







## A thought for today

I lost my ability to speak, I lost my words, I couldn't talk and I couldn't go on... That's how frightened I was

E JEAN CARROLL

## UnSafe Spaces

Sexual crimes on campus hurt women's aspirations in singular ways, but politics could be least bothered

Why did a woman college student in Balasore, Odisha set herself on fire? We will never know the entirety of the answer. But there's plenty we do know and it's all dismaying. She had apprised her college internal complaints committee about a professor who had been asking her for 'favourites', and there was pressure to withdraw the complaint. She had also gone to police but no FIR had been registered. She had posted on X that if she didn't get justice she would commit suicide. Finally, it took 4.5 hours after she poured petrol on herself to get her to AIIMS Bhubaneswar, and that proved too late. This seems the most pitiful case of a death foretold. Except such a label belies the culpability of every person and every system that failed to both protect the 20-year-old and give her a rightful hearing.

There are mandated POSH committees, strong laws against sexual harassment, polity-wide specifying for safe campuses. Yet, when women students complain, all too often what they actually meet is institutional stonewalling. Horrifying cases continue to wound in silos. In Kolkata, even as the law student rape case makes its way through court, another one is being reported from a premier B-school. But shouldn't a single such case anywhere in the country alert every college and university to audit its safety and complaint apparatus? Odisha of course had been served a warning by a woman's suicide at KIIT just this Feb. Her complaints of harassment and blackmail seemed to have been shrugged off as carelessly as in the Balasore case.

The immolated student's father says he doesn't want her to be 'used' for political gain. His plea is getting as poor a hearing as her complaint did. Fact is that if govts and political parties responded with sincerity to such horrors, they would speak and act unitedly. Tragically, it is other agendas that go on the frontfoot. This explains why BJP won't be sustainably outraging the Balasore case like it does the Kolkata ones. Or why TMC doesn't take issue with sexual crimes in Bengal in its usual decibels. It's discouraging enough that all-India conviction rate for rape cases that go on trial is only 2.6%. But muddying campus crimes has particular knock-on effects. For women to be attacked and brushed aside in the very space that was supposed to empower them, is a particularly noxious deterrent to their dreams.

## Indian Drone Shield

Pak-origin UAVs must be countered through huge tech investments across the board

In what should worry the security establishment, there's been an uptick in Pakistani smugglers pushing drones laden with drugs, arms and ammunition deeper into India. After a brief lull during Operation Sindoor, drone-borne smuggling has resumed with greater precision, reportedly using Chinese drones that can fly higher to evade detection. This is hardly petty smuggling but part of a well-planned Pakistani ICAD (illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive) strategy to undermine India's security. The goal is to get drugs, guns and money to criminal elements on this side of the border.

It's part of Pakistan's old doctrine of bleeding India with a thousand cuts. Consider this: last Sept, a police team in Punjab discovered a haul of Nato-grade guns - most likely originating in Afghanistan - from smugglers linked to Pakistani drone drops. With such weapons being also found with terrorists in Kashmir, the modus operandi is clear. Drone drops from Pakistan started after the nullification of Article 370 in 2019. To counter this BSF adopted anti-drone systems like Dronaam that neutralises Pak-origin UAVs using laser. Even specialised anti-drone teams have been set up. But the versatility of drone tech means that it is constantly evolving.

Drones can be modified and adapted to evade detection, they can change modus operandi and alter application. The Ukraine war exemplifies this. Drone tech is changing every fortnight. This also means counter-drone tech has to constantly innovate in real time. That in turn means creating a large pool of expertise throughout the security establishment and linking this with R&D institutes. Drones are rapidly transforming from FPV to fibre optic to the emerging AI versions. The only way to stay ahead of the curve is to heavily invest in drone tech in both industry and academia. India must create its own drone shield.



Bachi Karkaria

## Coco-colonialism

London is going nuts over 'hariyal'

Oxford Street isn't yet redolent with aromas of simmering *ariyal*, albeit close enough. Goodbye, Coca-colonialism. Hello, coco-colonialism. London is being blitzed by coconut milk, water, oil, fresh/desiccated/compacted kerd. From tabloid, tube and bus, I'm bombarded with ads ordering 'Coconut to Coconut'. It isn't baptism by fiery *kari*, but by cool coconut. Down the packed *hariyal* paani isn't a patch on slurping from the real thing, even if easier to wield. It's already caught on among India's sipping classes. Here, the little blue and white cartons are *drink du jour* not only coz Britain - indeed all exited-from Europe - is in the throes of a throat (and grass)-parching Indian summer. It's a wider conquest.

The unrelenting ad's baseline says, 'It's not a cult'. The odder distaste for milk from nature-intended sources led to such substitutes as soya, oat, almond, apple...Coconut conversion, however, goes beyond Veganism & Co. Its messaging cashes in on the greatest, latest messiah: 'gut health'. This is the silver bullet: sure-fire seduction; certain path to nirvana, physical, mental, psychological, yes, even social. As always, We knew it first. Remember the ancient eastern wisdom of a healthy morning evacuation? Here, 'potty' is ensured by a pot of 'Coconut Yog'. That's yoghurt, not Gurjari lyengar. The ad promises 'ALL YOUR PROBLEMS WILL BE SOLVED'. If your problems are exclusively breakfast-based, Or dessert-based. Or curry-dollop-based. Or wanting a whole coconut in each pot-based.

Chicken tikka masala and king-sized samosa, ok, but no self-respecting diner will cure home-food yearning with ersatz Enakulam. Better to favour real curry. Mercifully this is no longer the pineapple-riddled atrocity once dished up in icky-sticky Bangladeshi dives. As a mark of my own upgrading, the only Bangladeshi I encountered was expertly shaking signature cocktails in a Portobello tapas bar - and calling himself 'Jose'.

Still, good to know that 'coco' is now something more desirable than a WOG (Westernised Oriental Exoticism) who was 'brown outside, white inside'. Even more satisfying is palms metaphorically swaying amidst odors, more evidence of East and West mixing, and nixing colonial Mr Kipling.

Alec Smart said: "Tesla test-drives India."

## The Voter &amp; The Commission

EC's Bihar exercise throws up too many questions, including why Jan's summary roll revision by state election commission can't be the basis for coming assembly polls

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TDP wants EC to clarify that its country-wide Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is "not related to citizenship verification". As Supreme Court asked EC last week, "why are you getting into" deciding citizenship.

EC's initial insistence on birth certificates for those enrolled after 2003 was based on Vajpayee NDA's Citizenship Amendment Act 2003 - those born after 1987 and before 2004 must show one parent is an Indian citizen. Those born after 2004 must prove both parents are citizens. Many poor and internal migrants, including minorities, aren't able to produce such documents. News reports lay bare the problems and anxieties at the grassroots.

EC in its June 24 circular allowed booth level officers (BLOs) to report on voters whom a BLO finds iffy basis "missing documents or otherwise". Not only is that subjective, poll officials - school teachers, postal workers, govt admin - have neither the mandate nor the competency to identify illegal immigrants.

It's still unclear why EC chose Bihar to pilot SIR months before assembly polls. SIRs haven't taken place since the 2000s because digitisation was expected to sort out 'duplication' and weed out 'ineligible' voters on the rolls, updated on a rolling basis. Every summary revision by an SEC rationalises voter lists. For instance, over 8L names were deleted from Bihar SEC's roll released after summary revision ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

SC should ask why EC doesn't consider its Jan 2025 revision kosher. If the 2022 census survey in Bihar's Seemanchal districts revealed more Aadhaar than population, why did EC wait three years? EC could have ordered constituency-wise checks immediately, not on the eve of elections.

Plus, there exists no scientific study, survey, or estimate by EC or any SEC about the extent of to which rolls are 'bloated' because of duplication or ineligible voters. Is it 0.1%, 1%, 3%, 10%? What is the sudden need for an SIR India-wide with short lead times? Imagine the chaos if the next rounds are in Assam, Bengal,

Kerala, and Tamil Nadu - again months before state polls between March and May 2026.

Also, EC has said both that *no name will be deleted* and that voters who don't submit forms *won't be included*. What does it want? A new roll, or an update?

EC refuses to accept Aadhaar for SIR, recognising its inadequacy. Yet it has collected an estimated 80% of Aadhaar numbers nationwide and, in March 2025, doubled down on linking Aadhaar with voter IDs. If Aadhaar is unreliable for SIR, why continue promoting its linkage with voter IDs?



EC's push for a tech-forward interface between citizens & EC is concerning. When electoral processes, especially voter rolls, are tech-led, controls move away from a human-led voter-state interface to multiple tech layers. Citizens deal with a centralised faceless entity with no accountability, away from the booth-level interaction.

Technically, bloated rolls can be identified through turnout patterns, anomalies in elector-to-population ratios, low male turnout in certain migration constituencies, and linkage with death registries. These can all be addressed through existing targeted interventions - what summary revisions accomplish like clockwork before every election.

EC cites the need to de-duplicate. Voter rolls are built in parts. Parts are brought together to build a constituency's voter roll. But 'integration' between two constituencies or at inter-district levels is uneven across states. EC had envisioned EPIC portability for migrants through connected voter rolls. But to make that happen linking of rolls is required. This has not materialised yet. To understand why ask who owns voter rolls?

SECs are guardians of their respective voter rolls. EC is given voter data ground up, state by state. It is not yet a reality that Karnataka's voter roll is linked with UP's or Gujarat's. SIR cannot fix de-duplication, because how do you prove the Bihar migrant also has a vote in Bengaluru?

Is it a question of deploying tech? No. EC was the keeper of Lok Sabha and state assembly election rolls. But in letter and spirit of the Union of states, the question of linking or integrating rolls becomes a political, federal, legal matter.

The drive to hang all states' voter rolls on a BigTech BigData frame is overcentralisation of electorate's details. This becomes relevant given EC is set to start prepping for One Nation One Election (ONOE), which may kick in by 2034 Lok Sabha polls. To that end, SIR appears to be a renewed attempt to create an all-India integrated single roll - tech-led.

But is this desirable? Simultaneous elections have been held successfully without integrated voter rolls - Andhra and Odisha are cases in point. There's a perceptible shift in EC's digitisation goals. If empowering migrants was once the focus, 'weeding out ineligible voters' has emerged a concern without any survey suggesting this is a bigger issue than bogus voting or missing names.

SECs, set to lose powers with ONOE, must ask EC to explain the need for SIR. None of the reasons EC cited - rapid urbanisation for poll booth rationalisation, migrants, or 'ineligible' voters - demand a *total* redo of digitised voters' list. The latter two need targeted interventions.

Bihar voter rolls are a litmus test for EC.

## Why Cheer A Show That Empathises With Male Rage?

Emmy nominations for *Adolescence* can't hide its troubling message: that male violence is a product of male suffering, and women are accountable for the actions of violent men

Anna M M Vettickad



Spreading awareness about the causes of violence could help combat it. But what if awareness-building camouflages subtle victim-blaming and sympathy for perpetrators? I've wrestled with this question since *Adolescence* went globally viral this summer, more so since it bagged multiple spots among the Emmy nominations announced on Tuesday.

The British series revolves around the fallout of a 15-year-old boy murdering a girl from his school. Through four episodes, it examines circumstances surrounding his brutality, including an absent Dad, bullying and online misogyny. Amidst all-round adulation, what's gone largely unnoticed is the stealth with which *Adolescence* makes room for women/girls to be held accountable when assaulted by men.

**Viral fever** | "She must have done something to provoke him." *Adolescence* takes a deftly disguised version of this oft-repeated line against victims of male violence, packaging it in beautiful acting, poignant music, technical brilliance and polished obfuscation.

This is unfortunate because the show has spawned necessary worldwide discussions on pressures borne by teenage boys in this social networking era. In India, it has mainstreamed hitherto niche topics related to internet influencers inflaming boys: the manosphere (a virtual ecosystem devoted to hate for women), incels (men/boys who self-identify as involuntary celibates) and proud misogynists like Andrew Tate with massive followings. These themes are more familiar to North America and Europe, where the radicalisation of men on the deep web has led to mass killings recognised as misogynistic terror attacks. But Tate clones exist in India too, driving an under-reported sub-culture of unapologetic, aggressive misogyny among male youth.

This conversation is incomplete though unless we critique the surreptitious misrepresentation

of incelhood in *Adolescence*.

**Tricky selectiveness** | One aspect of the show that has drawn flak from a handful of feminists is that while the teenaged murderer, Jamie, is written with depth, we never meet the victim, Katie. To my mind this is not the issue. A criminal's biography need not include biographies of his/her victims, nor should audiences require profiles of victims to condemn a crime. Here's the issue though: having excluded Katie from the story, the writers get other characters to reveal crucial information that renders her unreliable and could potentially be viewed as justification for Jamie's



revenge. We learn that she belittled Jamie while rejecting his romantic overture, bullied him online and publicly labelled him an incel.

For the record, the manosphere was not born of bullying by women - bullies, anyway exist across genders. The manosphere is rooted in anti-feminist sentiment, imagined male victimhood and a theory among incels that 80% of heterosexual men are denied romance and sex to which they are entitled.

Given this, characterising Katie as a bully is a mischievous scripting choice.

The show's defenders may claim that a balance is struck when Katie's friend calls her "the best person I knew...the only one who thought I was actually okay".

Notably though, these are fleeting, subjective comments in the few minutes allocated to this character who spends most of her screen time being belligerent and charmless. Katie's meanness, however, is detailed over a span of two episodes, by Jamie and an objective third party who did not personally know either of them but provides proof of her conduct. Earlier, in Episode 1, Jamie gets about an hour to be adorably scared and child-like, before we see a video of the murder. In the finale, he also has a redemptive moment.

**Questionable motives** | Even more than for Jamie, the script incorporates justifications for his father Eddie's fierce temper and violence. In fact, though the plot initially purports to be about Jamie, its overall design ultimately centres Eddie through whom *Adolescence* works hard to foster empathy for violent men. Eddie had a physically abusive father. Eddie wanted to be a better parent than that, Eddie's van was vandalised after Jamie's crime, Eddie was recognised as Jamie's Dad by a creepy stranger at a store - flawed but good-hearted Eddie on whose pain the spotlight is trained.

Jack Thorne, who co-created *Adolescence*, has said the show's purpose is "to look into the eye of male rage". In pursuit of this goal, the writing avoids addressing the inconvenient truth that enraged girls and women don't mimic the violence of enraged boys and men, though girls too face social media pressure and feelings of alienation in contemporary society, in addition to the violence and discrimination always intrinsic to the female experience.

For instance, Jamie's entire family was harassed after the murder, yet Eddie alone erupts in anger. While his wife and daughter walk on eggshells around him, we hear nothing of why they did not turn out like him and Jamie. They just don't.

This is not watertight. These are logical questions that could yield insights into gender conflict. *Adolescence* sidesteps them and insidiously positions male violence as a product of male suffering, while taking female restraint for granted.

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## Calvin &amp; Hobbes



## Sacredspace

The solutions that are ever worth anything are the solutions that people find themselves.

Satyajit Ray

## Practising Unconditional Love For Ourselves

Rajiv Vij

We all experience a sense of incompleteness or inadequacy from time to time. You could be insecure about your intellect, capability, lack of natural talent. Perhaps you struggle with imposter syndrome - the feeling that you are not as good as people perceive you to be.

What we don't realise is how much this underlying insecurity shapes our life experience. It often at the heart of our fear, anxiety, ego, and restlessness. It influences how we relate to others and how we react to setbacks. In many ways, it forms the fabric on which much of our life experience is woven.

Subconscious mind tries to overcome this insecurity in many ways. We seek perfection in ourselves, seek approval of others around us and chase visible and material goals. We implicitly assume that achieving these will make us feel

complete. In our own eyes and that of others. But we'll finally feel secure.

Yet, the top of every hill we climb turns out to be the bottom of the next. And the feeling of incompleteness returns. Comparing ourselves with others leaves us dissatisfied and insecure because there's always someone who's more successful, smarter, fitter, kinder, or who seems to have a more 'perfect' life.

True progress begins with building greater self-acceptance and deeper self-love. Ordinarily we judge ourselves all the time - we are often our worst critics. Instead, we need to practise unconditional love for ourselves. This unconditional love doesn't mean we believe we are perfect - simply that we are enough the way we are.

Know that each one of us is complete, whole and enough the way we are and

where we are in life right now. Irrespective of whether you get that coveted promotion or not, whether you lose weight or not, and whether your child gets admission to their dream college or not.

To connect with our completeness, we need to look beyond our passing thoughts and emotions. What is our essential unchanging self? Is it the body that is always changing with age, is it the thoughts and feelings which routinely arise and disappear, or is it the witness awareness that is present before, during and at the end of every experience?

We are the silent awareness that experiences all these changing states without getting altered itself. Our true nature is not the movie (the series of momentary experiences that we associate ourselves with) but the screen

on which it unfolds. We are not the waves in an ocean but the ocean itself in which the waves appear.

Take a moment now. Gently close your eyes. Turn your attention inward. Rest in that quiet witnessing presence. Notice how it feels - peaceful, calm, untouched by fear or striving. It's complete, whole and enough. And so are you! Becoming more secure is the doorway to experiencing lightness and inner peace. One of the biggest sources of our suffering is our attachment to fixed outcomes. When we are more secure within, we commit to the process while staying open to different possible outcomes.

This self-knowledge guides us to be more authentic, more humble, more fearless and more kind. We seek without striving, grow without pride, relate without judging and love without expectations.

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## Some cheer

India needs to diversify its energy sources to keep trade deficit low

India's trade data for the first quarter of this financial year (Q1FY26) and for June 2025 are leading to some room for cheer but there is considerable concern as well. The Commerce Ministry's monthly export-import data indicate that June's merchandise trade saw the sharpest uptick in outbound shipments to the U.S. in 14 months, at a growth rate of 23.5% to \$8.3 billion. This was likely aided by importers wishing to stock up before the July 9 "pause" in "reciprocal tariffs", but now extended to August 1. While overall goods exports in June almost stayed flat at \$35.4 billion (\$35.16 billion, last June), likely on account of softer crude oil prices, Q1FY26 registered a marginal year on year growth of 1.52% at \$12.17 billion. Despite the widening year on year merchandise trade deficit to \$67.26 billion (\$62.1 billion, Q1FY25), it is the impressive growth in services exports, by almost 11% to \$98.13 billion (\$88.46 billion, Q1FY25) that has aided in shrinking India's overall trade deficit by 9.4% in Q1FY26. This mirrors years of India's trade trajectory, where services have outperformed goods exports.

It is important to note that refined petroleum products have traditionally constituted the largest chunk of India's goods export (at about 15%). While many believe U.S. President Trump is unlikely to stay the course on his threat of a 100% "secondary tariffs" on countries buying Russian crude – to pressure Moscow to end its invasion of Ukraine – it hits an underbelly in India's merchandise trade. India overtook China recently to become the largest importer of Russian crude, forming 36% of its oil imports. This has helped India leverage the cost arbitrage as western European nations maintain a ban on Russian crude imports. But Mr. Trump's threat makes India's need to diversify its fuel and energy imports more urgent, as it focuses on electrifying transport and ramping up renewables. It also highlights the need for India to diversify and grow merchandise trade, by further leveraging its sprawling, labour-intensive micro, small and medium enterprises, which constitutes almost half (46%) its goods exports. Exports in electronic goods (46.93%), tea (32.64%), meat, dairy and poultry (19.7%) and marine products (13.33%), saw steady growth this June when compared with last June. But overall goods exports excluding petroleum and gems and jewellery were almost flat in the same period. With a fortnight to go and three rounds of negotiations to scramble a "mini deal" before the autumn deadline to reach a Bilateral Trade Agreement, the government has its task cut out to reach a favourable outcome. The stakes could not be higher as the U.S. has constituted the largest share of India's overall exports for some years now, at nearly a fifth (17.7%) of total exports in the last fiscal alone.

## Safe havens no more

Sexual violence in workplaces and educational institutions is worrying

From Odisha to Karnataka, Bengal to Delhi, violence against women has seen an ominous rise over the past few months. What is even more appalling is that crimes are being committed in spaces such as school and college campuses or workplaces which are usually presumed to be safe havens. On July 14, a 20-year-old student of Fakir Mohan Autonomous College, Balesore, passed away after suffering 90% burns in an immolation bid. The B.Ed student had taken the extreme step outside the principal's office after her repeated complaints of sexual harassment, against a senior teacher, went unheard. The accused teacher, Samir Sahu, and the principal, Dillip Ghosh, have been arrested, but a precious life would not have been lost had her grievances been redressed in time. She ran from pillar to post, taking it right up to the Chief Minister's office, but no one paid attention to her grave complaint. In Bengal, even before a year has passed since a post-graduate student's brutal killing at R.G. Kar Medical Hospital in 2024, a law college student was gang-raped on campus this June; in Mangaluru, two lecturers have been arrested for the alleged rape of a student; in Delhi, a nine-year-old girl's rape and murder led to the Opposition crying foul over the collapse of law and order.

Little seems to have changed on the ground after Nirbhaya's rape and murder in Delhi in 2012. Stringent laws are in place, but to what effect? The Odisha student's plight has put the spotlight on Internal Complaint Committees, mandatory under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013. The Odisha government asked all colleges to form the committees within 24 hours, after the tragic death. Questions should be raised about the manner in which the system failed the student, and the absolute lack of accountability. The annual 'Crime in India' report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for the year 2023 is yet to be released. Figures available for 2022 show that a total of 4,45,256 cases of 'crimes against women' were registered, showing an increase of 4% over 2021. While the majority of crimes against women were registered under 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' (31.4%), 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' comprised 18.7% of all crimes, and 'rape' was pegged at 7.1%. It must be noted that many crimes go unreported as well. In this backdrop, conversations about sexual violence and gender are imperative, and must start early. The clamour for justice against a crime should not die down after a few days either, especially when protectors turn defectors.

What does it mean to live in a democracy if your name no longer appears on the electoral roll? In Bihar today, this question has attained chilling salience. Lakhs of citizens face an imminent threat of disenfranchisement solely because they may be unable to meet the onerous, shifting, and arbitrary burdens imposed on them by the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

The revision, announced in June 2025, with Bihar's State elections looming in the background, has ushered in a period of deep uncertainty. There can be little doubt that electoral rolls must be periodically updated, ensuring that people eligible to vote are included and ineligible persons are excluded. The integrity of our democratic process demands nothing less. However, the present exercise seeks to redraw the rolls in a fashion that is both opaque and hurried. With the publication of a draft roll scheduled for August 1, it is difficult to see how the administration can conduct so expansive an exercise in a constitutionally sound manner within so narrow a time frame.

### What is troubling

More troubling still is the nature of the classifications that the ECI has introduced. A June 24 notification lists 11 acceptable forms of documentary proof – these range from passports and caste certificates to matriculation records. But, notably, it omits others that are more widely held, including Aadhaar card, ration card, driver's licence, and even the Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) issued by the ECI itself.

In parallel, the exercise also carves out a difference between voters who were included in the roll as part of the last intensive revision in 2003 and those added subsequently. The latter group must now re-establish their eligibility through a fresh application supported by documents. The ECI has not explained why it believes these entries, created and verified through its past processes, now warrant re-verification on a mass scale. If the implication is that the prior inclusion was flawed, then the onus must lie with the state, not with the voter.

To be sure, Article 324 of the Constitution empowers the ECI to maintain superintendence, direction, and control over the preparation of the electoral rolls. Article 326 also mandates that elections are predicated on adult suffrage – that is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age on an appointed date shall be eligible to vote.

To that end, The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950, authorises the ECI to revise the rolls from time to time, and even to carry out "special revisions" where necessary. But these



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The Supreme Court must intervene, once again, in the matter of the Bihar Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and ensure that the manner of the preparation meets India's exacting constitutional standards

powers are not unlimited. They are subject to a slew of constitutional protections. The exercise of discretion, however well-intentioned, must be rooted in legality and proportionality and must remain restrained by the rights of those it affects.

### Need for fairness and non-discrimination

The Supreme Court of India has long affirmed that free and fair elections constitute a non-negotiable cornerstone of India's constitutional order. While the right to vote flows from statute, it remains critical to this guarantee – it operates within a framework that promises equality and political participation. Consequently, the process by which electoral rolls are revised must conform to standards of procedural fairness, transparency and non-discrimination. A revision that imposes unduly onerous burdens – particularly without adequate notice – on registered voters to re-establish their citizenship and which permits exclusions based on vague and inconsistently applied criteria would certainly fall afoul of these imperatives.

Under Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to equality, a classification made by the state must satisfy a two-part test: there must be an intelligible differentia distinguishing those people grouped together from those people left out. And that differentia must bear a rational relation to the object sought to be achieved by the law or action in question.

On this test, the classifications made under the SIR are deeply suspect. First, there is the division between voters added during the intensive revision in 2003 and those added thereafter. Even assuming that this distinction is intelligible, its relevance to the stated objective – of ensuring electoral-roll integrity – remains unclear. Is the ECI suggesting that its post-2003 additions were based on weaker evidentiary standards? If so, why have those names remained on the rolls through successive elections?

Second, the categorisation of identity documents also appears arbitrary. The notification treats school-leaving certificates as sufficient documentation, but disregards ECI-issued EPIC Cards, introducing, in the process, an element of unreasonableness that is impossible to reconcile with the guarantee of equal treatment. The consequences of these decisions are far-reaching. If the draft electoral roll published on August 1 omits previously registered voters, they will be left with a mere 30 days to furnish further documents evincing eligibility. That burden will fall most heavily on individuals who are least equipped to shoulder it – the socially marginalised and the economically disadvantaged. Many might not even be aware that their names have been deleted. To impose

new documentary hurdles is to raise the cost of participation for those already furthest from the system.

### Top court's intervention

On July 10, lengthy arguments were advanced before a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on whether the SIR should be stayed. During the hearing, the Bench appeared perplexed by the ECI's exclusion of widely held identity documents. While it did not issue any interim restraint, the Court said that it would be in the "interest of justice" if the ECI "also considers the following three documents as well (apart from the 11 documents mentioned in order dated 24.06.2025), i.e., A) Aadhaar Card; B) Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC), which is issued by Election Commission of India itself, and C) the Ration Card".

But what does the word "consider" mean in this context? Must the ECI accept these documents as valid evidence, or merely review them and reject them if it so chooses? The ambiguity leaves enough doubt to create further delay, which can also potentially lead to the creation of a fait accompli. By the time the matter returns to the Court, the draft roll will be on the verge of publication, with voters who have been wrongly excluded scrambling to meet deadlines.

Given the gravity of the issues involved and given the impending Assembly elections in the State, the status quo in the case must be preserved. But, equally, given that the questions are limited and the record essentially documentary, the Court must move swiftly. It should prompt parties to exchange pleadings without delay and schedule the matter for a final hearing before the revision becomes irreversible.

The legitimacy of an election depends not only on the fairness of its outcome but also on the inclusiveness of its process. When the rules of inclusion are changed midstream, when the onus of proof is moved without reason, and when constitutional guarantees are filtered through layers of bureaucratic and administrative discretion, what remains is not participation but performance. The Court can scarcely supervise every line on the roll, but it must ensure that the manner of its preparation meets our exacting constitutional standards.

In India's founding moment, the electoral roll was an act of republican republicanism. As Omri Shani has shown in her book, *How India Became Democratic: Citizenship And The Making Of The Universal Franchise*, it was built not by excluding the undocumented but by bureaucrats striving to find and register them. The presumption then was that people belonged. That presumption now hangs in the balance. It is for the Court to decide whether it still holds.

# A tectonic shift in thinking to build seismic resilience

The tremors that were felt in Delhi on July 10, 2025, at 9.04 a.m. with a magnitude of 4.4 on the Richter Scale – as reported by the National Center for Seismology (NCS) – are a wake-up call for India's seismic vulnerability. The epicentre, which was located approximately 20 kilometres southwest of the city at a shallow depth of five kilometres, did not cause significant damage but did expose the fragility of the city's infrastructure, where over 80% of buildings, especially those pre-dating the year 2000, fail to comply with seismic codes.

The July event follows a series of earthquakes across Asia since March 2025, including the devastating quake in Myanmar and Thailand (magnitude 7.7), tremors in Tibet and Greece, and recurring seismic activity along the India-Myanmar border. As India sits on one of the world's most tectonically active plates, the urgency to build seismic resilience has never been greater.

### The danger of unpreparedness

India's seismic risk is rooted in the northward drift of the Indian Plate, colliding with the Eurasian Plate at 4 centimetres to 5 cm a year, shaping the Himalayas, which is a region overdue for a "Great Himalayan Earthquake" of magnitude 8 or higher, potentially impacting over 300 million people across northern India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Delhi, which lies in Seismic Zone IV (high risk), with a peak ground acceleration (PGA) factor of 0.24g, lies perilously close to this tectonic frontier.

The tremors felt in July, though moderate, highlighted the risk to the city's estimated 33.5 million residents and over 5,000 high-rises, many built without adhering to the Bureau of Indian Standards' IS 1893:2016 Code, which mandates ductile detailing and shear walls. Historical events such as the Bhuj earthquake of 2001 (7.7 magnitude, 20,000-plus deaths) and the Nepal quake of 2015 (7.8 magnitude) underscore the catastrophic potential of unpreparedness.



Balasubramanian Govindasamy is a retired Chief Engineer and former Deputy Adviser, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. He has been a central government team member to mitigate the drinking water problem in the wake of natural calamities across India

With earthquake activity intensifying, regionally and globally, the Government of India must lead a national dialogue to enforce seismic codes rigorously

Beyond Delhi, India's seismic zones, which range from Zone II to V, span a vast vulnerable area. The northeast, including Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram in Zone V (very high risk, PGA 0.36g+), has felt the ripple effects of seismic activity in Myanmar, notably the 7.7 magnitude Mandalay quake on March 28, 2025, and a 5.2 magnitude event on May 17, 2025. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also in Seismic Zone V, remain prone to tsunamis following subduction zone activity, as seen in 2004. The 5.7 magnitude Tibetan quake on May 12, 2025, caused tremors in Sikkim, reinforcing the restlessness in the Himalayan belt. Even distant events, such as the quake of magnitude of 6.2 in Greece on May 22, 2025, reflect a global pattern of tectonic unrest, though their direct impact on India is minimal.

### Greater danger with urbanisation

Delhi's rapid urbanisation exacerbates the risk it faces. Older structures in East Delhi, built on liquefaction-prone soils, and poorly designed high-rises pose a threat during strong quake shaking. The NCS's real-time monitoring using the IndiaQuake app offers early warnings, but enforcement and public awareness lag behind. Compare this to Bangkok, where updated seismic codes since 2007 mitigated damage despite a flat-slab collapse in 2025, or Myanmar, where unenforced codes worsened the quake toll in 2025. India must bridge this enforcement gap to protect its cities.

The global seismic context heightens the urgency. The Greece earthquake, though 5,000 km away, is part of a series of tremors since March, including those in Indonesia, the Chile-Argentina border, and Ecuador on May 3, 2025. While these do not directly trigger Indian quakes, they signal a dynamic earth, pointing to the need for preparedness. The Himalayan seismic gap, where strain has built since the quake in Kangra (1905) and the 'Gorkha quake' (Nepal, 2015), are a ticking clock, with a major event potentially devastating Delhi and beyond.

To counter this, India must enforce seismic codes rigorously. In Delhi, retrofitting older buildings with steel jacketing and mandating deep pile foundations in vulnerable areas can enhance stability. Guwahati, in Zone V, needs strict IS 1893:2016 compliance, avoiding Brahmputra floodplain construction to prevent liquefaction, and adopting base isolation for critical infrastructure. Bhuj requires expanded retrofitting and community disaster response teams. The Delhi Development Authority should accelerate compliance checks, while the NCS expands early warning systems to rural Zone V areas.

### Global lessons

The international lessons are instructive. Bangkok's use of high-strength concrete (30MPa-40 MPa) and ductile detailing offers a model, though its lower seismic risk (0.1g-0.2g) differs from India's Zone V challenges. The damage seen in Myanmar due to unreinforced masonry is a warning about neglect – a risk India must avoid. Tailored solutions – accounting for the Northeast's soft soils and Kutch's sandy basins – require annual retrofitting investments of ₹50,000 crore, as estimated by experts.

With seismic activity intensifying regionally and globally, India cannot afford delay. The Government of India must lead with stringent enforcement, public education, and resilient infrastructure investment. Citizens should educate themselves about the need for emergency kits, safe building practices, and evacuation plans. The Bhuj disaster, where unpreparedness amplified casualties, remains a haunting lesson. As tremors punctuate India's seismic landscape, building resilience is a technical and moral duty in order to protect lives and livelihoods.

There needs to be a national dialogue urging action before the next major quake strikes. Delhi's tremor echoes this urgency, demanding a transformation from vulnerability to strength.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Indian nurse's case

The case of the Indian nurse, Nimisha Priya, in Yemen, and a reprieve for her, is a reflection of the delicate blend of justice, mercy, faith, and diplomacy. It shows that even in the shadow of death, life can still be reclaimed through compassion and timely action (Front page, July 16).  
Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

### Unhealthy food intake

While steps are being initiated through quality checks and spreading awareness on the health risks associated with the consumption of snacks and sugar intake (Editorial, "More than symbolic", July 16), one wonders whether these steps are adequate. The directions on labelling alone may not suffice. Most packages already have

information on the percentages of oil, sugar and trans-fat content. The real dangers lie elsewhere. The consumption of a variety of snacks prepared and sold by street and roadside vendors is on the rise, but is there a watch being kept on the cheap quality ingredients that are being used in the preparation? There is nothing more profitable

today than the food business. There are no checks in place especially on the use of cooking oils and the ingredients. There needs to be a system where quality checks are mandatory. Comprehensive and meticulous planning is needed. But, most importantly, its execution is a must.  
Balasubramanian Pavani, Secunderabad

### Danger and drills

A goods train carrying 27,000 litres of diesel caught fire near Tiruvallur station, which is close to Chennai, on July 13. The blaze forced the cancellation of a number of train services and the evacuation of people who lived nearby. Although firefighters managed to control the fire, this is an incident that has exposed

gaps in safety protocols, equipment checks and communication. Southern Railway must conduct regular emergency drills. Being proactive measures will safeguard lives and property, and restore public trust.  
Vivek M. Jain, Chennai  
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.



# CERN collider reveals major clue to universe's bias against antimatter

For the first time, scientists have observed that the laws of physics are different for the particles that make up visible matter and their antiparticles. The finding is key to understanding why matter dominates the universe even though it once had equal quantities of matter and antimatter

Vasudevan Mukunth

**T**he universe is made mostly of matter, not antimatter, but scientists believe that after the Big Bang, both must have existed in equal amounts. One of the big mysteries in physics is understanding why matter dominates the universe today and what happened to all the antimatter.

A key clue comes from something called CP violation – a difference in the behaviour of matter and antimatter.

While CP violation has been observed in certain types of particles called mesons, it has never been reported in baryons, which are the particles (like protons and neutrons) that make up most of the matter around us.

Based on new data, the LHCb collaboration in Europe has now reported the first-ever observation of CP violation in baryon decays, specifically in a particle called the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon (pronounced "lambda bee-zero baryon").

Their findings were published in *Nature* on July 16.

"For the first time, we have clear evidence of CP violation in baryons," Xueting Yang, the corresponding author of the study, a member of the LHCb team, and a PhD student at Peking University in Beijing, told *The Hindu*.

"The matter-antimatter asymmetry in the universe requires CP violation in baryons, such that the discovery is a key step forward."

## Looking for the signal

In CP, 'C' stands for charge conjugation, which means the action of swapping a particle with its antiparticle. 'P' stands for parity, which is the action of flipping the spatial coordinates, like looking in a mirror.

CP symmetry stipulates that if you swap particles for antiparticles and look in a mirror, the laws of physics should be the same.

CP violation thus means this symmetry is broken and that the laws of physics are slightly different for matter and antimatter. This is important because CP violation is a necessary ingredient to explain why the universe is made mostly of matter.

The  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon is made up of three smaller particles: an up quark, a down quark, and a bottom quark. The antiparticle of the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon is called the  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar.

The newly reported result focuses on a specific decay of the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon: into a proton, a negatively charged kaon, a positively charged pion, and a negatively charged pion. This is denoted:  $\Lambda_b^0 \rightarrow p K^- \pi^+ \pi^-$ .

The collaboration also studied the same decay for the antiparticle,  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar, but with all charges reversed.

The experiment used data from the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, specifically from the LHCb detector on the machine.

The LHCb team collected data between 2011 and 2018, corresponding to a very large number of collisions between beams of protons accelerated to nearly the speed of light.

In these collisions,  $\Lambda_b^0$  and  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar baryons are produced and then rapidly decay. The LHCb researchers looked for events where the decay products matched  $p K^- \pi^+ \pi^-$ .

To reduce background noise – in the form of random combinations of particles that mimic the signal – they used machine learning to distinguish real decays from fake ones. They also used particle identification tools on computers that could tell protons, kaons, and pions apart.

The main quantity they measured was the CP asymmetry. It compares the number of  $\Lambda_b^0$  decays to the number of  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar decays: if there is no CP violation, the value of CP asymmetry should be zero. In practice, they measured the yield asymmetry, which is the difference in the number of decays observed for  $\Lambda_b^0$  and  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar.

There are some effects that can mimic CP violation. For example, the proton-proton collisions may produce more  $\Lambda_b^0$  than  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar to begin with. For another, the LHCb detector on the Large Hadron Collider might have been slightly better at detecting one charge over another.

To correct for these possible biases, the researchers used a control channel – a similar decay where no CP violation is expected. Here, an  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon decays to a positively charged  $\Lambda_c$  baryon, and a negatively charged pion:  $\Lambda_b^0 \rightarrow \Lambda_c^+ \pi^-$ .

Any asymmetry seen in this control channel was considered a nuisance and subtracted from the main measurement.



The Large Hadron Collider is the world's largest, most powerful particle accelerator. It accelerates particles, mainly protons, to near the speed of light in opposite directions around a 27-km underground ring. Then the particles are made to collide at four locations, where massive detectors collect data on what happens during the collision. CERN

The researchers used statistical methods to determine how many real  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon and  $\bar{\Lambda}_b^0$  bar antiparticle decays the detector recorded. Then they checked their results for consistency across different data-taking periods, detector settings, and analysis methods.

Thus, the team found a significant difference in the decay rates: about 2.45%.

## Mesons, then baryons

According to the paper, this result is 5.2 standard deviations away from zero, which is well above the statistical threshold required for physicists to claim a discovery in particle physics.

"It was expected that the LHCb group had enough data. They are reporting it now," theoretical physicist, University of Hawai'i affiliate graduate faculty, and Chennai's Institute of Mathematical Sciences retired professor Rahul Sinha told *The Hindu*.

This is the first time CP violation has been observed in baryon decays. Previously, physicists had reported CP violation only in mesons, particles which are made of a quark and an antiquark, and not baryons, which are made of three quarks.

The result matches the predictions of the Standard Model, the main theory of particle physics, which says CP violation comes from the way quarks mix and decay. However, the amount of CP violation in the Standard Model is not enough to explain the matter-antimatter imbalance in the universe.

"The observation of CP violation in baryons still doesn't settle the mystery of the universe's missing antimatter," Prof. Sinha said.

"The Standard Model predicts a rate of disappearance of antimatter that doesn't match what we're seeing in the universe."

## 'New physics'

The new announcement opens new ways to search for 'new physics', the name for hitherto unknown effects or particles beyond what the Model predicts, and which physicists believe will reveal the 'complete' theory of subatomic particles.

According to Prof. Sinha, the new paper reports observing CP violation in



More precise and comprehensive measurements across different particle systems are required to build a coherent and consistent picture of CP violation. Theoretically, improved calculations and refined models are essential to connect these experimental observations with the fundamental physics driving the matter-antimatter asymmetry

baryons but doesn't say whether the amount of violation is higher or lower than that predicted by the Standard Model. Ascertaining that requires researchers to determine the complex phase.

In the context of CP violation, the complex phase is a combination of variables present in the Cabibbo-Kobayashi-Maskawa (CKM) matrix, a mathematical tool physicists use to understand how the quarks in a baryon interact with each other.

If the complex phase has a non-zero value, it means the laws of physics are not identical for matter and antimatter, leading to observable differences in their behaviour.

The Standard Model predicts specific values for the amount of CP violation, which are determined by the magnitude and phase of the variables in the CKM matrix.

By measuring the phase associated with CP violation in baryon decays, physicists can compare the observed amount of violation to the Standard Model's predictions.

In their paper, the LHCb researchers have reported that the complex phase information proved too difficult to extract from the data collected by the detector.

"Until we measure the phase, we can't say if the rate of antimatter's disappearance is too high or too low compared to the Model's prediction," Prof. Sinha said.

The same technique to measure the

phase for mesons can't be used for baryons. To this end, Prof. Sinha added that in 2022, he and his peers Shibasis Roy and N. G. Deshpande described a new way to measure the complex phase for baryons. It was published in *Physical Review Letters*.

Observing CP violation in baryons is important because the visible matter around us today is made of baryons. Some baryons like protons and neutrons are very stable and don't decay for a long time.

Others, like  $\Lambda_b^0$ , decay in around 1.5 picoseconds. The point is what is true for one baryon should be true for all baryons. "To definitively resolve the asymmetry problem, both experimental and theoretical progress are needed," Dr. Yang said.

"Experimentally, more precise and comprehensive measurements across different particle systems are required to build a coherent and consistent picture of CP violation."

Theoretically, improved calculations and refined models are essential to connect these experimental observations with the fundamental physics driving the matter-antimatter asymmetry."

## The Sakharov conditions

How did matter gain an overwhelming upper hand over antimatter in the universe? CP violation in baryons is an important piece of this puzzle – but also only one piece.

In 1967, the Soviet physicist and later famous political dissident Andrei Sakharov said three conditions will have to be met for the universe to be made predominantly of only matter. They are:

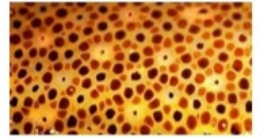
- Baryon number violation: physical processes must exist that create an imbalance between the number of baryons and the number of antibaryons.
- CP violation in baryons
- Departure from thermal equilibrium: to prevent processes from balancing baryon and antibaryon production, interactions must occur out of equilibrium.

The observation of CP violation in baryon decays provides a 'source' that adds to CP violation among mesons. The complex phase of the mesons' violation has been measured whereas that of the baryons is pending. Once the latter is known physicists will be able to compare it to that predicted by the Standard Model. If they match, it will mean the Standard Model is right – but at the same time leave a gap between the predicted matter-antimatter asymmetry and that observed in the universe.

If the values don't match, it could be a sign of 'new physics', which physicists will have to explain using new theories and experiments.

Overall, the newly reported observation is a milestone showing that the laws of physics treat matter and antimatter differently not just in mesons but also in baryons – the building blocks of the visible universe.

(mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)



Chromatophores on squid skin. MINETTE (CC BY)

## Surprising disorder found on squid skin

Vasudevan Mukunth

Have you ever wondered how the unusual patterns on a squid's skin are formed? Scientists have studied these patterns to uncover new insights into how living things organise cells as they grow. The research, led by a team at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, focused on pigment cells in squids called chromatophores, the cells that allow squids to change the appearance of their skin.

The study explored how these cells are packed together as the squid grows, showing the process creates a surprising kind of disorder that the researchers have called hyperdisorder.

Unlike many systems in nature that become more regular or more uniform as they grow, squid skin instead revealed patterns where randomness and fluctuations increase with size.

The study's principal goal was to understand how the arrangement of chromatophores on squid skin changed as the animal grew. While scientists already knew a lot about how particles or cells can pack together in stationary (non-growing) materials, they've known little about what happens when packing takes place on a surface that's also expanding, like a squid growing over time.

**When biological tissues like squid skin grow, they can develop unique patterns. The constant addition of new cells led to a kind of ever-growing, dynamic disorder called hyperdisorder**

To investigate these questions, the scientists blended biological experiments with computer simulations. The team raised oval squids in the lab and took super high-resolution photographs of their mantles, the main part of the squid body. Second, using advanced computer vision and machine learning, they analysed thousands of pigment cells in the images. Finally, they tracked individual chromatophores and measured their positions and sizes as the squids grew over weeks.

The team checked how random or organised the arrangement of pigmentation cells were in small patches versus over larger areas – and made several surprising discoveries.

First, instead of becoming more regular as a squid grows, the chromatophore patterns became more disordered at larger scales. The scientists described this as hyperdisordered behaviour, meaning that as they looked at larger and larger pieces of a squid's skin, the differences from place to place got bigger, not smaller.

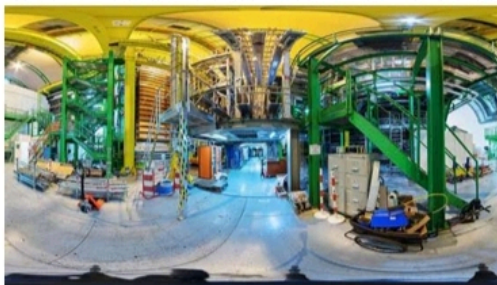
Second, this hyperdisordered state arose from a combination of the random placement of cells and the skin's growth. The growth constantly created new spaces between cells, preventing them from settling into a neat, uniform pattern.

Third, as the squid developed, older chromatophores got bigger even as new, smaller ones kept appearing. Even so the overall distribution of cell sizes stayed roughly the same over time – indicating a balance between growth and new cell insertion.

The study thus revealed that when biological tissues like squid skin grow, they can develop unique patterns that don't follow the trends that scientists have seen in non-growing systems. The constant stretching and addition of new cells led to a kind of ever-growing, dynamic disorder called hyperdisorder.

The study also showed how blending biology and physics can uncover hidden patterns in the living world. The resulting insights can help scientists understand how squid skin works as they point to underlying physical rules that could apply to many other tissues in nature, from plant leaves to animal organs.

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



The LHCb detector at the Large Hadron Collider is designed primarily to study the decay of particles containing bottom quarks and charm quarks. CERN



## Rethinking the reinforced one-front war concept

Indian strategists have long worried about the deepening security partnership between China and Pakistan. The bilateral relationship today extends well beyond arms sales to include diplomatic shielding, intelligence sharing, and even elements of tactical integration. Some observers, however, suggest a more diabolical possibility: the threat of a "reinforced one-front war" — a scenario in which India would face Pakistan and China fighting together on a single front. Proponents of this view imagine a deeper military integration, with Pakistan benefiting directly from Chinese technology, intelligence, security assets, and even military personnel. When the balloon goes up, they warn, China would act as a strategic enabler on India's western front, turning Pakistan's challenge into a more formidable, integrated threat.

The argument seems almost a truism at first glance. China's support for Pakistan is undoubtedly real, sustained, and strategically motivated. Even so, describing it as a "reinforced one-front war" risks overstating the degree of operational integration in ways that misread Beijing's intentions and distort India's own strategic calculus. At the very least, it calls for a dispassionate assessment of the facts.

### Not one front

Let's begin with the undeniable. China has become Pakistan's principal arms supplier, offering advanced drones, missile systems, naval platforms, and even satellite navigation support through its BeiDou system for missile targeting. During crises, Beijing has provided diplomatic cover, blocking UN sanctions and limiting international fallout. This sustained support ensures Pakistan remains a capable military adversary, able to field modern systems despite economic constraints, while also deepening Beijing's political influence in Islamabad.

Worrying as these



**Abhijit Singh**  
retired naval officer and former head of maritime policy at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi

However serious China-Pakistan nexus may appear, Indian planners ought to avoid turning prudent concern into simplistic formulations

developments are, they do not readily lend themselves to the notion of a single, integrated military front. Arms transfers — even at scale — are not the same as a shared war plan. India itself is a major buyer of Russian, Israeli, American, and French military systems. Nobody claims India is fighting America's or Russia's wars by proxy. India has even begun exporting weapons — such as BrahMos missiles — to the Philippines — without any suggestion from Beijing that Manila is fighting an Indian war against China. Similarly, advanced sales — such as China's potential supply of J-35 stealth fighters to Pakistan, or India's exploration of Russia's Su-57 — do not imply joint war planning or a unified front.

China may have provided direct military support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, even monitoring the performance of its weapons systems in Pakistani use, as Indian military officials recently stated. However, monitoring battlefield performance of supplied systems is standard practice for arms suppliers. The United States, Russia, Israel, and France all routinely do this, and India itself will understandably be interested in how the BrahMos missile performs in the Philippines. This is all typical of arms sales relationships, not evidence of a single, unified war front with joint command or shared planning.

What many alarmist narratives often gloss over is that China and Pakistan have very different strategic interests vis-à-vis India. For Pakistan, the military contest with India is existential — a constant, defining rivalry. For China, India is a regional competitor to be managed and contained, but not an existential focus remains the U.S. While China has much to gain from an India tied down on its western border, Beijing's preferred denouement is an India that is cautious, preoccupied, and wary of escalation. That is precisely why China might be careful about escalation itself. The caution is

evident in the absence of any commitment to join Pakistan in a full-scale war with India. China-Pakistan military exercises, while symbolically important, fall short of the combined-force planning seen in alliances such as NATO or even U.S.-South Korea.

### Challenges for India

This is not to deny the challenge of China-Pakistan collusion altogether. Their defence partnership does complicate India's security environment, increasing the costs of military preparedness and the demand for sophisticated countermeasures. Even so, framing the threat as a single "reinforced one-front war" risks misunderstanding. It imagines a level of operational integration that does not exist, encouraging Indian planners to over-invest in blunt, worst-case military postures that may be unaffordable or strategically rigid. It also underplays opportunities for diplomatic management with China, further shrinking India's options.

Beijing may shield Pakistan diplomatically and arm it militarily, but it also has an interest in limiting escalation that could trigger nuclear thresholds or force Chinese military intervention. That is a lever India can look to exploit. Overstating China's willingness to fight India directly on Pakistan's behalf risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which all crisis management is abandoned in favour of maximalist, binary threat perceptions.

However serious the China-Pakistan nexus may appear, Indian planners ought to avoid turning prudent concern into simplistic formulations. Instead of declaring the threat a single, unified front, Indian analysts must see it for what it is: a complex, asymmetric partnership in which China equips Pakistan to be a tougher local rival without assuming the costs and risks of fighting India itself.

That is the harsh strategic truth. Planning for it requires clear-eyed analysis, not rhetorical overreach.

## Task ahead for BJP chief in Telangana

Ramchander Rao faces the challenge of uniting cadre and expanding rural reach

### STATE OF PLAY

**Ravi Reddy**  
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After months of suspense, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) central leadership has finally zeroed in on former MLC Narayana Ramchander Rao as the new president of the State unit for the next three years. A veteran of student politics, a legal eagle, and long considered the intellectual face of the party, Mr. Rao replaces Union Minister for Coal & Mines G. Kishan Reddy, who held the post for the last two years.

Although the position was slated as an election, Mr. Rao was the only candidate to file a nomination.

Mr. Rao has the backing of the BJP's central leadership, which will help him to streamline his work systematically. Amid mounting pressure to appoint a Backward Class candidate as the party chief, the BJP stuck to its convention of recognising leaders who have risen from the grassroots. Mr. Rao edged out Malkajigiri MP Eatala Rajender, who had used all his resources to get the top post.

The next Assembly and Parliament elections are still four years away, but there has been intense competition among the aspirants for the coveted post. While the selection process was repeatedly delayed, lobbying for the prestigious post never disappeared. Over the past six years, the BJP has taken a calculated risk in wooing leaders from other political parties.

The party tasted success in the 2023 Assembly elections, where eight BJP first-timers — emerged victorious. The same tempo continued in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, where the BJP again won eight seats,



doubling its tally from 2019. Interestingly, several outsiders joined the party and went on to become MPs.

However, the BJP, by encouraging those from other parties, created resentment among old timers. This also led to groupism in the party, which seldom tolerates indiscipline and discourages leader-centric politics. This heartburn among the loyal leaders and cadres has been contained with the appointment of Mr. Rao.

In Telangana, where Backward Classes form the largest share of the electorate, followed by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and then Forward Castes, most major parties — especially the Congress — have focused heavily on winning their support. With this backdrop, BJP workers had hoped the party would elevate a Backward Class leader as State president.

To the surprise of everyone, the top brass went ahead by loyalty and commitment, naming Mr. Rao, a Brahmin, as the party chief.

Coming to the caste equations, the BJP is known to hold a strong sway among the Brahmins and the influential Velama community, followed by a few Backward Class communities. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have, traditionally, avoided sailing with the saffron party.

The powerful Reddy community, which traditionally sailed with the Congress, had

shifted its support base over the years. In the 2018 Assembly elections, it leaned toward the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), backed the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, and returned to the Congress fold in 2023.

### 'Leadership to be tested'

According to the Socio-Economic, Education, Employment, Political and Caste Survey — which covered 3,54,77,554 people and 1,12,15,134 families — Backward Classes account for 56.33% of Telangana's population, including 10.08% BC Muslims. SCs make up 17.43%, STs 10.45%, and Muslims 12.56% (of whom 2.48% are OC Muslims). Forward Castes constitute 13.31% of the population.

Therefore, the new BJP chief has his task cut out to woo the Backward Class voters. Beyond his political capabilities, Mr. Rao's leadership will be tested in the upcoming local body polls. It is a fact that the BJP has not penetrated the rural areas as expected, with its support base largely confined to a few pockets. The local body polls, particularly the gram panchayat elections, which are held on a non-party basis, will require Mr. Rao to focus on identifying willing and capable candidates. The BJP will be up against the ruling Congress, which will leave no stone unturned to secure a victory. The BRS, the main opposition party, will also be in the reckoning.

If the BJP hopes to make further inroads in the State, Mr. Rao will have to channel all his energy into reaching every corner of Telangana; constituting village units, and enlisting the cadres. His experience and ideological grounding will be put to the test in the coming months, as he takes on both the ruling Congress and the BRS.

## For every child free for adoption, 13 parents wait in line

The average delay for prospective parents to get an adoption referral in India has increased to over three years

### DATA POINT

**Sambavi Parthasarathy**  
**Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

For years now, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) — the country's nodal adoption agency — has struggled to effectively manage adoptions. While a significant number of parents are willing to adopt, only a limited number of children are legally cleared for adoption. This imbalance has not gone unnoticed. In 2022, a Parliamentary panel called this imbalance a "paradoxical situation," and in 2023, the Supreme Court "expressed displeasure" over the time-consuming adoption process. Latest data obtained through a Right to Information application filed by *The Hindu* show that the asymmetry continues even in 2025, and the gap has widened further. In 2021, 26,734 prospective parents registered in the CARA portal, and 2,430 children were legally free for adoption. In other words, there were 11 prospective parents for every child free for adoption in 2021.

As of mid-July 2025, the number of prospective parents has grown to 36,381 — an increase of about 9,600 from 2021 — while the number of children legally free for adoption has increased to 2,652 — only 222 more than in 2021. Currently, there are 13 prospective parents for every child free for adoption (Chart 1).

The rise in the number of prospective parents could be one reason behind the growing gap. "The number of people opting for adoption has substantially increased. Issues such as infertility are no longer the only reasons why parents consider adoption," said Gayatri Abraham, the founder of Padme, a comprehensive adoption resource platform for Indian parents. Still, in a country where an estimated

3.1 crore children were orphans according to the 2020 World Orphan Report, the fact that only a couple of thousands were identified as free for adoption is difficult to justify.

Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and West Bengal accounted for over 50% of prospective parents in 2025 (Chart 2). The average delay for prospective parents to get an adoption referral has increased from one year in 2017 to three years by 2022, to about 3.5 years currently. If CARA does not act soon, the delay will increase further in the coming years and "force parents to adopt a child illegally", as warned by the Parliamentary Committee.

The Juvenile Justice Act (2021) lists out a time-bound procedure for a child in Child Care Institutions (CCI) to be declared legally free for adoption. Yet, the status of its implementation remains questionable. "There are so many stakeholders on the ground. Nobody is held accountable for not implementing," says Smriti Gupta, co-founder of Where Are India's Children, a Child Welfare and Action Foundation. She said that implementation could be a huge challenge due to resource limitations, lack of training, and a gap in linkages between adoption agencies and the CCIs. She added that the idea that every child deserves a family is not strong in India.

Data shows that over 22,000 children are in the CCIs, 8.5 times more than the number of children legally free for adoption, in 2025 (2,652). The children in the CCIs include those orphaned, abandoned, surrendered by parents and those who have parents/guardians who are unfit for parenting or do not visit them.

The process of declaring children in the CCIs as legally free for adoption remains a grey area. Smriti Gupta explained, "There are children whose parents keep them in the shelter because of eco-

nomic issues. They might occasionally visit them. There is another set of kids who are completely abandoned/orphaned. Then, there are these kids in the middle, who have a guardian/parent on paper. And this person never visits the child, but exists only on paper. CARA is pushing to evaluate children with no visitation and an unfit parent/guardian, but needs a lot of follow up and follow through."

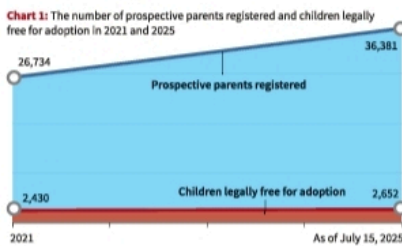
Because of these complexities, not every child in the CCIs can be made free for adoption. Even after accounting for that, the gap between the number of children in these institutions and those entering the adoption pool is still quite high. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh, only one child is legally free for adoption in 2025, whereas 829 are in the CCIs (Chart 3). In Maharashtra, only 236 children are legally free for adoption, while 5,284 are in the CCIs. It will be a big leap to assume that these gaps are only due to the complexities stated above and the delay needs to be audited. The delay in declaring children legally free for adoption reduces their chances of getting adopted. Close to 34% of the children currently in the adoption pool fall in the 14-18 age group.

As the Parliamentary Committee had stated, "older children and children with special needs are usually not preferred for adoption by Indian parents". Moreover, delay would make it harder for the child, who has been in the institution for so long, to adapt as well.

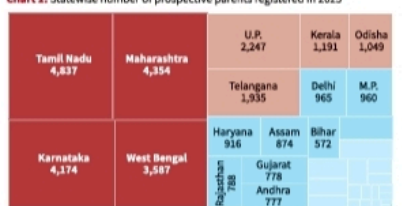
The longer wait times also have an impact on the registered prospective parents. Gayatri said, "Many parents start looking for children in the 0-2 group. Then, they see the waitline is three years, and become anxious. They then become willing to make the switch to adopt slightly older children, willing to jump the queue. Waitline shouldn't be the reason one changes categories, especially not while going through the process."

## The adoption paradox

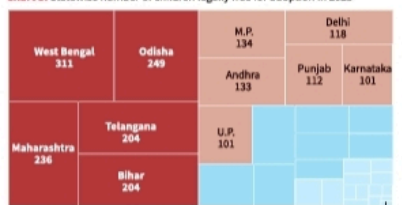
The data for the charts were sourced from an RTI reply received from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the 2020 Orphan Report (INSAMER), and "Review of Guardianship and Adoption Laws" by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances and Law



**Chart 2:** Statewise number of prospective parents registered in 2025\*



**Chart 3:** Statewise number of children legally free for adoption in 2025\*



\*Data for Chart 2 and 3 is as on April 24, 2025

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 17, 1975

## Astronauts remove stuck docking mechanism

Space centre (Houston), July 16: The Soviet Soyuz spacecraft to-day shifted into position for a cosmic link-up with the American Apollo ship to-morrow while astronauts and cosmonauts used a screwdriver, pieces of tape and band-aids for repairs aboard their ships.

After removing a stuck docking mechanism from a tunnel which will connect the two spaceships when they hook up, the astronauts replayed televised pictures of the tunnel to Houston Mission Control as they inspected it and found it in good condition.

The cosmonauts repaired their balky TV camera and began transmitting clear pictures to earth.

Cosmonauts Alexei Leonov and Valeri Kubasov fired their spaceship engine for 21 seconds and reported the manoeuvre was performed perfectly.

The Moscow Mission Control Centre reported the burn placed Soyuz in a near-circular orbit of 220 km to 223 km above the earth, precisely where the cosmonauts want to receive the visiting Americans at 16 15 GMT (21 45 IST) over West Germany.

Apollo 20 conducted two orbital shifts and plans several more as it closes in on Soyuz, serving as the target vehicle in the celestial chase.

The docking probe problem was discovered aboard Apollo last night.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 17, 1925

## First Iraq Parliament.

Baghdad, July 16: King Faisal opened to-day, in the presence of a distinguished assemblage, the first properly elected constitutional parliament in Iraq.

The King's speech referred to the improving relations between Iraq and Britain and commented on the tendency of foreign countries to establish diplomatic relations with Iraq, which, he said, was valuable as a recognition of the country's independence. The speech outlined an ambitious programme of political and commercial developments, combined with economies recommended in the recent report of the British Financial Mission.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of tourists in Japan in the first six months of 2025**

**21.5** In million tourists. The figure in June alone jumped 7.6% to a record 3.4 million, due to "increased demand to coincide with school holidays," Japan National Tourism Organization said. This is a 21% increase year-on-year despite visitors from Hong Kong dropping. **HP**

**Amount requested by Delhi to upgrade road infrastructure**

**1,500** In ₹ crore. The government of Delhi has requested funds from the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund to support various infrastructure initiatives. Including the repair, decongestion and modernisation of major city roads. **PI**

**Number of inmates Italy might release to ease overcrowding**

**10,105** Italy may release up to about 15% of the total population of inmates, to ease overcrowding, the Justice Ministry has announced. As per the World Prison Brief database, Italy has one of Europe's worst prison overcrowding records. **PI**

**Number of bonded labourers rescued from Beed district**

**14** The police in Maharashtra's Ahilyanagar district have rescued these persons, including six children aged between 7 and 8, from bonded labour, an official said on Wednesday. Accused Viju Seth and Uttam Sheth from Ambora in Beed had employed them for the past one and a half years. **PI**

**Fall in India's gold imports in June compared to last year**

**40** In per cent. India's gold imports in June fell 40% from a year ago to their lowest level in more than two years, as a price rally to a record high sapped demand. Gold imports fell to \$1.84 billion in June from \$2.48 billion a year ago. **PI**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Why has the Thailand PM been suspended?

What transpired between Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and former Cambodian premier Hun Sen during the fateful 17-minute-long conversation? What is the history of the relationship between the two neighbours? Has this issue led to domestic instability in Thailand?

### EXPLAINER

Adithya Narayan

#### The story so far:

**T**hailand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended by the country's Constitutional Court on July 1, following a leaked phone call with former Cambodian Premier Hun Sen. The case, brought about by 36 lawmakers, accused the Prime Minister of being pliant and deferential to the Cambodian leader by referring to him as "uncle" while trying to resolve a border stand-off between the countries' troops. The incident led to the largest partner of Thailand's ruling coalition withdrawing its support and sparked protests calling for the Prime Minister's resignation.

#### What was the call about?

The conversation on June 15 was initiated by the Thai leader to contain the fallout from a Cambodian soldier's death in border clashes on May 28. During the 17-minute conversation, posted in its entirety by Hun Sen after a leaked version surfaced on the Internet, Ms. Paetongtarn referred to a Thai military general overseeing the border as "opponent". In a country with a history of border tussles, where the military enjoys considerable clout, and is prone to coups, the statement was perceived as disparaging the troops.

#### How did Thai stakeholders react?

Ms. Paetongtarn termed her actions as a negotiating tactic and said, "My intention was to help stabilise the situation and I never expected the conversation to be leaked". Furthermore, the 38-year-old leader vowed support for the Army and called for unity among citizens, as her administration summoned the Cambodian Ambassador to deliver a protest letter condemning the leak of the private conversation.

Regardless of the clarifications, the Prime Minister's largest coalition partner, the Bhumjaithai Party quit, taking with it their 69 MPs and leaving her Pheu Thai Party with a narrow majority in the 495-strong House. The main opposition, the People's Party, an offshoot of the immensely popular Move Forward Party that the Constitutional Court banned despite securing maximum seats in 2023, sought fresh elections.

As rumours of a coup began making the rounds, the Army sought to shake off memories of past instances and stated that it "affirms commitment to democratic principles and national sovereignty protection". In a similar tone, Ms. Paetongtarn also struck a reconciliatory note with the Army by visiting the general, whom she had derided in the call, at the border.

#### Why did the Cambodian leader leak the conversation?

Former Cambodian Prime Minister and current leader of the Cambodian Senate Hun Sen, in his defence, cited the source of the leak as one of the 80 people he had shared the conversation with. He had recorded the conversation "to avoid any misunderstanding or misrepresentation in official matters." However, the Cambodian leader, despite sharing close ties with the Shinawatra family, chose to further comment on the matter and called Ms. Paetongtarn's remarks against the military an insult to the monarchy.

"An insult to a regional commander is an insult to the Thai king because it is only the king who issued a royal decree to



In protest: People rally to demand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra's resignation in Bangkok, Thailand on June 28. GETTY IMAGES

appoint him," Hun Sen said. This statement gains relevance when one considers the fact that Ms. Paetongtarn's father and former Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, is going to stand trial for insulting the monarchy in an interview with a South Korean newspaper nine years ago (in Thailand, *lèse-majesté* or a crime of defaming or insulting the monarchy or monarch is a serious offence and punishable by law).

Mr. Hun Sen further stated that the former Thai premier had faked illness to evade prosecution. Following a military coup in 2006 in which he was deposed, businessman-turned-politician Thaksin Shinawatra went into a 15-year-long self-imposed exile. He returned to Thailand only in August 2023 after the Pheu Thai had come to power. Originally sentenced to eight years in prison for conflict of interest and abuse of power, his sentence was subsequently commuted to one year by the King.

#### What is the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand?

Thailand and Cambodia share an 800 km-long border, with various contested locations sitting on this front. These hotspots serve as fodder for irredentist factions to stake a claim and stoke regionalist fervour. It is also not uncommon for governments of both countries to cite clashes in these areas to deflect attention from domestic issues and further their agenda.

Experts believe that Hun Sen, who currently serves as head of the Cambodian Senate after ceding the Prime Ministership to his son Hun Manet following 33 years in office, has employed this technique. He is suspected of having

made the statements against the Thai government to deflect global attention from the scam call centres his country is accused of hosting. The 72-year-old leader has also blamed Thailand as the origin of the call centres.

For Ms. Paetongtarn, who is only 10 months into her term, the suspension from office could not have come at a worse time. She began her term on a shaky wicket after coming into power as a replacement for her predecessor Srettha Thavysin, who was suspended by the Constitutional Court. Burdened with a failing economy then, Ms. Paetongtarn must grapple with border tensions and domestic unrest now.

#### Does the issue go beyond a 'leaked' audio clip?

Preceding the leaked recording was a shooting incident and the death of the Cambodian soldier on May 28. It transpired in the province of Preah Vihear, which hosts the eponymous temple – a 12th-century monument claimed by both countries. While the temple and a 1 sq. km area around it were ruled in Cambodia's favour by the International Court of Justice, a 4.6 sq. km land near it is still contested territory. Such a verdict was borne out of a conflict between the two nations over the area in 2011 resulting in 28 casualties, including both military personnel and civilians.

But Preah Vihear is only emblematic of the problem.

The crisis dates back to the 12th century when Cambodia's Khmer empire, in its full glory, consisted of parts of present-day northeastern Thailand and southern Vietnam. Many prominent temples in the region were built during

this time. As is the case with empires, they rise and fall. And wars fought among neighbours have seen the borders shift and temples change ownership.

Much like border relations, diplomatic ties between the Southeast Asian neighbours, too, have been fraught with tension and periods of friendship. From being perceived as belonging to opposing camps during the Cold War, to lending support to dissidents from the neighbouring country, both Cambodia and Thailand's ruling classes have a chequered history.

This is characteristic of the Hun Sen-Shinawatra relationship, too. It initially began with the Cambodian leader embracing the Thai entrepreneur's pro-business policy. The period from 2001 to 2006, when the two leaders were in power in their respective countries, saw tensions spike and subside. Since the start of Mr. Thaksin's exile (which was largely in Dubai), Hun Sen facilitated the use of his country as a political base for the Thai leader to host his allies. During this period, he would reportedly have business meetings with Hun Sen while overseeing his party's rule in Thailand. Hun Sen had even appointed Mr. Thaksin as a personal adviser and Economic Advisor to the Cambodian Government, infuriating the then-Thailand administration.

If the Cambodian leader had then been trying to safeguard his interests by protecting Mr. Thaksin, with both benefiting from the weakening Thai regime, it could be said that Hun Sen, even today, is operating on the same principle by diverting attention to the neighbour and trying to weaken it from the outside.

### THE GIST

During the 17-minute conversation, posted in its entirety by Hun Sen after a leaked version surfaced on the Internet, Ms. Paetongtarn referred to a Thai military general overseeing the border as "opponent".

Ms. Paetongtarn termed her actions as a negotiating tactic and said, "My intention was to help stabilise the situation and I never expected the conversation to be leaked".

Thailand and Cambodia share an 800 km-long border, with various contested locations sitting on this front. These hotspots serve as fodder for irredentist factions to stake a claim and stoke regionalist fervour. It is also not uncommon for governments of both countries to use these areas to deflect attention from domestic issues and further their agenda.



KEYWORD

# How genocide came to be named and codified

Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer from Poland, used the term 'genocide' for the first time in his book in 1944. It was coined when humanity witnessed a category of evil so unspeakable that none had thought of a word for it

G. Sampath

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian occupied territories Francesca Albanese, "Israel's genocide on the Palestinians is an escalatory stage of a longstanding settler colonial process of erasure". Her latest report urges UN member states "to enforce the prohibition of genocide" in accordance with their obligations under international law. The debate is no longer about whether what Israel is doing in Gaza is genocide. It is about whether the international community, including private citizens, will uphold their moral obligation to oppose the genocide unfolding before them in full social media glare.

### On naming evil

The term 'genocide' belongs to the language of transgression – words that describe the wilful violation of basic moral codes such as, for instance, the universal taboo on killing children. But there are gradations even in the forms of extreme violence that determine whether a given atrocity is to be deemed a war crime, a crime against humanity, or genocide – a category of evil so unspeakable that humanity hadn't thought of a word for it.

It was a Jewish lawyer from Poland, Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term in his book, *Ax's Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944). As a university student in the 1920s, Lemkin was horrified by the mass killing of Armenians during World War I. He couldn't believe there was no international law under which the Ottoman leaders could be tried. "Why was killing a million people a less serious crime than killing a single individual," he wondered. Lemkin's interest in the crime of mass murder took a different colour after World War 2, during which he lost 49 members of his own family in the Holocaust. He devoted the rest of his life to the mission of getting recognition in international law for what Winston Churchill called "a crime without a name".

As Lemkin explains in his book, he formed the word from the Greek 'genos', meaning 'race' or 'tribe', and the Latin 'cide', meaning 'killing'. He defined 'genocide' as "the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group". Despite serving as advisor to Justice Robert H. Jackson, the lead prosecutor at the International Military Tribunal (IMT) that conducted the Nuremberg trials, he wasn't happy with how it dealt with the Nazi leaders.

The IMT prosecuted them for 'war crimes' and 'crimes against peace'. But how should they be prosecuted for crimes against civilians who were their own citizens – German Jews targeted for their ethnicity? British and French prosecutors sought to use Lemkin's concept of genocide, but the Americans steered clear of it. Given their own (then prevalent) Jim Crow laws of racial segregation, they were anxious not to grant international court jurisdiction over how a government treated its own citizens, a sentiment that was shared by the Soviets as well.

Lemkin was disappointed as the IMT prosecuted the Nazis politicians only on charges of "crimes against humanity", a juridical approach that failed to account



As the world watches: A Palestinian girl queues for a portion of hot food distributed by a charity kitchen at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on July 15, 2024

for the criminal logic of the Holocaust, which picked out specific ethnic and political groups, including Jews, gypsies and communists. As Lemkin put it, "The Allies decided a case in Nuremberg against a past Hitler – but refused to envisage future Hitlers." His fears have come true in Gaza, where the Israeli military continues to enjoy impunity for its mass murder of Palestinians even as Western governments seem unable or unwilling to acknowledge that these crimes have surpassed the threshold of genocide.

### Codifying genocide

In the years following the Nuremberg trials, Lemkin worked relentlessly to get genocide codified in international law. His efforts bore fruit in 1948 with the United Nations adopting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Although the Genocide Convention included much of Lemkin's

ideas, it did not accept all of them.

It had a rather narrow legal definition of genocide, with two main elements. It had a mental element, the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group", and a physical element, consisting of any of these five acts: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Initially, this definition was criticised on the grounds that "intent" is difficult to establish since no government publicises its intent to commit genocide. Also, it is tough to attribute genocidal intent to individuals who can claim to be merely carrying out orders in their official

capacity. However, subsequent proceedings, including those of the tribunals set up to try the accused in the Rwanda genocide (1994) and the 1995 genocide of Bosnia Muslims in Srebrenica have clarified that "a pattern of purposeful action" leading to the destruction of a significant section of the targeted group would suffice to establish genocidal intent.

While the 1948 Genocide Convention defines the crime and obligates the states that are parties to the Convention to prevent and punish it, the 2002 Rome Statute gives the International Criminal Court the jurisdiction to take up and try cases of genocide.

The Genocide Convention, however, still does not recognise mass murder of any social or political group – say, communists – as genocide, an aspect considered a major lacuna by genocide experts. The concept of genocide has also not been adequately applied to understand colonial mass murder, slavery, deportation and other atrocities inflicted upon native populations, including aboriginals by erstwhile coloniser nations and empires.

Away from the media spotlight, the egregious practice of forcibly transferring children away from their Aboriginal families – now seemingly benevolent in intent but barely distinguishable from genocide in practice – still goes on in Australia, according to a 2025 report by Human Rights Watch.

### The importance of 'thinking'

Mass murder is by no means a modern phenomenon. Even in ancient times, it was not uncommon for the victors in a war to massacre the entire male population of the conquered kingdom or state. Typically, however, genocides occurred against an enemy population, or in the context of a war. The phenomenon of a state conducting mass murder of a certain ethnic or national group among its own citizens is a more recent phenomenon – one that has raised fundamental philosophical questions about human nature and evil.

Some of the most profound engagement with these questions came from Hannah Arendt, a German American Jewish historian and philosopher who covered the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a key architect of the Holocaust. In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Arendt asks the question: does a person have to be evil in order to do evil? Her answer is 'no'. All that is required for a person to do evil is to suspend thinking. Arendt argued that it is the exercise of the capacity to think that connects one human with others. What gave Nazism its power was its all out assault on thinking, and on the very impulse to reflect. Eichmann's crime, in this sense, was the banality of doing what seemed to be in the best interests of his career – to please his bosses. This is because for him, thinking had been outsourced to the Nazi bureaucracy and leadership. It is this failure to think – achieved on a mass scale through institutionalised assault on intellectual life, on the life of the mind – that is banal. This banality creates the space for evil to assume the garb of the routine, the normal, and the quotidian, all of which are in ample evidence in the routinised daily massacres of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

As the philosopher Judith Butler observed in an essay on the banality of evil, "[Arendt's] indictment of Eichmann reached beyond the man to the historical world in which true thinking was vanishing and, as a result, crimes against humanity became increasingly 'thinkable'. The degradation of thinking worked hand in hand with the systematic destruction of populations."

Questions and Answers from the July 15 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The town in which Rembrandt was born and the meaning of his full name. **Ans: Leiden and his name means 'Rembrandt, son of Harmen, from the Rhine'**

2. This celebrated work is said to be the first painting in which he used the simple name signature 'Rembrandt'. **Ans: The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1632)**

3. This work painted in 1625 is considered his first signed painting. **Ans: The Stoning of Saint Stephen'**

4. This painting shows the apostles reacting to the moment Jesus reveals his identity post-resurrection. **Ans: The Supper at Emmaus (1648)**

5. The 'Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee' can now be seen here. **Ans: Nobody knows as it was stolen from Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990 and has not yet been recovered**

6. The speciality of the 'The Next Rembrandt'. **Ans: It was a new, AI-generated work that compiled a dataset of Rembrandt's 346 authenticated paintings to create a digital-physical hybrid portrait**

Visual: The popular name for this Rembrandt masterpiece. **Ans: 'The Night Watch' at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum**

Early Bird: Sadhan Panda

## THE DAILY QUIZ

Jannik Sinner won his first Wimbledon, closing the curtain on this year's edition of one of the oldest sporting events in the world. Here is a quiz on the Championships

Vignesh P. Venkitesh

### QUESTION 1

Who holds the record for most singles titles at the tournament?

### QUESTION 2

What food combination is famously associated with the tournament, a tradition that began with the seasonal availability of one of its components during the early years of the tournament?

### QUESTION 3

What was the original colour of the balls used in the tournament and

what prompted its change to the current yellow?

### QUESTION 4

What was the electronic line judging aid, introduced at Wimbledon in 1980, called?

### QUESTION 5

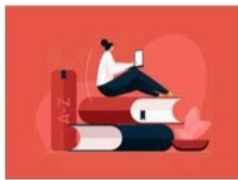
The first-round match between John Isner and Nicolas Mahut in 2010 lasted more than 11 hours over three days with the fifth set being decided at 70-68. Name the spoof movie starring Andy Samberg that was partly inspired by this game.



### Visual question:

Name this bird and its role in the tournament. 4P

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



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
S. Upendran

"I see you are back with your essay. You have more questions?"

"What's wrong with this sentence? 'My sister and I fight everyday'. I don't find..."

"...it should be 'My sister and I fight every day'. Every day should be two words, not one."

"Wait a minute. I have seen 'everyday' written as one word."

"There is a difference in meaning between 'every day' and 'everyday'. When written as two words, it means 'daily'. For example, I go to school every day."

"My father watches the news on BBC every day."

"I would love to play tennis every day." "Newspapers report about corruption every day."

"Yes. Corruption has become an everyday problem. In that sentence, 'everyday' is one word. When used as one word, it means 'common', or 'routine'."

"So, when you say, 'Corruption is an everyday problem', it means corruption is a common problem?"

"That's right. Here's another example. During the summer having no electricity becomes part of our everyday life."

"That's true."

"Good. Now try to use 'everyday' as one word."

"Meeting Madhuri Dixit or Sachin Tendulkar is not an everyday event."

"That is some example."

"Is it wrong?"

"No, it's a wonderful example."

"Then why did you say, that's 'some' example?"

"Because 'some' is sometimes used in speech to express approval or admiration. For example, if I say, 'That's some cassette player', it means that I think it's a wonderful cassette player."

"In other words, you are giving your approval."

"That's right. Here's another example. Seles played some game last night. This would mean Monica Seles played a wonderful game of tennis last night."

"Can I say, 'The English Patient' was some movie?"

"You certainly can."

"In that sentence 'some' would mean 'wonderful' or 'extraordinary', right?"

"That's right. By the way, e.x.t.r.a.o.r.d.i.n.a.r.y is pronounced the same way as you would pronounce 'extra' and 'ordinary'."

"What do you mean? 'Extra' has two syllables, and the word 'ordinary' has four syllables. So, the word 'extraordinary' should have six syllables."

"Well, the word 'extraordinary' has a maximum of five syllables. Not six. The first syllable 'ex' sounds like the words 'picks', 'fix' and 'mix'. The 'a' in 'tra' is pronounced like the 'aw' in 'saw', 'paw', and 'law'."

"You mean the second syllable of 'extra' and the first syllable of 'ordinary' combine to form just one syllable?"

"Well, you could say that. The 'i' in the third syllable 'di' is like the 'a' in 'China'. And so is the 'a' in the fourth syllable 'ra'."

"I see. So the word is exTRAOrdinary. Is that right?"

"That's right."

Published in *The Hindu* on April 8, 1997.

## Word of the day

### Irredenta:

a region that is related ethnically or historically to one country but is controlled politically by another

Usage: Many nations stake historical claims on territories considered irredenta, leading to territorial disputes.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/irredentapra

### International Phonetic

Alphabet: /ɪr.ɪˈdɛn.tə/

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



# CERN collider reveals major clue to universe's bias against antimatter

For the first time, scientists have observed that the laws of physics are different for the particles that make up visible matter and their antiparticles. The finding is key to understanding why matter dominates the universe even though it once had equal quantities of matter and antimatter

Yasudevan Mukunth

**T**he universe is made mostly of matter, not antimatter, but scientists believe that after the Big Bang, both must have existed in equal amounts. One of the big mysteries in physics is understanding why matter dominates the universe today and what happened to all the antimatter.

A key clue comes from something called CP violation – a difference in the behaviour of matter and antimatter.

While CP violation has been observed in certain types of particles called mesons, it has never been reported in baryons, which are the particles (like protons and neutrons) that make up most of the matter around us.

Based on new data, the LHCb collaboration in Europe has now reported the first-ever observation of CP violation in baryon decays, specifically in a particle called the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon (pronounced “lambda bee-zero baryon”).

Their findings were published in *Nature* on July 16.

“For the first time, we have clear evidence of CP violation in baryons,” Xueting Yang, the corresponding author of the study, a member of the LHCb team, and a PhD student at Peking University in Beijing, told *The Hindu*.

“The matter-antimatter asymmetry in the universe requires CP violation in baryons, such that the discovery is a key step forward.”

## Looking for the signal

In CP, ‘C’ stands for charge conjugation, which means the action of swapping a particle with its antiparticle. ‘P’ stands for parity, which is the action of flipping the spatial coordinates, like looking in a mirror.

CP symmetry stipulates that if you swap particles for antiparticles and look in a mirror, the laws of physics should be the same.

CP violation thus means this symmetry is broken and that the laws of physics are slightly different for matter and antimatter. This is important because CP violation is a necessary ingredient to explain why the universe is made mostly of matter.

The  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon is made up of three smaller particles: an up quark, a down quark, and a bottom quark. The antiparticle of the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon is called the  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar.

The newly reported result focuses on a specific decay of the  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon: into a proton, a negatively charged kaon, a positively charged pion, and a negatively charged pion. This is denoted:  $\Lambda_b^0 \rightarrow p K^- \pi^+ \pi^-$ .

The collaboration also studied the same decay for the antiparticle,  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar, but with all charges reversed.

The experiment used data from the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, specifically from the LHCb detector on the machine.

The LHCb team collected data between 2011 and 2018, corresponding to a very large number of collisions between beams of protons accelerated to nearly the speed of light.

In these collisions,  $\Lambda_b^0$  and  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar baryons are produced and then rapidly decay. The LHCb researchers looked for events where the decay products matched  $p K^- \pi^+ \pi^-$ .

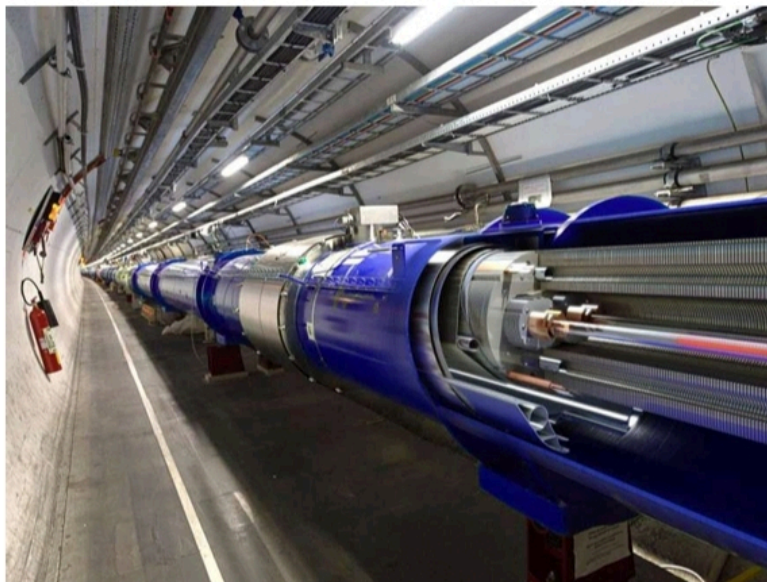
To reduce background noise – in the form of random combinations of particles that mimic the signal – they used machine learning to distinguish real decays from fake ones. They also used particle identification tools on computers that could tell protons, kaons, and pions apart.

The main quantity they measured was the CP asymmetry. It compares the number of  $\Lambda_b^0$  decays to the number of  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar decays: if there is no CP violation, the value of CP asymmetry should be zero. In practice, they measured the yield asymmetry, which is the difference in the number of decays observed for  $\Lambda_b^0$  and  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar.

There are some effects that can mimic CP violation. For example, the proton-proton collisions may produce more  $\Lambda_b^0$  than  $\Lambda_b^+$  bar to begin with. For another, the LHCb detector on the Large Hadron Collider might have been slightly better at detecting one charge over another.

To correct for these possible biases, the researchers used a control channel – a similar decay where no CP violation is expected. Here, an  $\Lambda_b^0$  baryon decays to a positively charged  $\Lambda_c^+$  baryon, and a negatively charged pion:  $\Lambda_b^0 \rightarrow \Lambda_c^+ \pi^-$ .

Any asymmetry seen in this control channel was considered a nuisance and subtracted from the main measurement.



The Large Hadron Collider is the world's largest, most powerful particle accelerator. It accelerates particles, mainly protons, to near the speed of light in opposite directions around a 27-km underground ring. Then the particles are made to collide at four locations, where massive detectors collect data on what happens during the collision. CERN



More precise and comprehensive measurements across different particle systems are required to build a coherent and consistent picture of CP violation. Theoretically, improved calculations and refined models are essential to connect these experimental observations with the fundamental physics driving the matter-antimatter asymmetry.

baryons but doesn't say whether the amount of violation is higher or lower than that predicted by the Standard Model. Ascertaining that requires researchers to determine the complex phase.

In the context of CP violation, the complex phase is a combination of variables present in the Cabibbo-Kobayashi-Maskawa (CKM) matrix, a mathematical tool physicists use to understand how the quarks in a baryon interact with each other.

If the complex phase has a non-zero value, it means the laws of physics are not identical for matter and antimatter, leading to observable differences in their behaviour.

The Standard Model predicts specific values for the amount of CP violation, which are determined by the magnitude and phase of the variables in the CKM matrix.

By measuring the phase associated with CP violation in baryon decays, physicists can compare the observed amount of violation to the Standard Model's predictions.

In their paper, the LHCb researchers have reported that the complex phase information proved too difficult to extract from the data collected by the detector.

“Until we measure the phase, we can't say if the rate of antimatter's disappearance is too high or too low compared to the Model's prediction,” Prof. Sinha said.

The same technique to measure the

phase for mesons can't be used for baryons. To this end, Prof. Sinha added that in 2022, he and his peers Shibasis Roy and N. G. Deshpande described a new way to measure the complex phase for baryons. It was published in *Physical Review Letters*.

Observing CP violation in baryons is important because the visible matter around us today is made of baryons. Some baryons like protons and neutrons are very stable and don't decay for a long time.

Others, like  $\Lambda_b^0$ , decay in around 1.5 picoseconds. The point is that is true for one baryon should be true for all baryons.

“To definitively resolve the asymmetry problem, both experimental and theoretical progress are needed,” Dr. Yang said.

“Experimentally, more precise and comprehensive measurements across different particle systems are required to build a coherent and consistent picture of CP violation.”

Theoretically, improved calculations and refined models are essential to connect these experimental observations with the fundamental physics driving the matter-antimatter asymmetry.”

## The Sakharov conditions

How did matter gain an overwhelming upper hand over antimatter in the universe? CP violation in baryons is an important piece of this puzzle – but also only one piece.

In 1967, the Soviet physicist and later famous political dissident Andrei Sakharov said three conditions will have to be met for the universe to be made predominantly of only matter. They are:

- (i) Baryon number violation: physical processes must exist that create an imbalance between the number of baryons and the number of antibaryons.
- (ii) CP violation in baryons
- (iii) Departure from thermal equilibrium: to prevent processes from balancing baryon and antibaryon production, interactions must occur out of equilibrium. The observation of CP violation in baryon decays provides a ‘source’ that adds CP violation among mesons. The complex phase of the mesons’ violation has been measured whereas that of the baryons is pending.

Once the latter is known physicists will be able to compare it to that predicted by the Standard Model. If they match, it will mean the Standard Model is right – but at the same time leave a gap between the predicted matter-antimatter asymmetry and that observed in the universe.

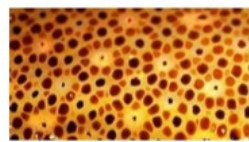
If the values don't match, it could be a sign of ‘new physics’, which physicists will have to explain using new theories and experiments.

Overall, the newly reported observation is a milestone showing that the laws of physics treat matter and antimatter differently not just in mesons but also in baryons – the building blocks of the visible universe.

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Chromatophores on squid skin. MINETTE (CC BY)

## Surprising disorder found on squid skin

Yasudevan Mukunth

Have you ever wondered how the unusual patterns on a squid's skin are formed? Scientists have studied these patterns to uncover new insights into how living things organise cells as they grow. The research, led by a team at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, focused on pigment cells in squids called chromatophores, the cells that allow squids to change the appearance of their skin.

The study explored how these cells are packed together as the squid grows, showing the process creates a surprising kind of disorder that the researchers have called hyperdisorder.

Unlike many systems in nature that become more regular or more uniform as they grow, squid skin instead revealed patterns where randomness and fluctuations increase with size.

The study's principal goal was to understand how the arrangement of chromatophores on squid skin changed as the animal grew. While scientists already knew a lot about how particles or cells can pack together in stationary (non-growing) materials, they've known little about what happens when packing takes place on a surface that's also expanding, like a squid growing over time.

**When biological tissues like squid skin grow, they can develop unique patterns. The constant addition of new cells led to a kind of ever-growing, dynamic disorder called hyperdisorder.**

To investigate these questions, the scientists blended biological experiments with computer simulations. The team raised adult squids in the lab and took super high-resolution photographs of their mantles, the main part of the squid body. Second, using advanced computer vision and machine learning, they analysed thousands of pigment cells in the images. Finally, they tracked individual chromatophores and measured their positions and sizes as the squids grew over weeks.

The team checked how random or organised the arrangement of pigmentation cells were in small patches versus over larger areas – and made several surprising discoveries.

First, instead of becoming more regular as a squid grows, the chromatophore patterns became more disordered at larger scales. The scientists described this as hyperdisordered behaviour, meaning that as they looked at larger and larger pieces of a squid's skin, the differences from place to place got bigger, not smaller.

Second, this hyperdisordered state arose from a combination of the random placement of cells and the skin's growth. The growth constantly created new spaces between cells, preventing them from settling into a neat, uniform pattern.

Third, as the squid developed, older chromatophores got bigger even as new, smaller ones kept appearing. Even so the overall distribution of cell sizes stayed roughly the same over time – indicating a balance between growth and new cell insertion.

The study thus revealed that when biological tissues like squid skin grow, they can develop unique patterns that don't follow the trends that scientists have seen in non-growing systems. The constant stretching and addition of new cells led to a kind of ever-growing, dynamic disorder called hyperdisorder.

The study also showed how blending biology and physics can uncover hidden patterns in the living world. The resulting insights can help scientists understand how squid skin works as they point to underlying physical rules that could apply to many other tissues in nature, from plant leaves to animal organs.

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The LHCb detector at the Large Hadron Collider is designed primarily to study the decay of particles containing bottom quarks and charm quarks. CERN



WORDLY WISE  
I'LL BE HAPPY IF RUNNING AND I CAN  
GROW OLD TOGETHER.  
— HARUKI MURAKAMI

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# A world of our making

India's foreign policy reflects a refusal of true realism. It shies away from a confrontation with our predicament



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

## AN INTENT TO REPAIR

Minister Jaishankar's visit to China, recent instances of widening engagement, reflect a thaw. There will be challenges

FIVE YEARS AFTER the military standoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's meetings with China's President Xi Jinping, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Liu Jianchao (head of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party) signal an intent to repair the relationship with Beijing. Minister Jaishankar's visit to China this week — his first since the 2020 skirmishes — for the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, taken alongside recent instances of widening engagement, reflects a thaw in bilateral ties. Recall that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Xi met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit last October, shortly after a new border patrolling arrangement was announced and a few days before the disengagement process officially concluded. Since then, NSA Ajit Doval, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misra have all visited China. Other signs that the India-China relationship has been moving in a positive direction include an understanding to expedite the restoration of direct flights and easing of visa restrictions, and resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. While Jaishankar has said that "a far-seeing lens" should be used for rebuilding ties, some key issues remain unresolved.

Post-disengagement, the de-escalation process — the withdrawal of troops from forward positions — hasn't begun at the border. China's restrictive trade practices, such as curbs on critical exports like rare earth magnets and high-tech manufacturing machinery, continue to be a stumbling block. These concerns were conveyed by Jaishankar to Wang, along with a pointed reminder that the SCO was founded to fight "three evils": Terrorism, separatism, and extremism. At the same time, in an increasingly turbulent world order, and especially with an unpredictable occupant of the White House, re-engagement with China, or what Wang recently described as a "cooperative *pas de deux* of the dragon and the elephant", is pragmatic policy. For example, the US and NATO threatening to sanction countries doing business with Russia — a move that would hit India and China hardest — underscores the need for a partnership. The fact, however, is that China continues to view its relationship with India primarily through a lens of competition, not cooperation. The most recent example is China's growing military cooperation with Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. The power gap is also widening. India runs a trade deficit of over \$100 billion with China. The latter continues to scale up its defence budget and capabilities. China also leads in critical technologies like AI, quantum computing, and rare earths. And Beijing is steadily strengthening its influence across South Asia, luring countries strategically important to India into its own fold — Bangladesh, most recently.

India must, therefore, remain vigilant. Alongside dialogue, to increase its leverage, New Delhi must focus on getting its own house in order: Accelerate economic reform, bolster technological capacity, and foster social and political unity. Some members of the Opposition have criticised Jaishankar's China outreach. His calibrated diplomacy, however, was necessary. The China question demands long-term, strategic clarity at the domestic level as well. And on the foreign policy front, New Delhi must widen its engagement across the neighbourhood and beyond, to prevent Beijing from gaining a decisive upper hand in the region.

## ACT OF DISRESPECT

De facto house arrest, manhandling of Omar Abdullah, was an unseemly spectacle. Onus is on L-G's office to make amends

IN THE AFTERMATH of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam on April 22, Omar Abdullah, the first elected Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, condemned the heinous act and expressed solidarity, in a way that was both empathetic and striking, with the families of the 26 tourists who were killed. He called a special one-day session of the Assembly. The gesture emphasised that the people of J&K participated in the nation's grief, and endorsed the diplomatic measures announced by the Centre. As CM this time, Omar Abdullah has been seen to avoid a confrontational tone with the Centre and its powerful nominee, the L-G. J&K's ruling coalition has not insisted on the restoration of special status — it has pressed the demand for statehood, which both the Centre and the Supreme Court have promised. But even as Omar Abdullah has shown accommodation and flexibility, the Centre seems to be taking backward steps. Visuals of CM Abdullah being placed under de facto house arrest by an unelected administration on Martyrs' Day, July 13, and of him being manhandled by police personnel, are unseemly and deeply disturbing.

Martyrs' Day has both historical and political significance. It marks the killing of 22 protestors by the Dogra monarch's police in 1931. Sheikh Abdullah, his successors, separatists and even leaders in PoK and Pakistan have invoked the moment for political ends. After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the holiday was scrapped by the J&K administration. The CM's insistence on visiting the cemetery where those killed in 1931 are buried can be seen as a political statement — a way to distance himself from the Centre and the L-G. But why should that invite this bizarre spectacle of punishment choreographed by the L-G's office, its strings evidently pulled by the Centre?

The UT administration's actions risk denting the people's trust framed in the heartening turnout of 63.9 per cent in last year's polls, among the highest in the region's electoral history. The Centre has long claimed that, since August 5, 2019, the erstwhile state has made strides across sectors, including in law and order and security. It has made it clear that the question of statehood is not if but when. An overzealous Raj Bhavan, and its political masters at the Centre, should not undo the hard-won gains in the UT. It is now for the L-G's office to make amends.

## A MARATHON LIFE

Behind Fauja Singh's many accomplishments lay a simple joy

IF FORREST GUMP had to wear leg braces because his back was "as crooked as a politician", Fauja Singh had such weak legs that he couldn't walk properly until he was five years old. Both outran their limitations, and kept running. If the story of Tom Hanks's character was a sprint through mid-20th-century American history, the supercentenarian's life must have been a marathon. He was born in the year of King George V's Delhi Durbar, was three years old when Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated and the world plunged into war, and 36 when India won its Independence. On the day he died, the second Indian in space was preparing to return to Earth.

Fauja Singh discovered his joy in running later in life, and in the wake of sorrow, when he had moved to the UK following the deaths of his wife and one of his children. It was a chance meeting with the man who would go on to become his coach that saw him take wing. He ran nine full marathons — setting records for his age group — between 2000 and 2013, when he retired. In Toronto in 2011, he became the first centenarian to finish a marathon. He quickly rose to fame after appearing in an Adidas advertising campaign that also featured the likes of Muhammad Ali and David Beckham. Through it all, he donated most of his earnings from brand endorsements to charity.

Sixths in the City, Fauja Singh's running club and charity in London, is reportedly planning a series of events to celebrate his life and achievements. In a moment of mourning, and while reckoning with the tragic nature of his death in a hit-and-run, it's important to find time and space to do the same: To remember the many feats and more joys of a man who, at the age of 95, found life so "beautiful" that he "just didn't feel like dying".

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY is in a deep morass that is often difficult to see. Our hyper-nationalism prevents us asking tough questions. The daily news cycle is caught in tactical matters or image management for the government. Behind our failures lies a refusal of true realism, or a genuine confrontation with our predicament.

This refusal of realism is manifest in our diplomacy. The former foreign secretary, Jagat Mehta, often used to say at the Centre for Policy Research that the first exercise in approaching the world in any given situation should be to abstract out proper names, including that of your country, so that you are more ruthlessly objective about your task. Try and imagine how you appear to your toughest adversaries on the outside. India is rightly concerned, and is somewhat shocked, that it lost the diplomatic high ground after Operation Sindoor. We got boilerplate costless condemnations of terrorism, but also felt that no one stands with it. It was fascinating to contrast the breathless self-proclaimed triumphs of the parliamentary delegations and our government with what other countries from the Global North and South were actually saying, behind our backs, as it were. We can blame other countries' self-interest and their anti-India disposition for the failure to politically capitalise on Operation Sindoor. But we were so besotted with our sense of our case that we did not honestly confront how the case might appear to others.

The rest of the world may be mistaken. These days, no country has much of a moral leg to stand on. But it is worth asking why the moral distinction between India and Pakistan was diplomatically much harder to convey than we thought. There are four reasons. I have no idea what we might actually be doing in Balochistan. But there is little doubt that our security establishment brags, sotto voce, about using the Balochistan crisis against Pakistan. In doing so, we ourselves muddy the waters about the use of proxies, and targeting on the basis of religion.

The violence in Balochistan and Kashmir, for the rest of the world, gets connected, in a chain of associations. In the backdrop of the fact that we have a govern-

ment that does not exactly have a stellar reputation on moral condemnation of targeting people on account of their religion, it makes it easy for the world to say that these horrendous killings are, as one diplomat once put it, "one of those periodic South Asian things". This is condescending, but we invited it.

Second, we are missing the point on anxieties on the nuclear front. Both sides may be right in thinking that, in principle, they can control an escalatory ladder. But focus on rational control of escalatory ladders does not address genuine worries about accidents. In the minds of India and Pakistan, this may be a controlled operation. But any confrontation between nuclear powers is risky. When Donald Trump brags about preventing nuclear war, listen to the underlying concern, not the surface drama or his put-down of Narendra Modi. He is in effect saying that even the smallest step to war makes India and Pakistan a problem for the rest of the world. Pakistan has no diplomatic high ground to lose. But war will always make India lose its moral high ground. War makes India a problem for the world.

Third, wasn't it a matter of pride among our diplomats to say to Europe and the rest of the world that Ukraine was their problem? If the gobbling up of a whole sovereign nation is "their problem", not a matter of principle, guess what? Terrorism is also not "their" problem. What is their problem is the risk of nuclear accidents. And finally, India's absolute loss of credibility in the Global South. A country that cannot so much as morally squeak on what is now almost universally acknowledged as an ongoing genocide in Gaza, obsessing over terrorism adds narcissism to the charge of moral abdication. Add to this the fact that we botched our credibility as a state on meaningless operations allegedly targeting useless Khalistan activists in Canada and the US. Further add to this the fact that not allowing an open domestic discussion even on the bare facts of the war furthers our credibility crisis. Even our truths become less credible.

One ought to feel sorry for the able diplomats of the MEA. Their political and national security masters have made their job more difficult even before they have begun. So, India's moral claims now invite a long 'me' at worst. And since our foreign policy establishment is easily satiated with the meaningless communicate that makes the evening headline, that is at best what we get.

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SARTHAK BAGCHI

THIS NEWSPAPER HAS welcomed the use of the lottery system for the appointment of five college principals in Patna University ('Drawing Lots', 17 July 7). I disagree with its argument that in a "system corroded by nepotism, caste and political patronage, randomisation may be an impartial arbiter". The lottery system is, in fact, an arbitrary solution to a longstanding problem of maintaining quality checks in teachers' recruitment in Bihar. It is akin to fixing a broken bone with an ordinary band-aid.

The irregularities in teachers' appointments, coupled with delays in recruitment, have dented the credibility of Bihar's already crumbling higher education system. Education and migration are key routes to escape the poverty trap in the state. The deterioration of higher educational institutions, therefore, has repercussions on the state's development trajectory. Institutions in Bihar seem to be completely under the sway of the *labharthi* system. Students are no longer expected to demand and expect good quality education as a matter of right. What Bihar needs is transparency and structural changes. The editorial is right in pointing out that for decades, "government appointments in Bihar, including in its university system, have been hostage to cronyism". But it is misplaced in asserting that an arbitrary lottery is the "necessary first step" towards reform.

### DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which readers tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

The system has led to bizarre appointments like a chemistry professor being posted to head the arts and history-oriented Patna College, a history professor being made the head of the Patna Science College, and a male history professor appointed the principal of the Magadh Mahila College.

The system has led to bizarre appointments like a chemistry professor being posted to head the arts and history-oriented Patna College, a history professor being made the head of the Patna Science College, and a male history professor appointed the principal of the Magadh Mahila College. Such mismatched appointments come at a time when the state government has shown itself incapable of meeting the aspirations of the youth, especially those related to higher education. Most estimates place the teacher-to-student ratio in the state's institutes of higher education at around 1:50. In several postgraduate departments in state-run colleges, there is one teacher for 200-350 students.

The dilapidated state of higher education departments in state-run institutes like the BN Mandal University in Madhepura, where several departments from the social sciences and natural sciences streams reportedly share the same room, the delays in hiring teachers, the stopgap arrangement of mass recruitment drives and the overcrowded classrooms in coaching centres in Patna, where students from all over the state converge to learn ways of cracking entrance examinations, have pushed the state's youth to the brink. The state's two major mainstream political parties, the BJP and the JD(U), tend to milk this situation for political gains — recruitment in educational

institutions, like government appointments, is a way of providing political patronage and exercises in favouritism. More than one investigation by this newspaper has shown — and the editorial also points out — that these processes are biased towards well-connected candidates. A lottery system, as the editorial points out, might introduce "an element of neutrality". But its rightful emphasis on fairness in recruitment procedures is considerably weakened by the editorial's endorsement of a system that's totally contingent on chance.

The Bihar government would do well to take a leaf out of the book of its counterparts in other states. Tamil Nadu, for example, has a Teacher Recruitment Board to appoint teachers to higher education institutes. Maharashtra is reportedly framing a policy that gives 80 per cent weightage to academic quality, research and teaching and 20 per cent weightage to on-camera interviews to bring more transparency to the recruitment process. The editorial underlines the need for 'specialised selection panels, independent oversight bodies, public appointment records and rotational leadership' in future. Why not begin work on that immediately?

The writer teaches political science at Ahmedabad University

## JULY 17, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

### DECODING CVR

THE PRELIMINARY HEARING of the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) of the ill-fated Air India Jumbo, Kanishka, established that the snapping of communication was "sudden and abrupt". The preliminary run was done at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. The spokesman and secretary to the court of inquiry, S N Sharma, said the preliminary run of the tape was "pretty good and normal".

### CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

TAMIL GROUPS HAVE set out four basic principles that they say are vital to Tamil interests

and which they want recognised in any new proposals for ending the ethnic conflict. Neelan Tiruchelvam, a spokesman for the Tamil United Liberation Front, said the principles were conveyed to the government at peace talks in Thimphu. They are the acceptance of the Tamils as a national minority, recognition of their traditional homelands, the right to self-determination and citizenship and the right to live in Sri Lanka for all Tamils.

### ARMY WITHDRAWN

THE ARMY, WHICH was called in to assist the civil administration in Ahmedabad and Baroda to contain violence in the wake of the

anti-reservation agitation, has been withdrawn. It will, however, stand by. The decision to withdraw the 2,000-odd troops was taken at a high-power meeting of state government officials with the Army and police.

### LONGOWAL'S PLAN

HARCHAND SINGH LONGOWAL, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Longowal) has said that the Akali Dal had decided to organise district-level conferences all over Punjab and parts of Haryana. These will be held from August 1 to 20 to mobilise the masses for the new line of action, to be announced on August 20, for the acceptance of its long-pending demands.





## THE IDEAS PAGE



C R Sasikumar

## Displacement is not peace

Israeli plan to relocate people of Gaza to a 'humanitarian city' is illegal under international law and morally indefensible



SUJATA ASHWARYA

EVEN AS CEASEFIRE talks have stalled in Doha, the bombs keep falling on Gaza, with the death toll having crossed 55,000 according to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry. The vast majority of Gaza's population has been displaced, and much of the enclaves lie in ruins. While diplomats speak of "phased withdrawals" and "hostage exchanges", the war's deeper tragedy is unfolding on another scale: The erasure of a people's presence from their homeland under the guise of humanitarian planning.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest proposal, endorsed by Israel's security cabinet, outlines the full military capture of Gaza, indefinite control over its territory, and the creation of a so-called humanitarian city on the ruins of Rafah. Under this plan, Israeli forces would control the perimeter of the site and initially relocate some 600,000 Palestinians, primarily those already displaced in the Al-Mawasi area, into the zone. Eventually, the entire population of Gaza would be concentrated there. Israeli officials have openly linked this relocation to a broader emigration scheme, described by one as something that "will happen", raising serious concerns that this so-called humanitarian arrangement is in fact a staging ground for mass displacement.

This is not the language of peace. It is the architecture of a controlled displacement. While the Israeli government frames its intentions as voluntary relocation, prominent human rights lawyers and legal scholars have

called it what it is: Forced transfer, which is both illegal under international law and morally indefensible. As Michael Sfard, a leading Israeli human rights lawyer, put it plainly: "It is all about population transfer... in preparation for deportation outside the Strip."

In the background, the rhetoric of Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump hints at a shared vision for Gaza that stretches beyond ceasefire deals. Trump's earlier proposal to transform Gaza into a "Riviera of the Middle East" has, within months, evolved into open discussions of third-country resettlement for Palestinians—an idea that has been openly embraced by far-right Israeli leaders. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has categorically rejected any withdrawal from the territory Israel has "conquered", explicitly linking military occupation with expansionist goals in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Meanwhile, efforts to negotiate a 60-day pause in hostilities, mediated by Qatar, are inching forward. The terms under discussion include phased hostage releases, expanded humanitarian access, and Israeli military withdrawals from parts of Gaza. But the core impasse remains: Hamas demands a permanent ceasefire and full withdrawal, while Netanyahu insists on Hamas's unconditional surrender and removal. In other words, both sides continue to speak past one another while civilians are crushed between ruin and rhetoric.

This is not to excuse Hamas. Its October 7 cross-border attack, which killed civilians and triggered the current war, was a destructive act that has only deepened Palestinian suffering. The group has not only endangered Israeli lives but has also placed Palestinians in Gaza in a double bind, using them as human shields in wartime and as political leverage in negotiations. Yet Hamas's actions cannot justify the obliteration of Gaza, nor should they be used to obscure the underlying realities of occupation, blockade, and dispossession that long preceded this war.

For decades, Palestinians have demanded something very simple and very difficult: The right to live freely in their homeland. That demand has been undermined not only by Israel's policies but also by a global order willing to look away when the language of security is used to justify siege and expulsion. The international community, including India, must reject any diplomatic framework that seeks to normalise permanent displacement or indefinite occupation.

What is at stake is more than ceasefire logistics. The current moment risks hardening a framework in which Palestinian existence is contained and relocated rather than recognised and restored. A humanitarian pause that simply reorders the geography of displacement is not peace. A corridor controlled by foreign troops is not sovereignty. And a camp built on the ruins of Rafah is not a future.

For decades, Palestinians have demanded something very simple and very difficult: The right to live freely in their homeland. That demand has been undermined not only by Israel's policies but also by a global order willing to look away when the language of security is used to justify siege and expulsion. The international community, including India, must reject any diplomatic framework that seeks to normalise permanent displacement or indefinite occupation.

There can be no durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without recognising the Palestinians' right to remain on their land and live free from forced displacement. Ceasefires are essential to ending violence. They may bring temporary relief, but they do not dismantle the structures that sustain it or substitute for justice. If the talks in Qatar are to lead anywhere meaningful, they must move beyond preserving Israel's military objectives and confront what has been lost by the Palestinians.

What is unfolding in Gaza cannot be separated from the pressures and dispossession faced by Palestinians in the West Bank. Any agreement that ignores this shared reality risks becoming a cover for entrenching injustice. The goal cannot be to manage Palestinian displacement. It must be brought to an end. A just resolution of the Palestinian question is not a threat to Israeli security. It is the surest path to it.

The writer is professor at the Centre for West Asian Studies (Middle Eastern), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi



D RAJA

THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF India (ECI) has launched a sweeping Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. Though presented as a legitimate administrative effort to update voter data ahead of the Assembly elections, the move has drawn criticism and legal challenges. The ECI has initiated door-to-door verification of voter records across the state, demanding submission of multiple documents including personal and parental proof of age and residence, particularly for those born after 2003. While the stated purpose is to remove inaccuracies and eliminate ineligible voters, the exercise stands out for its timing and the implications for already vulnerable populations.

Bihar has one of the highest concentrations of working people and marginalised communities in the country, many of whom are under-documented and live in conditions that make it impossible to maintain consistent paper trails. For migrant workers, Dalits, Adivasis and the rural poor, furnishing documents that prove not just their own eligibility but that of their parents within a month's notice is an almost insurmountable challenge. These groups now face the prospect of disenfranchisement, not due to fraud or manipulation but due to systemic inequality and administrative insensitivity. The scale and pace of this process, during the monsoon season and across difficult terrain, virtually guarantees errors and exclusions. This fear was echoed in the Supreme Court when a judge observed that even someone of his stature would struggle to produce the kind

## Undermining a right

Bihar electoral roll revision threatens right to vote, especially of the disadvantaged

of documentation now being demanded. This observation from the judiciary came during the ongoing hearings on the constitutional validity and timing of the SIR. The author of this article is also a petitioner before the Supreme Court, part of a collective legal challenge to the SIR by 10 Opposition parties. The Court has taken note of our apprehensions and has asked pointed questions to the ECI, including on the timing of the exercise. Further, the Court has also asked the ECI to consider other documents like Aadhaar cards, ration cards and the EPIC, which is issued by the ECI itself, for the SIR. The very fact that the judiciary had to intervene in an exercise that should have been routine and inclusive is a troubling sign.

What makes this exercise even more suspect is its political context. The BJP, which has ruled at the Centre for over a decade and has all but eclipsed other parties in Bihar's ruling alliance, has continuously devised new methods to retain power in politically crucial states like Bihar. Whether through orchestrated debates, covert encouragement of splinter groups, or manipulation of alliances, the BJP has shown an unwillingness to respect electoral uncertainty. With its position weakening in Bihar and the Opposition Mahagathabandhan gaining strength, the SIR appears to be the newest instrument in this playbook. The demand for complex documentation will disproportionately affect voters who are less likely to support the BJP: the poor, Dalits, minorities and migrant workers.

What is being portrayed as a neutral administrative measure is, in fact, deeply political.

While the ECI has defended the process as constitutionally mandated and necessary under the Representation of the People Act, these claims do not hold up to scrutiny. No such intensive revision was undertaken in other states that recently went to the polls. The electoral rolls in Bihar had already been updated for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. A limited update to include new eligible voters would have sufficed. The ECI is yet to offer a clear explanation for the surge in the number of voters before the Maharashtra elections. This selective use of revisions raises questions about whether these exercises are being conducted impartially. Most tellingly, BJP spokespersons have been far more enthusiastic in defending the SIR than the ECI itself. This creates the impression that the ECI, while formally neutral, is presiding over an exercise whose political consequences are highly skewed.

This perception has been strengthened by recent changes in the appointment process of Election Commissioners. The Union government now holds the sole authority to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and other Commissioners, a move that weakens the structural independence of the institution. In public forums and press interactions, the ECI has failed to assert its autonomy with the kind of firmness shown in the past. It is worth recalling that former Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan deliberately

stopped using the term "Government of India" in Commission communication to underline its institutional independence from the Executive. Today, such symbolic and substantive measures are largely absent, and public confidence in the Commission's impartiality is eroding as a result.

The timing of the Bihar revision is particularly telling. With only months to go before the announcement of elections, lakhs of voters are now scrambling to confirm their inclusion on the rolls. Many face uncertainty, confusion and fear. In a democracy, no citizen should be in doubt about their right to vote. Yet in Bihar today, this doubt has been manufactured, not resolved, by the very institution meant to protect electoral rights. The revision has come as a shock to voters who had already voted in the 2024 general elections and are being asked to once again prove their eligibility. The burden of proof has unfairly shifted to the citizen, and the consequences will likely be felt most by those already marginalised by the system.

The right to vote for an eligible citizen is not a privilege that should be filtered through bureaucratic red tape. It is a right and any attempt to limit it under the pretext of administrative reform must be challenged firmly and decisively. The people of Bihar are no strangers to struggle, and this latest battle must be fought not just at the doors of the Court but at the doorsteps of every citizen.

The writer is general secretary, CPI

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The longer this calamity persists, the more Israel risks losing what was once its most valuable asset — the bipartisan support of a majority of Americans."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

## A much-needed pruning

Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of Bihar's electoral rolls should serve as a template for similar campaigns in other states



DEVESH KUMAR

AS THE SPECIAL drive launched in Bihar by the Election Commission of India to rid the electoral rolls of all errors enters its fourth week, some positives are already visible. The booth-level officers (BLOs), who have fanned out across the state to distribute and collect the enumeration forms, while moving around from one house to another in the areas covered by their respective booths, have found that 1.59 per cent of voters had died in the intervening period. This translates to a whopping 12.5 lakh electors. Another 2.2 per cent, whose names appeared on the voter list, had migrated to other states. This amounts to 17.5 lakh voters in a state with a total voter base of 7.90 crore. As many as 5.5 lakh voters, or 0.73 per cent, had their names appearing at two places in the electoral roll.

The voters of Bihar, it is clear, have given their thumbs-up to the drive, and delivered a snub to the parties that have been trying to create doubts about the ECI's decision to go in for a "Special Intensive Revision (SIR)" of the electoral roll. The BLOs had, till July 15, succeeded in disbursing enumeration forms to 88.18 per cent of the voters. Of these, 83.66 per cent had submitted their filled-up forms to the BLOs. By the time the first phase of the SIR draws to a close, it is estimated that almost all bona fide citizens of the state will have been covered.

It follows that the names of people who fail to provide any citizenship proof will have to be deleted from the electoral roll. As reported widely in the media, the Election Commission, during the course of its drive to collect filled-up enumeration forms, stumbled upon several illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. They had, over a period of time, somehow found their way into the voter list, despite the fact that they had failed to submit any citizenship proof.

Former Bihar BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal, the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha, while speaking to newsmen in Patna on July 9, laid the bare the conspiracy launched by the Opposition parties to shore up their fortunes in the districts close to Bangladesh by demanding the inclusion of Aadhaar as proof of citizenship. "In Kishanganj district, the number of Aadhaar cards in circulation is an impossible 165 per cent. In neighbouring Araria, the figure is marginally lower at 103 per cent. It is clear that a whole lot of illegal Rohingyas and Bangladeshis have succeeded in laying their hands on Aadhaar cards," he pointed out.

He also alleged that since June 25, when the SIR was rolled out in Bihar, there

had been a scramble among the people of Kishanganj to procure proofs of residence. "As many as 2.27 lakh people had filled up forms for address proofs. This amounts to 27 per cent of the district's population. How is this possible? It is evident that the people behind this are Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, who want to smuggle their way into the voter list," the BJP leader said. The election watchdog needs to be lauded for deciding to go in for electoral roll revision in the state on such a massive scale. Its success should serve as a template for similar campaigns in other states.

Embarking on the SIR, the ECI is working strictly according to the mandate bestowed upon it by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, along with other provisions of the latter. In keeping with this, it asked the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)/District Election Officer to aid the ERO to fulfil the Constitutional mandate that "every eligible person, as per Article 326 of the Constitution of India, read with Section 16 and 19 of the RPA, 1950, is enrolled as an elector".

The circular issued by the ECI on June 24, 2025, clearly mentioned that "while carrying out the SIR of the electoral rolls, the ERO (Election Registration Officer) of each constituency shall be responsible for ensuring that no eligible citizen is left out, while no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll".

This is not the first time that the ECI is undertaking such an exercise. It has done so several times in the past, across the country, or in individual states. In Bihar, the revision of electoral rolls on such a massive scale took place way back in 2003, when the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) was at the helm in the state. The BJP and the NDA, in keeping with their needs to play the role of a constructive Opposition, had offered full support to the SIR.

Contrast this with the conduct of the Opposition parties in the state now. In an attempt to whip up popular frenzy and communal tension, the RJD-Congress-Left combine organised a bandh across the state on July 10. Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi put in a keen appearance during the protest march in Patna, held a day before the Supreme Court's hearing on a clutch of petitions against the SIR. The bandh failed to elicit any response in the state. The Opposition's attempts to erect roadblocks in the path of the SIR received a further setback when the Supreme Court declined to put a stay on the electoral roll revision.

The SIR has built-in checks. The draft electoral roll will be unveiled on August 1. Individuals, civil society organisations and political parties will then get a full month's time to submit their objections. When it comes to matters of national security and interest, the Opposition parties should shun their narrow and parochial agendas and rise to the occasion. They have clearly failed the people of India.

The writer is Member of Legislative Council in Bihar, and prohubari of Mizzoram BJP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## BALASORE TRAGEDY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'She too' (IE, July 16). It is heart-rending that a student in Balasore, subjected to continuous sexual harassment by her own teacher, was forced to end her life. She stood up against the abuse of power by complaining to a number of authorities, but her grievances fell on deaf ears. Inaction made her conclude that death would free her from protracted suffering. A teacher is put on a high pedestal in our culture. But in such a case, exemplary punishment is what he deserves. It is tragic that the police swung into action after the victim took an extreme step.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

## SPARE ONE LIFE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Breather for Kerala nurse as Yemen defers execution' (IE, July 16). The deferment of the execution of Indian nurse Nimisha Priya in Yemen has opened the way for a commutation in Yemen to commute the death sentence. Hopes are now pinned on intercession with the king of the deceased to get them to agree to settle for an indemnity. Sometimes, one life spared or saved reverberates beyond the prolongation of that life and becomes an affirmation of humanity. The tremendous moral force a pardon releases intangibly does the world a world of good.

G David Milton, Marathanchal

## LOVE IS CONTEXT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'They had

us at wool' (IE, 16 July). Turning our pets' wags or purrs into "discrete data" risks erasing the magic of a bond that predates language itself. AI could be life-saving in extreme cases, like flagging silent pain, illness or distress we'd otherwise miss. But for the majority of everyday interactions, real-time translation "would" flatten a nuanced, wordless dialogue into sterile captions. A look, a nuzzle, a tail thump already convey all that matters because "love is context, not syntax." We can keep algorithms on standby for emergencies, but let's not convert ordinary affection into binary codes.

Rajwardhan Rana, New Delhi

## WELCOME BACK

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Back on Earth' (IE, July 16). The successful return of Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla from the International Space Station marks a historic milestone for India's growing presence in space exploration. As the first Indian in space and the first to have visited the ISS, Shukla's 20-day mission has not only showcased India's scientific potential but also reinvigorated national ambition toward human spaceflight. His journey is a powerful example of international collaboration, scientific excellence, and unwavering determination. India is clearly poised to emerge as a serious contender in human spaceflight. This mission has bridged a 40-year gap since Rakesh Sharma's historic 1984 flight and has placed Indian astronauts back on the global stage.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali







# Kanwar Yatra: When governance becomes management of religious events

It looks like the Yogi Adityanath regime in Uttar Pradesh and large sections of the Sangh Parivar equate governance with the management of religious events. First it was Mahakumbh and now it is Kanwar Yatra. Incidentally, it is not just the government machinery, but life itself finds itself enmeshed in the intricacies of pilgrimages. The Kanwar Yatra, a deeply revered Hindu pilgrimage undertaken in the month of Shravan, draws lakhs of devotees, known as Kanwariyas, walk long distances to fetch water from the Ganga and offer it to Lord Shiva in temples. Over time, this event has evolved from a humble spiritual exercise into a massive and heavily orchestrated religious procession, drawing extensive state support. In UP as in other BJP-ruled states like Uttarakhand,

Haryana, and Delhi, the Kanwar Yatra transforms the civic and administrative landscape for several weeks each year. It is no different this year. As the yatra gains momentum, several districts in UP have taken the extreme step of shutting down schools temporarily. The ostensible reason is to safeguard students amid overwhelming road congestion, traffic diversions, and the general chaos that accompanies the event. District administrations have also rerouted traffic, deployed thousands of police personnel, and put civic services on high alert. Roads are reserved for Kanwariyas, while ordinary citizens face long detours and disruptions to daily life. Worse still, educational institutions being closed for religious reasons sets a problematic precedent. It sends a

clear message: spiritual events, when they reach a certain magnitude, can override social responsibilities like education. Students, particularly from rural and lower-income families who rely heavily on government schools, are the silent victims. Their academic calendar, already fragile due to Covid-related disruptions in recent years, is being tampered with for reasons that are no way related to education. This normalisation of such disruptions reflects a misplaced priority. Thankfully, the Supreme Court has taken cognisance of petitions challenging another controversial move by the state government: a directive mandating eateries and dhabas along the Kanwar route to display QR codes with ownership information. Ostensibly framed as a security measure, critics argue that

this directive opens the door to surveillance and possible targeting of minority-run establishments. There is a growing perception that such policies are less about public safety and more about religious profiling, under the guise of administrative diligence. The apex court has rightly sought an explanation from the Uttar Pradesh government on the legality and intent behind this decision. What is alarming is how all stakeholders—administrators, judges, law enforcement—are sucked into the vortex of this religious exercise, willingly or otherwise. From district magistrates to police commissioners, from municipal workers to teachers, almost every arm of governance is redirected to facilitate a pilgrimage. This is not just an expression of religious

accommodation but an institutional surrender to spectacle. Governance is becoming indistinguishable from the management of festivals. This must stop. There is nothing wrong with supporting religious events in a secular and diverse democracy like India. It is entirely reasonable for the state to ensure safety, hygiene, and traffic regulation during such events. However, when religious festivities start dictating the tempo and tenor of governance, it becomes problematic. When students are denied education so that roads can be cleared for devotees, when businesses are monitored in the name of religious security, when hospitals, fire services, and administrative offices and that is when one should take such initiative with a pinch of salt.

## MEDLEY



## LETTERS

### Kudos to The Hans India

It is indeed great that in the fiercely competitive world of media, particularly when the electronic media is getting louder and creating nuisance, The Hans India has withstood everything to successfully complete 14 glorious years. My association with the daily goes back to the year of its launch. It is delightful that many of my thoughts have found a place in its columns. Wishing many more successful years to Team Hans.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

### More glory to the media 'all-rounder'

I wish more glory to The Hans India that has completed 14 years since inception. A defining factor is that it covers news with equanimity and comes up with rational analysis and solutions without any bias or leanings, whatsoever, including its edit page. Young Hans, national and world news, education, research and development, sports, politics and women, et al to earn it the distinction of being an all-rounder. Most importantly, the Hans India has never gone for sensational journalism, while its satirical cartoons are quite educative and thought-provoking.

PVP Madhu Nirviti, Secunderabad-61

### A must in all TG and AP public libraries

It is really a proud moment for any newspaper to step into its 15th year of existence. The Hans India, which took off 14 years back, has been in the public domain and winning accolades for its wonderful all-round coverage all these years. It is one of the few newspapers that runs readers' columns even on Sundays. Though it focuses on local issues, it also gives due weightage to national and global issues, including sports and the world of entertainment. A unique aspect is that it maintains a regular column on women. On this occasion, I urge the management of the daily to impress upon the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governments on the need to have the paper in public libraries across the two Telugu speaking states. Many librarians are shy away from subscribing to it, despite its readership value, citing 'resource crunch'.

Pratapa Reddy Yanamala, Tiruvuru (AP)

### Check food poisoning cases in Gurukul

THE news item "KTR blames the government for the deaths of Gurukul students in Telangana (The Hans India July 16) makes for disturbing reading. He has alleged that over thousand food poisoning cases were reported across the State, and there were over 100 deaths of Gurukul students, over the past one year. It is a 'serious issue' and the government of the day should address it on a priority basis. TSWREIS and TTVREIS are the two societies primarily responsible for overseeing Gurukul patashalas, which also feeds students from marginalised sections. The incompetent government departments are to be blamed for providing rotten rice and contaminated drinking water, which are resulting in many food poisoning cases. It will be a good augury if NGOs like Akshayapatra Foundation and Arundhati Trust are roped in to be assured of delivering nutritious food to the hapless students, who, otherwise, live in horrifying conditions.

R J Janardhana Rao, Hyderabad-28

thehansreader@gmail.com

# The changing face of universities over the years



DR MOHAN KANDA

**T**he earliest examples of the concept of a university as a place of higher learning can be found in medieval history.

While the University of Bologna in Italy, known for the study of law, is recognised as the oldest in the world, Nalanda University in Bihar is considered one of the greatest centres of learning in ancient times and the world's first residential University.

There is, then, the University of Calcutta, the oldest and one of the most prestigious institutions. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is generally accepted as the front runner among the universities in the world. Harvard and Yale in the USA, Cambridge and Oxford in England, the University of Melbourne in Australia, the University of Singapore and the Peking University also ranking among them.

While universities do need autonomy, excessive freedom can lead to pitfalls such as a decline in academic rigour. Poor oversight can also create an environment conducive to propagation of religious fundamentalism or extreme political persuasions.

The need for universities, which specialise in traditional arts and crafts, such as dance, music, painting, sculpture, apart from games and sports,

- ▶ Mechanisms like tax breaks for educational institutions and scholarships for students can incentivise private participation
- ▶ Several colleges resort to the pernicious practice of linking admissions to donations thus becoming centres for selling degrees

is being advocated by experts in recent times.

It is felt that they can promote self-realisation as well as lead to more opportunities for gainful employment.

The history created by the legendary rock band, 'The Beatles', in the early 1960s, the dazzling careers of celebrities such as madame Indira Amritabh Bachchan, and cricket superstars Sachin Tendulkar and M.S. Dhoni should serve as inspiration for taking such an idea forward. It has also been felt in some quarters that their scope needs also to be extended to cover traditional rural sports like Kho Kho and Kabaddi. The move is expected to increase the chances of the students obtaining employment.

Many feel that universities need to insist on a requirement of apprentice experience, or practical orientation, so that students can hit the ground running, after leaving the institutions, with a valuable addition to their curriculum vitae. High-end institutions send pupils on educational tours, to within the country and abroad, make them gain experience and exposure to the environment outside, to enable better preparation for competing in the emerging highly competitive environment.

Universities are of different types, such as Central universities, which are established by acts of Parliament, State universities and deemed universities. There are also colleges which can be affiliated or be autonomous depending on the degree of control exercised on their academic, administrative and financial matters, by the universities in whose jurisdiction they are located.

The affairs of universities in the country are promoted, coordinated and supported by several institutions and organisations.

For example the University Grants Commission (UGC) is the statutory body that has been established to ensure qualitative development of higher education, setting standards, promoting quality assurance, and providing funds for various initiatives, apart from according recognition to universities and colleges and disburse funds.

Likewise the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), is a statutory body that is responsible for proper planning and coordinated development of the graduate, post-graduate, technical and management education system.

Similarly the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) plays a vital role in the education system by promoting cooperation, facilitating recognition of qualifications and acting as a liaison between universities and government bodies. It is also recognition of degrees and diplomas awarded by the universities recognised by the UGC as an implementing agency for the agreements signed between India and other countries in the field of education.

Reverting to the question of the desirability of government funding, a consensus is beginning to emerge in recent times, suggesting that the current funding model may not be efficient or transparent, and



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growth. Men with a family history of prostate cancer are around three times more likely to develop and die from prostate cancer due to their genetic susceptibility. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have a higher risk of dying from prostate cancer compared to non-Indigenous men. This may be due to delayed diagnoses and limited access to prostate cancer treatment options in remote areas. For these men with higher prostate cancer risk, the draft guidelines recommend earlier and more frequent PSA testing, starting at age 40.

This change could prioritise and serve targeted, high-risk populations of men who would benefit most from more regular PSA testing.

**No more 'finger up the bum':** Previously, men with high PSA levels were referred for needle prostate biopsies which involve invasive insertion of needles into different areas of the prostate to remove tissue samples for lab analyses. Needle biopsies are painful and come with risks of bleeding or infection. So, it's helpful to use additional prostate cancer testing approaches to guide who is referred for a biopsy.

The new draft guidelines no longer recommend the use of digital rectal examination, the dreaded 'finger up the bum', to screen for signs of prostate cancer together with PSA testing. Men find this unpleasant and embarrassing. Instead, clinicians can turn to advanced imaging. Medicare rebates have been available for magnetic resonance imaging to diagnose prostate cancer since 2018. Medical specialists often order a multiparametric MRI (mpMRI) following elevated PSA levels to determine if biopsies are required. This is a specialised MRI that uses strong magnets and radio waves to construct a detailed three-dimensional image of the prostate from different angles and identify suspicious-looking areas.

**Draft guidelines:** The Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia has released new draft clinical guidelines for the early detection of prostate cancer for public consultation.

The following recommended changes aim to reduce over-treatment and minimise harm.

**1. Offer all men a 'baseline' PSA test at 40:** All men will be offered an initial PSA test at age 40 to provide a baseline PSA measurement to compare against follow-up tests. A baseline PSA measurement would enable the calculation of PSA doubling time: the number of months taken for PSA level to double from baseline. Aggressive fast-growing tumours tend to have shorter PSA doubling times, so this would enable early detection of high-risk prostate cancer for prompt treatment. Such a change could improve prostate cancer risk

classification and spare more men from unnecessary harmful treatment side effects.

**2. GPs offer men aged 50-69 PSA tests every two years:** The draft guidelines recommend GPs offer PSA testing every two years for all men aged 50-69. For men over 70, PSA testing would be recommended based on clinical assessment by GPs. Men are more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer at an advanced age. So, as they get older and have a shorter life expectancy, the harms of treatment are more likely to outweigh the benefits of early detection. This recommendation could reduce over-diagnosis by considering individual life expectancy, overall health and potential treatment harms.

**3. Target populations at greater risk:** As with other cancer types, prostate cancer is a disease caused by gene malfunctioning leading to tumour

# A simple PSA blood test cannot reveal prostate cancer

KEVIN M KOO

**P**ROSTATE cancer is the most common cancer in many countries, including Australia where 26,000 men are diagnosed per year. The majority (more than 85 per cent) are aged over 60 years.

Prostate cancer kills around 3,900 Australians a year. Yet most prostate cancers progress very slowly, and many men die 'with' and not 'from' prostate cancer, which presently is detected with a blood test. This measures the amounts of prostate specific antigen (PSA) in the blood, a protein produced by the prostate gland. But while an elevated PSA can indicate prostate cancer, other non-cancerous conditions, such as prostate enlargement or inflammation, can also increase PSA levels.

New draft guidelines aim to provide clearer recommendations about the role PSA tests should play in detecting prostate cancer.

## Life-saving treatment vs

harmful overdiagnosis:

Early detection of prostate cancer by PSA testing is important. It allows for timely treatments such as prostate removal surgery, radiation or hormonal therapy. But despite their effectiveness, these treatments can

cause problems such as erectile dysfunction. Urinary incontinence issues occur in up to 14 per cent of patients. Therefore, if the prostate cancer is considered low-risk and has not spread outside the prostate, the clinician may recommend "active surveillance" to closely monitor the cancer for signs of progression. If the low-risk prostate cancer doesn't progress, treatment and its associated side effects can be delayed or avoided.

The controversy around PSA testing is that it can over-diagnose low-risk prostate cancers that would never become life-threatening. PSA tests may also give false positive results when someone doesn't have cancer. Such scenarios cause harm to men who are over-treated for prostate cancer solely based on elevated PSA levels.

In a decades-long clinical study involving 182,000 men, PSA testing reduced prostate cancer deaths by 20 per cent compared to men who didn't undergo testing. But a trade-off was having to over-treat around 48 men to prevent one prostate cancer death.

We need to find the balance between enabling early life-saving detection and preventing harmful over-treatment of men with low-risk prostate cancer.

growth. Men with a family history of prostate cancer are around three times more likely to develop and die from prostate cancer due to their genetic susceptibility. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have a higher risk of dying from prostate cancer compared to non-Indigenous men. This may be due to delayed diagnoses and limited access to prostate cancer treatment options in remote areas. For these men with higher prostate cancer risk, the draft guidelines recommend earlier and more frequent PSA testing, starting at age 40.

This change could prioritise and serve targeted, high-risk populations of men who would benefit most from more regular PSA testing.

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The draft guidelines recommend mpMRI to supplement PSA testing to better determine if a biopsy is needed. This saves men from unnecessary invasive procedures and reduces health-system costs. The information gathered from the public consultations will inform the final draft prostate cancer early detection guidelines.

The final recommendations will then be sent to the National Health and Medical Research Council for approval, before becoming clinical practice.

(The writer is from the University of Queensland)

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### Can you declare Kharage as PM candidate? BJP asks Cong

BENGALURU: The Karnataka BJP has dubbed the AICC Advisory Council meeting in Bengaluru as political drama staged by the Congress in the backdrop of the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections and asked the party if it could declare chief Mallikarjun Kharage as the Prime Ministerial candidate.

The party further challenged the Congress to declare AICC President Mallikarjun Kharage, a veteran Dalit leader, as its Prime Ministerial candidate if it truly cares about the welfare of SCs, STs, and OBCs.

Speaking to the media at the BJP headquarters on Wednesday, Karnataka BJP President, B Y Vijayendra stated, "The Congress party's OBC panel meeting has made national headlines. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has claimed that the committee has the responsibility of carrying forward the social movement in the country. He also alleged that the BJP has always opposed reservations and social justice."

"I want to ask CM Siddaramaiah, the national Congress leaders, and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi whether they genuinely care about the OBCs, SCs, STs, and minorities."

"I challenge LoP Rahul Gandhi — if the Congress truly cares about the Backward Classes, SCs, and STs — let him declare Mallikarjun Kharage as the Prime Ministerial candidate. But they won't. The Gandhi family won't allow it. Neither Rahul Gandhi nor Sonia Gandhi will approve it," Vijayendra claimed. He alleged that the agenda of the OBC meeting was not the uplift or development of OBCs, but rather electoral gains in Bihar. "This is the real agenda. With Bihar elections approaching, the AICC OBC panel meeting is being held in Bengaluru — a move that holds no real importance. It is nothing more than a political gimmick aimed at the upcoming Bihar polls," he claimed.

**Read more at**  
<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>



# Why even moderate rainfall leads to flooding in Gurgaon

**SHINY VARGHESE**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

THE DELHI Master Plan of 1962 saw Gurgaon (Gurugram) as a place of modest urban growth, primarily because the area has no groundwater resources. In 1980, with Maruti setting up its factory in Manesar, Gurgaon emerged as an industrial hub.

A decade later, with liberalisation and the promise of rapid economic growth and infrastructural development, the mythical village mentioned in the Mahabharata became India's Millennium City, a model for 21st century urbanisation in India — and everything that is wrong with it.

Every monsoon, Gurgaon witnesses extreme flooding: hours-long traffic jams, cars floating in the deluge, and people being electrocuted are common occurrences. All this happens even though Gurgaon receives only about 600 mm of rain on average every year. In comparison, Kochi receives well over 3,000 mm of rain annually without going un-



A flooded underpass at Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon last week. *Pravien Khanna*

der every monsoon.

What makes Gurgaon, home to nearly 2 million people and boasting the third highest per capita income among cities in India, this vulnerable to monsoon flooding?

**Ignoring topography**

The Aravalli ridge, on the southern edge of Gurgaon, is the natural high ground for the city. From there, the land slopes down towards the north, which is at a lower altitude. Rainwater in Gurgaon thus flows mainly from the south to the north, towards the

north-south axis — this makes them ideal routes for surface runoff, especially given that drains are non-existent or poorly planned. "Topography was not only ignored but also abused," Biswas said.

**Piecemeal planning**

One reason why urban expansion in Gurgaon has not kept up with topographic realities is the piecemeal nature of city planning. This is borne out of the city's unique land acquisition model which is central to Gurgaon's growth story.

From the 1970s onwards, the Haryana government introduced a series of laws, which enabled private firms to acquire land on a large scale to develop townships. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) was created in 1977 to streamline the process.

Having developed neighbourhoods such as South Extension and Kailash Colony in Delhi, Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) alone acquired 52 villages in the initial years from farmers. As other players came along, land acquisition was not carried out in a uniform

manner. This led to irregular plots, and roads that led to nowhere.

"Allocative decisions from the very core of conventional urban planning, which was missing in Gurgaon's story from the beginning," Biswas wrote in *Gurgaon to Gurugram: A short biography* (2021).

The "plug-and-play" mode of urban expansion meant that roads were not built with proper gradients, nor was there any big picture thinking behind basic planning decisions for the city.

**Concrete everywhere**

In Gurgaon, mustard fields have long made way for highways and highrises. A region which once had 60 natural canals, critical to absorb its excess rainwater, barely has four today.

But as concrete, impervious to percolation, has covered Gurgaon, civic authorities have failed to build a robust drainage system to deal with the problem. Concrete drains only add to the flooding due to their inability to absorb water.

According to Biswas, India's engineer-

ing codes have no reference beside steel and concrete — earth is simply not something that planners consider while building a city.

**Common sense solutions**

Biswas offered three "common sense" solutions to address flooding in Gurgaon.

- Identifying local green areas where there is waterlogging, which can then become water harvesting sites where runoff can be captured and allowed to seep into ground through aquifers or filters. Urban planning should be as localised as possible, Biswas suggested.
- Creating soft drains beneath pavements and along the road: these will allow for percolation of rainwater into the soil. Biswas suggested building "French drains" — trenches that are filled with gravel and perforated pipes to redirect surface and groundwater away from waterlogged areas.
- Sloping the roads such that water can drain off. If land is surveyed efficiently, swales can be created such that large drainage channels with gentle sloping sides can decrease surface water from collecting.

## EXPLAINED CLIMATE

### HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS FUELLING DEVASTATING WILDFIRES IN EUROPE

WILDFIRES HAVE scorched hotspots in several Mediterranean countries this month, with blazes forcing thousands of people into lockdown in Catalonia in Spain, and encroaching on Marseille, the second-largest city in France.

**How bad have wildfires been this year?**

Wildfires have burnt 227,000 hectares of land since the beginning of the year — more than double the average for this time of year over the past two decades, according to the EU's European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).

While far above average, it's not the highest in EFFIS records, which go back to 2002. Europe had particularly bad fire seasons in 2003 and 2017, when blazes burnt more than 1,100,000 hectares in each year — an area equivalent to the island of Jamaica. It is not yet clear if 2025 will be a record year, that will depend on how the fire season evolves in the coming months.

The number of fires in Europe has also surged this year so far, with 1,118 blazes detected as of July 8, versus 716 in the same period last year, EFFIS said.

Heatwaves in Europe earlier this month stoked blazes around the Mediterranean, including in Syria, where fires have burned through more than 3% of the country's forest cover, according to the UN. In the Greek islands of Evia and Crete, wildfires this month forced thousands of people to evacuate their homes.

But while Europe overall has seen a jump this year, scientists observing the fires say those in the Mediterranean region have, while destructive, so far been relatively isolated.

**What is driving the wildfires?**

Scientists say the Mediterranean region's hotter, drier summers put it at high risk of wildfires. Once fires start, plentiful dry vegetation and strong winds in the region can cause them to spread rapidly and burn out of control.

Climate change exacerbates the risk of wildfires by creating hotter and drier



Flames rising from a wildfire in Greece on July 3. *Reuters*

background conditions. This has contributed to the fire season starting earlier in recent years in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. It has also made fires more intense in these countries.

Greenhouse gas emissions, mainly from burning coal, oil and gas, have heated the planet by about 1.3 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times. Europe has warmed at twice the global average since the 1980s, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

That warmer baseline means higher temperatures can be reached during heatwaves, which climate change is also making more frequent. This has been confirmed by the United Nations' global panel of climate scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in recent reports.

**What is the forecast?**

Countries are preparing for worse blazes. Warmer-than-average temperatures are forecast across Europe in August, according to EFFIS, meaning fire danger will remain high across much of southern and eastern Europe.

While Southern Europe is expected to see normal rainfall patterns, the rest of the continent is expected to be drier than normal in August — potentially exacerbating fire risk in other regions.

**REUTERS**

## EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

### China's GDP growth data

Why have the data released this week surprised global analysts for the second time in two quarters? What domestic and external challenges does China's economy face, and how has it managed them?

**UDIT MISRA**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

CHINA'S GDP grew 5.2% in the second quarter (April-June) of 2025, according to official figures released on Tuesday. This means that despite the high tariffs imposed by United States President Donald Trump, the value of the economic output (that is, all goods and services) inside China during the second quarter of 2025 was 5.2% more than the economic output during the same quarter of 2024 (Chart 1).

This is the second consecutive quarter in which China's GDP growth has beaten the expectations of global analysts. In the first quarter (January-March), the Chinese economy grew even faster, at 5.4% on an annualised basis. Market estimates had pegged its second-quarter GDP growth at about 4.5%.

At this rate, China looks set to achieve its annual growth target of "around 5%". However, most analysts outside the country still expect China's growth to slow down in the second half of the year.

**China's economic challenge...**

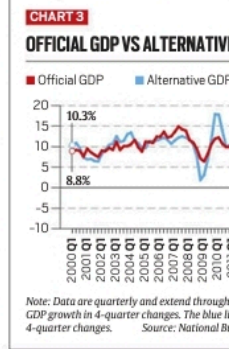
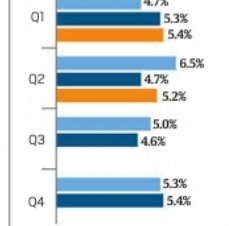
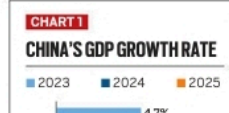
For three decades, China's economy grew at an explosive pace on the back of a historic manufacturing boom that allowed it to capture an ever increasing share of global exports. Within the country, there was a massive expansion of physical infrastructure. This dependence on exports (on the external front) and real estate (on the domestic front) created structural imbalances.

Over the past several years, many countries have turned away from globalisation and global trade, even as their economies have slowed. As the share of exports in China's GDP has fallen, its growth has been affected. That said, even now exports contribute around 20% of the Chinese GDP.

With China's domestic consumer base still struggling to recover from the economic shock of the Covid-19 disruption, the country's economy was hit by a collapse of its booming real estate market. The downfall of Evergrande, once the world's most valuable real estate company, underlined the scale and consequences of the crisis.

Real estate figured prominently among people's household assets — the crashing prices of property hit consumer confidence further, dampened the overall demand for goods and services, and slowed down China's domestic engines of growth.

A direct fallout was an increase in unemployment. Youth unemployment (ages 16 to 24) rose to more than 20% — one in five — by



the middle of 2023, the last time that the government released these data.

The Chinese economy has also been facing deflationary pressures (Chart 2), which refers to prices going down year on year. Deflation, the opposite of inflation, often presents serious problems for an economy. As prices start to fall, consumers hold back purchases in the hope of buying the same good for cheaper later. This behaviour brings down prices further as the gap between sup-

ply and demand widens.

A deflationary spiral means there is no incentive for businesses to invest or produce goods, and this results in the economy stagnating. Resolving deflation can be more difficult than containing high inflation because there is only so much that policymakers can do in terms of cutting interest rates and increasing government spending to boost economic activity.

The supply chain disruption caused by

the pandemic spotlighted the dangers of high dependence on China and led to efforts by countries to diversify by adopting a China+1 strategy. In the US, the Biden administration continued with the tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration and took other policy initiatives (such as the CHIPS Act) to boost the American semiconductor industry and contain China's advance in critical new technology areas.

Indeed, in the years after the pandemic, the world's largest economy has increased the lead over its nearest competitor. In 2021, China's economy was around 75% the size of the US economy; in 2024, China's GDP was only 64% of the US's.

Between 2021 and 2024, the US economy grew from an annual nominal GDP of \$23.6 trillion to \$29.1 trillion. China's annual GDP during this same period increased by less — from \$17.8 trillion to \$18.2 trillion.

**...And how it has coped**

Many had expected Trump's tariff war would significantly affect the Chinese economy. But the data since the start of 2025 have been counterintuitive. While the US economy shrank in the first quarter and there are persistent worries about a recession, China has maintained a steady growth momentum.

China's GDP growth rate has moderated from the first quarter, but underlying data show manufacturing growth has remained resilient, and industrial production continues to beat forecasts.

Chinese exports too have continued to grow. Even though exports to the US have reportedly fallen 26%, the gap has been more than filled by a rise in exports to other destinations such as the ASEAN countries, Africa, and the European Union.

There is one other, fundamental question: can data from China's National Bureau of Statistics be trusted?

China's national accounts have never enjoyed credibility of the kind that Western economies with a free press and transparent reporting standards have had. Thus, every time China's data beats expectations, questions are raised on its credibility.

But doubts over China's GDP data are gradually receding. Research by Barcelona at IESE (Chart 2) published on June 5 on the US Federal Reserve website, concludes: "Assessing the accuracy of China's GDP growth remains a challenge and no statistical model can provide a definitive alternative measure. But our analysis suggests that official figures have not recently been overstating GDP growth..."

# Secretly recorded conversations admissible in divorce cases: what SC said

**APURVA VISHWANATH & AMAAL SHEIKH**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

THE SUPREME COURT on Monday ruled that secretly recorded conversations between spouses are admissible as evidence in matrimonial disputes. It set aside a 2021 Punjab and Haryana High Court judgment that had barred a husband from using secretly recorded phone conversations with his wife as evidence in divorce proceedings.

The top court's ruling changes the contours of spousal or marital privilege in Indian law, which protects private conversations between a husband and wife during their marriage, and even after the marriage has ended.

**What is spousal privilege?**

Spousal privilege means that a person cannot be compelled to testify against their

spouse in a criminal case. It is rooted in the idea that a degree of protection must be provided to private conversations between a husband and wife during their marriage. Spousal privilege is codified in Section 122 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. "No person who is or has been married, shall be compelled to disclose any communication made to him during marriage by any person to whom he is or has been married; nor shall he be permitted to disclose any such communication."

According to the law, spousal communication is allowed as evidence only when the other spouse consents to it or when one spouse has narrated the events to a third party, who then testifies in court.

**How does the law apply to divorce cases?**

Spousal privilege does not directly apply in divorce cases where one spouse makes allegations against the other spouse,

and testifies in a court of law. These allegations are supplemented by evidence such as letters, photographs, or testimonies of other people. However, with technological advances, text messages, video and voice recordings, and emails are often presented as evidence.

Many High Courts have refrained from accepting secret recordings as evidence due to two main reasons.

- There is a risk that secret recordings can be procured through suspect or coercive methods. Courts must weigh whether the material is relevant and lawfully admissible as evidence in each case. This process in a trial is called the appreciation of evidence.
- There is a reasonable expectation of privacy in a marriage, and secret recordings violate an individual's privacy. A relationship benefit of this expectation gives rise to

concerns of surveillance among spouses.

**Why did the SC allow secret recordings to be admissible in court?**

The SC's ruling relied on its 1973 judgment in a case that pertained to a telephonic conversation recorded secretly by the police to prove a bribery charge against a doctor. At the time, the apex court overlooked how the evidence was obtained, given that the case involved corruption by a public servant and the phone tap was conducted by the state.

The SC has now effectively extended this reasoning to matrimonial cases.

The court has said that if evidence is relevant, independently verifiable, and falls within statutory exceptions, it can be admitted even if collected in secret. Although secret recordings are a violation of fundamental rights, the right to privacy

must be balanced with the right to a fair trial, according to the SC.

The apex court has also said a telephone tap that secretly records conversations is "no different from an eavesdropper". But simply the SC has equated digital evidence to a third party who is a witness to a privileged conversation and is testifying.

**Why is the ruling significant?**

The ruling is an example of how the SC operationalises the right to privacy. In its interpretation of Section 122, the apex court said the provision was drafted for the "sanctity of the marriage", and not to protect privacy within marriage.

While this is true for a law which came into force in 1872, the SC's 2017 judgment in the *Puttaswamy* case made the right to privacy a fundamental right, protecting the inner sphere of the individual from interference from both state and non-state ac-

tors. Any infringement of the right to privacy must be backed by a valid law.

Also, there have been concerns that making secret recordings admissible as evidence in court could lead to surveillance within a marriage. The SC, however, has stated that "if the marriage has reached a stage where spouses are actively spying on each other, that is in itself a symptom of a broken relationship and denotes a lack of trust between them."

Another concern is that the ruling could affect women's right to a fair trial as there is a huge gender gap in smartphone ownership in India. According to the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025, there is a 39% divide in ownership of smartphones by women compared to men in the country. This means that men have more access to recording technologies which gives them an upper hand in cases related to matrimonial disputes.



## Fix the basics

GCC revolution needs infrastructure, policy certainty

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently said that the government viewed global capability centres (GCCs) as a "great opportunity". This follows up on her statement in the Union Budget earlier this year that a national framework would be produced to incentivise the movement of GCCs to smaller towns. It is certain that GCCs are an exciting development for what has become a moribund industry. It is vital for India that its strength in the export of services is not overtaken by technological advances but progresses in lockstep with them. The shift in business processes and the creation of in-house capacity that is associated with the growth of GCCs is one that India must certainly take advantage of. Ms Sitharaman shared some optimistic projections about the global roles that might be associated with the growth of such centres: They would grow from merely 6,500 today to 30,000 in 2030 if correct steps were taken to find and establish home-grown talent.

The minister also noted that the government would back GCCs through taxation and legislative support, among other things. While it is always important to add clarity and transparency to tax requirements, including the use of advance-pricing agreements, tax laws are not the primary constraint for GCCs. Broader administrative, judicial, and governance reforms are necessary. Indeed, GCCs face a subset of the same constraints that bedevil many enterprises across the country, including in manufacturing. Certainty about taxes is one aspect, but clarity on regulatory requirements and infrastructure availability is perhaps even more important. Fundamentally, as with any new and emerging sector, the government must understand that its role is to fix what is holding back growth and then get out of the way. It must invest in basic infrastructure and ensure that building permissions are available in a timely fashion and that power supply is accessible and uninterrupted. What is good for manufacturing and retail will also be good for GCCs. The broader business climate must improve so that India can take advantage of GCCs — there is little point, as history has demonstrated, in trying to focus on a single sector or a single constraint on that sector when the broader environment remains inimical.

The deeper question, however, is whether India's human capital is prepared for a shift up the value chain. Past variants of information technology-enabled services exports did not necessarily depend upon hiring or developing the highest-skill stratum of the workforce. If global roles within GCCs, however, are the endgame, then it is a different matter. Investment in human capital has always been a problem for India, and skilling initiatives have either focused too much on pre-qualifications or have not aligned the skills they are imparting closely enough with the needs of potential employers in the private sector. This has to change if GCCs are to pick up the high-productivity employees they need. Finally, some deeper thought must be given to the overall ecosystem effect of GCCs. While greater value addition within India is a goal that is in and of itself worth chasing, what will be the broader impact on innovation and entrepreneurship of the GCC ecosystem? Traditional research networks are often able to benefit from positive spillovers in such a way that domestic companies, old and new, find new technologies and opportunities. The gated research programmes in GCCs might not have the same effect.

## Regulating AI development

EU's code of practice offers a way forward

As artificial intelligence (AI) evolves, governments are drafting rules to govern the way AI is built, trained, and deployed. Yet, regulators across the world are struggling to keep pace. There is a growing sense of understanding that AI, especially generative AI, doesn't recognise national borders. The European Union (EU) is leading the way in crafting a structured framework. Its AI Act came into force in August last year. Meanwhile, the recently released Code of Practice for general-purpose AI sets important benchmarks on transparency, copyright compliance, and systemic risk management, helping firms comply with those norms and offering legal clarity to those that adopt it. The code encourages AI companies to document their models, respect rights over scraped content, and monitor risks from harmful outputs, though signing up remains voluntary. Transparency measures require AI developers to disclose model documentation, training methods, and intended use cases, helping downstream providers and regulators alike. The copyright chapter mandates respect for digital rights, use of lawful data sources, and safeguards against infringing AI output. Most notably, the safety and security framework demands lifecycle assessments, post-market monitoring, and serious incident reporting for models with systemic risks. Clearly, this is the most comprehensive AI governance effort yet, combining precaution with innovation support.

Most countries have still not been able to catch up. India, for instance, has no dedicated AI law. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, passed in 2023, offers only a partial safeguard and is not built to address the complexities of model training, open-source proliferation, or cross-border data scraping. Meanwhile, companies building these models — OpenAI, Google, or Meta — are operating at a global scale. Their crawlers scour the web, collecting information, often with little regard for copyright or consent. There is barely any regulation that governs how this data is collected. Most countries are trying to adapt old laws — copyright, privacy, and intermediary liability — to fit this new technology.

The assumption that Big Tech will regulate itself and companies will deploy responsible and ethical AI, especially in the face of profit pressures and geopolitical competition, is naïve at best. Even during the first international summit on AI safety, held at Bletchley Park (United Kingdom) in 2023, founders and chief executives of large tech companies, for instance, were unable to arrive at a consensus regarding the severity of long-term risks posed by AI. However, despite these challenges, it is encouraging that the EU has come up with a common framework to contain some of the potential bad effects of AI. India can gain from global standards because it has a large pool of tech professionals who can help develop solutions for the world. Thus, developing global standards and regulations will be critical, but it will not be easy. There is indeed a need to develop AI with minimal possible restrictions. Such applications should, however, undergo risk assessment to determine their appropriate risk category before deployment. Additionally, every AI system should maintain an audit trail of its decision-making processes to facilitate investigations and forensics, ensuring transparency and accountability.

# Innovation needs the right firms

The RDI Scheme should fund firms with adequate absorptive capacity — but which firms and how will be key

The Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme has been cleared by the Cabinet. The scheme allocates ₹1 trillion (or \$12 billion) to funding R&D in Indian industry. Of this, ₹20,000 crore is in this year's budget. Initial comments on how the funds will flow suggest that much of it will be provided in the form of low- or zero-interest loans to a mix of funds and directly to firms. My eyes glaze over in incoherence when I hear the phrase "fund of funds" — I just do not know how they will be held accountable for directly enhancing innovation. I would argue for the bulk of the funding going directly to firms. Why to firms? Which firms? How should they be funded?

**Why fund firms:** Innovation happens in firms. There are nuances to that statement, but the fact remains. Get everything else right — publicly funded research done perfectly in higher education, the right national missions, the speedy and unbureaucratic flow of abundant funding — but get what happens in firms wrong, and the entire effort will come to naught. I cannot emphasise this enough: Innovation, everywhere in the world, largely happens in firms. Consider the now-classic Kline chain-linked model of innovation (see figure).

The central innovation activities — market finding, design, and distribution — are all in firms. Research and new knowledge can be invaluable, but they are an input to the innovation system, not its heart. Getting firms to invest more in R&D, to translate that R&D into innovative products and services, and to build businesses around proprietary technology that is deployed internationally is the key to a vibrant national innovation system. So firms must be the focus of any scheme that seeks to enhance innovation. The right R&D pipeline in firms will act as a pull on the public research system like no other. It is inadequate investment in innovation and R&D by Indian industry that is the single factor hindering our national innovation system. That is what the RDI scheme must target, and it is best done directly and without intermediaries like funds of funds.

**Which firms to fund is about absorptive capacity:** Start with the facts. As I have long argued in this column, in my book, and to anyone I can capture for more than two minutes, Indian industry invests too little in R&D. We invest 0.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in in-house R&D to a world average of 1.5 per cent. Our 10 most successful non-financial firms (highly profitable firms in refining, information technology services and consumer goods) invest 2 per cent of profit in R&D; whereas their 10 most successful peers in the United States,

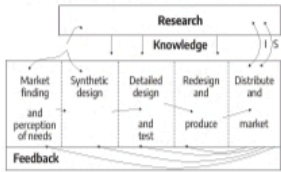
China, Japan and Germany invest between 20 and 55 per cent. And Indian firms are completely missing in five of the 10 most technology-intensive industrial sectors worldwide.

The net effect is that the great bulk of Indian industry does not do enough R&D to immediately absorb any substantive increase in funding. The Budget's allocation of ₹20,000 crore is a decent sum. R&D spending is largely about people — equipment and materials, on average, are less than a third of total spending. An outlay of ₹20,000 crore could add around 20,000 more people in R&D. Which firms, between them, would be able to expand at scale in one year? We need a set of firms that already invest a large amount in R&D and employ R&D teams of international strength. The firms we pick should be those that are already reasonably R&D-intensive — at say, half the R&D intensity (R&D as a per cent of sales) of their international peers. The 2,500 firms is easily available for the top 2,500 firms in the world and for us; the table shows our top five firms in six sectors — pharmaceuticals, chemicals, autos, defence, industrial engineering and food — on average have an R&D intensity that is above half of global levels. The top R&D-investing firms in these six sectors should have the highest absorptive capacity to rapidly expand their R&D teams.

A generous direct funding scheme should seek to attract many more applications than there are funds available. Get applications from many of the top say, 300 Indian R&D investors. Our hundredth largest spending firm invested about ₹97 crore in R&D in 2022-23; our two-hundredth largest, about ₹33 crore; and our three-hundredth largest, about ₹16 crore. These are small numbers relative to the world's leading firms. The RDI scheme should directly aim to change this. I would suggest that we require the firms we fund by RDI to expand R&D in terms of the number of people employed in R&D by one-half in the next 12 months. Successfully doing so could lead to another similar tranche of funding, and so on. (Conversely, expanding by under one-third should result in the firm dropping out in the next round.) In five years, the consistently successful firms should be investing eight times as much in in-house R&D — enough to show in India's aggregate R&D statistics and to build a solid R&D pipeline of new products and services that begin to flow out into the world.

We should have a second requirement. Firms that get funded by RDI should deepen the R&D they do. "Deepen" means they should be investing in lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRL). In the

The Chain-linked Model of innovation (Kline, 1995)



R&D intensity: India's top 10 sectors vs global average (2023) (Top 5 firms, %)

Sector	Indian average	Global average
Pharmaceuticals & Biotechnology	9.4	16.7
Automobiles & Parts	2.3	4.2
Oil & Gas	0.2	0.3
Software & Computer Services	1.0	14.5
Aerospace & Defence	6.9	4.4
Chemicals	1.7	2.2
Industrial Engineering	2.2	3.2
Industrial Metals & Mining	0.3	1.6
Electronic & Electrical Equipment	0.9	5.1
Food Producers	1.5	1.2

Source: CITEA Handbook: Technology and Innovation in India 2025 (forthcoming)

Jargon of the field, where TRL-7-9 is the development that firms typically do and TRL-1 - the best research done in academia, firms should begin to "pull" in publicly funded research to deepen their innovation effort. That would mean investing in the TRL-4-6 space, where research findings move on to proof of concepts that then start translating into products and services that are commercially viable. We do also need transparent metrics to objectively assess TRLs, keeping our goal of deepening the R&D we do constantly in focus.

**What does it look like:** We today have no firms that match their world-leading peers in both the percentage of turnover and the absolute amount invested in R&D. Five years out, we should expect to have over 100 Indian firms that do so. These firms will, in turn, act as role models for many others, and we will be on our way to a vibrant, world-leading national innovation system.

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# India's cities: Crowded but not dynamic

In urban economics, "agglomeration" is the stuff of dreams. When firms, workers, and ideas cluster in dense, dynamic cities, they reap the rewards of shared infrastructure, pooled labour, and innovation. Economists from Alfred Marshall to Edward Glaeser have lauded these "agglomeration economies" as engines of productivity and growth. For some time now, several Tier-1 cities in India have followed this agglomeration logic. Bengaluru drew in tech firms and engineers, Mumbai concentrated finance, media, and ambition in a few square kilometres, and Delhi pulled together politics, bureaucracy, and everything in between.

In theory, this clustering should have supercharged productivity — and perhaps for a while, it did. Now, as Bengaluru stalls in traffic, Mumbai strains under a housing crunch, and Delhi suffocates under smog, it raises the question: is this the logic of agglomeration at work? Urban India contributes over 60 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and this figure is projected to reach 70 per cent by 2030. Metros such as Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai continue to attract capital and labour. The government, for its part, promotes shiny cities, clean energy, and high-speed rail. It all sounds rather agglomerative. Yet, daily congestion in Bengaluru stretches 190 km. A study by the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Karnataka estimated that traffic congestion cost Bengaluru ₹1,170 crore in lost productivity hours. The city's metro system, still incomplete, serves only a fraction of its swelling suburbs. Pune, one of India's most livable cities on paper, lost a third of its carbon-sequestering green cover in a decade. In suburban areas like Nagpur, rising heat is already taking away 10-13 per cent of informal workers' productivity.

The crux of the issue is that agglomeration isn't just about piling more people into cities. It's about the quality of interactions. Urban productivity grows

when people can collaborate, move, and learn. However, if commutes exceed two hours, housing costs eat half your income, and heatstroke threatens your daily wage, those benefits vanish.

A 2024 study on the municipal performance of Indian cities underscored how poorly equipped many urban centres are to support effective agglomeration. Of the 152 municipalities assessed, only 94 had data available on development planning, and just 59 of those had updated, GIS-based plans. Only 37 municipalities had an active mobility plan, and a mere 16 had full coverage under a town planning scheme. While 113 municipalities reported having qualified town planners, fragmented and inconsistent planning frameworks continue to undermine the very systems that make urban density productive rather than chaotic. India is thus experiencing a form of partial agglomeration, where firms and skilled workers still cluster, but are undercut by falling infrastructure and environmental stress.

To translate urban density into productivity, Indian cities must address their own limitations. The Asian Development Bank's recent findings make this clear: Wage elasticity with respect to population density is a measure of how much people benefit from agglomeration — in Indian towns is just 1-2 per cent, a fraction of the 4-6 per cent observed in more advanced urban economies. This gap reflects not just a lack of infrastructure, but a deeper absence of coordinated, future-facing urban strategy. Cities need robust urban data systems that can support real-time decision-making, from land use planning to service delivery. Planning processes must shift towards flexible, scenario-based approaches that anticipate demographic shifts, climate risks, and economic transformation.

Equally crucial is the need to consolidate fragmented governance structures; many Indian cities are constrained by jurisdictional overlaps that undermine

integrated planning across housing, transport, and environment. Finally, spatial planning must directly support labour mobility and economic inclusion, ensuring that people not only live and commute in cities, but are meaningfully connected to jobs, services, and networks of innovation.

Among its Asian peers, Singapore exemplifies successful agglomeration, where integrated land use and transport planning have turned density into productivity and livability. Its mass rapid transit system carries over 3 million passengers daily, supported by the early adoption of congestion pricing and a compact urban design.

Similarly, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam has demonstrated strong agglomeration effects, with labour productivity nearly double that of Hanoi, driven by concentrated industrial zones and strategic infrastructure investment. These examples highlight how urban concentration can yield significant economic gains. What we may be witnessing in most Indian cities today is a phase of deglomeration, not because they have reached the limits of success, but because they have yet to fulfil the basic promise of agglomeration. The clustering of people, jobs, and services was expected to enhance productivity, foster innovation, and unlock new economic opportunities. These outcomes have been uneven at best. The foundations required to make density work such as reliable infrastructure, coordinated planning, and effective urban governance have often been missing. As a result, many cities have become dense without becoming dynamic. To move forward, a different approach is needed. Indian cities must pursue what can be called re-agglomeration: A deliberate reimagining of urban growth that focuses on quality, resilience, and equity. The classic agglomeration curve, long assumed to lead naturally to growth, may now need a second chapter that is shaped by careful design.

The author is chair, Institute for Competitiveness. With inputs from Meenakshi Ajith

## Coping with information overload



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

Information overload is that awful state in which we all find ourselves today, overwhelmed with the vast amount of information with which we are forced to deal. This sense of helplessness occurs when the volume and speed of incoming data exceed our cognitive processing capacity, leading to stress, reduced productivity and poor decision-making. With the internet, social media, and constant notifications, individuals and organisations face excessive choices and data streams, often struggling to identify what is relevant or true. Information over-

load can dilute focus, hinder learning, and reduce the ability to think deeply, requiring strategies such as filtering, prioritisation, and digital minimalism to manage effectively.

The focus of this book is to provide the reader with what the author considers the most critical skill a person needs to navigate through a career: The skill to generate "insights" from this flood of information. By "insights" he means uncovering hidden patterns in the data that the person has about a problem or challenge and opening up entirely new possibilities based on these findings.

Vivek Banerji provides examples of this from his work experience at several companies, including PepsiCo India, McKinsey & Company in New York and London, and a company he founded called Insight Dojo. He has provided insight to help the UK's National Health Service reduce smoking rates, an Asia-based entrepreneur in launching a new

innovative climate control devices in the US, and South America's largest beer company in building a stronger brand strategy from base in Colombia. He has also helped World Health Organization members develop insights on obesity reduction strategies, and contributed to the development and launch of breakthrough oncology treatments in the US and Europe. He says his target audience could be a chief executive officer, a research head in a technology company, a market research manager, or an investment professional. The key qualification is that the person is keen to generate insights that can make a positive difference to their organisations or businesses.

He illustrates the principles he espouses with real-world case studies from the consumer goods, technology, healthcare industries as well as non-profit organisations. He covers both B2C and B2B settings.

He takes the view that today's com-

plex environment makes it practically mandatory for decision-makers to develop insights. He lists some of the complexities confronting us today: Covid-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, a recession, and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence. He points out and lists the modern-day paradoxes where, despite the abundance of information, eliciting truth has become challenging.

He has several suggestions on how to make "truth" more reliable. Here is just one of his several suggestions: "We must actively cultivate a mindset of not knowing. We need to be aware of our biases and overcome them. That's how we create space for insights to appear," he writes. He also has many suggestions on how organisations can get greater and more impactful insights that can transform their businesses. An example: "The easiest way to break closed think-



Insight Edge Crafting Breakthroughs in a World of Information Overload by Vivek Banerji Published by HarperCollins 368 pages ₹799

All in all, in *Insight Edge*, Mr Banerji argues that in today's flood of data, true breakthroughs come not from more information, but from better human-centred insight and shows that curiosity, analytical thinking, creativity, and empathy are essential to cutting

ing is to set up a small cross-functional team that works throughout a project. Thoughts related to strategy, insight, creativity, and execution flow seamlessly, connections are made, and the process moves along nicely. Also, small teams have skin in the game. They own the success of the innovation and commit to making it work. They are not detached observers". The book combines a philosophical approach with a practical list of steps to follow, concluding with a chapter on "A Checklist for Building Your Aha! Insight Quotient."

What I found inspiring is that in an era where everyone is touting AI and mathematical models to gain insights about complex data, his statement that it's not algorithms and statistical insights that we need to draw on to get great insights. In his case, he says, he gets his breakthrough insights because of his deep involvement with his hobbies — music, karate, yoga, literature — and extensive reading related to a variety of subjects.

through noise and identifying what truly matters. Mr Banerji blends psychology, cultural analysis and decision sciences, illustrating each framework with clear, real-world examples from corporate and societal challenges. Rather than relying on intuition alone or drowning in data dashboards, he proposes a structured yet human approach to insight generation. *Insight Edge* is a guide for professionals seeking to create breakthroughs in business, policy, or social initiatives, transforming information overload into clarity and action.

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[ OUR TAKE ]

## A wake-up call from Odisha

The college student's suicide underlines the importance of empathy and a quick response

The death of a college student in Odisha after she set herself on fire — over alleged sexual harassment by her professor and the inaction of the college administration — puts sexual violence on campuses in the spotlight yet again. Higher education regulator UGC has announced a probe, and the Opposition in the state has called for a *bhundi* on Thursday. Having failed to act promptly, the state government and the college administration must now ensure that the probe is completed quickly with due rigour and accountability fixed for violations and lapses established by the probe.

The tragic end to the young woman's life offers at least two takeaways for the government, college authorities, and society at large, on curbing sexual violence. One, complaints about harassment must be heard with empathy and responded to immediately — more so in places of learning that are viewed as laboratories of societal change. The tendency is often for the authorities to back the faculty/staff member facing allegations — from caste-related complaints to sexual harassment — and silence the complainant. A thorough probe can ascertain or refute guilt, but the complainant should be acted upon immediately, and necessary counsel provided to the complainant. The process has been laid out in several legal provisions on sexual harassment, including the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, but their implementation is often tardy — deliberate or otherwise — and sometimes the response is even hostile. Timely intervention can save lives, as the Odisha incident shows — the young woman's act was undoubtedly one of untold despair when relief didn't seem forthcoming.

Second, the trust between the student and the teacher is fraying for a host of reasons. There is a certain power dynamic embedded in this relationship, as underlined by the MeToo list some years ago. Hence, clear red lines must be drawn so that people at one end are aware of their rights and those at the other, of their responsibilities. Most college students are fresh out of their teens, staying away from home, and emotionally vulnerable; guardrails are necessary so that this situation is not exploited by faculty and other staff at educational institutions. A bigger challenge is to ensure that the trust between the faculty and the student community on campuses is restored.

## Soft power outreach to India's neighbours

New Delhi's outreach to Dhaka to help with the restoration of the ancestral property of cinema legend Satyajit Ray in Mymensingh is a step in the right direction. The property that once belonged to Ray's grandfather, Uppendra Kishor Ray Chowdhury, an important cultural figure of the Bengal Renaissance, had fallen into disrepair after years of neglect under the custodianship of the Bangladesh government. As the ministry of external affairs said, "it would be preferable to reconsider the demolition and examine options for its repair and reconstruction as a museum of literature and a symbol of the shared culture of India and Bangladesh". Ray, or the Ray family legacy, is an important part of the Indian subcontinent's cultural history, a transnational inheritance that transcends national boundaries. Bangladesh, a nation born in the name of its linguistic heritage, should not let that legacy wither away.

India's proactive stance on this issue is also welcome because New Delhi must view itself as the custodian of the pre-1947 cultural inheritance of the subcontinent. It must offer both funds and technical expertise to its neighbours for the preservation of ancient sites as well as cultural/historical spaces associated with modern times, without being restricted by the post-1947 borders. Sites associated with Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and cultural figures who migrated after Partition should be conserved and memorialised to invoke the common historical, political, and cultural inheritance. New Delhi has done such work in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal in recent times. The MEA has invested in at least 20 heritage projects across 15 countries, many of them in Southeast Asia, offering grants and expertise from the Archaeological Survey of India, in the past decade.

This is a way of extending Indian soft power and expanding India's outreach beyond the transactional sphere of business and economy; in fact, it can run parallel to or complement the hard diplomacy centered on national security. The outreach centred on Ray, if pursued with the right intent, may help in inducing a thaw in the frozen India-Bangladesh ties.

## Whatever happened to Brics common currency

The bloc may find it hard to push ahead with trade in local currencies, given the threat of punitive US tariffs

Yet another Brics Summit has ended as a non-event. The joint declaration at Rio de Janeiro, despite its grandstanding about multilateralism and a rules-based international order, is notable for its political posturing. It calls for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and condemnation of Ukrainian attacks on Russian infrastructure.

The fact that geopolitics now occupies more mind space than economics in Brics is evident from the near silence in the declaration on its one-shafted initiative — a Brics common currency. The focus was quietly shifted to a more modest, though still ambitious, goal of promoting trade and settlement in local currencies.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has threatened 10% additional tariffs on Brics countries for what he labels "anti-American" policies. (And, on Monday, when the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was meeting in Beijing, he threatened 100% tariffs on Russia and secondary sanctions on countries buying oil from Russia, among them India.) His frustration is not unfounded. The Brics effort to reduce reliance on the dollar directly challenges American economic dominance. The dollar's

centrality in global finance gives the US a structural advantage. As the world's primary reserve currency, the dollar allows America to borrow more cheaply in global markets. The world's demand for dollar assets effectively provides the US with an endless supply of low-cost credit. For example, if you carry \$100 in your pocket, you are in effect giving America an interest-free loan of \$100. That is the essence of what former French finance minister (and later president) Valéry Giscard d'Estaing famously called America's "exorbitant privilege".

That privilege goes beyond economics. It gives the US the unique power to weaponise the dollar, using financial systems like Swift and dollar-clearing banks to impose sanctions and exert political pressure. Brics's move toward de-dollarisation is, in part, a pushback against this power.

Still, for all the motivation, a Brics common currency remains a difficult project. Unlike the eurozone whose members are geographically contiguous and share broadly similar political and economic institutions, Brics countries are scattered across continents, with different development levels, GDP sizes, and strategic interests.

Even assuming political will, formidable technical and institutional hurdles remain. A common currency requires a common interest rate. But how do you calibrate monetary policy that

works at the same time for China and South Africa, or Brazil and India, given their vastly different growth and inflation dynamics? More critically, are these countries ready to cede monetary sovereignty and expose themselves to the risk that economic instability anywhere in the bloc could mean economic instability everywhere?

An even more complex issue is the China factor. With China contributing roughly 70% of the bloc's combined GDP, any common currency arrangement will inevitably be dominated by Beijing. In trying to escape the hegemony of the dollar, would Brics willingly embrace the hegemony of China, an authoritarian state with questionable transparency, weak institutional checks, and limited commitment to the rule of law?

While the common currency vision stalls, the motivation to break free from dollar dominance remains strong, and is growing. The biggest driver is trade. A large proportion of intra-Brics trade is still settled in dollars, adding avoidable transaction costs. Eliminating these costs by using local currencies could boost intra-Brics trade.

There are also deeper concerns. Brics countries see dollar dependence as a source of systemic risk to their financial stability. The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008 was triggered by reckless risk-taking in the US housing and banking sector. Had this happened in an emerging economy, its currency would have



Duvvuri Subbarao

## Forty years after Karamchedu, caste cauldron still simmers

Like many villages across India, Karamchedu had two drinking water tanks — a sprawling one used by the dominant Kamma communities and a decrepit one used by the Dalit Madiga groups. For decades, this hierarchical divide had bred a cocktail of oppression and helplessness in a region where the division between the land-owning communities and the labourers was stark. The farmhands earned less than the minimum wage and many were locked into generational cycles of debt by agricultural landlords.

On July 16, 1985, that compact broke. That evening, a young Kamma man was washing his buffaloes near the steps of the tank used by the Dalits. A disabled Madiga man and another woman from the community objected to their primary drinking water source getting contaminated by sludge. Shocked by what they saw as an affront, a second Kamma man joined his fellow villagers and together, they thrashed the two Dalit people with the thick ropes used to whip buffaloes. During the melee, the woman hit back — some said she grabbed hold of the rope and another second man, others said she shielded herself from the incoming blow with her water pot. As the dispute spiralled, a third Dalit man intervened to plead for a compromise.

But the dominant group was seething. It was unprecedented that the marginalised community had not submitted to the dictate of the powerful, and instead had the audacity to hit back. That night, groups of men tried to drag the Dalit woman out of her hut but were thwarted. The next morning, a hundreds-strong mob descended on the Madigapals with axes, sticks, and spears. By 9am, the settlement was ravaged and the houses of the 300-odd families torched; six people were hacked to death and at least three women were gang-raped. For years, the other traumatised Dalit families refused to return.

The brutality of the Karamchedu massacre sparked outrage, galvanised Dalit communities in their quest for a stronger law to protect them against atrocities, and shattered the chimera that an India readying itself for the 21st century could shed caste dogma. The first such killing in southern India in nearly two decades, it birthed an independent Dalit movement that focussed on Dr BR Ambedkar's philosophy as a driving force. The murders also set the unfortunate stage for a string of similar caste attacks across the country — many at the hands of a landed, dominant community. That some of

these same communities are now not only asking for reservations but also underlining their marginality shows just how long a time period 40 years is.

Caste atrocities have blighted the history of independent India, belying the promise of India's founding document many times over, and splintering the hopes of each generation to undo the knots of caste that continue to bind society. But the grisly crime at Karamchedu presaged three important factors. One, the massacre was stoked by critical shifts in state politics, where the dominant Kamma community was coalescing behind the newly formed Telugu Desam Party and the Dalits were moving away from Left (and radical Left) politics towards the Congress. The Dalits had defied their landlords and voted for the national party in assembly elections just two years before. This tension between dominant communities (many of whom are landed and some classified as backward) and the Dalits continues to simmer — one that has bubbled up to the surface in a number of atrocities against the marginalised castes (think of Tsunduru, Khairnarai, Dharmapuri, Mirchpur).

This was more straightforward when lines of electoral support were clearly demarcated, with dominant groups backing regional outfits and Dalits siding with the Congress or the Left. But it complicates current politics, especially for the Opposition that is trying to marry the two groups even as sections of Dalits are more comfortable with the BJP. In states such as Bihar, this divide is most pronounced and continues to pose the biggest challenge to the 85-15 brand of politics.

Two, the 23-year-long lull in the case — the trial court sentenced 159 people to life imprisonment, the Andhra Pradesh High Court found infirmities in the investigation and prosecution, and acquitted everyone, and eventually the Supreme Court sentenced one person to life in jail and 29 others to three years imprisonment — spotlighted a common problem in cases involving atrocities against Dalits. Despite the SCIST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act — one of the toughest anti-discrimination laws in the world — shoddy investigation and poor prosecution often ensure that powerful perpetrators are able to bend the system to their advantage. From Laxmanpur Bathe to the recent Hadhras gangrape, there is a long line of crimes where Dalit victims have struggled to access justice even in glaring cases, given systemic biases on the ground among the law enforcement machinery.

And, three, while the nature of caste discrimination is morphing both in urban and rural areas, the motivation remains the same. From spectacular acts of violence, perpetrators have moved to more everyday killings (attacking someone for riding a horse or sporting a motorcycle, for example) in rural areas, and subtler forms of bias in housing, education and employment in urban areas. But caste animosity is still driven by a misplaced sense of superiority, a desire to put some people in their place, a belief that reservation (and not historical disadvantages) is the fount of caste, and a zeal to preserve a fundamentally unequal system of social life. Unfortunately, modernity has only altered the form of this stubborn bias, not tempered it. No caste census will cut it either.

The views expressed are personal.



With China contributing roughly 70% of Brics's combined GDP, any common currency arrangement will inevitably be dominated by Beijing.

collapsed. But the dollar, paradoxically, gained value during the crisis. Global capital, in search of safety, fled emerging markets and rushed into US assets, a phenomenon economists call the "safe haven effect". Ironically, it was emerging markets that paid the price for America's excesses.

The GFC wasn't a one-off. The taper tantrum of 2013, the Covid-19 shock of 2020, and even recent US interest rate hikes have repeatedly exposed emerging economies to capital flight, currency volatility, and inflation — all collateral damage of an American-centric global finance.

Against this backdrop, Brics's pivot towards trade in local currencies seems pragmatic. While less radical than a common currency, it is a tangible step towards financial autonomy. For instance, if India and Bangladesh settle their bilateral trade in rupees and takas, both benefit by cutting out the dollar intermediary costs. However, local currency trade works best when bilateral trade is roughly balanced. But if the trade is lopsided, the arrangement favours the larger partner.

That's what happened with India-Russia trade. When Russia agreed to accept rupee payments for its oil

exports, it quickly began accumulating rupee balances far beyond what it could spend on Indian goods. With no outlet for those rupees, Russia backed away from the deal.

Can Brics still push ahead with local currency trade, especially under threat of punitive US tariffs? It's worth remembering that the dollar's status as a global reserve currency is not backed by any formal treaty. There's no international law obligating nations to use it. So under what legal basis can Trump, or indeed any American president, mandate Brics countries to stay within the dollar-based system?

Yet, as we have seen over the last few months of Trump 2.0, US tariffs, no matter how whimsical, are hard to defy.

This puts India in a delicate spot. As the US prepares to assume the presidency of the G20 next year, India will need to carefully navigate between supporting the "Global South's" push for a more multipolar financial system and maintaining stable relations with America, its most important strategic partner.

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[ GENERAL ANIL CHAUHAN ] CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF, INDIA

Dependence on foreign technologies weakens our preparedness ... and results in a shortfall of critical spares for sustenance

At a workshop on UAVs and Counter-Umanned Aerial Systems indigenisation



## Bommai judgment draws the line for democracy

Indian politics is no stranger to power struggles, party splits, and mid-term shake-ups. But when this starts affecting elected state governments, constitutional principles — and the trust of the people — are at stake. One of the most important cases to ever deal with this was SR Bommai vs. Union of India, 1994. A constitutional firewall against arbitrary dismissal of elected governments, it was a landmark ruling. And yet, the 2023 Maharashtra crisis involving the Shiv Sena split showed how political machinations can strain even the strongest constitutional guardrails.

But first, what was the Bommai case? SR Bommai was the Chief Minister of Karnataka. His party had recently undergone a merger, leading to political instability. A few legislators were said to have withdrawn support. At the time, the Governor asked the President to dismiss the government. Crucially, Bommai was not allowed to prove his majority in the Assembly — there was no floor test. But this wasn't an isolated case. By then, Article 356 of the Constitution — which allows the Centre to dismiss a state government if it fails to function according to constitutional norms — had been used 95 times. Sometimes legitimately, but often as a political tool to unseat opposition governments.

The Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 caused serious political unrest, prompting the dismissal of four more state governments. Three states challenged the dismissals alongside Bommai. The stage was set for a nine-judge Supreme Court bench to hear these petitions together and draw lines around the constitutional limitations of Article 356.

The bench concluded that a floor test is mandatory to prove majority and the power to impose President's Rule under Article 356 is not absolute — it is subject to judicial review. Secularism was held to be part of the basic structure of the Constitution, and any state government violating secular principles could be dismissed — a point powerfully expanded on in a separate 37-page concurring opinion by Justice AM Ahmadi — grandfather to one of the authors here, Insyiah Vahanvaty. And so, the Court struck down Bommai's dismissal. The other three, rooted in principles of secularism, were upheld.

These principles of federalism in centre-state relations have returned to the limelight in recent times with the Maharashtra political crisis. In 2022, the Shiv Sena was hit by internal

turmoil. One group of legislators remained loyal to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray; the other to Eknath Shinde who had joined hands with the BJP. Both claimed to be the "real" Shiv Sena. Amid this turmoil, the Governor asked Thackeray to prove his majority through a floor test. But before this could happen, Thackeray resigned. Shinde was sworn in as Chief Minister, but serious constitutional questions lingered. Was the governor justified in calling for a floor test without any formal claim that Thackeray had lost the majority?

In 2023, a five-judge bench answered. The governor's decision to call a floor test was unjustified as it was based on internal party dissent, not a constitutional crisis. Mere expressions of discontent by a few legislators do not amount to a formal withdrawal of support. At the time, the Governor's decision offered by the Court, the political outcome remained unchanged. Because Thackeray had voluntarily resigned — without facing a floor test — the court could not reinstate him as chief minister. The Election Commission of India (ECI) allotted the name and symbol of Shiv Sena to Eknath Shinde. The Supreme Court will hear Thackeray's appeal against ECI's decision next month.

In Bommai, the governor had relied on letters and speculation instead of a floor test. In Shiv Sena, the governor misapplied the floor test. In both, a sitting CM was pushed out without due process.

The Supreme Court's 2023 ruling in the Maharashtra case proved that the historic judgment (Bommai) is far from history — it's very much alive in India's political and legal landscape. Over the years, the Court has turned this landmark verdict in several crucial moments. In 1999, the Rajiv Dutt government was reinstated in Bihar. In 2016, status quo ante was restored in Arunachal Pradesh citing governor's decisions to be "unconstitutional". That same year, a dismissed Uttarakhand government was reinstated. More recently in Karnataka, the Court reaffirmed that intra-party rebellion alone doesn't justify a floor test. Three decades on, Bommai is still doing what it was meant to do: holding the line. As political turmoil challenges and tests Indian democracy, Bommai stands as a critical reminder: in a democracy, power must shift through process — not politicking.

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