



More for later

Chancellor Merz's India visit signals a wider engagement with the EU

Ambassadors on several other foreign policy fronts, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz was the first of several high-level visitors to Delhi to strengthen India-Europe ties. Preparations are on for the EU India Summit later this month, when the Presidents of the European Commission and Council will attend the Republic Day parade; plans for French President Emmanuel Macron's visit — he will attend the AI summit in February — are also being finalised. The visit between Chancellor Merz and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad was about more than bilateral relations. It was about reaffirming elements of talks with the EU to conclude a long-pending trade agreement, as Germany is the biggest economy, as well as exchanging views on geopolitical turmoil, especially the U.S. actions. The leaders also attended a business council meeting, where they discussed more investments. With trade passing \$50 billion in 2019-20, Germany remains India's largest trading partner in Europe. While the talks are understood to have been substantive, the outcomes were to ensure a series of "Joint Declarations of Intent" (JOI) and MOUs. Among the JOIs signed, several deal with cooperation on strategic issues, including a defence industrial cooperation roadmap to promote collaboration and technology partnerships in defence equipment. This is seen as a precursor to the existing agreements for defence purchases that India and Germany have been discussing but have yet to sign on to.

When India and Germany have a long common view on the Ukraine war, and the European Commission that India near central its relationship with India, Germany's bilateral trade with India, pegged at \$287 billion in 2019-20, has not diversified and China is Germany's largest trading partner. It is therefore doubly significant that Chancellor Merz made India his first stop in Asia. The two sides also have differences over the up-lifting of the five-year-old Airbus deal, who was to be taken away by German civil services in 2021 over allegations that he had been secretly allowed to fly in German fighter jets, with only periodic consular and parental visits, and little sustained consular or Indian culture or language. The case of an individual may seem less important, but should be resolved without further delay.

Language of harmony

The rights of linguistic minorities must be protected in every State

The Malaysian Language Bill, 2020, which seeks to promote the language and passed by the Kuala Lumpur Assembly, is being opposed by leaders in Karnataka. The concern that minority languages in the form, particularly Tamil and Kannada, would be adversely affected is misplaced and arises out of misunderstanding of the provision. The Bill's objective is to provide for the "adoption of the Malaysian language as the official language of the State of Karnataka and for Malaysia to be used for all official purposes, to provide for the use of the Malaysian language in all sectors in Karnataka, subject to the provisions of the Constitution of India", and to advance the overall progress and enrichment of the language. The Bill proposes the adoption of Malayalam as the first language for schoolchildren and measures to promote the language in various sectors, from the judiciary to IT. The Bill states that Tamil and Kannada linguistic minorities in notified areas may correspond with the State Secretary, Heads of Departments, and local State officers in their respective languages, and replies shall be issued in these languages and that students whose mother tongue is not Malayalam may pursue education in other available languages in State schools, in accordance with the National Education Curriculum. Additionally, students from other States or foreign countries studying in Karnataka whose mother tongue is not Malayalam are exempt from writing Malayalam examinations at the classes IX, X, and higher secondary levels.

An earlier version of the Bill, passed in 2016, was languishing for the Centre's clearance for 10 years. After the Centre returned the Bill following a Supreme Court of India decision that Bill cannot be indefinitely delayed, the State passed the current version. The Centre, seemingly, has a policy of promoting all Indian languages, as do several States. As long as such measures are incremental alongside those for the protection of the rights of linguistic minorities, no other State or the Centre should have any objection. Many States, including Kerala and Karnataka, have multiple linguistic communities. The linguistic division of States was only an approximation, and language borders have weakened due to migration. Language policies at the national and regional levels must account for these realities rather than pursuing a blind cultural agenda of Hindi or any single language promotion. To be clear, all these language issues have their rightful place in administration and the public sphere. To achieve that objective without allowing fissilines between communities is a challenge of nation-building. Mechanisms such as the Inter-State Council, which has been dormant, must be revived with more authority, and wider, good-faith conversations across linguistic groups promoted.

The recent crisis in Iran has been enveloped in a media fog and has polarised binary narratives, making an objective analysis difficult. Yet, given Iran's geopolitical importance and economic potential, such a greater exercise is required, particularly as it has in India's extended proximity.

The genesis of the ongoing crises in the increasingly disreputable conditions, it began on December 28, 2019, when a group of Tehran residents ("Basij") staged a shutdown to protest the frequent devaluation of the market value of the rial, the national currency. While the rial's official exchange rate to a dollar was 42,000, the market rate was nearly 38 times lower at 1.6 million, having fallen 20,000 times since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Its 45% decline in 2019 made importing essential commodities such as rice, sugar and edible oil and selling them in the rial at artificially controlled prices, capexible.

Subsequently, other disaffected sections of the population, such as unemployed youth and low-paid employees, also joined the stir, making it a countrywide anti-government movement. Among, vandalism and anti-establishment violence were reported. On January 11, authorities disclosed that over 2,000 people had died during the protests, making the casualties on estimated "tens of thousands".

Crisis and the official playbook

Since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the authorities have performed a four-stage playbook for dealing with recurring mass civil unrest, as seen in the election fraud in 2009, petrol price hike in 2009 and 2010, and protests in 2012 — none of which succeeded. In the first phase, more police action is taken to contain the law-and-order problem. If the agitation persists, a "shoot-to-kill" order is issued, while some high officials visit of angry protesters, others evade sympathy for the "legitimate grievances", offering talks and concessions. Social media is locked down. The third stage involves arrests of agitators, sending confusion, splitting the agitators and holding pro-government rallies. These three stages usually succeed in tapering off the protests. Thereafter, the leading protesters are rounded up and sentenced summarily with long prison terms or even execution. During all this time, the western media plays the role of an agent provocateur to the hilt.

The current maladministration seems to be entering the third phase. Over the next few months, a billion to million dollars (\$2), as a monthly handout, will be directly transferred to all citizens to mitigate inflation. The fanatics of the security personnel killed and pro-establishment rallies were accompanied by a demonstration of foreign attempts to hijack the agitation.

The Pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps or IRGC) and the army have stayed loyal, considering the agitation as a continuation of the Gray Israel-United States war of June 2020 against Iran. The oil industry, the mainstay of the



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national economy, has stayed unaffected, and the governing elite has also not capitulated. However, no alternative leadership has emerged among the protesters.

The dynamics in Iran, foreign threats

Although the establishment seems to have managed to reinvent the protest, the outbreak has exposed new systemic vulnerabilities. First, the Iranian strike against the clergy-led regime was unprecedented. In Iran's modern history, the Basij has been an influential belt-tether lobby, at times forcing Iranian rulers to retreat. Their withdrawal of support doomed the Shah in 1979. Their internalisation with the clergy initially permitted profiting from unilateral imports at a preferred exchange rate and selling domestically at market rates.

However, during the past two decades, this economy has cooled. The economic conditions worsened mainly due to the U.S.'s "maximum pressure" sanctions. Further, they were also squeezed by the IRGC and the Pasdaran (various security and intelligence foundations for war reserves, weapons and cryptos), moving into lucrative sectors of trading, manufacturing and contracting. While Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani, recently claimed resolution of the nuclear agreements, the details have not been made public. It remains to be seen if the agreement IRGC, currently crucial to government survival, would agree to roll back its businesses.

Second, while Tehran may have tactics to curb protests, it still lacks co-optational levers to fix the root causes of the swirling social contradictions. The Iranian leadership's residual pursuit of a nuclear and missile programme and support to regional proxies diverts scarce economic resources and triggers western economic sanctions, causing social angst.

Over two-thirds of Iranians were born after the revolution and have different aspirations than their generational politico-theocratic leadership. They see the influence of their Gulf Arab neighbours and hold the leadership responsible for their abject poverty. They also notice the hypocrisy and corruption in the top echelons of power. Moreover, with radicals in control of the clergy, parliament and judiciary, and a relatively powerless executive, significant social groups, such as women and non-State minorities feel alienated. While the managed election of a moderate President in 2013 raised hopes, these have been belied due to regional turmoil.

Third, the foreign alignment of the agitators has become mainstream, with U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly encouraging them with military threats to punish the Iranian regime and possibly replace it. However, they lack any mass and any options, and the outcome of any perceptible foreign action cannot be guaranteed. In 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein attacked Iran to exploit the post-Islamic revolutionary chaos, only to see all Iranian unite against foreign aggression. Moreover, Iran's Shia majority

has a long tradition of glorifying martyrdom and sacrifice, making them more loyal to foreign military threats.

Despite its losses during the June 2020 military clash with Israel, and the U.S., Iran retains sufficient military capability to threaten a repetition. Tehran's options include targeting U.S. interests in the economically sensitive oil fields region, making the Gulf Arab states wary about paying for a U.S. military misadventure.

Moreover, when driven to a corner, Iran could close the Strait of Hormuz, raising global oil prices. Mr. Trump has often criticised his predecessors for dragging the U.S. into "endless wars" and has so far avoided having "boots on the ground", preferring surgical air-strike strikes and smart economic coercion. Although he has been emboldened by his tactical success against President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, there is a clear realisation that the multiplicity of power centres in Iran makes military decapitation a risky and often counter-productive endeavour.

Instead, Mr. Trump is leaning toward one-liner measures such as cyberattacks and the imposition of secondary sanctions to curb the economic trading with Iran, encouraged by the success of a similar exercise in curbing Indian imports of Russian crude. Their efficacy remains uncertain as Iran has long been subject to Israeli cyberattacks and has a well-oiled sanctions-busting machinery in place, from manufacturing cryptocurrencies to dark web markets smuggling crude to China and divers to Dubai (the world's largest trans-shipment port for 150 kilometres across the Persian Gulf).

Despite U.S. pressures, China and the United Arab Emirates are Iran's top two trading partners, with respective bilateral commerce estimated at \$40 billion and \$30 billion last year, trailing over half of the entire Iranian foreign trade. The proposed secondary sanctions by the U.S. may not curb such trade but only intensify it. Still, as a discretionary tactic, Tehran has offered to reopen talks with Washington.

Impact on India

The notion that turmoil in Tehran is inconsequential for India is misplaced. First, any confrontation in Iran would affect the security and stability in the Gulf, where India has substantive stakes in terms of imports and supplies, investments in oil trade and investments.

Second, it would allow Pakistan to project itself as a defence security ally to both Iran and the Gulf Arab states and turn towards both the White House. India also needs links to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. Third, after Iran, South Asia has the largest number of Shia, with their number in India estimated at around 25 million. They are natural stakeholders in what happens to their Iranian co-confessionals. Lastly, once few decades of western sanctions are lifted, the reconstruction of the Iranian economy would provide lucrative opportunities for India, particularly as Tehran has long pursued its version of Ahmadinejadism.

India must focus on AI and its environmental impact

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) takes us much closer to a future that ranges from health care to agriculture, but concerns about its impact on the environment have not attracted much discussion. According to an OECD working paper, "Measuring the Environmental Impacts of Artificial Intelligence: Concepts and Applications", the development of AI algorithms comes with certain environmental costs such as an increased carbon footprint which exacerbates climate change-related challenges. The report says that the global ICT industry (including hardware such as televisions) is estimated to be responsible for 1.8%-2.8% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; other calculations have a figure as high as 3.7% to 5.9%.

It is worth noting that data about the carbon footprint of AI models and their use are not always authentic. A Google report (Google 2020) claims that a single text AI prompt consumes electricity of only 0.24 watt-hours. What may seem to be low levels of electricity consumption has also drawn criticism for the report's incomplete and misleading conclusions.

Impact on the environment

In September 2019, an issue note by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on the environmental impact of the AI life cycle, said that Google AI servers may still use 4.2 million cubic metres (Cm) to 4.8 billion of water in 2027, leading to water scarcity. The note also refers to a study which indicates that training a single large Language Model (LLM) can generate almost 3,000,000 kilograms of carbon emissions.

Similarly, a study, "Strategy and Policy Considerations for Deep Learning in NLP" (June 2019), has assessed that the training of a single large AI model entails the emission of over 1,30,000 pounds of carbon dioxide. This is equivalent to emissions caused by five cars in



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their lifetimes. A look at the energy consumption in the case of ChatGPT, a widely used AI virtual assistant, lacks understanding of AI algorithms impact the environment and contribute towards climate change. According to a study, "Sustaining New Horizons" (UNEP, July 15, 2020), any request made through ChatGPT leads to energy consumption that is 30 times more than what it would be through a Google search.

Solutions, the world versus India

In 2018, UNESCO released its "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence", which emphasised recognising the "negative impacts of AI on societies, environment". These new binding recommendations were adopted by around 190 countries. The United States and the European Union (EU) appear to be the prominent jurisdictions that have proposed legislation dealing with the environmental impact of AI, as the Artificial Intelligence Environmental Impact Act of 2014 and The European Union's restriction on harmful AI rules.

Since there are global conversations about the carbon cost of AI use and deployment, India also needs to recognise the environmental costs of developing AI models. Current discussions now an AI and climate change are on how AI can help protect the environment, but without going into the drawbacks of developing large AI algorithms.

The first step to address this challenge is to carry out an exercise to measure the environmental impacts of developing and deploying AI models. In India, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is mandatory as per the EIA Notification, 2006. While an EIA is often conducted to evaluate projects concerning the environment such as river water projects, its scope can be extended to include assessing the impact of development of AI algorithms on the environment.

There are several AI sustainable practices that India can adopt

The government could also focus on the establishment of monitoring standards in order to assess AI's impact. It can be done by involving stakeholders such as tech companies that are developing large-scale AI algorithms, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations that are working toward reducing carbon footprint and mitigating other environment-related challenges. This will help in building consensus on terminology, standards, and consistent indicators and reporting requirements, ultimately leading to informed policy decisions.

Another essential exercise is data collection which can be done by deploying sustainability metrics such as GHG emissions, energy, water and natural resources consumption that are utilised by AI algorithms. Environmental costs beyond energy, such as the impacts on freshwater and land use, could also be evaluated.

As a part of disclosure standards

The government can also explore the possibility of making the environmental impact of developing and deploying AI models as part of environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosure standards by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and Security and the Securities and Exchange Board of India. It can take inspiration from the EU, as its Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) framework requires the disclosure of emissions data from data centres and high compute activities, which includes training of LLMs.

The focus should shift to including AI as a part of solutions toward global sustainability goals. There are several AI sustainable practices that can be adopted to mitigate the adverse impact of AI on the environment such as deploying pre-trained models, using renewable resources in power data centres, and reporting AI-specific estimates.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Iran and Trump

Iran lies at the heart of a foreign-policy question that reveals how toxic Trump's MAGA has become. Washington's stance toward Tehran — marked by sanctions, open threats and episodic brinkmanship —

reflects sustained pressure from the Netanyahu government to treat Iran as a permanent adversary rather than a state to be engaged. This stance has coincided with Iranian claims of foreign intelligence meddling, including allegations

involving the CIA and Mossad, particularly after recent protests appear to have lost momentum. Whatever the veracity of these claims, they undermine how credible Iran appears to be determined to prove that it

is not a terrorist. President Trump has been strongly warned in the diplomatic for international law — at times suggesting he does not read it, and similarly dismissive of the United Nations, except when it suits to serve immediate ends. In this sense, his

presidency reads as an accumulation of America's darkest instincts, echoing the anticolonialist of Andrew Jackson, the secrecy of Richard Nixon and the interventionism of the Bush years. And on top of it, one has Trump's obsession to win a Nobel Peace Prize.

Well, MAGA thus promises moral but delivers economic restraint, power, greed, and very complete the turn. **Dr. Anand Kumar, Mysore**
(Letter emailed to editor@thehindu.co.in to meet with the postal editor.)

The importance of blue

In India, the colour blue has an age-old association with the struggles of the marginalised. In early 1955, protest in Bengal, who had been exploited by white planters for decades, took a cue from a magistrate's notice that made the wearing of indigo non-optional, and for the first time refused to cultivate the plant. Though many historians have treated the protests that ensued as non-violent, some others say that hooliganism, peasants attacked factors and defamed themselves against armed goons sent by the planters. The hooligan bourgeoisie were careful not to antagonise the British government. This force-cultivation by the indigo planters may have been one of the reasons why this "blue movement", which sustained for over a year, remained local and anti-planter, and did not develop into a larger anti-colonial campaign. Nearly 90 years after this episode, the indigo line came back into focus. But this time, it was to the launch of an entirely new method of anti-colonial activism. One that played a pivotal role in freeing us from the colonial yoke in 1947.

The Champaran Satyagraha

Gandhi's first experiment with satyagraha, or civil disobedience, in India was in Champaran, Bihar, in 1917. Champaran was full of indigo plantations. The terms of the plantation were bound by law to plant indigo on a portion of their land. "This system was known as the *chikhi* system, as three lakhs out of twenty lakhs (which was one acre) had to be planted with indigo," Gandhi noted. The tenants lived in miserable conditions, and landlords used force and coercion to make sure they remained subjugated. Even when the price of indigo began falling, they had no choice but to grow the crop.

Gandhi first went to Champaran on the invitation of Rajkumar Shukla, an agriculturist. He studied the problems, listened to



T.N. Krishnan

Former minister and editor. This is an edited version of his latest book, *The Blue People of India: Decoding a Nation's Symbol*. (Crown/Hachette, 2018)

the voices of the tenants, and mobilised public participation for a peaceful agitation. His opponents in the official quarters of the planter associations were badly rebuffed. He was a consider. Still, Gandhi's investigations were having an impact and made the government uneasy. He was issued a notice to leave Champaran, but he stayed on. Then the administration issued him a summons. The night before Gandhi was to appear in court, a crowd gathered around the house where he was staying. The following day, the court was overflowing. In his characteristic style, Gandhi said, "In my humble opinion it is a question of difference of opinion between the Local Administration and myself. I have entered the country with a view of rendering humanitarian and national service. I have done so in response to a pressing invitation to come and help the poor, who are being unfairly treated by the indigo planters. As a law-abiding citizen my first instinct would be, as it was, to obey the court's order. But I could not do so without doing violence to my sense of duty to those for whom I have come. I feel that I could just now serve them only by remaining in their midst."

Ambedkar's suit

But the dark blue of indigo soon faded from memory. It needed Ambedkar to bring it back into the public imagination. Ambedkar states that he first arrived in a blue suit, holding the Constitution in one hand and signing it in the other. There are many theories about how the association between blue and Dalit movement came about. Ambedkar's suit was a social statement and the colour of blue, possibly his preference. Some associate blue with the expense of his vision and the new discoloration outside of the sky itself. Blue is also considered the colour of equality, representative of the working class, Buddhist and Hindu

associations with the colour blue have also been pointed out.

Could there have been another reason for the choice of blue? In his *Kiddies of India*, Anupama Anand writes that Ambedkar reviewed when the Preamble had to be on the origin of the various options. He quoted from John Ruskin's translation of some sections of the Mahabharata and the vulgar version of *Shivavastava*.

From the Mahabharata: "The colour (varna) of the Brahmins was white; that of the Kshatriyas red; that of the Vaishyas yellow, and that of the Sudras black."

From *Shivavastava*: "The Brahmins, beautiful for, dear to Brahma, were formed from an imperishable substance, the Kshatriyas from a perishable substance, the Vaishyas from a substance, the Sudras from a modification of smoke... Hence in the world men have become divided into castes, being of four descriptions, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras."

That the colour blue and black and used as interchangeable shades was not important in these correlations. The scholar Nick Allen demonstrates that equivalences between certain colours and people's social functions, nature and even appearance are found in many cultures. These cultural associations also reveal that people at the lowest rung of society are invariably associated with dark colours, very often blue or black. Allen calls black a "non-colour" which is connected with the semantics of inferiority and otherness. This makes one wonder if his choice of blue was influenced by the association of this colour with shades.

The blue chakra is at the third heart of the Indian flag, holding within itself the strength of the Hindu community and the spirit of civil disobedience. It is a reflection of our right to assemble peacefully and without arms. An assertion that we will assemble to protect our rights and ally with all those society forgets to notice. It is also a reminder of our unmet promises.

The UDF's ray of hope in an uphill battle

Local body poll results give it momentum, but Assembly polls could be challenging

STATE OF PLAY

M.K. Suresh

the political pundit

The local body elections held in Kerala last December have breathed new life into the Congress-led Democratic Front (DF) in the state. The DF, which has struggled to reclaim power from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) led Left Democratic Front (LDF) following the latter's unprecedented victories in consecutive state Assembly elections.

The LDF garnered 26.5% of the vote, compared with the DF's 21.4% and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) 14.2%. Other factors include the CPI(M)'s loss of its traditional base in the coastal districts, and the BJP's loss of its traditional base in the hill districts.

While the prospects seem favourable for the Congress, which has been out of power for a decade in Kerala, the local body results, while encouraging, may prove a false dawn. What remains to be seen is whether the Congress can sustain its momentum in the upcoming Assembly elections.

Key strategies include early candidate selection with a 50% quota for women and youth, and a focus on winning the 100 seats in the 120-member Assembly. The Congress has also been successful in winning the 100 seats in the 120-member Assembly.

Key strategies include early candidate selection with a 50% quota for women and youth, and a focus on winning the 100 seats in the 120-member Assembly.



Map of Kerala showing the distribution of seats in the 2020 local body elections.

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Big mandates, bigger responsibilities: trends in elections

Large electoral mandates raise high expectations, which many parties and alliances in India have struggled to meet over time

DATA POINT

Sankar Kumar

Archives Editor

Whenever voters hand a party or an alliance a big mandate, they also have very high expectations from the government. India's electoral history shows that many parties or alliances have struggled to live up to that responsibility for long. Let us look at some of the examples where voters have given a party or an alliance a big mandate and what has followed.

In the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, held after Bhabha's assassination, Indira Gandhi led the Congress to one of the biggest victories in Indian electoral history, crossing 400 seats in the 543-member House. This result reflected a mix of sympathy, hope and a young new leader, and a desire for stability (Table 1). Yet, the mandate faded quickly. Within five years, in the 1989 general election, the Congress suffered a significant drop in its vote tally. It has never again reached an outright majority like it did in 1984.

After the Emergency and the JP movement, voters placed faith in a new alternative, in the Janata Party in 1977. In north India, and particularly in Uttar Pradesh, the Janata alliance swept all the Lok Sabha seats, finally ousting out the Congress in the state and signalling a huge shift in public mood.

For sharp internal conflicts and unstable governance meant that the experiment did not last. In 1980, the Janata government had collapsed and voters brought the Congress back (Table 2).

In Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a party which emerged from the Assam Movement, captured power in the 1985 Assembly elections by winning 61 out of 125 seats. This was an extraordinary achievement for a new regional party led mostly by young

activist leaders of the movement (Table 3). Over the decades, however, organisational weaknesses, splits, and competition steadily reduced its footprint. Today, the AGP survives largely as a junior ally in state politics.

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) won 61 out of 125 Assembly seats in Assam in 2001. The mandate, built on an anti-corruption plank and promises of better schools, health care, and basic services, was one of the most decisive ones in any State in recent years.

However, in the 2005 Assembly polls, the AGP failed to retain its earlier dominance. Several senior leaders lost their seats. The result showed that even a party built on around politics of welfare and development can be punished when alternative narratives gain ground.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front government in West Bengal consistently for more than three decades, and the CPI(M) still won 25 of 234 seats in the 2019 Assembly elections (Table 4). This period gave the Left deep organisational roots and a reputation for stability and a socialist model of governance. The severe, Manu Sharma's 11-year-old Congress vote to power in 2001, during the left down to around 40 seats. Similarly, in Tripura, the once-dominant front has not recovered since (Table 5).

The Shiksha Democratic Front (SDF) electoral journey tells a similar tale (Table 6). After consistently polling above 50% vote and sweeping successive Assembly elections from 1991 to 2005, the party's 22-seat victory in 2014 with around 58% vote share marked its last comfortable mandate. The emergence of the Shiksha Democratic Front (SDF) as a credible challenger, along with growing anti-incumbency, ended this hegemony.

In 2018, the SDF's vote share remained competitive but the party got just 6 seats. The SDF crossed the majority mark, ending the SDF's uninterrupted 25-year rule in power. The subsequent defection of 10-12 SDF MLAs to the BJP and two to the SDF further weakened the organisation. By the 2024 Assembly elections, the SDF had captured 21 of 32 seats with over 30% of the vote, while the SDF was reduced to a single seat, its worst performance since 1991.

The BJP in Gujarat has not only retained its vote bank but has also expanded it in the last few elections, especially after 2014 (Table 7). This can partly be attributed to the support the State party unit receives from the Central government and Central government in-state, but it is clear that the BJP has successfully deployed cultural nationalism, welfare, and populist policies to its advantage.

Particularly, its ability to grasp the popular sentiment of the majority and respond accordingly has played a critical role in sustaining such a large vote base.

In Bihar, the Janata Dal (United) recorded one of its best performances in the 2019 Assembly elections. It had strong backing for its governance and development narrative and its leader, Nitish Kumar, enjoyed support.

However, in the 2020 Assembly elections, its individual tally fell significantly even though the new Mahagathabandhan as a whole defeated the BJP. The 2020 Assembly elections gave a big mandate to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in Bihar (Table 8). This was in contrast to the 2010 Assembly elections when the NDA won the election with a very small majority.

The Trinamool Congress has been in power in West Bengal for the last 15 years with its vote share hovering above 49% (Table 9). It will be interesting to watch how it performs in the 2024 Assembly elections. Will it be able to keep the momentum going?

Sankar Kumar is a Professor and political analyst, who has been a columnist with THE HINDU. He has also written and co-edited several books on Indian politics.

Momentum no more

Thumbnails for the charts were sourced from the Election Commission of India



With the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won more than 400 out of 543 seats. In the 2019 elections, Congress polled 19.5% of the vote. Following the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won 21.4% of the vote.

Source: Election Commission of India

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Archives* Funda.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 14, 1970

Pugwash meet opens: call for abolition of nuclear weapons

Bombay, Jan. 13: A short speech by the Pugwash President Nobel Laureate, Prof. Dorothy Hodgkin, in which she expressed the interest of the scientific community in the abolition of nuclear weapons, and indeed of all other weapons, and in the re-building of society on equitable lines, heralded the opening of the week-long deliberations of the 25th Pugwash Conference at the spacious Taj Hotel in Taj Coromandel here.

She said India had a very special place in the history of the Pugwash Movement in as much as the late Prime Minister Nehru organised a Committee of Scientists to explore nuclear energy which provided the actual framework for the movement. From which the date of the Movement was usually made. Prof. Dorothy Hodgkin recalled how the late Dr. Raghunathrao, when he was India's envoy in Moscow and also a Professor at Philosophy of Eastern Religions at Oxford, had urged her to visit the Soviet Union for contacts with her scientist counterparts in that country for a share in the cold war which was then at its peak. She actually made the visit three years later.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FROM THE JANUARY 12, 1920 (1920) AG-THIRTY-THREE WAS HIS ISSUE ON JANUARY 14, 1920

The literary institute, Namakkal

The Secretary writes: The Literary Institute, Namakkal was started in the year 1906. From small beginnings, the Association has grown in its numbers. The rules of the Association are as follows: That every poor man may become a member of the same - the least subscription being Rs. 4 per month. After 7 years, the Association thought of expanding the library attached to it and thus making the Association more useful to the public. With this end in view, private efforts were made and are being made even now to make additions to the library which contained only 100 volumes in the beginning and the efforts so far made increased the number of volumes to about 500 in number. Vast funds stand in the way of further improvements.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Delhi's coldest temperature in January in three years

3 In Greater Kailash, the maximum temperature for the day is expected to be around 23 degrees Celsius. Cold wave conditions are likely to persist over Delhi on Wednesday as well. Delhi's air quality deteriorated to the 'very poor' category with the Air Quality Index (AQI) sitting at 311. (N)

Songs 'promoting gun violence' removed from digital platforms

67 These songs promoting 'gun lifestyle' and glorifying weapons and violence have been removed from digital platforms, the Karnataka Police said in a statement. Official sources said some songs sung by Marathi rappers are among the 67 songs, which were removed in the past one year. (N)

Number of children killed in Gaza since the tenuous ceasefire

100 At least 100 children have been killed by Israeli airstrikes and ground forces in Gaza since the start of a tenuous ceasefire three months ago, the UN said. An official at Gaza's health ministry has reported a higher figure of 161 children killed during the ceasefire. (N)

Number of police personnel deployed for Mumbai civic polls

25,000 More than 25,000 police personnel will be deployed across Mumbai to oversee polling and vote counting for the 16th Mumbai Municipal Corporation elections. The security cover includes senior officers. (N)

Number of new orders booked by Boeing in the last year

1,175 Boeing announced last in 2019 to deliver the most planes since 2013 and beat rival Airbus in new orders for the first time in seven years in a sign of a turnaround for the U.S. plane maker after a series of crises. (N)

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Is the government seeking phones' source code?

What is the issue around the government seeking source code data from companies? What is source code, and why don't companies want to give access to it? Will keeping the code open for review risk security threats and cyberattacks? What has the government said?

EXPLAINER

Anand Deep

The story so far

The telecom agency Anusant reported that the Indian government was contemplating a requirement for smartphone makers to disclose their source code to third party testing agencies, and make this code open for review. A further requirement the agency reported was that phone makers would have to notify the government before pushing major software updates to user devices. The Union government has developed the nature of these conversations, and refused the source code demand allegation.

What is source code?

Source code is the core repository of software programmes and their associated digital assets that drives a digital system. While some parts of the code, especially of Android phones, is open to begin with, there are significant modifications and adaptations that phone manufacturers make to that codebase. Also, each firm polices its own technology driving these respective changes. Source code is kept secret not just for commercial reasons, but also as a security measure. If a software system's complete inner workings are visible to a malicious attacker, then the system is at risk of being probed for weaknesses that can be exploited, and can lead to data breaches and other types of cyberattacks.

Why is such a demand controversial?

It is highly unusual for source code of any kind of system to be disclosed outside a company, except perhaps in sensitive fields like defence, and that too in specific countries. Apple Inc., for instance, has not disclosed its source code to the Chinese government, even as the firm has carved out policies specific to that country to make sure data stored on the cloud potentially were accessible in



response is legal impacts.

These reports have come shortly after a troubling episode for the government, just weeks before, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) was at the receiving end of massive political and public pushback due to an order it sent to smartphone manufacturers to "provide" the open source app source code. There were widespread concerns that the app could be used for snooping at work, and represent a security threat by a third party attacker at best. This was also a demand global smartphone makers generally don't entertain.

But source code disclosure would be a far more intrusive demand, as it would require smartphone makers to essentially expose their entire code base to a third

party. Cyber attackers that find and take advantage of software vulnerabilities often do so with aspects of computer systems that are visible externally; internal visibility would greatly amplify the risks of such vulnerabilities being found, especially if the source code includes detailed documentation on a system's inner workings. As such, mobile phone operating systems, even if they are running on open source Android, do not expose every detail of their actual implementation.

Is the Indian government demanding that source code be made public? In 2020, the National Centre for Communication Security (NCCS), under the DoT, tasked a document called an Indian Telecom Security Assurance

Requirement (ITSAR) for "consumer equipment". ITSARs are technical standards used in the Mandatory Testing and Certification of Telecommunication Equipment (MTCTE) framework, a key bureaucratic step for importing telecom gear into India.

The MTCTE framework stems from the Indian Telegraph (Extension) Rules, 2007. However, shortly after the Telecommunication Act, 2018 was passed, the DoT and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) decided that the MTCTE regime should be done away with for smartphones, which already go through a certification process for India administered by the Bureau of Indian Standards. A senior MeitY official told The Hindu that since the house had now been passed to the IT Ministry, the discussions were picking up where the DoT had left off. A press statement by MeitY stated that the IT Ministry was keeping an "open mind" and would decide on what was best for the country and its consumers. The India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA), which represents some smartphone firms, also downplayed the seriousness of the discussions.

The Internet Freedom Foundation, a digital rights advocacy group, pushed back on that demand, pointing out that the meetings the government was holding were not transparently conducted, and that the ITSARs remain public.

"If the government claims these proposals do not exist, it must explain the specific documentation currently hosted on its own website and also disclose the minutes of meetings," IFF said in a statement.

"IFF asserts that 'stakeholder consultation' cannot be limited to closed-door meetings with big tech giants. If the IFF's claim that 'no final regulations have been framed' is true, then the government should have no hesitation in releasing the current draft of the ITSAR for public scrutiny immediately. We support the need for transparency and an open public consultation."

THE GIST

Source code is the core repository of software programmes and their associated digital assets that drives a digital system.

It is highly unusual for source code of any kind of system to be disclosed outside a company, except perhaps in sensitive fields like defence, and that too in specific countries.

Anusant reported that the Indian government was contemplating a requirement for smartphone makers to disclose their source code to third party testing agencies, and make this code open for review.

Are India's small towns being increasingly urbanised?

Are small towns an alternative to the over-accumulation witnessed in the country's metro cities?

Tikender Singh Pareek

The story so far

India continues to continue its urban future through the load shedding of migration, but a quarter and its core consequential transformation is unfolding. Of India's nearly 60,000 cities and statutory towns, barely 300 qualify as large cities. The overwhelming majority are small towns, with populations below 1,00,000. This proliferation of small towns is a structural product of India's capitalist development — and of its crisis.

How have small towns proliferated?

From the 1970s through the 1990s, capital accumulation was organised through metropolitanisation. Large cities became the primary sites for industrial production, state investment, infrastructure, and labour absorption. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and later Bangalore and

Hyderabad became special hubs for capital by absorbing surplus labour; concentrating consumption; and by creating conditions for accumulation. However, today, India's metros have run into the classic problem of over-accumulation. Land prices have detached from productive use, infrastructure systems are stretched beyond inputs, and rising costs have become unbearable for working groups.

It is in this context that small towns have emerged. Across India, one can see this shift. Towns like Hapur in Uttar Pradesh, Chitragarh, Bhatnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Raigarh in Karnataka, Bangalore in Andhra Pradesh, and Udaipur in Gujarat are now logistics nodes, agro-processing hubs, warehouse towns, construction economies, service centres and consumption markets. They absorb migrant workers pushed out of metros and rural youth with few options

outside the urban process; they are left inside it. Small towns are often under conditions of capitalist stress — cheaper land, pliable labour, weaker regulation, and minimal political scrutiny.

Are small towns a better alternative?

They offer no inherent emancipatory promise. What is unfolding is not inclusive growth but the reformation of rural poverty. Informal labour dominates — construction workers without contracts, women in home-based piecework, and youth trapped in platform economies with no security. In towns like Bhatnagar in Madhya Pradesh or Raigarh in Karnataka, one sees new hierarchies budding: real estate brokers, local contractors, money-lenders and political intermediaries are controlling land and labour. This is where policy failure becomes glaring. India's flagship urban missions remain a deeply metro-centric

ambition, even in its expanded version, effectively excludes most small towns from meaningful infrastructure investment. Water supply and sewerage projects are designed for large cities, while small towns survive on fragmented schemes and temporary fixes. The result is predictable: rather than economic flourish, groundwater is mined indiscriminately, and ecological stress deepens. Moreover, governance remains the weakest link. Small-town municipalities are underfunded and undertrained. Planning is constrained to conventional formulas with local realities and participation is reduced to procedural hearings.

What next?

The first step is political recognition. Small towns must be acknowledged as the primary frontier of India's urban future. Second, planning must be reimagined. Town-level plans must integrate housing, livelihoods, transport and ecology, rather than replicate metropolitan complexity. Third, small towns need empowered municipalities, transparent budgets, and institutional space for workers' collective, environmental action and cooperatives. Finally, capital must be disciplined. Platform economies and digital infrastructures need regulation to ensure labour rights, local value retention and data accountability.

Tikender Singh Pareek is a member of the Kerala Urban Commission.

THE GIST

Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and later Bangalore and Hyderabad became special hubs for capital by absorbing surplus labour; concentrating consumption; and by creating conditions for accumulation.

India's flagship urban missions remain deeply metro-centric. AMRUT, even in its expanded version, effectively excludes most small towns from meaningful infrastructure investment.

Small towns must be acknowledged as the primary frontier of India's urban future.



Editor's TAKE

Germany bets big on India

As Berlin looks to reduce its overdependence on familiar partners, New Delhi is emerging not just as a promising market, but as a trusted collaborator

The world has changed beyond recognition when it comes to geopolitics. The last two years have been dramatic, the rise of China as a formidable superpower, the crisis in NATO, the decline and disintegration of the US, and the emergence of the Global South as too visible to ignore. New alliances are thus coming up as the old ones become weak and irrelevant.

This is indeed visible in Germany's shift towards India, pronounced by the German Chancellor's presence in India on the occasion of the Bharat Gaurav Summit. The choice of India for German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's first visit to Asia was not a matter of protocol; it was a statement of intent. Immediately Berlin is looking east, and New Delhi is emerging as a partner to place long-term bets on. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's designation of the India-Germany economic relationship as "limitless" summarises the emerging bond between Germany, the manufacturing giant of Europe, and India, an IT powerhouse of Asia. What began decades ago as a largely transactional partnership of machines, automobiles and chemicals has matured into a relationship based on mutual respect and expediency. Defence cooperation, joint work on critical resources, healthcare, artificial intelligence and clean energy are widening the scope of cooperation. The Joint Declaration of Intent on defence, signed during this visit, marks a quiet but important step in that direction. For Germany, an export-driven economy is under strain, as it can no longer depend on the US and Europe alone to sell its goods. The big question is why Germany is choosing India over China. The answer lies in the fact that China is currently struggling with its supply lines, whereas India offers scale, growth and political stability without the strategic concern that comes with ties with China. With India growing at over 8 per cent and steadily improving its regulatory environment, German industry sees not just a market, but a base for manufacturing innovation and talent.

For India, the need for German technology, its focus on green initiatives and its expertise in manufacturing large machines cannot be overstated. Besides, its partnership diversifies India's trade and lessens its dependence on the US, which is currently highly unpredictable. The availability of an EU India free trade agreement, floated during the visit, adds urgency to this moment. If concluded, it would ease trade flows on both sides. However, challenges remain, and India will have to weigh what it can compromise. Europe wants lower tariffs on cars, medical devices and high-value consumer goods. If India allows that, does it mean giving the better access for better-intensive exports. The negotiations will be tough, but a window of opportunity has definitely opened. India will have to tread with caution, as differences over carbon levels, steel imports and intellectual property will test negotiators' patience. Germany's growth has been stalling, and India has to reduce its reliance on Russian energy and arms. Russia's sensitive status in New Delhi, the India and Germany, underlines the need for growth. Spices or trade balances, they are about peering into the future for cooperation in a world that is becoming more inward-looking.

One Year of the World Trumped

Marked by unilateralism, transactional deal-making, and an unapologetic assertion of executive power, Trump's second-term approach has unsettled allies, reshaped global alignments, and raised fundamental questions about international stability and America's long-term credibility



KALYANI SHANKAR

US President Donald Trump will complete the first year of his second term on January 20. Trump's second-term foreign policy, which began in January 2025, represents a significant departure from traditional US approaches, even compared with his first term. His foreign policy actions include withdrawing from international agreements and the aggressive use of tariffs to highlight a turn towards unilateralism that has raised concerns about global stability and the durability of long-standing alliances.

Trump's new approach has been more revolutionary than evolutionary, triggering significant shifts in international relations. The defining elements include a renewed focus on the Western Hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine, strained relations with European allies, and a move away from democracy promotion towards transactional diplomacy signalling a major strategic realignment.

As CNA observed, Trump "employed agencies such as USIA, fired thousands of USIA workers, set government prosecutors on his enemies, and attacked judges with personal for-jury suits." During this period, Trump's foreign policy underwent more dramatic changes than during his first term. His unpredictability repeatedly shocked the world and contributed to a sense of global instability. Trump's supporters welcomed his negotiating style and emphasis on American interests, while critics worried that such actions could weaken long-term alliances. The hallmark of his second-term has been the rapid and expansive use of executive authority, creating a perception of overwhelming presidential power.

Trump's withdrawal from multilateral agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Climate Agreement raised concerns about the United States' long-term influence and credibility in global institutions. He ended the TPP in his first week in office and later withdrew from the Paris accord, reinforcing his scepticism towards international frameworks he believed contravened American sovereignty. He has shown little enthusiasm for alliances, frequently portraying European partners as weak. During the year, Trump held personal calls with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, and almost took back-to-back in Alaska in an effort to end the war in Ukraine, while the conflict appears to be moving towards a resolution, progress has been slower than Trump anticipated, largely due to Russian resistance.



TRUMP ONCE DECLARED, "AMERICA WILL RECLAIM ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE AS THE GREATEST, MOST POWERFUL, MOST RESPECTED NATION ON EARTH, INSPIRING THE AWE AND ADMIRATION OF THE ENTIRE WORLD"

The writer is a political columnist

Relations with Europe became increasingly strained, compelling efforts to promote democratic values. At the same time, the administration placed renewed emphasis on the Western Hemisphere, a shift that has generated concern among regional partners.

Trump initiated the withdrawal from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and pursued renegotiations. Alongside imposing tariffs on products such as solar panels and steel from Mexico, he has used tariffs as a strategic weapon even against allies, accused the release of hostages from Gaza, and launched a grievance campaign against the Venezuelan government. US military action led to the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro following strikes on the country.

Maduro and his wife were brought to the United States, where he was indicted on drug charges in New York. The National Security Strategy released in December outlined a markedly different stance for global engagements. It shifted away from democracy promotion and instead prioritised narrowly defined national interests, identifying major regions as the next great contest for global influence.

The strategy presents a world divided into spheres of influence dominated by the United States, Russia, and China, and calls for reasserting the Monroe Doctrine to reinforce American dominance in the Western Hemisphere, with particular focus on Latin America and the Caribbean. US officials, the United States continued to provide military and intelligence support to Ukraine, but President Zelenskyy and former President Joe Biden were blamed for the conflict. Peace negotiations, including US-Russia talks held in Saudi Arabia in February 2025, have progressed slowly. Trump's efforts to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians have continued, with the United States maintaining strong and unequivocal support for Israel. India renewed talks with optimism about what a second Trump presidency might mean for bilateral relations, public opinion in India was largely positive about Trump's return to the White House. However, expectations were quickly challenged as the administration raised tariffs.

lightened H-1B visa rules, and struck deals with China. Most recently, India faced a major shock after Trump backed legislation proposing a 100 per cent tariff on exports to the United States.

Trump once declared, "America will reclaim its rightful place as the greatest, most powerful, most respected nation on Earth, inspiring the awe and admiration of the entire world." A short time from now, we are going to be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. "His expansionist vision is now under way—and the world is watching closely to see where it leads."

The Pioneer

OPINION

Makar Sankranti: The science of the sun's energy



ASHWANI GURUJI

2ND OPINION

The Sanskrit word Sankranti means "transition" or "movement," signifying the movement of the sun from one zodiac constellation to another over the course of a year. The very fact that ancient Maharaja traditions originated and observed twelve Sankrantis annually reflects a sophisticated understanding of cosmic rhythms. Long before telescopes and satellites, our ancestors mapped the motion of the sun and planets, their relative positions, and their influence on life on Earth. Beyond astronomy, they grasped something deeper: what many today have overlooked is the science of energy, or shakti, and how shifts in celestial alignments reflect the energy patterns of creation itself. Amongst heavenly bodies, the Sun, or Surya, holds

a unique place for life on Earth. It is the fundamental source of energy that sustains existence, a truth fully acknowledged by modern science. The Sanskrit wisdom is so profound that it cannot be given upon directly with the naked eye, a reminder of its immense power.

By absorbing themselves to the sun, three seers were said to radiate a similar luminosity—both physical and spiritual. With this knowledge, to which the Gayatri Mantra is attributed, is believed to have unlocked extraordinary creative powers through which ancient sages laid the foundations of civilisation. The sun is revered as the deity of pure knowledge and the hidden laws of creation, as it is described as the guru of Bhagawan Narayana and the origin of the Rishabh Manjari, which produced figures such as Manu, King Shaganti, King Agni, and Bhagawan Ram. Importantly, the sun generates all organised religion, it offers light and warmth indiscriminately, beyond boundaries of race, caste, or birth. In this sense, the sun serves as a reflection of universal equality, transcending modern scientific religions who adhere to rigid dogmatism. In the West, Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity, which was inspired by the sun, and many great thinkers rely on their contemplation in the primordial light of the sun. According to yogic understanding, sound gives rise to form, colour, and ultimately the five elements that constitute physical existence. Thousands of years ago, the risks of flood tamed into this fundamental vibration and gave humanity the nature that is a direct link to the source of creation. Makar Sankranti holds special significance because it traditionally marked the beginning of Uttarayan, the sun's apparent northward journey. This transition was considered auspicious, symbolising longer days, increasing light, and spiritual upliftment. Its importance is underscored by the fact that Maharaja Harishchandra, in the Mahabharata, chose this period to renounce his body in pursuit of moksha. Over modern geography markers this ancient insight: the Tropic of Cancer, the Sun never sets at this turning point. Sun worship was not unique to Bharat. Civilisations across the world revered it—Egyptians as Aten and Heli, Greeks as Helios and Apollo, Romans through Sol Invictus, the unconquered Sun, and many others. Over time, due to the gradual shift in the earth's axis, the timing of Sankranti has changed, now falling more closely with the December solstice.

Makar Sankranti thus serves as a reminder of an ancient, integrated science linking the cosmos, energy, and human consciousness.

The Pioneer

OPINION

The writer is a spiritual teacher



People take part in a community festival ahead of the Magh Mela festival in the Malabar district of Kerala.

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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TICKETLESS TRAVEL UNDERMINES RAILWAY DISCIPLINE AND FAIRNESS

Ticketless travel has become increasingly common across the extensive Indian Railway network, undermining discipline, particularly in general coaches, as it is difficult to identify and control. These systems require passengers to demonstrate their status, often through biometric data, as they occupy reserved seats and refuse to vacate when confronted. Such behaviour undermines discipline and disrupts the travel experience.

The existing penalty system is insufficient to deter habitual offenders. A minimum fine of ₹250 along with the journey fare fails to discourage discipline violations. Many so-called privileged passengers knowingly travel without tickets, claiming that paying a fine, if caught, is cheaper than purchasing a valid ticket or using alternative transport. This attitude erodes respect towards the railway system.

Without adequate enforcement through increased manpower and robust checks beyond entry and exit points, surprise inspections remain ineffective. The railway system is under a constant state of emergency to protect reserved passengers, random stops, and avoid fines. Only firm enforcement will ensure that rail travel remains safe, disciplined, and accessible, while reinforcing respect for rules among all commuters nationwide.

Janardhan Reddy (Andhra Pradesh)

Strict ban on Chinese Marjha protects

The decision of the administration and police in India to impose a strict ban on Chinese Marjha and enforce police action against violators is widely praised. The ban is a necessary step to protect the health and safety of the Indian population, as Marjha is a highly contagious and deadly disease. The ban is also a necessary step to protect the health and safety of the Indian population, as Marjha is a highly contagious and deadly disease.

However, the ban is not a silver bullet. It is essential to ensure that the ban is enforced properly, and that there are no loopholes. It is also essential to ensure that the ban is not used as a pretext for discrimination against Chinese people.

The use of this ban as a pretext for discrimination against Chinese people is a serious concern. It is essential to ensure that the ban is enforced properly, and that there are no loopholes. It is also essential to ensure that the ban is not used as a pretext for discrimination against Chinese people.

Youth inequality needs global policy

The recent World Economic Forum survey found that youth inequality is a global problem. The survey found that youth inequality is a global problem, and that it is a problem that needs to be addressed. The survey found that youth inequality is a global problem, and that it is a problem that needs to be addressed.

However, the report also highlights several encouraging aspects of the present generation. It notes that today's youth, particularly Gen Z, show greater civic participation and readiness to assume leadership roles. They demonstrate adaptability to digital innovation and a willingness to embrace artificial intelligence as a tool for acquiring new skills.

Despite persistent challenges, positive attributes increasingly outweigh negative realities rooted in economic inequality, and the resilience and optimism of youth remain intact. There is hope that governments across nations will take responsibility for addressing this divided reality. Through inclusive governance, equitable policies, and targeted investment in education and employment, authorities must work to bridge these gaps.

Festivals turned fatal traditions

The blind pursuit of modern practices has steadily eroded the spirit of Indian traditional festivals. Whether it is the burning of effigies during Dussehra or the excessive use of loud chemicals during Holi, celebrations have increasingly felt like chaotic carnivals rather than cultural traditions.

Driven by profit and thrill, many shopkeepers and travellers continue to ignore the devastating consequences. This dangerous trend causes death, severe injuries, and fires among performers, commuters, and two-wheeler riders. There are many ways to celebrate festivals safely. For example, instead of burning effigies, people can use eco-friendly materials. Instead of using loud chemicals, people can use natural colours. Festivals should be celebrated in a way that is safe and respectful to all.

Arpit Lal Nani (Madhya Pradesh)

DEVI CHANDI (Odisha)

DEVI CHANDI (Odisha)

Arpit Lal Nani (Madhya Pradesh)

Please send your letter to the editorial@pioneer.com. It will not be more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Building partnerships

German Chancellor's visit raises hopes of EU/FTA

The two-day visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has raised hopes of concluding India's free-trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU). Mr Merz stated the FTA is a long-term project and it is not possible to conclude it in the short term. However, the relations are such that India and the EU have a common vision. For instance, last year reached 25 years of the India-Germany Strategic Partnership. In the area of defence, Germany intends to participate in the naval exercise MILAN and an air-coastal exercise in September. Both countries intend to develop a road map on defence industrial cooperation to enable long-term collaboration among industries, technology and technology personnel. The idea is to develop defence platforms and equipment. Further, the two countries would collaborate on technology, including the semiconductor value chain. Both countries also cooperate in energy and sustainable development goals.

Additionally, Mr Merz, under the New Economic Policy, has invited leading German universities to start campuses in India. Both countries intend to increase people-to-people contact. In this regard, Mr Merz announced a visa-on-arrival for the Indian passport holders through Germany. Stronger relations between the two countries, as seen from the visit of the German Chancellor, have gained significance with the changing geopolitical conditions. Such partnerships will be critical to the global order in a multipolar world. It is worth noting that the US has been the US and the United States has been strained over the past year. It is now clear that the US cannot be trusted for partnerships in trade or strategic areas. American President Donald Trump believes US allies have not benefited from it. The EU has signed a new trade deal with the US, and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation have been creating defence cooperation.

The US has not been able to India either. As a result, the US has called for a trade deal of 25 per cent. It imposed an additional 25 per cent tariff on India for importing 100,000 tons of steel. Months of negotiations have not yielded a trade agreement yet. The new US administration in India, however, made all the right moves to ensure a trade deal. However, it is not clear if the US will be able to do so. The US has been the US and the United States has been strained over the past year. It is now clear that the US cannot be trusted for partnerships in trade or strategic areas. American President Donald Trump believes US allies have not benefited from it. The EU has signed a new trade deal with the US, and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation have been creating defence cooperation.

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India's sports ambition

Scaling up requires governance and institutional reforms

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reiterated India's intent to host the 2036 Olympic Games, building on the decision to host the 2020 Commonwealth Games and the expansion of domestic sports such as Khelo India to broader sports participation and exposure. The target date of 2036 is a bold move as it is a long-term vision. The government data further highlights the establishment of 1,000 Khelo India Centres (KICs) and the support for 1,000 athletes through training, equipment, medical care, and stipends.

However, budgetary allocations alone cannot compensate for the persistent institutional weaknesses. A key task for India is to build a robust Olympic model. India has a long history of sports administration, but it is not clear if the model is sustainable. The government data further highlights the establishment of 1,000 Khelo India Centres (KICs) and the support for 1,000 athletes through training, equipment, medical care, and stipends.

Another critical weakness lies in the lack of integrated pathways for athletes to move from grassroots to elite level. Despite the expansion of sports participation, the government data further highlights the establishment of 1,000 Khelo India Centres (KICs) and the support for 1,000 athletes through training, equipment, medical care, and stipends.

Further, India's own experience of hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games and the 2014 Asian Games, despite being held in India, in terms of overall performance, the government data further highlights the establishment of 1,000 Khelo India Centres (KICs) and the support for 1,000 athletes through training, equipment, medical care, and stipends.

A shift in focus

Union Budgets are no longer just about tax changes, but more about an expenditure revamp

The chairman of the Union government's annual budget has shifted focus from the last few years. Instead, they are now about more and more about the government's fiscal stance, stimulus and expenditure policies.

The big focus in the Budgets, therefore, is on the government's plans to reduce its debt and fiscal deficit, change control policies, launch new schemes, and improve the quality of its expenditure. Budgets are now more about the government's fiscal stance, stimulus and expenditure policies.

Of course, there are a few changes in the tax structure in the Budgets, but these are not the main focus.

This is a welcome development. As the economy grows, the government's plans to reduce its debt and fiscal deficit, change control policies, launch new schemes, and improve the quality of its expenditure. Budgets are now more about the government's fiscal stance, stimulus and expenditure policies.

Consider the following. Since the launch of the goods and services tax (GST) in 2017, over a fourth of the tax collection by the Union government has gone outside the purview of the Budget presented by the Union Finance Minister. This has changed the way the government collects taxes.

Under the GST, the government has to collect taxes from the private sector. This has changed the way the government collects taxes. The government has to collect taxes from the private sector. This has changed the way the government collects taxes.

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Illustration: A person sitting at a desk with a laptop, representing a taxpayer or business owner.

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The board's 2026 agenda

As Indian companies continue to grow, their boards will have to address a range of issues. The board's agenda for 2026 will be to address the challenges of a growing economy. The board's agenda for 2026 will be to address the challenges of a growing economy.

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Training citizens out of reality



Illustration: A person sitting at a desk with a laptop, representing a citizen or student.

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Killing of Tripura youth: Racial innuendos demand firm action

BY NETHANIEL

In 2000, when my wife, Sudhita, based in Delhi, was on a posting in Assam (Mizoram), we were directed to look for a place to stay in a village in the hills. It was a small, remote village, but it was a place where we could find a place to stay. It was a small, remote village, but it was a place where we could find a place to stay.

The mark of a 24-year-old Arjun Chakrabarti, an MBA student from Tripura, who was stabbed by six goons in Delhi on December 13 and succumbed to his injuries on December 15, is now a symbol of racial hatred. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

The country is in a state of panic. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

While the incidents of racial hatred that led to the killing of Arjun Chakrabarti are not new, the police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

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Times journalists got a rare look inside one of the compounds where the online fraud industry makes its billions. Inspirational slogans like 'keep going' were just the start

HANNAH BECHTOLD

In a South Asian way, the Chinese settlement dedicated to scamming people from Kenya to Kazakhstan grew fast on London. Over just a few months, a sprawling office park rechristened and transformed into the chaotic headquarters of Myanmar, with over 100,000 people living in the park.



Offices in Shanda Park were left in shambles after a surge of fighting between Myanmar military and rebel forces nearby.

At this office park, scamming the world was the business

When the police arrived at the scene of the crime, they found a man lying on the ground. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

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Some parts of the scammer complex resembled a prison. Other parts resembled executive offices. While traditionally regarded as a scammer's paradise, the park has become a place where people can find a place to stay.

One journey to Shanda Park occurred during a visit to the park. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

By then, the park was a place where people can find a place to stay. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

While most of the workers at Shanda Park were from Myanmar, the police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

What, then, does work? Evidence from India and abroad consistently points to a lack of a clear vision of the future.

Phishing sites for specific tasks are a key part of the scammer's business. The police have not yet identified the goons, but the police have not yet identified the goons.

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OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

30 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 1976
RT Saurashtra (H)

25 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 2001
Meditation and yoga

25 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 2001
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OASIS | SRIPRIYA SATISH

Faith transforms lives

Faith is a powerful force that can transform lives. It is a force that can give us the strength to overcome our fears and doubts. It is a force that can give us the courage to face our challenges and to live our lives to the fullest.

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North out of Atmanirbharta defence mission



LT DEB KJ SINGH (RETI)
FORMER CHIEF OF
INDIAN ARMY

THERE is great expectation and a flurry of events on the Korean peninsula as self-reliance in defense moves forward, both at the national and regional levels. Unfortunately, these endeavors are yet to find north-south traction in the regional context. It is indeed worrying that North Korea seems to be completely out of this defense-related strategic vision. At the largest multilateral, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in human resources and reputation for international impact, there is no Korean presence.

India has set an ambitious target of achieving a \$20-billion turnover in the defense and aerospace industry by 2025. Projections include planned exports in defense/aerospace sector, amounting to \$8 billion by 2020. While some may term these as ambitious, yet true, that in the context of an industrial base is clearly evident, with exports totaling \$2.56 billion this year.

Debraun, middle, mother

undertakings (HPSUs) and advanced factories (AFs) were set up as part of industrial reforms. The trend was initiated by former Union Minister for Defence Krishna Murthy in the early 80s, with heavy vehicle manufacturing plants in Jewett (Chennai).

These defined logistic aid centres are usually deployed on the western front and have to traverse long distances for the final deployment and combatting. This is of course, nobody has been neglected in the setting up of two defence industrial centres in Tamil Nadu and UP as also clusters concentrated around southern and western India.

The old logic of the island providing security to industrial base is no longer valid with the rush of long-range vehicles. In fact, heavy concentration, in a few states, has only enhanced the vulnerability of these coastal enclaves. The reassuring fact is that the trend is multiplying with even more rapid and overhaul IBM's choice spreading in those hubs, entailing the ferrying of equipment some 1,000 miles.

The contrarian mood of shooting opposition groups means some states like Punjab has further reorganised its Northern Block. GND The state government in the region instead of strengthening its regional initiatives, are engaged in liaison game and become a

The bacterial loss of auto-
catalytic mechanisms, and



STRENGTHS: Two delivery and application devices have been setup up. One for the hands and the other for the feet.

machine parts, which had withered/shrunk due to formation in the 30s, continue to

The government has launched a number of initiatives, like the Innovation for Defense Excellence (IIDE) and Technology Development Fund. As per the directions of the IIDE units engaged in defence manufacturing, NN units will also be working on the

The Arco Design Bureau had put out 152 purchase statements last year, revealing 1,237 imports—up the NR accounted for less than 1%. Last year the Arco occupied US capital contracts for \$5.180,000 more, with NR getting just one, valuing the 256 contracts.

In R&D payments, the picture is even more dismal—out of \$1.6 billion, NR got only

The old logic of the hinterland providing security to the industrial base is no longer valid.

erest, the 302 has a nominal pressure in one project of less than 10.1 cm.

North India currently has just one unit of Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), set up during Rajiv Gandhi tenure as Defence Minister. BEL makes machine tools in its factory in Panchkula. The Semi-Conductor Laboratory, Mohali, after the huge fire accident in 1999, has only one fully stocked component of a few days' stock.

It is important to rigorously take stock of the claims of the Northern Region. Firstly, the region is the national legislative base for the large number of deployed Army and Air Force formations. Secondly, the inventory of deployed assets includes the vast fleet of tracked/untracked vehicles, armoured and helicopter, and

Listening to the land and its people, the Gadgil way



PARINEETA DANDENWAL AND
HIMANSHU THAKUR

AT the ground level, people are really interested and they want to get involved. Our report, if finished also, seems to have served the purpose of triggering some kind of an interest," said Dr. Matthew Gage, who delivered a lecture on Democracy and ecology at contemporary India in Delhi in July, 2002. He was referring to the 2000-01 report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEPE), which he chaired and which was one of the major contributions of Gage to Indian environmental conservation.

The accompanying team during some of his travels. They mostly consisted of back-to-back and often heated meetings in some of the remotest corners of the Western Ghats. The meetings were not only about plants, trees and rivers, but also about what the villagers had about development and how it should happen. No one had asked such questions before. It was the demoralization of environmental consciousness at the

most beautiful resort beautiful. Something that was never attempted before. Not too big, not too small, just right.

Nevertheless, the report, prepared after such a radically different approach — trusting the people of the land — was not acceptable to the vested interests. In Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala, politicians twisted the report, made false claims, did what they knew best: spread rumours and lies.

The report was rejected and the government set up a High-Level Working Group, headed by Dr Kishoribongia, essentially to affirm the recommendations of the WGPB Report. But the Kishoribongia Committee ended up with a report that was at odds with facts and inference. Under the leadership of Dr Goshal, the Western Ghats now has brief periods

The Gadgil report is a sort of a tool to help in managing rivers in ecologically important places. No wonder because one of the initiators of the Movement against Abhidhanyu Dam in Kerala, the late Dr. Lathin Aravind, worked with Gadgil on this matter. Gadgil was an important figure in Kerala's landmark Silent Valley struggle against a hydro project, which led to a cascade of environmental laws in the country. He also supported the movement against the Abhidhanyu Dam



PEOPLE'S CHOICE A magazine is tested and approved. Tapped full of ideas to help you and your company.

ted by long communities. He was a vocal supporter of the Normans Redwood Archery's epic struggle against the Soudar Hammer project on the Normans river.

He joined the *Phichitrakarn* (straight-upright) of Chao Golan as a way of hope since that was a struggle led by a peasant, which brought a multi-national company to its knees. The strain he took against the royal patronage in the Late Phichitrakarn region of the Western Ghats was so effective and people started to find his work is used by the people to this day.

The last mission on the road to change local people in the doctor-crafting groove and increase dissemination of information. He took the example of the *Amul* (Amul) from Bikaner, Rajasthan.

The Gadgil report is a valuable textbook about managing rivers in ecologically important places.

where citizens are trained to monitor the health of a river, just by looking at the two key indicators. He said that India should take lessons from this and initiate such programmes. He added that for India to progress, we should take the bottom-up approach and strengthen democracy, rule of law, civil-life transparency and traditional ecological knowledge.

Guiding him forward, thinking he was, was a long recommendation of the NCRSP report, asking for the initiation of policy and legal steps towards diversification of dams in India, where India had no policy at all in this regard.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Complex (9)

8. Down off (4)

10. Complexity (5)

9. Change (5)

10. Landed property with large house (6)

11. A state (4)

12. Intensely (2,3)

15. Unhappy (4)

16. Key to (4)

20. Distasteful (7,8)

21. Inexpensive (7)

22. A man-made (5)

23. Diller's wife (6)

DOWN

2. A casual point (5)

3. Insure (4)

4. Put into practice (3,3)

5. Profit (1,6)

6. Sounding contradictory statement (7)

7. Facing serious criticism (2,4)

11. Allow very small margin (3,4)

13. Complimentary (5,5)

14. Green peas (7)

15. Money paid back (4)

17. Assert strongly (6)

19. Treat with contempt (5)

SU DO KU

4	8			5	2
6					3
5	7	6		1	8
	3	8		6	7
		7		9	
9	4		1	2	
3	2	7		9	1
9					7
7	4			6	8

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chesapeake	55	35
Hampton	50	34
York-Dublin	50	34
Richmond	52	32
Washington	52	32
Frederick	54	32
Roanoke	54	32
Charlottesville	55	33
Manassas	55	34
Springfield	53	35
Fredericksburg	53	35
Stafford	53	35
Leesburg	53	35
Warrenton	53	35
Wheaton	53	35
Wheaton	53	35

The Glory of Somnath Swabhiman Parv

The glorious history of the Somnath Temple spans thousands of years. It has a history of reconstruction and victory, India is proud of this history. The elements that oppose this glorious history still exist today. It is the duty of every Indian to defend such elements and embrace the golden history of their Indian culture. On Saturday, on the occasion of Somnath Swabhiman Parv, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his beautiful address at the Somnath Temple, said that the same force that opposed the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple are still present today. The only way to be right against them is for the country to become strong and remain united. Sunday marked the anniversary of the attack on the Somnath Temple 1000 years ago, as well as the 75th anniversary of the temple's reconstruction. So many sacrifices were made to protect this glorious temple, and the history of so many homes is connected to the Somnath Temple, but why hasn't it received the importance it deserves in history? This shows that there is a need to rewrite the country's cultural history. This is the effort being made today before the judge. Most participated in the Shreeyama Vata (Vadav Marathi). On this occasion, a group of people playing drums and the sound of 100 horns 'boom' resounded the atmosphere of the Shreeyama Vata. Prime Minister Modi watched this grand celebration from an open-top vehicle. As the procession moved forward, the crowd gathered on the streets cheered and showered flower petals.

Undoubtedly, the flow of faith of Indians dedicated to religion is unparallelled. The way Indians welcomed the Somnath Swabhiman Parv and embraced their cultural pride was an unmatchable sight. But those who don't want to see the good feel back in everything. Even on the occasion of Somnath Swabhiman Parv, some politicians called it Modi's triumph card in elections. They argued that such events and processions, held in the name of cultural awakening, were being used to polarise Hindu votes. But if someone objects even to initiatives aimed at celebrating the nation's cultural and religious consciousness, won't this diminish our national pride worldwide? What about the fundamentalists? They even objected to the tricolor flag. They also criticised the Vande Mataram campaign. Now with the Somnath Swabhiman Parv (Somnath Vata Festival), the opposing forces are trying to find some political angle in this too. Remember, our ancient religious sites, not only our temples but also mosques and Gurudwaras, hold centuries of glorious history. If a festival is celebrated in their honour, a true Indian should not have any objection whatsoever. That the whole of politics are blowing in such a way in this country these days that even a festival commemorating the immortal culture of Somnath is being questioned. This should not happen; instead, we should be content with being enriched by our cultural heritage. Gaur Gopal Singh's statement, "I will make opponents fight again," will only be successful when community fights its cultural pride. There is nothing wrong with celebrating festivals; rather, those who find commonality in them are themselves disconnected from reality. Compared to them, the majority of the country appreciate such initiatives.

Therefore, we salute every devout person, every devotee, who participated in the procession celebrating the pride of the Somnath Temple. The Glory of Somnath Swabhiman Parv. The glorious history of the Somnath Temple spans thousands of years. It has a history of reconstruction and victory, India is proud of this history. The elements that oppose this glorious history still exist today. It is the duty of every Indian to defend such elements and embrace the golden history of their Indian culture. On Saturday, on the occasion of Somnath Swabhiman Parv, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his beautiful address at the Somnath Temple, said that the same force that opposed the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple are still present today. The only way to be right against them is for the country to become strong and remain united. Sunday marked the anniversary of the attack on the Somnath Temple 1000 years ago, as well as the 75th anniversary of the temple's reconstruction. So many sacrifices were made to protect this glorious temple, and the history of so many homes is connected to the Somnath Temple, but why hasn't it received the importance it deserves in history? This shows that there is a need to rewrite the country's cultural history. This is the effort being made today before the judge. Most participated in the Shreeyama Vata (Vadav Marathi). On this occasion, a group of people playing drums and the sound of 100 horns 'boom' resounded the atmosphere of the Shreeyama Vata. Prime Minister Modi watched this grand celebration from an open-top vehicle. As the procession moved forward, the crowd gathered on the streets cheered and showered flower petals.

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Abhishek Vij

CAN INDIA AFFORD TO MISS THE QUANTUM MOMENT?



Parvati Sachdev
Chairman of Real Estate Regulatory
Authority and founding author
of *Art of Innovation*

Over the past decade, quantum technology has moved from a laboratory novelty to a commercially viable technology. In the past, quantum computing was a niche technology, but now it is a mainstream technology. The first quantum computer was built in 1998, and since then, quantum computing has grown exponentially. In 2019, quantum computing was valued at \$1.2 billion, and it is projected to reach \$10 billion by 2025. This growth is driven by the fact that quantum computing can solve problems that classical computers cannot. For example, quantum computing can be used to simulate molecular structures, which is important for drug discovery. It can also be used to optimize supply chains and financial portfolios. The potential of quantum computing is vast, and it is clear that it will be a key technology in the future.

For the record, IBM explains that while classical bits which are either 0 or 1 used in the computers are all known today, quantum bits or qubits can exist in a state of superposition, meaning they can be both 0 and 1 simultaneously. Entanglement allows qubits to correlate in ways that classical bits cannot. Putting it in simple terms, quantum computers have the potential to compute complex problems much faster compared to classical computers. The idea of a quantum computer was first proposed in the 1980s, but practical developments have only gained momentum in recent years (Q&A).

Quantum technology promises the potential to improve processing speeds and efficiency by hundreds of fold. The implications of this are almost unlimited. The OECD-EIU release is explicit that the sector is entering a more disciplined phase. Investors who were bullish in 2018, 2019 and 2020-21 and the global economic capital investment, and thus partially recovered in 2020. The sector, which recorded over 20% growth in 2019, now looks closer to a plateau than a continued growth (IBRD). The implication is not that quantum is weakening, but that it is becoming a deep-technology industry that is moving from rapid experimentation into commercialisation.

WHO LEADS QUANTUM IN THE

REAL WORLD? INCIDENTS FIRST, PURE-PLAY SECOND

A practical way to understand "top companies" in quantum is to separate (i) *pure-play quantum* companies that can sustain very long R&D cycles and that commercialise, and (ii) *pure-play quantum* companies that generate the most "quantum native" products today but remain small in turnover. Among the incumbents, the leaders are those computing and industrial firms that can afford patient capital and can integrate quantum into cloud, cybersecurity, and specialised hardware ecosystems. IBM is widely treated as a reference point in cloud-delivered quantum experimentation and enterprise pilots, its capacity to fund this effort is underscored by FY2020 revenue of USD 62.4 billion (IBD). Microsoft's position on quantum computing hardware and software development (Q&A). Report reported USD 10.8 billion revenue for the period ended 31 December 2019, again indicating that the sector's total capabilities are still in a pre-scale phase (Investment Intelligence).

Quantum, one of the most watched integrated players, is also a useful signal of where value may accrue. In September 2019, Honeywell announced a USD 600 million equity raise for Quantum as a USD 10 billion pre-money valuation, with investors reporting participation including NVIDIA's venture arm and several development companies.

WHAT "PRODUCTS" MEAN IN QUANTUM. THREE MARKETS WITH VERY DIFFERENT CLERKS. Quantum is often discussed as if it is one product category. In reality, it is three distinct technology markets—quantum computing, quantum communication, and quantum sensing—each entering at different speeds and with different layers. The OECD-EIU report suggests that while quantum communication remains central, quantum computing is currently the fastest-growing domain (Q&A). In quantum computing, the core products today are not consumer devices; they are combinations of specialised hardware, control stacks, error mitigation software, and cloud access models that allow researchers and enterprises to experiment in real machines.

In quantum communication, the most mature near-term product line is secure quantum key distribution (QKD) networks, quantum-safe key management architectures, and post-quantum transition planning in critical infrastructure. Governments and defence forces have been early adopters because the value proposition is strategic rather than purely economic. In quantum sensing, ultra-precision



Quantum computing hardware and software

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sensing, navigation, geodesy, and materials characterisation, and materials characterisation is often where "quantum advantage" can appear earlier, in narrower and more visible forms. IS INDIA IN THE RACE? YES, BUT LAGGING VIA MISSED FOCUSING AND SECURITY-FOCUSED START-UPS.

India's position is best described as "serious intent with uneven industrial depth." The government's anchor is the National Quantum Mission, approved at a total outlay of Rs. 8,000 crore for 2020-21 to 2023-24, explicitly aimed at seedling and scaling scientific and industrial R&D to build a domestic ecosystem. (Pulse Information Bureau).

On the corporate side, India has made steady early moves, but the market is still largely focused on academic "quantum native" tech stacks. QIQA Labs, for example, positions itself as an Indian quantum-cryptography company, providing solutions across quantum key distribution and related quantum security offerings. QIQA Labs, QIQA, a Singapore-based firm pursuing a "full stack" approach, has attracted meaningful attention and funding. (Pulse Information Bureau).

In July 2020, it raised \$22 million in a round led by Accel Ventures and India's National Quantum Mission. The Economic Times. The more careful conclusion is that India's near-term commercial strengths are likely to appear first in software, applications, and quantum-ready security—areas that leverage India's existing IT depth—while hardware scale remains harder because it depends on materials, ecosystems, advanced materials, and supply-chain readiness.

WHAT CHALLENGES WE EXPECT DISRUPTED SCALING, NOT A SINGLE "QUANTUM MOMENT". If the last decade was defined by single-point growth and a rush of startups, the next decade is more likely to be defined by a smaller number of quantum computing startups. The OECD-EIU report notes steady gains in the direction of quantum acceleration, from research to pilot, and investment has become more selective after the 2018 peak (IBRD).

For markets, this means quantum's early revenues will disproportionately come from government, defence, critical infrastructure, and a thin band of high-value industrial use cases. The firms best placed to capture these revenues are the likes of IBM, Microsoft, Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Honeywell, Quantinuum, and NVIDIA in the practical hardware space (NVIDIA Newsroom).

India may not have missed the quantum bus, but it surely needs to move to the front seats.

(Views expressed are the author's own.)

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul.
—Emily Dickinson

The Honest Mirror: Learning from Failure



Dr. Shashi S. Chaudhary
ODP Managing Director, Punjab Police
Insurance Corporation

Failure is never private for a police officer. When a case collapses, or an investigation misfires, it plays out in full public view. Policing lives under constant scrutiny, where every mistake becomes a headline and every shortfall an invitation to judgment. Yet within this exposure lies a quiet strength, the ability to learn, grow, and rise without bitterness. Unlike other professions where failure can remain buried in files or forgotten, policing has no such luxury. The courtroom, the street, the media, and the community all reflect its actions. Every setback is seen, debated, and often amplified. This very visibility keeps the profession alert, accountable, and evolving. As Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is

not final. It is the courage to continue that counts." In policing, that courage is shown not only in action, but in recovery.

Failure in the police service does not end as defeat; it reflects it. A failed investigation, a missed deadline, a flawed piece of evidence—these are not just setbacks, they are lessons in communication. A delayed response to a crime, a technological malfunction, a department that lacks from its own strengths and struggles in both capability and conscience. The badge may shed some light, but it rarely shines.

This is an attitude society must shift. In the modern world, people live under constant scrutiny. Students face peer grades, professionals face social targets, leaders face public ratings. The fear of appearing imperfect often grows. The police cannot afford that mindset. Their failures are discussed before breakfast, yet they return to duty the next morning. This resilience is born from every patrol, every investigation, and every family. Failure, when met with honesty, teaches more than success ever can. Confession is admission. "Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail." In policing, every fall is public, but every rise is earned. The constant who reflects in a misjudgment because when the

officer who admits a mistake gains credibility. The leader who accepts error builds trust. In a world eager to hide weakness, transparency itself becomes courage.

Society often demands perfection from police officers, forgetting their humanity. They make difficult decisions in impossible circumstances, often within seconds, with consequences that endure for years. When things go wrong, the real question should not be "Who failed?" but "What can be learned?" This approach applies far beyond policing. Teachers, doctors, journalists, and entrepreneurs all face scrutiny. What separates growth from stagnation is whether failure is treated as humiliation or instruction. The police service should not be an exception. It should be a model of learning from failure. After setbacks, more reports, inquiries, and systemic corrections. This discipline turns error into evolution, teaches that failures, companies, and industries all the same, choosing only one place and improvement over stagnation. As Henry Ford said, "The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing." Learning from failure also demands emotional maturity. A police officer cannot collapse under criticism. They must absorb truth without injury and

distilling wisdom from truth. This is how we live. We learn. We grow. We evolve. Failure is not a dead end; it is a detour. When failure is embraced, it becomes a teacher. When failure is denied, it becomes a burden. When failure is accepted, it becomes a lesson. When failure is learned from, it becomes a strength. When failure is ignored, it becomes a weakness. When failure is embraced, it becomes a strength. When failure is ignored, it becomes a weakness. When failure is embraced, it becomes a strength. When failure is ignored, it becomes a weakness.

Learning from failure brings pain into progress. It compels creative thinking, challenges assumptions, and strengthens weak links. In policing, this adaptability is constant. Failed methods invite new technologies, rigid hierarchies give way to better communication. Modern organisations need the same spirit, because refusing to learn from failure is refusing to grow. As Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I just found ten thousand ways that won't work." This mindset defines progress. A police officer who learns a new does not allow failure to define them.

Sri Guru Gobind Singh and the Institutional Completion of Sikh Civilisation



Prof. Ravhendra P. Tewari
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Punjab, India

Preface

Sikhism, emerging in early modern South Asia, under conditions of imperial domination, unlike most other religions, neither retreated into ascetic withdrawal nor pursued imperial conquest. Instead, under Sri Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), Sikhism underwent civilizational completion, the definitive construction of institutions, authority structures, and ethical norms capable of sustaining a universal spiritual vision. In this context, Sri Guru Gobind Singh's religious mission is not merely a reform movement, but a reworking, with remarkable foresight, the four essential elements that constitute most religious traditions: canonisation, authority, collective identity, and the ethical use of power. Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji redefined courage as an ethical obligation rooted in dharma, not in personal ambition or power. The Guru's Khanda, and the martyrdom of the Bhatlwanas, embodied an uncompromising principle that no individual, not even such one as himself, is above dharma. For this personal grief never allowed public responsibility and sacrifices

was offered not for revenge, but for civilizational survival. He rejected the false binary between renunciation and engagement. He was simultaneously a spiritual master, poet, warrior, administrator, and philosopher. His vision of ethical discipline alongside outward responsibility. The Guru protected India's civilizational values while defying the threat of conquest for all, including those outside his own faith. His struggle was against oppression, not against any community, and for his religious identity was a source of courage, and not of exclusion. He strongly believed that true civilisation must be inclusive, self-renewing, and non-violent, and cultural confidence should equal freedom, not doubt it.

Completing the Civilizational Journey: Beyond Empire and Renunciation

Sikhism's traditions typically evolve through three overlapping phases of ethical-evolutionary articulation: renunciation, consolidation, and institutionalisation. In Sikhism, the first phase begins with Sri Guru Nanak's articulation of original Khanda, radical monism, and the rejection of caste and ritualism. The second phase unfolds through institutions such as sangats, langars, and pangats, which modelled equality and collective discipline into everyday practice. However, by the late seventeenth century, Sikhism confronted a crisis: how to maintain religious traditions amidst political persecution intensified with the absence of heroic power. The martyrdoms of Sri Guru Arjan Dev and Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur underscored

the inadequacy of purely ethical resistance in a context of imperial repression. Sri Guru Gobind Singh's intervention marks the decisive entry into the third phase. Rather than transforming Sikhism into a territorial state or withdrawing into puritanism, he reimagined it as a non-territorial, non-imperial civilisation, capable of organized resistance without abandoning tolerance. Comparatively, few traditions complete all three phases under a single moral vision. Thus, Sikhism completes the civilizational arc without sacrificing empire or renunciation.

The Most Chastising Moment: The Creation of the Khanda and the Guru Hukam

The creation of the Khanda in 1699, a discipline of ethical order within Sikhism, represents one of the most original institutional formations in religious history. After seeking and rejecting five volunteers (the Panj Pyars), the Guru performed an unprecedented act: he knelt before them and received initiation himself. This moment represents one of history's clearest examples of leadership through voluntary initiation of authority. He demonstrated to the world that the strongest leaders are those willing to be led by the same rules they ask others to follow. With this act, Sri Guru Gobind Singh completed what Sri Guru Nanak Dev began spiritually. Sri Guru Arjan Dev sacrificed bodily, and Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed through martyrdom. The Khanda was neither a sword nor a ritual object; it was a disciplined moral collective, open to all regardless of birth, bound by initiation, ethical conduct, and

readiness to defend justice. Unlike Christian priesthood, the Khanda possessed no sacerdotal monopoly. Unlike Buddhist monasticism, it claimed no divine mandate to rule territory. Unlike Hindu Brahmins, it did not require withdrawal from social life. From a civilizational perspective, the Khanda may be understood as an ethical republic of equals, grounded in the principle of spiritual discipline. Inward, moral responsibility, ethical and collective defense. Outward, moral responsibility across political contexts, enabling Sikh identity to survive dispersion, exile, and statelessness; features that later facilitated Sikh resistance under colonial and postcolonial regimes.

Power Without Domination: Sikh Political Ethos and Lessons for Contemporary World

Discussions on how fragmented modernity erodes religious faith and moral values are not new. Yet, a few religious leaders have not merely observed their own authority. Sri Guru Gobind Singh's religious vision is a profound civilizational confidence, that the ethical system he helped complete could endure without modification. This should not be considered a withdrawal, but institutional maturity. Sri Guru Gobind Singh emerges as a rare of the moral personality in not merely a reformer or martyr, but a civilizational architect. Sikhism's durability, ethical resilience, and resistance to corruption testify to the relevance of his design. Restoring Continuity: Without Compromise. Sri Guru Gobind Singh's civilizational architecture is that he completed, transformed, and institutionalized

the Sikh tradition of a decisive historical mission. His construction in Sikhism is uniquely original. He completed the chain and vision of earlier Gurus. He turned faith into decisive responsibility, devotion into discipline, and spirituality into a living, self-renewing civilisation. Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji is not merely the Tenth Guru. Rather, he is the architect of Sikh civilizational permanence. Where earlier Gurus awakened conscience, he ensured continuity without compromise. In civilizational terms, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji founded a spiritual vision; Guru Gobind Singh Ji ensured it would never be erased by history. In global context for religion, Sri Guru Gobind Singh is best understood not only as a religious leader, but as a civilizational architect, one who ensured that spiritual ideals could evolve, adapt, and resist erosion within history.

Sikhism, in an era of dominance, fragmentation, polarization, institutionalised civilizational decline, and ethical decay, Sri Guru Gobind Singh's life reminds the world that true strength lies in moral clarity backed by courage, and institutions, not individuals, must remain supreme. For strong systems and strong personalities, his legacy is not merely religious, it is civilizational. For this to happen, scholars must go beyond empathy to character, skill, courage, moral responsibility, and ethical reasoning. Sri Guru Gobind Singh should be read not merely as a religious leader, but as a civilizational architect, one who saved ancient Indian ethical memory to survive domination without loss of soul.

Panchayat Advancement Index: Strengthening Data-Driven Decision-Making for rural transformation



Sanjay Kumar Lahani
Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayat Raj

Ancient Indian villages, a silent but powerful shift is underway. From a panchayat in Maharashtra installing CCTVs and solar lights after seeing posts on the "Women's Panchayat" theme to a village in Gujarat launching rapid sanitation drives after news of the "Clean India Mission" campaign, the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is beginning to reshape how grassroots development is planned and delivered. In many Panchayats, gaps noticed in PAI, such as institutional delays, poor waste management, or water scarcity, have directly triggered targeted interventions based on PAI scores. These early use cases indicate a simple but powerful truth: when panchayats can see their strengths and weaknesses clearly, they act faster and more accurately. For decades, rural development in India relied heavily on anecdotal reports, subjective perceptions and political priorities. Today, PAI brings a new model – transparent, data-driven – that is aligned to the best of rural administration. Launched by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, the Panchayat Advancement Index is India's first countrywide framework to measure the progress of Gram Panchayats using objective indicators across critical areas relating to sanitation, health, governance, women's empowerment, infrastructure, environmental sustainability etc., organised across six themes of Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDSDs) derived from 17 SDGs goals. Logically, the attainment of SDGs at the national level will require actions at the local level where

Panchayats can play a pivotal role. In this context, PAI provides an evidence-based new paradigm for building progress by building the LDCs and thereby SDGs in rural areas. The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is conceptualised through a robust, multi-step process using 400 unique local indicators across nine themes. While the Ministry of Panchayat Raj develops the Indicative framework in consultation with other Ministries, Departments and State Governments, the actual data is collected by Gram Panchayats and entered into the Panchayat Learning Centre, while States like Jharkhand, Bihar, Kerala, Punjab and Rajasthan are entering such Gram Panchayats for various exposure visits of PDS. Several states like Tel. PAI performance with recognition & awards. Maharashtra offers major awards under the Chief Minister's scheme, SDGs and MP provide financial incentives, whereas Punjab, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Tripura offer cash awards to Panchayats at state-level events. PAI scores are increasingly embedded in state planning and monitoring systems, with PAI scores being used to allocate funds, plan projects, and monitor progress. PAI has converted hard-to-understand social, economic, and environmental indicators into easy-to-understand, accessible, and actionable planning and decision-making. The indicators, scores, and digital tools assist in. Panchayat-level governance that is based on evidence. However, PAI is still new. India's latest report scores (2023-24) show that many long-term rural studies that show clear, measurable improvements. Due to uneven technical capacity, inadequate understanding of data points and inconsistent reporting systems, data quality varies across regions. Convergence among the departments and PDS is improving but remains fragmented. These are not challenges, but opportunities. Learning from this, the Ministry has now simplified the process for PAI 2.0 by reducing the number of unique indicators from 400 to 100, adopting more robust and refined indicators, and improving workflows, making data collection more consistent and of improved quality.

Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue: Unlocking Youth Leadership for Viksit Bharat



Dr. Manoj Kumar
Undersecretary of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment

India's growth story will be written by those who are shaping its future today. Across the country, young Indians are thinking deeply about how India can grow faster, govern better and become developed by 2047. Their ideas are emerging from campuses and communities, startups and sports fields, classrooms and village meetings. The real question is no longer whether the youth have something to contribute, but whether their ideas are given a credible platform to influence the nation's trajectory. The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBRLD) is designed to provide that very platform. India today is home to the largest youth population in the world. It is a demographic dividend that the nation's future will be shaped not merely by policies or institutions, but by the imagination, conviction and courage of its young citizens. This vast reservoir of youth holds the key to many, both a demographic advantage, it is India's greatest national asset, capable of driving innovation, strengthening democracy and propelling the country towards inclusive and sustainable development. The aspirations of India's young generation are guided by a strong sense of purpose and possibility. Today's youth are not driven solely by personal advancement; they are equally motivated by a desire to shoulder responsibility and make a meaningful impact. They seek avenues where their creativity can translate into solutions, their energy into leadership and their ambition into service. During my time as Youth Affairs and Sports Minister, I have had the opportunity to engage with young Indians in varied settings, not merely in urban centres, but in rural schools, at sports events and during youth-led community initiatives. What consistently stands out is the determination with which young people think about the nation's future. I recall meeting a group of rural youth volunteers who had organised informal learning centres in their

villages. With limited resources but strong conviction, they were addressing gaps in education and skill development through locally designed solutions. Their stories were practical, rooted in ground realities and driven by a clear sense of responsibility. Experiences like these reaffirm a simple truth: when young people are trusted and given space, they do not merely participate, they lead. Inspired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's call from the Red Fort to bring our youth to the forefront of the nation's development, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue was launched in January 2025, reimagining the National Youth Festival in an entirely new format. The response was unprecedented. Over 30 lakh young people engaged through the Viksit Bharat Challenge, more than two lakh essays were submitted, and thousands of youth presented their ideas at the state level. The journey culminated at Bharat Manapada in New Delhi, where 10,000 youth leaders interacted in a three-day dialogue with the Prime Minister, who spent several hours listening to their ideas and inspiring them to lead. Beyond the numbers, it was the sense of engagement that made the dialogue truly historic. It encouraged leaders to lead and speak, that the vision of India's youth matter in shaping the India of 2047. Young participants were encouraged to think critically about national challenges, propose solutions and align personal ambitions with collective progress, bridging the gap between aspiration and action. The strength of the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue lies not only in its scale, but in its design. Diversity of thought, language, culture and lived experiences found their way into the very structure of the initiative. Youth from urban and rural India, students and professionals, innovators and grassroots leaders came together on a common platform. Multiple stages of engagement ensure that ideas are refined through dialogue and exchange, not filtered out by geography, language or background. In doing so, the dialogue ensures that every young person who participates has both a voice and a platform to amplify it. India's youth have always been at the heart of the nation's defining moments, from the freedom struggle to the building of the institutions of an independent India. At every turning point, young Indians have stepped forward, carrying a torch of vision and willingness to lead. Today, the nation once again looks to its youth not just

for participation, but for leadership and dynamism. In an era of rapid change, growth and challenges, the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047 goes beyond economic progress alone; it calls for social harmony, environmental responsibility, technological stewardship and inclusive growth. These complex challenges require fresh thinking, adaptability and an ability to embrace the new qualities that reside strongly in India's Youth Shakti. Building on the resounding success of a landmark first edition, VBRLD 2025, scheduled from 9-12 January 2025, signals a decisive leap from a national youth convening to a platform with global resonance. With new initiatives such as Design for Bharat and Tech for Viksit Bharat, and the inclusion of the international Indian youth diaspora, the dialogue expands beyond borders. Yet, at its heart, the mission remains unchanged: to empower young Indians to think boldly, create fearlessly, and lead with conviction. The scale of this edition underscores the depth of that ambition. More than 30 lakh young people participated in the Viksit Bharat Quiz, the first stage of selection for VBRLD 2025, making it one of the largest youth engagement exercises in its kind. Over four lakh students, participants from every corner of the country will engage with leading national and global visionaries, sharing practical insights, ideas, and concerns that transcend disciplines and geographies. What truly sets VBRLD 2025 apart, however, is that it gives our Youth Shakti an opportunity not only to speak, but to be heard. The platform enables young Indians to articulate their ideas, aspirations, and solutions directly to the Prime Minister of India. On 12 January, observed nationwide as National Youth Day to commemorate the birth of Mahatma, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will personally interact with the youth at Bharat Manapada, listening to how they imagine, and intend to shape, the future of Bharat. As India advances towards the summit of its independence, it demands the engagement of young individuals who possess the courage to imagine boldly and the resolve to translate ideas into meaningful action. More than a platform for dialogue, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is a movement that calls upon young Indians to lead from the front, contribute to nation-building, and channel their individual talents towards building a Viksit Bharat.



LOKMAT TIMES

Berlin calling

German Chancellor's first visit to India heralds a new chapter in bilateral ties

The fact that India was Chancellor Friedrich Merz's first destination in his Asian tour has acquired special relevance in a broader context of disruptions triggered by US President Donald Trump in global trade and security. After his wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two sides unveiled an expansive, future-oriented roadmap to elevate bilateral ties to a "new and higher level". India and Germany have signed 19 pacts spanning defence production, semiconductor, green hydrogen, skillings and higher education. The German Chancellor announced visa-free travel for Indian passport holders and fresh green funding commitments of 1.24 billion euros to India. As PM Modi pointed out while addressing a joint press conference in Gandhinagar, Merz's choice of India as his first Asian destination underscored the importance Berlin attaches to the partnership. Merz described India as a "partner of choice" for Germany in ensuring rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

The visit also gave political momentum to ongoing talks on the free trade agreement between India and the European Union. Merz said he expected the long-pending deal to be finalised by January end. Germany is India's leading trade partner in Europe, and the India-EU summit is scheduled to be held in New Delhi on January 22. While the breadth of India-Germany relationship is undeniable - spanning culture, education, research, trade and strategic dialogue - its economic weight falls short of its potential. In 2024-25, bilateral trade stood at \$55.52 billion, with Indian exports at \$18.54 billion and imports at \$16.98 billion. For the world's third largest economy and its fourth largest counterpart, the low value-added trade is a constraint and more to be accelerated. The joint statement issued after the Modi-Merz meeting promises a quantum leap in bilateral trade.

The most promising area is technology-led collaboration. Germany's strengths in engineering, hardware, precision manufacturing and industrial standards complement India's capabilities in software, digital platforms, data and sustainable innovation. Joint partnerships in microelectronics, quantum technologies, semiconductor, AI-enabled manufacturing could yield substantial gains. India and Germany adopted Joint Declarations of Intent on semiconductors, critical minerals and telecommunications, underlining shared priorities in securing critical and emerging technology ecosystems. Green growth also featured prominently, with the two leaders announcing the establishment of an India-Germany Centre of Excellence in Renewable Energy. On the geopolitical front, Modi and Merz shared their commitment for a joint fight against terrorism and push for UN Security Council reform.

Indian football

Those in charge of Indian football must put interest of game before their greed

While Indian football continues to pass through one of its most turbulent phases, All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chatterjee on Sunday kickstarted the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour in New Delhi, a moment that immediately drew attention for its uncomfortable timing and optics. The party mood around the trophy tour didn't quite land with fans. Social media was quick to point out the irony of rolling out football's biggest silverware while the domestic game is barely stirring afire. After a nine-month impasse caused by the expiration of the AIFF-PSM commercial deal, the Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 season is finally set to kick off on February 14 with fewer matches and less revenue in a truncated season. The financial and commercial realities that have come to play have resulted in franchisees asking players to take a pay cut for the league to stay viable.

The league was supposed to get underway in September but was in a limbo due to the expiry of the commercial rights deal between the AIFF and Baitane's Football Sports Development Limited (PSDL) on December 5. That a country with ambitions to host the Summer Olympics after a decade can't even get a top division in operation is not great for the optics. Something had to be done, sooner or later, and everyone, including the players, had to play a part to get the show on the road. The ISL franchisees, like those in the Indian Premier League (IPL), while caring for the game and on-field results, always have the balance sheet at the back of their minds. They can endure heavy losses for some time, but not too long. Barring any sport in the country should be the mandate of the National Sports Federation recognised by the government and the corresponding world body, not any private entity - even if it is owned by one of the biggest conglomerates in the world - or franchisees.

If the AIFF can't conduct a regular football league - small levels - and hence fulfill its responsibility as a corporation, in return for a sum of money, then it has to qualify as a parasite of inefficiency. One doesn't need a league to be big, glitter and glamorous. One has to learn to walk before one can run. The AIFF must get the act and both right and not get blinded by bright lights. Just ensure matches are held at regular times with all the rules and regulations followed. It can't be so difficult. After all, even before PSDL got involved, there was football in India, even if on a smaller scale, with promotion and relegation in place. That was before the custodians of the game in the country ran after money, TRPs, big names and glossy coverage. Those in charge of Indian football need to get the foundation in place and put the interest of the game before the bottom line.

One party, two bosses! The perils of reuniting NCP

How ED blinked as Mamata seized moment



Harish Gupta
FLY ON THE WALL

Speculation over the reasons of the two factions of the Maharashtra Congress Party - one led by Shambhu Pawar and the other by his nephew Ajit Pawar - has gathered pace, making it one of Maharashtra's most contentious political developments. What started as a limited tactical understanding for a municipal election in Pimpri-Chinchwad, has snowballed into serious talk of a formal merger, surprising some senior observers of Marathi politics.

The broad outline being discussed appears deceptively simple: Shambhu Pawar would retain the position of supreme leader of a reunited NCP, while Ajit Pawar would continue as the undisputed power centre in Maharashtra's day-to-day politics and governance. On paper, it seems like a neat division of authority - the political, as opposed to the operational, reins.

But this formula is fraught with risk. Ajit Pawar is no longer the rebellious lieutenant he once was. After splitting the party along with the BJP and securing the deputy chief minister's post, he has built power independently, built his own network and demonstrated a clear and self-interestive climb. In the process, he has proved his mettle and laid out a narrative for a boss in his own right.

That raises the central question: how would Ajit Pawar willingly return to a subordinate role under Shambhu Pawar, especially when he commands legislators, ministers and leverage? A reunion may help consolidate the NCP vote base and reduce fragmentation, but it also risks repeating all that has gone wrong under authoritarianism and control. For Shambhu Pawar, the merger is about regaining the NCP's role as a power and authority. Reuniting the two may prove for more complicated than stitching together a pre-political alliance.

Why did central officers not assist chief minister? Mamata Banerjee when she arrived in the province of Jharkhand, questioned the role of the state government. And why did the central government not assist her in the very moment of her arrival? She was being chased?

One explanation during the merger in political and bureaucratic circles is institutionalised centralisation in the Congress party. Also, although the ED officers in the past have been criticised for not being able to handle the situation, they were not the ones who were being chased. Whether or not such institutions were equally given or considered could be another's guess. However, former ministers say the "defect rule" in such high volume

situations is to avoid confrontation with constitutional authority and let the legal process catch up later. As one former home secretary remarked privately, "You don't want to be like this with the state. You can do it with paper and politics."

In effect, the ED's non-resistance reflects a larger strategic dilemma: enforcing the law without feeding a political narrative designed for confrontation. By stepping back, the agency may have preserved legal ground - but at the cost of appearing politically overruled. The Mamata Banerjee, that perception itself may have been the end point. A final word will, however, come from the judiciary on the issue.

Rakha Gupta's 'history lessons'

Social media is having a field day over Delhi Chief Minister Rakha Gupta's growing collection of "bits of the tongue" - though many are now asking whether these are slips at all, or something more fundamental. The trouble began when Gupta announced in a video on not too far from the state's capital that she was a "NCP leader". She said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader". She said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader".

During the winter session of the Delhi Assembly, Gupta recalled the membership of Bhagat Singh, Subhas Chandra Bose and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. She said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader". She said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader".

The list of gaffes has also grown: garbage bins being coated to look like "the brothers", and "NCP" described as "terrorism", and repeated historical mistakes. Gupta has responded by introducing a "speaker's rule", claiming the opposition made her say it - "cannot be a woman NCP at work".

That argument, however, sits awkwardly in a city that has already seen three women chief ministers - without either more festivals, better lives or less on gender but on women. And to go back, in its history, the first role in single-party rule. Especially when avoiding matters who no longer have the luxury of competing.

Fear of women's vote: BJP's Bengal dilemma

Just before the crucial Assembly election in West Bengal, the Nirmala Kumar government had announced a 100 per cent increase in women's reservation in the state's political landscape. Around the same time, a video went viral from Bihar's Shilpa Singh in which a senior BJP leader was heard telling a journalist that women would not step out of their homes to vote for Nirmala Kumar - and that city women who did so would face consequences. The video caused serious embarrassment to the BJP, but it also revealed a deeper truth: Women voters in Bihar had cut across caste lines to back Nirmala Kumar.

A strikingly similar situation is now unfolding in West Bengal. A statement by the Nirmala Kumar Party leader and state minister, Nirmala Kumar, said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader". She said she was a "NCP leader" and that she was a "NCP leader".

The author is an editorialist, Lokmat Media Group.

Indore deaths: States ignore warnings



Dharjati Mukherjee

The recent deaths of over 100 people in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, have triggered a major crisis in the state. The deaths were caused by a combination of factors, including a lack of proper sanitation, poor water supply, and a lack of proper medical facilities. The state government has been accused of ignoring warnings from health officials and not taking adequate measures to prevent such deaths.

Another report by the Madhya Pradesh State Pollution Control Board had warned of a major crisis in the state. The board had said that the state was facing a major crisis in the area of water supply and sanitation. It had said that the state was facing a major crisis in the area of water supply and sanitation.

The highest sanitation concentration was observed in Punjab, where over half of the samples showed high levels of contamination. The situation has now reached even higher levels. It is all this due to lack of government of the municipal authorities or water corporation in the system that projects are not monitored and implemented strictly.



Indore deaths: States ignore warnings. The situation has now reached even higher levels. It is all this due to lack of government of the municipal authorities or water corporation in the system that projects are not monitored and implemented strictly.

As per government figures under Jal Jeevan Mission, 81% of rural households have tap water connections as of mid-2023. Though the figures may not be realistic, the problem lies in the quality of water. It has repeatedly been stressed that there is an urgent need to invest in low-cost spectrometers that measure TDS.

heavy metals, nitrates, phosphates and microbial loadings. Whether AI can help in this regard is not known, but it is understood that experiments in this area are being carried out by various research institutions. This is especially true in cases where water must be made available at around 15 per cent per litre for the supply system, say not be dependent.

Though the approved National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD) monitors water quality, transparency and accountability of rural drinking water services under the mission represented a major digital transformation in rural water governance. It is not known how effective the system is. It is designed to enable remote tracking, geo-tagging and data-driven monitoring of water infrastructure, making the operation and maintenance of schemes more efficient and transparent. Gradually, the approved platform for water management is expected to create a GIS-based asset registry linked via the PM-Gat Shakti platform.

Problems for monitoring water quality are largely posed in much of the country's existing schemes about the effectiveness of state pollution boards and municipal bodies in providing safe drinking water. Most cities rely on municipal supplies and local committees to regularly purify their water, so ensuring free public water should be a top priority for governments. The big question is how well will the ruling class recognise the agency?

The author is a consultant at Joint Agency of Bharatiya Jyoti Bhawan, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal.

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Oped

Past coming in the way of future

At a Time When India Needs Progress, We Have Revenge Rhetoric



Comment
Mehbooba Mufti

In India, reality is moving towards the sphere of violence against its Muslim citizens, as recently warned by senior Pakistani Raj. This troubling question cannot be dismissed lightly, especially in the context of recent remarks by National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, which appeared to glorify the idea of "revenge" and implicitly encourage Hindus to settle scores for incidents that occurred centuries ago. Such rhetoric, coming from one of the country's most powerful security officials, is deeply alarming and deserves serious reflection.

On a personal level, Doval's statements were profoundly unsettling. I have known him for a long time, well before the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He would often visit Mufti Mohammad

Second Fatima, and the two spent long hours discussing politics, governance and the future of the country.

The man my father engaged with so closely did not strike me as someone driven by communal thinking. It is difficult to reconcile this image with a senior official today invoking historical grievances to inflame present-day passions.

What is most disturbing is that if someone as educated, experienced, and seemingly enlightened as Doval can urge people to look backwards in anger, what message does that send to society at large?

Calling for "revenge" in the 21st century for incidents old enough to not sit correctly in historical awareness, is as dangerous as dog whistle. It risks inciting pure and unadorned wrath, already vulnerable to manipulation, to turn their frustration and anger against a minority community that is facing increasing social, political and economic persecution.

While sometimes invoking history, Doval conveniently ignores the most recent and devastating chapter of India's past: British colonialism. It was the British who subjugated India, treated its people like slaves, and systematically looted its wealth, including treasures accumulated over generations.



More of those who benefited from that plunder continue to prosper even today. Yet, there is no call for revenge there.

If, instead, the focus is on the Moghul period, India's rich history is reduced to a narrow view.

The Moghals, like all rulers of their time, had their share of success, but they also left behind an extraordinary cultural and architectural legacy.

Monuments such as the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and cen-

tes are not only symbols of India's rich history but also major contributors to its tourism economy.

Ironically, the distant descendants of those rulers live in acute poverty, while

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The Muslims of today bear no responsibility for the actions, good or bad, of rulers who lived centuries ago.

more Hindu primary families who forged alliances with the Moghals, often through marriage, continue to live in luxury even today.

Most importantly, the Muslims of today bear no responsibility for the actions, good or bad, of rulers who lived centuries ago. To suggest otherwise is to promote the dangerous idea of collective guilt – an idea fundamentally incompatible with democracy, constitutional values and justice.

At a time when India should be discussing how to move forward economically, scientifically, socially and morally, it is tragic that a senior security official is instead speaking the language of revenge. The role of the NSA should be to ensure the nation equated real threats, not to divide by re-opening historical wounds.

History must be studied to learn and to build, not weaponised to polarise. When those in positions of authority blur that distinction, the consequences can be disastrous not just for one community, but for the very idea of India itself.

Mehtab Akhtar is the founder of the International Institute for Democracy (IIDD), who served as the chief advisor of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

(This Week)

Swami Vivekananda: India's Spiritual Renaissance

He believed that the regeneration of India depended on the strength of its youth



Personality
Aurobindo Ghosh

Swami Vivekananda stands as one of the most luminous figures in modern Indian history—a monk, philosopher, patriot, and visionary who reimagined India's ancient spiritual wisdom for a modern, global audience. Born as Narendranath Dutta on January 12, 1862, in Calcutta, Vivekananda emerged as a spiritual beacon when India was grappling with colonial domination, social stagnation, and a crisis of self-confidence. His life and message became a clarion call for spiritual awakening, social reform, and national regeneration.

From an early age, Narendranath displayed a questing mind and an intense yearning for truth. Educated in Western philosophy, logic, and sciences, he was deeply influenced by rationalist thought, yet remained restless in his search for spiritual certainty. This inner conflict found resolution when he met Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the spiritual master of Chittaranjan. Under Ramakrishna's guidance, Vivekananda experienced a profound spiritual transformation. He came to realise that the essence of all religions lies in the same ultimate truth, a conviction that would later shape his universalist outlook.

After Ramakrishna's passing in 1886, Vivekananda embraced the life of a wandering monk. Travelling tirelessly across India, he witnessed firsthand the pervasive poverty, ignorance, and social inequalities afflicting the masses. These

experiences deeply affected him. He recognised that India's spiritual greatness had to be complemented by material upliftment and social justice. For Vivekananda, spirituality divorced from service was hollow. This realisation crystallised into his famous doctrine: "Service to man is service to God."

Vivekananda's global fame was sealed at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. His opening address, beginning with the words "My brothers and Sisters of America," elicited a standing ovation and lasting admiration. In his speeches, he presented India as a rational, vibrant, and universal philosophy, emphasising harmony among religions rather than conflict. At a time when the West often viewed Eastern traditions with skepticism or condescension, Vivekananda asserted India's spiritual and spiritual heritage with dignity and confidence. He became, in effect, India's foremost spiritual ambassador to the world.

Beyond religious philosophy, Vivekananda was deeply concerned with nation-building. He believed that the regeneration of India depended on the strength of its youth. His exhortations—"Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached"—continue to inspire generations. He called for mass education, and that built character, self-reliance, and a spirit of service, rather than mere accumulation of information. To him, education was the means to awaken the dormant potential within every individual.

In 1897, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission, institutionalising his ideal of practical Vedanta. The Mission continued spiritual practices with modernity, engaging in education, healthcare, disaster relief, and rural development. Vivekananda's influence lies in its synthesis of contemplation and action, reflecting Vivekananda's conviction that true spiri-



tuality expresses itself through selfless work for the welfare of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda's influence extended far beyond his lifetime, which was tragically short—he passed away on July 4, 1902, at the age of 40. Yet, his ideas glowed a eternal fire, shaping modern Indian thought. Leaders of the freedom movement, including Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Jayaprakash Narayan, acknowledged his impact. He infused India with a renewed sense of pride and purpose, urging Indians to embrace their heritage and rediscover their inherent strength.

At the core of Vivekananda's philosophy was an unshakable faith in the divinity of the human soul. He taught that every individual possesses infinite potential and that realisation of this truth is the highest goal of life. His message transcended narrow religious boundaries, advocating universal brotherhood, social justice, and respect for all religions.

During his travels in 1893-1894, after his triumphant return from the West, he was no longer an obscure wandering monk but a global figure, carrying the burden of India's spiritual message and the pain of her social ills. Kolkata, with its ancient temples, sacred lakes, and intellectual legacy, deeply moved him. He regarded it as a land where Vedantic thought, Shaivism, and Buddhism had once flourished in the highest level.

One of the most emotionally intense episodes of Vivekananda's life was his association with the Kheer Bhawan temple, dedicated to Goddess Rugya Devi, a revered deity of the Radha-Krishna tradition. In 1894, near Tulsi, the temple is situated around a sacred spring where changing colors are traditionally believed to hold spiritual significance. Vivekananda visited Kheer Bhawan during a period of inner turmoil and spiritual struggle. According to accounts, he was deeply charmed by the historical suffering of Kolkata's people and the devotion and sagacity of its ancient temples.

At Kheer Bhawan, Vivekananda is believed to have entered a state of intense prayer and emotional surrender. Overcome with anguish, he is said to have wept before the Goddess, questioning why such a spiritually elevated land had been subjected to centuries of decline, invasion, and famine.

Swami Vivekananda's association with Kheer Bhawan assumes a distinctive place in his life and spiritual journey. The visit to the Valley were not merely trends in a picturesque land, but deeply reflective moments with India's spiritual past, living traditions, and civilizational challenges. Kheer Bhawan, a historical site of learning and spirituality—held a special significance for Vivekananda, who saw in it both the glory and the tragedy of India's cultural history.

Vivekananda visited Kheer

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He infused India with a renewed sense of pride and purpose, urging Indians to rediscover their inherent strength.

sharp signals and even anger over India's historical struggles. After Kheer Bhawan, there was a noticeable softening in his tone. He increasingly emphasised inner strength, self-purification, and constructive service rather than blame or bitterness. Kolkata, in this sense, became a crucible for his evolving philosophy of national regeneration rooted in spiritual realisation.

Vivekananda's time in Kheer Bhawan also reflected his deep concern for education and cultural revival. He lamented the loss of Kolkata's ancient intellectual traditions, particularly the decline of centers of learning associated with Sanskrit scholarship and philosophy. He believed that reviving these ancient centers required reconnecting with such knowledge systems while simultaneously embracing modern education and social reform.

Another remarkable episode from his Kheer Bhawan stay was his attempt to visit the ancient Bharata Puri temple, once a renowned center of learning and scholarship in Kolkata. Though political and logistical barriers prevented him from reaching the site, the very desire underscored his reverence for India's rich centers of wisdom and his anguish over their neglect.

Swami Vivekananda's visit to Kheer Bhawan and Kheer Bhawan were thus far more than geographic journeys. They were deeply spiritual moments that shaped his inner life and public mission. Kheer Bhawan embodied the link between India's civilizational brilliance and its historical wounds. His experience at Kheer Bhawan, in particular, reinforced his belief that India's redemption could come only through social and spiritual renewal. Today, in Kheer Bhawan, a poignant reminder of the suffering land before him stands as a testament to his vision of a united, self-reliant, and spiritually awakened nation.

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Tax breakthrough

OECD progress on global minimum tax, welcome

The agreement reached by 147 countries and jurisdictions under the OECD/G20 inclusive framework to implement the global minimum tax, despite the challenges posed by the Trump administration, is quite an achievement. In January 2025, Trump had not only declared that the global minimum tax would have no force or effect for the US, but had also threatened revenue tax on countries imposing the same on US multinational companies.

Although the agreement covers US MNCs, the adoption of the global minimum tax of 15 per cent is a good first step which will check profit shifting by large MNCs to low-tax jurisdictions, India as well as other signatories stand to benefit from this. The OECD agreement signed in October 2021 under the Biden administration had agreed on two tax pillars to ensure that large MNCs paid tax in the jurisdictions where the profit is derived from and to ensure that digital multinational entities did not evade tax by not having a physical presence. The 'pillar two' of this agreement, which has been agreed upon now, applies global minimum tax on MNCs which earn revenues over €50 million. It lays down that irrespective of the corporate tax structure in any country, MNCs should pay at least the minimum tax in the countries they operate in. A top-up tax can be levied by tax authorities on those companies if their effective tax rate is below 15 per cent. The agreement ensures that the minimum tax is paid in all the countries where an MNC group operates. If a subsidiary of an MNC group pays less than 15 per cent tax in a low-tax jurisdiction, then the country where the parent entity of the group is situated can impose a top-up tax to bring the tax to 15 per cent. The idea is to remove the motivation for MNCs to look for innovative tax arrangements to bring down their tax liability.

The exemption for American MNCs is, however, a setback. Tech giants from the US such as Microsoft, Apple, Alphabet and Amazon, will not be liable to pay the minimum tax in the jurisdictions they operate. MNCs all over the world are known to leverage low-tax jurisdictions to bring down their tax incidence, India will, however, be able to impose the minimum tax on such companies from other jurisdictions such as Europe which operate here; it will also rather in better transparency and will level the field between domestic companies and MNCs.

India, along with other signatories of the OECD/G20 agreement should also continue to work towards implementing the 'pillar one' of the 2021 agreement. This says that with respect to MNCs with global revenue of €20 billion and pre-tax profit of over 10 per cent, 25 per cent of the profit above this 10 per cent threshold will be allocated to the countries where this revenue is earned. This could give India chance to tax tech giants. It had abolished the equalisation levy of 6 per cent on revenues earned on online advertisements. The dilution of 'pillar two' can perhaps be made up to an extent.

POCKET



"Ruled by Gen-AI!
Titled, 'Mona Lisa by De Vinci, CRO'!"

Infusing competition is not easy

MARKET REALITIES. Policy to promote more players, say, in aviation, may not work. Effective regulation is the answer



One of the immediate actions by the Central government after the Indigo fiasco in early December 2020 was to attract competition in the civil aviation. The Ministry of Civil Aviation has reportedly given NCA to two new airlines. Two airlines, which received NCA last year, are about to commence operations. Reportedly, a few more are in the pipeline that may be approved in due time.

The Indigo crisis was not a case of corporate fraud. In fact, it was a case of mismanagement and poor planning, given the massive disruptions in travel and doubts of policy regulatory in getting, using passenger facilities.

Two broad themes dominated the aviation discussion: corporate governance and competition. Several experts have commented extensively on the corporate governance issues in many of the airlines.

COMPETITION CONUNDRUM
The issue of competition, however, has been only tangentially addressed. More an over-the-top, not a bottom-up, approach to monopoly/dominance (as per the group model) is the focus of market structure. However, in competition in this era of high-tech, high capital intensity, dominated by such a small number of players, the competition is not to be created in an industry service that has reached high level of dominance of a few players. Whether competition can be sustained in such industries or if they start with a multi-player structure?

This conundrum explores the issue of the competition of a few industries where the authorities are trying to 'create competition' for service providers. Classical economics understood competition as a basic feature of the market economy. However, John Robinson and Edward Chamberlin, through their research in the 1930s, brought out the limits of perfect competition in competition.

Regulation has been the policy response for managing market failure emanating from such structures.

CIVIL AVIATION
Civil aviation services in India moved from private monopoly (Tata Airlines, 1912) to State monopoly (nationalisation, 1946), to private public-private partnership (the



DOMINANT STRUCTURE. Oligopoly is market structure where competitive regulation is essential

early 1990s (Tata Airlines, 1991; Jet Airways, 2001) till January 2020, when Air India was brought back by Tata. In 1995, Jet Airways had a traffic share of about 30 per cent, and Air India 50 per cent. This got reversed by 2021. Indigo had 84-85 per cent traffic share by then, despite very low cost services since entering the field since early 2000s.

Air India as a small group model, with one or two large ones dominating the market. High barriers to entry, massive capital cost and complex regulatory requirements, permit flow, various authorities, and intense competition both price and non-price factors make it a winner-takes-it-all model.

Though airline services provide dynamic benefits of failure, attempts to create competition through fresh entrants has not been successful. Despite entry being allowed, capacity players seldom move into the field.

TELECOM
Telecommunications, everywhere, are characterised by a large firm, with high barriers to entry, massive investment in costs, monopolistic behaviour, intense price and non-price competition, and quick market consolidation.

A State monopoly for long after liberalisation, Indian telecom kept being characterised by providing multiple services to the masses. Private sector leaders kept adding to the public sector players. It is now the private players and not the public sector players, as consolidated very fast, with new entrants 34 per cent and 44

per cent subscriber share respectively) pushing Tata Teleservices (TT) to a distant third (17 per cent), and BSNL to a fringe. A worried government kept propping up the inefficient BSNL, and was left with an unexpected step of being equity participant in MTNL, like the private telecom, huge amount of the stock of the government, seeking and getting more support of foreign funds and domestic payments etc.

STOCK EXCHANGES
Stock exchange is a special case of small group model. Though not capital intensive like telecom and airlines, large high-tech technological infrastructure with time sensitivity, high liquidity and network effects, demanding regulatory framework to ensure fair exchange between operators and to avoid monopoly in most activities.

In India, BSE and NSE dominate the equity space, with NSE by a wide margin. In the early 2000s, government formed three national stock exchanges, which it was opened up.

Pure competition is a tale of the past; oligopolies led by big leaders is the hard reality now. Not only hi-tech, capital-intensive sectors, but even service networks are oligopolies

Very soon, MNCs become dominant controlling about 50 per cent of revenues. The rise of NCA and BSNL resulted in the closure of the small regional stock and commodity exchanges as well as the few others got absorbed in the interim they could not attract enough participants and volumes.

SHIPPING AGAINST CURRENTS
Pure competition is a tale of the past; oligopolies led by big leaders is the hard reality now. Not only hi-tech, capital-intensive sectors, but even service networks are oligopolies. Shipping, credit rating, insurance services, operating globally, covering many countries, including India, even the approach to competition from those sectors against competition from regional stock oligopoly environment.

The OCI approved the Air India-Vietnam merger took several months, despite the merger being long a matter of fact. Only about 25 per cent, when the merger, India, had about 65 per cent. NCA, BSNL, MTNL, etc. were not approved nor approved that merger is fast-track mode.

EFFECTIVE REGULATION
While creating outwards competition has been successful in many countries, creating competition through alternative industrial policies have rarely been so. Concentration has to be addressed through effective regulation and a fresh, modern approach to competition policy.

OCI cannot do anything, the reality, state, relevant market in many other triggers need to be examined in line with the objectives of hi-tech, hi-finance, networked services and global players. And effective coordination between OCI and sectoral regulators needs substantial institutionalised, operational upgrade.

Indian market industrial structures are the result of a number of factors and characteristics: very close relationships with policy-makers; significant role played in a different era. Then, Air India, MTNL, BSNL, and many other monopolies were created, then too without regulation. The new normal is concentrated, private business models. It is for the sector and competition regulators to regulate these effectively, and by pulling out government's role in its involvement, to address the government's concerns.

Focusing on a comprehensive regulatory vision, on duration, capacity building in line with the evolution of the times and positioning them beyond capture and capture are the available means.

Illustration by G. K. Nair. Hindustan Times. Photo: Anand Kumar

Venezuela's oil is secondary to the dollar problem

Monetary power is now central to geopolitics. India should gradually go beyond dollar-dominated system of settlements

Monetary Power

The prevailing narrative is that the US-Pennsylvania state is a major oil producer. It is a country that controls almost 17 per cent of global proven reserves. This is a major reason for its economic power. The more durable fuel has been through the international monetary system. Venezuela's challenge to the dollar, not merely its oil, explains the persistence and intensity of US pressure.

Today, close to 90 per cent of global foreign exchange transactions involve the dollar, which alone is 60 per cent of global foreign exchange reserves in dollar-denominated. This dominance gives Washington an extraordinary privilege: the ability to impose financial sanctions that function as a global law. Venezuela, like Iran and Russia, has been on the receiving end of this power.

US sanctions on Venezuela since 2017 aimed for beyond trade restrictions by cutting off access to dollar clearing systems and US-linked financial intermediaries, they targeted the country's ability to sell oil, refinance debt, or even import resources. As a result, Venezuela's oil exports took a massive hit.

Traditionally, Caracas responded by



DOLLAR. Monetary power under challenge

attempting to bypass the dollar by experimenting with non-dollar oil pricing — pricing oil exports in euros and yuan, or using gold. For credit arrangements with China, and deepening financial ties with Russia. These efforts were clumsy and limited, but symbolically significant. For Washington, allowing a major oil exporter to circumvent non-dollar money trade was setting a precedent and weakening the 'petrodollar' system.

This monetary policy has been more visible during the presidency of Donald Trump, when tariffs, sanctions and trade restrictions were deployed with increased frequency. While tariffs on Chinese steel imports appeared to be about trade balance, they also reflected a deeper concern: the weakening of US economic centrality, its monopolising trade and

finance. The US sought to prevent leverage. Ironically, this strategy may be accelerating the very de-dollarisation it seeks to prevent.

Since 2015, the share of dollar reserves held by central banks has fallen by about 10 percentage points, while their gold purchases have risen sharply — over 1,000 tonnes annually in 2021 and 2022, the highest on record. Countries facing sanctions or strategic uncertainty are diversifying away from dollar dependence, not reporting the dollar outright but hedging against political risk.

INDIAN OPTIONS
For India, these shifts carry material implications. India imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil, making it acutely sensitive to global oil market. Even as a marginal producer, Venezuela retains sufficient scale to influence prices at the margin when supply conditions tighten.

More structurally, de-dollarisation affects India's external sector. India's share of 30 per cent of its merchandise trade is invoiced in dollars, and the Reserve Bank of India holds nearly 35-40 per cent of its foreign-exchange reserves in dollar assets. Further fragmentation of the dollar system would increase currency volatility and transaction costs. Not a

gradual, managed diversification could offer India strategic benefits.

India has already experimented with non-dollar mechanisms — import trade settlements with Russia, local currency arrangements with Iran in the past, and discussions with BRICS on alternative payment systems. These are not dollar alternatives, they are local alternatives. In a world where sanctions and tariffs are used as strategic tools, reducing single-currency exposure is prudent economics.

The lesson from Venezuela is that oil is not a back, but that monetary power is now central to geopolitics. Control over payment systems, data flows, information systems as much as control over physical resources. For India, the response should be pragmatic: preserve confidence in the dollar-based system while steadily expanding options beyond it.

The global economy is not winning the collapse of the dollar, but the end of its hegemony is inevitable. Venezuela's economic rise may be modest, but the concern it triggers in Washington points to a deeper issue — a contest, over the future configuration of global finance, rather than a narrow struggle for control over oil resources.

Illustration by G. K. Nair. Hindustan Times. Photo: Anand Kumar

• **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to businessline@hindu.com or by post to Letters to the Editor, The Hindu Businessline, Eastern Bypass, 875/40, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Greenland's exploitation
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OPINION

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

EDITORIALS

Trump takes another shot at Fed independence. It could backfire.

"NEVER AGAIN" President Donald Trump pledged in his inaugural address last January, "to the American people, if the state is to prosper, it must be protected from political appointees." That has proven to be the biggest broken promise of his second term. The latest example is the criminal investigation of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome H. Powell.

The process in Powell's testimony, however, is not the real issue of the investigation. It's the real issue of the investigation is Trump's clashes with Powell, even as the Fed's independence has a long history and that should be the central focus of the investigation rather than politics.

Congress tried to isolate the Fed from direct presidential control. The idea, supported by capitalist interests across centuries and over decades, is that independent monetary policy keeps inflation lower and steadier. Fed presidents have an incentive to do so because they are elected for two-year terms and are not subject to the political pressures of Congress.

Trump has eroded that independence and — perhaps because of his lack of interest in the Fed — is especially eager for just that, even though it's the Fed's independence that he's attacking. Last April, Trump issued an executive order, but he failed to back it with the support of Congress.

Since then, the president has tried other ways of influencing the Fed. In August, he announced he was firing Lisa Cook, a member of the Board of Governors appointed by President Joe Biden, after Trump's attack-dog lawyer, Matthew C. Drane, dogged her for a month. In September, he fired the Fed's vice president, Richard H. Fisher, after Trump's lawyer dogged her for a month. In October, he fired the Fed's president, Janet Yellen, after Trump's lawyer dogged her for a month.

THE CRIMINAL PROBE OF CHAIR JEROME H. POWELL IS UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES.

challenging her nomination next week. In September, Trump's attorney for the Board of Governors, Stephen Miller, said he would not resign from his White House role while serving, further eroding the central bank's independence. Now comes the more serious Powell.

The Fed chair's appointment is not an isolated issue, but it is a symptom of a larger problem. The Fed's independence is being eroded by the Trump administration's attacks on the Fed's independence. The Fed's independence is being eroded by the Trump administration's attacks on the Fed's independence. The Fed's independence is being eroded by the Trump administration's attacks on the Fed's independence.

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Grok's 'weapons of abuse'

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gently become essential imagery in the political arena.

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D.C., where Powell is apparently under investigation, is even less friendly to Trump. Including Powell would be a major escalation, but even then, a conviction on these charges seems very unlikely. Powell's term as chair expires in May, so he might be out of office by the time any case goes to trial.

Meanwhile, Sen. Thom Tillis (R-North Carolina) announced the Justice Department's threat to Powell and said he would oppose the confirmation of any nominee for the Fed — including the upcoming Fed Chair vacancy — until the legal matter is fully resolved. That's a real threat. Tillis is the chair of the 24-member Senate Banking Committee, which must advance Trump's Fed nominee. Trump says he's already decided on Powell's replacement, but the committee will be asked to confirm the nominee. Tillis's move will force Trump to either back down or risk a veto.

The threat to Powell might also cause other Republicans on the committee to more carefully vet potential Powell successors for a willingness to break with Trump when the evidence warrants it. Sen. Dan Claitor (R-Mississippi) has already said he's not sure he'll support a nominee who's not a Republican. Sen. Lankford (R-Idaho) is not on the Banking Committee but endorsed Tillis's posture after speaking with Powell on Monday. The suit Congress should investigate the Justice Department's "intercept" as overreach.

It will be up to the Senate and the Supreme Court to decide whether the Fed becomes a Cabinet-like agency under the control of the president, or if it remains a creature of independence. The Trump administration is clearly trying to erode the Fed's independence. The Fed's independence is being eroded by the Trump administration's attacks on the Fed's independence. The Fed's independence is being eroded by the Trump administration's attacks on the Fed's independence.

MICHAEL RAMIREZ



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Maryland needs a taxpayer revolt like California's

Every three years in late December, when people are heading out for the holidays, I receive my Maryland property tax assessment. The 2016 bill is an average 12 percent increase over the 2015 bill. That's a lot of money. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high.

I have been hit with property tax increases as high as 30 percent in a house that has had practically no improvements compared with the rest of the neighborhood. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high.

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broken any law or got anyone in danger. They were killed for exercising their civil rights. President Donald Trump told the Tulsa for Black Matters "you're people." And SCAG says "you're people."

Are SCAG agents being given food? I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high. I'm not sure why my assessment is so high.

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Your sibling is your first friend...



LAKSHMI RATHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

CHILDHOOD

relationships are always switching, and even more so when they are of your time with your siblings. Life was as simple then with no plans for the future. The dream profession changes now and then, and most of us want to grow up and be like our favourite teachers.

Growing up means moving to different geographical locations, pursuing careers and dreams. Until then, it is fun and manageable. But when one has to say goodbye to his/her sibling, it is a pain that is so unbearable that it can leave a scar and take forever to heal. One continues to live with that permanent silence, in the absence of their pacifist, reactions and comments.

One feels nostalgic. Sibling love is an enduring bond, and what makes it so special later in life is the shared history. The places you visited together, the things that made you laugh, the troubles you escaped from, and the laughter and tears that were shared are all important parts of what makes us who we are.

Your sibling is your first friend. This is the person you learn to share with before we step out to the world. This is when we learn that actually sharing is caring.

While parents might indulge in pampering us, a sibling can put us in our place. Yet, when

we are out in school or in a public place, they are our cheerleaders with unconditional support. Although at home it could be a mix of affection and rivalry. One can rest assured knowing that siblings are our best critics.

If you take a few minutes to reflect, you will remember how much your siblings have contributed to your personal development. It could be that moment when you just did not believe in yourself, but your brother or sister did not give you an option but to move forward until one day you just became a confident person.

That is right; older or younger, they know how to push you out of your comfort zone. That is why they form a core part of personal development and lifelong connections, even through conflict, say the experts.

If you have had an awkward habit, they will make sure they nag you enough to change for the better.

Why is it such an unconditional friendship? Because it is a bond that has been there since birth, and it is meant to last.

Siblings are the keepers of inside jokes and family secrets. They are the support system no matter how many disagreements appear on the surface.

There could be a spirit of competition, especially when it comes to parents' love and praise.

Your sibling is your first friend. This is the person you learn to share with before we step out to the world. This is when we learn that actually sharing is caring.

Your first playmates can be quite difficult at times, but there is a deep understanding. Some might think it ceased to be, but in reality, it is always present.

It is an essential part of life. So much so that in Japan there is a facility where actors come in to play the role of family members.

Of course, it may not be the same because your own siblings are the ones who know you as you always were. The reason this is so special is that you do not have to explain yourself.

There is a sense of security in knowing that someone knows you at the core level and they will be with you in your tough situations and moments of joy.

In a world where more and more people require counselling, sibling love was the best system for emotional support. A sibling relationship, if one is lucky, can be the longest relationship one could have in life.

It is not necessary that a sibling relationship should be a comfortable one, and that is why they say not to take anyone for granted. Only mutual respect can make any relationship survive.

Some of the best older siblings lay the red carpet to the world for the younger siblings. But we have to make sure we do not take them for granted. Siblings – they are some of the best gifts in the world.

NICOLAS MADURO'S FALL HOPES FOR ECONOMIC BOUNTY

ASHANA FIGUEROA

After the US said that deposed Nicolas Maduro is Venezuela's leader, citizens hope the resulting rifts on selling its oil to the United States may improve their dire economic fortunes.

US forces shocked many when they bombed Caracas in the night and sent Maduro – but analysts agree that the raid has radically changed the country's outlook and economic expectations.

Maduro's successor, interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, has invited Venezuela's oil "industry" to Washington after it seized his, but she has pledged to cooperate with it on oil.

Maduro's government had reacted to cryptocurrency to boost foreign exchange flows amid a lack of investment, while managing inflation wiped out people's already meagre wages.

"I don't really understand those agreements signed by Trump and Delcy, but I hope they help improve the economy," said Mariana Ochoa, a 47-year-old teacher. "Hopefully salaries go up – this inflation is unbearable."

Until Friday, January 2, relations between the two countries were at their lowest: US sanctions and attacks of freedom were sparking Venezuela's shaky oil industry.

The country had been selling oil to allies such as China and Russia at discounts of up to 50 per cent, with low production and export levels.

"Now, rapprochement between Washington and Caracas could mean rising sanctions, restoring oil exports and reviving cash flow," said Alejandro Gueand, director of consultancy Economafrica.

Barril oil company (PDVSA) has said it is negotiating crude sales with Washington under schemes similar to those applying to firms such as Chevron – the only US company currently exempted from sanctions including in Venezuelan crude.

Trump signed an order to suspend Venezuelan oil revenue held in US Treasury accounts from the courts and seizures, and has urged US oil firms to immer in Venezuela and reduce its already oil dependence.

Analysts say interim president Rodriguez could attract investment if she signals openness and flexibility. "The country urgently needs a growing and stable cash flow, and not just permit it (breadth)," said independent economist Carlos Torrealba Rangel.

Growth prospects are among those of accounts for 87 per cent of Venezuela's foreign currency earnings. Analysts Ochoa, an independent economist, forecast "a 30 per cent expansion – double the rate of the past two years."

"Terminated oil income from higher output and reduced discounts will boost cash flow and help a currency market that is practically dead," he said.

Traders said economic activity was finally picking up after the US air strikes on Saturday, January 3, that led to the capture of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores.

"Little by little, the economy is maturing," said Carmen Alvarez, who represents informal traders in western Caracas. — AFP

The global economic transformation is local

WE are at the dawn of a new age: the climate transition is upon us, the era of hyper-globalisation is receding, middle classes worldwide are under strain, and poverty reduction in developing countries faces new headwinds. Even without the destabilising shifts brought about by US President Donald Trump's international trade and foreign policies, the world would be desperate for new solutions.

To devise them, governments need to reconsider the fundamental question of who our economies and markets are meant to serve, and they must re-examine the policies and institutions that have brought us to our current economic and political niching. While global cooperation and national resource mobilisation will be necessary to address the challenges we now face, it is local action that offers the most promising path forward.

In the United States and other advanced economies, the political backlash against globalisation and multilateral institutions is rooted in the adverse effects that globalisation and technological change have had on former industrial regions and middle-class workers. Support for protectionism, hostility to immigration, and openness to ideological extremism have emerged in an environment of economic distress and increasingly unequal access to opportunity. National governments' inadequate policy responses underscore the need to address economic constraints locally through a portfolio of measures, including workforce development, support for small businesses, community reinvestment, and promotion of research and development.

Signalling opportunity for middle- and lower-wage workers is far from a rich country problem. In fact, the types of challenges that developed and developing economies face are converging, which implies that reconsidering our approach to regional economic development requires us to broaden how we think about industrial policy. Conventional industrial policies need to be adapted to current technological and



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Conventional industrial policies need to be adapted to current technological and geopolitical realities

geopolitical realities, including premature de-industrialisation, the challenge of productivity growth in service sectors, the uncertain impact of emerging technologies and AI, and more volatile global economic and geopolitical conditions.

This adaptation will require expanding what we regard as industrial strategies to encompass a broader range of public inputs and private interventions. To address challenges such as the green energy transition, we will need to find new ways to develop and commercialise emerging technologies, upgrade worker skills and help those who may lose jobs in traditional energy sectors.

Similarly, we cannot expect job creation in services, where most employment growth will occur, to follow naturally from standard manufacturing-first approaches.

It will require interventions on both the demand and supply sides of the labour market, through supporting incumbent firms, enhancing supplier networks, targeting small enterprises with high growth potential, leveraging technology that raises workers' earnings and upskilling workforce training.

Equally important, the new economic strategies will have to be context-specific. Much of the responsibility for their enactment will fall on local actors, including national governments, social enterprises and NGOs. Examples of such interventions (and

organisations) abound globally, including the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator in South Africa, Kazi (a micro-learning platform targeted at rural areas) in Kenya, and Generation India, a foundation that aims to improve the country's human capital.

While the locus of action will be decentralised, national governments and regulatory authorities still have crucial roles to play. They will need to activate a vision for structural transformation and provide needed fiscal resources. They will also need to create an enabling environment for "good jobs" – such as banking, access to training and a business level of social insurance.

Moreover, governments will need to shepherd the direction and deployment of AI, but a handful of large tech firms control emerging technology. And they will need to strengthen coordination and goal setting in a manner that accommodates the multitude of public and private players involved at various levels of governance.

National capacity for industrial policy does face fiscal constraints, particularly in developing economies (where government spending is dwarfed by that of China and the United States). Philanthropic and firm-led approaches will themselves have to be iterative and dynamic, and their funding will need to be more flexible to enable experimentation. Successful transformation policies need not require large subsidies.

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OPINION

A shock to the system

Richard Javad Heydari says Maduro's raid has stirred fears of return to 'rule of the jungle'

A recent episode of Venezuelan strategic manoeuvres in the Andes to a special operation was shock waves across the world. With the country's military might, the world's 12th President (Daniel) Trujillo failed Operation: Mountain Battle in "an assault like people have not seen since World War II" and "one of the most daring, effective and powerful chapters of American military might" history.

His deputy was quick to add that the operation also showed the long run of the US policy system by accusing Maduro of involvement in drug trafficking, while from the economic oppression of Democratic forces, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo even pointed it as a dilemma of Venezuela from Latin American forces, who were heavily indebted to the Maduro regime.

The response from much of the world, however, was muted. It is critical, Beijing, Tehran and Moscow probably would have been critical of the Maduro regime.

"These actions constitute a dangerous precedent for peace, regional security and pose a risk to the civil population," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and the other key Latin American leaders in a joint statement.

"We reiterate that the situation in Venezuela must be resolved exclusively through dialogue [...] without interference and adhering to international law."

European leaders from Paris to London also condemned the Venezuelan-backed force, but a similar criticism, notably from the US, often such as the Philippines

attack a critical issue. Maduro's statement stressed "the relevant principles of international law, including the independence and sovereignty equality of states ... and non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states".

While wary of alienating Washington, middle powers are simply worried about the dangerous precedent and, more broadly, the collapse of the system of international law. In this year's chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Philippines has a special responsibility to coordinate a diplomatic response to strengthen the foundation of a rules-based order in the Asia-Pacific.

Despite its tactical sophistication and shock and awe effect, the broader message beyond actions and legal justification for Maduro's capture was not so clear. With the exception of Maduro and his immediate security personnel, who were neutralised by US special forces, no other Maduro regime officials were killed. This is a clear message to Maduro and his regime: no regime is safe in place. This is a clear message to Maduro and his regime: no regime is safe in place.

Through the key US allies of Japan and South Korea have no sign of a military policy shift. If anything, they are likely to be coordinating a response with other regional middle powers. How serious the Philippines, originally positioned to coordinate a joint diplomatic response by regional middle powers in favour of a rules-based international order.

Notwithstanding the internationalist

Venezuela, the clear intention is to weaken strategic implications of America's military operation. Maduro's statement is a clear message to Maduro and his regime: no regime is safe in place.

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For frontline US allies and middle powers such as the Philippines, a rules-based order is an existential issue.

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an among member states. As the first of secondary pan-regional platforms, most notably the East Asia Summit and Asian Regional Forum, the Philippines can also serve dialogue in support of international law and a democratic and peaceful future for Venezuela — just story of directly coordinating the Trump administration.

The broader US allies and middle powers such as the Philippines, a rules-based order is an existential issue. Maduro's statement is a clear message to Maduro and his regime: no regime is safe in place.

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LETTERS

Share your views with us and other Post readers in a letter to the editor, include your full name and address, and a phone number for verification. Please keep your letter to a maximum of 400 words. Email us at letters@scmp.com. Address: 1201, Tower 1201, Times Square, 1 Harbour View, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

Airport on a firm heading to become top regional hub



The HK's airport saw a surge in passenger over the Christmas holiday period. Photo: Figure 100

I refer to the article "HK airport sees decline in connectivity after pandemic" (January 12), which showed findings and figures from three years ago. It would be useful to see what the latest scenario is for Hong Kong International Airport.

Since 2015, HKIA has seen a robust recovery and growth in traffic, volume and destination network. The airport in 2015 was particularly successful, with 30 global destinations added to its network. HKIA is currently connected to about 120 destinations around the world and the Chinese mainland. Some 390 airlines operate in Hong Kong, exceeding the pre-pandemic level. Our network of destinations continues to expand to meet major airports in the region.

Our competitive advantage remains strong and we remain optimistic in our efforts to further enhance our competitiveness.

According to relevant consolidated air traffic figures in 2019, passenger traffic is expected to exceed 12 million trips, an increase towards the forecast of last year, as seen in the first quarter of this year, which shows a strong recovery in passenger traffic, with a 10% increase in passenger traffic in the first quarter of this year. This is a strong recovery in passenger traffic, with a 10% increase in passenger traffic in the first quarter of this year.

We expect our air traffic and network will continue to grow. Airport Authority Hong Kong has been proactively supporting the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government in expanding its air network, and significant progress has been made in the past few years.

Our competitive advantage is derived from different factors, not the least our close connection to the vast market on the mainland. We serve the Greater Bay Area as our main market. In addition, we have a strong network of long-haul routes connecting the airport to the rest of the world. This is a strong recovery in passenger traffic, with a 10% increase in passenger traffic in the first quarter of this year.

In parallel, we will continue to enhance our connectivity with different markets and Hong Kong will continue to be the best of the best of the world.

HKIA will continue to build our mission as a leading international airport hub in Asia.

Chairman, Airport Authority, Hong Kong
 Authority: Wong Hong

Middle class is left to bear the brunt of medical fee increase

A rising medical fee may not help reduce the burden of the middle class, but it will increase the burden of the middle class. The middle class is the largest group in the population, and it is the group that is most affected by the increase in medical fees. The middle class is the largest group in the population, and it is the group that is most affected by the increase in medical fees.

The hospital operators will be fully responsible for the increase in medical fees. The hospital operators will be fully responsible for the increase in medical fees. The hospital operators will be fully responsible for the increase in medical fees.

Karen Cheung, the 10

High-speed railway link to the mainland a resounding success

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China needs North Korea denuclearised. It's time to act

Chan Young Rong says optimism over an end to the Ukraine war may give Beijing new leverage

The Ukraine war and Donald Trump's return to the White House have significantly altered the strategic landscape in North Korea's defence strategy with Russia and leader Kim Jong-un's decision to deploy troops to support Moscow have shattered any remaining illusion of strategic restraint.

While Russia is believed to be supplying North Korea with weapons and technology, Japan and South Korea are accelerating military spending and preparing for long-term modernisation, potentially - albeit cautiously and through with difficult - developing nuclear capabilities.

These dynamics create a new regional instability and undermine China's long-term objectives. The time has come for Beijing to take the initiative and launch a bold plan that can bring much-needed peace and stability to the peninsula while consolidating China's position as the regional preeminent power.

First, Beijing needs to pursue peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. Yet China's strategic ambiguity towards North Korea has impeded this objective.

North Korea's nuclear weapons development and repeated provocations cause regional instability, disrupt economic integration and heighten the risk of conflict, while also providing Washington with a pretext to expand and legitimise its deeper military involvement with Japan and South Korea. The resulting reinforcement of the US and security architecture reduces China's strategic room for manoeuvre.

Second, China aims to prevent South Korea from a sovereign state facing a strategic buffer between China and fully South Korea. By strengthening denuclearisation and pursuing economic development, North Korea could contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

Third, China needs to end the US military and political presence on the peninsula. About 28,000 US troops are stationed in South Korea. Any effort to alter this presence would face diplomatic and security risks, and as long as Pyongyang retains nuclear weapons.

Finally, work to end the peninsula's contribution to the US's broader strategic environment, including its role as a strategic buffer between China and fully South Korea. Any effort to alter this presence would face diplomatic and security risks, and as long as Pyongyang retains nuclear weapons.

China's strategic ambiguity towards North Korea is not a concession but a strategic necessity for Beijing.

Many people expect the Russian con-

dition to conclude this year. Russia is likely to emerge economically weakened, diplomatically isolated and potentially isolated, sharply reducing its capacity to support North Korea. For Pyongyang, the consequences are severe. Once the war ends, Russia will no longer support North Korea's weapons as before - it is likely to be willing to negotiate for peace. A critical source of revenue and leverage will disappear.

The result is unambiguous: both Russia and North Korea will become significantly more dependent on China - economically, diplomatically and strategically. This shift creates a new opportunity for Beijing.

Beijing has an opportunity to reshape the peninsula's security architecture by offering a bold, comprehensive initiative that replaces the current status quo with a new security and strategic framework. This initiative should be a comprehensive package that includes a North Korea. At its core, the agreement should include complete, verifiable denuclearisation by North Korea in exchange for the following conditions.

First, the lifting of all international, along with military and political, sanctions, and third economic development funding, enabling North Korea to pursue market-oriented reforms. Third, security guarantees, including diplomatic recognition from the US and Japan, and a formal peace treaty with South Korea. Fourth, the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean peninsula in exchange for North Korea's relinquishing its nuclear weapons.

Such an agreement would generate

benefits for all major actors. The US will eliminate North Korea's nuclear threat, but without ending and reducing the risk of conflict while upholding military peace. South Korea would gain both relief from a nuclear anxiety and opportunities for more economic cooperation, while Japan would benefit from reduced nuclear and missile risks.

China would preserve North Korea's sovereignty, reduce foreign military presence and leadership South Korea's defence, strengthen its ability to act as a strategic intermediary, and secure regional peace and stability. North Korea would gain relief from international sanctions and opportunities for a viable economic future.

The Korean peninsula has long been a strategic issue. Managing instability is no longer sufficient; transformation is required. Beijing can act decisively to replace a fragile status quo with a new security and strategic framework. This initiative should be a comprehensive package that includes a North Korea. At its core, the agreement should include complete, verifiable denuclearisation by North Korea in exchange for the following conditions.

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China should design and implement a comprehensive package deal centred on North Korea

Richard Hurrell, LSE