, just inside Mars's orbit. After it swings past the sun in its hyperbolic orbit, it will exit the solar system never to return.

Early observations have confirmed that 3I/ATLAS is an active comet, exhibiting a visible coma – the cloud of ice particles and dust that enshroud the nucleus as it nears a star – and likely developing a tail as it approaches the sun. Photometric measurements have revealed it has a reddish hue. Its spectral slope of about 1.3% per 100 nm suggested its surface is rich in complex organic compounds or water ice.

NASA has said 3I/ATLAS won't pose any threat to earth. Its closest approach will be about 270 million km. After it swings past the sun in its hyperbolic orbit, it will exit the solar system, never to return

The size of the nucleus of 3I/ATLAS itself is still uncertain thanks to the dust surrounding it. Current estimates nonetheless suggest it's about 10-30 km wide, which would make it larger than either of its interstellar predecessors, 1I/Oumuamua in 2017 and 2I/Borisov in 2019. Its composition and rotation period are under active investigation by multiple international teams using ground-based telescopes.

Indeed 3I/ATLAS is likely to be the oldest comet scientists have ever observed, possibly predating the solar system itself by more than 3 billion years. Computer simulations that physicists have run have indicated that it may have originated in the thin disk of the Milky Way, or even from an older, thick-disk star.

This means studying 3I/ATLAS could reveal unique details from the Milky Way's galactic history.

Its rich water ice content and ancient origin also offer a rare chance to study primordial material from another star system, providing insights into the building blocks of planets and the processes of star formation across the galaxy.

A global campaign is currently underway to monitor 3I/ATLAS as it passes through the inner solar system. Astronomers at observatories are collecting data on its composition, activity, and trajectory, with the aim of learning as much as possible before it fades from view.

The comet should be visible to amateur astronomers with modest telescopes in late 2025 and early 2026.

In sum, the discovery of 3I/ATLAS has opened a new window into the study of interstellar objects, offering a wealth of data for planetary scientists and astronomers eager to learn about the distant origins of such cosmic wanderers.

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

Final report of AI plane crash should be definitive

THE preliminary report of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) probing the Air India flight 171 crash has answered only a few of the many questions. The objectivity and credibility of the report is already being questioned, thereby casting a shadow over what should have been an impartial and transparent investigation into one of India's worst aviation accidents in recent years. The AAIB has clearly stated that information in the report is "preliminary and subject to change," and this disclaimer is crucial. It reflects the nature of aviation accident investigations, which often require months of meticulous data gathering, expert analysis, and testing before definitive conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, given the

high public interest and the gravity of the crash, many had hoped that the preliminary report would at least offer a coherent narrative of what could have happened in the cockpit in the moments leading up to the disaster. One of the most significant findings in the report is the observation that both engine fuel cutoff switches "transitioned from run to cutoff position one after another with a time gap of one second."

This is a vital piece of evidence, as it essentially indicates that both engines stopped receiving fuel in rapid succession, leading to a total loss of thrust. However, the report stops short of explaining why this happened. Did the transition occur due to manual pilot input or a mechanical failure? This critical question remains unanswered, leaving a major gap in understanding the sequence of events that led to the crash. The report rules out a range of common contributing factors such as adverse weather conditions, bird strikes, incorrect aircraft configuration, contaminated fuel, and pre-existing issues with the engines that were known earlier on. This narrows the potential causes to a few possibilities, but without pinpointing whether human error or technical malfunction was responsible for the fuel cutoff, the report leaves a crucial ambiguity unresolved. The response of the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) India to the preliminary report has also served to deepen skepticism. ALPA has publicly criticised the findings, stating that the report

hints at "the guilt of pilots." This response reflects a broader concern within the aviation community: that the preliminary report, while ostensibly factual, may contain implications that are neither proven nor fair. In the absence of definitive evidence, implying pilot culpability—whether through omission or ambiguity—will not only damage reputations but also derail the broader safety learning that should be the primary outcome of any such investigation. It is essential that investigations focus on establishing fact-based causes and not stray into speculative territory. Aviation safety experts have also pointed out that investigations should aim not just at identifying the causes and those responsible

but at preventing future occurrences. From this perspective, the preliminary report would have been more helpful had it provided a clearer roadmap of the investigative steps ahead, especially regarding the analysis of the cockpit voice recorder (CVR), flight data recorder (FDR), and the potential examination of the aircraft's electronic and mechanical systems. What remains now is the hope that the final report will bring greater clarity, accountability, and closure. For the families of the victims, the aviation industry, and the traveling public, the credibility of the AAIB's conclusions is of utmost importance. A transparent, technically sound, and impartial investigation is a sine qua non of institutional responsibility.

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LETTERS

Judicial reforms and youth

THE Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice B.R. Gawai, while speaking at NALSAR University in Hyderabad, was quite forthright by bringing to the fore the deep flaws in the country's judicial system—especially excessive trial delays and the prolonged detention of undertrial prisoners, which erode public trust in justice. However, he expressed hope in young law graduates, whom he exhorted to lead with integrity and purpose. A practical path forward includes setting time-bound trial limits, increasing judicial appointments, integrating technology in court processes, and fast-tracking undertrial cases. Moreover, legal education must go beyond theory to instill ethical responsibility, shaping future lawyers as true guardians of justice.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

CJI is right about the craving for LLM from abroad

THE statement of the CJI B.R. Gawai as regards the fad of Indian students to go abroad for pursuing LLM courses is indeed true, particularly in the prevailing international circumstances. Moreover, laws may be universal but in practice they differ in the Indian context due to several inherent factors that must be understood at the grass root level. Returning to India after acquiring a PG qualification abroad does not in any way fetch more clients to practising lawyers. The young law graduates must evolve strategies to reduce delays in disposing cases, especially those related to innocent people, who have been in jails for decades together. The CJI has rightly advised students about not burdening their parents with financial requirements just to get a LLM from abroad but instead complete their higher education in India.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

CJI needs to streamline delivery of justice

THE advice given by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice B.R. Gawai, who urged law students to avoid higher studies abroad and instead extend their legal knowledge to serve the underprivileged sections is highly appreciative. This can help achieve justice to all. I urge the CJI to guide his team of legal heads and officials to sort out all pending and come up with viable solutions so that the innocent victims could get justice. Conducting frequent Lok Adalats across the country will provide relief to lakhs of innocent victims and considerably address the problem of inordinate delays.

Guidipati Anirudh, Secunderabad

Kota was a multifaceted actor

Kota Srinivasa Rao, popularly known as Kota, breathed his last in Hyderabad in the wee hours of Sunday at 83. He is known for his versatile portrayals, including as a villain, comedian and character roles. Though he was a stage star, he transitioned to cinema and acted in more than 750 films. He proved his acting skills even in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi films. A gifted artist, he could deliver dialogues in the local dialect of Telangana, Andhra and Seema with dexterity. His acting credentials are comparable to S.V. Ranga Rao, Rajanala, Kalka Satyanarayana and Ravu Gopal Rao. He also forayed into politics and represented BJP in Vijayawada East constituency in 1999. The humble bank employee has won nine Nandi awards and was conferred Padma Shri in 2015. His demise is an irreparable loss to the film world, especially to Tollywood.

Pratap Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

Kota legacy will live for eternity

THE film industry, especially Tollywood, on Sunday lost a versatile actor, who excelled in whatever roles he took up. A former employee of SBI, Kota Srinivasa Rao passed into the pages of history on Sunday at the age of 83 years. His film career spanned over 45 years during which he starred in more than 750 movies across genres. A recipient of Padma Shri and nine Nandi awards, among several other honours, as a distant relative of his, I am sure that the legacy of Kota will stay on for eternity.

N Ramakrishna, Secunderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

Sigandur Bridge set for inauguration

SHIVAMOGGA: A six-decade-long dream of 40 villages scattered across the backwaters of the Sharavathi River in Sagara taluk is finally becoming a reality, as the much-anticipated Sigandur Bridge is all set to be inaugurated on July 14. Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, who laid its foundation stone in 2018, will return to formally open this historic lifeline that promises to transform connectivity in the region.

For more than sixty years, the people of Ambagodlu, Kalkavalli, Tumari and surrounding hamlets lived like islanders, relying solely on limited daytime launch services to cross the Linganamakki backwaters. After sunset, they remained completely cut off, facing unimaginable hardship in medical emergencies or urgent travel situations. But this ordeal is about to end. Built at a cost of ₹8423 crore, the Sigandur Bridge is now Karnataka's longest inland cable-stayed bridge, stretching about 2.25 kilometers with a robust design to withstand the powerful flow of the Sharavathi. It connects Ambagodlu and Kalsavalli villages, dramatically cutting travel time between Sagara and Sigandur by nearly an hour. Not just villagers, but lakhs of devotees visiting the famous Sigandur Chowdeshwari Temple will benefit from this modern marvel.

The bridge is designed with advanced extradosed balanced cantilever technology and stands as India's second longest cable-stayed bridge after the Dwaraka bridge in Gujarat. Supported by 17 pillars and an 11-meter-wide roadway, it showcases a blend of engineering excellence and thoughtful planning amid the lush greenery of the Western Ghats.

Read more at

<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

Golkonda: Unifying Telangana's capital region



M. NAGESWARA RAO

PLACE names reflect their historical and cultural identities, and Hyderabad, a dynamic metropolis in southern India, is no exception. Debates persist over its origins, particularly the narrative that Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah founded it in 1591 as Bhagyanagar after his alleged Hindu wife or court-servant, Bhagmati—a claim lacking historical evidence. This article examines Hyderabad's nomenclature, challenges the Bhagyanagar story, and proposes renaming the urban agglomeration—encompassing Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Cyberabad—as Golkonda to honour its Kakatiya and Golla (Yadav) heritage, fostering a unified regional identity.

Golkonda and the Kakatiya legacy

Golkonda Fort, founded by the Kakatiya dynasty in the 12th century as a strategic western outpost, became the cornerstone of Telangana's capital region, shaping its political, historical, and cultural prominence. Renowned for their contributions to culture, architecture, economic prosperity, the Telugu language, and efficient governance, the Kakatiyas developed innovative tank irrigation systems for agriculture. Golkonda, a strategic western outpost, protected against invasions from the north. The name Golkonda, derived from the Telugu words Golla (shepherd or Yadav) and Konda (hill), reflects the region's pastoral heritage and the Golla community's role as herders, farmers, and warriors. The Kakatiya empire fell to Islamic invaders in the early 14th century, with the Delhi Sultanate, under Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughlaq, annexing the Deccan. By the mid-14th century, Golkonda came under Bahmani

ani Sultanate control. After its disintegration, the Qutub Shahi dynasty, founded by Sultan Quli Qutub Shah in 1518, made Golkonda its capital, leveraging its strategic location along the Musi River and natural defences.

In 1591, Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah, the fifth ruler, established Hyderabad, named after Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam (with Hyder referring to Ali's title, "Lion of God"), about eight kilometers east of Golkonda. With the iconic Charninar at its core, Hyderabad became the political and economic hub, while Golkonda remained a key military and cultural site.

The Bhagyanagar narrative—Fact or fiction?

The claim that Hyderabad was originally named Bhagyanagar after Bhagmati, a Hindu woman, is a narrative that lacks credible historical evidence. Primary Qutub Shahi sources, such as the Tarikh-i-Qutub Shahi and Tazkirat-ul-Muluk, make no mention of Bhagmati or Bhagyanagar, possibly due to a preference for Islamic nomenclature (Sherwani, 1974). However, 17th-century European accounts by travellers like Jean de Thévenot (Travels in India, 1687) occasionally refer to the city as "Baghinagar," suggesting some basis for the oral tradition preserved among local Telugu communities.

Cultural improbability:

The Bhagyanagar narrative raises cultural questions. It is unlikely that a Muslim ruler would name his capital after a Hindu woman, whether a wife or court-servant. Islamic rulers typically chose Persian or Arabic names for their cities, reflecting their religious and cultural identities, as seen in Ahmedabad (named after Sultan Ahmad Shah) and Aurangabad (after Emperor Aurangzeb). Naming a city after a Hindu woman would have been an anomaly. Moreover, the claim that Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah married a Hindu woman named Bhagmati is questionable, as conversion to Islam was typically required for marriage (Nikhil). Even if Bhagmati existed, naming a city after a court-servant would have been considered



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dishonourable in both Hindu and Muslim cultural contexts, further undermining the narrative's credibility.

Alternative explanations for Bhagyanagar:

If the Bhagmati story is fictional, how did the name Bhagyanagar arise in the first place? One plausible hypothesis is that Hyderabad was built on a pre-existing village named Bhagyanagar, possibly named after a local deity or temple. The Bhagyalakshmi temple within the Charninar premises supports this theory.

Given the historical prevalence of Islamic iconoclasm, destruction of Hindu temples, a temple dedicated to Goddess Bhagyalakshmi may have been demolished to construct the Charninar, explaining the site's religious significance for local Hindus. The name Bhagyalakshmi, derived from Bhagya (fortune or prosperity) and Lakshmi (city), could have been a local name preserved in oral traditions but absent from official records.

Archaeological considerations:

Verifying the Bhagyanagar hypothesis requires archaeological excavations under and around the Charninar and other historical sites in Hyderabad. Such investigations could uncover evidence of pre-existing Hindu temples or settlements. However, excavations near the Charninar are impractical due to urban constraints and communal sensitivities. The Bhagyalakshmi temple's location within the Charninar complex remains a tantalising clue, but without further evidence, the Bhagyanagar narrative remains speculative.

Cultural and political implications:

Even if the Bhagyanagar story

were true, its implications for Hindu cultural identity are problematic. Naming a city after a Hindu woman associated with a Muslim ruler, whether as a wife or court-servant, could be perceived as undermining Hindu pride. Such relationships often symbolised conquest or subjugation and commemorating them through a city's name would conflict with Hindu pride. Moreover, the lack of historical evidence for Bhagmati undermines the legitimacy of Bhagyanagar as Hyderabad's original name. Thus, insisting on Bhagyanagar is problematic, and a more inclusive, historically accurate nomenclature is needed to honour the region's indigenous heritage.

Golkonda—Etymology and cultural significance

The name Golkonda offers a compelling alternative for restoring the identity of Hyderabad's urban agglomeration. Derived from the Telugu words Golla (shepherd or Yadav) and Konda (hill or mountain), Golkonda reflects the region's pastoral and agrarian roots. The Golla community, traditionally cattle herders, played a vital role in Telangana's economy and culture. Their association with Lord Krishna imbues Golkonda with spiritual significance, drawing parallels to Govardhan Purvat, the sacred hill lifted by Krishna in Hindu lore.

Golkonda Fort, established as a Kakatiya western garrison outpost, represents a tangible link to Telangana's past. The Kakatiyas were champions of Telugu culture, constructing iconic monuments like the Warangal Fort, Ramappa temple, and architecture. Reverting the name Golkonda would pay homage to their legacy while fostering regional pride that transcends religious and communal divides.

Golkonda as the urban agglomeration's name:

This sprawling urban agglomeration today comprises three distinct cities—Hyderabad, the historical and cultural core; Secunderabad, a colonial-era cantonment; and Cyberabad, a modern IT hub—along with several other suburban localities. Naming the entire urban agglomeration Golkonda would celebrate the Kakatiya dynasty as the founders of Telangana's capital region, honouring their enduring legacy in shaping a unified identity that reflects the area's historical continuity and cultural diversity. This approach mirrors New York City's structure, which unifies its five distinct boroughs: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. Adopting Golkonda as the overarching name would honour the Golla community's contributions, restore the region's Kakatiya roots, and embrace its modern and Muslim heritage.

To begin, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (hMDA) and the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB) could be renamed as the Golkonda Metropolitan Development Authority and the Golkonda Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board, respectively, as the jurisdiction of these entities encompasses areas beyond the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) jurisdiction.

Benefits of the Golkonda nomenclature:

- **Historical accuracy:** Golkonda, unlike Bhagyanagar, is a documented name from the Kakatiya and Qutub Shahi eras, free from the speculative Bhagmati narrative.
- **Cultural inclusivity:** Golkonda honours the

Golla (Yadav) community and Kakatiya legacy, appealing to locals while remaining religiously neutral.

- **Regional unity:** Golkonda unifies Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Cyberabad under a shared identity.
- **Global recognition:** Golkonda's historical significance and diamond trade legacy (e.g., Kohinoor, Hope diamonds) enhance the region's cultural and economic brand.

Addressing potential concerns:

It may be argued that changing Hyderabad's name could disrupt its established identity or create other challenges. However, this proposal does not advocate renaming Hyderabad itself but rather adopting Golkonda as an overarching name for Telangana's capital region, similar to the Delhi-NCR model. This approach preserves the individual identities of Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Cyberabad while providing a unifying framework.

The Bhagyanagar narrative, while popular among some Hindu groups, is divisive. By contrast, Golkonda is rooted in Telangana's pre-Muslim history and avoids religious connotations, making it a more inclusive choice. Notably, the Qutub Shahi dynasty was also known as the Golkonda Nawabs, ensuring the name acknowledges their legacy as well.

Conclusion:

The debate over Hyderabad's nomenclature reflects broader questions of history and identity. The Bhagyanagar narrative, though evocative, lacks evidence and carries divisive implications. Golkonda, rooted in indigenous heritage, offers a unifying and historically accurate alternative.

As Capital Region Golkonda, Telangana can celebrate its diverse past, foster regional unity, and inspire a future of shared pride and recognition.

(The author is a retired IPS officer, and a former Director, CBI. Views are personal)

Treatable weakness in blood vessels can impact cancer survivors' muscles: New research

JAELES REHMAN

TUMOURS can destroy the blood vessels of muscles even when the muscles are nowhere close to the tumour. That is the key finding of a new study that my colleagues and I recently published in the journal Nature Cancer.

Muscle loss in cancer patients is a major health problem, but the exact causes of how precisely tumours affect muscles remain an active area of research. Scientists in my lab were curious whether one explanation for the muscle loss in cancer patients could be that the cancer impairs the blood vessels that are necessary to supply nutrients and oxygen to muscles. Healthy blood vessels ensure that blood containing oxygen and nutrients is transported from the heart to all tissues and organs in the body and then circulates back to the heart. Unhealthy blood vessels lose the ability to circulate sufficient blood and develop leaks, with nutrients seeping into the tissue prematurely and thereby cutting off the supply of nutrients to

tissues that are further downstream. To tackle this question, my colleagues and I worked with several other scientific research teams with expertise in advanced microscopy, cancer research and metabolism. We used animal models to study several kinds of tumours—lung cancer, skin cancer, colon cancer and pancreatic cancer. We consistently observed that the blood vessels in the muscles became fewer and leakier even before the muscle weakness set in.

Activin-A matters:

We also found that tumours release a protein called Activin-A, which acts on blood vessels to cause the leakiness and, ultimately, loss of blood vessels in the muscles. When we used gene therapy to restore blood vessel health by counteracting the effects of Activin-A, we were able to prevent muscle loss. So, we examined the muscles of patients who had passed away because of cancer and found that the muscles of cancer patients contained fewer blood vessels than expected.



Millions of cancer survivors struggle with muscle weakness, which can be so profound that they may have difficulties walking up a couple of flights of stairs or going shopping for groceries on their own. Severe muscle weakness and muscle loss during cancer is called cancer cachexia, which occurs in up to 80 per cent of patients with advanced cancer. Recent research indicates that cachexia is far more common among cancer patients than previously suspected, with approximately half the patients who see their cancer doctor for the first time already showing signs of muscle weakness. Importantly, cachexia can persist even after the cancer is successfully treated and cured.

This can have a devastating impact on the quality of life for cancer survivors. Our discovery that the loss of blood vessel function in the muscles occurs early on during the progression of the cancer suggests that fixing blood vessels in cancer patients and cancer survivors could be a new way to prevent or reverse cachexia. The reasons for the muscle loss in cancer are complicated and involve poor nutrition due to loss of appetite and inflammation, which are initially caused by the tumour but persist even when the tumour is removed. There are currently no treatments approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for cachexia, but

new therapies are on the horizon. One such therapy is an antibody drug that targets the molecule GDF-15, a protein that is thought to suppress appetite. Other studies are using a combination of targeted nutrition and exercise programs to help patients with cancer cachexia regain muscle mass and muscle strength. All these studies suggest that we will need a combination of approaches to enhance exercise, nutrition, appetite, muscle regeneration and strength—as we propose—blood vessel health. We are now evaluating drugs and exercise programmes that are known to improve blood vessel health. Repurposing these treatments that are traditionally designed for cardiovascular patients could be a rapid way to help cancer patients regain muscle strength.

We hope that our work highlights how important it is for cancer patients to receive comprehensive medical care, which includes improving cardiovascular health and overall quality of life. (The writer is from the University of Illinois, Chicago)